

Setting The World To Rights

Ideas have consequences.

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Our Politics

We are often asked to define our political stance.

We have a lot in common with Libertarians...

In that we believe in liberty as an essential human value, and would like to see the abolition of victimless crimes (especially the fun ones). We are very much in favour of entrepreneurship and take the view that if something is worth doing, it is worth doing at a profit. However, our talk of the wonders of making heaps of money is (so far!) mostly theoretical. Yet even though **some of us** do not even make enough money to pay any income tax, we want to see the gradual abolition of taxation. We think that anything government can do, a truly free market could one day do better and more cost-effectively. We are with the Libertarian movement wholeheartedly in many respects...

Except that we are not barking mad **idiotarians** who think that everything any government does is by definition wrong, or that the US government is just as bad as every mass-murdering aggressive dictatorship in sight – or, for that matter, France. We don't have a blind spot when it comes to the simple logic that being prepared to defend liberty is a pre-condition for liberty: *si vis pacem, para bellum* (if you want peace, prepare for **war**). We are not starry-eyed utopians who believe we own the blueprint for the perfect society. The perfect society will have to evolve: unlike many libertarians, we don't think that everything would be perfect if we could press that **magic button** to get rid of government. Like many Libertarians, we champion the freedom of the individual, but unlike many, we do not make an exception when it comes to **children**. We support the idea of a free-market in babies, but we thoroughly eschew the idea that children are in any way the property of their parents, the state, or anyone but **themselves**.

We are a bit like Republicans...

In that we revere the traditions of the United States and of the Anglosphere generally, we rather like **Donald Rumsfeld** and **Condoleezza Rice**, and, especially since hearing that Condie is against gun control because she does not trust government, we are rooting for her to be the next **President** of the United States. We believe in the right of self-defence, including the right to kill someone who is about to kill us or who puts us in serious danger. Thus, in the world as it is now, we favour national defence, because

no matter how good a shot one or more of us may **be**, we'd need a bit of backup in the event of a large-scale attack – not to mention a nuclear bomb. We think current US foreign policy could be a lot worse. We love political incorrectness and we are proud not to call ourselves 'feminists'. So you could say that we are a bit like Republicans...

Except that we do not believe in increased 'discipline' in schools (unless you're talking about the sort of 'discipline' that my old headmaster was rumoured to be engaging in with Matron in the privacy of his own quarters). We don't approve of **forcibly** incarcerating innocent people in institutions, and since we are in favour of **education**, we cannot support the existing **school** system or any other so-called 'educational' system that tends to stultify and sabotage the learning process. We approve of abortion, divorce, sodomy, and a woman's right to wear trousers... or a **burqa**. We find the 'anti-fornication' laws of some US states frightening, to say nothing of the **dry counties**, the 'war on drugs', and other horrors associated with the Republican movement.

We are a bit like Democrats...

In that we are in favour of abortion rights, we think Bill Clinton should not have been **impeached**, we are enthusiastically **in favour** of **stem cell research**, and we are nauseated by the very idea of insisting that children be taught the Creationist myth as if it were fact. We are a bit like Democrats in that we think of ourselves as 'liberal'.

Except that when we use the word 'liberal' we really mean liberal, as opposed to 'anti-liberal' as the word 'liberal' seems to mean in American politics.

(In Britain) We are in sympathy with the libertarian/**Portillo** wing of the **Conservative Party** (well they certainly need help!)... and we're right behind the Labour government's current foreign policy in regard to **Iraq**. We just wish the **Labour Party** was too.

(In Israel) We like **Natan Sharansky** and Ariel Sharon... and support reasonable factions within parties such as Likud, the Shinui Party, the Yisrael B'Aliyah Party, the Labour Party, the... well, if Israel isn't a good argument against proportional representation, we don't know what is. When are they going to wake up and realise that it is an unmitigated disaster?

(In Canada) To the extent that we can discern who's who in a country whose motto is reputed to be "as Canadian as possible under the circumstances", we like the libertarian strands in the **Canadian Alliance**, including, for example, **Garry Breitkreuz**, who is bravely continuing to fight gun control. Leader, **Stephen Harper** deserves support for his position on **Iraq**.

We think death is **overrated** and **conjecture** that **advances** in science and technology will eventually make death a choice. We are atheists, and are suspicious of all organised religion. But we believe that there is such a thing as right and wrong.

We hate... communism, fascism, Islamofascism, Wahhabism,

Eurofederalism, nationalism, idiotarianism, anti-Zionism, anti-Semitism, terrorism, racism...

Note: In [The Ethics of Liberty](#) near the beginning of the section on Strategies for Liberty, Murray Rothbard says that if one were to have a magic button that, if pressed, would automatically transform our existing society to one governed by libertarian rules, one should press it. He argues that we should aim for the most rapid advance towards libertarian society possible, rather than a gradual approach. This is the epitome of the approach that we repudiate.

Mon, 03/31/2003 - 20:49 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

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About Setting The World To Rights

Setting the World to Rights (or **The World**, for short), is a result of our deeply held belief that it is only ideas that are wrong with the world, and only ideas that can improve the world.

We want this site to speak in a distinctive voice of its own – and in any case, the texts posted here are often collective efforts. For these and other reasons, all posts on the front page of this site are editorials, and have the customary anonymity thereof.

But for the curious among you, those responsible for this web site include **David Deutsch** and Alan Forrester of **Elegance Against Ignorance**, with software support by **Kevin Schoedel**.

We are very grateful to all those who contribute editorials and comments, and if you would like to join in, that would be splendid. We encourage you to send submissions to us at submissions@settingtheworldtorights.com. Items that we like but that can't go on the front page, we attribute to the author, so when you submit an item, please state whether we may attribute it to you or not, and whether you wish your name, email address, and or web site details to be included. If you would prefer your piece to appear as an attributed article rather than a front page editorial, please make that clear in your message.

The software behind this site is **Drupal** (using **PHP** and **MySQL** on **Apache**) with some **custom** add-ons.

We'd like to thank Javier Henderson of **kjsl.com** for providing the web space.

Tue, 04/01/2003 - 13:49 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Our Comments Policy

We are experimenting with comments and, for the moment, have implemented an unusual comments policy: comments are ephemeral. You can expect any comment that you post to be deleted sooner or later. Some will survive longer than others, at our discretion. If we especially like a comment, we may take it out of the comments section and archive it permanently, but, generally speaking, you should always keep a copy of any comment you post if you want to preserve it for posterity. As we continue to experiment, we may change this comments policy without notice.

Tue, 04/01/2003 - 18:42 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

History of Israel

Take a look at this very short **presentation** of the history of Israel.

We are going to be posting our own History of Israel here shortly.
Look out for it!

Wed, 04/02/2003 - 19:51 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

When?

When do you plan on running this?

Bill Henderson

by a reader on Mon, 04/07/2003 - 12:44 | [reply](#)

It's Not About Oil

The Financial Times recently debunked the "It's all about oil" myth

One of those great ideological divides that seem to withstand all reasoned argument is the view that America's determination to oust Saddam Hussein is born of the desire to gain control of Iraqi oil. This view is prevalent in much of Europe and is shared in other parts of the world, especially in the Middle East. Even the wise Nelson Mandela believes it. The view is not, however, dominant, or even much discussed, in the US. Despite the chasm, the implausibility of this view warrants at least one more effort to dispel the myth.

And so they make the effort.

But they do not address another issue: what accounts for the tenacity with which this view is held – and will continue to be held – despite its "implausibility" and despite the efforts of the FT and all others who examine the question rationally?

Wed, 04/02/2003 - 20:22 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

War for oil, or for the flag?

If this war *were* about oil, it might be justifiable. I mean that if a foreign tyrant had seized oil fields legitimately owned by a private owner, the state representing this owner could be justified in protecting its citizen's property.

The problem is that this war is *not* about oil. It started as an extension of the so-called "war on terror", then invoked the excuse of disarming Saddam Hussein's regime, and finally started under the guise of liberating the Irakis (a large part of whom apparently don't want to be liberated from their tyrant more than most of us want to be liberated from the ones who rule over us).

This war is not about oil, alas! It is about legitimizing and glorifying our monstrous states.

As for why the false view of "war for oil" continues to be held, I submit that it is for the same sort of reasons that warmongers cling to their views: ideological irrationality in general, and naïveté

towards the state in particular. I don't want to imply that the Iraqi tyrant is not much worse than our own, but isn't it strange that the state (our states, the good states, the nice states, flectamus genua) is presumed to be man's best friend, despite the lessons of 25 centuries of history – and of five decades of Public Choice economic analysis?

Pierre Lemieux
<http://www.pierrelemieux.org>

by [Pierre Lemieux](#) on Wed, 04/02/2003 - 20:33 | [reply](#)

It's Not About Oil

I agree that this war is not mainly about oil. Although the prospect of the US enjoying direct access to it cannot be discounted. The "about oil" myth appears to be propagated by Middle Eastern sources and believed by many in the West. Another reason ascribed is the defence of the US dollar against the euro as the currency for oil purchases.

It is true that the initial Iraqi reaction to their "liberation" did not appear to be one of unalloyed joy, but more recent news clips show that the US, and the rest of us, did not fully appreciate the extent to which the Iraqi people in general had been suppressed and terrorised by the regime and its followers.

Our states may not be models of perfect liberty, but I doubt if in this imperfect world we inhabit it is likely to improve very much. At least we ordinary people all have the liberty to go to Iraq and fight for Mr Hussein, but the reverse is certainly not true.

by [Ralph Maddocks](#) on Wed, 04/02/2003 - 23:08 | [reply](#)

War for Rightness

The people who think the war is for oil are basically Marxists and anti-state cynics who can't believe that any country could possibly choose to risk life and limb for the sake of something more important than money. To them, the idea of a state actually trying to do what is morally right, despite the human costs, is unimaginable.

(Not that money isn't important and good, too: but saving the world from nuke-laden terrorists is even more important. It's hard to make any kind of a living when you're fallout dust.)

So, what do the Arab states have that we don't have? Oil is about it, really. In every other respect, they are entirely uncovetable. So oil it must be! The reason why those who hold this belief are impervious to argument is simply that they aren't **interested** in argument. Any more argument would upturn their entire world-views.

In the meantime, things are moving fast in Baghdad, and I very much look forward to hearing what more of the Iraqi people really **do** think about all this, as soon as the war ends and they can start

feeling safe. Until then, we should bear in mind that Saddam is still officially their leader and they are under fear of torture and death if they dare to do anything for the TV cameras other than enthusiastically support his regime.

by [Alice](#) on Thu, 04/03/2003 - 21:06 | [reply](#)

Confessions of a limb

I recognize myself in "the anti-state cynics who can't believe that any country could possibly choose to risk life and limb". I still have to meet a country for a drink, watch his limb, and listen to him talk about his life with his collective mouth. In the history of political thought, this is called social organicism. Auguste Comte, the French 19th-century scientist, believed that individuals were only "organs of the great social Being" -- limbs of the great country, as it were. Danten believed that society (substitute "race" in the case of Hitler) could scarifice an organ (read: an individual) when necessary for social health purposes, just as an individual decides to have a cankered limb cut off. Emile Faguet, the famous French literary critic of the turn of the (other) century (and extraordinary writer), LOL-ROTFed about this "zoological conception of society": "You believe you are a man," he wrote, "but you are only a foot."

Pierre Lemieux

<http://www.pierrelemieux.org>

by [Pierre Lemieux](#) on Fri, 04/04/2003 - 01:34 | [reply](#)

We even have oil. At least Ve

We even have oil. At least Venezuela does...

by [Daniel Strimpel](#) on Mon, 04/07/2003 - 00:57 | [reply](#)

False economy

Does anyone really believe that there is an oil shortage in the western world? No, so why would we want Iraqi oil? Well obviously, if we have access to their oil then the price of oil will go down, right?

Now can someone explain to me why they think this saving will outweigh the cost of firing billions of dollars worth of missiles at iraq, and then paying a comparable amount to repair all the damage caused by them afterwards?

Surely it would be easier just to use this money to subsidise oil in the first place, no?

by [Socrates](#) on Tue, 04/08/2003 - 14:24 | [reply](#)

Oil, Oil. Oil

The United States can't afford to "make it all about oil"! If the

United States rips one penny off Iraq, then all of OPEC would embargo the U.S.!

ditariel

by a reader on Sun, 06/15/2003 - 18:38 | [reply](#)

I Disagree

"Let's look at it simply. The most important difference between North Korea and Iraq is that economically, we just had no choice in Iraq. The country swims on a sea of oil." ~ Paul Wolfowitz, US Deputy Defense Secretary

by a reader on Thu, 07/03/2003 - 14:56 | [reply](#)

la de da

he's saying economic sanctions won't work on an oil-rich country.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 07/03/2003 - 16:58 | [reply](#)

its not about OIL its about \$\$

Money is everything today, Money is power.

The USA itself is not earning a cent, they are paying all that, but its not the USA itslef its the US citizens tax dollars, that are spent in missiles and fighterjets. Its YOUR taxmoney that is going to Bechtel co. that is doing the rebuild. Its not the USa itself that is owning the iraqi Oil, the oil will propably go in private hands. Privatisation is the key i think. al that belongs to the iraqi ppl today will be sold soon, who has the money to buy that stuff? the iraqis??????? its all about oil is just to simple. Its about the liberation and a good thing ,wel that would be nice, but it isnt. Voilence brings only new problems. There are Billions to earn, not by the US itself, but by some ppl inside the USA with much influence in the US goverments and other Goverments. Folowe the money!

by a reader on Sat, 08/23/2003 - 13:50 | [reply](#)

It's about oil and many other things!

If it were only about oil we would simply have planted our flag in Kuait 12 years ago and started pumping away.

Why must there be only one reason. A ruthless tyrant has been deposed, the children of Iraq have a chance for a decent future. Are they any less important than American children? How long were the no fly zones to be enforced, forever? Can anyone imagine solving the problem of Islamic terrorism in a world where Saddam Hussain is still in power? When the President speaks of liberty, freedom and justice for all people of the world how can anyone credibly argue

against him? History is being made in front of our eyes and I for one want to look back some day and knowing I was on the right side of it.

Oil, yes it's about oil too. The free flow of it among other things.

by a reader on Wed, 11/26/2003 - 22:09 | [reply](#)

Supporting Iraq war doesn't become you, libertarians!!! Get rid

What are you talking about? Many people agree that it is not about oil. So what?

- 1) Iraq supported terrorism. No more than: Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Iemen. USA supported terrorists in Macedonia
- 2) Saddam supported Ben Laden - very weak link is observed and it is still not proven. Again, not more than etc.
- 3) Tyran regime. Not more than Northen Korea etc. etc. USA supported Ben Laden at the beginning of his "career".

Does it look like a hypocrisy to you?

4) WMD. A little doubt is remaining about why Saddam resisted and that was probably about well hidden WMD. Again no proofs, a weak doubt after all.

5) Liberate people. They will always choose Islam. And Islam is "incompatible" with democracy. Do they want to be liberated? You talking about children making their choices. Now you have to tell that adult Iraqis are less able to make a choice. Hypocrisy again. Or a devil in details?

by a reader on Mon, 03/15/2004 - 12:16 | [reply](#)

The invasion of Iraq is not about Nation Building or WMD

It is about survival. The world is running out of oil (Noth Sea oil will last just another 5-6 years) and the industrialised world needs desperately the stuff at an affordable price. With a real danger of Saudi Arabia falling in the hands of a fundamentalist regime I believe that securing and controlling the world's second largest oil reserves is just plain common sense. Good luck!

by a reader on Mon, 09/20/2004 - 20:54 | [reply](#)

Make your point intelligently

Wouldn't it be nice if some of the hotshots who want to change the way the world works or explain to all of us who are obviously STOOPID (stupid to the power of 10) could, just once, spell correctly in their musings and make correct use of the language.

by Ted Harris on Fri, 11/26/2004 - 22:15 | [reply](#)

Elections, money, empire, oil and Dad

Of course the second Iraq war was not **all** about oil.

It was about "elections, money, empire, oil and Dad" (to quote Andrew Motion).

To make the point less flippantly, we have the following:

- (1) The USA's constant, gargantuan thirst for oil.
- (2) The fact the Iraq is the second most oil-rich nation on Earth (if I recall correctly - in any case, there's a hell of a lot of oil there).
- (3) The fact that replacing Saddam with a pro-Western regime has the 'side-effect' of securing long-term American access to the oil (*provided that this regime doesn't collapse*. However, we have every reason to think the Americans believed 'their' Iraq would (will) be nice and stable in the long term.)

Put them all together, and the conclusion that Iraq's oil factored heavily in the decision to go to war is almost unavoidable.

Suppose you put a plateful of food in front of a hungry man at 9:00 and by 10:00 he has eaten it. What possible evidence could overturn the contention that the man ate at least partly because he was hungry?

by Neil Fitzgerald on Sat, 11/27/2004 - 03:05 | [reply](#)

A foot in the door

What it's all about is securing a foothold in a vast area hostile to "the life" as we all know it in the west.

Where are an endless number of crazed murderers coming from?

Why are they fighting with barbarity beyond all known values of engagement?

And how are they instructed, trained and financed?

Who knows...Perhaps the neighbouring dictators are a bit uptight about democracy creeping closer and closer...

Or are the Sharia puritans of the near by theocracies worried sick by freedom with all it's accompanying degenerate baggage of fun,alcohol,porn,gambling,choice and all that..

My preference is for an extension of the real world..tourism and decadence included.Murdering women, molesting mules,amputations or even a Friday night out clubbing in Teharan or Jeddah just are'nt my cup of tea...

But that's me

Hooray George.W..Afganistan and Iraq are a good start.

by accidental tourist on Wed, 12/22/2004 - 15:54 | [reply](#)

Advancement depends on cheap energy!

If you can think without your "American Dream" bias, you will soon see that the underlying issue is the building up of defense to maintain "the American Way of Life". In the past two decades things have changed dramatically in regards to foreign oil dependency. This includes that the Asias(China,Japan,India)have become grosly dependent on the same oil we depend on) All have started implementing a oil stockpile strategy .We also have seen peaks in discovery of new oil wells in the 1970s . In the 1950's we were using about 50million barrels per day, now we are using around 75 million barrels per day worldwide. Many physicist believe that our limit to production may very well be around 110 million barrels per day. In the 1970's America expirienced its first energy crisis, where we only saw a drop of about 5% in production. (That is all that is needed to cripple our nation, OIL DOES NOT NEED TO RUN OUT TO CAUSE A COLLAPSE)

So, what do we do as Americans, well we pretend to believe that there is sufficient research and advancement of alternative energies, where as the US energy policy contradicts thees "pipe dreams". Simply stated the US energy policy (dealing with the aspect of oil production decrease) is to continue to build up a massive defensive program. If you cannot realize the importance and uniqueness of oil as an energy, then you have your eyes closed. What other liquid can push a 3000lb piece of metal 10 miles with one gallon. The bottle of water you buy everyday and throw away, the car you drive, plastics, paints, distribution systems (average piece of food travels 1500 miles before being consumed) are some of the many of thousands of luxuries we will have to live without if we want to avoid major global resource wars in the future. As long as we have a reason to send 150,000 troops to an oil abundant nation (terror) we will also be able to baby-sit our oil supplies on that side of the planet. Certainly people have come up with great ideas like hydrogen for instance. Another pipe dream, "the hydrogen economy" is a complete fallacy. At the moment the only economical hydrogen fuel cell must use platinum, which is a very finite resource (like oil) and would not come close to replacing the 700million vehicles worldwide. Even if it could, Hydrogen is currently a energy carrier, which means it takes more energy to create potable hydrogen then is actually given out. Furthermore, things you may not even connect with oil are: pesticides to maintain agriculture, running water, construction (6,500 gallons of gas per average house built) and our basic monetary system is controlled by the price of gas per gallon. If you can't see the deeper turmoil that is brewing between the major contenders, China, America and the middle east, then maybe you are just another ignorant American, that comes home from work, turns on the big screen, and absorbs all of the propoganda that the US media has to offer.I certainly realize that our little hundred year spurt of burning off massive amounts of petrochemicals to create prosperity in America will not last through even the next two generations. If we do not address the situation of American over consumption, and global overpopulation, we will have no choice but to go to war to

maintain the same increase in energy consumption we see each

year.

Sincerely

Matthew E. Coyle

University Films Production Executive

*Coming soon, the end of the industrial age, the beginning of the resource wars!

by [Matthew Coyle](#) on Wed, 04/20/2005 - 18:49 | [reply](#)

Your argument makes little se

Your argument makes little sense when you look at who's paying (us, taxpayers) and that some non-paying parties (corporations) are benefiting in the breakdown, buildup and available resources thereafter.

by a reader on Wed, 11/23/2005 - 06:12 | [reply](#)

Re: Your argument makes little sense

Your counter-argument of cui bono, to have any substance, would have to include some account of how the benefit to certain corporations was translated into the liberation of Iraq. How, for instance, did it cause large numbers of people to become persuaded of the rightness of such a liberation? And how did it cause the President and his Administration to embark on a mission whose real purpose was to dispossess their own voters for the benefit of a third party?

Without such an account, your counter-argument is just a general-purpose **conspiracy theory**.

by [Editor](#) on Thu, 11/24/2005 - 00:59 | [reply](#)

The war on Iraq was more on a

The war on Iraq was more on and ego booster than oil. People who are speculating that America needs the oil of Iraq are totally lost. Perhaps it is a possible reason, but I don't see any logic since America is already controlling Saudi's oil. The attack on Iraq was Bush's move to show the world not to mess up with America or else.

by [Online Wong PoKér Hu](#) on Fri, 11/25/2005 - 00:13 | [reply](#)

hahahaha

what an amazing time capsule about how retarded the supporters of the phony war in Iraq were back in the day.

they're still totally stupid but back then they were goose-

stepping!!!!

by a reader on Sat, 12/03/2005 - 18:27 | [reply](#)

Firmly in the 'stupid' camp!

Whichever side of this debate you come down on, anyone who spends some time considering the facts and questioning some of the half-truths and propoganda that surround this issue, will quickly realise that there were strong, valid and logical reasons both for and against going to war in Iraq.

Anyone who dismisses the other side as: "Retarded", "Totally Stupid" or "Goose-stepping" is either themselves too stupid to understand the debate, or (more likely) too intellectually lazy.

Unless they change, they are doomed to learn nothing from history, and blunder through life with their shallow, mistaken opinions, continually astonished at the 'stupidness' of others, and the 'retarded' nature of others' actions.

I can only hope that 'a reader' never ends up in a position of power where his/her ignorance and laziness can do any real harm.

by Mark on Mon, 08/21/2006 - 11:18 | [reply](#)

'A reader'

If this pathetic, infantile tirade is what 'a reader' has to contribute, then I suggest he go back to playing in his sandbox, because he is not fit to join an adult debate.

His screeching reference to goose-stepping tells us a lot about the 'mind'-set of this ignorant individual.

by **Yoni** on Sun, 09/10/2006 - 16:03 | [reply](#)

OIL AS A WEAPON

Osama bin Laden himself has said if America leaves the Middle-East, Muslims will still sell them oil. What do THEY need the oil for? Here's a critical point that everyone seems to keep missing though: OIL IS MONEY! Not primarily for us, for THEM!! And tell me, oh great wise CONSPIRACY THEORISTS OF THE WORLD, what will the Fanatical, Extremist Islamic Fundamentalists of the Middle-East DO with that oil money?

Why don't we FIGHT in Darfur? Why don't we invade South-East Asia again? Why don't we take-on North Korea? Is it REALLY because they don't have oil? Actually YES! But not because WE make money, but because the radical assholes who have the OIL make money! Do we invade NICE nations, with good leaders and decent political potential, who happen to have OIL? NOPE!

North Korea can't even feed its' own, let alone fight US. The Sudan

might spread their violence across their borders, which may cause us to go in, even without the oil, as we did in the former Yugoslavia. We don't tolerate the 'spreading' of violence so much. BUT, if you have OIL, if you have MONEY from that OIL, you are a much, Much, MUCH bigger international threat!!!

Think about it please, before you go on and on about how we are fighting for cheap OIL, oil for US! No, it's to keep OIL MONEY out of the pockets of tyrants.

by REN on Fri, 11/10/2006 - 06:23 | [reply](#)

Are you people serious?

Consider two things:

1 The US is by far the largest user of oil.

Our own reserves, combined with Venezuela and Mexico could not sustain us. We could not meet demand when OPEC cut us off in the 70s, and we use far more today than we did then.

2 Iraq has around 25% of the proven oil reserves in the world. The Persian Gulf has 50% all together.

No, oil was not the only factor. Partly the war was an excuse to increase military spending, to set a precedent of ignoring the UN, and to generally get citizen support of increased government - particularly executive - power over both our own lives and the world.

Partly it is a warning to other countries that the US is not to be messed with, that we should be given whatever we want without having to ask twice.

Basically it is about world domination.

However, oil is a huge component of that, and it is not coincidence that we choose as our target the country with the second most oil reserves on the planet.

There are plenty of other countries with human rights abuses, genocide, a lack of democracy, or Islamic based governments. We did/do not send massive amounts of troops into Rwanda or Darfur even though what happened/is happening in those countries is at least as bad as anything Saddam ever did.

Saudi Arabia has a King and no Parliament or congress. There are no elections in Saudi Arabia. There never have been. Saudi Arabia is also a Islamist country in which law is based on the Koran. People have very little freedom.

Yet, Saudi Arabia is our ally.

Iraq, by contrast, was a secular government. People had far more freedom in Iraq than in Saudi Arabia, and in fact, more freedom under Saddam than they do now (for example, in most areas not directly controlled by US troops today women must wear head scarves).

Ultimately it is about preserving the American way of life - i.e. CONSUMPTION. Massive, excessive amounts of consumption. When our leaders use the term "democracy" what they actually mean is "capitalism". Unrestricted free trade is what allows our corporations (which are becoming more and more synonymous with

government) to become as excessively wealthy as they are. If we did not display a giant show of force now and then, the rest of the world would not put up with us. Iraq is a warning to OPEC. We leave Saudi Arabia alone because they give us a fair price. Most people, when making a deal with the mafia or any other bully, offer a good price, and then except what ever terms are suggested. Saddam had balls, so we cut them off to serve as a warning to everyone else. Getting control over the immense Iraqi oil fields is much more than just a side benefit.

It is about power. We are exploiting the world. This is why illegal immigrants want so badly to get in here. Everyone would prefer to be on this side of the fence, since we have both the guns and the money.

The "threat" of "terrorism" is no different than the "threat" of "communism" a few decades ago. What did the communists want which made them evil?

They want to take away the money of the wealthy, and spread it around.

That's it.

Nothing to do with democracy or authoritarianism. It has to do with capitalism. Russia was a democracy. Not a perfect one, but ours never has been either (look at a Gerrymandering district map).

And they were able to convince the American people that it was an issue of good (us) vs evil (them).

Even today you see people on this very form using "Marxist" as an insult, with no context or basis. And so it continues...

by Jay Aziza on Wed, 12/20/2006 - 16:19 | [reply](#)

Oil or Oil Money

We are not getting much oil out of Iraq, but our economy is still doing well. Therefore Iraqi oil is not necessary for the United States and Great Britain to be economic powers.

On the other hand, we did try and should keep trying to keep oil money (and money from other sources) out of the hands of Saddam and other evil dictators. We need to do this because many dictators use money from oil and money from other sources to foment evil throughout the world.

We don't invade other countries whom we would also like to deprive of the resources to foment evil, either because we lack the power to do so without grave consequences to ourselves or other innocents, or because such countries have less capacity to create evil throughout the world.

Although we should pay much more attention to Darfur and other African tragedies, we are currently not paying much attention because we suspect that many countries in Africa, ruled by evil dictators, will not have the resources to be able to immediately hurt freedom loving peoples throughout the world.

The reason we don't attack North Korea, despite their potentially

very threatening war machine, is that if we do so, we are concerned that our freedom loving brothers and sisters in South Korea will be killed.

That's why we invaded Iraq, and do not want to invade North Korea (right now). And that's why we basically ignore Darfur, but not Tehran.

Now, whether our invasion of Iraq will keep more money out of the hands of terrorists and states that sponsor terrorism, for example, is open to debate. But that was our intent.

by a reader on Thu, 12/21/2006 - 00:57 | [reply](#)

A little volatile of a post,

A little volatile of a post, but spot on. Another reason that we didn't invade N. Korea is because they already had nukes, and Saddam didn't (yet).

by a reader on Wed, 04/11/2007 - 21:33 | [reply](#)

Reading past posts is humorous.

A few Americans must be feeling sheepish right about now. I wonder, have the posters become more informed regarding U.S. policy towards oil in the past, present, and future?

by a reader on Fri, 06/22/2007 - 21:12 | [reply](#)

1) A country (in our case the

1) A country (in our case the USA) is not an agent, it is an aggregate of many people with various opinions. Therefore, the different reasons that people give to go to war can all be correct in the same time.

2) Even if simple everyday acts are often driven by single motives (going out to buy cigarettes), political decisions are usually taken after a complex process of weighting pros and cons.

Conclusion:

-Most of you are probably right in different degrees.

-If we want to discuss this topic seriously we should try to avoid speaking of America as a single entity and start speaking about Bush, a typical conscript, a board member of Halliburton, a think tank representative, Cheney etc...

P.S. Understanding demands cold blood, rational thinking and a careful hear for arguments of the opposite conviction. After the analyse is done, speaking forcefully for one side and calling the other side blind is sometimes justified! Sometimes one side is 99.9% right.

by jmd on Sat, 10/06/2007 - 23:26 | [reply](#)

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History

In another of his superb, moving essays, **History**, Bill Whittle places the present war in its broadest context, analysing it from the perspective of other times, other conflicts, and other universes too. Read this piece, and when you have finished, read his other essays.

Wed, 04/02/2003 - 22:37 | [permalink](#)

Understatement

To call it "moving" is an understatement. I have tears pouring down my face. In amongst the powerful words about history is the following important argument we should never forget:

No sane person wants to fight a war. But many sane people believe that there are times when they are necessary. I believe this is one of those times.

For it seems to me that if you are against any war ♦ if you believe that peace is always the right choice -- then you must believe at least one, if not both of the following:

1. People will always be able to come to a reasonable agreement, no matter how deep or contentious the issue, and that all people are rational, reasonable, honorable, decent and sane,

or,

2. It is more noble to live under slavery and oppression, to endure torture, institutionalized rape, theft and genocide than it is to fight it.

History, not to mention personal experience, shows me that the first proposition is clearly false. I believe, to put it plainly, that some people have been raised to become pathological murderers, liars, and first-rate bastards, and that these people will kill and brutalize the good, meek people and steal from and murder them whenever it is in their personal interest to do so. [...]

We fight wars not to have peace, but to have a peace

worth having. Slavery is peace. Tyranny is peace. For that matter, genocide is peace when you get right down to it. The historical consequences of a philosophy predicated on the notion of no war at any cost are families flying to the Super Bowl accompanied by three or four trusted slaves and a Europe devoid of a single living Jew.

It would be nice if there were a way around this. History, not merely my opinion, shows us that there is not. If all you are willing to do is think happy thoughts, then those are the consequences. If you want justice, and freedom, and safety, and prosperity, then sometimes you have to fight for them.

by **Sylvia Crombie** on Mon, 04/07/2003 - 15:54 | [reply](#)

Man's best friend

Actually, this piece is a well done romantic job to make midinettes cry; I suggest it has little rational content, and certainly no libertarian wind. It is more glorification of the state than humanistic poetry. Read this: "these kids died for all of us. We asked them to go, and they went." Jesus Christ! just like Him!

We should not be cynical towards heroism, as we might need some in the future (and it is not going to be against some little foreign tyrant!), but the more sober truth in this case is probably that the men who died in Irak (I don't mean the Irakian conscripts or brainwashed thugs) are adventurous men who do a fun job (they are all volunteers), like to obey orders, and who, more often than not, will shoot a suspected drug smuggler when ordered to.

And read this: "Today, the United States is at war with Iraq." Oh! I thought that the U.S. state was at war with the Iraki state. But perhaps there is no difference: in a Rousseauvian way, the state is us.

What a naiveté towards the state perceived as man's best friend! The author should read Christopher Browning's Ordinary Men. Some Public Choice readings wouldn't hurt his warrior poetry either.

The reference to Lincoln is truly fascinating. Indeed, one could possibly argue that, just as Lincoln liberated the slaves and enslaved free men(see Jeff Hummel's fabulous book on the Civil War), Bush will liberate "the Irakis" and enslave Western individuals.

Pierre Lemieux
<http://www.pierrelemieux.org>

by **Pierre Lemieux** on Tue, 04/08/2003 - 02:52 | [reply](#)

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Curious About Joe McCarthy

Elliot Temple at **Curiosity** has become curious about what McCarthyism was really all about. His preliminary findings, and musings comparing the beginnings of the Cold War with the present day, are **here**:

[Joe McCarthy wanted] to fight to get idiotarians out of government. Or so it sounds. Don't actually know how many idiotarians there were in 1950. Have heard plenty, but must do more research.

So, to sum up, McCarthy was pro-morality (and Christianity), anti-commie, anti-complacency, didn't like anti-Americanism at home, and had some suspect facts. And was blunt. So far ... I like him.

Oh, and Elliot recently **wondered**:

I still haven't gotten any hate mail. What's up with that?

Thu, 04/03/2003 - 09:34 | [permalink](#)

On Loyalty – Part 1: True Allies, True Loyalty

Down with loyalty! In international relations, the very concept undermines the struggle for good against evil and plays into the hands of the enemy.

The redoubtable **Steven Den Beste** once mused on the subject of which countries are truly “allies” of the United States, and **concluded** that

It's a very short list. We've got the UK, and Canada, and Australia. That's the lot.

He contrasted these countries with others who merely co-operate with the US out of “self-interest”:

Real allies sacrifice for you, take risks for you.

Well, yes, of course allies sacrifice and take risks to help you. But so do fair weather friends, whenever they consider it expedient. The West sacrificed plenty to help the Soviet Union in World War 2 but that did not make them “real allies” of Stalin in the sense that Steven is looking for.

Steven – do you think that there exist countries who make sacrifices to help another country *to do wrong* as they see it? That never happens. You have put your faith in a chimera - the chimera of loyalty. As George Washington said in his **Farewell Address**:

There can be no greater error than to expect or calculate upon real favors from nation to nation. It is an illusion, which experience must cure, which a just pride ought to discard.

What about those countries who take risks, not ‘for you’ but because they *agree with you* - because they share fundamental moral values with you and therefore have reached the same conclusion about what should be done? Such countries do not count as “allies” by Steven's definition! Because if, by some quirk, you embarked on what they saw as a morally wrong path, they would refuse to help. Instead, they would offer friendly criticism.

No doubt some readers will see in this an echo of the slimy excuses that are always trotted out by the Weasels when they are

weaseling, such as: “friends don't help friends to drink and drive -

so the fact that we are trying to thwart the liberation of Iraq doesn't mean we're not friends of America". Such readers are not seeing the wood for the trees. The point is, drunk driving is *wrong*; liberating Iraq is *right*. The Weasels are at fault, not for 'lack of loyalty' in refusing to condone a war that they believe to be wrong, but for believing that it is wrong in the first place.

As soon as you take the argument out of that moral arena and into that of morality-free analysis - loyalty and betrayal, gratitude and ingratitude, sacrifice vs. self-interest - you have let the Weasels off the hook. Because then, for every accusation that the Weasels have betrayed a friendship, they can counter that so have you: it takes two to fracture Western unity, does it not? Has not Britain fractured EU unity too, by siding with the US? For every appeal to gratitude for saving France from the Nazis, they can claim that the US wouldn't even exist if it had not been for French help in the Revolutionary war. For every claim that the the war is enforcing UN resolutions, they can claim that the war violates the UN Charter.

These claims are absurd; but one cannot discover this by examining the entrails of who has been more disloyal to whom. One has to face the issue of who is in fact right about Iraq and who is wrong.

The Weasels are in fact wrong. America and Britain and Australia are right. And they are helping each other to fight this war because they have all come to similar, right conclusions about what should be done about Iraq. It was no coincidence that they have: it is because of fundamental moral values which they share. And that does indeed make them true allies. But loyalty did not come into it. It would have been shameful if it had.

UPDATE: Steven Den Beste points out that his comments [here](#) regarding allies are congruent to ours.

Part 2

Thu, 04/03/2003 - 09:41 | [permalink](#)

Loyalty

I've always thought of loyalty as a virtue, but I like your argument. Is loyalty always the wrong focus? Is it legitimate to use the word as a shorthand to refer to acting rightly in certain ways?

by [Chris](#) on Fri, 04/04/2003 - 12:01 | [reply](#)

Loyalty

I think loyalty takes on a worthwhile meaning when you define it between a state and an idea, rather than between two states. In that case, it might mean something like ideological integrity i.e. in the face of adversity, the state sticks up for its principle, instead of wimping out and falling back on a more conciliatory one.

by [Daniel Strimpel](#) on Wed, 04/09/2003 - 01:04 | [reply](#)

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Fri, 04/04/2003 - 00:41 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Why?

From Lt. Smash

I'm here because there is a hole in the ground in New York, where a couple of the world's tallest buildings used to be.

I'm here because I knew some of those people in the Pentagon.

I'm here because my seven-year-old nephew has nightmares about terrorists.

I'm here because whether Saddam is responsible or not for those terrorist attacks, he has the will and is developing the means to do much, much worse.

I'm here because if History teaches us anything, it is that evil men cannot be deterred by sanctions, containment strategies, diplomacy, resolutions, or weapons inspections.

I'm here because I don't believe in appeasement.

I'm here because someone has to be.

This concise and moving argument from a serving soldier leaves no room for evasion. That is why he is there. That is why we support him and his comrades.

May they achieve their purpose soon and return home safely.

Fri, 04/04/2003 - 08:43 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Do they all know why they're there?

I read that a marine said that if a bunch of people had come to his hometown and did to them what he had been doing to Iraqis, *he* wouldn't be too happy about it either. As though the two situations are morally indistinguishable. They don't all get it, do they? Could this adversely affect what they're doing?

by [Chris](#) on Fri, 04/04/2003 - 11:56 | [reply](#)

There's always a few

We don't know how representative that Marine is - or the context in which he said that. From everything else I've seen, the soldiers in general seem to have a remarkably coherent and nuanced take on the objectives of the war and its moral basis. Of course there are always the weird people on the far edges of any Gaussian distribution, like **this guy**. But my guess is that they are vanishingly few

by **David** on Fri, 04/04/2003 - 15:26 | [reply](#)

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Legitimacy of the Post-War Iraqi Government

Now that their epic 12-year struggle to preserve the regime of Saddam Hussein is nearing its final relegation to the cesspool of history, the forces of Weasel are **turning their malevolent attention** to the next government of Iraq. The one that will replace Saddam's.

The thrust of their opposition to Iraq's liberation was that Saddam's regime is *legitimate*. In other words, states are sovereign: no matter what they may do to their people and no matter what future threat they pose to the world (so the theory went), their rule is legitimate. Only the Security Council of the United Nations can take away this legitimacy and since (under the Weasel interpretation at least) it refused to do so, the liberation of Iraq is illegal. Likewise, it is only the UN that can grant legitimacy to any post-war government of Iraq.

Hence, before anyone had any idea what such a government would look like or how it would behave, the Weasels were already **threatening it pre-emptively**:

The European Union issued a blunt warning yesterday that it would not finance the reconstruction of Iraq if Washington went to war without a clear mandate from the United Nations.

Chris Patten, the European external affairs commissioner, said it would be "very difficult" to convince states already facing a budget crunch that they should spend large sums of money repairing the damage done by America in a conflict they opposed.

Just step back and consider the sheer depravity of this threat and what lies behind it. Be optimistic for a moment. Suppose that sometime soon the murder and the torture and the repression and stagnation in Iraq have come to an end and a new government is trying to rebuild the country and feed the hungry. The Europeans will suddenly find it "very difficult" to help. Why? Well, it's all about legitimacy: Let the new government be as democratic and representative as you like; let it respect human rights and religious freedom and let it achieve prodigies of reconciliation; let it recognise Israel's and Kuwait's right to exist and let it disarm so

transparently that Hans Blix completes his work in an afternoon; let

it excel in every virtue known to Paris and beyond, and it will avail it nothing. For what the Weasels will find unforgivable about the new Iraqi government has nothing to do with what that government will do or be. It is not really about Iraq at all. It is that *the Americans deposed Saddam*. For their taint of association with this crime, Chris Patten will withhold aid to the people of Iraq. This is the same Chris Patten, incidentally, who is the principal cheerleader for EU funding of the Palestinian Authority on "humanitarian" grounds, and who scornfully (and successfully) **opposed** the proposed European Parliament investigation into the use of these funds for terrorism.

Will the UN likewise withhold legitimacy? The weasels would certainly have them **threaten to**:

In the face of continued US reluctance to consider a role for the UN in postwar Iraq, Mr de Villepin insisted that the UN was vital to tackling problems in Iraq, and their repercussions in the region. "The requirement for UN approval is both a principle and a necessity," he said. The US and Britain, above all, would find political cover and legitimacy from the UN necessary in the war's aftermath.

Necessary, why? Because should the Coalition be unwilling to pay the Weasels' price, the UN will exert its magical prerogative and deny the new Iraqi government legitimacy.

And what is this price? *Control*:

In the war's aftermath, he accepted that "it is clear that the countries that have taken the lead on the ground may have a special responsibility". But they should exercise it "under the umbrella of the UN to confer legitimacy". The UN should approve, even if it did not run, operations in postwar Iraq.

By what right? What will entitle the Weasels and their bloodstained allies, all the tyrants of the world, to control the destiny of the people whose liberation they tried so long and hard to prevent, and for which Coalition soldiers are today fighting and dying?

Fortunately the legitimacy of governments is not really in the gift of the UN. It comes from **the consent of the governed**. In the long run this is the standard against which it will, in practice, be judged no matter what anyone says. It is a standard against which the United States, but conspicuously not the UN, *wants* its post-war policy to be judged. The UN is not – or at least not yet – a legitimate or honest judge. But whether the UN in future can find a role in a world order based on that criterion of legitimacy, or whether, alternatively, it continues to be a major obstacle to the creation of such a world, is the standard against which the UN must itself be judged.

UPDATE: **The Emperor Misha** has graciously noticed our humble

remarks and has proposed that, consequently, as the war draws to a close, the Weasels would be better renamed "The Axis of Vulture". Good point.

FURTHER UPDATE: The Vultures are **squawking louder**.

Fri, 04/04/2003 - 08:55 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Tony Blair

Can Tony Blair be trusted not to betray the US in this matter? I don't like what I'm seeing him say.

by **Chris** on Fri, 04/04/2003 - 11:24 | [reply](#)

Tony Blair

I don't like what I'm hearing Blair say either (not that I like what I hear Colin Powell saying, but that's another story).

Despite their troops who are doing a fine job in Iraq, the Brits (particularly that arse Jack Straw) are determined to insist that Israel not be allowed to do exactly what the "coalition" is doing - namely drain the swamp and shoot the rats....Don't trust the Brits. Without W leading the charge they'd have sat this whole thing out too.

by a reader on Sat, 04/05/2003 - 04:03 | [reply](#)

Interesting

The thought that that the UK would stay out of a fight to liberate a country of the oppressed gives me chills. I am hoping that as an Australian, that my government made the decision to deploy to Iraq, not because the UK was involved, but because it was the "right" thing to do. Admittedly, we didn't see too much overt US/UK presence in East Timor, although it was VERY nice to know they were there. The western democracies (why western, look how far east Australia is!) are free countries. If we can create other democracies, it is our legitimate right, nay, our duty, to do so. Oppression by other nations is wrong. I know that sounds simplistic, however this is essentially the crux of the argument, economic factors notwithstanding. We should not tolerate any nation that does not allow a citizen to speak his/her mind, without persecution. I understand personal limitations and inflammatory remarks, however, democracy is a robust concept that has weathered these tribulations before. And will do so gain. Free speech for all. Regardless of colour, race or creed. For fuck's sake, it's deeds, not words, that are the evil actions. Speak evil, be derided as an ignorant asshole. Do evil, be bombed. So sayeth the world.

by a reader on Sat, 04/05/2003 - 13:48 | [reply](#)

(1) That was a brilliant post

(1) That was a brilliant post. I agree completely and wholeheartedly.

(2) It worries the shit out of me to hear all that UN nonsense again and again, with the peaceniks latching onto a new issue to beat the US with. There has been no public information (I refrain from saying anything about the broadcast media) about what an interim government needs to do (flush out the Ba'ath Party functionaries and destroy its power, provide security, institute the rule of law and civil rights, establish freedom of speech and assembly) and how Iraqis will end up with a Russian situation (gangsters, organised crime) or a new set of Saddam-lookalike replacements, if the UN is allowed a hand in things. They have spent 12 years cosyng up to the Ba'ath functionaries, and even now attack the British army for trying to destroy the party's power. People think all you need is a wish and a prayer and the virtuous power to stop evil US corporations getting their hands on the oil. What is perhaps most sickening is that any authority through the UN Security Council would involve Syria, which is hardly any better than Iraq as far as promoting terrorism is concerned, and ought to be taken out next!

by a reader on Mon, 04/07/2003 - 10:46 | [reply](#)

Is it even possible?

We're all kinda assuming this whole thing is possible, but sometimes I wonder. Like, can we take out the regime and impose a better one? How can we be sure that's possible if the people there are still the same people they were before? don't get me wrong--I sure HOPE this is possible. It's necessary! But is it possible? Is Iraqi opinion going to suddenly turn good? How do we know they don't prefer Hussein or that kind of regime? Show me the Arab countries that have a Western democracy. Where are they? Do Arabs want a democracy? Even Turkey's going down the tubes. Aren't we trying to impose our own values on people who just ain't gonna get it? Help me here, guys!

Bill Henderson

by a reader on Mon, 04/07/2003 - 12:41 | [reply](#)

gradual change

Certainly, we can't drag a people into the 21st century, kicking and screaming, but surely we can meet them more or less where thier understanding is, and bring them along through education and democratic institutions? I hope.

by a reader on Mon, 04/07/2003 - 14:30 | [reply](#)

post Saddam Iraq

You are, in general terms, talking my language. Not many weblogs

are presenting anything new or useful.

I set up baghdadskies.blogspot.com in order to work out my ideas in a context of memories of Iraq in the 1950s. Though not as slick as your site - especially in its lack of comments and email - it has some value.

A general algorithm that includes:

FACT

IDEA

CLARIFY

DELIMIT

DEFINE

EXPLAIN

PREDICT

would allow anyone to think through any set of ideas without resorting to the the methods of "argument" outlined on my weblog which Schopenhauer detailed in his "The Art of Controversy".

Sincerely,

Andy

by a reader on Thu, 04/10/2003 - 12:06 | [reply](#)

Duty

"If we can create other democracies, it is our legitimate right, nay, our duty, to do so."

and so by this "duty" we enslave ourselves

by a reader on Sat, 05/17/2003 - 02:49 | [reply](#)

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United Nations Reform – A Modest Suggestion

If the UN is to have any beneficial role in the future of the world, the Security Council must live up to its responsibilities from now on. That means it must never again behave as it did during the Iraq crisis.

What, then, is to be done about France? Here's a possibility. France can retain its permanent membership of the Security Council, but with a slight alteration in the voting rules: *any vote cast by France must have the unanimous consent of all other EU members.* Without such consent, France/EU is deemed to abstain.

This at a stroke would make the UN more effective, increase the EU's role in world affairs, encourage European unity and promote multilateralism. Since these are all prime aims of French foreign policy, France would welcome the change.

Heh heh heh.

Sat, 04/05/2003 - 10:41 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

What happens to France if it

What happens to France if it refuses- how, in the fantasy, does the rightness get enforced?

by [Alice](#) on Sat, 04/05/2003 - 15:54 | [reply](#)

What happens to France?

In the fantasy, France approves of the reform.

In real life, the US imposes this or some equivalent reform by threatening to withdraw funding from the UN or, ultimately, to suspend its membership or leave altogether.

What happens to France? It takes the consequences.

by a reader on Sun, 04/06/2003 - 17:46 | [reply](#)

The UN

Do you think the US would do that? Don't they need the UN for the

support it gets them from otherwise unsupportive governments and individuals?

Bill Henderson

by a reader on Mon, 04/07/2003 - 12:25 | [reply](#)

Excellent idea. Just one slig...

Excellent idea. Just one slight modification - France would need approval of all other EU members that are not also at the time members of the Security Council.

by a reader on Tue, 04/08/2003 - 20:50 | [reply](#)

France should be told to shut...

France should be told to shut up, and get back to the kitchen and the vinyard. Otherwise the ANGLOnofreakinfroggiesSPHERE will unsheath Operation French Freedom III, and do it properly this time, liberating all french women from the tyranny of french men, who will be disenfranchised.

Kofi should be reclassified as French, and, just as Peking became Beijing, Putin's name should be corrected to Putain.

The UN should be moved to Waco Texas and Bill Clinton should be put in charge of fundraising, staffing, and travel.

by a reader on Fri, 04/11/2003 - 08:47 | [reply](#)

At Least One of Us Has Gone Mad

We knew Matthew Parris when he was still fairly sane...

Better than sane. His extraordinary political perceptiveness, his personal and intellectual integrity, his kindness and his humane, libertarian instincts made him first a Conservative MP whom one could unashamedly support, and then arguably one of the greatest columnists ever. About a decade ago, we were on the same side, or so it seemed.

Not any more. Not for a long time.

At some point he seemed to start losing it. To be fair, he has written excellent articles on some subjects quite **recently**, but war is not one of them. He opposed NATO's military intervention in Kosovo, and the liberation of Afghanistan from the Taliban and Al Qaeda. In a December, 2001 **article** which still seems germane and true, Henry Porter wrote:

A little under two months ago the Times columnist Matthew Parris put the hawks on notice. In the **Spectator** he declared his deep misgivings about the war, and wrote that he hoped that, if the Afghan adventure ended, like Vietnam, in palpable humiliation, those who had argued for the war against terrorism would be man enough to admit they were wrong.

Well, it hasn't ended like Vietnam; in fact the result has been a complete vindication of the plans devised by the Pentagon, of the Bush administration's resolve and of Tony Blair's support. Mr Parris has yet to concede that he and other prominent doves were wrong but while we wait, it's worth recalling another sentence in his column which captures much of the venom that existed between the two camps during the jittery weeks of autumn: " But they (the hawks) will know who they are, and we can guess who they are: the people who went the extra mile, and urged the troops the extra mile, towards the battle-front, and who did so not because they had to but as a matter of personal judgment and moral choice."

That is exactly right. Every journalist, academic and expert called upon in September to write about or debate what should happen had to make a difficult personal

judgment. But it was not just the hawks who made a choice. The doves did too, and although at the time it seemed a safe bet that to opt for peaceful means in Afghanistan was to claim a kind of de facto high ground, it turned out to be the less courageous choice and now demonstrably the wrong one.

To say that Matthew is firmly against the coalition action in Iraq would be an egregious understatement. In his March 29th, 2003 article in **The Times**, he writes:

I am not afraid that this war will fail. I am afraid that it will succeed.

The title of the article is: "Are we witnessing the madness of Tony Blair?" But who is the madman here? Oh! The irony of it all! To quote Matthew's opening paragraph:

Most of us have experienced the discomfort of watching a friend go off the rails. At first his oddities are dismissed as eccentricities. An absurd assertion, a lunatic conviction, a sudden enthusiasm or unreasonable fear, are explained as perhaps due to tiredness, or stress, or natural volatility. We do not want to face the truth that our friend has cracked up. Finally we can deny it no longer and then it seems so obvious: the explanation, in retrospect, of so much we struggled to reconcile.

UPDATE: No surprise here.

Sun, 04/06/2003 - 04:35 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Insanity

Interesting how war has a habit of polarizing opinion into the good guys and the bad guys.... Tony Blair's come along great, IMO.

Bill Henderson

by a reader on Mon, 04/07/2003 - 12:30 | [reply](#)

Matthew Parris

Interesting.

I recall reading Matthew Parris years ago in the "Spectator" and liking him.

Now he's become a typically European envious little raging impotent.

by a reader on Wed, 04/09/2003 - 22:34 | [reply](#)

Insult

That last comment is an insult to impotent men.

Or do I mean Europeans?

by **Rob Klein** on Thu, 04/10/2003 - 21:00 | [reply](#)

Out of context

The Matthew Parris quote ("I am not afraid that this war will fail. I am afraid it will succeed.") is taken out of context.

He didn't want the Iraq war and its aftermath to go too smoothly for the Americans lest they be tempted to continue their policy of trying to export freedom and democracy by force of arms.

Of course, if we temporarily ignore the world outside of Iraq, then Parris, just like the rest of us, prefers the Americans to win as quickly and painlessly as possible.

I should point out, furthermore, that it's ignorant and even a little bit insulting to call someone insane when all you really mean is that you think some of their opinions on current affairs are rationally indefensible. (Never mind that they and many other people think the same of you.)

by Neil Fitzgerald on Sat, 11/27/2004 - 03:50 | [reply](#)

Times change....

Since it is a while since you wrote this article, perhaps it would be fair to all concerned if you spent a few moments considering, in the light of events, if your opinions have changed?

by Roger S on Mon, 09/18/2006 - 12:15 | [reply](#)

Events

Which events do you think might change our opinion, in what way?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 09/18/2006 - 13:52 | [reply](#)

Benefit of retrospect

I do hope Matthew someday has the pleasure of reading this silly drivel. Only the second paragraph reflects reality: he's a very nice man and probably one of the best columnist ever. Maybe the writer of this article should check his bearings, especially with the benefit of retrospect from 2007 when almost everyone agrees that the war was a mistake. The writer should also hesitate before making condemnations and consider whether he really understood Matthew's articles.

by K Johansen on Sun, 09/23/2007 - 07:36 | [reply](#)

On Loyalty – Part 2: Who? Whom?

In a **previous** item we criticised the idea that a true ally is one that exhibits loyalty. We said that the whole idea of loyalty in international affairs is a chimera – and also exculpates Weasels (and, we should add, the bad guys too) by shifting the focus away from moral issues towards merely formal ones.

After Steven Den Beste had expressed that idea (NB he may have **changed his mind** since), some of his readers queried his omission of Israel from his short list of true allies of the US (Britain, Australia and Canada). And he **explained his conclusion** – again in terms of loyalty:

In all three cases of Canada, the UK and especially Australia, their willingness to stand by us in this crisis is more voluntary, more motivated by feelings of loyalty and friendship, than by the frank lack of choice which is Israel's top (but not only) reason for standing by us.

Yet **recent events** seem to cast doubt on that opinion of Canada. The Canadian government's "willingness to stand by us in this crisis" turned out to be **close to zero**. Perhaps even more telling, there was an upsurge of bitter anti-American feelings among Canadians – or at least, an upsurge in public expressions of hostility that already existed: events like **this one** in Montreal:

The sellout crowd of 21,000 at Bell Centre was asked to "show your support and respect for two great nations" before the singing of the American and Canadian national anthems.

But a significant portion of the crowd booed throughout "The Star-Spangled Banner" in an apparent display of their displeasure with the U.S.-led war against Iraq.

Defenders of Canada's honour will point out, quite rightly, that governments come and go, and that if the accidents of history had happened slightly differently, a Canadian Prime Minister might well be standing stalwartly with the US – and Israel – today. **This one** certainly would have. They will also rightly point out that there are plenty of idiotarians, and indeed plenty of anti-Americans, in the United States itself, where it has not been difficult recently to drum

up far larger crowds chanting far viler things than "boo".

This illustrates a further misconception in the idea of international 'loyalty'. For the real alliances are not between nations but between political traditions. Within each nation, there are many of these, struggling continuously for expression and domination of the souls of their respective nations and of the world. Governments represent factions, and the extent to which a particular government 'truly' represents the nation's values can only be determined later, with the hindsight of the victors. So governments – and public opinion too – sometimes take positions contrary to what will later be regarded as the fundamental moral values of that nation. An alliance between states can become **unreliable or completely worthless** if a faction whose heart isn't in it happens to be influential at the time. So if we want to gauge the extent to which there is a 'true alliance' between two nations, we have to take into account all the political traditions that have a reasonable chance of affecting the relevant policies of the governments of those nations. That includes not only political parties but also such things as the traditions of Common Law and the world-views of the US State Department, the British Foreign Office, media professionals and the 'Arab Street'.

Now, speaking of Israel, please cast your mind back to a time when it was Israelis, not Canadians, who were displeased with US policy: the moment of shame in 1981 when the US Government behaved spitefully towards Israel for **delaying Saddam Hussein's nuclear weapons programme**. The White House suspended deliveries of F-16 fighters and the State Department joined the frenzy of international condemnation of a morally impeccable action which, a decade later, **made the Coalition's job so much easier in the first Gulf War**.

So America's 'loyalty' to Israel faltered at that moment, but do you think that any crowds at Israeli sports stadiums booed the Star Spangled Banner or American athletes? It's unlikely, because Israeli national pride, unlike that which was on display in Montreal, contains no element of anti-Americanism. Consider also what would be happening at this moment if Israel had no need of allies. What if it were secure, universally recognised, and not under any threat or attack? Can anyone doubt that Israel would nevertheless, today, be a prominent member of the Coalition of the Willing? When someone is fighting righteously for their life, it is always easy to accuse them of acting out of 'mere' expediency. But that's a grossly unjust argument. *Of course* they are acting out of expediency, because to act expediently is, in that situation, also to act rightly. But Israel is, primarily, acting rightly, just as Britain was when it was fighting for its life in 1940, and as the nascent United States itself was in 1776.

Fundamentally, when Israel or Britain or Australia side with the United States (or when, as usually happens, Canada does too), and when the United States supports them, it is neither out of loyalty nor out of narrow expediency, nor should it be. It is out of agreement about what is right.

Part 3

Question

Did America ever issue some sort of apology to Israel about criticizing the bombing of the nuclear reactor?

by [Daniel Strimpel](#) on Mon, 04/07/2003 - 00:52 | [reply](#)

Apology

I don't know if they apologized but they did honor the pilot, didn't they?

Bill Henderson

by a reader on Mon, 04/07/2003 - 12:20 | [reply](#)

Canada?

Canada? Who's that?

by [Chris](#) on Mon, 04/07/2003 - 15:24 | [reply](#)

Perhaps the UN Should Send In Some Saddam Inspectors

White House correspondent: Given that the main excuse for attacking Iraq was its alleged possession of a so-called 'SHD' (Saddam Hussein the Dictator), and given that Coalition forces have now reached as far as the heart of Baghdad without finding any SHDs, is the Coalition at all worried yet?

Senior Administration spokesperson: No. The regime is skilled at concealing its SHDs.

Correspondent: But if no SHD is ever found, will the US Government itself have any legitimacy left?

Spokesperson: [*sigh*] Yes. But in any case, we have overwhelming evidence that an SHD exists and we are confident that it will be located and rendered harmless.

Correspondent: OK, you have found palaces, statues, intercepted television broadcasts ... but isn't it true that you have as yet found no 'smoking gun' *proving* the existence of SHD?

Spokesperson: Why would a regime spend fortunes on palaces if not to house its SHD? Also, we have found all the trappings of a classic SHD such as torture chambers.

Correspondent: Couldn't they have some other, innocent use?

Spokesperson: It occurs to me that I have no firm evidence that *you* exist. On the whole you seem very implausible.

Correspondent: Oh, I exist all right.

Spokesperson: Too bad.

Tue, 04/08/2003 - 08:26 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Iraq : An opportunity to reform the UN

- 1) If the UN was an Union of Democratic States no one could deny it a role in post-Saddam Iraq
- 2) Syria - an unelected dictatorship - is on the security Council How can the UN make sensible resolutions in these circumstances?
- 3) UN as a humanitarian organisation ought have a strong role

- provided the US/UK monitor what staff it sends [e.g. no corrupt Arabs/Russians]

check out www.baghdadskies.blogspot.com

by **andy** on Thu, 04/10/2003 - 13:25 | [reply](#)

Democratic States

Does France get to be in the hypothetical Union of Democratic States? If so, how would a Union of Democratic States be any better at solving problems than the current UN?

by **Sentient** on Sat, 04/12/2003 - 03:06 | [reply](#)

It would be better, but it would still suck.

Does France get to be in the hypothetical Union of Democratic States? If so, how would a Union of Democratic States be any better at solving problems than the current UN?

It would be better, but it would still suck.

David Schneider-Joseph

President, **Americans for a Society Free from Age Restrictions**
Chief, **Tewata**

by **DavidSJ** on Sat, 04/12/2003 - 06:10 | [reply](#)

Why?

It would be better, but it would still suck.

What would make it better?

by **Sentient** on Sun, 04/13/2003 - 09:01 | [reply](#)

Because

What would make it better?

As much as France sucks, surely it's not as bad as the many dictatorships in the U.N., like Lebanon and Syria, etc.

David Schneider-Joseph

President, **Americans for a Society Free from Age Restrictions**
Chief, **Tewata**

by **DavidSJ** on Sun, 04/13/2003 - 19:31 | [reply](#)

US troops arrive at Baghdad Bob's press conference. He responds:

"You aren't Americans."

5% (2 votes)

"See, ladies and gentlemen, these are the only survivors of the entire invading army"

22% (9 votes)

"Americans? What Americans?"

17% (7 votes)

"No I'm not" (when they tell him he's under arrest)

2% (1 vote)

"Welcome, liberators, I have been foretelling your arrival for weeks"

15% (6 votes)

"I don't exist."

7% (3 votes)

"I'm not the Saddamite you're looking for. I can go about my business. Move along."

32% (13 votes)

Total votes: 41

Tue, 04/08/2003 - 12:37 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

US Libertarian Party Protests Against Censorship of Iraqi TV

The **Libertarian Party of America**, which has voiced its principled **opposition** to the liberation of Iraq has now protested against the **latest atrocity** committed by the US government:

BAGHDAD (Reuters) – Iraq's domestic state television has gone off the air in Baghdad as US troops advance into the city.

"This disgraceful censorship of free speech cannot be allowed to go unchallenged," stated a Libertarian Party spokesman. "It is typical of this entire war which is an unjustified violation of the sovereignty of the state of Iraq. Libertarian Party policy has always been that states should be revered and respected at all costs. Regardless of how many innocent Iraqis the Iraqi state **slaughters**, regardless of how much terrorism it **sponsors**, regardless of how blatantly it is planning further acts of aggression and regardless of how **bellicose** its rhetoric becomes, it is wrong to take any action against it until a nuclear bomb is detonated in New York with 'This is from Saddam Hussein, may you all rot in hell, Zionist infidels,' written on it in Saddam Hussein's handwriting verified by an international panel of handwriting experts." The US government is said to be 'studying' the statement.

Tue, 04/08/2003 - 15:24 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Bad Satire

Was this supposed to be funny?

We can disagree with the position expressed by the Libertarian Party about when US forces should be deployed, but these false quotes should seem hysterical and ridiculous to anybody familiar with the subjects.

by [Gil](#) on Tue, 04/08/2003 - 16:25 | [reply](#)

Bad Satire continued...

I should have added that I meant hysterical and ridiculous in a way that doesn't criticize a real problem with the theories involved in the Libertarian position. I understand that they were intentionally

hysterical and ridiculous. But they make the author seem hysterical and ridiculous, not the Libertarians.

by **Gil** on Tue, 04/08/2003 - 16:38 | [reply](#)

It *is* funny. The bit abo...

It *is* funny.

The bit about the nuclear bomb kinda blows it, imo, but there really are lots of people: "Oh, they kill their own citizens....that's not force.....no NAP violation.....nothing to see here.....weeeeeeeeeeeeeee"

-- Elliot Temple
<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 04/08/2003 - 17:28 | [reply](#)

No it isn't!

No, there really isn't anybody who says "that's not force". Particularly not a spokesman for the Libertarian Party.

What they (the Libertarians) say is that the US military should only be used to defend the US. This isn't a stupid or immoral position. The extent to which the Iraqi regime posed (I love using the past tense about this!) a threat to the US is controversial. I agree with this campaign, but I can understand why some serious, smart, moral people thought it was a bad idea.

by **Gil** on Tue, 04/08/2003 - 18:13 | [reply](#)

sweatdrop

"the US military should only be used to defend the US"

Because this position is divergent from "the US military should do what is right" it *is* immoral. And people trying to use it to oppose fighting against Iraq *are* stupid (the solution to terrorism is not more people patrolling our borders).

-- Elliot Temple
<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 04/09/2003 - 02:29 | [reply](#)

Good Satire but lets LP off too lightly

I don't understand the objection to this satire.

The LP harps on about the violation of Iraq's national sovereignty, completely ignoring the effect of this sovereignty on the liberty of the Iraqi people. **The World** satirizes this by saying "Libertarian

Party policy has always been that states should be revered and

respected at all costs." How is that anything other than fair satire?

The LP harps on endlessly in their barrack-room-lawyer way, not about facts or morality, but about whether the US has obeyed legal technicalities or treated different states equally or not. **The World** satirizes this as the LP complaining that the war is disgraceful censorship. That too is a perfectly legitimate use of satire.

"Libertarians say: Saddam has not committed an act of aggression against the United States." **The World** satirizes this as "it is wrong to take any action against it until a nuclear bomb is detonated in New York." Well that's hardly even satire, it is almost exactly what the LP is saying.

And **The World** doesn't even bother to satirize IMO the worst thing in the LP press release, which is the barking moonbat conspiracy theory on which the whole thing is based. "Since Bush has no legitimate reason for waging war on Iraq, he has cobbled together a list of accusations."

I think the LP got off too lightly.

by a reader on Wed, 04/09/2003 - 10:47 | [reply](#)

Right and rights

Elliot,

The Libertarian Party **do** think that their position is moral, obviously. Not everybody agrees about what is right and wrong. They think taking armies abroad is wrong. This doesn't make them complete idiots. Unless you think all but four or five people in the world are total idiots, which is an extremely pessimistic position, which is immoral.

by a reader on Wed, 04/09/2003 - 10:49 | [reply](#)

The LP are idiotarians

Alan Forrester

Sorry Gil, but it's true. So the question becomes if it had been any other idiotarian group would you have objected to the piece above being written about them. If this piece had lampooned the Green Party say would you still be angry?

Oh, and about the reader who thinks that the peice didn't point out the gaping holes in their logic, it was kinda implicit in the links that went with the piece.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Wed, 04/09/2003 - 13:15 | [reply](#)

Hawks Are Morons (just kidding)

Alan,

While it might give you emotional comfort, it's neither accurate nor

useful to lump the LP along with all other war opponents, call them names, and pretend that their reasons are equally invalid.

I would prefer the the Green Party be lampooned because I think they oppose the war for bad reasons.

I think the LP opposes the war because they consider the policy of limiting the US military actions to those that defend Americans from more direct foreign threats to be wise. This comes from a (well-deserved) distrust of politicians and how they behave when they have power and wide discretion about how to use it. This does not mean that they don't consider liberating Iraq to be a noble, moral project. They just don't think that it's good policy to have the US military do it, now, under these circumstances. I'm sure they'd be quite happy if you created and funded your own institution to pursue projects like this (that limited the use of force to moral causes).

And I don't think it's fair to use the LP's indication that the fact that Iraq is internationally recognized as a sovereign nation is a relevant consideration when complating invasion to accuse them of hypocrisy about reverence for states. It *is* a relevant consideration. I think it's a cheap shot.

Again, *I* have been in favor of this campaign. But that doesn't mean I think everybody who has opposed it has been equally foolish. I recognize that the decision involves a great deal of judgement, and that I might be wrong about it.

by [Gil](#) on Wed, 04/09/2003 - 17:03 | [reply](#)

The LP are badly wrong

The reasons why the LP are better than the greens has nothing to do with their stance on the war. They are right that free markets are better than government intervention and so on while the greens use the fabricated excuse of the environment to push for a government controlled economy. But on this issue I'm not convinced they're really any better than the Greens - they don't have WMDs and anyway they're not going to give them to terrorists and Saddam isn't hostile to the US. You'll note in [this document](#) for example that they simply pay no attention to the wider issue of Islamofascist terrorism. They also attribute far too much good sense to Saddam Hussein. SH's worldview is a cobbled together bunch of crackpot conspiracy theories and any policy that relies on him being sensible is a bad policy, see Kenneth Pollack's book 'The Threatening Storm'. Either the LP are ignoring the truth or they are not doing their research properly. In either case I think they are a driven by a utopian wish to deal with everyone by the medium of free trade, even those who despise the very principle of free trade and would like nothing better than to see it crushed and utterly destroyed, such as SH.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Wed, 04/09/2003 - 20:21 | [reply](#)

The Idiotarians' big tent

The libertarians quite often are moral people.
It's the the apparatchicks in the Libertarian Party USA
that refuse to acknowledge that their fantasies of
what the world ought to be do not agree with the
world as it exists, full as it is of dangerous mass-murderers
and their followers and supporters.
There is nothing more despicable than the comfortable
deriding the efforts of those whose efforts and
sacrificies keep the peace and freedom of the deriders.

by a reader on Wed, 04/09/2003 - 22:27 | [reply](#)

Despicable

Somebody wrote:

There is nothing more despicable than the comfortable
deriding the efforts of those whose efforts and
sacrificies keep the peace and freedom of the deriders.

What a lack of imagination! There are lots of things more despicable
than that!!!

Here's one:

Attacking anybody who criticizes those who sacrifice in the name of
"Keeping the peace and fredom of the deriders" without reference
to the merits to any actual arguments (or with just some vague
accusation of being unrealistic); as if all sacrifices or military
campaigns are beyond criticism, and anybody who is guilty of being
comfortable should blindly praise them or shut the fuck up.

by [Gil](#) on Thu, 04/10/2003 - 16:35 | [reply](#)

Some Libertarians really are that stupid.

No, there really isn't anybody who says "that's not
force". Particularly not a spokesman for the Libertarian
Party.

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or immoral position. The extent to which the Iraqi regime
posed (I love using the past tense about this!) a threat
to the US is controversial. I agree with this campaign,
but I can understand why some serious, smart, moral
people thought it was a bad idea.

At least two people who call themselves Libertarians have told me
that if they had a magic button which they could push to end
Saddam Hussein's regime, they wouldn't push it, because we have
no right to intervene in that sovereign nation. I was surprised to
hear this, because I *thought* that their objection was using the U.S.

military for this purpose, not *any willing U.S. citizens* doing it

themselves.

David Schneider-Joseph

President, **Americans for a Society Free from Age Restrictions**
Chief, **Tewata**

by **DavidSJ** on Sat, 04/12/2003 - 01:34 | [reply](#)

Ok, some Libertarians are that stupid

But I still don't think that's the official position of the Libertarian Party or that of a substantial percentage of its members.

by **Gil** on Sun, 04/13/2003 - 07:54 | [reply](#)

Ok, some are that stupid...

"But I still don't think that's the official position of the Libertarian Party or that of a substantial percentage of its members." - Gil

Speaking as a voting libertarian [since 1983], Gil, it's not the position of a substantial percentage of libertarians. Definately not that of the ones I correspond with. "Official position"? Hmmm... officially, the Libertarian Party does contain a few idiotarians, just as the Democratic and Republican Parties do.

My understanding of libertarian principles encompasses an appreciation that totalitarianism is antithetical to libertarianism, and an awareness that dedication to libertarianism and liberty involves a responsibility to support and encourage liberty wherever it is lacking - else it's only hollow words, not a "principle".

by a reader on Tue, 06/17/2003 - 03:14 | [reply](#)

Whoulps. ;]

Sorry 'bout that - didn't mean to post anonymously. Brief moment of idiotarianism: I missed the create account on the sidebar. Used to blogs where you input usernick/name as you comment. ;]

That was me just above.

Sherman Barnes - Ironbear

by **Ironbear** on Tue, 06/17/2003 - 03:27 | [reply](#)

From a Libertarian

As far as Saddam goes, I for one was against invading because it was under false premiss and by a group who had personal biases and motives in his expulsion. The second reason is that I felt he was of no threat to anyone outside of Iraq, as he was having enough trouble keeping the peace between these rival bands that we now call "insurgents", to keep him bussy for decadedes. He was a very paranoid man, because his nation was falling apart into a multiple party civil war, that only his style of brutal dictatorship

could hold together. His massive killing and rape rooms, produces the Fear necessary to keep Iraq together, and this prevent mass chaos. That nation was a powder Keg, and it's now blowing up all over young american soldiers.

The world as a whole should have sent soliders in on a mission of peace, something like the Natural law party suggesed but less hokey and mystical. Once Iraq was healed from the inside, Saddams fear would have been eased and a less oppressive governement could have basically transcended the need for a sovergn like Saddam, while preserving his honour in the eyes of the people. Thus a sort of representational monarchy could have left the Husseins as respected figure heads, while the people themselves were given more control over the government, without interference from Saddam of the US in Iraq's policy.

As it stands, the US is obviosuly out to take control over Iraq and make it into a co-operative puppet, it has no altruistic motive in seeing the people rule themselves, but instead wants to install Iraq as another handle by which the US can attatch a string and be the puppet master of the world. That is why the "insurgents" are still fighting the US military after Saddam has been captured.

by Froclown on Thu, 11/18/2004 - 07:11 | [reply](#)

Er, what?

Froclown wrote

'As it stands, the US is obviosuly out to take control over Iraq and make it into a co-operative puppet, it has no altruistic motive in seeing the people rule themselves, but instead wants to install Iraq as another handle by which the US can attatch a string and be the puppet master of the world. That is why the "insurgents" are still fighting the US military after Saddam has been captured.'

Do you have an argument for that? Also, you probably ought to read this:

<http://www.settingtheworldtorights.com/node/202>

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sat, 11/20/2004 - 01:56 | [reply](#)

Proof

I am basing this on much study of how the US has acted in the past as well as the essays and books by such notable persons as Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn to name a few.

Also, from my personal experince that the US is itself far from a "free democracy". The US is run my all kinds of generally unwritten, moral codes, dress codes, race codes, behavioral codes, thought codes, etc. Failure to obey these codes, leads to social, political and economic alienation. Corporations and "privite" entities can fire anyone for any reason. I recently was fired frommy job, because I was talking about the Church of the Subgenius on my break time. It

is my understanding that absolute freedom and speech, expression and a life which does not restrict one's experiences was granted in the constitution of the United States, it seems this is a lie.

Certain drugs are prohibited from use under the notion that the "class" knows better than individuals and their doctors what substances are good for people. These drugs are obviously restricted because of their association with dissident groups. The class system only allows certain rich families access to the upper echelon of the government, and those are well trained in certain social disciplines. You will never see a Goth or a Punk in the White House, Howard Dean was dropped from the race because he was too enthusiastic. It seems only yuppie rich boys who spent their youth as drunken jocks, who most likely engaged in forceful beatings of other subculture types, are allowed to represent this nation.

With this nation so twisted against the individual and over run with consumerism and for profit bottom lines rather than for promotion of individual happiness and well being, I can only imagine what sort of system they have in store for Iraq. You know that country where all them "brown skin, towel-head sand niggers live, all hooting and plotting the death of mothers, baseball and apple pie, are sitting on all that oil" as the yuppie jocks in the White House call them in private",

by froclown on Sat, 11/20/2004 - 09:04 | [reply](#)

True Freedom

DO WHAT THOU WILT SHALL BE THE WHOLE OF THE LAW.

True freedom means that every individual is given maximum allowance and support to utilize his own mind, body and "soul" to its greatest extent, for the purpose of exploring and experiencing everything that is possible to the individual without restriction or limitation placed on the individual by any outside mandates, Gods, states, organizations or other such ideals.

We are as incarnate beings cast forth into the living world in bodies of flesh, just as an astronaut who awakens in command of a powerful space exploration vessel, we have every right and duty to push that vessel to its limits and explore the universe unhindered by the Goals and Ideals of others.

Man has the right to eat, drink, walk, sculpt, love, fuck, read, say, and in general DO what he or she wills, which is towards the ultimate goal; to push one's own body and mind even to the point of self destruction if he so will. Any and all restriction placed on any individual by any external agency, is a sin against that individual's True Will or "divine plan" if you want to view it in a religious/fate sense.

The US is such an external agency as much as Iraq is, and both must be considered equally as enemies of individual rights and

Liberty as set forth by the Divine/natural law as put forth here, also

known as THELEMA.

ANYONE WHO RESTRICTS THIS RIGHTS OF THE INDIVIDUAL HAS DENIED THESE RIGHT FOR HIMSELF AND HAS SET HIMSELF UP AS THE ENEMY OF LIBERTY, AS SUCH THOSE OVER WHOM THE TRANSGRESSION HAS EFFECTED HAVE EVERY MORAL RIGHT TO KILL, PUNISH, CORRECT OR PARDON THE WRONG DOING AS IS NECESSARY TO THE EXPRESSION OF THE WILL OF THE INDIVIDUAL INVOLVED.

LOVE IS THE LAW, LOVE UNDER WILL.

by Froclown on Sat, 11/20/2004 - 11:15 | [reply](#)

Noam Chomsky, Yawn

Oh, right, Froclown is a Chomsky zombie. Read this:

<http://www.frontpagemag.com/Articles/ReadArticle.asp?ID=1020>

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Wed, 12/01/2004 - 01:50 | [reply](#)

That article is hogwash

I do enjoy hogwash and this article is a great example of it, but I also like truth.

Chomsky is an anarchist, he doesn't not claim that america is the root of all evils, but that as not only a state, but the most powerful State, America is a danger to the world.

All states are dangerous because their existince is dependant on the control and subjection of individuals to the States goals. Those closest to the State, the political and economic elites, benefit on the backs of the common people. Any attempt at cetralized control, is leads to this problem. Certianly leaders like Sadaam and Ossama, are example of this same structure, where some people are used as cannon fodder for others, is the US millitaty any less of a suicide attacker than the terrorists who hit 9-11?

Neither the US as a state not Ossama as a leader, have the interests of Freedom and indivudalism at heart, both use individuals as pawn in their chess game for control over the world. The US seeks economic dominion over the whole world, judeo-christians are seeking religious dominion over the world. The islamics, if they had the power would also seek religious, cultural and econmic rule, however, they have been pushed back for hundereds of years and now only seek to defend what is left of their, culture, religion, economy, from the US.

The US is at war with Islam, and all that it stands for, because they stubbornly hold on to that last tiny remaining piece of power that, which is to say the oil supply. The islamic nations are no different that the US indian reservations. If we found oil or something valuable on one of those reservations, the US would try to pay the

indians, or failing that just take their land again. This would

endanger the native american way of life, their spiritual and traditional culture, and we would probably have native american suicide bombers.

Freedom, can not never co-exist with centralized power. Where there is a State, there is no freedom. Wherever men have dreams bigger than thier personal grasp, they will use fear, lies, signs, symbols, pychological tricks and physical threats to ensure that other are working towards the ends of the state, and benefit of the elite class.

by froclown on Thu, 12/02/2004 - 23:40 | [reply](#)

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From Whom Can the Coalition Accept Unconditional Surrender?

By far the best Reality TV in the world today can be seen on the live broadcasts of the British Parliament.

Today's Prime Minister's Question Time was a classic, including the following exchange:

Iain Duncan-Smith [Leader of the Opposition]: The Prime Minister will recall that at the end of the last Gulf War, Iraqi generals signed a document of surrender on behalf of the Iraqi regime. The current regime is in complete collapse ... Given that, from whom does he believe, or do his advisers believe, that the Coalition can now accept an unconditional surrender?

Tony Blair: ... It is extremely difficult as we speak to know what is left of the governing higher ranks of Saddam's regime, and I think the best way of answering that would be that we must be clear that whomever we accept a final declaration [from] - that so far as Saddam's regime is concerned the war is over - whoever it is has [the] proper authority. Now I can't at the moment make a judgement as to who that may be...

Un-named Member of Parliament: [Galloway!](#)

[22 seconds of laughter from the whole House]

Tony Blair: Right. I'm going to resist all temptation at this point, so we'll have to wait and see.

Wed, 04/09/2003 - 12:03 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

British parliament

The House of Commons is quite often hilariously funny. I think this is a sign of how cool it is. Apart from anything else, surely the enormous amount of room for heckling and humour must attract slightly more intelligent interesting people into becoming MPs than it would otherwise? Can't imagine this happening in Berlin, but perhaps they're all too busy taking drugs in the toilets. Is there a website of British parliamentary humour?

by [Alice](#) on Wed, 04/09/2003 - 13:43 | [reply](#)

Update

Not Venal, Evil

by **Kevin** on Tue, 04/22/2003 - 14:53 | [reply](#)

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Is Nothing Sacred?

Journalists have been frothing at the mouth about the incident in which the Palestine Hotel was shelled by US forces who had been receiving fire from there. How dare the coalition shell their preferred hotel? At a CentCom briefing earlier, one reporter asked whether the Palestine Hotel has now been designated as a site not to be attacked, like a mosque or site of special historic interest.

That might please the proud and haughty journalists who have been complaining that they have been targetted (would it be *very* bad not to care much if those particular ones really had been?). But if CentCom were to announce such a policy, where would all the fire be coming from, from then on?

UPDATE: As pointed out in a Comment by [a reader](#), it now appears more likely that the shelling that killed people in the hotel was done by the Iraqis.

Wed, 04/09/2003 - 13:37 | [permalink](#)

Is nothing sacred?

It appears that the shelling was done by the Iraqis:
<http://media.guardian.co.uk/iraqandthemedial/story/0,12823,932481,00.html>

by [a reader](#) on Wed, 04/09/2003 - 22:09 | [reply](#)

Fog of War?

Difficult to tell... the fog of war....

by [Rob Klein](#) on Thu, 04/10/2003 - 20:46 | [reply](#)

Sex vs. the FCC

by **Alan Forrester**

Although America is the most open and rational society in the world, occasionally things happen to remind us that there is still a long way to go. For example, a radio station in Detroit has been fined and may lose its broadcasting license for **talking about sex**:

The Federal Communications Commission proposed fining Infinity's 97.1 WKRK-FM station \$27,500 (17,500 pounds) for the January 9, 2002 "Deminski & Doyle Show" broadcast between 4:30 p.m. and 5:00 p.m., during which the on-air personalities asked listeners to call in to talk about strange sex techniques.

"The station presented graphic descriptions of violent sexual acts against women as entertainment at a time when children likely composed a significant portion of the audience," FCC Commissioner Michael Copps said on Thursday.

The agency warned the broadcast station that additional similar incidents by Infinity could lead to an FCC proceeding to revoke its broadcast licences, a move Copps said should have been initiated immediately.

The FCC said the company, a unit of media conglomerate Viacom, did not deny airing the material but argued that the agency's definition of indecency was unconstitutional.

The FCC defines as indecent speech that depicts or describes sexual organs or activities, and a broadcast must be "patently offensive as measured by contemporary community standards for the broadcast medium."

"The broadcast included explicit and graphic sexual references, including references to anal and oral sex, as well as explicit and graphic references to sexual practices that involve excretory activities," the FCC said.

The on-air cast members did warn children and women not to listen to the segment, but the law bars the airing of indecent material between 6 a.m. and 10p.m.

Revoking broadcasting licences because of the content of a programme, *prima facie*, violates freedom of speech. But the material, they say, is "patently offensive as measured by contemporary community standards for the broadcast medium." What does this even mean? Presumably that some sections of the community found the broadcast offensive. Presumably including the boring prudes of the FCC. Other sections of the community find boring prudery offensive, but unfortunately the boring prude section happens to have some clout and is ramming its agenda down everyone else's throats. Metaphor intended.

Next is the strange definition of "violent" sexual acts. The quote from the FCC about the nature of the acts described on the programme doesn't mention rape or anything else non-consensual. Some of the activities mentioned sound unpleasant and perhaps even unsanitary but the idea that they are *violent* seems to be part of the distressing tendency in our culture to introduce wilful fantasy into a political debate as if it were uncontroversial fact.

But should descriptions of even non-consensual sex be banned? Non-consensual sex, like other crime, is a staple of great literature. A description of a rape on a crime programme may lead to more victims of a rapist coming forward to help the police catch him. The very definition of 'non-consensual' changes over time (for instance, until quite recently, husbands could legally rape wives because the wives were deemed to have consented through their marriage vows), and such changes depend on public discussion of the issues. And so on.

Lastly there is the all-purpose argument about taking away the licence because children might listen to the show. So what? If they are not interested they'll change the channel or ignore it and if they are interested then they'll learn something. The relevant part of the show came with a warning. It did not advocate crime. Children are people. Case closed.

In general, sex gets a very bad rap in our society, which is a shame because it's fun. It would be good to see more open, positive discussion of sex, and less of the kind of the twisted, guilt-ridden pseudo-righteousness exhibited by the FCC and its ilk.

Wed, 04/09/2003 - 13:53 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

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Attributed Articles

Democracy Must be Experienced to be Learned!, by David
Rovner

Roadmap or Carjacking?, by Alan Forrester

Sex vs. the FCC, by Alan Forrester

Libertarian Foreign Policy Is Not Immoral, by Gil Milbauer

And finally...

Our Politics

Wed, 04/09/2003 - 14:01 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Libertarian Party Foreign Policy Is Not Immoral

by **Gil Milbauer**

In a recent [comment](#) Elliot Temple wrote:

“The US military should only be used to defend the US” [a paraphrase of the Libertarian Party position]. Because this position is divergent from “the US military should do what is right” it *is* immoral. And people trying to use it to oppose fighting against Iraq *are* stupid (the solution to terrorism is not more people patrolling our borders).

This gets several things wrong.

First of all, saying that the position is divergent from “The US military should do what is right” begs the question. What is right for the US military to do is what is in dispute. This depends on many things including what sort of institution the US military is, what its mission is, what its obligations are, etc. The US military is an agent of the citizens of the United States. It has a mission to defend them from foreign threats. What is right for it to do is different from what would be right for Superman to do. It has an obligation to use its resources wisely so as to defend America as well as possible, as well as to the soldiers who have volunteered and risk their lives for that purpose.

One thing that is NOT right for the US military to do, for example, is to engage in every conflict on earth where the exercise of the military's special capabilities can be expected to improve the local moral landscape, regardless of the resources required, and regardless of its effect on the safety of American citizens.

So, is it right for the US military to engage in campaigns like the one in Iraq? I think it is, because it does in fact use resources effectively and morally to make Americans safer. It combats the complex problem of the rise of radical Islamism (and the terrorism that comes with it) by striking a blow to open up one of a group of closed societies that help breed this threat (hopefully encouraging more liberalization in the region); it removes Saddam's terrible weapons from his reach, and that of future terrorists; it liberates the brutalized people of Iraq; and displaying the US military's impressive ability to effectively project force will make it unnecessary to do it on many future occasions. But this case is by no means obvious. It's possible that the costs outweigh the

benefits. Saddam could have launched a deadly attack that would kill many thousands of our soldiers and innocents. The action could incite more hatred of the US and cause more rather than fewer future attacks; there could be other ways to use our resources that would get us more long-term safety for less risk, etc.

Furthermore, some might argue that even if there are occasions like this when it's best to use force in the absence of a direct attack by the nation we invade, the policy of leaving it to the discretion of future congresses and presidents to identify these cases will make us less safe in the long run; it will lead to many mistakes that will be themselves immoral, and generate more enemies and entangling alliances, etc. So a simpler rule, even if it doesn't optimally address each situation, might leave Americans safer in the long run.

So, it's not at all clear that "the US military should only be used to defend the US" is divergent from "the US military should do what is right". In fact, "what is right" is misleading because it implies that only one policy is right, and all others are immoral. But that can't be true. Are we all immoral because we are not perfectly doing the absolute best thing we could be doing (morally) at all times? No. Morality can't require perfection. There are many moral paths that diverge from each other. There is not always just one thing that "is right" (although there may be one thing that is best). There are also things that are wrong and immoral, but it's not at all obvious that the Libertarian policy is one of them.

One thing that *is* obviously wrong is Elliot's assertion that people who use the Libertarian principle to oppose fighting in Iraq *are* stupid. There are many counter-examples to this claim, but one would be enough to disprove it. If he means that they are foolish to make this argument (rather than being generally stupid) then I hope the issues I've raised have disproved that claim as well.

Wed, 04/09/2003 - 18:34 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Stupidity

Being stupid is subject dependent, of course.

-- Elliot Temple
<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sun, 04/13/2003 - 15:31 | [reply](#)

Libertarians Don't Understand Morality

Is the sole responsibility of the US Army to defend the US from attack? It is the first priority by a large margin when the US is under direct attack but the thing is that it's not and seldom has been. The reason for this is that it is very difficult for the US to do anything at all is it gets destroyed, it's just common sense.

However, in the long run, the best way to make the US safe is for it to stick its nose into other state's business because the situations that might lead to military conflict are those in which the issue at

stake is related not to the geographical location of the US but to its political and moral values.

Take for instance the Arabs' fifty year long attempt to wipe Israel from the map. The Arabs are not directly attacking the US when they sponsor terrorism against Israel but it is still appropriate for the US to give money to Israel to kill Palestinian terrorists and to make alliances with Israel and to publicly support Israel when it takes on these terrorists. Why? Because the values the terrorists despise in Israel are the very same values held by the US and inevitably their attention would turn in the direction of the US among others once they achieved their goal of destroying Israel. The allegiance of the US army should be for the values that the US stands for not the piece of ground on which it happens to be sited. In the years to come there will be a lot of international politicking and possibly a few wars, these dealings will be replete with foreign aid deals and entangling alliances and most of it will be entirely good and right and the highups in the LP will still bitch about it endlessly because they don't understand the above argument.

by a reader on Sun, 04/13/2003 - 16:30 | [reply](#)

Why did you post *this*???? Y...

Why did you post *this*???? Yet another apologist for the LP.

by a reader on Tue, 04/15/2003 - 02:19 | [reply](#)

Martyrs to Fear

Cast your mind back a few months. The year is 2002, the world is still reeling from the attacks on 9/11. The US has invaded Afghanistan in a hunt for Bin Laden, and a discussion rages about what they should do when they catch him. One thing is clear in everybody's mind however – whatever the legal or ethical arguments about killing him, the last thing we should do is make him a **martyr**.

Stop.

Back to the present day. The Coalition has all but destroyed the Iraqi regime, and attention has turned away from the question of whether we can win this war (can you believe we ever had this discussion?) and onto the subject of Saddam.

Things are a bit different this time. The Coalition has made it clear that the moment they catch so much as a whiff of him, the last thing he will see is the smiley face painted on the nose of a 2000-pound bomb. And yet, until recently, people were still saying "The last thing we should do is make him a martyr." Some are still saying it. Today's **John O'Groat Journal** reads:

[T]his war, in a cack-handed way, will have given Saddam Hussein what he does not deserve. If [...] he has been killed [...], he will become a martyr fighting for the Arab cause[...]

In the light of news footage of crowds of Iraqis passionately hitting the fallen statue of Saddam with their shoes, this idea seems preposterous, so why did anyone think it in the first place?

Haven't we just swallowed this whole concept of martyrdom without really thinking? In a culture that worships death (no, not Islam, we mean something authentically Western here),

it becomes all too easy to believe that what our enemy really wants is for us to kill him so that he can rise up, Obe-Wan-Kenobe-like, more powerful than ever.

What rubbish. Where did this idea come from? Was it Jesus? Or did it predate that? Many influential people in history have indeed been willing to die for what they believe in, but so have a great many

more losers. Che Guevara springs to mind as a symbol that trendy

college students will gladly sport on their T-shirts, yet what he stands for is the triumph of (relatively) civilised society over an ~~upstart Fascist wannabe dictator~~ idealistic revolutionary – failure.

Did Che Guevara's brave sacrifice set off a global fascist uprising that would descend upon the capitalist pigs and bring them to their knees? No, actually all it set off was an opportunity for some handy T-shirt revenue for those capitalists smart enough to capitalise on it.

So why exactly were we afraid to martyr Saddam? His death (or trial, or ignominious flight) will not mark the dawning of a new wave of Islamic terrorism or super-Ba'athism or anything of the sort. All the terrorists that are going to rise up have risen up already: that is what started all this. The end of Saddam will mark the dismal failure of yet another uppity dictator who fucked with the Western world and got his arse kicked for the privilege.

Next...

Thu, 04/10/2003 - 15:14 | [permalink](#)

Anglosphere

You said "the Western world". Are the Weasels still part of the Western world, or do we need a new term? "Anglosphere" doesn't work, because it excludes the eastern Europeans, who are ok.

by [Rob Klein](#) on Thu, 04/10/2003 - 20:55 | [reply](#)

New Term

How about *Good Guys*?

And it needs to include Israel, too.

by [Gil](#) on Thu, 04/10/2003 - 23:42 | [reply](#)

This "martyr" business is jus...

This "martyr" business is just one of the many absurd memes floated ad nauseum by the mass media parroting the arab propaganda.

Any time such a junk idea is re-examined, it turns into a dud.

by [Boris A.Kupershmidt](#) on Sun, 04/13/2003 - 00:09 | [reply](#)

Suicide Bombers

In an item on CNN just now, about another suicide attack on US marines, the reporter on the ground likened the situation to that in Israel, where suicide bombers maim and murder people on a sometimes daily basis.

The question is: will this change people's attitudes to Israel, and in particular, to the way the Israelis handle their security?

Thu, 04/10/2003 - 17:07 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

... likened the situation to that in Israel

Note that these suicide bombers are merely attacking the soldiers of a liberating army, while the ones in Israel murder children.

Note that these suicide bombers merely intend to restore a tyrant to power, while the ones in Israel intend to exterminate a nation.

by a reader on Thu, 04/10/2003 - 18:03 | [reply](#)

Israel

I hope Tony Blair was watching that show.

Bill Henderson

by a reader on Thu, 04/10/2003 - 19:15 | [reply](#)

It will change opinions toward...

It will change opinions toward Israel slightly less than those other suicide bombings in America a year-and-a-half ago did.

by a reader on Thu, 04/10/2003 - 19:49 | [reply](#)

The previous comment seems to...

The previous comment seems to suggest that if 9-11 didn't change people's opinions about Israel, what's happening in Iraq at checkpoints won't either, but I'm not so sure. 9-11 was less likely to bring the plight of the Israeli population to mind, for the very reason that that attack was on such a different scale. I was glued to

the TV for weeks in September 2001 and I never saw anybody making the link between Palestinian suicide attackers and 9-11. These incidents in Iraq do more easily bring the Israeli plight to mind despite the differences other comments have pointed out.

by a reader on Thu, 04/10/2003 - 20:29 | [reply](#)

If they learn anything it'll be a first

This does not bode well: [HonestReporting analysis](#).

by a reader on Thu, 04/10/2003 - 23:35 | [reply](#)

I saw the link made.

I was glued to the TV for weeks in September 2001 and I never saw anybody making the link between Palestinian suicide attackers and 9-11.

I remember in March and April of 2002, during the height of the suicide attacks in Israel, the link was made a couple times on TV. I believe it was noted that the amount of Israelis murdered, as a percentage of their overall population, is much higher than the number of Americans murdered on 9/11.

David Schneider-Joseph

President, [Americans for a Society Free from Age Restrictions](#)
Chief, [Tewata](#)

by [DavidSJ](#) on Fri, 04/11/2003 - 23:34 | [reply](#)

Pessimistic

Most harsh critics of Israeli policy just don't like Israel. They have real contempt for Israel. As this is not a problem of a lack of knowledge about the situation in the Middle East, or even a problem of a skewed but consistent moral view, such parallels between suicide bombers aren't likely to change attitudes. It doesn't change the fact that one agent is Israel, the other is America.

by [Daniel Strimpel](#) on Sat, 04/12/2003 - 17:48 | [reply](#)

D'oh!

From a March 6 interview on Fox News by host Bill O'Reilly with anti-war activist/actress Janeane Garofalo, according to **CyberAlert**:

O'Reilly: "If you are wrong . . . and if the United States – and they will, this is going to happen – goes in, liberates Iraq [with] people in the street, American flags, hugging our soldiers . . . you gonna apologize to George W. Bush?"

Garofalo: "I would be so willing to say, 'I'm sorry.' I hope to God that I can be made a buffoon of, that people will say, 'You were wrong. You were a fatalist.' And I will go to the White House on my knees on cut glass and say, 'Hey, you and Thomas Friedman [sic] were right. . . . I shouldn't have doubted you' . . ."

We're waiting, Ms. Garofalo...

UPDATE: **Mean Mr. Mustard** has some thoughtful comments about **why we're still waiting**.

Thu, 04/10/2003 - 17:28 | [permlink](#)

Please DON'T Come Home

On CNN just now, a so-called 'human shield' in Iraq was shouting at a US marine. In a thick accent – an accent from somewhere in England – the 'human shield' shouted "Go home, Yankee. We don't want you here!"

All the jubilant Iraqis there might feel like replying: "No! YOU go home!" But speaking as residents of England, may we say: please, human shields, *don't* come home.

Thu, 04/10/2003 - 20:04 | [permlink](#)

On Loyalty – Part 3: The Individual and the Nation

Controversies about war tend to be especially divisive, because what is at stake is the legitimacy of violence. In the present crisis, anti-war demonstrators denounced the liberators of Iraq as **war criminals** – and that is among the more conciliatory of their statements. One protest banner in San Francisco read "**we support our troops – when they shoot their officers**". A **professor at Columbia University** called for "a million Mogadishus" (referring to the ambush in Somalia in 1993 in which 18 American soldiers were killed). The British MP George Galloway incited "the Arabs" to "**rise up**" against the invasion of Iraq.

A great deal has been written about where the line should be drawn between legitimate dissent and treason or sedition. Such people as Galloway have been widely denounced as traitors. Morally, we agree with this judgement. But what hangs on this?

First of all, what is so bad about treason, in itself – i.e. considered independently of what is being betrayed? Surely 'my country, right or wrong' cannot be the stance of any rational person: if an army is in the wrong, it can make no difference, morally, that you have previously sworn to serve it or that you were born in a particular country. So when soldiers and civilians commit treason against an evil regime, we approve. It's not that their treason is a character flaw, excused because it happens to serve a good cause: on the contrary, their impulse to betray *their* state in wartime is a positive virtue which we rightly **honour**. Conversely, even protests which do fall well within the category of 'legitimate dissent' under any reasonable interpretation, and are therefore entitled to protection, are not thereby rendered innocuous. As **The Dissident Frogman** pointed out, their peace **has a price**, and as **this soldier** says in a letter quoted by **Jawsblog**:

Even if not intended, the by-product of the protests can't help but add significantly to the totals of killed, maimed, and missing and puts US servicemen at greater risk.

Dissent is the bedrock of a free society, but protesters can't have it both ways. Catchy slogans and trendy chants can't change the fact that public protests provide support to Saddam.

We have **said** that the real alliances are not between nations but

between political traditions; well, for the same reason, the real war is between political traditions too. One of the bitter facts that many of us woke up to after September 11, 2001 was that our own society is profoundly split. It's not just a matter of a few spies labouring bright-eyed over a radio transmitter and a copy of *Das Kapital*; not just a few sleeper cells of fanatics awaiting the order to detonate themselves among the infidel, nor just a few potty academics and entertainers whose mouths are not connected to their brains, but entire sections of Western society. Some substantial proportion of your ordinary neighbours who watch **The Simpsons** and worry about bullying in their children's school are effectively – in their analysis of events, in many of their aspirations, in their words and in their votes – allies of those who are trying to extinguish our society in a cruel and vicious war. At the height of the liberation of Iraq, an opinion poll in **Le Monde** showed **one third of French people hoping the Coalition would lose**. In the Anglosphere, the proportion is lower, but it is by no means negligible: **Matthew Parris** is not alone in his views. In **this** opinion poll, 45% of British people considered President Bush a greater threat than Saddam.

So, if Galloway is a traitor and those Californian demonstrators are seditious, how many other citizens are guilty of the same crimes of disloyalty? Millions? Tens of millions? In any other society this would mean there was a danger of civil war unless the dissenting political traditions were slapped down hard. In any other society the courts and the gallows (or just the death squads) would now be working overtime making examples.

But the West does not work like that. The miraculous internal peacefulness of our billion-strong society, at once the most diverse and the most stable that has ever existed, is one of the most neglected arguments for why Western standards must prevail *everywhere* if the world is to avoid the hell of asymmetrical warfare fought with weapons of mass destruction. We are at war; and, ironically, in our case, this argues *against* adopting a strict interpretation of treason and sedition. It argues for bending over backwards to protect the enemy in our midst. In peacetime one might be inclined to be a stickler for the rule of law. But in wartime, victory takes precedence over procedure. Those who demand the prosecution of every air-headed demonstrator or celebrity who is technically a traitor are being just as silly as those who demand a fair trial for every enemy soldier before our soldiers are allowed to pull the trigger in battle. The Rule of Law, like the US Constitution, **is not a suicide pact**: *we have to win*. And winning involves strategy and tactics as well as soldiers and weapons. It involves struggling to ensure that the war is fought on our terms and not the enemy's.

And that means that it must, among other things, be fought out in the arena of ideas. Glenn Reynolds **says**:

The best way to stop terrorism is to kill terrorists, and stop the states that support them

Yes, but we also need to destroy the factions within our society that

sympathise with those terrorists and those states and therefore seek to paralyse our self-defence. And to do that, we need to avoid at almost any cost changing our way of life, the basic patterns of interaction in our society – not because the bastards deserve leniency, but because we need it that way. We need to take that battle to the ground on which we are the strongest and fight it on our terms. By argument. That is why **Setting the World to Rights** exists.

Sat, 04/12/2003 - 09:15 | [permalink](#)

Reality: The final argument

"We need to take that battle to the ground on which we are the strongest and fight it on our terms. By argument."

When profound moral progress occurred in the past, it was never the result of argument. Authoritarianism, fascism, communism all died because they simply couldn't face up to reality. Reality bit them and they were forced to grudgingly accept better alternatives. Similarly, these vast anti-Western segments of society won't change through argument, at least not verbal argument with other, more enlightened, human beings. Anyone who has tried to argue with an idiotarian won't dispute this. Rather, they will eventually change by realizing that they cannot find fulfillment with their current outlook. They will realize that their whole life plan is full of goals that will not be realized and fantasies that will not provide solace, just like fascist and communist states ultimately did. Embracing terrorism is indicative of a moral nihilism that can only bring anger, envy, despair and most of all, hatred. When the poverty of this existence becomes manifest i.e. when moral reality "kicks back", they will discover the West.

by [Daniel Strimpel](#) on Sat, 04/12/2003 - 16:41 | [reply](#)

Selling The World

Taking the battle onto the strongest ground seems ostensibly to be about *selling* places like the rational blogosphere: the problem of getting idiotarian antiwar lefties to argue in the first place, in fact. Mostly I find they just switch off or get confused or angry when their ideas are questioned.

Maybe if there was some way their ideas could just die out, that would be better? Perhaps we could round them up, and encourage them to go and live in Glastonbury, and help them make wickerware until they become extinct? I suppose they might notice the barbed wire fences after a while, though...

Read my blog:

http://libertarian_parent_in_the_countryside.blogspot.com/

by [Alice](#) on Sat, 04/12/2003 - 21:23 | [reply](#)

the premise

Lumping. Black & White. The premise is not sound. America was founded on dissent. If you look closely at protests, and who protests, you will find that it is not made up of one bloc. Nor of one opinion. People and ideas are not that simple. In a free society, as the Secretary of Defense just said, things sometimes get a little messy. Sure there are idiots. Sure there are people who benefit by American and British, and Western values, who would hope that they would fail and crumble. Don't count every person who protests with that group. Idiots and Traitors. Free People with ideas. Some flawed, some whole. Convince them if your ideas are right. Write columns which are based on the right to dissent. You do that of course. Do not forget that because some one walks in the street and says something which you might disagree with they are no worse than someone who writes their protest. Consider what they say. Draw your own opinion. However, always look at your premise. If your premise is flawed, your argument, your fine case may be flawed too.

by a reader on Sun, 04/13/2003 - 02:38 | [reply](#)

Reality?

When the poverty of this existence becomes manifest i.e. when moral reality "kicks back", they will discover the West.

So why are the former Soviet republics embracing EU socialism?

by a reader on Sun, 04/13/2003 - 05:11 | [reply](#)

Reality??

So why is Poland embracing capitalism and Americanness?

by a reader on Sun, 04/13/2003 - 13:03 | [reply](#)

Reality

So why are the former Soviet republics embracing EU socialism?

So why is Poland embracing capitalism and Americanness?

Because it's not really countries that do these things, but **political traditions**. In all these countries, pro- and anti-capitalist strands are struggling for the souls of their countries.

by **David Deutsch** on Sun, 04/13/2003 - 13:42 | [reply](#)

Reality

I've been trying this and running into brick walls.

Example 1: I tried posting facts to a left fest web site, and even

though I was polite in every post, they could not stand my very presence. My IP is now blocked from posting on the site any longer. In their mind their blog is by a liberal and for liberals, and other views are not welcome. Can you believe it?

Example 2: I have a nephew that I care about a lot. In our conversations in the last week I have discovered that he immediately discounts anything I say as coming from a right wing source, (in this case I sent him an article from the UK Telegraph). He also was unwilling to listen to facts about the proven falsifications in a "documentary", because said "documentary" happened to endorse his cynical "the west is evil" viewpoint.

Sigh. I'm really not a raving lunatic and I'm discouraged that so many are willing to disregard facts in order to justify their condemnation of western society. (Frankly I know not where the author of this blog is from. I am from USA. Led here from the dissidentfrogman. Nice to meet you.)

So, I'm coming to the conclusion that the battle of ideas is one best taken to our youth. From what I know of curriculum these days, the truth of the founding of our nation is not being taught in schools. We need to reach the next generation.

Comments?

by a reader on Tue, 04/15/2003 - 00:30 | [reply](#)

TCS Shall Save The World

Youth are a good thing to be worried about, but the way to help youth is not with better schools, but rather with better parenting. see www.tcs.ac

-- Elliot Temple
<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 04/21/2003 - 19:37 | [reply](#)

France, Scary?

Alan Forrester notes that a recent article by Guy Milliere, **France is not a Western Country Anymore**, is scary.

These days, it is becoming hard to find a French politician ready to speak about human rights, freedom or democracy. All of them seem to have the same speechwriter or to belong to the same totalitarian political party; all of them are anti-American, anti-Israeli and "pacifists." They regard Western civilization as something filthy and abhorrent.

If you read the newspapers, it's the same. At times it seems the only difference between the Soviet Union twenty years ago and France today is that in Soviet Union you had only one Pravda, and in France you now have at least ten such propaganda outlets: Different titles, same content. Their party line is clear in reporting on the personalities found in the present Middle Eastern crisis. Saddam Hussein, the "President of Iraq"? Well, maybe he has been brutal, but you know, in "those" countries... George W. Bush? He's a "moron" - a former alcoholic, who has become a crazy fanatic, in fact the most dangerous man on the face of earth. Ariel Sharon? A fascist who loves to kill Arabs. Arafat? A great freedom fighter. When an American general speaks, it is merely propaganda, but when Tariq Aziz pontificates, it is pure truth. Almost everyday you hear anti-Semitic remarks, to boot.

Let's hope that's not the whole story. After all, Milliere himself says

To hear [Chirac] speaking about morality or international law nauseates every decent Frenchman.

Aha! So he admits there's such a thing as a decent Frenchman. Milliere himself is presumably one. **Here's another**.

Seriously folks, remember that the differences between different countries are ones of degree. The true struggle is **between opposing political traditions**.

How do you define "political traditions"?

by a reader on Tue, 04/15/2003 - 01:22 | [reply](#)

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What Saddam Was Planning When He Invaded Kuwait

Time Magazine claims to have found letters by Saddam's son Uday in one of Uday's palaces in Baghdad:

In a 1990 letter, Uday reveals that his father plans to create a greater Iraq that includes Kuwait, Palestine and Arabstan, a region of Iran historically controlled by Baghdad. The note says Saddam is beginning with the easiest – Kuwait.

“Palestine”, huh? We doubt that he can have meant just the West Bank and Gaza...

The contiguity of the relevant territories suggests that Saddam favoured the original League of Nations Mandate meaning of the term ‘Palestine’ which included today's Jordan. Which puts an interesting light on his devotion to the cause of the “liberation of Palestine”.

Sun, 04/13/2003 - 14:35 | [permalink](#)

Do you think they're in Syria...

Do you think they're in Syria? Is the US going to invade Syria next? What about Iran having nuclear weapons capability in the near future? Can the US and the UK deal with all these threats? What about N. Korea?

by a reader on Tue, 04/15/2003 - 01:20 | [reply](#)

Alive?

Is he alive? If he is, why is he parading around Baghdad, as alleged on some Arab TV stations? If not, where did this video come from? Or why is a look-alike performing for him? If he is alive, where is he?

by a reader on Fri, 04/18/2003 - 13:09 | [reply](#)

Jopa

Nice try! <http://111111nogdr09gw-w.com> raspy **222222**
[url=http://33333kosi-gds.com]333333[/url] Thanks for this, seriously.

by **Jopa** on Sun, 05/02/2010 - 13:22 | [reply](#)

Women in Qatar and Children in England

An interesting article about how **women in Qatar** are treated.

Upon arriving at Doha International Airport, as a 22-year-old American female coming as part of an ABCNEWS Nightline team to cover the then-imminent Iraq war, I took one glance around the baggage claim and realized that, apart from my fellow journalists, every woman was completely covered in the black *abaya*...

Women in Qatar now have the right to vote, drive, and pursue many career opportunities, but the restrictions of family and tradition, which are much stronger than any law, are still strong...

"It's not from the government. There is no law to ask you what to wear or what to do," said al-Malki. "But the people themselves, they have the choice. Everybody here in Qatar has the choice to do whatever they want. Even women."

They have a choice do they? **Really?** If they have a choice, why do they all do the same thing and why do they all choose to wear costumes that have such obvious practical, not to mention sartorial, disadvantages?

Well, presumably there are a few women who wear abayas because they enjoy it. There must be many who think that God will punish them if they don't. Many do it because people they care about will put psychological pressure on them or punish them if they don't wear abayas. Many do it because their fathers or husbands will hurt them (or plain force them) if they don't, and hurting women against their will is legal in Qatar. There may be some who wear abayas because nobody has told them that there is no longer a law requiring them to do so. So the lack of a law banning something does not in itself make it genuinely possible to choose to do it.

Similarly, there is no law in England requiring children to go to school and yet most of them do go. A few go because they enjoy it. Many go because their parents will put psychological pressure on them or punish them if they don't go. Some go because their parents will hurt them (or plain force them) if they don't, and hurting children is legal in England. Most children and most parents are not aware that there is **no legal requirement to go to**

school. Even where a child does know that playing truant is legal (*for the child*),

the police often treat truancy exactly as if it were a crime, using force to prevent it. The lack of any law in England requiring children to go to school doesn't provide much help for many children who don't want to go, because most adults are determined to get children to go to school regardless of whether they want or not, and regardless of whether it is legally compulsory or not.

Mon, 04/14/2003 - 15:50 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Legally

This paragraph seems misleading:

The lack of any law in England requiring children to go to school doesn't provide much help for many children who don't want to go, because most adults are determined to get children to go to school regardless of whether they want or not, and regardless of whether it is legally compulsory or not.

You seem to imply that children may legally come and go to and from school as they please but that is not true. If a child is registered at school, the parent has a legal obligation to ensure that they attend regularly. This explains why parents of kids registered at school might want to get them to school. Only if the child is NOT registered is it legal for the parents not to make them go.

by a reader on Mon, 04/14/2003 - 20:47 | [reply](#)

Deregistration is available on demand

<http://www.education-otherwise.org/Legal/Deregistration.htm>

by [David Deutsch](#) on Mon, 04/14/2003 - 21:20 | [reply](#)

Yes but your article implied ...

Yes but your article implied that even if you're not deregistered it's still legal for the parents not to make the kid attend school and that's not true.

by a reader on Tue, 04/15/2003 - 01:16 | [reply](#)

Women in Qatar

I am a Canadian woman living in Qatar and I would like to provide an alternative perspective on wearing the Abaya. Did you know that I and many other non-muslim and non-qatari women wear them on occasion? It is especially helpful when driving in a country with a very high accident rate. There is a lot more respect given by both qataris and non-qataris alike to the local women who are easily

identified by the way they dress. Yes - some may even be afraid to offend or hurt them! Given that this is the case, wouldn't you prefer to assimilate into this society?

I originally bought my abaya on a trip to UAE when I was being hassled by men thinking that I was a quick and available western woman. But now that I have it, I am very practical about wearing it when I want to. I do thank the government in Qatar that I am not required to wear it and that I can choose my dress.

Before you make judgements upon arriving in the airport with very harsh views, please stop to take some time to understand ALL facets of what might be going on.. Also realize, that you can't tell which locals are NOT following the crowds because they blend in with the rest of us.

by a reader on Wed, 11/10/2004 - 08:35 | [reply](#)

Rational vs Irrational Anarchism

On a mission deep in enemy territory, we discovered **this** Anti-state.com article by Lee McCracken, called *Two Kinds of Anarchy*.

McCracken outlines two broad schools of thought that, he thinks, all anarchists fit into. He calls them voluntarism and liberationist.

[Voluntarism] holds that while the state is evil and illegitimate, it does serve certain useful and important functions, however inadequately. Chief among these is the maintenance of some semblance of just law and order. Anarchists of this persuasion tend to have a pessimistic (they would say realistic) view of human nature similar to that expounded by the philosopher Thomas Hobbes. According to Hobbes, human beings are fundamentally self-interested – they seek their own advantage, even to the detriment of others.

Such statements of human nature make no sense. Human beings make choices according to their (conscious or unconscious) ideas. So either human nature, in certain situations, prevents humans from making choices and controls them, or it is a statement about our ideas. However, we can change our ideas. The notion that some unexplained, nonphysical mechanism controls our behavior in some extensive but undefined class of situations, and that this mechanism contains knowledge of what 'self-interest' is, is pure mysticism.

Besides that, since when is self-interest divergent from morality?

The other defining bit on voluntarism states:

The idea is that since human beings are not going to achieve dramatic moral improvement any time soon, the existence and enforcement of rules necessary for common life has to be reconciled with human freedom.

In other words, voluntarists see laws as a necessary evil. Because humans are bad, they must be controlled by law, but because freedom is good, we should still strive to maximise it. And these goals are contradictory and must be balanced.

But are rules really a threat to freedom? No. To see why, imagine

two people with a chess set, but no rules. They might try to have a nice time with the board and pieces, but in itself, moving figures around on coloured squares has quite limited appeal. Now add rules to the picture – limits on what can legitimately be done with the pieces – and the players may, if the rules are good, flourish. Rather than find their lives limited by these rules, they find them enriched. Not all rules are a mechanism to oppress people, rather they are a mechanism to create consent in human interactions. Which is useful for the simple reason that humans are different.

Rather than seeing a conflict between laws and freedom, rational people should see laws as a potential force for good – an aid to freedom.

Next, liberationist anarchism:

[Liberationist anarchism] sees human nature as essentially reasonable and tending toward social cooperation without the need of external sanctions. It deems authority and institutions to be impediments to the full flowering and development of individuals. For the liberationist, human beings are governed by reason, and rational individuals will be able to avoid conflict on their own.

Liberationists are no better than voluntarists in their view of human nature; although they pick a more optimistic one, the above criticism still applies, namely that there isn't really such a thing. Furthermore, in a liberationist's warped view, our chess players would still be better off without rules. Why? Because liberationists think that rules are an impediment to the full flowering and development of the players. If only they weren't so constrained, they would promptly discover an even better game than chess!

However, creating fulfilling, consensual interactions is not a matter of good intentions or fiat. Rather, it requires knowledge and creativity. And therefore, for all practical purposes, it requires tradition. It would be folly to begin every discussion from first principles (including, we suppose, working out a language to use from scratch).

Fortunately, there *is* actually another kind of anarchist: a rational one. Rational anarchists respect the valuable knowledge that exists in current traditions, and wish for gradual improvement. They know that every function of government can, in the limit, be privatised, but also know that such a change, rather than being the difference between a bad society and a good one, will only be one step among many on the endless road of evolution.

Mon, 04/14/2003 - 23:25 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

You said: are rules really...

You said:

are rules really a threat to freedom? No. To see why, imagine two

people with a chess set, but no rules. They might try to have a nice time with the board and pieces, but in itself, moving figures around on coloured squares has quite limited appeal. Now add rules to the picture ♦ limits on what can legitimately be done with the pieces ♦ and the players may, if the rules are good, flourish. Rather than find their lives limited by these rules, they find them enriched. Not all rules are a mechanism to oppress people, rather they are a mechanism to create consent in human interactions. Which is useful for the simple reason that humans are different. Rather than seeing a conflict between laws and freedom, rational people should see laws as a potential force for good ♦ an aid to freedom.

This raises the issue of when rules are rational and when they are merely anti-rational impediments to the furtherance of intellectual and emotional flourishing. How do we tell the difference?

by a reader on Tue, 04/15/2003 - 01:12 | [reply](#)

Which Rules Are Rational?

I think the right approach is to look not at the content of the rule, but at how it was created and what tradition it is a part of. (Content can be a rough indicator too -- arbitrary (not false!) rules tend to be bad.) Rules that are part of rational traditions, rules that are open to criticism and evolution, are fine even if rather false. And unquestionable rules, created by fiat or dice, *even if mostly true*, are bad.

It's important to note that two rules, *that say the same thing*, may not be equally good. For example, imagine one company decrees that all employees must eat lunch from 12-12:30 exactly, and no other systems may be considered, and lots of people are resentful, and the management doesn't listen to complaints. Then imagine another company, where the employees found they would get back from lunch at different times, and this was making them less efficient, and in an effort to improve productivity by better coordinating everyone's schedule, a lunch time rule, from 12-12:30 is created. Same rule, different value.

-- Elliot Temple
<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 04/15/2003 - 06:24 | [reply](#)

Anarchists are boneheads

Actually it was a good post. But please drop the word "anarchist"!!!! "Real" anarchists (and they will blab for hours explaining it to you) are leftist/marxist/communist/socialist/anti-capitalist/etc etc. As you describe in the post, "fake" anarchists - market-anarchists, etc - are also a crock. why in heavens would a LIBERTARIAN want to be associated with these trash?

by a reader on Tue, 04/15/2003 - 11:28 | [reply](#)

Anarchism is a fine word

Why would you trust someone dumb enough to be a marxist/communist/socialist/anti-capitalist to be an authority on what "anarchist" means???

See this [FAQ](#) for a discussion of this dispute as well as other aspects of anarcho-capitalism.

by [Gil](#) on Tue, 04/15/2003 - 17:27 | [reply](#)

yeah then read the Anarchist FAQ

So what? There many dueling faqs out there on the true meaning of the word "anarchist." The mere fact that socialists use it means it is soiled, just like the word "liberal" has been. "Libertarian" is somewhat more clean -- though many during this war have chosen to stink it up.

Really the labels are less important than the ideas, but it is the case that "market anarchists" seem more hip to prove their anarchy than to espouse anything resembling Liberty. Hence they are un-libertarian boneheads.

by a reader on Tue, 04/15/2003 - 18:24 | [reply](#)

Some thoughts by (I)An-ok

I am of the belief that anarchism is against being against any and all forms of authority and domination, ie, systemic forms of coercion (TCS definition - <http://www.tcs.ac/FAQ/FAQShortGlossary.html>). And as a result of which, it is naturally opposed to all forms of the State, capitalism, coercive parenting, etc, because authority exists within these. It is not opposed to these because they are the State, capitalism, etc., it is opposed to these because of the authority and domination within them.

As far as anarchism being "libertarian", I would say that it is very much so, in the small-"L" sense of the term. Anarchism is all about individual liberty - individual liberty goes hand-in-hand with non-coercion.

by [AnarchoTCS](#) on Thu, 04/17/2003 - 14:27 | [reply](#)

If you are against all author...

If you are against all authority and any form of coercion in principle, then the rational position to hold is to be **for** government as it stands in the West. The reason is that Western Democracy/Capitalism is the best system known to man for facilitating freedom. Furthermore, it contains within its tradition, a capacity to improve and to become progressively less coercive, less authoritarian, less statist...If you care about this, there really isn't any alternative.

by a reader on Thu, 04/17/2003 - 14:57 | [reply](#)

Being against all authority means **all authority**

I don't see how one can be against all authority and domination and still support **any** kind of authority-based system. Whether it be "Western Democracy/Capitalism", or any other government or authority system in the world, it is STILL an authority-based system. If one is against all authority, then one is against all authority - full stop.

For anarchists, there's no playing favorites, there's no half-assed attempts, there's no compromises, there's no capitulation - the whole damn "authority" thing has gotta go.

"If you care about this, there really isn't any alternative."

Maybe that's how things seem for you, but I see a whole world of possibilities out there just waiting to be played with.

by [AnarchoTCS](#) on Sat, 04/19/2003 - 00:30 | [reply](#)

Why be against **all** authority?

What is it about authority that makes it always bad?

Why is it bad to voluntarily participate in a project where more decision-making authority is given to some people than to others so as to help the entire project progress and succeed?

If this works, by the lights of everyone involved, better than all of their alternatives, why would you want to deny them this option? And how could you stop them from doing this without exercising the bad sort of authority?

I think you've chosen the wrong enemy in "authority". Perhaps coercion would be a better target.

by [Gil](#) on Sat, 04/19/2003 - 21:57 | [reply](#)

Good comments, but slightly off

I think you slightly misinterpreted what I was getting at here. The "voluntarist" does not see rules as a necessary evil, but necessary, *simpliciter*. There is, in my view, no such thing as a necessary *evil*. In fact, I quote C.S. Lewis to the effect that "There cannot be a common life without a *regula*. The alternative to rule is not freedom but the... tyranny of the most selfish member." Rules are, in my view, a positive good that make civilized life possible.

The constraints of human nature that I identified with the voluntarist position is simply that self-interested individuals will sometimes seek to defect from cooperation and that rules (or laws if you like) are necessary to act as a check upon their actions. This is because there will always be people a) whose rational self-interest is served by taking advantage of their fellows and/or b)

who simply do not act out of enlightened self-interest, but wanton

impulse. I take this to be a fact about human beings that, at least under present conditions, is ineradicable. This is not an appeal to "nonphysical" invisible entities, but simply empirical observation.

Cheers,

Lee McCracken

by a reader on Tue, 04/22/2003 - 17:26 | [reply](#)

Epistemology Is Neat

It's not possible to observe explanations.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 04/23/2003 - 04:32 | [reply](#)

Look I Wrote More

To be a bit clearer, the notion that the things you observed are *because of human nature* is an explanation that you didn't actually observe, you just made up.

And also, you seemed to have missed the point that attributing personality to "human nature" is nonsense.

And also, the idea that there will necessarily always be people who intentionally, wrongly hurt others for their own gain, is either the idea that morality does not exist, or some sort of strange theory about the impossibility of progress.

And also, what's acting out of "wanton impulse"? Doesn't it just mean having a certain collection of personality traits (theories)? Don't you know that any particular theory is not a necessary part of the world?

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 04/23/2003 - 05:37 | [reply](#)

Not quite there

No, you're missing the point. "Human Nature" in this instance is not a hypothetical entity that purports to *explain* phenomena--it just *is* those phenomena. "Human nature" is just shorthand for those traits that human beings exhibit (or tend to exhibit). In this case, acting with disregard for the rights of others.

If assuming, in constructing any hypothetical anarchist social arrangements, that these traits will always be with us means denying Progress--at least inevitable Progress--then, so much the worse for Progress.

Acting out of wanton impulse just means acting without regard to

one's enlightened or long-term self interest (as when someone commits a crime where the likelihood of getting away with it is nil-- which happens all the time, or acting irrationally on a momentary impulse--so-called crimes of passion, etc.). Children and animals are the paradigm cases, but many adults exhibit this kind of behavior as well.

Lee McCracken

by a reader on Wed, 04/23/2003 - 17:49 | [reply](#)

First get a theory of the mind, then talk about minds

Personality/behavioral traits = theories/ideas = totally changeable
= no reason to think they will "always be with us"

btw, how do you plan to *get to* an anarchist society? isn't the basic route to change people's personalities (theories) by espousing anarchist ideas? and if that can work, why can't espousing good moral ideas work?

-- Elliot Temple
<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 04/23/2003 - 21:54 | [reply](#)

A=A after all...

You seem to be embracing a form of extreme nominalism wherein one cannot make any generalizations about the behavior of classes of entities.

I take it as obvious that humans have (within admittedly wide parameters) an enduring cluster of traits/capacities/dispositions to behavior. That's what makes them things of a particular kind, after all. And it's far from obvious that personality traits can be equated with ideas. One's personality is far more than just ideas; it's also a function of biology, heredity and environment (among other things). They are not "totally changeable."

I suspect an anarchist society, were it ever to come about, would require a critical mass of people to be convinced of the basic soundness of anarchist ideas. But this by no means requires a society of saints.

--Lee McCracken

by a reader on Thu, 04/24/2003 - 00:10 | [reply](#)

Subject Lines Are Fun

Errr, ok, I get that you don't like my theory of minds (that personality traits are ideas/theories),
but can you present a coherent one of your own please? One that

explains stuff, and doesn't violate our theories of physics, logic, or

epistemology.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 04/24/2003 - 00:29 | [reply](#)

Rejecting rules

Just like most people who're born into a religion and somehow get convinced that is the only right religion, [i'm not atheist btw], most people also get inculcated with systems of power from the time they're born.

Case in point: blind respect for parents as opposed to anyone in the same age group, respect by age, respect and subservience to religious leaders and omniscient omnipotent God/s.

Govts are no less. They play god all the time. Anarchy then is the flawed utopia. A system of power sets up the entire infrastructure, but after that, even without centralised power, people will just carry on their normal way of life.

The problem with using chess set rules to talk about reality is that there is no iterative prisoner's dilemma inherent in chess. But that is the sort of game we've been playing throughout the evolutionary cycle. It's not win or lose, some people go by the motto, "if I'm going down, I'm taking you with me." that behaviour is NOT seen in chess. There is never thoughts of collateral damage. Ideally every move is for maximal effect, immediately or in the long term.

The problem with using vanilla rule sets to describe an imperfect authority is very clear in the penal system for example. Murder is individually wrong, but as a govt they own your life sufficiently to decide to take it away?

Criminals have little to stop them from committing crime except the veiled threat of legal punishment, but once they're caught, the system actually protects them! Free food, good clothes, safety from grieving relatives. Imagine this happening in a live and let live world. No purchase.

<http://iandravid.wordpress.com/2008/03/22/think-anonymously/>

by **iandravid** on Sat, 03/22/2008 - 03:57 | [reply](#)

Cargo Cult Politics

When Europeans came into contact with the people of the Southern Pacific islands, they brought with them many goods which were, from the point of view of the islanders, so technologically advanced, and so desirable, as to appear magical. After the Europeans left, the natives wanted them to come back with more of the goods. This led to the religious practices known as **cargo cults**, which later gained new impetus because of World War Two when large quantities of supplies were frequently dumped, abandoned, or washed up on Pacific shores. In one cult in Papua New Guinea in 1942 the islanders set up fake armies with fake officers and dummy equipment in the hope that it would turn into real equipment. In another, on the island of Tanna, cultists built fake landing strips with control towers and warehouses and so on, in the hope that planes would land there. Of course, the problem with all this is that it imitated only the form, not the substance of what wealth creation is really all about.

The physicist Richard Feynman **pointed out** that many scientists have a cargo-cult attitude towards scientific knowledge. There is a similar and fairly widespread habit in politics, practised by people whom one might call *cargo cult politicians*.

Many dictatorships nowadays have elections and parliaments that ape the form of Western liberal democracy with embarrassing crudeness, while behind the scenes people are beaten and tortured and the ballot papers only have one name on them. Socialist governments think that if only they order the construction of factories and hospitals and employ doctors and teachers, just as free people would in a free economy, they can achieve what free economies do – only better, because after all, it's fairer isn't it? Some libertarians think that a free market and small government (or no government) are the **sole criteria** of a free society (and so many of them blithely force their children to go to school, do chores, and generally obey their every **whim**). Such people are best described as libertarian **statists**, partly because it annoys them, but mainly because they are convinced that it is the malevolent State, rather than bad authoritarian ideas and lack of knowledge, that is the basic obstacle to human progress. So they want to mimic the form of a future society in the hope that the substance will magically follow.

Just as participants in a cargo cult didn't understand how much

complexity is required to produce technological goods, what is missing in all these cases is an understanding of the complexity of the human condition.

Just as the people of the cargo cults sooner or later get bored and angry about the world's complexity and its failure to fit their unrealistic expectations, so the cargo cult politicians nurse a grudge against a civilisation that does not fit their preconceptions. They deny or sneer at its achievements and become cynical, twisted, and bitter. We have much more sympathy with those who appreciate the greatness of what the West has achieved – even those with whom we have substantial disagreements – than with any of the cargo cult politicians, regardless of what ideals they profess.

Tue, 04/15/2003 - 18:34 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Vision and Serious Work

In one sense, adopting the form of something and then hoping it will lead to the substance of the thing following on, makes sense. It is a form of conjecture. So, as you say, the problem with cargo cultism is not form-emulation but failure to do the work of making the vision come true; expecting it to happen all on its own by magic.

People might approach any school of knowledge, including TCS, with a cargo cult mentality, thinking that all they have to do is make one imaginative and intellectual leap (the paradigm shift) and their family futures will be bright and easy. But the process of building the future is likely to be more complex and difficult the more deep the paradigm shift: in other words, the most promising institutions are also the most demanding! Compared with forcing change revolutionary-style, or waiting for magic to occur, painstaking piecemeal knowledge-growth is very hard work indeed.

So, what if we have an exciting new vision, and are convinced that it is good, but lack the knowledge of how to bring it about? If neither institution-smashing nor reliance on the supernatural are viable, where do we begin?

The best approach would seem to be to hold the vision in mind, maintaining consciousness of its fantasy status, and then begin the process of conjecture and refutation of the many piecemeal ideas that might move us towards that vision. Individual moral choices must be made on the way, with reference to our vision, which should be constantly checked and adjusted as new information throws new light on its right or wrongness. A big conjecture can only be tested by a process of lots of other smaller ones *plus* their interactions with the big one. Growth is complicated.

Any idiot can be a backseat Prime Minister. But if a person is not prepared to undertake the work required actually to get into government, growing ideas is *all* the political change he can achieve. So he had better have some faith in the institutions he is working from within: otherwise, according to his own thinking, all that work will have been pointless. Which seems an immoral waste

of time.

http://libertarian_parent_in_the_countryside.blogspot.com/

by **Alice** on Wed, 04/16/2003 - 11:25 | [reply](#)

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What Are *These* Sanctions For?

The Weasels' vengeful fury against the Iraqi people **for the crime of being freed by America** is still **increasing**:

diplomats who for many years have called for the sanctions imposed in 1990 in the wake of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait to be lifted are now calling for a delay.

What? So, let's get this straight:

- Saddam's in power: they want sanctions lifted.
- Saddam's deposed: they want sanctions to remain, until...

Until what?

They say the restrictions should remain until the **UN certifies** that Iraq is free of WMDs.

In other words the UN is still malevolently seeking **control**, still holding innocent people to ransom until it gets it, and still using its utterly unmerited jurisdiction over legitimacy as a weapon.

Remind us again – **what good** do these bastards do?

Fri, 04/18/2003 - 12:07 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

UN

What good does the UN do? It provides legitimacy for the policies of the US and the UK sometimes. If it does no good, why do they keep sucking up to it? They need it, they's why.

by a reader on Fri, 04/18/2003 - 13:00 | [reply](#)

legitimacy

Many Americans, and even more Brits, have jumped on to the "legitimacy" bandwagon, eager to proclaim the pure altruism inherent in any proclamation made by a sophisticated European, who understands the importance of "transnational cooperation" and "international law". That is one big reason why politicians who know better find it expedient to suck up and pay lip-service. They don't have to mean anything by it, but why incur needless wrath from

weasels at home? The UN only confers "legitimacy" to the extent that people around the world believe in the fantasy. Currently, our best shot at discerning the *actual* legitimacy of a country is whether or not the US supports it consistently.

by [Daniel Strimpel](#) on Fri, 04/18/2003 - 22:44 | [reply](#)

UN 'Legitimacy'

To make things even clearer. The UN is an unelected and unaccountable body that sponsors terrorism. There is no sense in which its opinions are any kind of determinant of what is morally right.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Fri, 04/18/2003 - 23:15 | [reply](#)

Washington Post's Disturbing Hostility to Daniel Pipes

A **thread on LGF** discusses President Bush's appointment of **Daniel Pipes** to the Board of the new **Institute of Peace**. The moderate (i.e. anti-idiotarian) Islamic **Pakistan Today**, wholeheartedly **approves**:

American Muslims welcome the nomination of Daniel Pipes, a scholar of militant Islam and director of the Middle East Forum, by President Bush to serve on the board of the US Institute of Peace. They note in particular his care to distinguish between the minority of Islamists and the majority of normal, patriotic Muslims.

Many moderate American Muslims, frustrated by and angry at the extremist policies of militant Islamist organizations in the US and their efforts to portray themselves as the sole voice of Islam, have welcomed the nomination of Daniel Pipes

So do we. By contrast, the Washington Post **condemns the choice**:

Many Muslims received the news that the White House had nominated scholar Daniel Pipes to, of all places, the U.S. Institute of Peace as sort of a cruel joke.

It urges Congress to rescind the appointment, accusing Pipes of seeming

to harbor a "disturbing hostility to contemporary Muslims."

Consider the logic of these two opposite spins on what American Muslims think. If Pakistan Today is right, then the WaPo is opposing moderate Muslims and siding with "militant Islamist organizations in the US and their efforts to portray themselves as the sole voice of Islam". If the WaPo is right, then the American Muslims quoted in Pakistan Today's editorial are themselves extremists: Muslims with a disturbing hostility to contemporary Muslims? But they characterise most contemporary American Muslims as "normal" and "patriotic". Hmm.

Oh, of course! They are guilty of the most unforgivable of all

extremisms: support for the US Government.

UPDATE: The editor of Pakistan Today **protests** in a letter to the Washington Post:

At best, your editorial confuses Pipes's opposition to militant Islam with opposition to Islam as a whole. At worst, it reduces all Muslim opinion to an enthusiasm for a totalitarian form of the religion. Fortunately, a broader spectrum of Muslim opinion exists. Unfortunately, many anti-militant Muslims do not speak out, fearful of retribution even in the United States.

Sun, 04/20/2003 - 10:38 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

York University

It is interesting to note that when Daniel Pipes was invited to speak at York University, certain student groups violently prevented him from doing so on the grounds that he was a "racist", "nazi", "bigot" and no doubt in whispers "Jew". Determined not to become another Concordia (Concordia students had recently made violent attacks on Benjamin Netanyahu and sabotaged his visit. He was unable to speak and sent away) York hired armed security guards, mounted police and set up metal detectors so that Pipes could speak to a small group of students who had bought their tickets months earlier. Even then protestors were right outside the door. What is Pipes' crime? That's right, it will sound familiar: *he supports Israel*.

by [Daniel Strimpel](#) on Sun, 04/20/2003 - 18:39 | [reply](#)

York University in the UK

To Daniel Strimpel:

Are you referring to York University in the UK? If so, when did this happen?

by a reader on Sun, 04/20/2003 - 18:45 | [reply](#)

York University in Canada

I think it was at York University in Toronto, Canada. In January, 2003.

by [Gil](#) on Sun, 04/20/2003 - 21:17 | [reply](#)

Not that one...

He's referring to **this** York University, in Toronto.

by a reader on Sun, 04/20/2003 - 21:21 | [reply](#)

York Canada

Yes its the Canadian one. I think Pipes has a write up on it either on

his home page www.danielpipes.org or his admirable www.campus-watch.org. Its also worth noting that Pipes, along with Martin Kramer (www.martinkramer.org) are at the forefront of diagnosing the state of Middle East Studies at American Universities. IMO they are both right on the mark.

by **Daniel Strimpel** on Sun, 04/20/2003 - 23:18 | [reply](#)

Good Article

This is such a good article of his. The guy has real insight.

by a reader on Tue, 04/22/2003 - 15:04 | [reply](#)

Now Look Here, Mr Blunkett

David Blunkett, the UK Home Secretary, is blind. No, really, he's literally blind: he takes a **seeing-eye dog** into the House of Commons with him and everything. Admirable, and it's in no way his fault that this makes it somewhat difficult to criticise him for a certain range of political defects: lack of vision, short-sightedness ... and now – well, what is **this** but sheer *blindness*?

Everyone in Britain will have to pay around £25 for a compulsory identity card under proposals being put to the cabinet by David Blunkett, the Home Secretary ...

While forcing people to pay for the card could add to the anticipated objections from human rights campaigners, Mr Blunkett believes that concern about national security is sufficient to ensure that individuals will be prepared to bear the cost.

Mr Blunkett is confident that he can win support for the idea of a compulsory card even though previous ministers have failed.

Can't he see what's going to happen? Ought not someone take him aside and explain that it doesn't matter how many times he proposes such a measure, *we are still going to reject it?* Just as we have every time since **1952**, following a **1951 ruling**:

LORD GODDARD, *Willcock v. Muckle*, 26 June 1951.
Decision that led to Parliament's repeal of National ID card in 1952,

it is obvious that the police now, as a matter of routine, demand the production of national registration indemnity cards whenever they stop or interrogate a motorist for whatever cause. Of course, if they are looking for a stolen car or have reason to believe that a particular motorist is engaged in committing a crime, that is one thing, but to demand a national registration identity card from all and sundry, for instance, from a lady who may leave her car outside a shop longer than she should, or some trivial matter of that sort, is wholly unreasonable.

This Act was passed for security purposes, and not for

the purposes for which, apparently, it is now sought to be used. To use Acts of Parliament, passed for particular purposes during war, in times when the war is past, except that technically a state of war exists, tends to turn law-abiding subjects into lawbreakers, which is a most undesirable state of affairs. Further, in this country we have always prided ourselves on the good feeling that exists between the police and the public and such action tends to make the people resentful of the acts of the police and inclines them to obstruct the police instead of to assist them

...

They ought not to use a Security Act, which was passed for a particular purpose, as they have done in this case.

We agree. We have no objection to special wartime security measures where they are merited. But these are not merited, nor are they special wartime security measures. They are a piece of totalitarian nanny-state legislation, brazenly proposed under cover of the present emergency. This is shameful.

Tue, 04/22/2003 - 04:13 | [permalink](#)

Who's the blind one here?

I agree that ID cards would be a bad thing, but are you really saying they are not going to be brought in regardless? This flies in the face of all the evidence. Are you looking at the British government through rose-tinted spectacles? At what point do the British people get to say no? We're not going to have a referendum, are we? Isn't it inevitable that we'll get them?

by a reader on Tue, 04/22/2003 - 13:30 | [reply](#)

Two Modest Proposals

Here are two modest proposals which, after all, are not more inconsistent than an "entitlement card" which is not compulsory, but which will save you getting into a lot of trouble with the police when you don't carry it. My first proposal is that it be really an entitlement card, i.e, that it actually entitles you to be a citizen, that is, that it entitles you to carry a revolver. (A special law would be required to forbid policemen from carrying guns, as was the case during the few years following the creation of the New York City police: the normal situation is indeed that sovereign citizens be armed and state agents be not.) The second proposal is that the state finance itself exclusively with entitlement cards by charging, say, 6,400 pounds per card. After all, if the people want it, they will be willing to pay for it.

(The U.K GDP is 950 billion pounds. The tyrant's revenues are about 380 billion (i.e., 40% of GDP). With a population of 59,000,000 we get 6,400 pounds per capita.)

Pierre Lemieux <http://www.pierrelemieux.org>

by **Pierre Lemieux** on Tue, 04/22/2003 - 13:36 | [reply](#)

Who's the blind one?

are you really saying they are not going to be brought in regardless? This flies in the face of all the evidence. Are you looking at the British government through rose-tinted spectacles? At what point do the British people get to say no? We're not going to have a referendum, are we? Isn't it inevitable that we'll get them?

Sure, it's been inevitable for the last 51 years and it will continue to be inevitable for the next 51 million.

Look, people, we need to learn some method of analysis of political events beyond "*help, the evil government must irresistibly grow and grow and we're all doomed, doomed I tell you.*"

by a reader on Tue, 04/22/2003 - 17:01 | [reply](#)

The European Factor

Sharp-eyed **Steven Den Beste** has spotted an **embarrassing side-effect** of using an *ordinateur* instead of a computer.

Tue, 04/22/2003 - 16:28 | [permalink](#)

Not Venal, Evil

The hilarious **news** that the ever-odious George Galloway might have been – gasp – being **paid** larger sums of money per year than **some of us** have seen in a lifetime, by **Saddam Hussein**, has been described as “thrilleresque” by Glenn Reynolds on **Instapundit**, as “a bombshell” by **Andrew Sullivan**, and as “an impressive scoop” by Malcolm Hutty on **samizdata.net**. And now the **Guardian** is reporting that Galloway is going to sue.

But in all this **excitement** about Galloway's possible hypocrisy and fall from political grace, let's not forget the real issue here. George Galloway is an unfailing spokesman and advocate for evil, and whether or not he was bribed is a mere side issue. If the vile things he has done and said in connection with Israel, Iraq, and so on, were in fact right, there would be nothing morally reprehensible about taking money for them. As we have **said**, if a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing at a profit. By concentrating on the bribery issue, we are letting the likes of Galloway off far too lightly. So instead of saying darkly, as Malcolm Hutty does –

[N]ow it appears that [Galloway] was motivated by pure greed rather than just a love of controversy.

...[H]e was giving aid and comfort to the enemy for personal gain.

– which risks sounding as though we agree with our anti-capitalist opponents that seeking personal gain is a *bad* thing, let's remember to speak out against sin, not the wages of sin.

Tue, 04/22/2003 - 18:22 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Treason

I think Hutty's main point was that Galloway's action amounts to treason.

by a reader on Tue, 04/22/2003 - 20:29 | [reply](#)

But they say they're against greed

The reason it's worth mentioning that anti-war activists may have

been motivated by greed, is that that's what they profess to despise about the pro-war leaders. It's one of their major arguments for opposing the war.

So, not only are they completely wrong about the facts of the case, but they're hypocritical as well. Even *they* don't believe what they're saying. They clearly just say things to win supporters, not because they believe them.

Being wrong and vocal on life-and-death issues is bad enough. Being wrong and knowing that you don't believe what you're saying is particularly vile.

by [Gil](#) on Tue, 04/22/2003 - 21:05 | [reply](#)

Hypocrisy

Hypocrisy is the only thing immoral people can criticize in others, because it is the only vice that you can judge in the absence of a good sense of morality yourself.

by [Chris](#) on Wed, 04/23/2003 - 19:37 | [reply](#)

I disagree somewhat with the post.

If the vile things he has done and said in connection with Israel, Iraq, and so on, were in fact right, there would be nothing morally reprehensible about taking money for them.

That's true, but if he was saying those things *because he was being paid*, then he was in fact wrong to say them. Even more wrong than if he was saying them because he believed them, yet he was wrong in his belief.

David Schneider-Joseph

President, **Americans for a Society Free from Age Restrictions**
Chief, **Tewata**

by [DavidSJ](#) on Wed, 04/23/2003 - 22:42 | [reply](#)

To my constituents

What will he say to his long-suffering constituents? How will he wriggle out of this one?

by [Sylvia Crombie](#) on Thu, 04/24/2003 - 01:50 | [reply](#)

Galloway

There is, of course, the glaring hypocrisy. It is, after all, we on the right that are portrayed as greedy.

It is an interesting question of why those who proclaim their concern for the innocent citizens of Iraq so loudly fought so hard to keep the prisons, torture chambers and rape squads in business.

The horrors of the Baathist Regime were hardly secret, there must be a reason that so many fought so hard to let it continue, undisturbed. For at least one of the leaders of this movement, we may have found the reason.

It would be interesting to have a long hard look at the books of organisations like ANSWER.

I am rather uncomfortable with the newspeople going through those records found in Iraq. I'd be much happier if it were the FBI, CIA and the Brit SIS, with help from the IRS.

Much of the rank and file of the 'peace' movement is made up of what Lenin called the useful idiots, I do wonder how the leaders finance their lifestyles and travels.

by **Peter W. Davis** on Sun, 04/27/2003 - 04:04 | [reply](#)

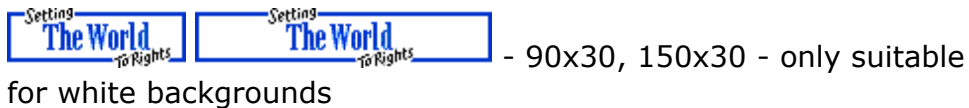
Setting The World To Rights

Ideas have consequences.

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- 166x98



- 180x96



- 200x117



- 250x130



- 280x150



- 300x156

Tue, 04/22/2003 - 21:18 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Setting The World To Rights

Ideas have consequences.

Poll: What Will Be Found First?

Following the Coalition's victory in Iraq, what is going to be found first? Vote in our new **poll** in the sidebar on the right.

Saddam Hussein: Saddam is captured alive or found dead by Coalition forces and this is verified by DNA matching.

Baghdad Bob: aka Comical Ali, aka Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf, the former Iraqi Minister of Information, is captured alive, found dead, or appears in public in a **new job**.

The 'smoking gun': Nuclear, biological or chemical weapons, or incontrovertible evidence that they were recently destroyed or smuggled out, are found in Iraq. (N.B. a barking moonbat being able to utter the words "that evidence was **planted** by the Evil Bush Administration" does not count as making the evidence "controvertible", nor does shrieking "but the US and Israel have WMD too!")

The quagmire: It is found that far from having ended swiftly, the war turns out to be another Vietnam, naturally covered up by the US and UK governments.

Janeane Garofalo's apology: Well you never know...

None of the above will ever be found: Well – never is a long time. Say, a year from now.

Wed, 04/23/2003 - 17:42 | [permalink](#)

Which one?

How do we know they have the DNA of the Real Saddam Hussein?

by a reader on Wed, 04/23/2003 - 19:15 | [reply](#)

It's all a big lie, I tell you!

They won't find anything. The whole thing is one big conspiracy dreamed up by the Jews/US government/aliens/anti-Libertarians/kids to overthrow The Powers The Be and become the preeminent Big Brother State which will take YOUR money.

I've made up my mind. Don't confuse me with facts.

Me? Paranoid?

by [Chris](#) on Wed, 04/23/2003 - 19:17 | [reply](#)

DNA

"How do we know they have the DNA of the Real Saddam Hussein?"

I read somewhere that they got a sample from Dan Rather's blue dress.

by a reader on Wed, 04/23/2003 - 22:26 | [reply](#)

Quagmire

When I saw that the quagmire option had some votes, I thought people were kidding... until I received an email saying "Don't be so sure it won't be another Vietnam." Hel-lo?

by [Sylvia Crombie](#) on Thu, 04/24/2003 - 01:55 | [reply](#)

IT seems none of the above

According to the globe and mail, Bagdad Bob tried to surrender and was turned down!

by a reader on Sat, 05/03/2003 - 15:31 | [reply](#)

Not yet decided

Bagdad Bob tried to surrender and was turned down!

That doesn't count. For Mr Sahaf to win, he has to be captured alive, found dead, or appear in public in a new job. For 'none of the above' to win, a year has to pass.

by [Editor](#) on Sat, 05/03/2003 - 15:56 | [reply](#)

Hello

Can I be of any assistance?

by [Hindsight](#) on Sat, 05/20/2006 - 16:41 | [reply](#)

CHI flat irons are a very

CHI flat irons are a very popular choice of hair straightener. The Farouk CHI flat iron was the first to have ceramic plates, making it a best seller. But are today's CHI flat irons any good or have they been eclipsed by other brands

[FHI Flat Iron](#)

[FHI flat irons](#)

[HAI Flat Iron](#)

[HAI Flat Irons](#)

[Hana Salon Flat Iron](#)

Croc Flat Iron

of flat iron?

You can still buy the original CHI ceramic flat iron. It's the cheapest model in the CHI range and falls into the medium priced category for flat irons. It comes with 1" ceramic plates, heats in seconds and is still a very good hair styling tool. But if you're

by [fesrefdsr](#) on Sun, 06/13/2010 - 15:02 | [reply](#)

following includes ?Britney

following includes ?Britney Spears, Jessica Alba, Mariah Carey, Mickey Rourke, Paris Hilton, Snoop Dogg, Chris Brown, Usher, Marilyn Manson, Madonna, Shakira, Ciara, Heidi Klum, T.I. & Jaime Foxx. His most recent ventures

wholesale Ed Hardy Jeans

wholesale Dunk SB Shoes

wholesale Tiffany

wholesale True Religion jeans

wholesale Gucci Shirts

wholesale ED Hardy jeans

wholesale Coach shoes

wholesale Dior Shoes

china wholesale

Wholesale Jordan Shoes include the new Ed Hardy brand based on the work of Don Ed Hardy, Smet in unison with Johnny Hallyday, and his own namesake Christian Audigier. Christian Audigier has also teamed up with Patrick de Montepeyroux of

by [fesrefdsr](#) on Thu, 07/08/2010 - 12:29 | [reply](#)

Following the Coalition's victory, what will be found first?

Saddam Hussein

6% (15 votes)

Baghdad Bob

24% (55 votes)

The 'smoking gun';

39% (90 votes)

The quagmire

3% (7 votes)

Janeane Garofalo's apology

3% (6 votes)

None of the above will ever be found (or not in the next year)

25% (58 votes)

Total votes: 231

Wed, 04/23/2003 - 18:07 | [permlink](#)

Read this:

This is how we introduced this poll. It provides more information than the brief choices given in the actual poll.

by [Sarah Fitz-Claridge](#) on Mon, 06/16/2003 - 12:35 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

Don't mind me

Just passing through

by [Tumbleweed](#) on Wed, 02/15/2006 - 02:27 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

In The News...

BREAKING NEWS: Baghdad Bob to be given top **job** in the **BBC**. Spokesman for the BBC says they are honoured to have him on the team. "We appreciate his clear-eyed perspective on world events. Being a top BBC reporter requires a particular gift, and Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf is amply qualified."

Wed, 04/23/2003 - 20:03 | [permalink](#)

Just wondering...

Have Bob al-Sahaf and Bob al-Fisk ever been seen together?



by [Kevin](#) on Wed, 04/23/2003 - 23:22 | [reply](#)

Ken Starr?

The one on the right looks just like Ken Clinton-Catcher Starr! And you're not trying to tell me that the one on the left is Our Friend The Iraqi Information Minister, are you? Baghdad Bob is much better looking.

I think he should get a job in PR -- for Janeane Garofalo.

by [Sylvia Crombie](#) on Thu, 04/24/2003 - 01:40 | [reply](#)

DNC

With the tremendous fundraising advantage the Republicans have, so far, in the upcoming election cycle the DNC may well be looking for a new National Chairman. Baghdad Bob would be a great choice.

by [Peter W. Davis](#) on Sun, 04/27/2003 - 04:09 | [reply](#)

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The Other Appeasement

Much has been written about the long history of appeasement of Saddam that eventually led to war. All Western countries bear some of the blame; yet there were some of them – ‘the Good Guys’ (hereinafter referred to as ‘us’) – that eventually rebelled against appeasement and insisted on opposing and ending the evil, while others – ‘the Weasels’ – did their utmost to have it continue.

But has it occurred to you that even as the Weasels were appeasing Saddam they were, at the same time, appeasing us?

Look at it from the Weasels’ point of view: Iraq invades Kuwait. A regrettable incident, and one very likely to ~~alarm every decent person in the world~~ provoke certain warmongers. So, the ~~appeasing Weasels~~ forces of moderation pretend to go along with the ~~liberation of Kuwait~~ cowboys’ cathartic acting-out, but as the price of their acquiescence they extract a promise that the ~~good guys~~ warmongers “have no further territorial ambitions” – i.e. will not liberate Iraq. This ensures ~~that no lasting good will have been done~~ stability. A classic appeasement manoeuvre, n'est ce pas?

But, as usually happens, though the appeasement seemed to work in the short run, it merely built up much more trouble for the future. No sooner did we fulfil the letter of our promise – incidentally betraying the thousands of Iraqis who tried to take that opportunity to liberate themselves – than our pesky cowboy demands started up again. First we demanded a surrender treaty requiring Iraq to give up all its weapons of mass destruction. Then it was Security Council Resolutions enforcing this, then no-fly zones, and so on inexorably through the years until eventually we could be appeased no more.

Every act of appeasement of the bad guys was also an act of appeasement of us. And it had the same effect on us: a sullen but temporary acquiescence. We were willing, for a while, to take the chance (however slim we considered it) that we could achieve our objectives by that method, and so not have to resort to war. But our objectives themselves did not change. How on earth could being appeased ever change anyone's *objectives*? So ours remained good, just as Saddam's remained bad, and the Weasels’ remained weasely. And inevitably it all unravelled, and in the end a few hundred thousand more people had been murdered than would

have been if either we or Saddam had rejected the appeasers’

whiny siren song in the first place.

And here is a marked difference between this appeasement and classic appeasement: Chamberlain was trying to cope with the threat posed by Hitler. King Aethelred with that of the Vikings. They feared invasion, violence, oppression and the destruction of their liberties. Today's Weasels are trying to cope with *us*. Because they fear insignificance.

Fri, 04/25/2003 - 10:16 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

It's piecemeal social enginee...

It's piecemeal social engineering at work until it no longer works and would demand a dramatic action. Otherwise we would fall into the trap to go right toward the perfect end and risking ourselves into making a grave error.

Words can fool men but nature doesn't give a damn!

by [Lan Nguyen](#) on Fri, 04/25/2003 - 16:34 | [reply](#)

Appeasement works ...

only when acts of appeasement are expected to change the dynamics that lead to the undesired behavior. The Progressive and Civil Rights Movements might be examples in history, where giving concessions to those who demanded them ultimately mitigated these demands.

I guess my choice of example really reflects my belief that you can only appease, or deal with, reasonable people with just grievances.

by a reader on Sat, 05/03/2003 - 08:04 | [reply](#)

Proper Responses to Treachery

Mean Mr Mustard writes that the **proper response** to the treachery of the **Russians**, the **Germans** and probably the **French** is to threaten them as we would any tinpot dictatorship that threatened us:

But the stripe of betrayal that has become more and more evident in Russia's case (and may very well manifest itself in both France and Germany's dealings) is entirely different. In essence, they were giving material aid to an enemy engaged in trying to kill American soldiers. Russia shared vital intelligence with Iraq and even trained some of Saddam's thugs in espionage. And that's just the official actions of the government itself. It seems the dealings involving private Russian companies (with the tacit approval but plausible denial of the government) were much worse than that. Germany was apparently looking to get very friendly with the Iraqi secret service. What possible reason could animate the desire for such a relationship at this point except thwarting US forces?...

Such overtures could only, in my opinion, signal a willingness to aid Baghdad in *physically hurting us while were actually engaged in battle...*

If they want to act like Syria, then we should oblige them and have our Defense department making similar veiled threats. They're the ones who committed the actions indicative of such hostility. For us to not respond in at least a rhetorical fashion this instant is just wilful blindness on our part.

Syria is an evil tyranny, and as such has no internal mechanism to correct their policies and remove their leaders. Hence, when they do evil things that endanger us, there is no alternative to our making it clear that the leaders themselves will suffer if they do not mend their ways – ultimately by being deposed in a war and put on trial for their crimes. France, Germany and Russia are democracies. As such they do have the ability peacefully to change their policies and if necessary to get rid of Putin, Chirac and Schroeder. It is therefore appropriate to maintain peaceful relations with them.

Certainly, it is also appropriate that they should **pay a price**

wherever possible. It is also imperative that the Americans cut them out of all diplomatic initiatives to deal with Syria and its poisonous ilk, and that they be very careful about what intelligence they are shown since they obviously cannot be trusted. Yet though the French, Russian and German governments may be run by men with all the moral courage and integrity of a weasel, they aren't actually evil and should not be treated on a par with Syria.

Sun, 04/27/2003 - 17:38 | [permalink](#)

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Correcting Common Errors

We have a new item in our sidebar: **Error Correction**. These are useful resources, but not directly for you, O Wise and Rational Readers of **The World**. They are for your friends and acquaintances. They are for those jaw-dropping moments when, for instance, you think you are having a deep discussion about some subtle geopolitical issue with someone whom you have not previously observed to deviate from sanity, when they suddenly come up with

- *"Well, there are people who could locate Saddam with their psychic powers. It's at least worth trying, isn't it? After all, the police use psychics to solve murders, and even the CIA..."*

Don't panic. Just refer them to the James Randi web site, where they will find **this** and be cured. More generally, don't engage with any argument about any supernatural claims that have not won Randi's million dollar prize. (None has ever got past the first stage, a prima facie demonstration of the claimed effect.)

If they tell you about an email message they have just received from **Bill Gates guaranteeing them a thousand dollars** if they forward it to ten people ... or if they remark

- *"Did you know that during the Nazi occupation of Denmark in World War 2 the **Danish king wore a yellow star** in solidarity with his Jewish subjects",*

Refer them to Snopes (which everyone should read thoroughly, by the way, and then regularly check out their **Recent Additions** page).

- *"Such diseases as anorexia, bulimia, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, **schoolphobia**, homosexuality..."*

Refer them to Thomas Szasz.

- *"Studies have shown that **watching TV makes teenagers more violent...**"*

Refer them to junkscience.com.

- *"Well, in some ways the Israelis and the Palestinians are as bad as each other. They should both..."*

Refer them to Myths and Facts. And you might also try

HonestReporting.com.

We should stress that to endorse these sites as excellent antidotes to common errors is not to claim that they themselves are error free. On the contrary, only **one web site** is error free. And in particular, we have reservations about some of the content of each of those sites.

Mon, 04/28/2003 - 02:08 | [permalink](#)

Not So Easy

The World writes: *Don't panic. Just refer them to the James Randi web site, where they will find this and be cured.*

As lovely as this sounds, it's not very accurate. Yes, Randi offers true refutations of psychics, and these other sites also offer true refutations of various other crap. But come on. You're all familiar with TCS, and its total lack of popularity. Despite lots of TCSers explaining it over and over on numerous forums, with highly varied approaches. Truth alone isn't enough to win many converts.

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 04/28/2003 - 02:48 | [reply](#)

Correction

Quote:

*On the contrary, **only one web site** is error free.*

Excepting of course the Readers' Comments (particularly this one).

by a reader on Mon, 04/28/2003 - 03:16 | [reply](#)

For those who missed the irony...

If ever you see on this site any of the following –

- (1) grandiosity
 - (2) anything that appears to imply that solving problems is a piece of cake requiring no creativity but a mere act of will
 - (3) optimistic-sounding claims that anyone in the grip of thoroughly bad ideas will surely change his mind when the truth is presented to him
 - (4) anything that sounds as though we think that the truth is manifest, and/or that
 - (5) we think ourselves infallible knowledge-generating systems
- ... and so on... –

look for the irony. If we appear to say such things, you can be pretty sure that it is not *entirely* serious.

On the other hand, we* are quite serious about switching to the Mac.

Sarah

* Kevin Schodel wishes to disassociate himself from this comment,

as he is a compiler writer pure unix type who does not seem entirely satisfied with what they have done with System X.

by **Sarah Fitz-Claridge** on Mon, 04/28/2003 - 14:39 | [reply](#)

Our First Convert From Idiotarianism?

In a *sensitively*-written piece in the **Globe and Mail** (via **Abode of Amritas**),

Roy MacGregor brought to life the terrible plight of Ms Dianne Burnham, who does not speak with "a loud voice, but ... quietly and cautiously". This poor peace activist has, it seems, been so traumatised by finding herself in "the minority anti-war side" in that most abominable of regimes, America, that she is looking for a "safe haven". Anxious to help her in her search for a new home, we'd like to recommend that she try **North Korea**, **Syria**, or perhaps **Cuba**, **France** or **Zimbabwe** might appeal to her too.

But wait! Could it be that Ms Burnham has experienced a last-minute access of sanity? Look at her bumper sticker ad for **The World!**:

"God Bless **The World**", she insists.

Though we are atheists, we gratefully accept the support of what may be our very first idiotarian convert.

Tue, 04/29/2003 - 01:58 | [permlink](#)

Unbelievable

This paragraph reached out and kicked me:

It is hardly an even split, the pro-war side vastly outnumbering the antiwar, and because **the media, particularly television, have been vastly pro-war**, little attention has been paid to the minority side apart from quick dismissals and even charges of unpatriotic activity.

I haven't read the Globe and Mail before, so I'm not clear on what its place is on the political scale, but I find that ridiculous. It seemed to me that 9 out of 10 news outlets here were anti-war (at least until the fighting was over, then it seemed to abate somewhat). It's like they made that up to somehow justify this woman's insecurity.

Oh, and does she realize how un-American it is to run when things aren't just how you like it? If she were in the old Iraq, after fleeing, her remaining family members would certainly be tortured after she

left for suspicion of disloyalty.

by a reader on Tue, 04/29/2003 - 06:09 | [reply](#)

The Globe and Mail

The Globe and Mail is the main traditional left-centre Canadian newspaper. They generally believe that the state is man's best friend.

by a reader on Wed, 04/30/2003 - 21:32 | [reply](#)

Was the writer entirely serious?

I thought I detected a hint of sarcasm in the *Globe and Mail* article. Anyone else?

by a reader on Wed, 04/30/2003 - 21:34 | [reply](#)

Ms. Burnham's hysterics

The Globe and Mail should reinterview Ms. Burnham next year to discover whether she had the courage of her convictions to disrupt her life by actually moving to Canada or Costa Rica. Or whether - after quivering delicately in the spotlight - she simply stayed put. As a former journalist I didn't detect so much as sarcasm in the tone of the report (as noted by a previous reader) as a sense of boredom with Ms. Burnham's creepy solipsism.

by a reader on Thu, 05/01/2003 - 17:41 | [reply](#)

As Anti-American As Anti-TV?

Is there a connection between anti-Americanism and being anti-TV apart from the obvious 'commercialism' aspect?

by a reader on Fri, 05/02/2003 - 01:52 | [reply](#)

Yeah, I'd lay money on her st...

Yeah, I'd lay money on her staying right where she is.

by a reader on Fri, 05/02/2003 - 01:53 | [reply](#)

Anti-American, Anti-TV

Yes there is a connection.

They both come from a preference for the "natural" (ie primitive).

America is seen as favoring using technology to control nature to "improve" (their scare quotes, not mine) our lives. This includes using TV to communicate and entertain.

Fundamentally, I think this preference is anti-human, because they

seem to view "natural" as "excluding human action", so they seem to think the world would be perfect if only there were no people in it.

by **Gil** on Fri, 05/02/2003 - 17:15 | [reply](#)

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Holocaust Memorial Day

Yesterday was Holocaust Memorial Day (Yom Ha'Shoah).

For those who wonder how much the West knew of the Holocaust while it was going on, have a look at [this footage](#) (RealPlayer required) at the [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#), of protests in New York in March 1943, and at the links [here](#):

After word reached America of the Nazi killing of European Jewry, pressure mounted on the Roosevelt administration to help European Jews. To spur action, playwright Ben Hecht prepared a memorial to the Jewish victims of Nazi persecution, "We Will Never Die." The pageant, sponsored by the Zionist Revisionist Bergson Group, was part of a mass demonstration at Madison Square Garden in New York City. Later seen in other U.S. cities, the show was part of the Bergson Group's effort to pressure Washington to act decisively to rescue Europe's remaining Jews.

However, interference with the Holocaust was **contrary to Allied policy**:

By the spring of 1944, the Allies knew of the gassings at [Auschwitz-Birkenau](#). Jewish leaders pleaded unsuccessfully with the U.S. government to bomb the gas chambers and railways leading to the camp. From August 20 to September 13, 1944, the U.S. Air Force bombed the Auschwitz-Monowitz industrial complex, less than five miles from the gas chambers in Birkenau. However, the U.S. maintained its policy of non-involvement in rescue, and bombed neither the gas chambers nor the railways used to transport prisoners.

For those who can't view the video, here's the transcript:

The pageant "We Will Never Die" is New York's Jewish protest against Nazi massacres. In Lublin, five hundred of our women and children were led to the market place and stood against the vegetable stalls we knew so well. Here the Germans turned machine guns on us and killed us all. Remember us. [Narrator:] And a great dramatic

appeal is made as Paul Muni tells of Nazi crimes against

helpless people. [Muni:] There are four million Jews surviving in Europe. The Germans have promised to deliver to the world by the end of the year, a Christmas package of four million dead Jews. And this is not a Jewish problem. It is a problem that belongs to humanity and it is a challenge to the soul of man.

March, 1943.

Wed, 04/30/2003 - 01:12 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Celebrity does good

Paul Muni Hollywood actor! <http://movies.yahoo.com/shop?d=hc&id=1800018166&cf=awards&intl=us>.

Was that the last time a Hollywood celebrity ever demonstrated on the side of good?

by a reader on Wed, 04/30/2003 - 01:38 | [reply](#)

Putin Taunts Blair

What *should* have happened:

Putin: **Is Saddam sitting in a bunker waiting to blow the whole place up with WMD?**

Blair: [smiles cheerfully] Dunno. If he is, will you resign your Presidency?

Putin: [indignantly] No.

Blair: So, you're not even willing to stake your career on the proposition. I'm not willing to stake countless lives on it.

Spot the difference.

Wed, 04/30/2003 - 18:37 | [permalink](#)

Excellent

Well put.

by a reader on Mon, 05/12/2003 - 08:19 | [reply](#)

Scientism Watch – Fishy Feelings

Fish do feel pain, scientists say

The first conclusive evidence of pain perception in fish is said to have been found by UK scientists.

The “conclusive evidence”? Well, it's that fish not only react to harmful stimuli (which might just be a “simple reflex response”) but behave differently afterwards. Uh huh. So does a computer, guys. Heck, so does a refrigerator.

Let's hope this doesn't answer **Alan Forrester's shark question**, but we have a horrible feeling it might. Has the world gone insane?

No. It always has been insane. That's why it needs setting to rights.

In related news, the BBC also reported: **Plants avoid worst Corus cuts**. Ouch! We don't blame them. Those Corus cuts *are* the worst.

Thu, 05/01/2003 - 01:38 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Scientism

Which meaning of the word 'scientism' do you have in mind?

by a reader on Thu, 05/01/2003 - 02:14 | [reply](#)

Scientism

The purported application of scientific methods to resolve non-scientific, philosophical issues, especially moral and metaphysical issues.

by **Editor** on Thu, 05/01/2003 - 02:39 | [reply](#)

Observations

Observations, in and of themselves, never resolve *any* issues. Explanations that rely on observations can. Many scientists either don't know this, or ignore it. So if you see a scientist talking about a study proving something, and you don't see any explanations of

how the observations demonstrate the purported conclusion, it's

scientism.

-- Elliot Temple
<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 05/01/2003 - 06:08 | [reply](#)

What we have here is a failure to communicate

I think that part of the problem is that different groups are using the same word ("Pain") and attaching different meanings to it.

The scientists are, indeed, observing something: "profound behavioural and physiological changes" and labeling it "Pain". Perhaps this is a standard usage in the field; but when most laymen hear "Pain" they think about the kind of anguish that people can feel. This is something entirely different and cannot be established by observation (certainly not today).

It's my understanding that our best theories about how brains work tell us that fish nervous systems are not capable of experiencing this human-like pain and these experiments do nothing to change that.

by **Gil** on Thu, 05/01/2003 - 16:52 | [reply](#)

Suuuuuuuuuure

Gil,

Can you find one source suggesting these "scientists" don't think fish feel pain in the human sense?

-- Elliot Temple
<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 05/02/2003 - 06:29 | [reply](#)

Isn't pain a feeling?

Pain is a feeling isn't it? How can that be measured? Aren't feelings subjective? Don't we interpret physical sensations with our brains? Thus, how can an animal have the same experience we have? They don't have our brains so they can't experience it the way we do.

by a reader on Fri, 05/02/2003 - 12:24 | [reply](#)

Wrong Word

You mean quale (plural: qualia) not feeling (emotion).

But it's not that fish can't experience it the same way because they "don't have our brains" -- two humans with different brains (we all have different brains) can, according to our best theories, experience the same quale the same way. It's that you have to be conscious in the first place to have them. Fish are thus no more

candidates than rocks.

-- Elliot Temple
<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 05/02/2003 - 13:20 | [reply](#)

Source

Well, *these* scientists didn't speak about their results describing how the fish *felt* (which is good from a scientism point of view). Those conclusions were drawn by the animal rights activists and, perhaps, the article author. The scientists only claimed to have observed responses to damaging stimuli.

There was a quote from another scientist that *did* explicitly distinguish these findings from *feeling pain*.

Dr Bruno Broughton, a fish biologist and NAA adviser, said: "I doubt that it will come as much of a shock to anglers to learn that fish have an elaborate system of sensory cells around their mouths...

"However, it is an entirely different matter to draw conclusions about the ability of fish to feel pain, a psychological experience for which they literally do not have the brains," he said.

He quoted from a study by Professor James Rose of the University of Wyoming, US, in which it was found fish did not possess the necessary and specific regions of the brain, the neocortex.

by **Gil** on Fri, 05/02/2003 - 16:18 | [reply](#)

Irony

I find it somewhat ironic that Elliot and this post's author seem to have drawn conclusions about what theories these scientists hold about fish *feeling* pain based purely on the observation that they have published a paper describing physiological and behavioural responses to damaging stimuli, the fact that they use the word "pain" (which probably has an observable technical meaning in their field), and the interpretations of laymen.

I know that they didn't claim these conclusions to be scientific, but they still suffer from the same supportability problems that are ascribed to others.

But, I agree that it is correct to criticize those who did explicitly draw grand conclusions about fish *feeling pain* in the human sense.

by **Gil** on Fri, 05/02/2003 - 16:51 | [reply](#)

oh c'mon

Gil,

Have you read any of the article besides the part you quoted, which is from a NAA (fisher ppl) adviser..? OK, i know you have, but stop studiously ignoring it.

-- Elliot Temple
<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 05/02/2003 - 19:32 | [reply](#)

What?

What am I ignoring? Where does the scientist (Dr Sneddon) say something that implied the fish feel pain as humans do?

Was it this?:

Dr Sneddon said the team's work "fulfils the criteria for animal pain".

Maybe I'm wrong, but I interpreted "animal pain" to be a technical term for observable responses to damaging stimuli, not a psychological, emotional, interpretation.

All of the conclusions about how the pain is felt seemed to come from the animal rights people, the author, and apparently many of the readers of the article.

by **Gil** on Fri, 05/02/2003 - 23:08 | [reply](#)

Do they mean 'pain' in the morally significant sense?

Gil I think you may be letting the authors off too lightly. Because

- If this were truly a technical term that they intend no other connotation for (as when a physicist uses the word 'charm' to refer to a property of sub-atomic particles), they would apply it uniformly to everything that passes the criterion. Such as certain robots. But I bet they do not say that robots feel pain.

- If this were truly a technical term that they intend no other connotation for, then the entire project has no worthwhile motivation. It's not something that has any significance for zoology or any other science. Zoologists reading this paper are not saying "oh, now we can understand this other perplexing problem; oh now we have a promising way of investigating that other phenonenon" or anything like that. Its *only* interest is its purported relevance to moral issues of how fish should be treated, in the wider context of animal rights etc.

- If this were truly a technical term that they intend no other connotation for, then they would be at pains to point this out to journalists -- for the possibility of confusion is abvious when you use a technical term that has a different meaning in everyday life,

concerning an issue of widespread interest and controversy. Journalists don't come away from interviews with physicists with the impression that the "charm" of elementary particles means charm.

For this and other reasons, I conclude that they are guilty.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Fri, 05/02/2003 - 23:35 | [reply](#)

Pain

David,

I think it would be useful to speak of robots experiencing pain. It would help people grasp a model for controlling it's behavior, learning, etc. It would be good to build in sensors that detect destructive stimuli, and avoid the source in the future. Pain is what I'd call it.

I'm not sure what facts are useful to zoologists, but this scientist said:

"We believe our study is the first work with fish of the teleost family [those with bony skeletons], and the results may represent an evolutionary divergence between the teleost and elasmobranch lineages."

Which sounds to me like it proves useful (some animals have developed certain receptors and others haven't).

As for the impression that the reporter was left with as evidence; it's my experience that reporters often make mistakes like this, and worse. I'd be very surprised if this has never happened to you.

by [Gil](#) on Sat, 05/03/2003 - 00:38 | [reply](#)

Pain

Gil: Yes it has, but that wasn't *my* fault! :)

by [David Deutsch](#) on Sat, 05/03/2003 - 01:06 | [reply](#)

Pain

David,

:) I'm sure it wasn't your fault!

So why don't we blame the journalist, and the animal rights wackos, and give the scientists the benefit of the doubt?

I like scientists.

by [Gil](#) on Sat, 05/03/2003 - 02:32 | [reply](#)

Innocent scientists?

Gil:

Are **these** scientists innocent too?

"Living within a group requires a moral code of behaviour... Most animals that live in communities exhibit similar moral codes to humans.

"Zoologists who have spent their professional lives studying animal behaviour, either by observation or by experiments to test their mental capacities, believe that many animals feel and think."

Joyce D'Silva, chief executive of CIWF, told BBC News Online: "The whole climate over whether to accept sentience has changed hugely in the last 15 years.

"It has huge implications for all the ways we use animals. It implies all farm animals are entitled to humane lives and deaths - and millions are denied them."

Dr Jackie Turner, research director of the CIWF Trust, told BBC News Online: "There's far more rationality and mental complexity in farm animals than we acknowledge.

by **David Deutsch** on Sat, 05/10/2003 - 19:33 | [reply](#)

Guilty

Ok, I don't know how many scientists are associated with that group and agree with its chief executive, but those who do are guilty.

by **Gil** on Sun, 05/11/2003 - 00:05 | [reply](#)

Consciousness, pain, and other's experience

In order to conclude that others feel conscious pain you must establish that they are conscious.
Which is impossible.

The only thing we can do is observe their actions and draw conclusions based on how their actions parallel our own in similar situations, and make the assumption that they have a similar experience.

This applies not only to fish.

This applies to humans.

How do I know that you feel pain?
Perhaps because you say so? What if you don't speak English? What if you are too young to speak? What if you have brain damage? Because you flinch, or yell, or cry? Those could be just instinctive stimulus responses. In fact, when you say "that hurts" that could just be a complex conditioned response. Perhaps no one feels pain in the way I do except me. Or, from your point of view, except you.

Maybe know one else is conscious. You can never prove that

anyone else is conscious, only that they behave as though they were.

So your neighbor and sister are just as much candidates to feel pain as a rock is.

If a fish has a brain, and reacts to avoid certain stimuli, it is not an unreasonable assumption to conclude that they are likely to experience something similar to what we experience in the same situation.

In any case like this, just insert "severely mentally retarded human" in place of what ever animal with a primitive brain you are talking about, and see how your argument sounds.

The only reason this is even a matter to debate is because people don't want to feel guilty for eating other things which have the capacity to feel.

Humans are animals. Animals think and feel and experience. Either get over it, or become vegetarian. Stop lying to yourselves so you can feel more justified. You aren't better than everything else, you are just different.

by **Jay Aziza** on Wed, 12/20/2006 - 17:51 | [reply](#)

Fish and Humans

So do you believe that a fisherman and a murderer are equally evil (both are animals)?

If you don't think that a fisherman and a murderer are equally evil, why are humans more important?

by a reader on Thu, 12/21/2006 - 00:27 | [reply](#)

Deceptively Irrational

With its cheery **daily briefing** today saying, *inter alia*, “we remain resolutely committed to our vision of building an America where freedom, opportunity, prosperity, and civil society flourish”, you might be forgiven for concluding that the **Heritage Foundation's** web site could be worth visiting on a regular basis, but you'd be a bit of a gudgeon.

OK, so we agree with them that moral and cultural relativism are egregious errors. They know the problem is one of right and wrong. They know that it is urgent and integral to the current crisis. They seem at first glance to understand key concepts such as objective morality and moral progress...

But appearances are deceptive.

They assume that moral relativism is also the cause of unrelated problems such as cheating in schools and colleges, corporate scandals and political corruption. They lament the lack of patriotism exhibited by a survey showing that 37% of college students would try to evade a draft. Heritage has been a “champion of the importance of marriage, parental rights, and traditional values – standing up against the liberal line that all lifestyles are morally equal”.

Their proposed cure is brutal: a mandatory politically incorrect American History course for first year college students. This coercion will supposedly “inoculate them against the lies and distortions of the anti-war left”.

D'oh!

So it turns out that the Heritage Foundation has little inkling of true morality. Their agenda is conservatism in the literal sense, that is, to conserve traditional institutions and practices by protecting them from criticism. In evaluating institutions and practices, they look to history rather than moral content. Their dogma – in effect, ‘our traditions are good, true, and infallible’ – is no better than the idiotarian one of ‘all our traditions are wicked, false, and must be replaced’. Thus the Heritage Foundation is hardly less of a threat to our society than the radical leftists. Their apparent grasp of the issues in regard to the war and its morality was little more than a coincidence.

The rational libertarian view is that there is valuable knowledge

contained in our traditions, but that all of them are fallible and can be improved through argument and debate in the absence of coercion. Dangerous ideas will not be defeated through the propagation of authorised truth to captive audiences. They will be defeated through argument, as will the Heritage Foundation.

Fri, 05/02/2003 - 00:09 | [permalink](#)

Fishy

"Gudgeon" = gullible person, I assume? The fishy definitions look ... fishy.

by a reader on Fri, 05/02/2003 - 01:56 | [reply](#)

Gudgeon

<http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=gudgeon>

"Slang: One who is easily duped."

"A person easily duped or cheated. --Swift."

by a reader on Fri, 05/02/2003 - 02:29 | [reply](#)

your bias is showing

I thought information was power?

Why are you not railing against all the brutal forced re-education that Politically Correct thought disciplins are enforcing on the first year college students?

Would it not make sense that if we cannot stop all forced education, we should insert forced education that refutes what authoritarians are pumping as the "correct" way to think?

This is what disgusts me about Libertarians, thier adherance is as fanatical as a wahabbist muslim, they would blow themselves up figuratively, or politically (literally) to adhere to some pure ideal they think trumps reality.

What makes the Constitution great is its ability to survive hypocrisy, and still give the society attempting to adhere to it, progress. There are miss-steps, but with all the checks and balances, and competing interests, we can evolve progressively. We can only evolve progressively if we have a true history, so that we as a society dont get caught in some negative feedback loop spanning centuries, or millenia.

by a reader on Sat, 05/03/2003 - 18:22 | [reply](#)

Not against all coercion?

Why are you not railing against all the brutal forced re-

education that Politically Correct thought disciplines are enforcing on the first year college students?

We most certainly do!

Would it not make sense that if we cannot stop all forced education, we should insert forced education that refutes what authoritarians are pumping as the "correct" way to think?

No. We should never take such a defeatist and immoral attitude. We should resist all coercive education, not substitute one lot of coercion for another. And that is what **TCS (Taking Children Seriously)** is doing.

by **Sarah** on Sun, 05/04/2003 - 13:45 | [reply](#)

Foreskin or Against?

Andrew Sullivan **says** of a **Reuters piece** about a study claiming to show that circumcised penises are just as sensitive as uncircumcised ones:

My own anti-circumcision view, however, is not based on the idea that mutilated men have less pleasure. It's based on the simple notion that individuals' bodies should not be permanently altered without their consent, unless the medical evidence for such a procedure is overwhelming.

We hope that he would not actually support the idea that innocent people's bodies should be altered without their consent, whatever the medical evidence! Perhaps what Mr Sullivan intended to say was that it would be unreasonable to assume consent on the part of the baby about to be circumcised, unless, say, the baby has a particular medical condition and no less invasive treatment is possible.

But to get back to the study: the questions it asked were necessarily mechanistic – and rightly so, because otherwise it would have been another case of scientism – so it does not really address the issue of 'sensitivity' in the sense anyone is interested in. Furthermore, the study's sample size is so small that it isn't difficult to find people who have engaged sexually with more men than were in the study. When we asked a few of our more experienced friends whether their intimate knowledge of both circumcised and uncircumcised men led them to concur with the study, the answer was no.

Europeans are often shocked to learn that circumcision is so common in the US. It is not common (apart from for religious reasons) in the UK, Europe and Australia. Parents in America are beginning to question circumcision, but many lack basic information. They are unaware, for example, that there is a difference in functionality between the circumcised and the uncircumcised penis. At the risk of getting a little too graphic here, the lack of moveable skin affects masturbation, etc. If interested, see the five photographs at the bottom of **this page**. Note the two lines drawn on the skin, showing how it moves. Whilst the functionality argument is obviously trumped by the human rights

argument above, some might want to take it into account when

making the decision.

Sat, 05/03/2003 - 01:34 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Amos

I'm no experts on men's dicks, but I can tell you that circumcision is very common, in fact nearly the norm, here in australia.

by a reader on Sun, 05/04/2003 - 15:10 | [reply](#)

Another Aussie

I'll second that observation. In my (limited to looking only) experience, it is the uncircumcized male that is the minority in Australia.

by a reader on Mon, 05/05/2003 - 03:04 | [reply](#)

A Circumcised Aussie

I was born in Sydney Australia in 1962. The first time I saw an uncircumcised dick was when I was 8 years old - a kid from England flashed his 'elephant trunk' in the classroom. All the other Aussie boys I knew were circumcised. I grew up thinking that in Australia you were born circumcised & that kids from Europe just had a stranger looking dick. You only have to visit any of the beautiful clothing-optional beaches in Sydney Harbour (I like Cobblers Beach the most)to see that the majority of Aussie men are circumcised.

by a reader on Fri, 10/17/2003 - 16:26 | [reply](#)

we're all cut here in Australia

My experience was the same. I didn't know there was such a thing as circumcision until I was over 10 when I asked what the word circumcision meant. I pretty much only ever saw circumcised dicks when I was growing up. And that's great - they're the best looking dicks around.

by a reader on Tue, 10/12/2004 - 13:29 | [reply](#)

i dont care!!

Well my's is uncircumcison,it's very overwhelming not being circumcised i was born puerto rico and lived in NY and now in FL,a long time a go, i told my friend that i was uncircumsed this when i just found out about it. so year have pass and one day my friend tell another one of my friend about my you know what.start calling me 'elephant trunk' and then pull back man which they got form the wal-mart comm on tv. this make me feel like \$hit every time they talk about it so about 10-20 people now know that i'm not circumcsed.and i'm 16 year old now!

by a reader on Thu, 10/28/2004 - 10:14 | [reply](#)

Circ'd at 15

Ever since I was little I wondered why my "thing" looked different. So I finally found out. When I found out it could be done easily I got it done in about an hour and I'm feeling free and fine with the results.

by a reader on Thu, 10/28/2004 - 22:14 | [reply](#)

Everybody is right!

The number of circumcised males counted over all age groups in Australia is currently well into the 65-75% range, but only about 15% of baby boys are now cut at birth. The very high (~90%) rates for infant circumcision were from about 1935 to 1970. The circumcision rate for each age group has been falling steadily since about 1975 when Australian doctors decided to refuse to offer it as a procedure at birth (although some would still provide it on parental request). So everyone is right! (But surgery without consent when there's no real reason is always wrong!)

by "an Aussie doctor" on Mon, 12/06/2004 - 15:08 | [reply](#)

Cut Aussie

I agree. Most men in Australia have been cut. I went to an all boys school and the majority there were cut. It is so much cleaner and looks better

by a reader on Sun, 12/12/2004 - 22:22 | [reply](#)

Yes again

I'm another Aussie guy who was born here in 1973. Pretty much every kid I knew while I was growing up was circumcised - I think a few of the Greek kids at school were intact but everyone else had been done. Australia seems to be thought of as a non circumcising country but even now, many of my peers are having their kids done with no problem at all.

Incidentally, an ex of mine told me about an ex of hers (still with me?) who was circumcised at age 19 and swore it was the best thing he'd done. My ex said he certainly seemed to be no less sensitive for it.

by a reader in oz on Wed, 01/12/2005 - 11:40 | [reply](#)

Saudi-islamo-Treachery

Saudi Arabia originally offered \$10 million for tsunami relief; then, after international criticism, upped its pledge to \$30 million. This sum is dwarfed by the \$150 million per year the Saudis have given to the families of suicide bombers. Meanwhile, according to government websites, they spend billions funding 1,500 mosques,

more than 200 colleges, and some 2,000 schools for Muslim children in Europe, North and South America, Australia, and Asia. Their aim is not to alleviate human suffering, or even Muslim suffering, but only to promote their version of Islam.

The tsunami tragedy shows once more that Islamist extremism does not seek freedom, democracy, or the alleviation of poverty. Its explicit goal is to advance enmity between Wahhabis and all others, and to create reactionary regimes ruled by a perversion of Islamic law. The extremists would remove a Muslim leader such as Mohammed Yunus, and perhaps execute him for the "crime" of cremating Hindu bodies and placing crosses on the graves of Christian victims. Islamist extremism--an incubator not only of terrorism but also of universal hatred--is the enemy of all other beliefs.

by pilgrim on Wed, 01/12/2005 - 18:06 | [reply](#)

how did you get circumsied

how did you get circumsied

by sam on Sat, 02/19/2005 - 22:26 | [reply](#)

you dipshit pilgrim

pilgrim you fanny. what the fuck has that got to do with circumcision. and are you so unaware that America is currently spending BILLIONS on keeping the corrupt saudia royals in power. if it wasnt for the THOUSANDS of American soldiers the Saudia royals would of been lynched and their dead bodies dragged around the streets.

forget the Tsunami. did you know the same amount of people die EVERY WEEK because of starvation and disease in Africa????? and before you bitch about Saudias whose wealth is being robbed by America (over a trillion dollars is in America out of saudia money) do you realise that America spends every year OVER 400 billion dollars on its milatry. it would cost America 40 billion to completely stop world hunger and all those people from dying.

and before you start all that "aid" bullshit no country offered out of their "hearts" straight away did they. The donations were so late and constantly chaning in Europe and America becasue of pure political reasons.

by a reader on Wed, 05/04/2005 - 21:59 | [reply](#)

I was born in Holland, but my

I was born in Holland, but my dad is american. When i was born, the doctors didnt accept to do circumcision on me. They thought it was abnormal and dangerous.... So my dad brought me into the U.S. so they could have the operation done. Im so glad they did it

to me, In my opinion, A Cut dick looks SOOOO much better than an

uncut one. I personally think about all the uncut dutch guys and its gross. These are things i love about The USA, Canada and Australia. The majority of their males are cut.

by Kehivi on Tue, 02/14/2006 - 21:03 | [reply](#)

Cutting Edge Australia

All this just shows how easy it is to get your foreskin in a twist.

It is plain to me that Australia is a circumcised country but is no longer a circumcising country.

Personally I don't give rat's arse about "your" foreskin or lack of it, but I sure wish adults would let kids keep theirs long enough to make up their own minds about it.

Whose dick is it anyway?

by a reader on Thu, 03/30/2006 - 09:35 | [reply](#)

Well, I'm an aussie born in 1

Well, I'm an aussie born in 1976 and I'd say 80% of my year were uncut. The cut kids were the one's who are in the minority.

by 76er on Fri, 04/21/2006 - 19:01 | [reply](#)

I'm glad my mum made the right decision

I found the last post a little weird. I was born in 1975 and i reckon about 90% of my year were cut all through school.

I was cut at birth, and I believe my mum made the right choice. It is way better and looks much nicer. foreskins are just so damn UGLY!!! If I ever have a son, he will be cut within the 1st 6 months of birth.

by a reader on Mon, 08/21/2006 - 06:42 | [reply](#)

add on to the last post

I was born in australia too.

by a reader on Mon, 08/21/2006 - 06:43 | [reply](#)

"abnormal and dangerous"

"the doctors didnt accept to do circumcison on me. They thought it was abnormal and dangerous..."

Then one really has to question their medical qualifications. Dangerous?!!! What utter drivle.

by [Yoni](#) on Sun, 09/10/2006 - 16:07 | [reply](#)

A short story

Today, the circumcision rate is very low in Australia. I am 20 and have just completed my final year of university in Brisbane. All through high-school/secondary school i thought i was in the minority with an uncircum sized penis. After school when my friends and I were more open about each other, I realised that only one of my friends was circum sized, and he felt quite embaressed. Every time he looked like hooking up with a girl he would tell her first that he was cut (not that she would really care). Since school i have had sex with about 15 women and not one of them has made any comment on my foreskin. My current girlfriend has never even been with a guy who has a cut penis, and asked me one day what exactly a circumcision involved. After explaining the pros and cons of the operation, she couldn't believe the mutilation. The POINT is, circumcisioin is not really performed on younger generation Australians. Most guys now under 25 have not been circumcised.

by Student on Thu, 12/14/2006 - 01:37 | [reply](#)

circumcision

I was born in Australia in 1950 of Australian parents.I am not circumcised but almost all other males born then, about 95%, were.

I think that circumcision is a good idea and had our 3 sons done.

by a reader on Sun, 10/21/2007 - 18:48 | [reply](#)

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Seriously Satirical

Whenever a political or social tradition is driven by psychological hang-ups (and at present they all are, to a greater or lesser extent), there is a potential for satire because the unfortunate sufferers of the hangup can neither defend their opinions rationally nor modify them. So they are sitting targets and, literally, **ridiculous**.

This is especially so when the opinions in question are currently being refuted by collision with cold reality. Refutation only **rarely** cures hang-ups, but it does increase the work that their holders have to do to cope with the 'cognitive dissonance' of living in a world that simply *is not* as they feel it *must be*. Satire likewise plays the important role of increasing the psychological cost of clinging to untenable views. For instance, the treatment that Muhammed Saeed al-Sahaf has received at the hands of **satirists** will make it harder, in future, for totalitarian Ministers of Information to get themselves taken seriously by Westerners – or even by the average idiotarian journalist.

Before 9-11, the ridiculousness of idiotarianism lay largely concealed under layers of complacency and political correctness. The fact that such a significant strand of political thought *did not even have a name* before 2002 when Charles Johnson **coined the term 'idiotarian'** (the very term being a form of serious/satirical criticism) is testimony to the psychological power of these concealment mechanisms. Their sudden failure – the sudden removal of the idiotarian emperors' clothing – may go some way towards explaining why there are many extremely good satirists among today's warbloggers. The funniest that we know of is **IMAO** – see, for instance, **these** masterpieces, but perhaps better examples of what we are talking about are **Scrappleface** (who coined the term '**Axis of Weasels**') and **The Skeptician**, who are masters of harnessing genuine, relentlessly logical arguments in the cause of satire. Of course, **so** are **we**, when we put our minds to it.

It's a good time for visual satire too. The 'Weasels' metaphor was **memorably** taken up by the New York Post. **Here**, blogger **Laurence Simon** pokes fun at idiotarian 'human shields' by ingeniously reinterpreting a much-mocked government emergency poster (via **LGF**). Here is a **parody of the New York Times**, which beautifully skewers a whole range of ridiculous postures that idiotarians have felt compelled to adopt in response to the recent

Coalition victory in Iraq. Here is a **cartoon** that did the same for post-9-11 postures. The most consistently excellent political cartoonists that we know of are **Cox and Forkum** – not so much funny as **clear-sighted**.

We are living in exceptionally interesting times, which, as the **urban myth about that being a 'Chinese curse'** indicates, means that we are in trouble. However, it has its consolations too. One is that we can witness, or perhaps even assist in, troubles being fixed. Another is that there are some seriously ridiculous people and situations out there at the moment. If it is worth **setting the world to rights**, it is worth laughing at them while doing so.

Sat, 05/03/2003 - 20:03 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Seriously Satirical

"The devil... the prowd spirit... cannot endure to be mocked." -- Thomas More.

"Nothing deflates a windbag faster than the prick of laughter." -- Me.

Curmudgeon Emeritus, Palace Of Reason

by [fporretto](#) on Sun, 05/04/2003 - 11:02 | [reply](#)

Keep up the excellent work!

The blog looks great. I especially liked your shameless plugs of other blogs when talking about satire. It was also very interesting to see your realization that people can absolutely *fail* to spot satire at times. Keep up the excellent work!

by a reader on Mon, 05/12/2003 - 18:55 | [reply](#)

Roadmap or Carjacking?

by **Alan Forrester**

Once again the US is trying to move along a Middle East Peace Plan by **putting pressure** on the Israelis.

The **road map** to peace envisions the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the establishment of a Palestinian state by 2005. The road map is horribly flawed. It is supposed to be implemented by the Quartet: EU, the UN, Russia and the US. The **EU** and the **UN** are both biased towards the Palestinian terrorists. The US and Russia have decidedly mixed records.

Furthermore, by adopting a peace plan with a time limit the US has painted its way into a corner. The problem is that Palestinian terrorists are **still dedicated** to destroying Israel and haven't got the slightest in making concessions. They may be squeezed if the Syrians shut down terrorist camps as they have been asked to but that's a big if.

It gets worse. The road map requires the Palestinian Authority (PA) to recognise Israel's right to exist, it has not done so. The road map also hinges on the introduction of a democratic constitution in Palestine and the PA cracking down on terrorism. The most recent version of the **Palestinian Constitution** includes words like "democracy" and "freedom" but sets the stage for tyranny. The Constitution also says that the Palestinian state will support terrorism.

As things stand now there is no substantial sign at all that the PA has any interest in peace. It is disgraceful that the US is putting pressure on Israel. No amount of pressure on Israel will make sure that the road map is implemented. Pressure on the PA might make it clear that this time the West actually intends to make sure that peace prevails in the Middle East. A good start would be for the US to issue a demand that the PA should rewrite the Palestinian Constitution. If pressure is not put on the PA to make real moves toward peace then they will conclude that the Quartet is not serious about peace and they will be right.

Introducing Our Series, “A Short History of Israel”

This is the introduction to our series, “A Short History of Israel”. The Table of Contents is [here](#), and at the foot of each part of the series, we link to the next part. If you want to skip this introduction, [click here to go straight to Part 1](#).

.....

Once upon a time, we wrote a parody history of Israel, intended for **Setting The World To Rights**, in which every sentence contained at least one lie.

But the reactions of many of our friends who read it were alarming. Instead of falling about laughing, saying, “Jolly good show! What a super parody!”, most of them read it as fact. These are not opponents of Israel, you understand, but people who are sympathetic to it. We hadn't realised quite how pervasive the prevailing distortions and falsehoods are. When you consider that the parody began: “Judaism is unique among religions in being exclusive to a particular ethnic group (the Jews). It teaches (in its doctrine of ‘the Chosen People’) that all other races are genetically inferior to the Jewish one and that Jews are entitled to rule over them”, you might (we admit we're optimists) understand our unease that our friends took it seriously.

We soon realised that we could not put the parody into the public domain. After all, **The Protocols of the Elders of Zion** is also a crude forgery, but is now part of the standard anti-Semitic repertoire – for instance it is in the **Charter of Hamas**. We do not want to be responsible for another anti-Semitic canard that might last the next few centuries.

However, everyone who read the parody asked us where they could find the true facts. Looking around the internet, we found that there are no satisfactory summaries containing just the facts (though we found many containing falsehoods far worse than our parody!). So we decided that we had to compile a short History of Israel ourselves, and we are pleased to announce that we shall post the first instalment (“Anti-Semitism and Zionism”) *tomorrow*. Look out for it!

UPDATE: [Click here for Part 1: Anti-Semitism and Zionism](#)

When you consider that the pa...

When you consider that the parody began: ♦Judaism is unique among religions in being exclusive to a particular ethnic group (the Jews). It teaches (in its doctrine of ♦the Chosen People♦) that all other races are genetically inferior to the Jewish one and that Jews are entitled to rule over them♦, you might (we admit we're optimists) understand our unease that our friends took it seriously.

What is false about that? No really. It looks OK to me.

by a reader on Mon, 05/05/2003 - 00:57 | [reply](#)

Why'd You Do That?

I'm curious about what sort of thought process could possess you to think that your comment was a good thing to post.

-- Elliot Temple
<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 05/05/2003 - 04:51 | [reply](#)

The parody

Well, I thought the parody was hilarious. Maybe it needed to be more obvious for idiots, like this:

"Judaism is the only religion which is limited exclusively to people whose noses are a certain length, and which actually shoots anyone else who tries to join in. It teaches in its doctrine of "The Master Race" that all other humans should be eliminated and that one day Jews will rule this universe, and most of the other ones as well, in a great big orgy of Broadway musicals, haberdashery shops and potato latkes."

http://libertarian_parent_in_the_countryside.blogspot.com/

by [Alice](#) on Mon, 05/05/2003 - 12:19 | [reply](#)

O Lord, I realize that we're...

O Lord, I realize that we're the Chosen People but can't you pick on the Hindus once in a while and give me a little break?

by [Peter W. Davis](#) on Mon, 05/05/2003 - 19:02 | [reply](#)

Will there also be a history ...

Will there also be a history of Ireland next week?

by a reader on Tue, 05/06/2003 - 12:39 | [reply](#)

Rastas

Here's a question I have always been embarrassed to ask: what is the connection between judaism and the rastafaris? Reggae songs talk of Mount Zion and the children of Israel a lot, although in some connection with Ethiopia: why?

With dreadlocks and silly hats on, they also look a bit like orthodox jews put through some kind of photoshop filter.

- "Dash"

by a reader on Tue, 07/01/2003 - 03:50 | [reply](#)

1. Anti-Semitism and Zionism

This is the first part of our series, "A Short History of Israel". If you have not read our introduction, it is [here](#). See also, the [Table of Contents](#).

.....

In the second century CE the Romans expelled and scattered the Jews from their homeland, which was roughly today's Israel [[MAP](#)] [[MAP](#)] plus the West Bank, Gaza, and part of Jordan. The Romans then re-named the region Palestine (after the Philistines, ancient enemies of the Jews who had passed into history long before then). As a result of that expulsion and previous expulsions, Jews settled in almost every country of the Old (and later the New) World, forming communities in which they continued to evolve their distinctive culture. The Jews of today are descendants of those Jews and of local people who occasionally adopted the culture through conversion to Judaism (the Jews' traditional religion, which permitted, but seldom sought, converts).

Most countries in Europe and the Middle East have persecuted Jews for most of their history. Most have expelled and/or slaughtered their Jewish populations at some time or other. They have justified this through a complex of ideas called *anti-Semitism*, which include

- the idea that Jews have collectively failed some crucial test (e.g. they rejected Jesus, or Mohammed, or do not have the Aryans' capacity for 'culture', or do not satisfy Stalin's criteria for being a 'nation', or lack a mystical 'connection to the land', etc);
- the idea that Jews cause pollution – for instance that they are poisoning the water supply, or that they desecrate holy sites and artefacts – which is often extended, semi-metaphorically, to the idea that Jews *are* pollution/vermin/rotten/cancer etc.;
- blood libels, the classic one being that Jews kidnap and murder non-Jewish children and consume their blood in religious rituals;
- the incorporation of an entity called 'The Jews' deeply into the fabric of many cultures as the eternal enemy bent on destroying whatever that culture values; and
- conspiracy theories, especially theories that 'The Jews' are secretly 'behind' the events of history and current affairs.

Before the twentieth century, Jews had responded to anti-Semitism

in various ways, of which the most important were: *endurance*, *conversion* and *assimilation*. But large-scale conversions occurred only under direct duress, and assimilated Jews were sometimes targeted as much as traditional Jews. During the Enlightenment, Jews were given equal rights in Western countries, though in all but the Anglo-Saxon ones this was little more than a facade. During the nineteenth century, there were sporadic mass murders of Jews in Eastern Europe. In the Arab countries, mass murders and expulsions (albeit on a smaller scale than in Eastern Europe), ubiquitous blood libels and day-to-day persecution, continued much as they always had. In Western Europe, virulently anti-Semitic ideologies arose. This seemed ominous to many assimilated Jews: if anti-Semitism was on the rise even there, at the hub of modernity where assimilation was almost total, then assimilation was not the solution to anti-Semitism and Jews everywhere were in danger. Some of them became socialists, identifying themselves with the struggle for a worldwide workers' paradise in which everyone, even Jews, would be truly emancipated. Some became Zionists.

Zionism is the idea that Jews should form a state, where they could live normal lives and defend themselves like the people of other nations, and provide a haven for Jews who might be persecuted elsewhere.

Zionism had been proposed by various writers during the nineteenth century. The Zionist movement, as a political organisation, was founded by an Austrian journalist, Theodor Herzl, who in 1894 had decided that his own assimilationist views were untenable. He was in Paris covering the trial of Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer in the French Army who was falsely convicted of espionage in an atmosphere of national anti-Semitic hysteria. Through writing, lecturing and individual persuasion, Herzl rapidly gathered support for his new movement. The First Zionist Congress was held in Basle, Switzerland in 1897.

Zionism was opposed by religious Jews because it had a secular objective. Some opposed it because it usurped the role of the Messiah, a mythical person who they believed would one day lead them back to their historical homeland. They considered any Jewish political movement not led by the Messiah futile, even sacrilegious.

Initially, Zionism was also opposed, or ignored, by most assimilationists, because it sought separation, which they believed to be the cause of anti-Semitism.

As the persecution of Jews continued to increase all over Eastern Europe during the early twentieth century, a significant minority of secular Jews, and a small minority of religious ones, became Zionists.

There had been a small Jewish community in Palestine for many centuries, perhaps since Roman times. In 1850, the total Jewish population was about 10,000, most of them in the city of Jerusalem where they had just become the majority (and have remained so ever since). During the second half of the nineteenth century,

Jewish philanthropists had been buying land in Palestine for the

purpose of resettling Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe. Palestine was very under-populated, in the sense that it could, even with nineteenth century technology, support many times its population at that time, which was less than half a million and declining. It was a run-down backwater of the Ottoman Empire [MAP] where people of many different races and cultures lived, mainly Arabs. There was no administrative region of the Empire called Palestine, and the inhabitants of the region did not think of themselves as a distinct political entity.

Western countries introduced immigration controls towards the end of the nineteenth century, and made them ever more stringent as the twentieth century progressed. This was in response to the waves of immigrants, including Jewish refugees, who kept arriving from Russia and Europe.

The British offered part of Uganda as a refuge for one million Jews. The Sixth Zionist Congress accepted this as an interim measure in 1903, but the British soon cooled to the idea and took no steps to implement it. Herzl, who had been its most prominent supporter, suddenly died, and the Seventh Zionist Congress finally rejected it in 1905. Also in 1905 there was a vast outbreak of murder of Jews in Russia, resulting in the arrival of thousands of Jewish refugees in Palestine – a total of over 40,000 by 1914.

The Ottoman Empire was an ally of Germany in the First World War. The British captured Palestine in 1917 and issued the *Balfour Declaration*, which said:

His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.

This was incorporated into the terms of the League of Nations Mandate under which, after the war, the British administered a territory that they called Palestine [MAP], consisting of the area that we shall call Palestine (Israel, the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights), plus today's Jordan. The Mandate required Britain to make arrangements to allow Jews to settle in Palestine and create their National Home. The Jews themselves would finance this, assisted by a charity which was later called the Jewish Agency. They would purchase land for farms and new towns, drain the swamps that spawned endemic malaria, build new infrastructure, and generally develop the country. The British would assist by donating some of the government-owned land which they had 'inherited' from the Ottoman Empire, and by maintaining human rights and the rule of law.

Between then and the Second World War, about 600,000 Jews came to Palestine. A few of them came because they wanted to be part of the new type of Jewish society that was being created in the Jewish National Home, but most had nowhere else to go and many

of them would otherwise have died in the Holocaust or the other mass murders that preceded it.

In 1920 there were Arab riots in Jerusalem and elsewhere, in which Jews were murdered. The Jewish community were alarmed that the British authorities seemed reluctant to intervene. After the riots, the British arrested many Arabs and Jews and dealt out harsh prison sentences for illegal possession of weapons. It seemed unfair to Jews that those who had been defending themselves from murder should be treated equally with their would-be murderers. A few months later, the British proclaimed an amnesty and released all those who had been sentenced.

One of the Jews imprisoned and then amnestied was Vladimir Jabotinsky, a Zionist leader and former British soldier who had led the defence of Jerusalem in 1920. He became disillusioned both with the British and with the Zionist movement whose policy of peaceful cooperation with the British, he believed, would lead to the destruction of the Jewish National Home. He founded a new movement called 'Revised Zionism' or 'Revisionism', which aimed for a fully independent Jewish state (not just a 'National Home'), in the whole of the Palestine Mandate, and also rejected the mainstream Zionist movement's socialistic ideology in favour of a free-market philosophy.

Also in those riots, the handful of Jews living on the Golan Heights were expelled. They had been farming there on land that had been purchased in the 1880s. Another tract of 18,000 acres further east, in what is today Syria, had been purchased by Baron Rothschild in 1891. The Jews who settled there had been expelled by the Ottoman provincial ruler soon afterwards. (But Rothschild had retained title to the land; his family donated it to the State of Israel in 1957.)

In 1921, the Jewish area of Jerusalem was attacked again, Jews all over Palestine were murdered, and many Jewish farms and settlements were destroyed. The British responded by temporarily suspending Jewish immigration.

They also removed the Mayor of Jerusalem for inciting anti-Semitic riots, but as a conciliatory gesture replaced him by his nephew Haj Amin al-Husseini, a leader of those riots who had been granted amnesty, and who now did everything in his power to incite anti-Semitic hatred and organise anti-Semitic violence. He added a new libel to the standard repertoire, namely that The Jews were plotting to demolish the Al-Aqsa mosque and replace it by a synagogue. Within a year, he was also appointed Grand Mufti of Jerusalem (i.e. the senior Muslim cleric in Palestine) and became the dominant Arab political figure in the region for the next two decades.

Part 2: The Gathering Storm

Mon, 05/05/2003 - 19:11 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Conversion?

Before the twentieth century, Jews had responded to

anti-Semitism in various ways, of which the most important were: endurance, conversion and assimilation. But large-scale conversions occurred only under direct duress, and assimilated Jews were sometimes targeted as much as traditional Jews.

Conversion of whom? By whom? To what?

by a reader on Tue, 05/06/2003 - 00:03 | [reply](#)

Conversion

Mostly to Christianity, by christians.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Tue, 05/06/2003 - 00:21 | [reply](#)

Conversions of Jews to Christ...

Conversions of Jews to Christianity and Islam of course.

by a reader on Tue, 05/06/2003 - 01:24 | [reply](#)

Other European happenings...

Would it be possible to mention some specifics of the treatment of Jews in particular European countries prior to 1900, and their roles in various societies? I imagine that to some extent that situation is relevant in understanding how various states' attitudes have crystallized today.

by a reader on Tue, 05/06/2003 - 23:01 | [reply](#)

Anti-Semitism and Zionism, part I

An excellent beginning. You've read your sources well. I'd suggest that you provide more documentation, though, if you can; some of your readers (especially those who disagree with you) will demand it.

For example, you might provide links in your text to a page of footnotes in your printed sources... so that anyone who doubts the forced conversions of Jews to Christianity during the Inquisitions, for example, would know where to look (and in which book) for your sources.

It also occurs to me that you haven't mentioned the Inquisitions (of Spain, Portugal, etc.). I think that might be pertinent; in the Inquisitions we saw the largest wholesale persecutions of Jews that would be known until the rise of Hitler.

As I said, though, a very good beginning! I look forward to future installments -- the partitioning of Palestine (east and west of the Jordan), the Haganah and its rivals, the wall-and-watchtower era, and so forth.
best wishes,

Daniel Schwartz
Medford, MA

by a reader on Wed, 05/07/2003 - 22:38 | [reply](#)

Zionism good or bad?

It's fair for Jews to have their own land as long as the human rights of the surrounding nations are not violated. Is it true that this nation has 110 different nuclear weapons- I know it is. In the event of war, the whole middle east will go under water.

Zionism is o.k to be concerned with the existence of Israel. What about if it is concerned with its expansion however, on the detriment of surrounding nations, violation of human rights etc. Do you know that the island of Cyprus is within the concept of the "GREAT ISRAEL?" The Armenians suffered a genocide of the Turks; Why U.S and other countries with the exception of France and Greece do not recognize such genocide? I think we should be fair to the Jews as much as we should be fair to other people that went through genocides. By adopting double standards is not the way to justice or truth.

by Reader on Fri, 03/18/2005 - 10:14 | [reply](#)

Zionism

Read the remaining instalments of this series.

Reader is mistaken: Israel's existence does not violate the 'rights' of other countries; there have been several Middle-East wars involving Israel after it developed nuclear weapons (all of them caused by murderous attacks on Israel) but they did not cause the Middle East to 'go under', because Israel is a civilised country. As for the proposal that 'we' should de-legitimise Israel out of fairness unless the Armenian genocide and every other wrong in the world is first 'recognised', or the absurd theories of Israeli expansionism, or the whole line of argument in that comment, this just demonstrates how the only way to reach the conclusion that Zionism is 'bad', is to ignore facts and base one's policies on conspiracy theories and antisemitism.

by **Editor** on Fri, 03/18/2005 - 15:38 | [reply](#)

That reader didn't stay on th

That reader didn't stay on the subject, so typically of that of an Arabists propagandists' menu:
'Attack the Zionists with ANY aslander, and then run...'

I have seen this before they insert some drama slogan, like: "human rights", as if Israeli Arabs are less well off than minorities in the US (The opposite is true!).

What "human rights" is he talking about?

The (surrounding) Arab Muslims' human rights squashed under their leaders' brutality (all of them as of today still on Nov-2005) and divert their attention to the "zionist-enemy"?

Is he maybe talking about the Syrian phony claim to Baron Rothchild's Golan heights where the Druze live better there than under the Syrian boot?

Not even going into the "judenrein" (areas where they plan to establish, a never before in history, a country by the name of:) "Palestine" where no Jew is allowed to live.

But even him mentioning Cyprus, which I don't see any Zionist leader having a "plan" there, shows the reader was brainwashed by an Arab Muslim that convinced him that the "Zionists are out to get him in Cyprus".

From this point on, there's no much sense in elaborating any further.

Only reaffirming again, who the victim is...

Lies!

by a reader on Mon, 11/07/2005 - 02:55 | [reply](#)

the true vitims are the milli

the true vitims are the millions slain for there leaders thoughts and views jewish and non jewish. Remember we r all human and live on the same rock, No culture has the right to put there needs first. just think if u were born and raised a muslim would ur veiws be the same? I doubt it.

by derrick on Tue, 08/22/2006 - 03:31 | [reply](#)

"No culture has the right to

"No culture has the right to put there needs first." Yes they do. That's the whole point of having different nations. What matters is whether the culture is giving individuals different rights based on cultural differences. To my knowledge, proof of Israel having done this or anything like it can only be found in the fevered imaginations of liberals and anti-Semites.

by EJS on Wed, 04/11/2007 - 21:19 | [reply](#)

A Short History of Israel

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8. **The Yom Kippur War**
9. **The Rise of the PLO**
10. **...And Then The World Changed**

...

Sources

- **Israel, A History**, by Martin Gilbert
- **United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine**
- **Historical Document Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Israel**
- **Jewish Virtual Library**

Mon, 05/05/2003 - 19:20 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Anti-Semitism and Zionism

The first installment of our short history of Israel is up! You can find it [here](#).

The table of contents page, which includes the sources, is [here](#).

Mon, 05/05/2003 - 19:45 | [permalink](#)

Maps

Anyone know where I can find good maps, showing the relevant areas?

by a reader on Mon, 05/05/2003 - 22:20

Maps

Excellent idea. We'll include some.

by [Editor](#) on Mon, 05/05/2003 - 23:31

What Are Armies For?

You may think it's obvious: armies are for defence. As **Lt Smash** said:

I'm here because my seven-year-old nephew has nightmares about terrorists.

And indeed that is what the US armed forces are ultimately for: they are the means by which Americans prevent bad people from coming to hurt American children, and adults. Likewise that is what the British armed forces are for, and also – quintessentially – the **Israel Defense Forces**.

But, of course, that has not been the function of most armies in history, nor of most armies in existence today. Some have exactly the **opposite function**: to go and hurt someone else's children, to loot, enslave and conquer the people of some other country. But that is not the core function of most armies either. Most commonly, the core function has nothing to do with the wars that they may or may not fight; it is to do with the internal functioning of their own country: the armed forces are the means by which the rulers keep themselves in power. In many cases this really does just come down to the crude business of **murdering the ruler's rivals and their supporters**, but often there is a complicated synergy between external war-fighting and the war against internal opposition.

OK. But now, how can we explain the purpose of **this** army?

“Old Europe” threw down the gauntlet at the feet of Britain, the United States and the Atlantic Alliance at a mini-summit yesterday, unveiling plans for a new Euro-army with its own military headquarters.

France, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg - described by some in the US as the “Axis of Weasel” - vowed to press ahead with a full-fledged defence union, brushing aside warnings that the move would entrench the European Union's bitter divisions over Iraq and could lead to the break-up of Nato.

Much has been written ridiculing these moves, pointing out the glaring contradictions in the overt justifications presented by the Weasel nations. For example, the sole and defining policy difference

between the military doctrines of the Weasels and those of the Good Guys is that in a certain class of cases where the Good Guys would fight, the Weasels will not. But what is the point of forming a separate military alliance for the sole purpose of *not* fighting? Actually, it's even worse than that, because the situations in which they would not fight are going to be all situations that are even remotely conceivable in practice. So they could, apparently, achieve the same effect by dismantling their armed forces.

Yes, armies have other legitimate uses – peacekeeping, disaster relief, military bands and formation flying at air displays – but note that the Weasels are already well provided-for in those respects. There is already a European Rapid Reaction Force that “operates under NATO operational command” (for now). So ... perhaps it is necessary to have a parallel Weasel-operated command structure just in case there should ever be an earthquake and the evil US President chooses to veto the dispatch of NATO troops to help.

Oh wait, that never happens ...

But anyway, this new entity is not like that. It is supposed to be a genuine war-fighting force:

While superficially similar, the new force is a different animal. It will be a fully-integrated Euro-army, and seems intended for combat in the future.

What sort of combat? Um...

There will be a “joint European protection capability” against weapons of mass destruction,

That may sound refreshingly robust. Until you remember that according to the military doctrine under which this force will operate, pre-emption is the ultimate crime. Worse than tyranny. Worse than mass murder and mass torture. Worse than fomenting terrorism. And worse – in particular – than any mere *danger* of weapons-of-mass-destruction attack. Therefore, by “protection capability”, they are referring strictly to forms of ‘protection’ that can be implemented **after** the attack has taken place. So actually we're back to disaster relief again. Plus, no doubt, special teams of soldiers with analytical equipment, to determine which of the many claims of responsibility to believe, so that the Weasel governments can know whom to appease next, or whether it is yet time to surrender outright.

No seven-year-olds were protected in the making of this army.

They're also proposing

a “solidarity clause” binding EU states to face all forms of risk together as elements to be included in the new European constitution.

We don't know whether to laugh or cry. Will this clause be more binding or less binding than the one in the Nato Charter requiring the members to assist Turkey recently? Does anyone remember the

“solidarity” displayed by Belgium in the first Gulf War, when it refused to sell ammunition to Britain? And again, given the doctrine under which all this is being done, “facing all forms of risk together” means no more nor less than that in future conflicts, Britain would be forbidden to fight on the right side without France's explicit permission (which, given that **war is always an acknowledgement of failure**, would never be granted), while the Weasels would continue to be entitled to do the **wrong thing** with impunity.

Yet we come back to the question: why do they need a *new army* to do all this? The thing is useless *as* an army, but it is almost as expensive as one – in fact more expensive if one includes the wilful ruin of irreplaceable stores of goodwill and friendship that it entails. What purpose is so desperately important that it justifies all that? It isn't to keep evil away from their seven-year-olds. It isn't to visit evil upon other people (it will do so, indirectly, but that is not its purpose: it isn't for raping and pillaging). Nor is it to have an excuse to chase down the leaders of the French and German opposition parties and torture them to death in secret cellars. What is it for?

It isn't *for* anything. To understand it, we need look no further than Lee Harris' classic analysis of **Al Qaeda's Fantasy Ideology**.

It was not aimed at altering the minds of other people or persuading them to act differently. Its whole point was what it did for him.

And what it did for him was to provide him with a fantasy – a fantasy, namely, of taking part in the revolutionary struggle of the oppressed against their oppressors.

[...]

A fantasy ideology is one that seizes the opportunity offered by such a lack of realism in a political group and makes the most of it. This it is able to do through symbols and rituals, all of which are designed to permit the members of the political group to indulge in a kind of fantasy role-playing.

So it's not what the new army will do that counts for anything. It is the very act of proposing it, of achieving the role-playing **semblance** of standing up for their **ideology**, not against any real threat (those, they deal with differently of course), but against – inevitably – the United States. And against the rest of the Anglosphere, and Israel. Against anyone, in short, whose reason for acting, and for having armies, is both real and good.

Tue, 05/06/2003 - 22:45 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Was the cold war so long ago that you can't remember it?

What history teaches is this – that people and governments have

never learnt anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it.

The point of a European military is to keep the US power in check.

The point of the US military is to protect our vast amounts of wealth, much of which is built on exploitation of other countries.

You are starting off with the assumption that the US is, always has been, and always will be a benign force, which acts only for the good of everyone in the world.

You can't actually believe that, can you?

We are not the worst there has ever been, but we have done a lot of bad things.

We are the only country to ever nuke another.

We sponsored military coups of democratically elected leaders. We actively exploit many other countries which have less than us to begin with.

We use 25% of the world's energy, while having only 5% the world's population. We produce as much pollution as China, even though we have far superior technology and 1 BILLION less people, less than 1/4th the population.

And our corporations are literally invading the entire world. There are McDonald's even in communist China.

Considering that we went into Iraq - with the 2nd largest known oil reserves in the world - virtually unopposed is why Europe wants a real military.

We used to have the USSR to keep us in check.

The founding fathers of our country recognized the value of checks and balances, because absolute power corrupts absolutely.

While in many ways we (citizens) benefit from our country taking over the world, they (political and economic leaders) see us as "other" just as much as foreigners, which makes us ultimately a legitimate target. We should all be concerned. For this reason, I support the Europeans in this.

Think of it this way: It can be very cushy living in a mob family, but it can be very dangerous as well. If the rival family finally takes out the boss, it's over, and you can go back to being a regular person.

by **Jay Aziza** on Wed, 12/20/2006 - 18:06 | [reply](#)

Good and Evil

1. "Nuke another" country
To stop evil.

2. "Staged coups"
Yes.. Often for good purposes but sometimes creating evil.

3. "Use 25%, of the world's energy"
But our technology has created more than 25% of the world's wealth. Proof: They are living longer and supporting much larger

populations.

4. "Our corporations ... (e.g. "McDonalds")...(are)..invading the entire world."

Tell them to stop asking for Big Macs.

by a reader on Wed, 12/20/2006 - 23:47 | [reply](#)

Deductions From History

Jay Aziza wrote:

What history teaches is this – that people and governments have never learnt anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it.

Now, what are the principles *deduced from history*?

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by [Liberal Iranian](#) on Fri, 12/22/2006 - 02:16 | [reply](#)

Lunatics, the Asylum, Self-parodying ...

What is there left to say? We've already heard about all **this** stuff:

The [United Nations Human Rights Commission] now includes six of the world's most repressive regimes - Cuba, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, China and Vietnam. A UN committee on the rights of women is headed by Iran. The former regime in Iraq was at one stage scheduled to chair a conference on disarmament. Meanwhile, the US two years ago lost its seat on the body it helped to set up in 1947. The situation can only be described as cultural relativism gone mad.

And we've all heard that Libya *chairs* the UN Human Rights Commission.

If there was still *any* sanity left in the institutions that purport to regulate international affairs, there would now be a good **opportunity for satire**. "Whatever next?" one would ask, and then one would invent an even more extreme travesty.

But what chance does a satirist have, if the reader can instead just look at today's news and find something so outrageous that no satirist would have dared invent it? So - try it. Think of a joke appointment that would be more absurd than the above.

Done that? OK now look at **this**:

Zimbabwe's police commissioner, who is accused of being a driving force behind President Robert Mugabe's brutal repression of opponents, has been appointed honorary vice-president of Interpol.

Augustine Chihuri is on a list of close Mugabe associates subject to sanctions by the European Union and the United States because of the regime's human rights abuses. Yet it emerged yesterday that he has accepted an invitation from the international police organisation's President, Jesus Espigares Mira, to take up the honorary post. The Zimbabwe Herald, the state-owned newspaper which is a mouthpiece for the Mugabe government, said the appointment was a "show of confidence" in the Zimbabwean police force by the international community.

How did you do? Was your idea more absurd and wicked than the

reality, or less? If more, we think you should consider abandoning your day job.

Fri, 05/09/2003 - 01:55 | [permalink](#)

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Ideas have consequences.

New Testament Quotations

These are quotations from the **King James Bible** that we referred to [here](#).

Matthew

6:24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

6:25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

6:26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

6:27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

6:28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

6:29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

6:30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

6:31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

6:32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

6:33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

6:34 Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

.....
19:21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that

thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.

.....

19:23 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.

19:24 And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

.....

19:29 And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.

Fri, 05/09/2003 - 14:32 | [permalink](#)

Frank Meets Jesus

We're delighted to see that Frank of IMAO is willing to contemplate **abandoning his religion** if Jesus turns out to be an asshole:

Finally, I had a lab assistant stop my own heart temporarily. I found myself at the gates of Heaven, and there stood Jesus.

"The time of your judgment has come," thus spake Jesus, "and now I shall..."

"Sorry to interrupt, Jesus, but I'm only here temporarily," I informed Him, "You see, Laurence Simon wanted to know if there is a Doggy Heaven, and I knew you'd have the answer."

"Yes, and the answer is... Wait a second; did you say 'Laurence Simon'? He's a Jew, and he'll just use this information for the Zionist conspiracy."

"What are you talking about?"

"Hey, I already have enough problem dealing with dead Iraqis since those bagel eating neoconservatives tricked Bush into attacking Iraq."

"Oh my God, Jesus, you're like a total anti-Semite!"

"Hey, just because someone raises legitimate questions about whether the Holocaust happened, doesn't make him an 'anti-Semite'."

"How can you be a Holocaust denier? You must have met all the dead people."

"Yeah, but I think they were lying about how they died as part of their Zionist conspiracy. It's all so they can oppress the peaceful Palestinians and..."

At this point, Jesus started cracking up, and I knew he was just pulling my leg. "You're such a rascal, Jesus."

"I had you going there, didn't I, though?"

"Yeah. I was thinking, **'Man, this Jesus is an asshole.**

"I think maybe I'll become a Buddhist."

"Sorry, but I just love playing jokes on people. You should see how much I mind-f**k the atheists."

[Our emphasis.]

Now ... can anyone think of any way of persuading Frank to **read the New Testament?**

Fri, 05/09/2003 - 22:45 | [permalink](#)

It Wouldn't Matter

Notice that Frank didn't say "...I think maybe I'll give up religion."

He'd rather adopt Buddhism, a religion that he'd never before considered to be true, than reject religion altogether. Because he seems to care more about being religious than about the *content* of the particular religion he's landed in.

He didn't consider leaving Christianity because he discovered it was false, but because it became uncomfortable. He has a stronger commitment to the comfortable lie than to reason.

On the other hand, he *is* funny, sometimes.

by [Gil](#) on Sat, 05/10/2003 - 05:21 | [reply](#)

Frank's Education, Continued

Since reading this article, I've been pondering this issue (no, not that of Frank's sadly lacking education, but of how Christians can read the Bible and take it seriously). I asked some good friends with theological backgrounds to comment, and one replied:

Money generally gets a very bad press in the NT – e.g.

In the Gospels – giving up everything is the only way the rich young ruler can get into heaven (his morality is already beyond question, but he is excluded because he won't give all his possessions up).

It doesn't stop at giving up material things – one potential follower is excluded because he wants to bury his father before he gives up everything and is told 'let the dead bury the dead' – there is a prevailing apocalyptic morality in which familial relationships must be abandoned in favour of serving God. In a parable Jesus excludes those who care about land they've bought or a person they have that day married – God is first, middle and last and nothing else can have priority.

In Acts the early Christians form a kind of commune and *everything* is handed over to be kept in common – one

couple keep back some land of their own and are struck

dead for their 'sin'

In terms of attitudes to women -

There is advice in Corinthians about correct dress for women to worship in and Paul has several references to women not being suitable to lead. He instructs women to be subservient in the same way as men should be subservient to Christ, with a resulting whole philosophy of male 'headship'.

The story of the woman taken in adultery is a bit double edged - although Jesus saves her life and prevents her being stoned, pointing out the fallibility of everyone, she is then told 'go and sin no more' - she is 'let off', but sex outside marriage is still bad.

Slavery is not questioned - "slaves, obey your masters". (Those translations which say "servants, obey your masters" were simply masking the historical reality, probably because "servants" was more culturally useful at the time of the King's James translation, which is very inaccurate generally.) The whole book of Philemon concerns a slave who has become a Christian and although Paul wants Onesimus (his owner) to let Paul have him he acknowledges the primary ownership of another person as a given.

For more general thinking the sermon on the mount (on the plain in Luke's gospel) glorifies suffering as a means of salvation and the central theme of Luke unfolds in the verse - 'whoever would follow me, let him first deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.' Suffering and self denial are very much *good* things. The 'suffering servant' Christology is a very strong motif and is held up as a model of discipleship.

Luke also contains Mary's Magnificat which talks of those who have losing what they have and the rich becoming poor.

How does Frank gloss over all this? How do other Christians rationalize it? Beats me! Can anyone explain it to me?

by a reader on Sun, 05/18/2003 - 18:14 | [reply](#)

Glossing Over Bad Ideas In The Bible

Well, one technique is to realise is no one uses them today, they *really don't matter*. Christianity has evolved, the current day version is better, and so people go by that. You may be objecting "if it changed, how can it be true?" And that is a problem even many Christians have. But the notion of "true and mutable" is actually a very important epistemic truth. We can and should hold our best theories true, and at the same time seek to improve them. And

when they do improve, we should hold these new theories true,

knowing full well they will be replaced. If you're objecting that "true" is supposed to mean "absolutely true" you've forgotten fallibility.

If you want something to bug Frank about, tell him that **washing a child's mouth out with soap** is not funny. *cringe*

-- Elliot Temple
<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 05/18/2003 - 20:32 | [reply](#)

Reconciling The Bible and Reason

I think that the problem with the question is that it assumes that people go to religion because they think it's a great source of truth. Only idiots think that today. But many non-idiots continue to be religious.

I think people go to religion for authority (both to relieve themselves of the responsibility of figuring out what's right, and to use as a weapon against others), for social bonding, for emotional comfort; **not** for true explanations. Elliot has to do lots of contortions and tap dancing to pretend that Christianity is something like an evolving body of knowledge containing our best theories. It isn't. I don't think it ever was.

So, I don't think there is a problem reconciling religion with the truth and the best theories available. I don't think anybody seriously tries to do this (who isn't willing to delude himself, and is thus not serious about it). I think they've effectively separated the parts of their minds that are interested in the truth from the parts that are drawn to religion. If the only way to read a passage as true is to "interpret" it as having a message completely different from its plain meaning, you have to undercut the entire authority of the text as the revealed word of an omniscient God. It's not comfortable to go there, so people who want to be religious just don't go there.

I think this is similar to some of the anti-war activists who rely on slogans and leftist consensus rather than arguments and explanations. They're not trying to pursue the truth, they're reveling in something that they like; something that people like them agree upon; something that lets them emotionally vent outrage at ideological enemies. It's not about what's reasonable, it's about what's comfortable.

by **Gil** on Sun, 05/18/2003 - 23:28 | [reply](#)

Delusions

To think that the memes perpetuated by a religion are not affecting people today- that a religion has changed and 'improved'- is a delusion, in this reader's opinion. These memes are so deeply inculcated into the culture that people don't even realize where they come from, and even those who are not 'religious' absorb and expound them- from patriarchy and women's inferiority to the

glorification of suffering and sacrifice, to the necessity of authority outside of one's self. These bad ideas cannot just be glossed over; a thorough deconstruction, in the light of reason, along with better ideas to replace them with, are necessary. It's slow going, but it's possible and desirable.

by a reader on Fri, 05/23/2003 - 15:45 | [reply](#)

Re: Delusions

To think that the memes perpetuated by a religion are not affecting people today- that a religion has changed and 'improved'- is a delusion, in this reader's opinion. These memes are so deeply inculcated into the culture that people don't even realize where they come from, and even those who are not 'religious' absorb and expound them

Aren't you contradicting yourself here? If non-religious people absorb and expound them (which I agree they do),

then these memes are not being perpetuated by a religion, right?

by [David Deutsch](#) on Sat, 05/24/2003 - 23:43 | [reply](#)

Re: Re: Delusions

David asks:

Aren't you contradicting yourself here? If non-religious people absorb and expound them (which I agree they do), then these memes are not being perpetuated by a religion, right?

Does "perpetuated by" have to mean "exclusively perpetuated by"?

If not, then I don't see a contradiction.

I'm not the reader who posted it. I just like to pick nits. :-)

by [Gil](#) on Sun, 05/25/2003 - 00:19 | [reply](#)

2. The Gathering Storm

This is the second part of our series, "A Short History of Israel". If you have not read our introduction, it is [here](#). Part 1 is [here](#). See also, the [Table of Contents](#), where you will find links to the other parts when they are posted.

.....

In 1923 the British ceded the Golan Heights from Palestine to the neighbouring French Mandate of Syria, and partitioned the Palestine Mandate [[MAP](#)] into an Arab autonomous region, which they called Transjordan (today's Jordan), and the western part, which they now called Palestine (today's West Bank, Israel, and Gaza Strip) [[MAP](#)]. They barred Jews from settling in Transjordan and announced that the Jewish National Home was to be created only in the western part.

In the Arab riots of 1929, the ancient Jewish community living near the holy places in the Arab town of Hebron were massacred and the survivors fled. Jews were also murdered in Safed, Jerusalem and Jaffa. The Jews of Palestine complained that the British authorities had done nothing to prevent these murders. Jewish self-defence militias, which had existed since Ottoman times, grew, and were unified into a single organisation, the Haganah (which means 'defence').

Arab violence grew worse. The British responded with a combination of force and conciliatory measures – i.e. measures against Jewish immigration and Jewish self-defence. The Jewish population became increasingly fearful for their lives and for those of European Jews, and distrustful and contemptuous of the British.

In 1931 some members of the Revisionist Party formed the Irgun (full name: Irgun Tzeva'i Le'umi, meaning National Military Organization, sometimes known by its Hebrew acronym Etzel), which would fight the British for independence, and also retaliate violently for murders of Jews, sometimes by murdering innocent Arabs. Thus it was a terrorist organisation, and great bitterness developed between it and the Haganah, whose constitution required it to act only in self-defence and which followed the mainstream Zionists' doctrine of restraint and cooperation. The Haganah and the Irgun each believed that the other was betraying the Zionist

project, undermining its chances of succeeding, and hence

endangering all Jews.

The rapid development of the country set in motion by the Jewish National Home project dramatically reversed the demographic and economic decline of the previous century. The flow of Arab emigration was replaced by Arab immigration and return of former emigrants. One immigrant was Yasser Arafat, who was born in Cairo in 1929 of an Egyptian father and a mother whose family came from Palestine. When he was four, she died and he was sent to live with relatives in Jerusalem.

The Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933. The Grand Mufti (al-Husseini) immediately approached the German Consul General in Jerusalem and offered his services. The Nazis were initially lukewarm to this offer because they still hoped to come to an accommodation (or even an alliance) with the British Empire. In Germany, they immediately embarked on anti-Semitic persecution, which soon included widespread murder. German Jewish refugees began to arrive in Palestine. The Arabs of Palestine demanded a ban on all Jewish land purchases and a complete end to Jewish immigration. In 1936, when the British refused the first demand and responded to the second merely by lowering the Jewish immigration quota, the Arabs responded with riots on an unprecedented scale.

In 1937 the Peel Commission proposed that Palestine (i.e. the western part of the original Mandate) would be further partitioned into Jewish and Arab self-governing regions [**MAP**]. The Zionists accepted partition, though they wanted to renegotiate the proposed borders (mainly because they excluded Jerusalem and several areas that had been developed by the Jewish Agency). But a conference of Arab leaders categorically rejected the idea of partition and declared that the British would now have to choose "between our friendship and the Jews".

Britain chose the former. In the White Paper of 1939 (usually referred to as 'the White Paper'), it finally abandoned the idea of a Jewish National Home. Jewish immigration to Palestine was to be limited to a further 100,000 in total, spread over five years. Jewish purchases of land were to be forbidden except within existing Jewish areas. After five years (i.e. in May, 1944), majority rule in the form of an all-Palestine legislature was to be introduced. The Arabs made it clear that at that point, they would use their majority in Palestine as a whole to ban all Jewish immigration.

All other countries (including Britain itself) had already imposed minuscule immigration quotas, so that in total, the world was prepared to give refuge to only a fraction of the hundreds of thousands of Jews trying to escape from Germany. The rest, and the millions of Jews in Nazi-sympathising countries and in countries that were shortly to be invaded by Germany, were trapped there by that universal consensus, several years before the Germans began the Final Solution.

The Nazis, too, sought the friendship of Arab nationalists. They

finally accepted the Mufti's offer.

The Haganah, in addition to its self-defence activities, organised peaceful demonstrations against the White Paper, and secretly began to support illegal Jewish immigration.

The Irgun had been organising such immigration for some time. With its help, and now also that of the Haganah, perhaps 25,000 European Jews succeeded in entering Palestine illegally. The number was so low because there were enormous difficulties: the refugees had to run the gauntlet of both officially- and unofficially-organised violence and expropriation in their home countries; they faced weeks of travel involving extortion, hardship and danger. The authorities in all the countries along their route were trying to stop them (both spontaneously and under pressure from Britain). Then, since they had to come by sea, they had to contend with scarce and unsafe boats (they could not use ordinary shipping lines, of course) and with the Royal Navy. Finally they had to enter and live undetected in Palestine.

Meanwhile Arab immigration continued. The number of Arab immigrants to Palestine during the Mandate period is **unknown and highly controversial**, but the net increase in the Arab Palestinian population was about twice the net increase in the Jewish Palestinian population.

When the Second World War began in September 1939, the British outlawed the Haganah. Illegal possession of a weapon was made a capital offence. Heavy diplomatic pressure was placed on all the countries on the main Jewish escape routes to Palestine to close those routes down, and on Mediterranean countries to ensure that no transportation was available. As a Foreign Office minute put it in December 1939 "The only hope is that all the German Jews will be stuck at the mouth of the Danube for lack of ships to take them". The Royal Navy's patrols to intercept illegal immigrants were increased. Those who were caught were imprisoned on the island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean, where the regime was designed to be (in the words of a Colonial Office minute of January 1941) "sufficiently punitive to continue to act as a deterrent to other Jews in Eastern Europe". Internees were also forbidden to join the Allied armed forces. Legal immigration was restricted to levels below even those of the White Paper. For almost a year during 1941, no legal immigration certificates were issued at all.

As the war continued, these measures were gradually relaxed. Many Haganah and Irgun members volunteered for the British armed forces: 30,000 of the half-million Jews of Palestine enlisted (as compared with 9,000 of the 1.5 million Arabs). Many volunteered for hazardous operations behind enemy lines. The Irgun promised not to attack British forces for the duration of the war. A small splinter group, Lehi (disparagingly known as the 'Stern Gang', after their leader Avraham Stern), refused to cease operations because they deemed that the White Paper had made the British legitimate targets.

The British relaxed the immigration restrictions for Palestine in 1943

– Jews fleeing from the Holocaust could now enter Palestine at will if they got as far as Turkey, but by now only a handful were arriving. Conditions at the Mauritius prison were not improved until 1944.

When France surrendered in 1940, the Nazis set up an intelligence and propaganda base in Syria (nominally under the control of the puppet Vichy French government), from where, in April 1941, they helped to instigate a pro-Nazi coup in Iraq, headed by Rashid Ali al-Gailani, a former Prime Minister and associate of the Mufti. In support of the coup, the Mufti, who had been deposed by the British for inciting the 1936 riots, declared jihad (holy war) against the British. The coup was soon suppressed by British soldiers (though not before about 150 Iraqi Jews had been murdered). Al-Gailani fled to Germany to join the Mufti who was trying to negotiate a formal Arab-Nazi alliance with Hitler against the Jews and British. They both remained with the Nazis for the rest of the war.

The Mufti made Nazi propaganda broadcasts, organised parachute attacks against the British, and helped to recruit an army of over 20,000 Muslim SS volunteers in Yugoslavia, for which purpose he was formally admitted to the SS with the rank of Gruppenführer (Major General). Captured by the French after the war, he escaped (thus avoiding prosecution as a war criminal by the Yugoslav government), and found refuge in Egypt, where he continued to incite violence and demand the total expulsion of Jews from Palestine until his death in 1974.

In May 1941, the Haganah began secretly training an elite fighting force (the Palmach).

In the late 1930s, some congressmen in the United States argued that Alaska (which was at that time being prepared for Statehood and was in dire need of immigrants) should be exempted from the United States' immigration quotas so that some victims of Nazi persecution could find refuge there. In November 1938, Representative Charles Buckley of New York wrote an open letter to President Roosevelt asking him to support legislation to that effect. Roosevelt refused. The idea also encountered **considerable opposition** in Alaska itself. It continued to be discussed for several more years but never found enough support. In 1939 the Wagner-Rogers bill, which would have admitted 20,000 refugee children to the United States, failed in the Senate.

During the war, most of the Jews of Europe were murdered by the Germans and their allies and collaborators.

Part 3: The War of Independence

Sat, 05/10/2003 - 14:31 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

The Irgun

Did the Irgun begin as a terrorist organization or did it turn into one later? I read somewhere it started out more like the Haganah. Is it

fair to call it terrorist?

by **Rob Klein** on Sat, 05/10/2003 - 16:48 | [reply](#)

The Irgun

We have responded to the above comment [here](#).

by **Editor** on Mon, 05/12/2003 - 20:35 | [reply](#)

The Irgun

On the question of whether or not Irgun was a terrorist organization: at the risk of splitting hairs, I would argue that, if we accept terrorism to be the deliberate (and random) targeting of civilians for the political purpose of undermining society, then Irgun's status is ambiguous. Yes, Irgun did carry out assassinations and bombings (in addition to its status as a paramilitary organization). But Irgun's targets were **military** targets, with no exceptions that I'm aware of. Even the King David hotel bombing (a subject of great controversy all by itself), which is often cited as a deliberate attack on civilians, was not -- the King David was targeted because it was the headquarters of the British military administration in Jerusalem. (The personnel of the hotel were also warned *before* the attack, something I heartily wish modern terrorist organizations would emulate.)

Lehi, on the other hand (Lohamei Herut Israel, the "Freedom Fighters of Israel"), did indeed target civilians and diplomatic targets.

Daniel Schwartz
Medford, MA

by a reader on Tue, 05/13/2003 - 21:04 | [reply](#)

The Irgun

We'd omit the provisos "random" and "undermining society" from your definition of terrorism. But in any case, for the other reasons you give, the blowing up of the King David Hotel was not a terrorist act. But things like this were:

Etzel rejected the 'restraint' policy of the Haganah and carried out armed reprisals against Arabs, which were condemned by the Jewish Agency. Many of its members were arrested by the British authorities; one of them, Shlomo Ben Yosef, was hanged for shooting an Arab bus.

(See <http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/History/irgun.html>.)

by **Editor** on Tue, 05/13/2003 - 21:31 | [reply](#)

Arab Immigration

Meanwhile Arab immigration continued. The number of Arab immigrants to Palestine during the Mandate period is unknown and highly controversial, but the net increase in the Arab Palestinian population was about twice the net increase in the Jewish Palestinian population.

If one compares the rise in birthrates across the region during this period, coupled with the lack of any serious documentation about immigration in the area, it is not honest to ascribe the rise in Arab population to immigration alone. Birthrates were multiplying in Syria, and the Lebanon, and presumably Palestine (where data is scarce). Anecdotal evidence suggests that immigration was limited. But, as you say, there is no solid evidence one way or the other, but the balance of mediocre evidence would suggest that immigration did not play a large role in the population rise, and that better accounting and higher birthrates were the primary causes.

by a reader on Wed, 07/02/2003 - 19:05 | [reply](#)

They didn't

They didn't "ascribe the rise in Arab population to immigration alone". But if the hugely increased economic activity and infrastructure building in the Jewish-settled areas did not cause a huge influx of labor from the surrounding run-down region, how would you explain that? It wouldn't make sense.

by a reader on Sun, 10/24/2004 - 00:08 | [reply](#)

Standards of living were incr

Standards of living were increasing throughout this time period, which would naturally increase birth rates. I personally don't believe that immigration was the *chief* cause for the increased Palestinian population.

by a reader on Thu, 11/11/2004 - 05:11 | [reply](#)

i just wanted to knoe, if it

i just wanted to knoe, if it was in the year 1939 and i lived in germany. What route do i take to get out of germany so i can get to america? can ise the picture?
-thanks

by a reader on Wed, 01/19/2005 - 14:49 | [reply](#)

There was no route

There would have been no route to America, because the US quotas were filled and the US Government did not permit any more Jewish refugees to enter. See the story of the **St Louis**.

by **Editor** on Thu, 01/27/2005 - 19:32 | [reply](#)

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The Gathering Storm

Part 2 of our series, "A Short History of Israel" is up. Here is a taste:

In the Arab riots of 1929, the ancient Jewish community living near the holy places in the Arab town of Hebron were massacred and the survivors fled. Jews were also murdered in Safed, Jerusalem and Jaffa. The Jews of Palestine complained that the British authorities had done nothing to prevent these murders. Jewish self-defence militias, which had existed since Ottoman times, grew, and were unified into a single organisation, the Haganah (which means 'defence').

If you missed Part 1, there is a link to it in the **Table of Contents**. The introduction is **here**.

Sat, 05/10/2003 - 14:48 | [permalink](#)

In a Nearby Universe ...

Germany Now "Committed to Peace"

Millions of Germans claiming Sudeten-German descent today marched peacefully into the Czech Republic and declared a Nazi State there. The German government had been keeping them in squalid camps ever since the **expulsion** of all Sudeten-Germans from their homes at the end of World War 2. Over the decades, making cynical use of the original refugees' grievances, the failed and tyrannical German state has fed them and their descendants a relentless diet of Nazi propaganda in which all their suffering, and the myriad ills of German society as a whole, has been blamed on the Czech government and people. In four major wars and a non-stop terrorist campaign, Germany has tried unsuccessfully to reconquer the Czech Republic.

Today the German Government expressed its "quiet satisfaction" that it has at last been able to achieve that objective by peaceful means. "The long nightmare (or, as we Germans say, *die Katastrophe*) of the existence of an independent Czech nation on our doorstep has now been finally rectified", said a spokesman, who declared that Germany is now "absolutely committed" to peace.

Following the land-for-peace takeover, the UN is instituting an urgent relief effort for the surviving Czechs, who are being airlifted to Uganda where they belong.

In other news:

Canadian Intransigence Torpedoes Prospects for Peace with France

There is no more fundamental axiom of French culture than that Canada is sacred French land which must be returned to the glory of French rule. The 40 million French who claim Québécois descent have been kept for generations in refugee camps, and their **children taught that their only purpose is to sacrifice their lives** in a holy war of murder and conquest of Canada. The French Government, having failed several times to conquer Canada by conventional warfare, has sent thousands of Québécois-descended militants to murder English-speaking Canadians, whom they accuse of **devouring the blood of French children** and plotting to **rule the world**. French politicians have repeatedly **threatened** to **"burn** half of Canada" with their fearsome *Force de Frappe*. Now

President Bush, in collaboration with the EU, the UN, and ~~the Soviet Union~~ Russia, has proposed a "Road Map" in the hope of ending the long cycle of violence.

But, as usual, Canada's **intransigence** threatens to torpedo all such conciliatory initiatives: although Canada has declared itself willing to make the "painful concession" of ceding Quebec to French sovereignty and forcibly relocating the English-speaking inhabitants, it has also declared in advance that it will never agree to a "right of return" of 40 million French "refugees" to Canada. Since Canada's population is only 32 million, "this would be a formula for the end of Canada as an independent nation," said a Canadian spokesman, "it would simply become another province of France and its English-speaking population would be oppressed, driven out or slaughtered." Dominic de Villepin, the French Foreign Minister, responded: "And votre point is?"

Sun, 05/11/2003 - 16:28 | [permalink](#)

Canadian Coincidence

You've heard of the **FLQ**, right? And who trained them? (see link) And, when their "targets included ... the homes of prominent English speakers in the wealthy Westmount area" (see link) -- you know who that means, right?

Fortunately, that was all in the **far distant past**.

by a reader on Sun, 05/11/2003 - 20:26 | [reply](#)

Not a Coincidence

Wow. In fact we did not know who that means. We should have guessed it on a priori grounds, but in fact we did not. Thank you for the information, "a reader".

by **Editor** on Mon, 05/12/2003 - 01:06 | [reply](#)

Delusions About Jurisdiction

Perry de Havilland is a **jolly nice chap** who often strikes us as a **libertarian** with some **sense** (and oh, how rare *they* seem), so we were somewhat taken aback by a recent **article** of his. Quoting this –

A United States federal judge has **ruled** that Iraq provided material support to Osama bin Laden and his terrorist group al-Qaeda for the September 11, 2001, attack and is liable to pay \$US104 million (\$163 million) in damages to two victims' families. The ruling, by Manhattan District Judge Harold Baer, is the first court decision stemming from the September 11 terrorist attacks.

– Perry stormed:

The notion a US court would think it had any standing or authority to order Saddam Hussain's Ba'ath Party, let alone the future post-Ba'athist government of Iraq, to do anything *whatsoever* is almost beyond belief. How divorced from reality is this? Judge Harold Baer and the people involved in this case must be suffering from serious metal delusions.

We guess that Perry can't have given this more than two seconds' thought before his the-state-can-do-no-right override cut in and his brain went offline, overwhelmed with revulsion at the idea of the American State 'intervening in someone else's affairs' – shock, horror: *outside its jurisdiction*. We have commented **before** on the unconscious **statism** inherent in this particular hangup.

Call us

"moronic" [...] "Cretinous? Idiotic? Ludicrous? Laughable?"

– but this seems to us a good illustration of the absurdity of the "non-intervention" idea. *Of course* the court in question had jurisdiction! For a start, there is, no doubt, money lying around in vaults *in America* whose legal ownership depends on the outcome of this case – for instance, on whether S. Hussein of Baghdad, or M. Omar of Kabul did or did not commit a tort against the plaintiffs. In other words, to decide what is legal or illegal by way of cash

transfers *within the US* in 2003, the court has to decide on the legality or illegality of acts committed in Baghdad and Kabul in 2001. And furthermore, there is property all over the world, which may at any moment be involved in trade with the US, whose legal ownership depends on the same thing. And there are people all over the world, whose status in US law may change from 'trader' to 'bankrupt' as a result of the same issues.

Judge Harold Baer is just doing his job. The all-too-common yearning of Libertarians to keep the Saddams and the Omars immune from his judgment is ludicrous and reprehensible.

Mon, 05/12/2003 - 11:58 | [permalink](#)

What about Sharon?

What does **The World** think about the Belgian courts trying Ariel Sharon for alleged war crimes in Lebanon?

Is there a jurisdiction issue there?

by **Gil** on Mon, 05/12/2003 - 16:17 | [reply](#)

What about Sharon?

That's a very interesting and relevant question.

Basically the answer is that Belgian courts do sometimes have to take a position on the legality of acts committed in Lebanon or Israel. Generally, the way to do this is to recognise the decisions of courts with more immediate jurisdiction. In the case of the US court hearing a case about Saddam this could not be done because there was and still is no Iraqi court able to try Saddam and hear the case with integrity, or under a legal system conforming even to minimal standards of human rights or the rule of law.

The case of Sharon in Belgium is, first of all, a malicious prosecution and should have been thrown out on its merits. That it was not thrown out is pure **political posturing** on the part of the Belgian government. Secondly, the case has already been heard by the competent Israeli authorities and by a **US court**, and there is no reason, other than crass **anti-Semitism** anti-Zionism and anti-Americanism, for doubting that those cases were conducted with integrity. Hence, again, the Belgian courts should refuse to re-open the case.

by **Editor** on Mon, 05/12/2003 - 17:20 | [reply](#)

What about Sharon?

And thirdly, the Belgian court is attempting a criminal prosecution, while the argument we gave only justifies civil cases.

by **Editor** on Mon, 05/12/2003 - 18:01 | [reply](#)

He's a Good Guy!

According to a Rabbi who hosted Sharon at a university in the UK, Sharon insisted on holding the hand of his wife, even if it made him look weak when he was being jeered at by Palestinian supporters, because his wife had comforted him through the time of his first wife's death. Imagine that! A big strong warrior leader holding his wife's hand. I love the guy!

by [Sylvia Crombie](#) on Mon, 05/12/2003 - 20:05 | [reply](#)

He's a Good Guy

Sylvia Crombie:

:) We think that this might not *quite* count as decisive evidence in most courts. Nevertheless, in fact, he is not guilty of any war crime, and is indeed a good guy.

by [Editor](#) on Mon, 05/12/2003 - 20:23 | [reply](#)

Was the Irgun a Terrorist Organisation?

Rob Klein asked a very interesting question in a [Comment](#) on [Part 2](#) of our [Short History of Israel](#).

Did the Irgun begin as a terrorist organization or did it turn into one later? I read somewhere it started out more like the Haganah. Is it fair to call it terrorist?

We sympathise with the thrust of this question. We have to admit that our calling the **Irgun** a terrorist organisation is, in a sense, unfair, especially in today's climate when the media are unwilling to apply the term 'terrorist' even to organisations whose sole reason for existing is to murder innocents, and which rejoice and vie with each other over the sadistic cruelty of their violence. By comparison, the Irgun were mere apprentices, mere part-time amateurs at the business of **murder**. We hope we have made it clear in our History that the Irgun, in sharp contrast with terrorist organisations of today such as the PLO, Al Qaeda and Hamas (or with the fedayeen at the time), did not have the murder of innocents as its purpose or even as its principal tactic, that the great majority of its activities were not murderous, and that it saved thousands of lives.

Having said all that, though, we must also say (and here the Irgun would, we are sure, be the first to agree) that fairness is not always the overriding moral concern. In this case, we think it is more important to retain a decent use of language. If an organisation sometimes, occasionally, commits acts of terrorism, not as an aberration or in the heat of battle but as a deliberate and continuing policy, then even if it also does many good things, it should be called a terrorist organisation. We would not want to see Hamas designated non-terrorist because it also funds hospitals.

One should perhaps also say that the overall objective of the Irgun, which was essentially to try to mitigate the effects of anti-Semitic violence and mass murder by making immigration to Palestine available to Jews, was an overwhelmingly right one. Also, the degree of provocation – the impending Holocaust, British complicity, and relentless Arab mass murder – under which the Irgun made the decision to commit terrorism was arguably unsurpassed in history. Nevertheless the Haganah had a similar overall objective, and lived through the same terrible history under the same provocation, yet did not choose terrorism. Its policies remained true to its name

(‘defence’) and to its ideals. We think – despite the unfairness which we recognise – that it is right to reflect that difference in the terminology we use.

Mon, 05/12/2003 - 20:14 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

What did the British do?

"One should perhaps also say that the overall objective of the Irgun, which was essentially to try to mitigate the effects of anti-Semitic violence and mass murder by making immigration to Palestine available to Jews, was an overwhelmingly right one. Also, the degree of provocation ♦ the impending Holocaust, British complicity"

What did the British do?

by [Trace Element](#) on Wed, 05/14/2003 - 12:12 | [reply](#)

What the British did

They were the ones who stopped the immigration and I also seem to recall that they banned Jews from carrying guns, I can't remember offhand whether they slapped the same ban on the Arabs.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Wed, 05/14/2003 - 17:20 | [reply](#)

Was the Irgun a Terrorist Organization?

It is interesting, how we as humans always find a way to rationalize and justify the wrongs we commit, no matter how wrong they may be. I think that as members of the human race we need to change this, we must be more honest about ourselves and history. Only by being honest and coming to grips with the truth can we begin to maybe change things and build a better world for all humankind. In this article we see the phrases, "mitigate the effects of anti-Semitic violence", "Also, the degree of provocation – the impending Holocaust, British complicity, and relentless Arab mass murder...", all as a means to justify what the Irgun did. The Irgun was a terrorist organization and did commit many crimes just like the Arab terrorist did. Terrorism is terrorism no matter who does it. The Arab terrorist who terrorize the new settlers were wrong just like the Irgun that terrorizes the Arabs were wrong. Only with truth can we prevail. Please, let us be honest and say it as it is instead of painting a nice picture by trying rationalize, justify the evil acts we commit. When will we learn?

Juan Rodriguez

by a reader on Sat, 11/06/2004 - 03:23 | [reply](#)

Listen, If irgun was a terror

Listen, If irgun was a terrorist organization

than so is hamas, plo, Islamic jihad etc.
they should be called so in the media and not militants.
second of all these terrorist are widely accepted and supported by the arab world. the Irgun was often condemned by the jewish agency and the jewish people who lived in israel pre 1948 and after 1948 Ben-Gurion bombed the 'Altalena' an Irgun ship that transported weapons and had many people on board. the bombing resulted in many casualties.
thirdly, the irgun was anti-british and tried to minimize civilian casualty unlike hamas, islamic jihad and plo
before many of their operation they warned and told their plans to minimize civilians hurt. they were ordered specifically not to hurt anyone who surrenders unlike al-queda and hamas who execute anyone who falls in their hands, especially if they are jewish.
so don't compare between them, because if you do, you can also say that Washington was a terrorist, and that the US Army is the biggest terrorist group out there because texas, new mexico and california are 'occupied territories' and dallas, st. antonio, houston, and los angeles are all illegal settlement build by the americans to steal mexican land.
btw the wall separating the US and mexico is also an 'apartheid wall' designed to 'steal land'

by a reader on Fri, 12/17/2004 - 00:56 | [reply](#)

don't dress it up

Any combatant who does not display their identification (Uniform) and is a member of a recognised regime or governments's armed forces . Who attacks an armed representative of any nation with the intent of killing or wounding them is a terrorist. I recall the incident in the orange grove as an example.

by a reader on Wed, 01/05/2005 - 12:38 | [reply](#)

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Patriot (Yeah, Right) Refuses to Celebrate

Jeez, when are these idiotarians going to get it? In a recent **article**, Howard Zinn writes:

Our government has declared a military victory in Iraq. As a patriot, I will not celebrate. I will mourn the dead -- the American GIs, and also the Iraqi dead, of which there have been many, many more.

Does he think people who take a different view on the war do not mourn the dead?

I will mourn the Iraqi children, not just those who are dead, but those who have been blinded, crippled, disfigured, or traumatized, like the bombed children of Afghanistan who, as reported by American visitors, lost their power of speech. The American media has not given us a full picture of the human suffering caused by our bombing; for that, we need to read the foreign press.

Clearly he does not celebrate the lives of those who would still be being blinded, crippled, disfigured, or traumatized at this moment and for untold years to come, had they not been rescued against his will.

Nor does he mourn those who were blinded, crippled, disfigured, or traumatized by the regime that was removed despite his shrieking opposition. In our name, but not in his.

What are his perverted criteria for celebrating and mourning, then? Not whether innocents are saved or die, not whether right or wrong is done, but whether America is involved or not:

I suggest that a patriotic American who cares for his country might act on behalf of a different vision. Instead of being feared for our military prowess, we should want to be respected for our dedication to human rights.

Well duh. The fact that barking mad idiotarians are unable to see that this is ultimately what this whole war was about, doesn't mean **others** can't.

Should we not begin to redefine patriotism? We need to

expand it beyond that narrow nationalism which has caused so much death and suffering. If national boundaries should not be obstacles to trade -- we call it globalization -- should they also not be obstacles to compassion and generosity?

Exactly! That's what we've been **saying** all along!

Should we not begin to consider all children, everywhere, as our own? In that case, war, which in our time is always an assault on children, would be unacceptable as a solution to the problems of the world. Human ingenuity would have to search for other ways.

Tell that to the millions of children who would have been tortured or murdered or enslaved but for the defeat of the tyrannies under which their parents lived. Tell that to the millions of American and British children who would likewise have died, or had their lives ruined by tyranny, had the American and British people not (at last!) stood up and made it known that WE WILL DEFEND OURSELVES. **Lord Palmerston** was right.

Wed, 05/14/2003 - 02:48 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Question about Lord Palmerston

Who was Lord Palmerston and what did he say? There was a connection error when I clicked on the link in your last line.

by **Trace Element** on Wed, 05/14/2003 - 11:50 | [reply](#)

Lord Palmerston

From the page linked:

Palmerston understood something the State Department has yet to grasp: In a dangerous world, you want to make sure your passport counts for something.

In an 1850 House of Commons speech defending his decision to blockade Greece after an Athenian mob had burned down the home of a British citizen, Palmerston put it this way: "As the Roman in days of old held himself free from indignity when he could say 'Civis Romanus Sum' ['I am a Roman citizen'], so also a British subject, in whatever land he may be, shall feel confident that the watchful eye and the strong arm of England will protect him against injustice and wrong."

You might also be interested in the War of Jenkins's Ear. In 1738, while in the Caribbean, the ship of Captain Jenkins had been boarded by the Spanish Guarda Costa, his crew had been maltreated, and the Spaniards had cut off one of his ears. This caused outrage, and war was declared on October 19 1739.

And then there was "Mad King Theodore" of Abyssinia, who held the

British consul and a small group of westerners hostage in 1867. The response? A grand punitive expedition equipped with elephants was sent to capture his fort, and King Theodore eventually shot himself.

by [Sarah Fitz-Claridge](#) on Wed, 05/14/2003 - 15:20 | [reply](#)

The Long Arm Of The American Military

Time was, I was reflexively opposed to the exercise of American military power for any reason except the defense of the homeland. I felt war for any other reason was unjustified, and worse, fattened the Omnipotent State more rapidly than any other kind of event.

Time was.

Whether it will always be this way or not, today we live under conditions in which **only** judicious exertions of American arms in distant places can 1) protect us against further atrocities such as Black Tuesday, and 2) bring the taste of freedom -- or even a prospect of survival -- to the subjects of bloody-handed dictators such as Saddam Hussein.

Perhaps not everyone is happy to pay for it. I sympathize; there are innumerable things Washington does that I'm not happy to pay for. But I'm more than happy to pay for American power to open children's jails, and shut down torture centers, and put an end to the reign of one of the worst regimes in the world, run by one of the worst men in the world. So, for the nonce, I'll pretend that all my tax money went to Operation Iraqi Freedom, and the anti-war types can pretend that all their tax money went to teaching brain-damaged welders how to speak Ameslan, and we can all be happy.

No perversion of arithmetic can make Operation Iraqi Freedom into anything but an immense gain for the cause of liberty and justice -- in Iraq, in the Middle East, and in the world.

Curmudgeon Emeritus, Palace Of Reason

by [fporretto](#) on Wed, 05/14/2003 - 22:01 | [reply](#)

The Long Arm Of The American Military

Hear hear!

One of the few pleasant side-effects of war is that from the point of view of good people, it decreases the coerciveness of taxation.

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 05/14/2003 - 22:26 | [reply](#)

3. The War of Independence

This is the third part of our series, "A Short History of Israel". If you wish to read the preceding parts, see the **Table of Contents** for links to them. We welcome comments and criticisms. Do tell us what you think.

.....

After the war, the Allies' policy was to force all refugees, including 250,000 Jewish Holocaust survivors, to return to their countries of origin. However, many of the German and Austrian Jewish survivors did not wish to live among the murderers of their families. Many Jews from Eastern Europe found that their properties had been seized and the new occupiers were violently opposed to their return. Many did not want to go and live under Stalinist rule. Over a thousand Polish Jews who did try to return home were massacred in anti-Semitic riots in several Polish cities. At least one, in **Kielce**, was inspired by a classic anti-Semitic blood-libel (that The Jews were kidnapping Christian children in order to drain their blood). Furthermore, a high proportion of Jewish survivors had become committed Zionists, and wanted to go to Palestine to help build a Jewish state. All Jews who refused to return to their countries of origin were detained by the Allies in camps in Germany and Austria. Those who were caught trying to make their way to Palestine were imprisoned in Cyprus.

In 1945 the League of Arab States (or Arab League) was formed, and as one of its first acts, declared a boycott of all Jewish businesses in Palestine.

When it became clear that Britain was not going to reverse its White Paper policy, the Haganah became a Jewish independence movement. They ceased their former close cooperation with the British authorities in capturing Irgun and Lehi members, and instead formed an alliance with those organisations on condition that they follow the orders of a joint United Resistance Movement. They continued collecting, and began manufacturing, weapons. They continued clandestine military training, even inside the detention camps in Europe. They attacked immigration offices and other property – on one occasion destroying ten of the eleven bridges over the river Jordan – and sought out and killed individual Arabs who had murdered Jews.

The United States put pressure on Britain to allow 100,000 Jews to

leave the camps and enter Palestine for humanitarian reasons. Britain refused. But it announced that it would withdraw from its Mandate (now a United Nations Mandate) in 1948. The United Nations proposed a partition plan for the aftermath [MAP]. It allocated the Jews more territory than the Peel Commission had, mainly by including most of the virtually empty (and, at that time, virtually uninhabitable) Negev desert. However, this territory did not include most of the Jewish historic or holy sites, nor many Jewish settlements, nor Jerusalem; moreover it was not defensible militarily. This plan was a bitter prospect for the Zionists, but they accepted it. The Arabs refused.

When the British left, the Jews of Palestine declared their new State of Israel in the territory allotted to them by the United Nations. The Chairman of the Jewish Agency and the Zionist movement, David Ben-Gurion, was named Prime Minister of the Provisional Government of Israel. The Haganah was renamed the Israel Defence Forces (IDF). The first two countries to recognise Israel were the United States and the Soviet Union. Most other countries, but no Arab ones, followed suit. The first act of the provisional government was to abolish all restrictions on Jewish immigration. Jewish refugees began pouring into Israel.

Despite the fact that a new state in the Arab portion of Palestine would likewise have been immediately recognised by the nations of the world, including Israel, *the Arabs of Palestine did not declare a new state in their portion*. Instead, Palestine was invaded by the armies of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq, plus a token contingent from Saudi Arabia [MAP].

The PLO was not founded until seventeen years later, but large numbers of Arab irregulars from Palestine and abroad had already been staging murderous attacks on a scale that dwarfed anything the country had yet seen: 1,200 Jews, and even larger numbers of Arabs, were killed in those attacks and in the open fighting that broke out as a result, during the few months before the Declaration of Independence. The departing British had made only sporadic attempts to halt this violence or to defend the borders and Jewish population of Palestine from incursions by the Jordanian army and by irregulars.

The Arab armies had initial success: the IDF was outnumbered and greatly outgunned – having at the outset no heavy artillery, few armoured vehicles, no military aircraft, and no navy (all of which the Arab armies had) – and was defending impossibly vulnerable territory. Though the IDF was better trained, and many of its members were veterans of the British army in the Second World War, the Jordanian Army in particular had been well trained and armed by Britain and had many British officers including its commander, Colonel John Glubb. The local Arabs also inherited most of the fortifications (except in Jerusalem, where the Jews seized them) and weapons left behind by the British.

The fighting was intense and bitter. Some Jewish villages put up astonishing resistance with grossly inferior and makeshift weapons. Some managed to hold out for weeks in epic sieges, but many were

overrun by Arab armoured columns. In some of those, the inhabitants were massacred; from some, they were taken into captivity; from most, they were merely expelled, or fled. In no location that had been captured by Arabs were any Jewish inhabitants allowed to continue living in their homes. Jerusalem was cut off and besieged. Its Jewish inhabitants began to go hungry and were bombarded continuously by artillery. The Arab armies advanced towards the Israeli population centres on the coast from the east, south and north. The Egyptian Air force bombed Tel Aviv and the Egyptian Navy began a blockade of Israel's ports and landed troops from the sea.

The IDF managed to halt all the Arab advances before they reached the main Israeli population centres, except the Old City of Jerusalem with its ancient Jewish Quarter, where the Jews surrendered and were expelled.

The United States had imposed an arms embargo on both sides, and kept it in place after the Arab armies attacked. Britain continued to supply the Arab armies. Because of a fortuitous quirk of Cold War politics, Israel was briefly able to buy weapons from communist Czechoslovakia. When these began to arrive, the IDF began to take the initiative.

They captured several key towns, and territory to connect their populated areas. They broke through to Jerusalem, relieved the siege but failed to recapture the Old City, which was then annexed by Jordan; Israel held the newer, western part of Jerusalem, and the city remained partitioned from then until 1967.

Jordan also annexed the other Palestinian territory it had captured, called it 'the West Bank' – forbidding the use of the term 'Palestine' on official documents referring to that territory – and expelled all its Jews. Egypt expelled all the Jews from the Palestinian territory it had captured (the Gaza Strip), and remained in occupation there until 1967. During the following few years, about 800,000 Jews remaining in Arab countries were either forced or 'allowed' to leave on condition that they leave their property behind, and nearly all of them came to Israel.

During the war, about 725,000 Arabs living in the territories allocated to or captured by Israel moved to the Arab-controlled area of Palestine or to neighbouring countries, and about 30,000 to locations within Israel. There were diverse reasons for this: some were fleeing the fighting; some were combatants; some heeded radio broadcasts by Arab authorities, urging them to get out of the way of the invading armies and of imminent bombing by Arab air forces; some, such as the inhabitants of villages overlooking the Tel-Aviv-Jerusalem road, were expelled by the IDF for military reasons. Some were expelled in acts of spite, revenge or callousness.

There was one massacre of Arabs by Jews: During the campaign to relieve the siege of Jerusalem, the Irgun offered, and was authorized, to help the IDF by capturing an Arab village, Deir

Yassin. At the end of the battle, they murdered some of the

villagers. The circumstances of the deaths, and the number killed, remain bitterly disputed to this day. In 1987 a study by Bir Zeit University (a Palestinian Arab university on the West Bank) concluded that the number murdered was between 107 and 120.

The worst example of expulsion occurred at the Arab towns of Lydda and Ramla. These were astride the country's main north-south and east-west roads and railway, and the IDF needed to capture them during a desperate battle to defend Tel Aviv from the main strength of the approaching Jordanian army, while also holding off the Syrian army which had crossed the river Jordan in the north and was using its superior artillery and air superiority to advance from its bridgehead. Ben-Gurion took the decision to force all 45,000 inhabitants of the two towns to leave, partly to allow the IDF to fight there (about 250 civilians had already been killed in Lydda in the crossfire of the previous day's battle with the Jordanians), but partly to impede the Jordanians' advance and increase the logistical burden on them. Some of the refugees were carried to the edge of Jordanian-held territory in buses driven by the Palmach, but most had to walk, and in the end some 335 of them died of dehydration and exhaustion on the way. The tactic worked – the Jordanians were delayed for long enough – but it caused moral revulsion and a fierce debate among the Israeli leadership, and was not used again.

Probably the most common single reason why Arabs left was that they feared that they would be harmed if the Jews won the war. In the event, the 160,000 who remained in Israel fared incomparably better than those who left. The latter were not permitted by any of the Arab governments into whose jurisdiction they came (including their 'own' Jordanian government on the West Bank) to lead normal lives. On the contrary, they were herded into refugee camps where they were systematically prevented from rehabilitating themselves or integrating into the local populations or (except in Jordan) acquiring citizenship of the host country. Today, over half a century later, although a proportion of refugees have been integrated, the basic policy of intentional misery remains in effect: the camps, including those in the areas now administered by the Palestinian Authority, are still occupied.

In contrast, the Arabs who remained in Israel became full citizens of the new state, and those who were internally displaced were resettled and integrated. They became, and they and their descendants remain to this day¹, the only Arabs in the Middle East who elect representatives to a democratic parliament, or live under the rule of law, or enjoy full human rights in the Western sense of the term. The only exception to their legal equality was that they were not allowed to join the IDF and were exempted from conscription. However, two small ethnic groups, the Druse and the Circassians, later asked for, and were granted, exemption from this exemption. In addition, Bedouins were granted the right to join the IDF voluntarily, and traditionally do so, and so were Christian Arabs².

When the United Nations envoy Count Folke Bernadotte proposed a

new partition plan which, among other things, again did not assign Jerusalem to Israel, he was assassinated by Lehi. Ben-Gurion ordered: "Arrest all Stern Gang [Lehi] leaders. Surround all Stern bases. Confiscate all arms. Kill any who resist." Virtually all Lehi members were indeed arrested and Lehi ceased to exist.

Ben-Gurion then demanded that the Irgun be dissolved. Any members of the Irgun who unconditionally handed over their weapons and joined the IDF, would receive amnesty for their previous crimes. Otherwise they would be treated as criminals. The Irgun, in a bitter statement in which they said that they evidently valued the lives of IDF soldiers more than the Israeli government did, complied, and its members joined the IDF.

On October 1, 1948, four and a half months after the termination of the Mandate and Israel's simultaneous Declaration of Independence, a council of prominent Palestinian Arabs met in Gaza and declared themselves to be the 'Provisional Government of All Palestine', electing the former Grand Mufti (al-Husseini) as its President. This claim was briefly recognised by most Arab states but by no other state, but was angrily rejected by King Abdullah of Jordan. A rival group of dignitaries in Jericho voted for union with Jordan and declared Abdullah King of all Palestine. Both claims were soon forgotten: Egypt did not permit the 'Provisional Government' to meet again, and Jordan reluctantly gave up its territorial claims beyond the West Bank when Britain threatened to cut off arms supplies.

But the Arab nations and people still insisted on the principle of Arab rule over the whole of Palestine, and would continue to fight and kill for this principle for decades to come.

1. Note added 2005-02-03: This was written before the Iraqi election on 2005-01-30.

2. Note added 2005-01-21: Since the 1990s, Muslim Arab Israelis not from those groups have also been allowed to **join the IDF**, and a few do so each year.

Part 4: Independence, But No Peace

Thu, 05/15/2003 - 00:45 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Bias

Up until this point I have found this document to be free of bias and generally factually accurate, and remarkably so for this is sensitive material. However in this account, virtually every paragraph is colored by bias, half-truths, and stilted language. Every Arab attack is "murderous" where the Jewish attacks are "disputed" or put in the context of military necessity.

Furthermore I can tell you that as an Arab-Israeli, your remarks about our status are typical, by which I mean fatally flawed. While it is true that the framework for democratic participation exists, in practice this is not the case. A quick example-- while there are only

a few laws against the transfer of land, the reality is that every Arab-Israeli town is surrounded by land owned by the JNF-- which specifically prohibits the selling of land to Arabs. This is why Arab towns in Israel experience overcrowding and artificially high land prices. I could also get into state-sponsored efforts to ensure there is no united Arab political party in Israel, institutional racism in the biggest state industries, detention of citizens without charge, the land confiscations that continue to this day, and the murder of peaceful protestors but I would need more space.

The bottom line is that this document was fair in parts I and II, but dives utterly towards couched language, ignorance of facts, and willful distortion in this section. I suggest that your readings of history are incomplete and that you also are purposefully distorting the facts in a fairly obvious manner, a simple analysis of the language you employ when discussing Arab and Jewish massacres should be your first clue that you have allowed passion to overwhelm reason.

by a reader on Wed, 07/02/2003 - 19:18 | [reply](#)

How should we write it?

Imagine groups A and B. lots of members of group A murder members of group B. group B defends itself sometimes, and sometimes observers make up stories about how group B is the same as group A, but these observers are lying. How would you write the history of that? Would you say the groups are morally equivalent? Wouldn't *that* be the lie? Just because history is on someone's side doesn't make it false/biased.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 07/03/2003 - 00:41 | [reply](#)

Re: Bias

The issue of whether we have described every Arab attack as murderous and no Jewish attack as murderous can be easily resolved by reading the piece.

We agree that this exercise of comparing the language we actually used with what 'a reader' alleges we used would provide a clue as to who has allowed passion to overwhelm reason.

We also agree with Elliot Temple that a mere numerical imbalance in the number of times that the respective sides' killings are described as murder is no indicator of bias.

by [Editor](#) on Tue, 10/21/2003 - 14:29 | [reply](#)

Re: Bias

As a reader from New Zealand Trying to create a speech upon "the

question of Israel/Palestine", if anyone i should be unbiased. personally i have to side with the first comment on this topic, as i am beginning to suspect a large creep in of bias. there has been no mention so far of the annual \$92 billion in funding provided by the US government aiding Israel yet, or the fact that Israel has invaded and Annexed the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which it claims to be part of Israel as international borders are drawn. what i thought was an unbiased essay is now something that i must recheck my facts upon, in order to cross-reference and get the real truth. i also agree with the statements made that the language used is geared heavily in favour of Israelis.

Yours Sincerely,

Andrew Lynch

by a reader on Wed, 08/25/2004 - 08:13 | [reply](#)

Re: Bias

Yes, you should re-check the facts, among other things.

by [Editor](#) on Thu, 08/26/2004 - 01:12 | [reply](#)

Ignorance Breeds Hatred

It is refreshing to read such a well-written, accurate and concise account of the history of Israel. I teach Argumentation and Debate at the university level and use your site often. It is unfortunate how many college students think that Israel was created in 1948 by a British declaration "stealing land from the peaceful Palestinian shepherds and farmers".

Once the facts of history are presented it is hard not to support the only island of Democracy in a sea of tyranny.

by Paul A. Deis on Thu, 02/03/2005 - 15:30 | [reply](#)

Re Bias

Well, Being fair you did say: "a fortuitous quirk of cold war politics" - which is an introduction of bias in that it supposes it was a good thing that Israel managed to get some better weapons. More appropriate would be "a quirk of cold war politics"

However, I find this a very good, and largely unbiased read. Thank you.

by a reader on Sun, 01/22/2006 - 01:43 | [reply](#)

Fortuitous

Thank you very much for the kind remarks.

Fortuitous in its best-established usage means happening by chance

rather than design. A fortuitous event may or may not be a good thing. A different and originally mistaken usage has been gaining ground, probably through confusion with 'fortunate' or 'felicitous'. See the usage note [here](#).

by [Editor](#) on Sun, 01/22/2006 - 02:17 | [reply](#)

Presentation

I am reading these articles in order and the closer you get to the present it seems you really do get biased. You have to agree that massacres are presented differently.

Most of the things I've read here are fatally omitted from the average History lessons and this seems quite appalling. Restricted immigration, for example, no history teacher ever mentioned that! Anyway, I think it's hard to remain objective when you're trying to write such a thing, you may take sides at a moment without realizing. Just make sure the research you do is not all based on books published by Jewish historians.

by [pauline](#) on Thu, 06/22/2006 - 06:23 | [reply](#)

fortuitous

fortuitous means:

"happening by accident or chance rather than design"

-- Elliot Temple

My Blog

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 06/22/2006 - 09:22 | [reply](#)

Fair and Balanced?

In a previous chapter you describe Britain's promise to provide a Jewish homeland in Palestine under the Balfour Declaration. Didn't Britain also make the same promise to the Arabs in exchange for their support during WWI?

by [bleacherdave](#) on Mon, 07/17/2006 - 05:32 | [reply](#)

Re: Fair and Balanced?

That's a good point. Thank you very much. Actually it wasn't 'the same promise' (and anyway it did not apply to the territory that is now Israel), nor did we refer to the Balfour Declaration as a promise. But yes, the McMahon letter certainly should have been included in our History, and it will be, shortly.

by [Editor](#) on Sun, 07/23/2006 - 11:22 | [reply](#)

The War Of Independence

The third installment in our series, "A Short History of Israel", is up. Here is a quote from **The War of Independence**:

The fighting was intense and bitter. Some Jewish villages put up astonishing resistance with grossly inferior and makeshift weapons. Some managed to hold out for weeks in epic sieges, but many were overrun by Arab armoured columns. In some of those, the inhabitants were massacred; from some, they were taken into captivity; from most, they were merely expelled, or fled. In no location that had been captured by Arabs were any Jewish inhabitants allowed to continue living in their homes.

If you have not read the preceding parts, you can find them linked from the **Table of Contents**.

Thu, 05/15/2003 - 00:59 | [permalink](#)

Lincoln's War?

Was the American Civil War, which ended slavery in the US, originally about something completely different? **Alan Forrester** knocks that theory on the head. Hard.

(N.B. if Blogspot doesn't deign to honour that link, click [here](#) and search for ACW.)

Thu, 05/15/2003 - 23:56 | [permalink](#)

Ridiculous

Slavery was definitely part of the reason, but federalism was also an issue. The outcome was possibly the biggest loss of liberty in history.

by a reader on Fri, 05/16/2003 - 04:52 | [reply](#)

Hyperbolic Steroids?

> the biggest loss of liberty in history

I cannot measure the chagrin of the millions of dead people who have learned today that their tyrannies don't measure up. Infinity, it turns out, is slightly smaller than a libertarian exaggeration.

Greg Swann, [presenceofmind.net](#)

by [gswann](#) on Fri, 05/16/2003 - 13:50 | [reply](#)

Speaking of Hyperbole

Greg,

The "reader" was obviously talking about a loss of liberty in American history caused by the changes brought about by the Civil War. And he's correct that these changes brought about dramatic anti-liberty effects (and some pro-liberty effects too).

I cannot measure the chagrin of the millions of dead people who have learned today that their tyrannies don't measure up.

I can measure it. Zero.

Infinity, it turns out, is slightly smaller than a libertarian exaggeration.

Pot. Kettle.

by **Gil** on Fri, 05/16/2003 - 20:35 | [reply](#)

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Two Wishes For The World...

If you have been enjoying **Setting The World To Rights**, and feel that your life will be for naught unless you take urgent measures to, as they say, "give something back to **The World**", now is your chance to do just that. We are accepting **submissions** for **The World**. Anything considered (hey, we're not desperate... just... keen) – provided you are a **rational person** who is a) a **top-notch writer**, b) as witty as **Frank**, c) as popular as **Glenn**, and d) in the running for Miss World or Mr Universe.

Failing that, you could buy us a set of these satirical cards from **NewsMax.com**:

The Pentagon's Iraqi Most Wanted "Deck of Death" playing cards was a huge hit with Americans. Now, NewsMax.com is raising the ante – with the Deck of Weasels, depicting the 54 worst leaders and celebrities who opposed America and were key members of "The United Nations of Weasels." ...

The Ace of Spades is none other than French Prime Minister Chirac, Saddam Hussein's partner in crime of 30 years, and includes his most infamous quote: "Our position is no matter what the circumstances, France will vote 'no.'" The Washington Times' new revelation that France helped Saddam's top goons escape shows just how relevant and useful this deck is.

Each suite of the Deck of Weasels reveals America's enemies. The Spades are the most treacherous of the world's foreign leaders. The Diamonds are the most backstabbing U.S. leaders. The (bleeding) Hearts, of course, consist of Hollywood's woefully ill-informed would-be geopolitical "experts." And the Clubs include the worst of the biased media and self-appointed pundits.

The Deck of Weasels is not only great fun, it's also educational. Check out the cards and learn:

- which rock star raged: "We [expletive] deserve to get bombed. ... Bring it on, I hope the Muslims win!"

- which Hollywood has-been whined: "This is a racist and

imperialist war. The warmongers who stole the White House (you call them 'hawks,' but I would never disparage such a fine bird) have hijacked a nation's grief and turned it into a perpetual war on any non-white country they choose to describe as terrorist."

- which movie star ranted: "I believe he [President Bush] thinks this is a war that can be won, but there is no such thing anymore. We can't beat anyone anymore"

- the shocking pro-Saddam comment that escaped the lips of the self-styled sweetheart of morning TV "news" (and she refuses to retract her statement!).

If that doesn't grab you, we'll have to get a tip jar. We can't have generous souls being prevented from giving a little back to **The World**, now can we?

Fri, 05/16/2003 - 01:49 | [permalink](#)

Blimey...

As rational as Woty, as good at writing as Bill Whittle, as funny as Frank and as popular as Glenn...

Good luck! :-)

by [Alice](#) on Fri, 05/16/2003 - 18:39 | [reply](#)

But Alice...

...we were thinking of *you*, of course! :-)

by [Sarah Fitz-Claridge](#) on Sat, 05/17/2003 - 16:13 | [reply](#)

Studies We'd Like To Commission – 1: On Idiotarianism

What Do Idiotarians Think That Non-Idiotarians Think?

In an interesting and much commented-on [essay](#), left-wing blogger Michael J Totten recently mused on the fact that left wingers typically know less, factually, about history than right wingers:

I am astonished and dismayed to discover this. I'm a life-long liberal and I devour history like food. Not until after September 11 did I learn I'm a minority on the left.

Read it. He makes some excellent observations, and suggests a good reason for the phenomenon. Inevitably though, he does not mention a more straightforward and perhaps more significant reason, namely that left-wing explanations of historical events are simply less true than right-wing ones. So left wingers studying history more often have to create laboured reinterpretations of the causes of events and then find ways to believe them – an overhead whose very existence they must hide from themselves. Conspiracy theorists (of the right as well as the left) thrive on all that, but for sane left-wingers, factual history is harder work than for sane right-wingers.

Anyway, we agree with what Perry de Havilland suggests (but does not explicitly say) in his comments [here](#), namely that the cultural divide in question is not really between left and right, but between **idiotarian** and **non-idiotarian**. And it puts us in mind of a long-standing conjecture of our own about the nature of idiotarianism. Our conjecture is easily testable experimentally and we should very much like to see it tested, for the **study of idiotarianism** [permalinks broken: search for 'idiotarian'] is, in our opinion, a dangerously neglected subject, and such an experiment might help to get it off the ground.

So, those of our gentle readers who wish to make a significant contribution to human knowledge and to the war effort, and who have influence in a suitable university department or opinion-polling organization (or have the wherewithal to hire one), please pay close attention.

In short, we conjecture that *idiotarians are unaware of what their opponents' position is*. We don't mean the bottom line: of course people who were against the invasion of Iraq know that their opponents were in favour of it. And they think they know why:

because the warmongers are greedy, bloodthirsty, stupid bastards who **do not mourn dead soldiers or dead children**. Now, never mind for the moment whether that is true; what the idiotarians don't know is what the warmongers *claim* their reasons are.

Specifically: select at random 500 people who approve of the recent invasion of Iraq (call those the "pro-war" people for short; few of them are idiotarians), and 500 who disapprove (call these the "anti-war" people, who are mostly idiotarians). Ask each pro-war person to write, in a paragraph, what they consider to be a valid and sufficient argument for the invasion. Then – and here is the crux of the study – ask them to write a second paragraph which, they believe, a typical anti-war person would endorse as a valid and sufficient argument against the invasion. Ask each anti-war person to do the same thing. Then randomly hand out copies of several of these 2,000 paragraphs to each of the 1,000 people, and ask them to guess which were written by someone on their own side and which by the opposition.

Here's what we expect the outcome to be: most of the pro-war people will be able to write an anti-war paragraph that anti-war people would endorse. But few of the anti-war people will be able to write a pro-war paragraph that the pro-war people would endorse.

Additionally, we guess that the stronger a person's pro-war views are, the more easily they will be able to write the anti-war paragraph, because, just as Totten points out in the case of historical knowledge, politically-engaged non-idiotarians are interested in, and aware of, what idiotarians are saying and where they are coming from (i.e. in their arguments and values). With politically-engaged idiotarians, we expect exactly the opposite: they are as uninterested in the other side's arguments as they are in factual history. So we expect that the stronger a person's anti-war views are, the less likely it will be that they can write a recognisable pro-war paragraph. In fact we should not be surprised if a significant proportion of the anti-war people are unable to comply with the conditions of the study at all: their "pro-war" paragraph will contain irony, or comical stereotypes of the warmongers, or even overt anti-war arguments.

If we're right, isn't this quite important? And if we're wrong, or the truth is the opposite of what we expect, wouldn't it at least provide some interesting additional context for Totten's phenomenon (which could be measured at the same time)? So – somebody out there: please do it.

UPDATE: Why We Use The Word 'Idiotarian'

Fri, 05/16/2003 - 20:34 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

An idiotarian reply

I see no evidence that "non-idiotarians" are aware of what their *own* position is. e.g. how you start at Popperian epistemology and end up advocating military action vs. Iraq. (Unless it was a scientific

experiment?1.Conjecture: Iraq has WMD. 2.Military action to get empirical data. 3.Apparent refutation: No WMD found so far)

by a reader on Sat, 05/17/2003 - 13:07 | [reply](#)

Re: An idiotarian reply

Thanks for the data, "a reader", but your reply only constitutes anecdotal evidence in favour of our conjecture. What we'd like to see is a scientific study.

by [Editor](#) on Sat, 05/17/2003 - 13:26 | [reply](#)

This is an interesting idea, ...

This is an interesting idea, and one that should be applied. I myself doubt your conclusion but it would be useful to be proved right.

by a reader on Wed, 06/04/2003 - 10:26 | [reply](#)

An example

This onion article at http://www.theonion.com/onion3911/pt_the_war_on_iraq.html is a good example of idiotarians being completely ignorant of the pro-war argument:

Point-Counterpoint: The War On Iraq This War Will Destabilize The Entire Mideast Region And Set Off A Global Shockwave Of Anti-Americanism

If you thought Osama bin Laden was bad, just wait until the countless children who become orphaned by U.S. bombs in the coming weeks are all grown up. Do you think they will forget what country dropped the bombs that killed their parents? In 10 or 15 years, we will look back fondly on the days when there were only a few thousand Middle Easterners dedicated to destroying the U.S. and willing to die for the fundamentalist cause. From this war, a million bin Ladens will bloom.

vs. No It Won't...

You are completely wrong.

Trust me, it's all going to work out perfect. Nothing bad is going to happen. It's all under control.

Why do you keep saying these things? I can tell when there's trouble looming, and I really don't sense that right now. We're in control of this situation, and we know what we're doing. So stop being so pessimistic.

Any reasonably informed pro-war person could write the first

paragraph, but the idiotarians can't come up with any pro-war position that even sounds like an argument.

~Woty

<http://woty.blogspot.com>

by **Woty** on Thu, 06/05/2003 - 01:37 | [reply](#)

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Give us Guns!

Tony Martin, a farmer who shot a burglar, has been **refused parole**, which he would have received by now if he had been willing to say that what he did was wrong. Gun crime in **Britain** has **risen** by 35 percent and robbery by 14.5 percent. In response, **David Blunkett** is seeking a ban on replica guns. Despite the disastrous record of the already draconian anti-gun policy, he is seeking further restrictions. Why?

In the ~~simple~~ minds of ~~Nanny State operatives~~ ministers like Blunkett, the thinking goes like this: if people have guns, they will commit crimes with these guns, therefore ~~Nanny~~ the responsible, effective and ever-vigilant authorities must prevent ~~her~~ charges citizens from getting their hands on them. Who could possibly disagree with this ~~illogical and antiliberal~~ common-sense idea?

Some nefarious characters acquire guns with the intent of committing crimes. This is true now, and it would be true if guns were legal. But someone should sit Blunkett down and explain to him that people have free will and might choose to buy guns for perfectly moral reasons. Moreover, his idea that crime is *caused* by the buying of guns is an insult to human beings in general and to would-be law-abiding gun owners in particular. This may come as a surprise to Blunkett, but a gun cannot control a person's mind and force him to commit crimes; it is an inanimate object.

Some of us would like to be able to buy guns for **self-defence**. **Big mistake**. It's just not cricket to prevent a person going about his unlawful violent business. After the decision was made to keep **Tony Martin** locked up, Mark Leech, founder of the ex-offenders' charity **Unlock**, expressed approval of the Court's decision. He explained why, on this occasion, Unlock is in favour of *lock*:

"We don't have a death sentence for burglary in this country and we don't want one either."

In other words, he wants Mr Martin to be kept in prison for as long as possible because he wants the penalties for crime in Britain to be lower.

The Tony Martin situation is a clear indication that Britons are no longer free. The State has decreed that it and it alone shall decide who will be defended from predation. That effectively **licenses the predators**, making them an arm of the State. I'd say the masks have fallen.

England was once known as the "land of liberties." Every idea in America's founding documents came from an English source.

To our English cousins: Do you folks have some ideas for how to correct this, or would you prefer that we send an American Expeditionary Force? We do this sort of thing rather well these days.

Curmudgeon Emeritus, Palace Of Reason

by [fporretto](#) on Sun, 05/18/2003 - 11:26 | [reply](#)

In a Nearby Universe ...

The President makes a statement on the latest Palestinian terrorist attacks

President Bush: Today's terrorist attacks in Israel and the disputed territories remind us of the reason why we are fighting this war: we are in danger from an evil enemy who takes pleasure in the deaths and suffering of good people.

These crimes come at an important moment in Middle East history, the moment when the United States' own vital interests require the war between Israel and the Arabs to be brought to an end. That is why we have published the Road Map for peace and have announced that we are going to be fully engaged in ensuring that it is followed. The first step on the Road Map is that the Palestinian Authority take effective steps against terrorism. So let there be no mistake: that is the standard against which we are going to judge the Palestinian Authority's new Prime Minister.

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen.

[Turns to leave, but there is a hail of questions and he stops to answer one:]

Reporter: Are you going to put pressure on Israel as well?

President Bush: Israel is a country with which we have not only a close alliance but shared, deeply held values. I am certain that without any pressure from us, Israel will respond to these attacks in exactly the way the United States would.

[Ignores further questions and leaves.]

Sun, 05/18/2003 - 22:15 | [permlink](#)

That must have been a very _f...

That must have been a very _far away_ Universe.

by [Boris A.Kupershmidt](#) on Mon, 05/19/2003 - 03:03 | [reply](#)

In another universe...

In another universe...

President Bush and Prime Minister Blair today issued a joint statement in which they announced that forces from the US and Britain will be dispatched to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the world's last remaining terror strongholds, to work with IDF forces. "I once said that if you're not with us, you're against us. We have waited for too many years for the Palestinian Authority to crack down on terrorists in their jurisdiction. They have failed. Now, we will act. I say to the people of Israel: soon you will be liberated from this menace."

Blair added: "I must admit that it is now clear that I was wrong in the past on this issue. I want the people of Israel to know that I am now fully behind them."

[Yeah, hiding behind them for cover when the suicide bombers come.]

by a reader on Mon, 05/19/2003 - 10:51 | [reply](#)

4. Independence, But No Peace

This is the fourth part of our series, "A Short History of Israel". If you wish to read the preceding parts, see the **Table of Contents** for links to them. We welcome comments and criticisms. Do tell us what you think.

.....

After many months of fighting, Israel had succeeded in surviving, defeating the Arab armies and consolidating its now larger territory. But over 6,000 Jews – about one percent of the Jewish population of Palestine – had been killed. Many more were wounded or made homeless. The survivors had been traumatised, and their economy and agriculture were devastated.

Jewish immigration was prodigious, especially from the refugee camps of Europe and from Arab countries where the Jews were being forced out. Within about four years the immigrants who had arrived after independence already outnumbered the 'pioneers', but their successful absorption was only one of the achievements of which the builders of the new state became proud. Israelis soon began to make world class contributions to science, technology, the arts and agriculture. Israel is a free and prosperous nation with a distinctive, diverse and tolerant culture, exceeding many of the most optimistic expectations of its founders. Of the approximately 100 new independent states that have been created since 1945, Israel is the only one of which that is true. And it has remained a haven for Jews fleeing persecution, or simply seeking a better life, from anywhere else.

Theodor Herzl had said of the First Zionist Congress in 1897: "In Basle I founded the Jewish state. Maybe in five years, certainly in fifty, everyone will realise it." He was proved right, almost to the year. Had he lived, he would have been 88 years old at the time of Israel's Declaration of Independence.

The Israeli War of Independence formally ended in 1949 with armistice treaties between Israel and its four neighbours: Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt. (Iraq assigned the territory it had captured to Jordan and withdrew without signing an agreement.) Under the treaties, Israel agreed to withdraw from all Egyptian and Lebanese territory it had captured, and the Arab countries agreed to withdraw

from all territory they had captured inside Palestine, other than

Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem.

The treaties also required the parties to resolve their differences peacefully in future. This was not to be. The Arab countries stressed that they remained at war with Israel. So as Israel struggled to rebuild its economy, absorb vast numbers of destitute immigrants and build the institutions of a modern society, its people were under constant attack. Arab soldiers and civilians frequently murdered Israelis venturing within rifle range of the border. Arab artillery would shell Israeli towns. Every few days, Arab terrorists (known at that time as 'fedayeen') would cross the border and murder Jews. Israeli farmers would plough their fields in armoured tractors to protect themselves from snipers. In border towns, people slept routinely in underground shelters.

Israel annexed all the territory that it had captured in Palestine. Most Israelis considered this to be the legal and justified action of a victim of an aggressive war. Having just sustained heavy casualties in defending indefensible borders in such a war, they felt morally obliged not to return to them, especially as their enemies were still committed to Israel's complete destruction regardless of borders.

Israel refused to allow back or compensate the Arabs who had fled during the war. The Israeli government believed that a settlement of Arab refugees' claims should form part of a peace treaty, along with the claims of Jewish refugees who had been expelled from Arab-held parts of Palestine, and other grievances arising out of the same war. Israeli attitudes on this issue hardened further during the following few years, when hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees arrived from Arab countries, most of them having been dispossessed.

Israel adopted a single-chamber Parliament (the Knesset) elected by proportional representation. This caused a proliferation of political parties and shifting coalitions, but one can classify the parties into three main groups, namely:

- The successors of the mainstream Zionist movement. This group, whose largest member today is the Labour Party, was dominant in every ruling coalition in the Knesset until 1977.
- The successors of the Revised Zionist movement. The largest member of this group today is the Likud party, which has since 1977 alternated with the Labour Party in being the main party in government.
- The religious parties. The largest, the National Religious Party, was the main party representing religious Jews who supported Zionism. Other religious Jews were still suspicious of Zionism. A small proportion still considered the State of Israel sacrilegious and actively opposed it. Because of the proportional-representation system, religious parties have frequently held the balance of power in shaky coalition governments, and have often won concessions in return for their support even though all of them combined have never gained enough votes to lead the opposition, let alone the government.

The religious parties (of all kinds) had three main items on their

political agenda. First, they wanted state funding for their own activities, especially religious schools; second, they wanted special privileges for orthodox Jews, such as exemption from military service; and third, they wanted certain restrictions on the lives of all Israelis, such as a prohibition on shops opening on the Sabbath. Many secular Jews (who have always been the overwhelming majority in Israel) felt anger and contempt for the non-Zionist religious factions because, during the 1930s, many European rabbis had discouraged their parishioners from fleeing while it would still have been possible. At the time of the UN partition plan in 1947, ultra-orthodox groups within Palestine had petitioned the UN not to allow secular Jews to rule over them.

The first act of the Provisional Government of Israel in 1948 had been to abolish all restrictions on the immigration of Jews. In 1950 this was formalised in the Law of Return, which stated that on reaching Israel any Jew (with certain exceptions such as criminals fleeing justice) must be allowed entry. A companion law granted such immigrants immediate citizenship. The exact definition of 'Jew' did not matter much at first, but within a few years a struggle developed between the Zionistic interpretation laid down by Ben-Gurion (which defined a Jew for the purposes of the Law of Return as "anyone who **declares in good faith that he is a Jew**") and religious definitions. The present definition is a compromise: Law-of-Return privileges are granted to Jews according to the religious definition (including converts to, but not from, Judaism), and to their spouses, children and grandchildren, and also to Righteous Gentiles (non-Jews who have risked their lives to save Jews from persecution) and their spouses, children and grandchildren. In parallel with the Law of Return, Israel has a normal immigration policy resembling that of other Western countries: over the years it has accepted many non-Jewish immigrants and asylum-seekers, from Vietnamese boat people to Muslim refugees from **Bosnia** and Kosovo, as well as people whom the secular authorities deem to be Jews but who are not in any of the above categories. The combination of all these arrangements has ensured that very few, if any, people satisfying Ben-Gurion's definition have ever been denied entry to Israel (or citizenship, eventually) and large numbers of people not satisfying it have also been welcomed and have become citizens.

Jordan failed to comply with the Armistice Treaty provision for free access to holy places for worshippers.

In 1951, King Abdullah of Jordan was assassinated at the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, for allegedly wanting to make peace with Israel. He was succeeded by his grandson, King Hussein.

The few Jews remaining in Arab countries continued to be persecuted in the traditional ways, but now in addition they were often charged, individually or collectively, with spying for Israel, and punished accordingly. Blood libels and other incitements to anti-Semitic hatred were encouraged by Arab governments, becoming part of the curriculum of schools and the vernacular of academics, politicians, writers, journalists and diplomats. By the time of the Suez war in 1956 (see below), the standard-issue equipment of all

Egyptian officers included a copy of Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, translated into Arabic.

Arab leaders issued incessant threats of war, mass expulsion of Jews from Palestine, and sometimes genocide.

Part 5: **The Suez Crisis**

Mon, 05/19/2003 - 15:51 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

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Independence, But No Peace

The fourth installment of our series, "A Short History of Israel", is here: **Independence, But No Peace**.

If you have not read the preceding installments, you can find them linked from the **Table of Contents**.

Mon, 05/19/2003 - 16:25 | [permalink](#)

There Is No Such Thing As Induction

Steven Den Beste, like most philosophers, has swallowed the ancient myth that we obtain and justify our knowledge of the physical world through a process called induction which is a bit like deduction only different.

Alan Forrester [permalinks broken so search for "induction"] is on the case.

From what Steven writes, we confidently induce (just kidding!) that he has not read **The Fabric of Reality**.

Mon, 05/19/2003 - 20:52 | [permalink](#)

weeeeeeee

I would have been on his case too, if I hadn't stopped reading him due to annoyance at his previous bad epistemology. And he posted that quantum physics is non-local and ignored my correction. Anyway, everyone should read FoR, it's the best book ever.

-- Elliot Temple
<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 05/19/2003 - 23:14 | [reply](#)

Well, At Least He's Aware of the Criticism

I see Den Beste has added an update noting that Nigel Kearney has commented.

Since this comment consists of referring Den Beste to the epistemology of Popper and Critical Rationalism, there might be hope that Den Beste will see the light.

by **Gil** on Tue, 05/20/2003 - 17:05 | [reply](#)

No surprise here.

As much as I like SDB's blog, he really needs to stop droning on under the delusion that he is on firm footing when discussing philosophy. Fact is, he is WAY out of his depth when it comes to metaphysics, and it's getting a little tiresome watching him try to

apply his knowledge of physics (which he never fails to remind his readers is prodigious, as in, "As an engineer, I blah-blah-blah, because we engineers blah-blah-blah") to philosophy. He's more strut than substance, and he really ought to get back to talking about the Great Mac vs. PC Debate, or something equally devoid of philosophical import.

by a reader on Thu, 05/22/2003 - 20:09 | [reply](#)

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More Or Less

Oooh, how exciting! One of our regulars, **a reasonable man**, he says (well he always did have a good sense of humour),

has started blogging. Knowing Gil, we were expecting to find some deep thoughts about the latest political situation, or a glowing tribute to Microsoft. Instead, we found toilet paper. And as it's on blogspot, whose archive links might as well be toilet paper, visit it soon or search for "toilet paper".

Wed, 05/21/2003 - 03:09 | [permalink](#)

In a similar vein -- any comm...

In a similar vein -- any comments on **this** ?

by a reader on Wed, 05/21/2003 - 04:13 | [reply](#)

It Makes Sense

Heh. I think it makes sense. Brake lights and complete stops can have long-lasting effects on traffic, so avoiding them should improve the average flow. I've been driving like that for a long time (avoiding frequent stops). It should save gas, too.

It's interesting that some people seem to always be looking for the best ways to do things while others never seem to.

by **Gil** on Wed, 05/21/2003 - 20:51 | [reply](#)

I've seen some work on trying...

I've seen some work on trying to ameliorate the effects of a flood surge in a river by breaching dykes *downstream* of the area one wishes to protect - it's a similar kind of thing, in some sense.

In a two lanes-merging situation:

Numerous experiments in various areas of the country have led me to believe that rolling down the window and pointing at the lane that is about to disappear will help dissuade drivers from jumping up to the front; it's got a 25-30% success rate in preventing

queuejumping. But I have a large and hairy arm, if not an imposing

car; YMMV. In some areas of the country it's more about people not putting their clicker on to merge - even if there **is** space.

Traffic flows definitely have a critical point - once fluidity is lost (a sort of critical 'temperature') capacity drops.

by a reader on Thu, 05/22/2003 - 21:24 | [reply](#)

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Axes

Why has the US Administration not adopted **Scrappleface's** felicitous phrase "**Axis of Weasels**"? After all, everyone else has.

Probably what happened is this: when a speechwriter first attempted to slip a reference to Weasels into a draft speech, he found himself on the carpet in the Oval Office, where the President told him:

"Read my lips: no new axes!"

[Inspiration from [GrahamLester.Com.](#)]

Thu, 05/22/2003 - 01:20 | [permalink](#)

BBC-zarro World

The Facts: Israeli Navy commandos have seized a boat on its way from Hezbollah in Lebanon to Palestinian terrorists in the Gaza Strip. The cargo consisted of rocket fuses, electronic bomb-making components and CDs containing instructions for assembling explosives belts for suicide bombers. All on board, including a Hezbollah terrorist, were captured.

The Spin from BBC-zarro World:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/3050769.stm

Israel 'seizes Hezbollah boat'

The purpose of the sneer quotes is as follows: The Israelis, being Jews, are the Fathers of Lies and cannot be trusted. Therefore (1) they may not have seized the boat; it may have sailed voluntarily into Haifa harbour after a sincere change of heart by the crew. (2) It may not have been from Hezbollah; it could be the Salvation Army who are now sending rocket- and bomb-making equipment from Lebanon to the PLO. (3) It may not have been a boat at all, but a large rubber duckie.

Israel said the ship was heading to Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip

No, BBC-zarro folk, the Israelis did not say that. *You* said that. The Israelis said that it was heading for Palestinian *terrorists* didn't they? And then *you* deliberately misrepresented what they said, didn't you? And don't say you don't know what "said that" means, or what the difference between a terrorist and a militant is, because if you didn't, you wouldn't keep lying spinning like this.

The Israelis say they have seized a ship carrying weapons for Lebanese militant group Hezbollah.

Oh the rich ambiguity of language! How long would it have taken someone without a Ph.D. in Bizarro-English to find a way of putting that which fudged the issue of where the weapons were headed and who sent them? Any less gifted person might simply have said that the weapons came *from* Hezbollah, and were going *to* the Gaza Strip.

Also, somewhere in any decent reporter's report there would have

been a mention that their sole use, on arrival, was going to be the murder of Jews. But the BBC-zarro reporter mentioned neither murder, nor Jews.

[...]

Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom said the arms were being transported from Lebanon to Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip.

There are those pesky militants committing mass murder again! Pretty soon their reputation is going to be quite tarnished, you know.

He added that the incident showed that Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat was behind terror operations.

Really? The fact is, the incident does not show anything about whether Arafat was involved. It may be that the Israelis have other evidence pointing in that direction. (In fact, **they do**.) But a reader of the BBC report has to wonder whether this is a case of Mr Shalom mis-speaking, or some other mistake, or just the BBC ~~lying through their teeth~~ spinning their report again. An experienced reader will know which is most likely.

[...]

Last year, Israel intercepted a 50-tonne shipment of Iranian weapons, which was destined for Palestinian militants, in the Red Sea.

Israeli sources say the current cache is much smaller than that.

Yeah, right. Much smaller. Couldn't have been used to murder more than – what? – a few dozen Jews? Couple of hundred tops. So let's all forget about such trivialities and get on with that nice Peace Process, shall we? Stage one: Israel stops intercepting boats.

Thu, 05/22/2003 - 23:15 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Are you sure about this?

Do you know for a fact that the Israelis said "terrorists" not "militants", or is that an assumption? I've seen both terms used. Do you have any evidence that the Israelis are being misquoted in this way? Have you asked them if they use the term "militants" or "terrorists" or both? Have they issued a statement to this effect? If you have or could get such a statement, I think we should mount a major campaign to get the BBC to stop. What do you think?

by a reader on Fri, 05/23/2003 - 11:54 | [reply](#)

We do not know for sure

No, we do not know, and that is a measure of the size of the lie that

it is the policy of the BBC (and many other news organisations, but the BBC is one of the worst) to tell. Although they claim to be telling us what the Israeli side of the story is, they systematically change what the Israelis say, so that we don't know whether:

- The Israeli government has taken to saying "militant" as part of confidence-building measures; or
- This particular spokesman has; or
- This case specifically involved militants who were not terrorists and the spokesman was being careful with language; or
- He said "terrorist" and the BBC claimed he said "militant".

As for mounting a campaign, there already is such a campaign under way here: <http://www.terrorpetition.com/>, But why should the BBC pay any attention? Their revenue is secure, and in any case, their reaction is likely to be "well, if the militant Zionists and militant Palestinians all think we're biased, that just shows that we are fulfilling our mandate of strict impartiality".

by **Editor** on Fri, 05/23/2003 - 14:03 | [reply](#)

The Scandal of Faked Grades

In schools and universities in the United States and elsewhere, it is standard practice to falsify the results of academic assessments as a means of punishing and controlling students. Typically, grades are reduced as punishment for disciplinary offences such as lateness to class, without even a pretence that the resulting grade is an accurate measure of the student's knowledge or competence in the subject in question. **Here's** a case where grades are being fraudulently *raised* as part of the fine-adjustment of a complex punishment. But whether the grade is raised or lowered, this practice deliberately misrepresents the student's competence to future employers or educators.

That this institutionalised corruption of scholarly values is accepted as normal in the world's most rational society never ceases to amaze and disgust us.

Academics and teachers should refuse to participate in it, starting right now.

Fri, 05/23/2003 - 22:53 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

Do high-school grades really ...

Do high-school grades really represent competence to future employers?

by a reader on Sun, 05/25/2003 - 02:49 | [reply](#)

So What?

No. But they matter for getting into college, and also children are made to care what grades they get by their parents.

(This is not a recommendation for going to college.)

-- Elliot Temple
<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sun, 05/25/2003 - 04:00 | [reply](#)

Yes

Some employers won't hire people who have not graduated from

high school. If students don't pass classes due to artificially bad grades, they are unable to present a qualification that they in fact deserve.

Also, as Curi pointed out, colleges consider high school grades in making decisions about who gets in.

by **Woty** on Sun, 05/25/2003 - 07:27 | [reply](#)

Umm, yeah

My answer did assume you graduated. If the messed up grades prevent that, it has to be revised to say it does mess up employment. Although if you get a GED, will that work just as well for employers? I'm not sure. I hear GEDs are super easy.

-- Elliot Temple
<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 05/25/2003 - 19:22 | [reply](#)

Generally speaking a GED is b...

Generally speaking a GED is better than nothing at all, but isn't considered as good as actually graduating from high school. I believe some states, like California, have a super-GED test that is more difficult than the 'regular' GED.

by a reader on Sun, 05/25/2003 - 22:19 | [reply](#)

Attendance

You note that tardiness and I would assume attendance, in-class behavior, and other factors not related to the knowledge learned by a student are being taken into account when calculating final grades. I'm actually shocked that you'd think this is a bad thing.

You write that it misrepresents the students' competence. That's most definitely not the case. Competence includes things like ability to get to work on time, to stay on task, and to maintain a professional workplace. These things are in addition to what is normally thought of as scholarship. And the truth is that scholarship is only part of what employers look for.

by **Rob Michael** on Thu, 07/10/2003 - 15:21 | [reply](#)

Attendance

Employers might be interested in more than scholarship, but they don't get useful information from a single grade that consolidates many factors.

It might be reasonable to argue that other factors such as tardiness, attendance, ass-kissing should be reported separately, so that employers could consider these things if they want to. But arguing that the grade that is supposed to measure command

of subject matter should be polluted with these other factors for the sake of employers is mistaken.

by [Gil](#) on Thu, 07/10/2003 - 16:41 | [reply](#)

Purpose of Grades?

I'm not sure I'm willing to agree with you that the purpose of a grade is to measure command of subject matter. I would say that it is a measure of performance in class. Performance includes understanding of the subject, attendance, etc. And, because teachers have been including attendance, behavior, and other factors in their grades at least as far back as the 80s (my own experience) I'd say there are few people who would agree with you that grades measure subject matter alone.

by [Rob Michael](#) on Thu, 07/10/2003 - 21:13 | [reply](#)

What is this obsession with competence anyway?

Rob Michael wrote:

I'm not sure I'm willing to agree with you that the purpose of a grade is to measure command of subject matter.

Exactly! What is this obsession with competence anyway? What possible use is a pure measurement of competence? When I go to have surgery I am interested in picking a well-rounded individual to operate on me. I want a surgeon who is not merely competent in his field, but is also good at performance in class, which I understand also includes attendance, behavior, and other factors in his grades, especially whether he used to hurry for the bus in the mornings when he was a student. Someone who often risked being late for class as a student might arrive late for my operation, and where would I be then? Am I supposed to wait for him, or what? That way lies anarchy. And who cares if one surgeon is slightly better than the other *at surgery*: I'll take the one who is slightly worse every time, provided he never talked back to his teachers.

by a reader on Thu, 07/10/2003 - 21:40 | [reply](#)

Learned behaviors...

Well, seeing as how surgery is not typically taught at the K-12 level (or the undergraduate either) I don't think your analogy works. Even setting aside my objection, learned behaviors like attention to detail, ability to focus on a task, and the desire to be properly prepared are not usually addressed beyond K-12. Once you hit college, most professors expect you to be able to show up on time, stay on-task, etc. Those behaviors have to be learned somewhere and if universities expect you to already have them, then it is clear that educators expect such learning to take place in K-12.

You didn't even take into account the attention or ability to stay

focused of your fictional surgeon. Could this be because we generally expect our surgeons to already have such behaviors???. Where do you think those behaviors are aquired?

by [Rob Michael](#) on Fri, 07/11/2003 - 14:41 | [reply](#)

Or better yet, beat the syste...

Or better yet, beat the system and don't get a regular job :P

by [entivore](#) on Mon, 08/18/2003 - 09:03 | [reply](#)

I think grades should measure...

I think grades should measure competence in the material, if only for the reason that the other stuff is biased beyond any usefulness anyway. I once had a teacher in high-school in 1st period who would penalize "points" for arriving late. The problem is, the bus service at the school was very unreliable, somewhere along the lines of 25-50% arrivals late. If every other day you are getting penalized on your grade for something you really have no control over, how does this indicate anything useful to future employers?

How about likability factor? If the teacher doesn't like you, they are more likely to penalize you for the same behaviour.

I think the only sane thing to do is make the most out of your job interviews and resumes. Make it clear that you know how to do the job, or at least know how to learn to do the job quickly. If a certain place doesn't want to consider you solely on your academics, it's their loss. . . unless of course you suck so badly at selling yourself that noone at all will hire you. Then it is your loss :P

I think I accidentally posted the post script to this first somehow. lol

by [entivore](#) on Mon, 08/18/2003 - 09:05 | [reply](#)

Surgeons

Rob Michael,

I want my surgeons to be on time and not like some of those smart-ass surgeons these days.

I also want him to be able to spell S-U-R-G-E-O-N... or at least be able to copy someone else when they spell it. Come to think of it, I want people in casual conversations to do the same thing.

But whether or not he can spell his profession, or you can, has little to do with his competence.

As Elliot says... Ho hum.

-Dan

by a reader on Thu, 08/26/2004 - 23:48 | [reply](#)

High-school Grades

I am an employer and have never asked about a potential employee's grades. We are rarely the same people we were in high-school. Personally my grades ranged from Cs one semester to As the next depending on my family ups and downs. As a college student I have been straight As.

by a reader on Thu, 09/14/2006 - 02:16 | [reply](#)

Grades

That might be reasonable when interviewing a 30-year old, but not a 19-year old.

by **Yoni** on Sat, 09/16/2006 - 16:28 | [reply](#)

Contraceptives: We've Been Had!

A recent judgment by a judge in Argentina said that contraceptives **violate women's rights**:

The judge in question, Cristina Garzon de Lascano of Cordoba province, on Thursday ruled in favour of a conservative Catholic organisation which argued that oral contraceptives and intrauterine devices (IUD) violated women's health rights.

The judge agreed that such contraceptives were "abortive" and banned their production and sale. She also ordered the destruction of existing supplies.

Abortion is illegal in Argentina and can be punishable by prison...

Women's and health organisations also condemned the ruling.

Some said it would increase the number of clandestine abortions carried out in Argentina - already the country's primary cause of maternal death.

What has not been reported is that the learned Judge went on to don red inquisitorial robes before explaining that these contraceptives constitute a health risk to the immortal souls of the women concerned: "They may think that not having access to contraceptives constitutes a health risk in this life, but at least their souls won't burn in hell for all eternity. Having Satan shove a spit up your arse and roast you slowly over an open fire for ever and ever is significantly more dangerous than doing the nasty without an IUD," she declared.

Well, it is, isn't it? Anything wrong with that argument?

Frank? Anyone?

Sun, 05/25/2003 - 13:48 | [permalink](#)

A still another reminder of w...

A still another reminder of what used to be true

through most of the human history: that the organized religion has always tried to use the coercive powers of the state to deprive people of their freedoms, property, and life. The robed quack in question has also been derelict in the discharge of her duties: she should have sentenced every contraceptive user, male or female, to be burned at the stake, to save their immortal souls.

by [Boris A.Kupershmidt](#) on Mon, 05/26/2003 - 01:18 | [reply](#)

This would be funny if it wer...

This would be funny if it were not so appalling.

by [Sylvia Crombie](#) on Wed, 05/28/2003 - 15:23 | [reply](#)

We Had to Shoot Them Down a Second Time

On June 13 1940, Winston Churchill made the last of several flying visits to France. He did this at some personal risk: at one point his plane came within sight of a squadron of German fighters, but was not noticed. His aim was to try to persuade the French government to fight on against the invading Germans. But unbeknownst to him, the French had already decided to make a separate peace with Hitler, in direct violation of their mutual defence treaty with Britain.

The French Prime Minister Paul Renaud opened the meeting with a hypothetical question about the "solemn pledge that no separate peace would be entered into by either ally": If France nevertheless made a separate peace, what would Britain's attitude be? It would, he said, "be a shock if Britain failed to concede that France was physically unable to carry on".

Churchill said that under no circumstances would Britain reproach France for any such decision, but that this was different from releasing them from the obligation. And he spoke of practical plans for a rearguard action, giving time for the bulk of the French forces to withdraw to North Africa, so that they and the powerful French Navy could carry on the struggle from there. But whatever France decided,

At all events England would fight on. She had not and would not alter her resolve: no terms, no surrender. The alternatives for her were death or victory. That was his answer to M. Reynaud's question.

(From *The Second World War* by Winston S. Churchill. Book 3: The Fall of France.)

After some fruitless to-ing and fro-ing, Churchill gave up. But he had one last favour to ask of his erstwhile allies, a favour which was of desperate importance given the nature of the battle which their surrender was about to precipitate:

Before leaving I made one particular request to M. Reynaud. Over four hundred German pilots, the bulk of whom had been shot down by the RAF, were prisoners in France. Having regard to the situation, they should be handed over to our custody. M. Renaud willingly gave this promise, but soon he had no power to keep it. These German pilots all became available for the Battle of

Britain, and we had to shoot them down a second time.

Let's hope that the same will not turn out to have happened in **this** case.

Mon, 05/26/2003 - 09:29 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

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5. The Suez Crisis

This is the fifth part of our series, "A Short History of Israel". If you wish to read the preceding parts, see the **Table of Contents** for links to them. We welcome comments and criticisms. Do tell us what you think.

.....

The Soviet dictator Josef Stalin's general paranoia focused particularly on Jews, and now on Israel. While the 1948 war was still in progress, he ordered Czechoslovakia to cease supplying arms to Israel. In 1949 the Soviet press began an 'anti-cosmopolitan' campaign – 'cosmopolitans' being a code word for Jews. Many Jews were arrested on trumped-up charges, tortured, and executed or sentenced to long terms in labour camps. In 1953 Stalin 'discovered' a fictitious plot by a group of doctors, most of them Jewish, to overthrow the Soviet regime. Mass murder of Jews was probably averted only by Stalin's own death a few weeks later, after which the new Soviet leadership disavowed the 'Doctor's Plot' and posthumously annulled the fifteen death sentences already carried out on account of it.

However, the Soviet Union continued to persecute Jews, and its foreign policy stance became violently anti-Israeli. In 1955 it began supplying large quantities of arms to Egypt and Syria. Egypt signed a treaty with Syria and Jordan placing the Egyptian dictator Gamal Abdul Nasser in command of all three armies. This was one of the high points of the pan-Arab nationalist movement, led by Nasser, which wanted to unite all Arabs into a single nation.

In July, 1956, Egypt nationalised the Suez Canal, an international waterway owned by the British and French governments. Israeli ships, and ships travelling to or from Israeli ports, were banned from using the Canal. Nasser ignored the UN's perfunctory protest. He had already imposed a similar ban on another international waterway, the Straits of Tiran, thus blockading Eilat, the port that Israel was trying to develop at its southern tip.

Violent incidents on Israel's borders increased. Jordanian and Egyptian soldiers and fedayeen crossed the border and attacked both military and civilian targets. The shelling of Israeli towns and villages within range of Egyptian artillery became almost continuous.

Israel prepared for war against Egypt. It planned to lift the blockade

of Eilat by seizing and holding Sharm-el-Sheikh, a town where a large military base had been built, dominating the Straits of Tiran. It also planned to retaliate for Egypt's attacks, and impair Egypt's ability to threaten invasion, by striking at its army, now deployed on the Sinai peninsula and in the Gaza Strip.

To do all this, the IDF needed modern weapons. The United States would not supply any. Nor would any Soviet-bloc country including Czechoslovakia (which was now supplying Egypt). Nor would Britain, which still considered itself an ally of the Arab countries – now excluding Egypt. But Israel had been cultivating a relationship with France, which prided itself on its independent foreign policy and agreed to sell weapons to Israel.

Britain and France had been secretly planning to recapture the Suez Canal, despite pressure from the United States to acquiesce in the nationalisation. Now the French informed the Israelis of this plan and invited them to coordinate their own attack with it. In negotiations which, for many years afterwards, all three countries would deny ever took place, they agreed that Israel would capture the Canal, then the British and French would call for both sides to withdraw, and when Nasser refused, British and French forces would be sent in to 'protect' the Canal zone.

Israeli paratroopers landed in the west of Sinai. Israeli forces captured Gaza, and Israeli armoured columns drove westwards into Sinai and southwards towards Israel's main objective, Sharm-el-Sheikh. The following day, Britain issued an ultimatum to Israel and Egypt, saying that unless both sides withdrew to a distance of ten miles from the Canal, force would be used against them.

During the next six days, the IDF defeated the Egyptian army in Sinai in fierce fighting, capturing Sharm-el-Sheikh and most of Sinai. Complying with the British ultimatum, it halted ten miles from the Suez Canal. The Egyptians did not withdraw from the Canal, and British and French forces invaded, landing at Port Said and pushing southwards through the Canal zone.

There was an enormous international outcry, led by the United States. President Eisenhower put intense pressure on Britain and France to withdraw. They complied: their forces halted, and soon afterwards returned home in humiliation. The British Prime Minister, Anthony Eden, resigned, a broken man. Eisenhower threatened Israel with UN economic sanctions and expulsion from the UN if it did not withdraw too. The Soviet Prime Minister sent a private letter to Ben-Gurion reminding him that the Soviet Union possessed missiles that could reach Israel. Israel sent a delegation to Washington, arguing that to withdraw without receiving any concessions from Egypt about future violence or blockading of international waterways would be to invite a repetition of the situation. Eisenhower was adamant about unconditional withdrawal, but he himself did make some concessions: he assured Israel that the United States would from now on keep the Straits of Tiran open, and that the international community would act 'firmly' if Egypt did not allow Israeli shipping through the Suez Canal. He also arranged for a UN Emergency Force to be deployed in Sinai and Gaza, whose

job would be 'to assure the scrupulous maintenance of the armistice agreement' – in particular, to ensure that those territories were not again used to launch fedayeen raids, artillery barrages or armed threats against Israel.

Israel withdrew. The UN Emergency Force was deployed. The fedayeen raids and other attacks from Egypt ceased. The Straits of Tiran and the Suez Canal were opened to Israeli shipping. The Suez war became a widely-cited symbol of the last gasp of Imperialism and of the futility of Western intervention in the affairs of other countries. Israel had lost 172 dead and 817 wounded.

The Egyptian authorities soon began to harass ships heading to or from Israel through the Suez Canal – delaying them and sometimes confiscating cargoes. The UN brokered a compromise under which cargoes would always be owned by the non-Israeli party to the trade, during their time of passage through the Canal. Israel agreed, under protest, to this cumbersome and illegal requirement, but the first ship to try it (the Greek ship *Astypalea*) was arrested anyway, and its cargo of 500 tons of Israeli cement was confiscated. For all practical purposes the Canal was again closed to Israel-related shipping. The 'firm action' promised by Eisenhower never materialised.

Part 6: Eleven Years of Fighting, Six Days of War

Tue, 05/27/2003 - 10:05 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

The Suez Crisis

The fifth installment of our acclaimed series, "A Short History of Israel", is now up: **The Suez Crisis**.

If you have not read the preceding installments, you can find them linked from the **Table of Contents**.

Tue, 05/27/2003 - 10:28 | [permalink](#)

Thanx 4 the history lesson

This history of Israel is stellar! I'm certainly learning a lot from it. I hope Robin Whittle does too. He sure does need it.

When you've finished posting it, would you please post the whole thing in one part for ease of downloading and printing? I'd like to print it out and give copies of it to my friends and family.

by **Sylvia Crombie** on Wed, 05/28/2003 - 15:32

Democracy Must be Experienced to be Learned!

by **David Rovner**

There is much talk these days about the importance of teaching values (democracy, peace, good citizenship, non-violence, responsibility) in our public schools. It appears that newspaper columnists, teachers' unions, public organizations and other civic minded people have suddenly come to realize that our youth is growing up ignorant of, and uncommitted to, the great principles upon which our nation is based.

Although I fully agree that the problem exists, I am afraid that the proposed cure – more classes on democracy or on peace or on being a good citizen or on being responsible – is not better than the disease. Why is it that people persist in thinking that the solution to real-life problems is talking about them? Does anyone really believe that subjecting children to yet another course will achieve really meaningful goals? We can't even get our kids to read or write or do arithmetic properly, despite endless hours of classroom effort. Are we going to make them into the defenders of peace, freedom and democracy, and responsible by adjusting the curriculum once more?

People don't learn values through teaching in classrooms. The very idea of "instructing" children in any set of values at school is off-base. At best, children view such teaching as boring and irrelevant; at worst, they treat it as obnoxious preaching.

The simple fact is that children are not committed to peace, or democratic principles, or political freedom or the Declaration of Independence, or behaving as responsible people because they themselves do not experience any of these lofty matters in their everyday lives, and in particular in their schools. Children do not have rights in school, they do not participate in meaningful decision-making at school (even where the decisions directly affect their own lives) nor do they have the freedom of self determination in schools (virtually all schools choose in fact to deny that students are capable of deciding and personal responsible for their acts – "success breeds success" is the password today – freedom of choice, freedom of action, freedom to bear the results of action – these are the three freedoms that constitute personal responsibility). In fact, the schools are models of autocracy -

sometimes benevolent, sometimes cruel, but always in direct

conflict with the principles on which our country is based.

How hollow have all these great civics and history lessons sounded this past year in schools, when the 54th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence was celebrated in classroom after classroom, to a captive audience of students to whom much of that very the Declaration of Independence DOES NOT APPLY !

The way ethical values are transmitted to children is THROUGH EVERYDAY ACTION, on the part of adult role models and ON THE PART OF CHILDREN. This is why the family is the epicenter of moral education.

Moral education belongs in the home. To be sure, it does. But does that exclude it from schools?

It sure does not exclude moral education from schools' control and authority ! !

The way to ensure that people of any age will be deeply committed to the democratic Way is to make them FULL PARTICIPANTS IN IT (provide real-life experiences: making choices significant to their lives, exercising judgment in consequential matters such as school rules and discipline, choosing between alternative courses of action, and evaluating and discussing the outcomes of these choices) LET US MAKE OUR SCHOOLS DEMOCRATIC, let us give our children FREEDOM OF CHOICE and THE BASIC RIGHTS OF CITIZENSHIP in their schools, and they will have no problem understanding what is TOLERANCE, RESPECT TOWARD PEOPLE, SELF-AWARENESS and RESPONSIBILITY.

(you are invited to visit a democratic school:

<http://www.sudval.org/>, and a network of democratic schools: <http://www.sern.org/>)

DEMOCRACY MUST BE EXPERIENCED TO BE LEARNED ! !

Haifa, Israel, May 2003

Tue, 05/27/2003 - 12:04 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

The Settler Non-Problem

In a piece on the **Arab-Israeli conflict**, Robin Whittle says that the evil Zionists and Americans are to blame for the problem:

The settlements and the severe restrictions and fragmentation of Palestinian life by Israel prove that successive Israeli governments have no interest at all in giving Palestinians even a fraction of their land [...]

Israel can only do this with the financial, technological and political support of the USA. Both the USA and Israel are democracies. The problem here is not despots – but democratic nations systematically killing and oppressing all Palestinians.

His description of Israel's overall stance and its counterterrorist policies in particular is utterly divorced from reality and he would benefit from reading **this excellent article** on Israel's counterterrorist policies, as well as our **Short History of Israel**. (Or perhaps he wouldn't. Someone who can seriously say what he says about "Palestine" may not have much interest in getting his facts straight.)

Whittle is not alone in advancing the curious proposition that the existence of Jewish settlements shows that the Israelis are fundamentally to blame for the violence against them. So let's go through this s-l-o-w-l-y, for Mr Whittle and other similarly confused nincompoops. Question: *Is buying land a crime?*

There are approximately **840,000 Indians** in Britain, many of whom have bought land here. By Mr Whittle's argument, all non-Indian British citizens are entitled to strap on belts of explosives and kill Indians, both here and in India.

Back in the real world, buying land and settling it is just buying land and settling it. Even if *all* Jewish settlers were to remain in the future Palestinian state and *no* expatriate Palestinians were to return there, Jews would constitute some 6% of the population, which one might usefully compare with the 20% of Israeli citizens who are Arabs and with whom Israel is living in peace. When there is an even vaguely reasonable leadership in Palestine, the settlements will be at the very most a minor issue in any peace settlement.

See also **this** piece.

Does Robin Whittle say Jews s...

Does Robin Whittle say Jews shouldn't buy land in other places too, or is he only worried about "Arab lands"? Does he also disapprove of Arabs buying land in Israel? Or does he think that's ok? I see Robin Whittle lives in Australia but was born in England. So that's ok, but it's not ok for Jews to do the same thing? It's like, ok, the Australians didn't object to his parents moving to Australia so that's ok, but it's not ok for Jews to move to Arab countries because Arabs do mind, right? But see, the Arabs also don't want Jews living in Israel either, or anywhere else. That's why they attack Jews all over the world. Where SHOULD Jews be allowed to buy land? Would Robin Whittle agree with those who think the Jews should be bulldozed into the sea? Hitler would be proud.

by [Sylvia Crombie](#) on Wed, 05/28/2003 - 15:15 | [reply](#)

The Arabs who sold land to Je...

The Arabs who sold land to Jews obviously don't mind Jews living there.

-- Elliot Temple
<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 05/29/2003 - 03:50 | [reply](#)

Buying land????

This is so stupid. Millions of lives are at stake here. The USA and Israel are oppressing the Palestinians. It's true that some Palestinians want to kill every Jew, but that is no justification for what Israel does to the rest of the Palestinians - the law-abiding ones. To describe what Israel is doing as "buying land" is a joke. What planet are you on??? How many American voters have ever seen that map of the settlements? The Israelis are not BUYING land, they are TAKING it. It's a case of the Israeli government giving Jews subsidies to settle on Arab land. There's no buying involved, they just take it and sell it to Jews.

by a reader on Thu, 05/29/2003 - 10:09 | [reply](#)

It's the Evil Jooossss!

"It's a case of the Israeli government giving Jews subsidies to settle on Arab land. There's no buying involved, they just take it and sell it to Jews."

If this is the case then the Israeli is taking money from some Israelis and giving it to others so that they can buy Arab land in PA areas and settle it. In any event the land is still being bought and the Palestinians can still refuse to sell, so the Palestinians have no

beef, but Israeli taxpayers might, strangely the latter group do not see fit to murder people.

As for the rest of your comments, they make no attempt to address any of the facts at issue and make no argument that our interpretation is wrong. Also I'm confused about the relevance of Americans not having seen the map, the map does not change the logic of the situation, it just depicts the distribution of settlements, or is it that the evil Jooos are concealing the map under their black coats along with the Palestinian babies they kill and eat in their dark rituals?

by a reader on Thu, 05/29/2003 - 21:33 | [reply](#)

ho hum

What he meant about the map is if only the Americans saw the map ... saw how much land the Jews had bought -- surely they would object too. See, if the Jews have bought *lots* of land, more than Arabs can afford, then using the premise that Jews aren't morally better, and the fact luck is a bad explanation, they must have gotten the money/land by stealing, or otherwise cheating. (Perhaps shooting Palestinian landowners under guise of fighting terror, and then installing settlements on the now "abandoned" land really fast and scaring everyone away.....la de da)

-- Elliot Temple
<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 05/30/2003 - 02:47 | [reply](#)

settlements

I've not noticed that the Indians in Britain live in Indian only settlements which other Britains are barred from living in.

They live by the laws of the country - unlike Israeli occupiers who seize Palestinian land in defiance of international law with no agreement or compensation to the Palestinians.

Neither do the Palestinians in Israel get to live in Arab-only settlements annexing land willy-nilly do no comparison there either.

by a reader on Wed, 04/21/2004 - 13:49 | [reply](#)

Re: settlements

Unfortunately, 'a reader' has fallen for a pack of lies and half-truths so far-reaching and so wicked that a full rebuttal of his or her admirably concise comment would require at least a hundred times as much space. We recommend, for a start, reading Mitchell Bard's [Myths And Facts](#).

But in short: Britain, during the periods when it was at war with Germany, allowed no Germans to live in the country at all, and imprisoned without trial anyone who was even suspected of

sympathising with them. But there **are** Arabs living in Israeli settlements on the West Bank, just as there are Arabs living all over Israel, including in settlements that contain no Jews, and also in predominantly Jewish areas. Land for the settlements is either rented government land (temporarily administered but not annexed by Israel, pending a peace treaty) or is purchased, not seized, from willing private owners.

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 04/21/2004 - 14:57 | [reply](#)

It's clear from his writing

It's clear from his writing that Robin Whittle cares much more about inciting people to blame "the Jews" than he cares about history. I hate it when someone who's clearly anti-semitic tries to portray himself as a neutral. This is a person who also writes about the "accepted history" of the holocaust. A holocaust denier. Big coincidence that he has so much to say about "Palestine". I don't think he really cares about the Palestineans, he just has a problem with the Jewish people. He probably just wants to convince others to feel the same.

Hello, you'd be more effective in spreading your hatefulness if you had actually read up on your history! A history lesson is needed! Does this guy even know what happened in 1948? Doubt it. People like Whittle really make me sick.

by a reader on Wed, 07/07/2004 - 17:16 | [reply](#)

Yes, I do think he would agree

Yes, I do think he would agree with that. Maybe he's just Hitler reincarnated.

by a reader on Wed, 07/07/2004 - 17:28 | [reply](#)

Questions

Don't you think your example of Asians in Britain would be a better analogy if Britain were occupied by the Indian army?

And is all that land being settled by Israelis sold by private individuals, or is some of it land in the public domain that the occupation authority is giving preferential access to?

The so-called "private property" of colonial settlers doesn't usually bear much looking into. In colonial Africa, for example, it was common practice for colonial administrators to preempt ownership of uncultivated land (including forest, pasture and other commons) and then distribute it among settlers. That's they way settlers in Uganda and Rhodesia wound up owning most of the best quality land.

Of course, English settlers in Africa are another object of sympathy for those who specialize in apologizing for right-wing settler pariah regimes.

Re: Questions

A reader wrote:

'Don't you think your example of Asians in Britain would be a better analogy if Britain were occupied by the Indian army?'

The Palestinian Authority has been offered and has received freedom from Israeli military interference on more than one occasion. The PA used this as an excuse to increase the intensity of their campaign to wipe Israel from the map and replace it with Islamist tyranny. When the IDF goes into the PA controlled areas they do so in self-defence. Those areas are not occupied but Israel has not allowed and should not allow those areas to be used to support violent Islamist thugs. You might want to try reading about Israeli history here, before you make any more false and baseless accusations:

<http://www.settingtheworldtorights.com/node/view/74>

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Wed, 11/03/2004 - 20:12 | [reply](#)

Myths from Laputa

"They live by the laws of the country - unlike Israeli occupiers who seize Palestinian land in defiance of international law"

ROFL. Utter drivel. There is no 'Palestinian land' by any sane definition (but hey, who says antisemites are sane?).

And there is no 'defiance of international law' (actually, there is no such thing as 'international law').

Basically, you just want to keep parts (all?) of the Jewish homeland Judenrein.

Won't work. Tough. Live with it.

by [Myself](#) on Sat, 09/09/2006 - 22:37 | [reply](#)

calls of racism

I personally am part African-American and part Jewish Ukrainian.

There have been one or two times in my life when I experienced something where racism might possibly have played some small part.

A lot of black people like to use racism as an excuse for anytime they don't get their way. Didn't get the job? Its not because the other candidate had a more relevant degree, its racism. More black people getting pulled over, its not because black youth have less respect for the law and tend to drive obnoxiously, its racism. More blacks in prison, its not a complex issue related to the legacy of

slavery, the lack of reparations, inheritance, capitalism, and the

accumulation of wealth leading to greater degrees of poverty and lack of education which in turn correlates to a higher crime rate - its just racism.

And American Jews do EXACTLY the same thing.

If anyone condemns the actions of Israel, they are called "anti-Semitic"

Yet these same people condemn the actions of any violent or oppressive government.

The issue here can not be reduced to "these people are right, these people are wrong"

First, Palestinians have no justification for blowing up Israeli citizens.

Second, Israel's reactions to Palestinian attacks is almost always disproportionate and unjustified. I read once in the paper about Israel firing mortars over a wall after some kids threw rocks at Israeli soldiers.

If you deny that Israel often overreacts, or claim it has never done anything wrong, you are just as much full of it as someone who claims the Holocaust wasn't that bad.

Yes we (Jewish people) have been heavily persecuted throughout history.

That does not make us perfect, or saintly, or immune from wrong doing.

History: thousands of years ago, Jews found what is now called Israel and claimed it. At the time a lot of land was not incorporated into any particular country, so this was kind of like Europeans coming to America and claiming it. There were people already living there, but they weren't organised into a country, so in their minds that made it ok.

Then, after Rome took over, and the Jews and Romans had their falling out, Rome took Israel, and as punishment for trying to gain Independence made the country of Palestine and Syria.

Thousand years later, the league of nations (UN) changed it back again.

Obviously no one from the last change was still around, nor their children or grandchildren, so its hard to say if the land was rightfully theirs or not.

Most of the middle east didn't think so.

Egypt was the aggressor in the first war, and in that aspect Israel was in the right.

Israel kicked the crap out of the Arab countries.

But they didn't stop there.

They also took, by force, about 26% more than land they had originally be given, (which, as pointed out already, was only semi-legitimate to begin with).

Then, years later in the 6-day war, they did it again.

In terms of international law, this was unjustified.

This is the origin of the Gaza Strip / West Bank conflict. They never were a part of Israel. It is as though the US settled parts of Mexico, and then when the Mexicans attacked the settlers, we started a war over it, and then officially claimed that land (oh, wait, we DID do

that).

Before any discussion over whether Israel's actions regarding land usage are moral or not, they would have to give back all of the land they claimed in all wars - not just to the green line, but to the original 1947 borders.

by [Jay Aziza](#) on Wed, 12/20/2006 - 18:54 | [reply](#)

capitalism is inherently moral?

"buying land and settling it is just buying land and settling it."

As though, if you can afford it, it must not hurt anyone.

Consider a hypothetical situation:

There is a natural disaster. As a result, most stores are short on food for a while.

A man who has plenty of money has an emergency shelter in place, well stocked.

He is out during the day, his shelter locked up, and he comes across a store which has some food, albeit at higher than normal prices.

But they have a limited supply.

He could just walk home, but he is hungry now, so he buys some bread and eats it.

Which means someone else can't.

He is just buying something and using it, and he can afford it - but it is still immoral.

Another example, a real life one this time.

I used to live in a trailer park about 15 miles from Manhattan.

In that area rent for even a small apartment can be over \$1000 per month.

Our rent at the park was \$420 a month.

It was affordable, and it was totally unsubsidized.

Some residents were retired, some disabled, some young, some with families, some working poor. The majority of the residents could not afford to more than double our rent. There were about a couple hundred households between my park and another one next door.

There was no other comparably low cost housing in the area.

The city government wanted to, under the eminent domain ruling, force the parks owners to sell, and then re-sell the land to private developers who would put up a strip mall in its place. The rationale was that the mall would provide more tax revenue to the city.

Economically, as long as they compensated the land owners, they would have been in the right, but it would have still been immoral (I don't know what happened, I moved out of the state).

Suppose Phillip Morris can afford to put cartoon ads for smoking on during Saturday morning cartoons. Would that be ok? Its just buying and using advertising slots on radio wave frequencies.

Suppose wealthy Islamists want to buy the Washington Monument,

Mt. Rushmore, Yosemite and Yellowstone Parks, and the Golden Gate bridge.

If they can afford it, do we let them?

Suppose someone wants to buy the house you live in as a renter, and throw you out.

In the REAL buying land and settling it is NEVER just buying land and settling it, because anywhere you go in this country, someone already lives there.

Go find a Native American and ask them if "buying" land and settling it is "just" buying land and settling it.

The pioneers bought the land they settled from the US government. Only problem is, it wasn't rightfully theirs to sell.

Little wonder that the citizens of a country built on this practice would support Israel for doing the same thing.

by [Jay Aziza](#) on Wed, 12/20/2006 - 19:13 | [reply](#)

Tiny Bit of Land

Even if the situations you describe suggest the immorality of trade in certain circumstances, in what sense are the situations you mention analogous to the settler issue in Israel?

The settlements are a tiny fraction of the land area of the West Bank and Jordan. In what sense are Palestinians being displaced?

Two peoples had individuals living on the land in the 1800's. Jewish immigration then encouraged Palestinian immigration because of the prosperity they created. The overwhelming majority of Palestinians living in the West Bank are descended from immigrants.

To the extent that Palestinians did lose land, they did so in the late 1940's because they declared war on the Jews and tried to take their land. So land was not stolen, except if you mean that there was intent to steal land.

In which case, Palestinians have a lot to answer for.

by a reader on Wed, 12/20/2006 - 23:34 | [reply](#)

Re: capitalism is inherently moral?

Jay Aziza is arguing by way of some examples that, trade is not just an isolated act and so it may be immoral or even illegal in some cases to allow free trade between consenting parties. However, in the examples he gives he has fallen victim to the same error he is supposedly trying to point out in the original post. Indeed, trade is not an isolated act; it always occurs within a broader social context. So if we mean to show that free trade may be immoral and (thus) illegal in some cases, we must do so by looking at those cases in the broader context they sit in.

In the first example Jay is saying that, the well-stocked person who

buys food at the local store would be doing an unethical act. That could be if the assumption that the store has "limited supply" were true over a long enough period of time. But, In such cases "food" or any such commodity would usually be thought of as a public good and even the most libertarian minds would agree that there would be a case for some (limited) government role at least in the form of laws and their enforcement. But in a context where free trade is the common form of trade, food supply does *not* satisfy this condition even in places where a natural disaster has struck except in rare occasions. Usually the shortage is over in a short time because the incentives of a free economy work overwhelmingly against it. In such a broader context, buying food at the local store when one is hungry, even if one is well-stocked, is nothing more than buying food to eat.

The second example, the one about the eminent domain of the city over the trailer park, in fact demonstrates the opposite principle to what Jay is trying to support. The eminent domain is supposed to be about giving the city (the state) the power they need to achieve the goals they are supposed to. Things like building roads, parks, etc. Giving permission to build a mall in place of existing, occupied housing is a modern overstretch of these goals and goes against the more important principle of private ownership. As such, this example does not show the moral deficiency of free trade, but the moral deficiency of state control.

If Philip Morris could buy ads in Saturday morning cartoons, he had not done any immoral act. But do you think the networks that allowed such ads in their cartoons would have nearly as many viewers as they would otherwise? Would they be willing to sacrifice the most important reason they could sell ad space to Morris in the first place? In a free-trade context, with enough information about the harms of tobacco, this would not be a pressing issue of morality, but a simple matter of economy.

If wealthy Islamists could afford to buy the Golden Gate bridge, why should we not let them? What are they going to do with the bridge? Close it, or blow it up? Then we just need to set a price that would allow us to build another one if that is a credible outcome. Would they then buy it? Another scenario is that, they might pose a security problem by building a base for themselves within our society through acquiring land, etc. This is actually already happening. In Canada for instance, there are credible rumors that the highest officials of the government of Iran have piled up enormous assets and private properties. But that is not an argument against free trade. The problem here is not freedom in trade but the ideology of the despots such as Hashemi Rafsanjani and Khamenei of Iran who are against it. In such cases, it is by default the responsibility of the government and/or the courts to create the necessary legal framework that protects the free trade for all to have, not to take it away by unnecessary restrictions.

So, in all Jay's examples, the actual conclusion is not one against free trade. To the contrary, the best solution to such problems is one that expands and protects free trade.

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by [Liberal Iranian](#) on Tue, 12/26/2006 - 11:39 | [reply](#)

Public Goods

In such cases "food" or any such commodity would usually be thought of as a public good and even the most libertarian minds would agree that there would be a case for some (limited) government role at least in the form of laws and their enforcement.

I don't agree the public good issues make any case whatsoever for government action. There was an extensive discussion of public goods in comments on another thread here. I don't believe that governments have any special knowledge of what should be done with goods.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sat, 01/20/2007 - 15:55 | [reply](#)

It's Not Knowledge

"I don't believe that governments have any special knowledge of what should be done with goods."

It's not a question of governments having special knowledge. When there are public goods, the government sometimes has the ability to act coercively in order to improve overall societal efficiency, even when private citizens do not. If this coercive action increases efficiency and if non-coercive solutions are less efficient (which is theoretically possible when the government enables public goods to be produced), this increased efficiency increases people's freedom because people have more money to spend. So citizens tolerate some coercion some of the time, in order to increase their freedom in other circumstances, more of the time.

Very few people (even the rich) will vote for a pure libertarian no government economy, because they recognize that limited government intervention, for example when there are natural disasters, sometimes increases efficiency. Virtually no one will vote for a pure libertarian economy, because in net it is too inefficient, and therefore too coercive to citizens.

"Liberal Iranian" is right. Sometimes even libertarians should consider that a consequence of limited coercion can be an increase in net freedom, due to greater prosperity.

by a reader on Mon, 01/22/2007 - 22:31 | [reply](#)

Knowledge

You believe everyone agrees on what is best (it's not an issue of knowledge), but some people act wickedly by refusing to do it (it's an issue of forcing people who refuse to do what they know is

right). Is that correct?

Regardless, this question may make sense to you: If it's not a matter of knowledge, then why can't a private citizen use force? He has, by premise, the same knowledge of what outcome to force as the government does.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 01/23/2007 - 00:58 | [reply](#)

More Public Goods

"You believe everyone agrees on what is best (it's not an issue of knowledge)"

Elliot

Mostly, I agree with that, but not entirely. With public goods, the overwhelming majority may favor using taxation to accomplish something, but there may be a few individuals who don't agree that a project qualifies as a public good (that the provision of the good by the government would increase efficiency in society).

Those individuals who don't agree, if they favor living in a particular democratic society, usually believe that even though they are overruled in one election, overall their rational conception of when something is a public good, will in general be shared by others. So they expect to be in the majority when most other votes are taken.

So they maximize their net freedom in society by participating in democracy, even if they disagree with a particular decision of their fellow citizens.

"If it's not a matter of knowledge, then why can't a private citizen use force?"

Elliot

The common knowledge of those in a democratic society is that a monopoly on the use of force is the most economically efficient way of providing security (and desired coercion) to the society.

In public good situations, a single coercive force can sometimes increase economic efficiency in society. With more money, people can do more of what they want, so their net freedom increases. But coercion is most efficiently implemented when only one specialized group of people have overwhelming firepower (the police). If everyone has overwhelming firepower, then no one has overwhelming firepower. So if everyone is equally powerful, everyone has wasted money on arms. Wasting money takes away people's freedom. So most people think that functioning militaries and police are "public goods", best financed by our tax dollars.

If minor forms of coercion can increase economic efficiency and therefore net freedom, most people will want that coercion produced in the most efficient way possible, again to maximize

freedom. Government police forces and militaries serve their citizens, in democratic countries, in that way.

by a reader on Tue, 01/23/2007 - 03:03 | [reply](#)

Monopoly on Force

The common knowledge of those in a democratic society is that a monopoly on the use of force is the most economically efficient way of providing security (and desired coercion) to the society.

What is the argument that this is most efficient? I thought that monopolies created by forcibly suppressing competition were inefficient. For example, the post office. And indeed our government: since when is it very efficient at anything?

The alternative I'd like you to address is not everyone having guns, but a relatively small number of companies having significant armaments.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us

[Dialogs](#)

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 01/24/2007 - 01:56 | [reply](#)

Knowledge

As I see it, your recommendation involves the majority, when it thinks it is right, imposing its will on a minority which says it disagrees. This is justified by saying that it's not a real disagreement -- they are wrong, and know it -- they are just being wicked.

One problem with this is that it makes no serious attempt to differentiate between wicked people (who know what's best, but refuse to do it), and people who genuinely disagree.

There is no justification for using force against people who disagree about what should be done with their property. I know that you will say there is: it's more economically efficient. But that presupposes that the forcer is right. That's invalid. There is no system with the quality that it only uses force when it is in the right.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us

[Dialogs](#)

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 01/24/2007 - 02:04 | [reply](#)

Radical Libertarianism Attacks Freedom

"There is no justification for using force against people who disagree about what should be done with their property."

Not quiet what I am saying. People make a trade in certain

situations. They agree to be coerced by the majority when they are in the minority, in exchange for being able to coerce the minority when they are in the majority. Theoretically, 100% of people could agree with that. Are you really saying that even if 100% of people agree to this, they are doing something wrong?

"no justification"?

None?

Even if 100% of people unanimously agree to utilize democratic principles to solve certain classes of problems?

We know that the overwhelming majority voluntarily agrees to live in a democracy because virtually no one, including the rich, will vote for libertarian candidates. The majority will not vote for (particularly radical) libertarian candidates because such individuals do not recognize the existence of public good problems.

The gross inefficiency created by not recognizing certain public good needs of communities (e.g. the need for defence, police, courts, roads, etc.) is too great for most people to stomach. A libertarianism that recognizes no public goods, deprives people of money and their lives.

So virtually no one will vote for these radical libertarian arrangements, because this libertarianism grossly violates individual liberty.

by a reader on Thu, 01/25/2007 - 01:42 | [reply](#)

Clarification

"One problem with this is that it makes no serious attempt to differentiate between wicked people (who know what's best, but refuse to do it), and people who genuinely disagree."

1. You seem to be saying that if a "serious attempt" were made to differentiate between "wicked people" and those who genuinely think the taxation is inefficient, you would be more sympathetic to taxation of everyone, except those who honestly disagree.

If so, what would constitute "a serious attempt", in your mind?

2. Or is your point that a "serious attempt" that gives a valid answer is truly not possible. In which case you didn't mean to say that serious attempts are not made, but rather that even serious attempts can never give valid answers!

Is 1 or 2 correct?

by a reader on Thu, 01/25/2007 - 04:54 | [reply](#)

Re: Clarification

The problem is that the supposed justification for coercion was that the majority **was** right (as, you say, everyone involved knows) -- the dissenters were wicked and had no point. But no attempt is being made to identify when the majority is actually wrong. It just

keeps being assumed that it is right, b/c of your delegitimazation of dissent. Such a system, with next to no ability to correct errors in the thinking of the majority, is deeply hostile to new ideas, and can easily entrench bad ones.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 01/25/2007 - 15:57 | [reply](#)

Public Goods

You say that not recognizing certain public goods is inefficient. Well, I say I recognize more than you. I recognize that, the option to buy a sandwich at a location for a particular price is a public good. Anyone in the world (with a few exceptions) has that option. It's a useful, valuable option.

I say the option to walk into a bookstore and browse books, and walk out, without paying, is a public good. You get something for free, and it's quite difficult for the store to give different treatment to people who plan to buy something, and people who don't. And the fact is that this public good exists.

Every single business and store on the Earth provides public goods. Many of them were created without force, and without help from the government. Public good problems are solved all the time, without force.

It's interesting that you mention roads as a public good, because privately built roads already exist. It's also interesting because you are aware of the concept of a toll road, and also a private driveway. How can you call roads a public good when it is relatively easy to exclude access to people who don't pay in advance? (Well, people will have the free option to buy use of the road. I will accept that answer, but it only puts roads in the same category as McDonalds.)

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 01/25/2007 - 16:06 | [reply](#)

Public Goods

"Well, I say I recognize more than you. I recognize that, the option to buy a sandwich at a location for a particular price is a public good."

Why is it a public good?

"I say the option to walk into a bookstore and browse books, and walk out, without paying, is a public good. You get something for free, and it's quite difficult for the store to give different treatment to people who plan to buy something, and people who don't. And

the fact is that this public good exists."

As I have said before in a different post, a chance of customers spending money, is in fact money in the bank to a business with a large enough volume of customers. A 50% chance of getting 100 dollars is worth something to most businesses, so they will spend some money to get that money.

Ask yourself whether you would be willing to pay a certain amount of money to have a 50% chance of getting 100 dollars. Most people would be willing to spend something (usually less than 50 dollars) to buy that deal. Again, most people would be willing to pay SOMETHING to buy a "chance", even if it is not a guarantee of money, but a "chance" for money.

Because people will spend money to buy a "chance", a chance at winning money is worth something to the people who will spend for it.

Borders is implicitly giving customers money, by giving customers a comfortable chair and reading materials. And yes, the customer is paying for it, because the customer is giving back something very valuable to Borders: A "chance" that he will buy something. And remember, chances are valuable, so the owners of Borders are willing to spend money (provide seating) to buy the valuable chance that a customer might buy a book.

So when the owners of Borders provides seating to the public, they are not usually providing a public good, though the charitable giving of the company certainly would qualify.

"Public good problems are solved all the time, without force."

Yes. The culture does encourage people to be generous with each other, and so many (even most) public good problems are solved that way. But for some public good problems, there is no known efficient way of solving the problem. The overwhelming majority of people will vote for a publically owned defense force (a public good), enforced by taxation for example, to prevent our country from being annihilated. (It is simply too inefficient not to have a publically owned military!)

by a reader on Fri, 01/26/2007 - 00:51 | [reply](#)

Owning a Public Good is Owning the Law

If one believes in the ability of individuals to steal, then one believes in the existence of public goods, because private ownership of a public good, is private ownership of the means by which people steal.

Therefore owning a public good is equivalent to owning the ability to create laws that give and take property from others, without consent. Try to think of any classically recognized public good, and try to think of one in which this is NOT true.

So those radical libertarians who believe that traditionally labelled

public goods should be privately owned, implicitly believe that private owners should be able to write the laws of their community that effect others, without their consent.

And those who believe that private individuals should be able to write the law that effects others, without consent, are otherwise known as dictators and socialists.

Therefore, a radical libertarianism that does not recognize a distinction between public and private goods, devolves into an equivalent socialism and totalitarianism.

And radical libertarians, espousing such a doctrine, are the enemies of freedom, like their socialistic and totalitarian identical twins.

by a reader on Fri, 01/26/2007 - 02:57 | [reply](#)

Chance

The "chance" that a customer will buy something is nothing like gambling on a 50% chance to get \$100. With the gambling if you win the dice roll the house must pay you. With the book store, no one has to pay them anything. It isn't a chance, it's a decision.

Why will a person choose to pay Borders? Simple. Because they value owning one of the books more than its price.

They will not choose to pay for a book because they like the chair they already sat in. That doesn't affect the calculation of whether to buy the book or not.

A further argument that customers aren't paying for the chairs is this: no matter how many books I buy from Borders today, they can remove all the chairs tomorrow. I can make no (legal) complaint, because I have not paid for those chairs to be there.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sat, 01/27/2007 - 17:28 | [reply](#)

Stocks Have No Value?

"The "chance" that a customer will buy something is nothing like gambling on a 50% chance to get \$100. With the gambling if you win the dice roll the house must pay you. With the book store, no one has to pay them anything. It isn't a chance, it's a decision."

So stocks, which may be worth nothing when you try to sell them, have no value at all? Look at the stock page of any newspaper. Note the prices of stocks.

Then you might wish to rethink your argument!

by a reader on Sun, 01/28/2007 - 04:00 | [reply](#)

Chairs

For each person in the world, there is a certain probability that he will buy a certain number of additional books at Borders if they offer seating compared with if they do not. This does not mean anyone is paying for chairs, but never mind that for now.

For some people, this probability is zero: these include people who would never go to Borders anyway, and people who buy a lot of books at Borders but do not value sitting down there.

But it also includes people who never buy books but do value sitting in chairs in malls, reading books free. Such people are paying Borders zero. They are free riders. And it is entirely possible for a bookstore not to be built, that would have been built if only those free riders paid for the chairs they value.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 01/28/2007 - 22:11 | [reply](#)

A Fair Coin..A Fair Chance..Flipped or Not

"For some people, this probability is zero: these include people who would never go to Borders anyway, and people who buy a lot of books at Borders but do not value sitting down there."

So if I flip a fair coin and then cover the results with my hand, so I can't see the results, are you really willing to say that I don't have a 50% chance of getting heads, because the coin was already flipped and must already be showing heads or tails underneath my hand?

From the perspective of the *owners* of Borders, each customer has a certain average chance that he will buy books, regardless of whether the individual customer knows that he will or will not buy books. The managers of Borders know that they can increase the average chance that a customer will buy books, if the store provides a comfortable place to sit.

As individuals, I have no doubt that the owners of Borders can be as altruistic as anyone else. But comfortable chairs and a nice ambience in stores are present, for the most part, to increase profit, not to increase altruism. If managers waist money on store furniture that does not improve long-term profitability, the store will lose investment money to competitors who invest their money more profitably.

by a reader on Mon, 01/29/2007 - 00:16 | [reply](#)

Free Chairs

Borders has some free riders in their chairs who will never pay.

Borders makes profit from its policies that allow free riders.

One way a public good problem can be solved is to ignore the free

riders because it's profitable to carry on anyway.

With me so far?

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us
Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 01/29/2007 - 01:40 | [reply](#)

Good Post!

I changed my mind. You are right!

Good Post.

It is entirely possible that the owners of Borders are maximizing profit, but at the same time unintentionally giving away a free service, because of the cost of measuring who is a "true" customer and who is just there for the "free ride".

It actually neatly illustrates a point that I often try to make when discussing these issues. From the perspective of the owners of Borders, there is variable behavior of customers. Presumably, if they could *perfectly* tell who was going to buy, they would lavish considerably more attention on him/her....very comfortable couches!

So variability in the customers behavior, from the perspective of Borders, is a *cost* to its owners. Memes and culture probably have a role in making it easier to determine who is the real customer. Or at least, if such mechanisms existed, it would minimize the cost of "free riders" and hence the transaction costs of the business.

Thanks.

by a reader on Mon, 01/29/2007 - 02:07 | [reply](#)

Excellent

Great! I think it will interest you to now apply similar logic to a classic public good problem:

There is a valley with farmers, and this valley has yearly floods. A dam is proposed to keep more exact control over water levels and make all the farms have better yields. The dam costs many times more than the benefit to one farmer, but the benefit to all the farmers combined is much more than the cost of the dam.

The public good problem says: a few people don't actually want the dam right now. Maybe they are in too much debt to make an investment of that size. Or they think dams are ugly. Or they hate technology. If we ask everyone who wants the dam to pay their fare share, everyone has an incentive to pretend to be one of the people

who doesn't really want it. Then they won't have to pay, but they

will still get the dam.

How can Borders help us here? Well, in that case, we ignored free riders on a public good (the chairs), while making a profit on a private good (the book sales). Maybe it's better than that: we didn't just ignore the free riders, we took advantage of them being in our store: while there, they saw advertisements and book covers that could tempt them to buy a book.

In the case of the valley, one thing to do is remember that having the public good available makes the valley a more valuable place, just like the chairs make Borders a better place. So we could buy real estate there before building a dam, and its value would increase afterwards.

But getting back to the original plan, what other private goods could we sell? Well, the owners of a dam for a large valley have a lot of important decisions to make. What will the dam be named? What sort of tourism program will it have? What will be the exact schedule of releasing water, and what will be the exact target water levels in the valley on each day? Will it take various steps to be "environmentally friendly"? Who is allowed to press the big red button to release huge torrents of water?

So another thing we could do is sell the name of the dam, and give tours. We even could call it "the dam that defies public good theory" if that would impress enough people. And the farmers won't all want the same exact schedule of water releases. Having preferable water levels could be worth a lot to a major farmer. The other farmers will get non-ideal water levels for free which are better than when there was no dam. But so what? That isn't hurting us. As long as we have things we can sell, we may be able to build the dam.

It may be true that the dam is more difficult to build than Borders. Maybe it's harder to find enough things to sell for the large cost to build it. But my claim is only that we can think of both projects as, fundamentally, facing the same issues.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 01/29/2007 - 17:07 | [reply](#)

Hmm

"In the case of the valley, one thing to do is remember that having the public good available makes the valley a more valuable place"

I have a great business idea. Let's move all Border's bookstores to blighted/impoverished/high crime locations. After the move, there is more of a public good problem available, so we have more of an opportunity to make money stopping "free riders" and criminals. Better yet, let's move all the Border's stores to flood plains. That way the stores can increase in value, when we agree to lose money

in perpetuity to "free riders", who won't support the building and

maintaining of dams.

Find the greatest public good problems, and business will come!

by a reader on Tue, 01/30/2007 - 01:17 | [reply](#)

Radical Libertarianism Attacks Freedom (part II)

An "economic good" is defined as

-noun

a commodity or service that can be utilized to satisfy human wants and that has exchange value.

From Dictionary.com, Based on the Random House Unabridged Dictionary

Radical libertarians claim that there are no public goods. But if there are no public goods, then all goods are private goods.

If a person owns the "ability to create the law", he owns the rights to a valuable service (having property rights defined in the way he wants them to be defined). This service certainly is worth something in an economic exchange. Therefore, "the ability to create the law" is an economic good, given the meaning of "economic good" specified above.

But if the radical libertarian believes that there are no public goods, then all goods should be considered private goods, including "the ability to create the law." But the ability to create the law, owned by an individual, turns an individual into a dictator, in the standard meaning of *that* term. Therefore radical libertarians, although talking loudly about freedom, in fact (logically) support dictatorship.

But the situation is worse than that. If an individual owns "the ability to make the law", he owns the ability to steal from others, if he chooses. But legal protection from theft, independent of this choice of someone else to steal, is what defines a private good. So if the radical libertarian does not believe in public goods, he does not believe in private goods, either. Finally, believing neither in the existence of public goods nor private goods; in other words believing in the existence of no goods at all, makes no sense at all.

Therefore, by a reduction ad absurdum argument, it is illogical not to believe in the existence of public goods.

So Elliot, do you believe in the existence of public goods, independent from private goods?

by a reader on Tue, 01/30/2007 - 03:03 | [reply](#)

pg

I didn't say there are no public goods, I said that Borders has a public good problem! They are very common. But also, as Borders illustrates, they can be solved without government.

Please don't be sarcastic. I think we misunderstand each other

enough when we are straight-forward.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 01/30/2007 - 04:41 | [reply](#)

Radical Libertarians and Public Good Problems

A reader wrote:

Radical libertarians claim that there are no public goods

Here is a chapter almost entirely devoted to the discussion of public goods and public good problems, in the textbook *Price Theory* by the anarcho-capitalist (and radically libertarian) economist David Friedman.

by **Editor** on Tue, 01/30/2007 - 12:53 | [reply](#)

But at Times...

I recently had a discussion with a certain individual whom you might know, who argued that one can never make a convincing argument that a particular economic situation represents a public good problem.

The implication of that argument was said to be that since one can never make a convincing argument that a particular situation represents a public good problem, one can not be convincing in arguing that the government should intervene to solve a public good problem.

I believe I demonstrated in other discussions that the argument is mistaken.

So there are people who have believed that one can not make a convincing argument that public good problems exist.

by a reader on Wed, 01/31/2007 - 00:23 | [reply](#)

Thanks

Yes! I think it would be good to read his chapter.

In a public meeting situation, the author describes the following:

"The long-winded speaker is underproducing the public good of brevity. Another, and equivalent, way of describing the situation is to say that he is overproducing his speech. The problem can be described either as underproduction due to the public-good problem or as overproduction due to the existence of an externality."

So someone who is a mugger is overproducing the externality called "stealing" and underproducing the public good called "public safety". Public goods and externalities are two-halves of the same

coin.

I have previously said that it is a mistake to believe that one cannot make a convincing argument for the existence of public good problems. But we can now say something stronger. If one knows that stealing is a problem, this proves the actual existence of public good problems.

by a reader on Wed, 01/31/2007 - 01:35 | [reply](#)

Who Determines?

"There is no justification for using force against people who disagree about what should be done with their property."

Elliot Temple

Who determines (or how is it determined) that something has been done to one's property?

by a reader on Wed, 01/31/2007 - 04:08 | [reply](#)

Convincing Arguments

A public good problem is a situation in which the right outcome will not happen voluntarily or by market forces. However, forceful government intervention can help everyone and make the right outcome occur. The way this happens is that the right outcome is for many people to pool their money to buy something that will help them all. A few people don't want the good, so they shouldn't pay. Unfortunately, people who do want the good do not have an incentive to tell the truth: if they say they are one of the few people who doesn't want it, they will save money. They get a free ride. But if everyone acts rationally, they all try to get a free ride, and the right outcome isn't paid for until the government steps in. Technically, not everyone is helped this time -- a few were telling the truth when they said they didn't want to buy the good at this price -- but, on average, they all benefit from the government's interventionist policy.

How do you identify a public good problem in real life? Well, you need to know what the right outcome is, and you need to know it won't happen by market forces: no one could possibly invent something that puts incentives in the right places. But how can you convincingly argue for those?

If something is the morally best outcome, it is best for everyone involved. If only they understood that, they would voluntarily want to do it, because it is better for them to do so than to do anything else. So, it seems to me that it's always the case that sufficient knowledge in the right place will make people do something voluntarily -- if it really is best.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 01/31/2007 - 04:23 | [reply](#)

Subjective vs. Objective

"There is no justification for using force against people who disagree about what should be done with their property"

So is it a person's "subjective" sense that something has been done to change his property and this precludes the use of force to create the change? Or is there an "objective" sense in which something has been done to his property, and this precludes the use of force to create change?

by a reader on Wed, 01/31/2007 - 13:00 | [reply](#)

Objective

There is a fact of the matter about whether someone has violated your property. It isn't subjective.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

[Dialogs](#)

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 01/31/2007 - 18:25 | [reply](#)

Stopping Others from Trading

"There is no justification for using force against people who disagree about what should be done with their property"

Elliot Temple

If an individual's property value will not go down (objectively) and no objective damage will be done to anyone else's property values, should an individual be able to legally stop (coerce) others from making a voluntary and mutually beneficial trade, on the grounds that he thinks the trade is immoral?

by a reader on Thu, 02/01/2007 - 00:15 | [reply](#)

no

no

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

[Dialogs](#)

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 02/01/2007 - 00:45 | [reply](#)

Even Government Immorality?

"There is no justification for using force against people who disagree about what should be done with their property"

Elliot Temple

Multiple (but not all) farmers, who experience flooding on their

land, make a deal with the government to collect taxes from *all farmers* after a dam is built. The dam increases the income of all farmers (due to increased crop yields from decreased flooding), more than the taxes subsequently collected to pay back the government.

Should a libertarian farmer be able to stop this deal, just because he has moral problems with the government collecting taxes from him? Has governmental force been applied against the libertarian because he disagrees with the government decision and has to pay taxes?

by a reader on Thu, 02/01/2007 - 03:40 | [reply](#)

Yes

In an ideal world, he should be able to stop it: no one has a right to sign him up for some deal if he doesn't want to be part of it. But they can continue on without his money.

For all you know, his kids were in a car accident yesterday, and he doesn't have insurance, and your government taxes mean he has to choose one to die.

There is a huge variety of milder circumstances. But the point is, taking people's wealth matters. And if they don't want to sign up for the deal which you think is in their interest, they will have a reason. And it could be a good one. And if it isn't, you could persuade them it isn't so there is no need to use force.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us

[Dialogs](#)

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 02/01/2007 - 07:32 | [reply](#)

Wealth Increased

"There is a huge variety of milder circumstances. But the point is, taking people's wealth matters."

But his wealth is not being taken. The increase in yields from his crops is greater than the tax subsequently collected to build the dam.

by a reader on Thu, 02/01/2007 - 12:11 | [reply](#)

Taken

You take his money now, and according to your predictions, if he continues with the same lifestyle, which you don't know if he will, then he will make more later. That could ruin someone's life.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us

[Dialogs](#)

Libertarian Objections

"You take his money now and according to your predictions..."

The tax can be collected, for example on the sale of his produce, if he produces it. So the tax can be collected only when we are as objectively sure (as possible) that the libertarian has made a net profit. Making a net profit would take into account his entire tax obligation as one of the farmers benefitting from the socialized dam.

If this arrangement occurs, but the libertarian objects to having to pay taxes, has he been coerced or forced to do so? Should it be legally OK to collect taxes in this way?

by a reader on Thu, 02/01/2007 - 18:33 | [reply](#)

Objections

I am trying to isolate the cause of the sense that the libertarian has been coerced.

If you do think it should be illegal to tax the libertarian farmer, is it because even if all the assumptions are true, so the libertarian's net profit increases, the libertarian is being forced to involuntarily *change his behavior* (e.g. write a check to the government) though he does not want to?

by a reader on Thu, 02/01/2007 - 18:43 | [reply](#)

Tax

You could be wrong about why his profits increased.

Your dam may increase his profits less than another dam which he would have preferred to pay for.

Your dam may have policies he doesn't like. If you were a private company, he wouldn't buy from you, b/c he'd rather give his business to another company with policies he prefers.

He may think the flood control isn't helpful. Even if he's wrong, you need to persuade him, not force him, b/c you could be wrong as well.

He may object to reporting his income to you, so that you know how much to tax him. Privacy...

He may think the dam is ugly, and not worth the profit, and doesn't want to pay to support it.

He may prefer not to do business with you. Being selective about who we do business with is important. What if the dam project doesn't work out? Perhaps because of resistance from people like

him, even. Well, then you might have a half-finished dam sitting around (plus angry bureaucrats). That could be worse than no dam.

The main point: if the dam is a good idea, persuade him. Then he will happily consent to pay for it out of his profits. As Godwin said (quoted on the front page of my website):

Let us consider the effect that coercion produces upon the mind of him against whom it is employed. It cannot begin with convincing; it is no argument. It begins with producing the sensation of pain, and the sentiment of distaste. It begins with violently alienating the mind from the truth with which we wish it to be impressed. It includes in it a tacit confession of imbecility. If he who employs coercion against me could mould me to his purposes by argument, no doubt he would. He pretends to punish me because his argument is strong; but he really punishes me because his argument is weak.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 02/01/2007 - 19:41 | [reply](#)

Mistake?

1. "In an ideal world, he should be able to stop it (the dam)"

Elliot Temple

2. If an individual's property value will not go down (objectively) and no objective damage will be done to anyone else's property values, should an individual be able to legally stop (coerce) others from making a voluntary and mutually beneficial trade, on the grounds that he thinks the trade is immoral?

a reader

"No"

Elliot Temple

Argument number 1 applies to the dam. So you are saying that the dam should be able to be legally stopped by the libertarian in an ideal world.

Argument number 2 also applies to the dam. So you are saying that the dam should not be able to be stopped by the libertarian in an ideal world.

Which of your statements is mistaken?

by a reader on Thu, 02/01/2007 - 22:22 | [reply](#)

re: mistake

arg 2 does not apply for reasons including:

- the trade involves him, not just "others"
- he isn't objecting on purely moral grounds

- it isn't voluntary if he objects

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 02/01/2007 - 22:55 | [reply](#)

Does Apply

A few farmers are trading with the government. Nobodies property values go down, though all are being taxed. The tax has increased the libertarian's wealth. Are you saying the libertarian has been coerced because he has been given money?

Perhaps you are saying that the libertarian has been coerced because he has to change his behavior?

What is it that is "objectively" coercive about the new arrangements?

Number 2 precisely applies.

by a reader on Thu, 02/01/2007 - 23:07 | [reply](#)

doesn't

umm i edited my post above FYI (before seeing that you replied)

can you reply to my reasons i've now spelled out that arg 2, as written, does not apply?

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 02/01/2007 - 23:13 | [reply](#)

Libertarianism and its Twin, Socialism

"The trade involves 'him,'" (The libertarian, therefore, is involved in the trade but his objections are not taken into account.)
Elliot Temple

If a government sells a road to a businessman and everyone's property values go up and everyone's time to work decreases, should a socialist be able to legally object to the trade on the grounds that the roads should be owned by the government? Can the socialist object to the trade on the grounds that he used to have to pay the government, but now has to pay a private individual (the road owner)? So the socialist feels "coerced" because there are now a few private roads. As usual, the libertarian and the socialist are on the same page. Both want to socialize morality at the expense of property.

"he (the libertarian) isn't objecting on purely moral grounds"

Elliot Temple

What other grounds is he objecting on?

"it isn't voluntary if he objects"

Elliot Temple

If a Best Buy buys a small local grocery store near me, and my property values go up, should I be able to legally object on the grounds that I am opposed to business? Should I be able to stop the trade, on the grounds that the "people" have not agreed to this? The libertarian and the socialist, once again, share this concern that everyone has to be on the same page before anything is done. So they are willing to steal property by preventing exchange in real time, in the name of socializing morality.

by a reader on Thu, 02/01/2007 - 23:57 | [reply](#)

the socialist has no grounds

the socialist has no grounds for complaint -- he doesn't have to trade with the road owner if he doesn't want to. *except* that the government has various duties to its people, and shouldn't irresponsibly mess up reasonable access to the roads it built. if he makes that objection, he can complain to the government, not to the new owner.

"What other grounds is he objecting on?"

I gave a list of reasons people might object in a previous post. If no one objects, then go ahead.

regarding voluntary: part of the deal is the government takes my money to pay for it. your grocery store example lacks that aspect.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 02/02/2007 - 00:43 | [reply](#)

Socialists and Libertarians

"the socialist has no grounds for complaint -- he doesn't have to trade with the road owner if he doesn't want to."

If the businessman-road-owner owns the only road out of a cul-de-sac, then it becomes very difficult for a homeowner not to exchange with him. Now, a homeowner could take a helicopter out, or he could develop a new road.

But the same is true of the libertarian farmer. He does not have to plant crops, and he therefore does not have to pay the government (for the dam) from taxation of his crops. So like the homeowner who uses a helicopter to leave his house, the libertarian can decide

to not pay for the dam by not planting crops (not using the benefit

from the dam).

Creating new solutions to flooding may take some time, but it will take the homeowner time to build alternative roads, in the cul-de-sac. I'm afraid there is exact symmetry between the socialist and the libertarian. Both are trying to prevent trade that objectively increases the wealth of everyone, including themselves. Note that there is even a physical symmetry between a river that runs between farms, and a road that runs between homes in a cul-de-sac.

"You could be wrong about why his profits increased."

If the government sells the road to a businessman and everyone's property values increase, and if the best economic theory suggests that the cause was placing the road in the hands of private individuals who value efficiency; the socialist could nonetheless claim that the analysis is mistaken. Perhaps the increased housing values occurred for other reasons.

Imagine the consequences if the socialist and the libertarian should have the legal right to stop any trade because there is uncertainty about the outcome, even though the best economic theory says that a private road and a public dam increase the wealth of everyone.

There is always going to be some uncertainty in trading. So stopping trade because of uncertainty amounts to stopping all trade. And this amounts to a defense of the status quo, because there are inevitably uncertainties. Once again, the libertarian and the socialist are restricting free exchange between people, this time because of fears and pessimism.

"regarding voluntary: part of the deal is the government takes my money to pay for it."

Actually if everyone's wealth increases, the private/government actions are in net creating wealth, not taking it.

"Your dam may have policies he (the libertarian) doesn't like. If you were a private company, he wouldn't buy from you, b/c he'd rather give his business to another company with policies he prefers."

The policies of the private owner of the cul-de-sac road may not agree with everyone, either. Some may disagree about the placement of the lights, for example.

The socialist homeowner and the libertarian farmer may need to help create alternatives that increase the value of their own properties, without decreasing the value of their neighbor's property. But "command and control" libertarians restrict the wealth of everyone, by stopping an efficient public dam from being built. And "command and control" socialists do likewise, if they prevent efficient, privately owned roads that benefit everyone.

"He (the libertarian) may prefer not to do business with you."

The socialist homeowner may not prefer to do business with the

private owner of the cul-de-sac road, either. As you can tell, socialist homeowners and libertarian farmers have a lot of objections in common.

"He may think the flood control isn't helpful. Even if he's wrong, you need to persuade him, not force him, b/c you could be wrong as well."

The socialist homeowner may not think that the private road is more efficient, either. But even if our best economic theories say the socialist is wrong, are you really claiming that the cul-de-sac road should not be privately owned, even if everyone becomes wealthier as a consequence?

Does it really make sense for a libertarian farmer to think that if he judges any trade anywhere in the United States to adversely affect his property values, he has a right to stop it, until he is convinced that it doesn't? Does he have a right to stop every single trade, even if our best economic theories suggest that the trading of others helps, not hurts him?

Well, now I think the libertarian farmer is worse than the socialist homeowner. For if the libertarian can stop every trade in the United States, until he says that it does not hurt him, that libertarian is no socialist; he's a plain dictator!

"He may object to reporting his income to you, so that you know how much to tax him. Privacy..."

If the tax is based on the total cost of the dam to the private individual, collected after he sells his produce, the amount that he pays in tax is fixed. Income information is not shared.

"He (the libertarian farmer) may think the dam is ugly, and not worth the profit, and doesn't want to pay to support it."

If a libertarian can stop any trade because he thinks the results are ugly, then he can stop all trades in the United States (when he says they create something ugly). Do you see, as you listen to these arguments, how libertarian conceptions of people's rights amount to a defense of dictatorship? One libertarian is demanding the right to restrict every other person's trade, on the grounds that he thinks the results are ugly.

"The main point: if the dam is a good idea, persuade him."

Should the privatization of roads not be allowed, unless every socialist has been persuaded? Indeed, should no trade take place in the United States, unless there is unanimous rule? Should therefore no trade take place, at all, because every single person in the United States does not 100% agree about what is right?

But property is created *because of exchange*. So should we have no property, at all, because of a totalitarianism that insists that everyone first agree? In other words, is the libertarian arguing that we should have no property at all, unless we can first create totalitarian unanimity of mind? But this implies that everyone must own a little bit of all property, if everyone must be persuaded for

any piece of property to be exchanged. But this sounds exactly like the mantra of the socialist, indeed is the mantra of the socialist. The libertarian is implicitly arguing, in his insistence on universal consent, that everyone owns a little bit of every piece of property. In other words, the libertarian is insisting that all property is socialized. And like the socialist, the libertarian claims this creates freedom.

by a reader on Fri, 02/02/2007 - 05:00 | [reply](#)

Who Must Consent?

It isn't universal consent that is required for a trade, it is consent among all participants of a trade. Your dam+taxes trade involves everyone in the valley. So it's very hard to organize. You have to convince everyone that you want to pay you.

You say it doesn't count as paying you because they become richer. But what if something goes wrong? Say a blight takes all their crops. Then what?

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us
Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 02/02/2007 - 20:10 | [reply](#)

You Have to Pay for Services

Actually, it involves only those people who use the services of the dam. So yes, those who use the dam have to pay for it. If the farmer does not plant crops, so gains no benefit, or can objectively demonstrate that he has his own method of flood control, then the farmer wouldn't pay (be taxed).

If the socialist homeowner does not use the (only) road exiting the cul-de-sac, then he wouldn't pay the private road owner, either.

"Your dam+taxes trade involves everyone in the valley."
Elliot Temple

It involves everyone in the valley only as much as private ownership of a cul-de-sac road involves everyone living in the cul-de-sac.

So why is the libertarian farmer a "participant" in the trade but the socialist homeowner is not?

by a reader on Fri, 02/02/2007 - 22:26 | [reply](#)

not the same

with the valley, people come to my door, ask for money, and put me in jail if i refuse. just for growing crops on my land. with the cul-

de-sac, that does not happen -- they only ask for money if i use

their land w/out an easement. why do you think they are the same?

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 02/02/2007 - 22:54 | [reply](#)

Identical Situation

If there is an easement or not in the cul-de-sac is irrelevant. If people put a toll booth on the road and if I use the private road and don't pay, I get thrown in jail for stealing.

Similarly, if I use the dam and I don't pay (taxes), I also get thrown in jail.

The situations are identical.

by a reader on Fri, 02/02/2007 - 23:43 | [reply](#)

using

You are counting me as "using" the dam even if i carry on with my life as normal from before it existed. Even if I didn't know it exists, you'd count me as using it. Even if I don't want it, and I think it is making me poorer, you'll send me a bill for it. Right?

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 02/03/2007 - 01:07 | [reply](#)

Substitute "Dam" for "Road" and "Libertarian" for "Socialist"

The libertarian: "You are counting me as "using" the dam even if i carry on with my life as normal from before it existed. Even if I didn't know it exists, you'd count me as using it. Even if I don't want it, and I think it is making me poorer, you'll send me a bill for it. Right?"

The socialist: "You are counting me as "using" the road even if i carry on with my life as normal (using the road) from before the road was privatized. Even if I don't know the road is private, you'd count me as using it. Even if I don't want the private road, and I think it is making me poorer, you'll charge me for it (when I get to the toll booth). Right?"

I do think that people should be informed that the road is private and there will be charges. I think the same is true for the dam.

Elliot, your argument is essentially declaring a "right" to the status quo. But nobody has such a right. Otherwise one person can stop all other people from trading based on his subjective sensibilities. And

that is immoral.

by a reader on Sat, 02/03/2007 - 03:41 | [reply](#)

it should be the same lifesty

it should be the same lifestyle from before the road existed to make the claim it doesn't use the road.

in the dam case, i stick to my property. in the road case, i leave it.

what is your claim that i'm using your dam? that *you* affect water flow onto my property. you are spilling water (or dryness) onto my land. that i didn't want, and that i think is hurting me. then you have the nerve to charge me for it. if anything, you owe me.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 02/04/2007 - 20:13 | [reply](#)

Socialists are People Too

Libertarian "It should be the same lifestyle from before the road existed?"

Socialist "Well, it's not! I bought my house and positioned the driveway precisely so I can have a very direct route to work. As you correctly point out, my property came with an easement (the road itself which I shared with my neighbors.) The law protected my use of my driveway and the easement. I bought a package of rights when I bought my home, and you are taking them away from me and making me pay for the same thing I used to do for free! Disrupting my route to work, and the way I wanted to use of my driveway, which I just repaved, disrupts my lifestyle. What's more, you have the nerve to ask me to pay for these changes that I don't want. Now *I*, a freedom loving socialist, have to pay a businessman to drive the same route I did before? You should pay me for taking away my right to use the driveway as it functioned before and the easement as it functioned before!

And libertarian farmer, I have no sympathy for you. You are using your property in virutally exactly the same way as you did before. You are farming the same land, just having an easier time of it, according to objective economic analysis. So your lifestyle is the same, except you get more money for doing what you already are doing. On the other hand, you have not had to change your route out of your housing complex to avoid paying capitalists. How can you say your "lifestyle" has changed, certainly not to the degree that mine has. So the government has given you money, despite virtually identical behavior on your part, yet you complain and desire to deprive everyone else of money. Typical capitalist thief!

by a reader on Mon, 02/05/2007 - 15:04 | [reply](#)

P.S.

Socialist to Libertarian

To maintain my lifestyle (where I don't have to stop at toll booths just to drive), I have to pave my backyard and put a hole in the back of my garage to drive my car through, to avoid the businessman's toll booths. Yes, if I do all that I can find a ridiculous dirt road behind my house which is called the new 'easement' leading out of my complex, and avoid toll-booths. Anyone can see that having to do so much just to maintain the lifestyle I had, I am worse off. In other words, *my lifestyle has been disrupted*, if I don't want to use the capitalist toll booths. Yet you, libertarian farmer, claim your "lifestyle" has been disrupted, yet you do virtually the same behaviors as before, just make more money doing them. That makes no sense. On what grounds do you say *your lifestyle* has been disrupted?

by a reader on Mon, 02/05/2007 - 15:41 | [reply](#)

My kids preferred to swim in

My kids preferred to swim in the old level of flooding. To me, that's worth a million dollars. Stop changing my life and telling me I should prefer it. Caring about swimming conditions is reasonable. You are assuming you are right about what I should want, without addressing why I want it.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 02/05/2007 - 19:53 | [reply](#)

Political Economy

"My kids preferred to swim in the old level of flooding. To me, that's worth a million dollars. Stop changing my life and telling me I should prefer it. Caring about swimming conditions is reasonable. You are assuming you are right about what I should want, without addressing why I want it."

No I am not assuming that you are wrong for what you want. I am assuming you have to pay for what you want.

Of course the socialist can also say, "My kids preferred to use our driveway as it had been, and use our easement without having to stop at a toll booth. That is worth 1,000,000 dollars to me. The government should not sell the road to a private businessman without my consent. Stop changing my life and telling me I should prefer it. Caring about how I travel to work, the sites I see, the way I go to work: All of these concerns are reasonable. You are assuming you are right about what I should want, without addressing why I want it."

Now, with a million dollars, you might be able to change many

people's minds, but without compensating them, you usually should not be allowed to use your moral claims (your children "like swimming"), to damage the property and productivity of others. This is precisely why we have the police and government in the United States, to protect people from libertarians (and socialists) trying to impose their moral standards on everyone else.

You may not want me to paint my house a particular color because the photons entering your family's eyes, as you stand on your property, bother your children or you an awful lot. But we have the police to protect us from individuals who want to impose their moral values on the rest of us, while taking our property. If your property values do not fall when I paint my house, in general, you do not have a right to complain about the color of my house. And if you want me to change the color of my house, you have to pay me.

Now, should objective economic efficiency trump all questions of morality. Obviously not! The real question is how should it be decided which issues are questions of morality, in which it is sometimes OK to involuntarily take property from others, and which are not.

Mantra's about "coercion" and "force" being "bad" usually don't solve many real-world problems. The reason is that one person's "stealing" of property is another person's "justified ownership" of the same property. Both sides will perceive that their property has been forcefully taken, no matter what the outcome, as the examples of the "socialist" and the "libertarian" demonstrate, discussed above. By assumption, property values and income of both increased but the socialist and the libertarian wanted their moral claims to trump the economic ones (the efficiency claims).

So the real question is not about "force" and "coercion", because one person's "justified force" is another person's "stealing". We can all agree that no one likes bad things to happen. But rather, the real issue is how should free people decide which goods should be subjected to efficiency analysis, and which should be subjected to ethical analysis. The two sometimes go together, but as the examples above show, not always.

Such discussions are the beginning of a discussion of political-economy.

by a reader on Tue, 02/06/2007 - 00:06 | [reply](#)

Re: Political Economy

one person's "justified force" is another person's "stealing"

Is this true too? One person's freedom fighter, is another person's terrorist.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us
Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 02/06/2007 - 00:25 | [reply](#)

"what is your claim that i'm

"what is your claim that i'm using your dam? that *you* affect water flow onto my property. you are spilling water (or dryness) onto my land."

The condition of the road is spilling over onto everyone's house in the cul-de-sac. How do we know this? Because economic analysis shows that property values will increase when the "spill-over" effect from the ugly road is changed. Predictably, when the road is repaired by the private entrepreneur, everyone's property values increase. And certainly, the private entrepreneur is changing the way the road affects the visual perception of those standing on their own property.

Now, a socialist may say that his children and he appreciated the "old rustic road" (the spill-over effect that damages property values), but they do not have a right to take people's property for that "want" (their sense of aesthetics), unless they pay for it.

"one person's 'justified force' is another person's stealing"
a reader

"Is this true too? One person's freedom fighter, is another person's terrorist."
Elliot Temple

People do disagree about who is a freedom fighter and who is a terrorist. But I think there is an ethical answer in each case, although we might not know what is correct at this point in time. As I said, "the real issue is how should free people decide which goods should be subjected to efficiency analysis, and which should be subjected to ethical analysis."

Most of the time one person's ethical principles should not allow him to stop other people's trades. However, this is not true all the time! Many people who call themselves "freedom-fighters" should be stopped, even if in some way they improve the local economy (think Hezbollah!) I think it is OK to take the property of those who support Hezbollah.

by a reader on Tue, 02/06/2007 - 13:57 | [reply](#)

efficiency vs ethics

the real issue is how should free people decide which goods should be subjected to efficiency analysis, and which should be subjected to ethical analysis.

I take it that by "efficiency analysis" you mean considering whether it meets people's preferences as much as the alternatives. And by ethical analysis, you mean to consider not just what people do prefer today, but also what they ought to prefer. I put it to you that an ethical analysis is always the best one.

An ethical analysis is the general case of analysing what choices

people ought to make. It must, therefore, take into account everything relevant, including efficiency, but also including anything else. It will be capable of judging how important efficiency is in each situation, and each other factor as well. By contrast, an efficiency analysis is not universal, and isn't self-aware: it can't tell if it was the right type of analysis to use. So it is bound to sometimes mislead us, if we sometimes start with it.

Something that dominates many ethical analyses is property rights. This is partly because they exist in our society, so you'll do as well ignoring them as ignoring road signs. But it's also because they help humans to cooperate. Property rights tell us how to resolve many disputes about the use of goods, and as an evolved tradition in our society, they are sufficiently clear that they can be resolved in court. Our courts would have no trouble at all deciding who violated whose rights in the case of the unwanted-dam-and-charges, or the case of the terrorist "freedom fighter", if the parties involved were all just citizens.

There is one thing that is considered to change the analysis: when government takes an action, like charging people for a dam they didn't want, that is deemed legitimate, even though if a private citizen did the same thing it would be clearly illegal. It remains illegal even if the perpetrator proves in court that his action was economically beneficial. The government is a special case: it is thought right to use force "for our own good", (as are parents with their children), but private citizens aren't.

What's the purported justification for these exceptions, and is it reasonable?

Is this way of considering the issue agreeable to you so far?

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 02/07/2007 - 01:00 | [reply](#)

Such Efficiency is Inefficient

"I take it that by "efficiency analysis" you mean considering whether it meets people's preferences as much as the alternatives."

No. But wouldn't it be nice if we could do that! The problem is the information cost (the transaction cost) of accurately figuring out everyone's wants and then trading goods (given those wants) is far too high.

So everyone's incentive is to NOT want everyone else's preferences to be optimally met, because if these preferences are discovered, the cost of this process will cause each person to receive less overall from trade. So no one will vote for a system that only allows a trade if everyone in the entire society feels happier about it. Virtually everyone is willing to sacrifice having his own preferences

optimally met, as long as everyone else does the same, because overall that makes everyone wealthier. Not having everyone's preferences considered in any transaction, therefore, is a public good.

Instead, when many speak of efficiency, they refer to the idea that objectively determined property values of everyone's goods should not be decreased by others' transactions.

Obviously, this is not a perfect rule, either, but it does have the advantage of protecting objective property values.

I agree with you that asserting that efficiency analysis is often "good", is a moral claim.

by a reader on Wed, 02/07/2007 - 22:53 | [reply](#)

Unanimous Rule Takes Freedom

"What's the purported justification for these exceptions, and is it reasonable?"

Virtually every transaction that is made involves people doing things that at least some people do not want. So when things happen which people do not want, it is the norm, not the exception!

What is the ethical justification for

1. ruining the subjective quality of a socialist's property easement, though his wealth increases when an entrepreneur buys and repairs a dangerous road.
2. allowing people to smoke cigarettes in their own homes, though others would prefer they did not,
3. repainting one's house to a color that helps property values but annoys one neighbor,
4. having a dam that increases everyone's property values and wealth by preventing flooding, though one libertarian objects...

What is the justification for not demanding unanimous rule about every decision? People understand that demanding unanimous rule takes so much property from everyone (to discover what everyone actually wants), that everyone's choices become impoverished because of the cost of this process. People understand that the ability to choose is valuable and that money can sometimes provide people with choices. People therefore reject socialism and libertarianism because of the ethical principle that it is important to value freedom.

So why do we allow the government to build dams to prevent flooding? Why do we allow a private entrepreneur to own a road to make it safer, citizens to smoke cigarettes in their own homes, and neighbors to paint their houses utilizing their own imagination?

Because these decisions increase our freedom. And freedom is an

important ethical value.

It is only an immature person who demands everything that he wants and expects everyone else to accommodate. Adults understand that one can't have everything that one wants. But if we are willing to compromise with each other, often we all can have much more than what any one of us can create alone. And that's an important ethical value, as well.

by a reader on Thu, 02/08/2007 - 20:48 | [reply](#)

Adults

It is only an immature person who demands everything that he wants and expects everyone else to accommodate. Adults understand that one can't have everything that one wants.

Where do adults (presumably as contrasted with children (non-adults)) come into it?

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 02/09/2007 - 22:36 | [reply](#)

Enforcement of Rules is Sometimes Good

"The government is a special case: it is thought right to use force "for our own good", (as are parents with their children), but private citizens aren't."

When a private entrepreneur buys a cul-de-sac, according to a socialist, force was utilized.

Indeed, when virtually any trade is made, someone's behavior is involuntarily altered. It is not a sign of immaturity to desire government intervention in certain circumstances.

Rather, immature political philosophies do not recognize the freedom-promoting potential of enforceable rules.

by a reader on Mon, 02/12/2007 - 15:30 | [reply](#)

Re: Enforcement of Rules is Sometimes Good

Freedom is Slavery

Voluntary Trade is Coercion

War is Peace

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 02/12/2007 - 23:01 | [reply](#)

Contradictory Claims

Being unable to defend a position is not the same as being able to defend it.

by a reader on Fri, 02/16/2007 - 22:33 | [reply](#)

Huh?

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 02/17/2007 - 02:24 | [reply](#)

Shoot the Junk Down

The **most pointless engineering project in history** has just been approved by – **guess whom?**

European governments have given the final go-ahead for the launch of the Galileo satellite navigation network, Europe's answer to the U.S.-controlled Global Positioning System.

Europe's answer? What was the question?

The long-delayed \$3.6 billion (3.2 billion euro) system, Europe's biggest ever infrastructure project, will be based on 30 satellites and should be operational by 2008.

Yes, but **what is it for?**

“Only the realisation of this civil system will allow the beginning of the development of the use of satellite navigation in conditions which are suitable for Europeans,” French Transport Minister Jean-Claude Gayssot said in a statement.

“Conditions which are suitable for Europeans”? What is that supposed to mean? Does this man compose his speeches using a Eurospeak random-platitude generator or is he criminally insane?

“It will allow the European Union to liberate itself from dependence on the American GPS system,” he added.

Ah, the one kind of “liberation” that the Euro-folk understand. Now we're getting to the point of all this:

Galileo will lead Europe into conflict with the US, which has security concerns about the building of a navigational network to rival its own system.

GPS, like the Russian Glonass system, is a military-run network and can be downgraded or taken offline if an enemy attempts to use the data to launch guided missiles, for example.

By contrast, Galileo will be a civilian-run operation that

will be guaranteed in all but the direst circumstances so services that are safety-critical – landing planes, for example – can rely on the data.

So – just to be clear about this: the entire purpose of this multi-billion-Euro technological miracle is that one day it will be left switched on at a time when the US has switched off the GPS. Which the US will only ever do when it believes an enemy is “using the data to launch guided missiles, for example”.

The US has absolutely no choice but to announce that if the European system is ever left switched on at a time when the GPS has been switched off for security reasons, the Galileo satellites will be shot down.

Mr Bush, Mr Rumsfeld, members of the United States Congress, please make that announcement now. Some of us here in **Europe** find it galling enough to be forced to pay for this monstrous monument to anti-Americanism, but we do not want blood on our hands as well. Please promise us that if it ever comes to it, you will not hesitate: *shoot the junk down*.

Wed, 05/28/2003 - 14:02 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Not on topic but...

What is going to happen about the United States of Europe superstate? Is it going to happen? Will the British people accept it?

by [Sylvia Crombie](#) on Wed, 05/28/2003 - 15:20 | [reply](#)

What will happen?

I was wondering that myself. These are the ideas I've come across:

1. It's already too late, the UK **is now** a fully paid-up member of the evil Communist superstate,
2. It hardly matters, the UK is already on a decline so dire that nothing can save it,
3. We join Europe, change our minds, announce unilateral departure, and Europe starts bombing us.

Some more ideas of my own are:

4. Europe (at any stage of the proceedings) tries to impose some ruling on us that we *really really* don't want, whereupon we get out, war or no war (what's a war these days? A couple of threats from America? Bear in mind Europe would actually have to try to *invade the UK*. Not many people have ever successfully managed that before. And the US would be on our side.)
5. Europe (ditto), whereupon we manage to change that law to suit us, and this keeps happening until such time as we get out, or getting out becomes insignificant because they don't control us anyway.

As far as I can see, our freedoms have not so far been horribly

attacked by Europe. Either they tried to attack and failed, or we basically didn't get up enough energy to care about what measures we buy our food in. Dictating the shape of bananas is as trivial as it is absurd.

"Ah, but surrendering small freedoms is the slippery slope to surrendering big freedoms!" Not necessarily: it depends at what point you decide to tell the people pissing you off to get lost.

"Ah, but surrendering small freedoms anaesthetises us against surrendering big freedoms!" Gosh, people, aren't they dumb? Except for we who are clever, of course, and immune to anaesthetics!

My suggestion: instead of just arguing against Europeanness per se, we need to start arguing against the ideas which we fear being imposed on us. What laws are actually going to get passed, which will compromise our identity?

My suspicion is that the British government is only handing such power as it doesn't care about handing over anyway. Being left-wing, they happen to enjoy stupid banana-regulations. Countries join Europe because they think it will further their own aims. But nobody can make you stay in a gang you don't want to be in anyway, except by threats and force. What we need to know is: what will happen to countries who try to leave, and how will it be enforced?

by [Alice](#) on Fri, 05/30/2003 - 12:42 | [reply](#)

Diversify power!

While I agree that the EU should not be spending this money, in one sense I think it is a good thing. We need to DIVERSIFY power, and the worst thing is for the US State to have all the power. This system should not be in the hands of one tyrannical State (the US) it should be in many hands.

If you are serious about shooting it down, that brings us to something like a *1984* state of affairs.

by a reader on Wed, 06/04/2003 - 12:14 | [reply](#)

Non-Libertarian Argument

Are you saying that it would be wrong for private companies to have a GPS system, or merely that if they did, and the US State perceived a threat, the US State should shoot down their GPS system? It is not clear to me that this would be a good thing. You are naive in trusting the US State this much if you ask me.

by a reader on Wed, 06/04/2003 - 12:20 | [reply](#)

This is totally true! I cannot...

This is totally true! I cannot convey how strongly I agree.

After 8,000 years of human history, we have finally found the magic formula that transforms the lead of violence into the gold of happiness: a state which is all powerful, all legitimate, all glorified, but inoffensive as it consolidates ALL INDIVIDUALS' DEMANDS AND ACTS ON THEM. After all, isn't it the essence of the Anglo-American political tradition to have a state that puts into effect the conclusions of the "social conversation" (if you will allow me for a moment to use French intellectual Newspeak to express a truth)? This sort of state is, to use a Hegelian formula, the incarnation of Right.

Long live the (especially American, Israeli, and Labour-English) state! Be seeing you.

Pierre Lemieux
<http://www.pierrelemieux.org>

by **Pierre Lemieux** on Wed, 06/04/2003 - 14:58 | [reply](#)

How do you shoot down a satellite?

Anyone know if this is even feasible?

by a reader on Fri, 06/06/2003 - 05:42 | [reply](#)

The capability to destroy sat...

The capability to destroy satellites (in low Earth orbit at least) has existed since the 80's. The U.S. has a missile launched from an F15 at high altitude that can destroy a satellite.

The problem of shooting down a satellite is simpler than getting a satellite into orbit. A warhead need only be lofted to the same altitude as satellite to destroy it. The warhead doesn't need to go into orbit. Much less energy is required.

by a reader on Sun, 06/15/2003 - 19:28 | [reply](#)

How to defeat Galileo

No one has yet (publically) fielded an antisatellite weapon capable of shooting down a GPS or Galileo satellite.

Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellites, those in orbits of about 1000km altitude or less, are relatively easy to shoot down. There was an F-15 anti-satellite missile, I believe successfully tested several times. The Soviets had a system where they used a guided bomb placed in the same orbit as the target satellite. They could tail any LEO satellite they wanted and destroy it at their leisure. This was also tested several times.

LEO satellites are important targets because almost all the surveillance satellites, both imaging and radar, are kept as close to the ground as they can, to maximize resolution.

Navigation satellites, on the other hand, are a much different

problem. Both GPS and Galileo are in (will be in) Medium Earth Orbit (MEO) at about 20000km altitude. It would require a launch vehicle of almost identical capability to the one which originally launched the target to intercept it. This would mean that shooting down a satellite that high is almost as expensive as launching it in the first place.

Probably if we wanted to shut down Galileo, the best way to do it is by spoofing. Spoofing is a process by which an adversary is able to mimic the signal from a real satellite, but with incorrect information, so that receivers on the ground either cannot compute a position at all, which is bad, or compute a wrong position, which is worse.

The whole point of the encoding on the present military system is to prevent spoofing. The GPS transmits two signals simultaneously, one unencrypted and one encrypted, for military use only. The military code is secret. Any satellite broadcasting a military signal without that military code will be completely ignored by the receiver. In fact, the receiver will not even detect that it is there. Since the code is secret, only the military can create that signal, so if your receiver is able to detect it, it must be authentic. The civilian signal on the other hand, since it is published, can be replicated by anybody and therefore easily spoofed.

The Galileo system has a civilian unencrypted signal, a commercial encrypted signal you can buy access to, and a government encrypted signal you cannot. The civilian signal can be easily spoofed, and the commercial signal also if our military buys the keys.

The american GPS satellites are perfectly placed to act as spoofers, and have all the necessary hardware already onboard, to do their main jobs. It would surprise me a great deal if they could not be programmed to spoof either the russian or the new Galileo system, but of course that capability would properly be kept secret

So if the bad guys equip their weapons with civilian or commercial Galileo receivers, those are pretty easy to jam. If they use government receivers, then one of the governments involved is a conspirator and is committing an act of war against whomever the bad guys are targeting. Galileo does not represent a real threat.

On the other hand, a little competition is a good thing. It may be that the american military will be forced to compete against Galileo by providing a better civilian service, thereby causing everyone to buy american GPS receivers which can be disabled in an emergency. This has already begun by the removal of selective availability, an intentional degradation of the civilian signals, and is continuing in the form of new more accurate civilian signals on the next generation american GPS.

As a patriot, I want my military to have as much control over navigation capability as they think they need. As a civilian GPS user, I want as much accuracy as possible. By providing competition, Galileo forces the american military to improve the second to maintain the first.

LETS SHOOT DOWN THE GPS SATELITES!

this is a great idea

Europe just needs to be able to shoot the U.S. satellites down in order to ensure they never shoot the Galileo satellites down

Balance needs to be struck somewhere - WHY SHOULD THE US HAVE CONTROL OF EVERYTHING?

In answer to the British question (whose side are we on?) i say the British need to cast aside both these powers and become as independant and selfsufficient as possible. Even if the cost is high (to the economy) We could rest assured neither powers would invade because this would put them at odds with one-another.

by a reader on Tue, 10/26/2004 - 16:54 | [reply](#)

Balance needs to be struck somewhere...

No, it doesn't. The opposite is the case. Because if even one system capable of being used to destroy the United States is left under the inalienable control of the criminally insane, it is just as much of a disaster for the world as if they all were.

by [Editor](#) on Tue, 10/26/2004 - 17:19 | [reply](#)

Do We Have a Winner?

Now that it has been **confirmed** that the mobile labs discovered in Iraq were built for the purpose of manufacturing biological weapons – and for evading inspections at that – are we going to declare **WMD** the winner of our **What Will Be Found First?** poll?

No, because our criterion was that:

Nuclear, biological or chemical weapons, or incontrovertible evidence that they were recently destroyed or smuggled out

should be *found*. The mobile bio-weapons labs are merely evidence that Saddam had a WMD program which (in case anyone has forgotten) we already had quite sufficient evidence of before the war began.

Likewise we are not going to accept news of **Baghdad Bob's failed attempt to surrender** as a substitute for his being “captured alive, found dead, or appearing in public in a new job”. Again, it's not the same. We already knew he *existed*.

So, no winner yet.

Thu, 05/29/2003 - 12:26 | [permalink](#)

Is The World alone in its opt...

Is **The World** alone in its optimism that WMD will be found?

by a reader on Mon, 06/16/2003 - 09:13 | [reply](#)

The World Not Alone

No.

Look at this.

And this.

This too.

And here.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 06/16/2003 - 10:00 | [reply](#)

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Ignorance is a Battlefield

In a comment on an op-ed on the Command Post, Simon Barnett **writes:**

Mohammed Al Faisal, recently convicted in the UK for preaching the use of chemical weapons against... well everyone that didn't agree with him in fact – in his poisonous sermons. He gave a brief interview on the BBC during his trial in which he explained how he had gone to university, was an educated man, (the establishment in question was in fact the University of Riddayh) and how he KNEW from his studies there that the Jewish Holocaust was a fabrication used to bring about a state of Israel.

I was eating whilst I was watching the interview and nearly choked to death. At the end of the interview I waited patiently for either the reporter or anchor to point out that the Jewish homeland was created after the fall of the Ottoman empire in WWI and the Holocaust was in WWII. It never came. Either they didn't know or didn't care. I stopped watching the BBC and switched to CNN – permanently.

Ignorance, even in the 'educated', is as much a battlefield in the [War on Terrorism] as Afghanistan or Iraq.

Quite right. Everyone should read our series, **A Short History of Israel** and, as **our readers** would say, tell everyone they know to read it too.

Fri, 05/30/2003 - 14:45 | [permalink](#)

Actually, he was correct, tec...

Actually, he was correct, technically speaking. European Jews began settling in Palestine even before WWI, as a matter of fact still in the 19th century. The Zionist movement did pick up steam following the defeat of the Ottoman empire, and the take over of the ME by the Eropean, especially GB. The Balfur declaration came about in 1917, and it was the basis for the future Jewish state. But the official and formal recognition of the state of Israel came only in 1948, and the

Holocaust played a huge role in making it happen.

Alisa.

by **Alisa** on Thu, 06/05/2003 - 03:17 | [reply](#)

What his position is

His position is:

he KNEW from his studies there that the Jewish Holocaust was a fabrication used to bring about a state of Israel.

Which is, of course, *not* correct, technically or otherwise.

~Woty

<http://woty.blogspot.com>

by **Woty** on Thu, 06/05/2003 - 13:44 | [reply](#)

Neither Death Nor Taxes

'Nothing is certain but death and taxes', said Benjamin Franklin, but we think that he was too pessimistic. We deny that taxes are inevitable or desirable, and we see no reason to take a different attitude towards death. Though it is not yet known how to do away with either, doing away with them *is* just a matter of knowing how.

Death from old age is not a fundamental part of what makes us human any more than defecation is. They are both merely unfortunate and entirely contingent accidents of nature. What makes us human is the ability to think, to create new ideas about the world. Death gets in the way of thinking. It is alien to everything truly human and we should try to get rid of it.

The explanation for why we die is quite simple: the human body is a collection of design kludges brought about by millions of years of random trial and the elimination of error. The human body evolved, not to live for as long as possible but to pass on genes. Our lifespan is merely the accidental consequence of adaptations selected for that purpose.

But we have different, better purposes in mind. So what can we do about this? We could contemplate designing a human body Version 2.0 that would last longer, but this would be extremely difficult and is definitely not something we could even begin to embark on today. We can work on replacing organs when they fail, but that will only take us so far. A better, more general approach is that advocated by Aubrey de Grey, a geneticist at Cambridge University. The idea is to intervene using biotechnology to remove damage to our bodies as it accumulates, before it poses a serious problem. It is called **Engineering Negligible Senescence** (ENS). The **recent discovery** of the chemical that allows stem cells to divide indefinitely often is an important step towards ENS:

Scientists have identified a molecule that allows special cells from embryos, called stem cells, to multiply without limit.

The UK researchers have dubbed the molecule Nanog, after the mythological Celtic land of the ever young.

Stem cells found in embryos are special because they can turn into almost any type of cell in the body, whether it is a heart cell, skin cell or brain cell.

Research into these cells is expected to lead to revolutionary new treatments for a range of conditions from Parkinson's Disease to heart failure and diabetes...

"If Nanog has the same effect in humans as we have found in mice, this will be a key step in developing embryonic stem cells for medical treatments."

The end of death as an inevitable part of human life is now one step closer. Hurray!

Sun, 06/01/2003 - 00:05 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Death "designed in" -- by whom?

While I applaud the development you've reported on here, I must register a minor quibble. Death is not an "unfortunate accident." It's an **epiphenomenon**, a characteristic that arises from innumerable other, more fundamental characteristics of the design of organic life.

Evolutionists will tell you that death is integral to the mechanism by which species advance and differentiate. Creationists will tell you that death is part of the Divine plan, that this world is merely a preparatory stage for the next, far more important one. Both these views are teleological, one obviously, the other more subtly. They deflect attention from the central value of life -- itself -- to its exact opposite.

Regardless of whether the evolutionist or the creationist is more correct, Man has more control over his life in this world than any of the lesser species. That we've come so far, and appear poised to go this much farther, is a truly wondrous thing, a ringing affirmation of the glory of the mind.

Curmudgeon Emeritus, Palace Of Reason

by [fporretto](#) on Sun, 06/01/2003 - 11:50 | [reply](#)

Prolonging life is good and p...

Prolonging life is good and possible, but how can we ever know if we have *combated death*? It would take eternity to find out, wouldn't it?

Alice

http://libertarian_parent_in_the_countryside.blogspot.com/

by a reader on Sun, 06/01/2003 - 15:00 | [reply](#)

How Could We Know?

We could know in the same way as we know anything else: if that was an implication of our best explanatory theories in the relevant area. If, given our best understanding of physics, biology, and the

relevant technology, it one day follows that it is extremely likely that no person will ever die again, then we'd know that in the same sense as we now know that with present-day technology, a typical lifespan will always be 76 years or whatever. And of course it's a testable theory.

by **David Deutsch** on Sun, 06/01/2003 - 15:44 | [reply](#)

There is no proof

Alice:

It's never possible to prove that death has been eliminated. Proof only works in maths, and even then it is not absolutely reliable. It is possible for the best available explanation to be that people don't have to die permanently anymore, though.

For example, if humans had multiple redundant backups of themselves in many locations throughout the universe, and it was known how to make them active again, it would be reasonable to say that people didn't have to die anymore.

~Woty
<http://woty.blogspot.com>

by **Woty** on Sun, 06/01/2003 - 15:46 | [reply](#)

Math

Woty wrote: "Proof only works in maths, and even then it is not absolutely reliable. "

Another way to say that is proof *doesn't* work in math.

-- Elliot Temple
<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 06/01/2003 - 20:07 | [reply](#)

Maths

There is a form of argument called proof, that is an effective way of demonstrating things in maths, and that there is no equivalent in other fields.

~Woty
<http://woty.blogspot.com>

by **Woty** on Sun, 06/01/2003 - 23:17 | [reply](#)

Math

Syllogisms are effective and seem equivalent to me.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 06/02/2003 - 01:33 | [reply](#)

Proofs

Predicate logic is even better than Aristotalian syllogisms, but both rely on the creation of tautological axioms, which I doubt many people can agree on outside of pure mathematics.

Anyway, I expect that degenerative diseases will be eliminated before radical life extension becomes a reality. People will always die, even if by accident.

Master of None

by **Michael Williams** on Mon, 06/02/2003 - 23:13 | [reply](#)

Error correction

Michael:

What if there was a way to make accidental death non-permanent?

~Woty

<http://woty.blogspot.com>

by **Woty** on Tue, 06/03/2003 - 01:37 | [reply](#)

Backups

"For example, if humans had multiple redundant backups of themselves in many locations throughout the universe, and it was known how to make them active again, it would be reasonable to say that people didn't have to die anymore."

Yes they would.

Having one or more "backups" of yourself doesn't do you any more good than having a twin sibling does.

by a reader on Tue, 06/03/2003 - 12:58 | [reply](#)

Backups

I meant backups of the content of your mind, not genetic backups.

~Woty

<http://woty.blogspot.com>

by **Woty** on Tue, 06/03/2003 - 13:24 | [reply](#)

Still doesn't help. A backup...

Still doesn't help. A backup of the content of your mind simply produces *other people* who think they're you.

by a reader on Wed, 06/04/2003 - 00:00 | [reply](#)

Are Human Copies Fungible?

Short Answer: Yes.

Slightly Longer Answer (for people who have read *The Fabric of Reality*):

Imagine a bunch of universes, which are all different times in the last year, and are all in the history of this present. In each you will find a brain state, that is different than my present one, and is in a different time and a different place than my present one. But you won't balk at saying it's me.

Slightly Longer Answer (for people who have not read *The Fabric of Reality*):

The idea that the particular matter that makes up my brain, is privileged, is mysticism.

Another Answer:

If we make a double of someone, and it acts *as if* it is that person, what sort of explanation will say it is not that person (besides a bad one)?

(Click link on sidebar to purchase *The Fabric of Reality*, the best book ever)

-- Elliot Temple
<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 06/04/2003 - 05:19 | [reply](#)

We should be satisfied with t...

We should be satisfied with the good long lives modern medicine allow and then die with dignity.

by a reader on Wed, 06/04/2003 - 10:21 | [reply](#)

New Scientist article

See also [this article](#).

by a reader on Wed, 06/04/2003 - 15:03 | [reply](#)

Copies

Creating copies or backups of oneself clearly would not obviate death. As the previous poster pointed out, they would not be you, even though they would be just like you.

Even if the copies are fungible to other people, you yourself would still be dead. Same goes for transporters in *Star Trek* :)

Aside from my expectation that we will never be able to back-up a

human.

Master of None

by **Michael Williams** on Wed, 06/04/2003 - 16:11 | [reply](#)

Re: Copies

Brains are complicated, and I expect it will be a very long time before their emergent properties are fully understood.

However, the local structure of brains is relatively simple. Suppose artificial neurons are developed, that act just like the meaty ones, but can use a backup power source other than sugary oxygenated blood, and/or fully preserve their state when shut down. Nanoscale installers operate on your brain over the course of months or years, replacing individual original neurons one by one with copies of the improved model.

For the sake of argument, the installers only operate while you are conscious. Individual neurons die continually, with no detectable effect to us, so presumably the temporary loss of neuron while its state is copied would likewise have no detectable effect.

At the end of the replacement process, are "you" dead?

by **Kevin** on Wed, 06/04/2003 - 17:12 | [reply](#)

Copies

And the same goes for changing from one time to another, right?

How can that be the same person, if he's in a whole different universe? (To quote Fabric, "Other times are just special cases of other universes.")

-- Elliot Temple
<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 06/04/2003 - 17:16 | [reply](#)

"Imagine a bunch of universes..."

"Imagine a bunch of universes, which are all different times in the last year, and are all in the history of this present. In each you will find a brain state, that is different than my present one, and is in a different time and a different place than my present one. But you won't balk at saying it's me."

No, but you would. And if you gathered them all together, and then I shot you (but not them), their presence would not be much consolation.

by **Ken** on Thu, 06/05/2003 - 00:38 | [reply](#)

sigh

Look, I understand your thesis: fungibility does not exist, all matter is special, blah blah blah, (or maybe only when consciousness is involved) but do you have an argument for this?

-- Elliot Temple
<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 06/05/2003 - 04:07 | [reply](#)

Copies

Our arguments are at least as weighty as your appeals to authority. Frankly, the question hinges on axiomatic beliefs, and I doubt that we'll agree on them.

If dying neurons were progressively replaced with artificial neurons, my intuition tells me that yes, it would still be "you". Additionally, I completely agree with Ken: the existence of other-universe-"yous" may be fine for the rest of us, but for you yourself it's meaningless.

I'm not sure what arguments you're putting in my mouth by saying "fungibility does not exist, all matter is special, blah blah blah". Special how? Fungibility is relative. What could possibly serve as proof?

Master of None

by **Michael Williams** on Thu, 06/05/2003 - 05:03 | [reply](#)

Epistemolgy Again

Our arguments are at least as weighty as your appeals to authority.

Erm, which appeal?

Frankly, the question hinges on axiomatic beliefs, and I doubt that we'll agree on them.

I have no such beliefs. The correct approach to knowledge, is to acknowledge that we cannot know anything with certainty, but still to hold our best explanations to be **tentatively** true.

(out of order) *What could possibly serve as proof?*

Of course, nothing, ala fallibility. That's not the point, we need good explanations. As a general rule, if reality behaves *as if* something is true, it's a good explanation that it's true.

the existence of other-universe-"yous" may be fine for the rest of us, but for you yourself it's meaningless.

The notion that the copy would act *as if* it was me, and be the same for other people, but would not be "me", is the notion that the specific matter making me up is privileged (but can, apparently, gradually bestow this privilege on other bits of matter a little at a time ala artificial neuron replacement). In the absence of an explanation for this privilege, I have no choice but to consider it

mysticism.

I'm not sure what arguments you're putting in my mouth

That was to Ken, who claims I will balk at considering me-2-seconds-ago me. I know many adults disassociate from their former selves WRT things like hating highschool, but this is really pushing it.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 06/05/2003 - 06:21 | [reply](#)

Copies

And what if the replaced natural neurons, rather than being discarded, were being assembled into a functioning recreation of your brain in exactly the state it was in at some point in time?

Which would be you?

The artificial, but continuous you?

Or the natural, discontinuous you in a state identical to a previous natural state?

I think, for most of us, the continuity seems more important than the material or the precision of the state-match. I think our sense of identity is tied to the idea of a single mind evolving rather than a sequence of brain states; so even perfect copies would still be "other people".

This might be an illusion, but it's a difficult one to shake off, because it's central to how we think of our existence.

by **Gil** on Thu, 06/05/2003 - 07:34 | [reply](#)

I can't believe no one mentioned this

Think about what happens if we eliminate death.

If it is universal, the population increases by over 328,000 people literally overnight (well, ok not literally, it would take 25hours). The population growth rate not quite doubles.

If it is not universal it means the average age among wealthy populations gets higher and higher relative to everyone else, until they are prime for non-natural death at the hands of the younger, stronger, mortals.

It would mean birth control would have to become universal, and not optional. It would mean forced abortions. It would mean food shortages.

It is unpleasant that, as individuals, we have to die, but that's just the way reality goes.

by **Jay Aziza** on Wed, 12/20/2006 - 19:34 | [reply](#)

Unless We Move to Another Planet

by a reader on Wed, 12/20/2006 - 23:17 | [reply](#)

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Weapons of Mass Distortion

The Wall Street Journal has something to say about the current rash of complaints about the lack of WMDs so far found in Iraq:

For ... opponents of [the] war, it isn't enough that a tyrant and his psychopath sons have been deposed. It doesn't count that mass graves have been uncovered, that torture chambers have been exposed, or that Saddam's victims can speak freely for the first time in 30 years. The critics are now claiming the war was illegitimate because no one has yet found a pile of anthrax in downtown Baghdad.

[...] That Saddam had biological or chemical weapons was a probability that everyone assumed to be true, even those who were against the war. U.N. inspections in the 1990s had proved that Iraq had such weapons, including 30,000 liters of anthrax, and Saddam had used chemical weapons against Iran and Iraq's own Kurds. The French themselves insisted that disarming Saddam of WMD, as opposed to deposing him, had to be the core of U.N. Resolution 1441.

[...] What seems to be going on here is an attempt to damage the credibility of Mr. Blair, President Bush and other war supporters. If their backing for the war is morally vindicated, they will emerge as even larger forces on the world stage, and so they must be tarnished after the fact as dissemblers.

So where are the WMD? We don't know. Check out **Andrew Sullivan**'s take on it though. Also **L.T. Smash** asks:

Saddam was an evil and ambitious man, who cast a shadow of darkness over the lives of millions. He had to go. As we uncover scores of mass graves and further evidence of his atrocities every day, only one burning question remains: How could anyone in good conscience have opposed the liberation of Iraq?

We don't know the answer to that one either.

Nobody's found Saddam either, but that doesn't mean he didn't exist and wasn't a threat.

After 9/11, the US has a right, nay a *responsibility* to take out terrorism-sponsoring regimes. Arresting individual criminals after the event/s isn't good enough. Even if the WMDs didn't exist at all (which I don't believe for a minute), it was still better to take out the Ba'athists than leave them in place murdering their own people and helping out terrorists who threatened freedom.

Alice

http://libertarian_parent_in_the_countryside.blogspot.com/

by a reader on Tue, 06/03/2003 - 17:43 | [reply](#)

If WMDs were not the point of...

If WMDs were not the point of the invasion, why did Blair say they were?

by a reader on Wed, 06/04/2003 - 10:19 | [reply](#)

Rationalization

Isn't this all one big rationalization for war?

by a reader on Wed, 06/04/2003 - 12:32 | [reply](#)

Although I was and am for the...

Although I was and am for the war, I think it is simply inadequate to argue that for each new grave we find "how could you not support the liberation of Iraq?" Because there are plenty of potentially reasonable ways. Suppose you are under the impression that using the same amount of money, ten times more lives could have been saved if it were used in other ways. Or suppose you believe that a few thousand American deaths in the war and the long presence afterward are simply not a fair price to pay for the liberation of a foreign people in a foreign land, alien to American culture and values. These theories are wrong, but pointing in shock at them and crying about the morality of saving Iraqi children doesn't refute them.

I think that at this point, there is a real issue of credibility. Leaders united on apparently incontrovertible intelligence that Saddam had these weapons. Its worth finding out why things didn't go as planned. But this is a political issue, not a moral one.

by [Daniel Strimpel](#) on Wed, 06/04/2003 - 15:06 | [reply](#)

Well said. Alisa....

Well said.

Alisa.

by **Alisa** on Thu, 06/05/2003 - 03:00 | [reply](#)

About WMDs

Can I point out that the reason that people fear WMDs is that some of them are small and easily hidden. 30,000 liters is less than 150 55-gallon drums, and Iraq is 171,599 square miles in area.

Three questions:

What are the odds of finding this stuff in a couple of months?
What are the odds that some of will never be found because the people that hid it are dead/disappeared?
What is the likelihood that anything would be found if Saddam were still in power?

by a reader on Thu, 06/05/2003 - 06:01 | [reply](#)

My Answer

My answer is that you could save 10 times as many people today, but you could lose many thousands or even millions tomorrow. That is what WMDs are designed to do.

Everyone of these dictators who kills his own people or his neighbors **is** a weapon of mass destruction.

by a reader on Thu, 06/05/2003 - 06:09 | [reply](#)

Oiiiiiiiiii

Everyone of these dictators who kills his own people or his neighbors **is** a weapon of mass destruction.

And the ones who have oil and therefore lots of money can get much more effective weapons than their poorer counterparts. So oil actually matters in legitimate ways.

~Woty
<http://woty.blogspot.com>

by **Woty** on Thu, 06/05/2003 - 13:42 | [reply](#)

Re: Oil

Sure oil matters, having Iraq sell oil on the open market means Saudi Arabia has less leverage. Having a free and prosperous Iraq in the middle of a bunch of medieval theocracies/kleptocratic dictatorships is going to be worth a lot strategically.

by a reader on Thu, 06/05/2003 - 16:29 | [reply](#)

Check out the dissident frog...

Check out the dissident frogman's comment here:
<http://www.thedissidentfrogman.com/dacha/000168.html>

by **Chris** on Tue, 06/10/2003 - 16:44 | [reply](#)

Weapons of Mass destruction

Oh my God - People people people...are you all for real? You don't find Bush evil? Who are the terrorist? is it bin Laden? or al Qaeda? maybe the Taliban? And where are these mass graves your talking about? I have heard and why are we worried about them when we're busy making more. And speaking of Iraqi oil we won't see a drop of it for a long time, if ever, because Iraqi's have plenty of old explosives to keep them shut down for a long, long time.

Weapons of Mass destruction was all they could talk about. Don't you find placing the blame squarely were if belongs a good thing? And if you're willing to write that off then shame on you. You should never have children or raise them because you wouldn't know the difference between the truth and a lie.

by Burnie123 on Sun, 01/16/2005 - 00:47 | [reply](#)

Re: Weapons of Mass destruction

Burnie123 wrote:

Oh my God - People people people...are you all for real?

No, we're just playing a really, really elaborate joke on you.

You don't find Bush evil?

He's not evil. He's wrong about some things, but not evil.

Who are the terrorist? is it bin Laden? or al Qaeda?
maybe the Taliban?

Those are examples of evil terrorist organisations, but not the only ones.

And where are these mass graves your talking about?

Iraq, I done saw it the **news**.

I have heard and why are we worried about them when we're busy making more.

Um, no we're not. Even the terrorists who the Coalition sends to the big Virginarium in the sky will get buried in a nice little plot. It'll have flowers on it and everything, honest.

And speaking of Iraqi oil we won't see a drop of it for a long time, if ever, because Iraqi's have plenty of old explosives to keep them shut down for a long, long time.

I see. And they're keeping the oil wells shut down for what reason?

Oh, I see, so the US doesn't steal the oil despite the fact that they could easily have bought it. Okay they would have had to pay ~~Saddam Hussein's pimp~~ Kofi Annan a cut but it's still a lot less expensive than a war.

Weapons of Mass destruction was all they could talk about.

Apart from Saddam Hussein being a tyrant and a terror sponsor and their desire to spread democracy in the Middle East...

Don't you find placing the blame squarely where it belongs a good thing?

Yes. We blame Saddam Hussein and his fellow tyrants and terrorists for their evil crimes and we blame the UN for being stuffed to the gills with apologists for these terrible people.

And if you're willing to write that off then shame on you. You should never have children or raise them because you wouldn't know the difference between the truth and a lie.

A statement is true if and only if it corresponds to the fact it purports to describe. The truth is the set of statements that is true. A lie would be where a person intentionally makes an untrue statement. A mistake would be where a person unintentionally makes an untrue statement. A mistake and a lie are not equivalent. I hope this helps.

by **Alan Forrester** on Mon, 01/17/2005 - 02:48 | [reply](#)

Is *Selling Land* a Crime?

The other day, we asked whether it is a crime to **buy land**. The question was rhetorical, but we were remiss in not mentioning that in Palestinian Authority territory, it is not merely a crime, but a **capital offence**, to **sell land to Jews**.

As **Le Monde Diplomatique** explains:

Since Jordan had made land sales to Israelis a crime punishable by death (from 1973-87 about 100 people were sentenced by Jordanian courts to death in absentia), the PA has imposed its own death penalty for such sales, including land in Jerusalem. This was announced by Freh Abu Meidan, the justice minister, on 6 May 1997. Twenty-two Palestinians have been since arrested and the Palestinian legislative council has begun debating a law to restrict sales.

Le Monde Diplomatique goes on to point out that individual Jews and Jewish charities have sometimes stooped to such shocking tactics as paying "astronomical prices" or finding new homes for the vendors, out of reach of the ~~terrorist overlords~~ Palestinian Authority.

Even **Amnesty International** has found something to complain about, namely that the Palestinian ~~in~~security forces often don't even bother with trials for these offences:

Unlawful killings, including possible extrajudicial executions, continued to occur. Three land-dealers were found dead during May after the Minister of Justice, Freih Abu Middein, announced that the Palestinian Authority would begin applying a Jordanian law which provided for the death penalty for those convicted of selling land to Jews. There were fears that statements by the Minister of Justice and the failure to condemn the killings appeared to constitute permission to security services to carry out extrajudicial executions with impunity. In June the Palestinian Authority made a public statement supporting the death sentence for land-dealers but rejecting any killing without trial and conviction.

israelis/palestinians

An NGO-type friend recently said that 3 times as many Palestinians as Israelis die through Israeli/Palestinian violence each year, and that Israeli soldiers kill many many innocent civilians (women and children was the phrase) in cross fire, through bulldozing houses etc.

Do you have any advice about where I might be able to verify the non-veracity of these claims?

by [emma](#) on Tue, 06/03/2003 - 21:33 | [reply](#)

Re: israelis/palestinians

A quick Google search turns up "[The War on Non-Combatants](#)" at *The Village Voice*, & "[Has Israel Used Indiscriminate Force?](#)" at *The Middle East Forum*.

by [Kevin](#) on Tue, 06/03/2003 - 22:48 | [reply](#)

You imply that the settlement...

You imply that the settlements are just a bunch of dwellings bought by Jews for the purpose of living peaceful lives but in fact the settlements are funded by the Israeli government and their purpose is to grab more territory for the Israeli State. Notice that in the Road Map, Israel is required to stop its settlement activity. If the Israeli State is not engaging in any such activity, why that stipulation? The truth is, the settlements are part of the occupation, and again, Israel needs to end the illegal occupation of Palestinian territory if it wants peace.

by a reader on Wed, 06/04/2003 - 10:17 | [reply](#)

Still true?

Is this still true? The links appear to be from 1997, not 2003. Could it be that things have changed since then? What evidence do you have that it is still the case?

by a reader on Wed, 06/04/2003 - 10:29 | [reply](#)

If both sides continue saying...

If both sides continue saying that they will not stop until the other side stops, where will peace come from? Isn't it the case that for peace to break out, one side or the other has to say enough is enough and that they will stop aggressing against the other?

by a reader on Wed, 06/04/2003 - 12:17 | [reply](#)

Both sides

See, the problem is that not all violence is aggression. Some of it is self defense. Some examples of self defense are killing terrorist leaders, destroying hostile bomb factories, and destroying the buildings terrorists operate from. On the other hand, not all violence is self defense. Some is aggression. A good example of aggression is going into a public place and blowing yourself up in order to kill as many Jews as possible. Another good example of aggression is building bombs for others to use for this purpose. Another is providing the funds for this activity.

The two sides are not equal, and the Israelis ceasing to defend themselves will not end this conflict.

~Woty

<http://woty.blogspot.com>

"Violence?" is not the question.

by **Woty** on Wed, 06/04/2003 - 13:48 | [reply](#)

AI Criticisms

Interestingly critical article about Amnesty International [here](#).

by a reader on Wed, 06/04/2003 - 15:09 | [reply](#)

'Innocent' civilians?

In a [survey](#) released yesterday, 80% of people in the P.A. territories supported the statement: "The rights and needs of the Palestinian people cannot be taken care of as long as the state of Israel exists."

Here's one for American readers: "Now I'm going to read a list of political leaders. For each one, tell me how much confidence you have in each leader to do the right thing regarding world affairs". In the P.A., 71% had "a lot of confidence" or "some confidence" in Osama bin Laden - the highest figure of any place surveyed. They want **you** dead, too.

by a reader on Wed, 06/04/2003 - 16:14 | [reply](#)

Re: You imply that the settlement...

There are predominantly Arab towns in Israel; what's the problem with having predominantly Jewish towns in a prospective Palestine?

A couple of questions for you: How many Jewish refugees were expelled from Muslim countries? How many fled Europe in/around WWII? Why aren't those Jewish refugees all now in UN-sponsored towns on the fringes of those various Muslim and European countries, blowing up *their* innocent civilians?

by a reader on Wed, 06/04/2003 - 16:29 | [reply](#)

"A [different] reader" wrote:...

"A [different] reader" wrote: "Israel needs to end the illegal occupation of Palestinian territory if it wants peace."

You think?

Sharon: "Israel is a society governed by the rule of law, thus we will immediately begin to remove unauthorized outposts".

Hamas: "We will never be ready to lay down arms until the liberation of the last centimeter of the land of Palestine" - i.e. Israel.

Please tell me who wants peace, and who doesn't.

by a reader on Wed, 06/04/2003 - 16:48 | [reply](#)

Homesteading or Buying?

Is your argument that the land was purchased on the free market from whoever owned it? Or is your argument that Jews have gone to remote locations and homesteaded land without permission from anyone (except the Israeli government)? If the former, you have a good case, if the latter, no State would allow such illegal immigrants.

by a reader on Thu, 06/05/2003 - 14:40 | [reply](#)

Intifada stats

Regarding the first post on this thread, I have exactly what you are looking for.

<http://www.ict.org.il/articles/articledet.cfm?articleid=440>

A complete statistical breakdown of casualties in the intifada. I think you may be shocked at what *hasn't* been told to you by the media.

by [Daniel Strimpel](#) on Thu, 06/05/2003 - 17:36 | [reply](#)

Settlements again

Does this (WSJ/AP) support your case? :

Palestinians consider the outposts on West Bank hilltops efforts to further expand Jewish settlement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and create new obstacles to a Palestinian state. They say all Israeli settlements are illegal encroachment on their land.

In what was perhaps an effort to strike a balance between the two sides, Mr. Sharon announced at the summit that an undisclosed number of outposts would be dismantled. Signaling that it may avoid full compliance, Israel has said some of the outposts serve a security function -- overlooking roads, for example -- and should stay. However, an adviser to Mr. Sharon, said if the Palestinians rein in militant groups that have attacked Israelis, then the security

outposts could become unnecessary and would be removed down the line.

Palestinian leaders said that was not good enough. "When the time for implementation of the road map comes, we expect that they will take down all the outposts ," Palestinian Culture Minister Ziad Abu Amr said. Information Minister Nabil Amr said that even if Mr. Sharon were to dismantle all outposts , it still would leave a more significant requirement of the road map unfulfilled: Israel's obligation in the plan's first phase to freeze all Jewish settlement construction.

The Peace Now group, which opposes settlement in the West Bank, says 117 unauthorized outposts have been created since 1998. Some are uninhabited while others consist of a few trailers with less than a dozen inhabitants.

by a reader on Fri, 06/06/2003 - 09:30 | [reply](#)

An Opinion Poll in Iraq

This article in the Weekly Standard (via the ever-trenchant **Emperor Misha**) is worth reading. Even though the survey it reports is unscientific, our own wild guess is that it is in the right ballpark in gauging Iraqi opinion.

It found support for the war much higher now (77 percent) than before it happened (62 percent said they had been opposed). And it showed respondents supportive of coalition troops' presence--65 percent said the troops should stay

If subsequent polls confirm these Iraqi opinions, will those who so loudly urged deference to the Baghdad Street take their own advice and give the liberation of Iraq their belated support?

(No, they won't.)

Wed, 06/04/2003 - 02:48 | [permalink](#)

Firstly, it was not deference...

Firstly, it was not deference to the Baghdad Street, it was not about Iraqis, it was about our own freedom. We object to being coerced to pay for the war in Iraq, and it is completely naive to think that our "kinder, gentler" States were fighting this war to liberate the Iraqi people. The whole reason for this war was to increase the legitimacy of our own States, i.e., the States were doing this to gain power. Look at all the new tyrannical legislation there has been since 9-11. War is the excuse to grab power. Why do you think they have yet to find the WMDs?

by a reader on Wed, 06/04/2003 - 10:09 | [reply](#)

What about our own opinion? T...

What about our own opinion? The opinion of the British and American tax payers and those who support them?

by a reader on Wed, 06/04/2003 - 12:31 | [reply](#)

What about it?

Do most people in the West think we should have left Saddam in

place? I don't think so. Or if they do, no doubt the antiwar US Libertarian party (and maybe the antiwar Lib Dems in the UK) will romp home in the next round of elections!!

Alice

by a reader on Wed, 06/04/2003 - 23:33 | [reply](#)

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There Was a Nazi Spy in Britain in WW2 After All

Until now, **it has been thought** that

All Nazi spies in Britain during the War were apprehended and turned, saving lives and shortening the War.

This was an astonishing tour de force, not only of counter-espionage but also of applied psychology, which is in our opinion far too little known and studied. Why is the same thing not being done to all the murderous bastards who are captured nowadays?

Anyway, now it turns out that **they missed one**:

Two amateur historians have uncovered the story of an audacious spy, who infiltrated the RAF in the middle of World War II and escaped back to Germany in a stolen RAF Hurricane.

Augustin Preucil came to Britain along with scores of other Czech pilots when mainland Europe fell under Nazi domination.

[...]

Preucil had taken off with another pilot, a young Pole, to practice dogfights over the sea.

The Pole returned to base reporting he had seen Preucil in a steep dive and assumed he had crashed. In fact Preucil had flown his machine across the North Sea to Belgium.

There he landed on a farm and was offered food and shelter by the farmer and his family .

But Preucil immediately betrayed them to the Gestapo and the family were imprisoned.

Preucil went on to work for the Gestapo mainly by infiltrating Czech political prisoner groups in concentration camps; it is known that some of those he betrayed were shot.

When Germany was finally defeated Preucil was captured

by the Czechs and put on trial for treason.

He was executed in 1947.

We are, as a rule, opposed to the death penalty but ... hurray!

Wed, 06/04/2003 - 23:51 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

why?

We are, as a rule, opposed to the death penalty but ... hurray!

Why?

by a reader on Fri, 06/06/2003 - 09:32 | [reply](#)

Fallibility?

Fallibility?

Alice

by a reader on Fri, 06/06/2003 - 14:06 | [reply](#)

Death Penalty

The death penalty is based on punishment instead of reparations, which many libertarians seem not to like. Maybe that's why. And, as Alice suggests, in the present, our courts make quite a number of mistakes.

I want to be clear that's not my position.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 06/06/2003 - 19:08 | [reply](#)

Re: Death Penatly

One big problem with the death penalty is that it's based on revenge rather than self-defense. This harms good people as well as the bad people who are executed. It deprives good people of the opportunity to learn things about the bad people that can be used to prevent future crimes, for example.

~Woty

<http://woty.blogspot.com>

by [Woty](#) on Fri, 06/06/2003 - 20:03 | [reply](#)

DP

Every person's situation contains some knowledge that could be extracted about morality adn the human condition etc. etc. Ideally,

society could integrate all this knowledge into its institutions.

But we don't know how to take criminals seriously yet in an organized and secure fashion. Our best theories involve imprisonment and death. I see no tangible difference between these in terms of learning from criminals. In both cases, if the criminal was right, we would not know.

An argument FOR the death penalty would be that its cheaper, and therefore easier on the taxpayers. But I don't think this is actually the case, after all is said and done.

Then there is revenge. This seems harmless, since it harms good people (in the way Woty said above) no more than life imprisonment does. And morally, my intuition says that there is no substantial differenc between executing a serial rapist/murderer and locking him/her up for life in maximum security prisons.

by **Daniel Strimpel** on Fri, 06/06/2003 - 21:08 | [reply](#)

Get rid of the traitor.

Get rid of the traitor

by a reader on Mon, 11/29/2004 - 21:23 | [reply](#)

Shock, Horror! Government Puts Spin on Policy!

Why have we not yet seen such a headline in the media? For although it may be ludicrous, this is now the principal argument for retrospective opposition to the liberation of Iraq.

This opposition centres on trying to uncover a high-level conspiracy to **alter intelligence reports** to make them seem more significant. In other words they think that somebody may have got their secretary to do a find-and-replace of "may have weapons" to "does have weapons".

Yet it is not in dispute that Saddam Hussein was/is a big fan of weapons of mass destruction: he has not only *owned* them in the past but has used them on his enemies both domestic and foreign. The evidence provided by the mobile bio-weapons laboratories found scrubbed clean is that he was still committed to retaining this capability until just before the end (unless you wish to believe that caustic cleaning fluid was only used to cover up the embarrassing smell of Iraqi conscripts' underwear).

These mobile laboratories were mentioned by Colin Powell in his **UN Presentation**. Iraq denied their existence, and at the time, we could not be *sure* that that was a lie. Nor could we be sure that any other weapons of mass destruction existed there either, but we had good reasons to believe that they did. And the main reason why we couldn't be sure was that Saddam insisted on obfuscating the investigation of the UN inspectors. Not the actions of an innocent government.

But why did we think it so urgent and important to invade Iraq on the basis that they *probably* had WMD and that they *might* use them to harm or threaten us? After all, North Korea had already started telling anyone who would listen about their intentions to use WMD on everybody in sight, so they definitely have them. (Or do they? Isn't it perfectly conceivable that they are lying too? Should we act on the assumption that they are?)

The fact of the matter is, the Middle East is a large and unstable area which is important to us for various reasons but keeps telling us in words and deeds that it hates us and wishes we were all dead. It would be a great thing for the world, and for the region itself, if it were to become peaceful and start putting its impressive resources into manufacturing cheap cars and electronic goods instead of various types of nasty weapon that serve no purpose other than

slaughtering their civilian populations and ours. Yet history tells us that it is very rare for entrenched psychotic societies suddenly to become friendly and start manufacturing cheap and/or high quality consumer goods without the saultory intervention of *us*, reforming their system of government by force or the credible threat of force.

Here's where the spin part comes in. In the light of the above, our government(s) decide to liberate Iraq. And they decide that given the nature of the opposition to this proposed liberation, they will emphasise the perfectly real and imminent threat of horrific death on our part, which everyone can understand and be afraid of, and de-emphasise the closely related and equally real 'making the world a better, safer place' aspect that sadly doesn't wash with significant sections of the modern trendy-lefty isolationist cheese-eating population. It must be the greatest deception in modern history, we don't think.

What if we never prove that there were/are WMD in Iraq? Well, while we are on the subject of 'what-ifs': what if we never prove that there was a high-level conspiracy to change intelligence reports? Will people stop believing there was one?

Don't forget that today's trendy theory (that the Government over-emphasised WMD in order to enable them to make the world a better, safer place) is *not* what the opponents said was happening at the time. What they said was that Bush, an infamous American oil baron (and President, but that was neither here nor there) had got his buddy/lapdog Tony to help him steal Iraq's oil. Surely nobody who was even slightly informed and/or sane could have believed that, so why haven't any opponents of the war stood up and given the real reason why they thought the war was happening – until now? Maybe because the truth – that the Government was trying to make the world a better, safer place – is not a terribly compelling anti-war argument, any more than it is a compelling pro-war one. Especially now that the war has been overwhelmingly successful by any reasonable criterion. So why haven't we seen the aforementioned headline? Perhaps a better question would be: why haven't we seen the headline "Shock, Horror! Opponents Put Spin on Government Policy" instead?

Fri, 06/06/2003 - 17:41 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Weapons of Mass Distraction from the real point?

I can't understand the obsession with this issue at all. So what if we didn't find any WMDs? Were the antiwar people swayed by that argument in the first place? No. Were the pro-war people motivated by finding WMDs, as opposed to *making damned sure no Iraqi WMDs were ever used on NYC*? I don't think so.

We know Saddam had the capability, and, at various times, the WMDs. He used some of them.

There are a million and one reasons why no actual user-friendly nuclear missiles have been stumbled across in a Baghdad cellar.

Imagine: you're an evil dictator, threatened with being deposed by

the US. Do you:

- a) hand over your WMDs like a good boy,
- b) dismantle and/or hide the fuckers, maintaining as much capability of reproducing them as you can, or
- c) dirty-bomb London as fast as you can?

I'm for b). Let's not get so distracted by "hard" evidence (ie trophies we can hold in our hands) that we forget the soft stuff... like, mass graves with thousands of bodies in them, for example.

Alice

http://libertarian_parent_in_the_countryside.blogspot.com/

by a reader on Fri, 06/06/2003 - 18:19 | [reply](#)

Lies of over-emphasis

You have said here before I think that the Iraqi invasion was a sort of projection of the real war of competing moral traditions in the West.

You have said elsewhere that it is sometimes right to lie to one's enemies, as the Allies did during WW2.

Is it acceptable for politicians in the West to tell lies of over-emphasis to other politicians and to the public for the sake of making the right things happen? Where do we draw the line?

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Fri, 06/06/2003 - 20:23 | [reply](#)

Spin is Not Good

However *predictable* spin is, though, that doesn't make it right. Better to sell your good ideas honestly on the open market, with free handy integrity added on.

Arguing that the war was for the finding of WMDs and then not finding any WMDs is arguably very bad for the Forces of Rightness. They could have been open about their morals instead of emphasising an excuse to "please" their enemies. Seems they may have shot themselves in the foot with that one.

Alice

by a reader on Sat, 06/07/2003 - 11:54 | [reply](#)

Spin is good

Alice

You seem to be pro-war. So I suspect that you would condemn a government policy that would prevent the war from happening. One such government policy would be complete honesty on politicians' part about their reasons for war. This is just a result of the logic of the situation: that large sections of American and British society do not accept any kind of "making the world a better place" argument

when it involves war.

by **Daniel Strimpel** on Sat, 06/07/2003 - 15:08 | [reply](#)

Helping freedoms take root

The risk we have taken in invading Iraq and setting up a democracy is that Iraq will degenerate into religious civil war once our forces have withdrawn. After many deaths, democracy may crumble and a new Islamofacist government emerge.

Making an assessment of this risk must have been hard. If our leaders were over-emphasising the immediate risk from WMDs in order to push through the invasion then the risk assessment was probably not done properly. OTOH, could it ever have been done properly?

The answer is to stay in Iraq for decades until capitalism and democracy have taken firm root. I guess this was probably the intention.

Ok, so I answered my own question. It probably is ok to lie within a democracy - sometimes. Doh!

by **Tom Robinson** on Sat, 06/07/2003 - 15:42 | [reply](#)

Spin and Lying

I think that spin (choosing which valid arguments to present according to how effective you think they would be) is a good thing. It isn't lying, and at present I don't see any credible evidence that Bush and Blair lied about WMD.

Lying to deceive the enemy is fine. But I find it hard to think of a situation where lying to change the outcome of a public debate, in the most advanced countries, is defensible. Certainly this wasn't one. Fallibilists do not want to participate in a political decision-making process that cannot decide against them even if they are wrong.

by **David Deutsch** on Sun, 06/08/2003 - 03:23 | [reply](#)

Theories of the state

I am not sure who are "they" in "What they said was that...", and who are these opponents of the war in "so why haven't any opponents of the war stood up and given the real reason why they thought the war was happening until now".

One thing I am sure of is that "they" do not include me, nor many antiwar libertarians I know. I have argued the libertarian case against the war in my Laissez Faire Economic Times piece "Political Economy of the 'War on Terror'", reproduced at <http://www.pierrelemieux.org/arteconwar.html>. Although I did not distinguish well enough the so-called "war on terror" and the war in Iraq (mea culpa),

I certainly argued nothing like what the convenient anti-war straw man is purported to have believed.

Another thing we can be (relatively) sure of is that a naive theory of the state cannot be relied upon to explain what states do or predict what they will do. "The Government was trying to make the world a better, safer place"? (Flectamus genua.) Perhaps this is what some people would like states to do, but more serious theories of the state and historical evidence show that this is not what states do in fact.

Pierre Lemieux
<http://www.pierrelemieux.org>

by **Pierre Lemieux** on Sun, 06/08/2003 - 10:12 | [reply](#)

The wrong emphasis?

Hmmm. Spin isn't necessarily done with good motives. It's necessary- one can't present any kind of political policy without *some* spin on it- and can be very good of course, but it can also be nothing more than evil propaganda. I can't see that Bush and Blair did anything wrong, but I don't know the details of what they said. If, for example, they promised people that WMDs in workable form *would* be found, they may have done something wrong.

Any mistakes they made in terms of presenting ideas to the public should be measured by the damage to their good cause that bad presentation results in, IMO. Over-emphasis on WMDs might be a misjudgement, IMO. More explicit statements about tackling Islamofascist terrorism, would, IMO, be a better emphasis, and not alienate anyone who isn't already antiwar.

It's quite possible that good governments will be mistakenly appeasing towards the forces of evil, and very difficult to judge whether this has happened without the kind of long-term perspectives that hindsight eventually offers. I just wonder if the Liberal antiwar left in the West has been appeased too much, and if this whole emphasis on WMDs as "proof" to shut them up isn't part of that: how do we know that a change of emphasis by the governments onto deeper issues would not have inspired more positive support from the undecideds, rather than more dangerous hostility from the peaceniks?

Alice

http://libertarian_parent_in_the_countryside.blogspot.com/

by a reader on Sun, 06/08/2003 - 11:51 | [reply](#)

Conspiracy theories suck

Pierre Lemieux wrote:

"Another thing we can be (relatively) sure of is that a naive theory

of the state cannot be relied upon to explain what states do or predict what they will do. "The Government was trying to make the world a better, safer place"? (Flectamus genua.) Perhaps this is what some people would like states to do, but more serious theories of the state and historical evidence show that this is not what states do in fact."

Western states do stupid and destructive things when the overwhelming majority of people want them to follow policies that lead to stupid and destructive things and not otherwise. The war on drugs is a result of the scientific bullshit about drugs that is so widespread in our society. Where the economy has come under state control in the West this is a result of people wanting that control in place and voting for it. The suffering many children undergo in school is the result of most people believing a false theory about education.

Your entire viewpoint is a bad conspiracy theory based on the idea that when something bad happens as a result of state action it is because the state *intended* something bad to happen, when in fact most of the bad stuff is an unintended result of their poor understanding of the world. I find it ironic that a classical liberal who should surely hold that the state is as thick as two short planks should instead see it as an all-powerful evil force.

Both in the case of the war on terror and the war on Iraq I see no reason to think that it is anything other than well-intentioned although some of the specific legislation may be stupid. The terrorists genuinely do hate our guts and want to kill as many people as humanly possible, as such getting rid of states that sponsor terrorism, as Iraq undoubtedly did, is good. Similarly, getting rid of evil aggressive tyrants who have WMD is good. The war on terror is good.

by a reader on Sun, 06/08/2003 - 17:53 | [reply](#)

States States States *runs away screaming*

Pierre,

The fact that the US government is a State, does not imply that everything it does is Wrong, nor that it can never have good motivations. The notion that the US government wanted to make the world a better place in 2003, does not mean we think all governments want to do that at all points in time.

Also, a State is just a kind of organisation, with a difference that is irrelevant to many discussions.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sun, 06/08/2003 - 21:55 | [reply](#)

Theories of the state (bis)

Dear Elliot,

"The fact that the US government is a State, does not imply that everything it does is Wrong..."

It depends on what you mean by "Wrong," or its opposite, "Right." Some theories of the state, like the Hegelian theory, claim that the state is the incarnation of right and that, therefore, it cannot do wrong. At the very opposite, the most realistic theories of the state hold that everything (or nearly everything) that a state does is wrong because it arbitrarily and coercively violates the preferences of some individuals. This has been quite conclusively demonstrated by the Public Choice school of economics which has developed over the past 50 years. (Or just remember Arrow's theorem: the state cannot be both democratic and rational.) Perhaps the best extension of Public Choice is to be found in Anthony de Jasay's *The State*, a book which, in my opinion, is a must for anybody talking about the state (even if the book is a bit technical, requiring some background in economic theory, including welfare economics).

"The notion that the US government wanted to make the world a better place in 2003, does not mean we think all governments want to do that at all points in time."

Did the US state want to make the world a better world by attacking a third-world, third-rate tyrant, thousands of kilometers from the American shores? There are good reasons to believe that the American state (and the British state) more naturally wanted to increase its legitimacy and its power. Otherwise, our (taxpayer supported) knights in shining armor would have attacked North Korea or perhaps China (although, it is true that there is the risk that the Chinese tyrant would have fought back more seriously).

Now, it is not impossible that one of the motivations of the American tyrant (let's call a cat a cat, even if Western states may still be "good tyrants", to borrow Lockean terminology from Randy Simmons). Of course, this would require quite a "conspiracy", but we can safely dismiss the simplistic view that the conspiracy buzzword is an argument. In fact, any theory of the state must explain why, since the 19th century (and, with a vengeance, the 20th), states claim to pursue the welfare of the whole population. We know that they can't do this, because one individual's welfare is another's burden. But what is most important to realize here is that the Nice State is often more dangerous than the Egoistic State. "What has always made the state a hell on earth," wrote German poet Friedrich Hölderlin, "has been precisely that man has tried to make it his heaven. (On the Nice State, see my LFET piece, reproduced at <http://www.pierrelemieux.org/artnice.html>.)

"Also, a State is just a kind of organisation, with a difference that is irrelevant to many discussions."

It is true that the state is only a kind of organization, but the difference is very material here: the state is based on coercion and violence.

P.

Pierre Lemieux
www.pierrelemieux.org

by a reader on Tue, 06/10/2003 - 11:49 | [reply](#)

P., you wrote: "It is true..."

P., you wrote:

"It is true that the state is only a kind of organization, but the difference is very material here: the state is based on coercion and violence."

Are you saying that violence and coercion are always wrong?

by a reader on Tue, 06/10/2003 - 13:30 | [reply](#)

Answer to "A reader"

"Are you saying that violence and coercion are always wrong?"

No.

There are unassailable (I think) moral arguments for the right of self-defense. Of course, they don't imply the right of an organization ("a secret band of robbers and murderers," as Lysander Spooner said of a state that was much less powerful than today) to control me more under the excuse of "self-defending" me!

Moreover, a moral argument against violence would not change the fact that violence exists, and will certainly exist as long as all men have not been transformed into angels. Indeed, counterviolence and the threat of violence are the ONLY way to protect individual liberty against violence. Of course, this does not mean allowing tyrants who disarm the populace to become more powerful and more powerfully armed all the time.

(I have written two books, and innumerable articles, on the right to keep and bear arms.)

Pierre Lemieux
www.pierrelemieux.org

by a reader on Tue, 06/10/2003 - 14:34 | [reply](#)

Duncan Smith Lays Into Blair

I just caught this in the FT:

The Tories claimed Mr Blair failed to meet his pledge last week that the government would be open with both parliamentary inquiries. "It would be quite incredible if any inquiry into Downing Street's use of intelligence material did not take evidence from Mr Campbell . . .

who is associated with every allegation," said Iain

Duncan Smith, the Tory leader.

What the hell is Duncan Smith doing? It seems like the height of cynical political BS. Wasn't he in favour of the war? It's this kind of thing that leaves me with a sour taste in my mouth when it comes to politicians.

by a reader on Tue, 06/10/2003 - 15:36 | [reply](#)

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6. Eleven Years of Fighting, Six Days of War

This is the sixth part of our series, "A Short History of Israel". If you wish to read the preceding parts, see the **Table of Contents** for links to them. We welcome comments and criticisms. Do tell us what you think.

.....

When Israel declared independence, the Arab League's boycott of Jews in Palestine became the anti-Israel boycott, enforced by law in every Arab country, and was then broadened in scope and institutionalised: individuals or companies anywhere in the world that had any dealings with Israel were not permitted to do business anywhere in the Arab world; companies that did business with *those* companies were also boycotted. Travellers with an Israeli stamp in their passports were not permitted to enter any Arab country. Many multinational companies complied with the boycott. Many did not, but in 1993 a study by the Israeli Chambers of Commerce estimated that the total loss to the Israeli economy caused by the boycott had been some \$45 billion.

Arab governments also used boycotts and other pressures to have Israel excluded from international organisations. As a result, for instance, Israel is to this day the only country in the world not permitted to join the International Red Cross. It is the only member of the United Nations not permitted to sit on the Security Council. It is also not permitted to participate in the World Court, and is excluded from most United Nations organisations such as UNICEF.

Syria built a military base on the Golan Heights, with gun emplacements cut out of the rock and invisible from the air, and a complex system of fortifications linked by underground tunnels. From there, long-range artillery dominated a region of northern Israel and caused a steady stream of deaths, injury and destruction.

France continued to sell weapons to Israel. In 1957, Israel began building a nuclear reactor and research facility at Dimona in the Negev, purchasing French technology to do so, and used this to manufacture its own nuclear weapons.

In 1959, the Egyptian Army suddenly crossed the Sinai peninsula. Israel's intelligence and early warning systems failed to detect the threat until hundreds of Egyptian tanks were at the border, where

they faced no more than thirty tanks on the Israeli side. Israel was unprepared and took a further 24 hours to mobilise an army and rush it southwards to face the invasion. But the Egyptians did not invade. Instead they gradually withdrew.

One of the perennial strategic facts of the Arab-Israeli conflict has been that because of Israel's small population, the only way it can raise an army large enough to repel a full-scale invasion is by mobilising more or less every eligible citizen. Such a mobilisation can be achieved in the remarkably short time of 48 hours; however, this is at the cost of shutting down most of Israel's civilian economy, so each such mobilisation is in itself a major economic disaster, and to remain mobilised for very long would bankrupt the country.

Israel's options for defending itself against attacks other than invasion were similarly limited. It adopted a policy of retaliation. When Arab soldiers had killed Israelis or collaborated with terrorists, the IDF might retaliate by shelling or bombing military installations or other valued property of the country in question. When terrorists could be identified as coming from a particular village, the IDF might raid that village, order the inhabitants out, and blow up houses. The IDF also became skilled at guarding the border, so that infiltrators were often killed there before they could do any further harm. And Israel developed a formidable intelligence service, the Mossad.

In 1962, President Kennedy initiated a historic change in the United States' attitude towards the Middle East (against the State Department's fervent opposition) by authorising the first ever sale of American weapons – Hawk anti-aircraft missiles – to Israel. The British government, too, was willing to overrule the opposition of the Foreign Office and authorise arms sales to Israel.

In 1964, Syria proposed to the Arab League that the Palestinian Arab refugees, who were still being kept in camps in various Arab countries, could be used to destabilise Israel. The proposal was accepted, and the Arab League set up the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) with the purpose, according to its founding manifesto, of 'liquidating Israel'. Despite its name, the PLO did not campaign for self-government for Palestinian Arabs, nor was any attempt made to install the PLO, or any Palestinian Arabs, as the government of those parts of Palestine that had already been 'liberated' in 1948 (namely Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem). The PLO soon fragmented into factions with widely differing ideologies and allegiances, but all agreeing on the basic purpose (Arab government over the whole of Palestine, and the destruction of Israel), and using the same basic means: murder of Jews. Arafat's Fatah movement, which had been in the process of formation at around the same time, became the largest single faction.

The Soviet Union, as part of its massive, mainly secret campaign to destabilise the West by supporting terrorist organisations, provided extensive training and other services for the PLO. The PLO was far better armed and funded than any other terrorist organisation

before or since – and it gradually made its presence felt in an increasingly ferocious and spectacular campaign of murder.

Egypt, Syria and Jordan again established a unified military command structure to prepare for war with Israel. Arab leaders made increasingly bellicose speeches. In 1965, Nasser said: “we aim at the destruction of the State of Israel. The immediate aim: perfection of Arab military might. The national aim: the eradication of Israel.”

In 1967, Syria stepped up its artillery attacks from the Golan Heights. Cross-border artillery duels followed. Several Syrian fighter aircraft were shot down in dogfights over the Heights. The Soviet Union gave Syria fabricated evidence that Israeli armour was massing in northern Israel preparing to invade. Syria massed its forces on the border and invoked its defence treaty with Egypt. Jordan then signed the treaty too.

In mid-May, Nasser again moved the Egyptian army across Sinai to the Israeli border, ordering the UN to withdraw its Emergency Force, which it did immediately and without objection. He again sealed the Straits of Tiran to Israel-related shipping. The United States proposed international action to break the blockade, but no country was enthusiastic to take any action, and none was taken. The Israeli government pointed out that the blockade was an act of war and threatened to lift it by force. Nasser replied “The Jews threaten to make war. I reply: Welcome! We are ready for war.” Iraq joined the alliance with Egypt, its President saying: “The existence of Israel is an error which must be rectified. This is our opportunity to wipe out the ignominy which has been with us since 1948. Our goal is clear – to wipe Israel off the map.” All over the Arab world, huge demonstrations clamoured for this. Ahmed Shukeiry, the leader of the PLO, declared in a speech in (Jordanian-occupied) East Jerusalem that after the forthcoming victory, all Israelis not born in the country would be expelled. When he was informed that the majority of Israelis were born in the country, he replied: “Those who survive will remain in Palestine, but I estimate that none of them will survive.”

The Soviet Union sent seventy warships to the Eastern Mediterranean and again made ominous hints about protecting its allies, especially Syria.

The IDF, on high alert since the Egyptian deployment in Sinai, was now fully mobilised. Even so, it was nominally the weaker force. Its total strength was 264,000 soldiers, 80% of whom were reservists, with 800 tanks and 300 combat aircraft. It was facing three armies, totalling 347,000 soldiers, most of whom had been training for this moment for years, with 1,900 tanks and 700 combat aircraft – and few Iraqis had yet arrived.

Israel struck first. Its air force attacked the Egyptian air force. Many Egyptian aircraft were destroyed on the ground, and others in combat. At Nasser's behest, the Syrian and Jordanian air forces attacked Israel. They were effectively destroyed. Britain, France and the United States imposed an immediate arms embargo on both

sides. The Soviet Union continued to supply weapons to the Arabs. The IDF, now with air supremacy, attacked on the ground in Sinai and defeated the Egyptian army. Soon they had captured the whole peninsula, opened the Straits of Tiran, and halted at the Suez Canal. Then, despite their fear of direct Soviet intervention, they attacked and captured the Golan Heights.

On the first day of the war, the Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol had sent a secret message to King Hussein of Jordan via the UN: "We are engaged in defensive fighting on the Egyptian sector, and we shall not engage ourselves in any action against Jordan, unless Jordan attacks us. Should Jordan attack Israel, we shall go against her with all our might." But thanks to the fog of war and erroneous reports from Nasser of Egyptian victories, King Hussein believed that Israel was about to be defeated. Even when Jordanian forces began shelling West Jerusalem, the IDF still held off for several hours. The Knesset building was among those hit, and members adjourned to the cellar. Finally the IDF attacked, captured East Jerusalem in fierce street-to-street fighting, defeated the Jordanian Army and captured the West Bank. Lebanon, which had not participated in the threats against Israel, was not attacked.

All these engagements were decisive victories and took only six days (hence this war is known as the Six Day War) but they were not easy victories. All three Arab armies fought competently and bravely in many engagements. Their effectiveness and morale were impaired mainly by the elimination of their air power during the first hours of the war, an action which cost Israel itself nearly a quarter of its fighter aircraft. In all, Israel lost 777 dead and 2,586 wounded during the six days – proportionately more than the United States lost during the Vietnam war. Nevertheless, among Israelis, grief was now combined with an overwhelming sense of relief that they had survived.

At the end of the war, Israel controlled more than three times as much territory as it had six days earlier. This time it did not annexe it (with the exception of Jerusalem – see below) or expel anyone from it (though some 325,000 Arabs chose for various reasons to leave the West Bank for Jordan). Instead, it proposed a peace plan to the Arab countries, via the United States government, under which it would return all the territory it had just captured, with the exception of East Jerusalem and some border adjustments, in return for recognition of Israel's right to live in peace within those borders. The Arab leaders did not respond to the Israeli proposal as such, and formulated no peace plan of their own. In the Declaration of Khartoum, they demanded that Israel withdraw from all the territory it had captured during the Six Day War, without receiving peace or recognition. The Declaration set out the: "main principles by which the Arab States abide, namely, no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with it, and insistence on the rights of the Palestinian people in their own country." The latter rights were, principally, the right to undo the partition of Palestine and establish a unitary Arab state there. Israel's Foreign Minister Abba Eban commented: "I think that this is the first war in history

that on the morrow the victors sued for peace and the vanquished

called for unconditional surrender.”

The UN Security Council then issued its deliberately ambiguous **Resolution 242** which Israel interpreted as being similar to its own land-for-peace proposal and the Arab countries interpreted as endorsing their demand for unconditional withdrawal.

Part 7. Settlements

Sat, 06/07/2003 - 19:13 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

eleven years of fighting, six days of war

A very good article! It's well written, it's factual, and it covers nearly all of the relevant bases from that period.

An interesting point that is NOT made (although the basic facts are there) is the nature of changing alliances vis-a-vis Israel. Prior to 1967, France was Israel's primary military ally, and the United States preferred a hands-off approach. After the Six-Day War (and because of it), France refused to sell any military equipment of any sort to Israel, and refused to deliver equipment that had been paid for; this resulted in the active courting of America. This new relationship was consummated six years later, in 1973, when Israel again had to fight for its life, and the United States stepped in as a true friend -- a role it has assumed ever since. (I hope more details of this reversal will appear in the next installment.)

Another interesting point -- which, again, this article does not make, but for which the facts are available -- is Israel's status as an undeclared nuclear power. Israel had to fight for its very life, in 1967 and again in 1973; by 1973 Israeli nuclear weapons almost certainly existed. That they were NOT used, even at a time of desperate need, is a powerful testament to the high moral standards of Israel as a country and the IDF as a fighting force. (It also stands in contradiction to the alarmist propaganda, currently rampant in the Arab world, about the "global threat" of Israeli nuclear weapons.)

One other comment -- Israel's highly-regarded intelligence services (including the Mossad, the IDF's Military Intelligence apparatus, and others) have contributed greatly to Israel's survival over the years, starting from the very earliest days. It's a pity to see the fascinating tale of Israeli intelligence given short shrift here... but I do recognize that it's beyond the scope of this series.

Please do keep up the good work!

best wishes,
Daniel

by [Daniel in Medford](#) on Mon, 06/09/2003 - 17:55 | [reply](#)

About time!

I'm at work right now and found this site via The Dissident Frogman

(which I found via deanesmay.com whom I work with, Mr. Esmay that is).

For a long while I've been looking for factual information dealing with the formation of the modern nation of Israel. While not as detailed as I'd like, which Daniel above pointed out, it's a very good primer and a good jumping off point to start more detailed studies. I read all 6 chapters in one sitting here and found them very interesting. The Six Day War was something I've always meant to study in more detail and this only whets my appetite. As you stated in your introduction, I too am surprised how many people accept falsehood as fact, almost too willingly. And then refuse to accept reality and are quick to label true facts as anything but. Perhaps someone here, or perhaps the author of this series themselves, can recommend books for further study. On a topic such as this, or in religious matters, I'm very careful about what I read for obvious reasons.

Keep up the great work,

Kevin

by a reader on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 09:48 | [reply](#)

Re: About time!

You might like to read the book listed first in the references we gave:

Israel, A History, by Martin Gilbert

by [Sarah Fitz-Claridge](#) on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 17:38 | [reply](#)

how israel?

I am a filipino and quite antonish with the way Israel surived and one of the supremes! WHAT MADE THE ARABS HATE SO MUCH THE ISRAELS?

by a reader on Sun, 11/30/2003 - 08:58 | [reply](#)

Re: how israel?

"WHAT MADE THE ARABS HATE SO MUCH THE ISRAELIS?"

It's *Jews* they hate.

Why? Well, it certainly wasn't the existence of Israel. Look what their attitude to Jews was in 1840: **The Damascus Affair**.

As for the root causes, perhaps there are some pointers here: **Symposium on Islamic Anti-Semitism**.

by a reader on Sun, 11/30/2003 - 19:43 | [reply](#)

Eleven Years of Fighting, Six Days of War

The **sixth part** of our series, **A Short History of Israel**, is now up. It **begins**:

The Arab League's anti-Jewish boycott became the anti-Israel boycott, enforced by law in every Arab country, and was broadened in scope: individuals or companies anywhere in the world that had any dealings with Israel were not permitted to do business anywhere in the Arab world; companies that did business with those companies were also boycotted. Travellers with an Israeli stamp in their passports were not permitted to enter any Arab country.

If you want to read the series from the beginning, start [here](#).

Sun, 06/08/2003 - 07:55 | [permalink](#)

Shocking!

I want to thank you for this superb series. I was shocked to read this:

Israel is to this day the only country in the world not permitted to join the International Red Cross. It is the only member of the United Nations not permitted to sit on the Security Council. It is also not permitted to participate in the World Court, and is excluded from most United Nations organisations such as UNICEF.

Am I the only one who doesn't know these facts? One thing I'd like to see is a list of references for where I can read more about each fact you present.

by [Sylvia Crombie](#) on Tue, 06/10/2003 - 16:09

The Stuff of Dreams

It's not quite as sexy as a Colt M4A1 with M203 grenade launcher, or even a serious pump action shotgun ("Make my day.") but there is something very cool about **this piece of kit**. Oh, the satisfaction one might get, if, upon being attacked by a would-be rapist, one's jacket would coolly deliver an 80,000-volt shock to him.

Once the jacket is armed, a squeeze on the trigger will deliver a 30-second shock of 80,000 volts. A single nine volt battery provides enough power for at least 20 shocks.

Ms Nugent said: "It's like armour but we have designed it so that you can wear it just like any jacket. If you are in an area where you feel nervous, you just arm it. I wanted to create something like a safe space around yourself."

The couple had the idea after Ms Nugent complained of feeling frightened walking home in Boston after parking her car.

One in three American women will be the victim of violent crime in her lifetime, according to FBI statistics. Most of these attacks, Mr Whiton found, involved "grabbing and grappling, often seizing the victim from behind", rather than an attack from a distance with a weapon. In Britain, police record 2.6 million violent crimes a year.

So far, 10 of the jackets have been made, some experimenting with different styles and technology. Three are now being "test worn" by friends of the inventors and volunteers. All the women say that they feel a new sense of safety when they wear it although none has yet used it in anger.

If you need more guineapigs for the tests, **Setting The World To Rights** will be *delighted* to help. Oh yeah, one small problem to iron out first: this jacket would be illegal in England, given that **self-defence** is a crime here. D'oh!

I want one like... **right now!**

by **Leo** on Mon, 06/09/2003 - 01:30 | [reply](#)

mmmmmmm, Voltage...

mmmmmmm, Voltage

by **Daniel Strimpel** on Mon, 06/09/2003 - 16:20 | [reply](#)

Worth testing?

Would it be worth testing in the courts the illegality of this jacket in the UK? It is so clearly for self-defence, would a jury really convict a woman of a crime (what crime?) if she was wearing it armed when attacked?

by a reader on Tue, 06/10/2003 - 12:39 | [reply](#)

I notice they have a model pl...

I notice they have a model planned for use against domestic violence. Um, isn't that just a little bit...crazy? Who's going to walk around their house with a protective device in the event of a domestic brawl? And what routine abuser is going to let it slide?

by a reader on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 00:59 | [reply](#)

About the domestic violence m...

About the domestic violence model--I agree with the previous poster, it sounds crazy. The abuser would be enraged and liable to further violence.

by **Sylvia Crombie** on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 08:38 | [reply](#)

Re>About the domestic violence model

Sylvia Crombie:

Something doesn't have to be useful in every single case to be useful. It is enough if there's a certain type of situation in which it is useful, even a fairly unusual one.

by a reader on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 13:32 | [reply](#)

"Would it be worth testing in...

"Would it be worth testing in the courts the illegality of this jacket in the UK? It is so clearly for self-defence, would a jury really convict a woman of a crime (what crime?) if she was wearing it armed when attacked?"

But Your Honour, if I'd not been wearing that jacket, I would have

ended up like the 17 women he is known to have raped and murdered.

...

But Your Honour, you don't understand! It was self-defense!

...

Self-defense isn't legal?

...

D'oh!

dvgbits bows

by [dvgbits](#) on Tue, 06/17/2003 - 11:50 | [reply](#)

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The Economic Case Against the Euro

Wilhelm Nolling, a former Bundesbank Director, former member of both Houses of the German Parliament, now Professor of Economics at Hamburg University, **understands** the devastating economic case against the Euro:

"Germany is suffering its worst economic crisis in decades [...] We are in bad shape and euro membership has played a major role in limiting our policy-making room for manoeuvre."

[...]

"The present euro zone structure is devastating for Germany ... Our economy is bleeding. And I am convinced the UK would be crazy to join - you should stay out for as long as I can foresee."

Wow!

If it ever comes to the referendum, we hope the No campaign uses its TV slot to air an interview with this man.

It's also well worth reading what **William Hague** has to say about this:

Neither France nor Germany is now keeping within the budget deficit limits which they themselves set for the euro zone. The Germans have tried, but are unable to do so. The French, unencumbered by any Germanic impulse to obey the rules, are simply unwilling to do so. One may wonder at the credibility of rules so swiftly broken, but wonder all the more that the Germans are prevented by euro membership from using either of the main policy instruments for tackling recession or deflation. The result could be great discontent: the product of a politically motivated project which economically is one of gargantuan stupidity.

Yes, gargantuan stupidity. And yet the economic arguments against Britain joining the Euro are as nothing compared with the political ones!

What are these so-called "political arguments"?

What are these so-called "political arguments"? [scratches head]

by a reader on Tue, 06/10/2003 - 12:30 | [reply](#)

Euro

Arguing against the euro because it deprives national states of "policy instruments" (meddling with short-term interest rates, and other such social-engineering games) is like arguing against hunting because it prevents animals from killing people. The only sensible economic argument against the euro is that is that it arbitrarily restrains individual choices. Individual preferences is what economics is about.

by a reader on Tue, 06/10/2003 - 12:31 | [reply](#)

Which political arguments?

The questioner who asked what political arguments has a good point. Is it the "we must keep the head of the queen on our coins for the tourists" one? Or the "sovereignty" one? Or the xenophic "we hate foreigners" one? Or what? What political argument is there that isn't an economic one?

by a reader on Tue, 06/10/2003 - 13:35 | [reply](#)

About the Euro

Where else can I find information about the Euro? I have read these articles and still feel I lack information.

by [Sylvia Crombie](#) on Tue, 06/10/2003 - 16:15 | [reply](#)

how?

how does the Euro restrain individual choice?

by a reader on Wed, 01/26/2005 - 10:11 | [reply](#)

Euro

Why should europe have any more problems with a single currency, where the United States does not?

by a reader on Sun, 01/15/2006 - 02:51 | [reply](#)

because the united states wor

because the united states works as an individual economy, eheras europe still works in individual economies, which can have veeey different needs!

by a reader on Thu, 04/06/2006 - 08:49 | [reply](#)

why can't we all in euroland

why can't we all in euroland work together under 1 economy then

by a reader on Tue, 06/27/2006 - 09:27 | [reply](#)

Political arguments

"What political argument is there that isn't an economic one?"

Plenty, mate. Life is not all about money and economics. That's the major flaw in the whole Communist-Leninist programme: it regards people as means of production, without imagination and emotions.

If you don't understand that the populations of individual countries have a sense of nationhood, of a shared culture which is different from that of their neighbours - something that ghastly Eurocrats like the Welsh windbag clearly have not enough brains to grasp - then it's difficult to see how to explain it to you.

However, the fact that the Germans are trying to obey the rules and failing, while the French can't be bothered to try, in itself shows that countries have different cultures. Every empire that has tried to squeeze diverse cultures into one straitjacket has ended up falling catastrophically apart.

As to the USA: although there are big differences between its various states, there is still one unifying culture.

by [Yoni](#) on Sun, 09/10/2006 - 11:39 | [reply](#)

The EU is not a straitjacket

While almost all countries on this planet are straitjackets formed from wars fought for personal gains of a few leaders, the EU is not. All EU countries are democracies, and those of you who do not like the way its going, can vote NO to it all. If we pro-EU people ever manage to convince the rest of you that it is a good idea, the EU will become the first "nation" built bottom-up.

And yes the Euro might not be the best idea (economically) for those of us living in rich european countries, however, I see it as a great opportunity for us to help the development of eastern europe economies. The euro needs the strong help of the the Danish Crown, the Swedish Crown and last but not least, the Brittish Pound.

by Björn from Sweden on Mon, 01/08/2007 - 10:54 | [reply](#)

The EURO DEBATE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

after reading all the information available to us we had come to an

unanimous decision that we feel very strongly that Britain should continue using the pound. Our economy is currently well good and the economy will continue to develop with a lower inflation and a sustainable level of employment joining the euro will only reduce this and cause the British economy to fall into a slump like the German economy is experiencing!!!

by John And Hannah on Fri, 03/16/2007 - 14:37 | [reply](#)

AGAINST THE EURO

We feel very strongly that having the Euro will result in a loss of identity for the UK. Having the Queen on our currency is a sign of patriotism and individuality. Therefore the Euro will banish this and for that we should not have it.

by Emily, Laura and Carmen on Fri, 05/04/2007 - 08:39 | [reply](#)

How to Ruin a Good Idea

Capitalism tends to encourage good ideas and weed out bad ones, so charging for road use, in particular, is a good idea. However, like any other good idea, it can be ruined by being implemented in the worst possible way and with the worst possible objectives. That is what the British Labour Government now seems **determined to do**:

Transport Secretary Alistair Darling wants to set pay-as-you-drive charges using satellite tracking devices fixed to cars.

The tolls would be highest for rush hour traffic – including commuters, motorway users and school run parents – and on busier routes...

The minister told the paper: "We have a choice in the next 25 to 30 years: either build more and more motorways – astronomically expensive, environmentally damaging, and I doubt if we could actually do it – or we take a radically different look at how we manage the system.

"That is where road pricing comes in. I am convinced that unless we look at the possibility of road pricing, then future generations will not forgive us."

But he conceded the technology meant implementation was probably 10 years away.

Mr Darling said the government would not want to make money out of the scheme.

This justification for the scheme is based on environmental pseudo-science. In reality, motorways are good: they enable people to move about more easily. They take up negligible land and need do little or no damage to the environment. The idea that we can't build more of them is just silly: we did it in the past and we have become far more prosperous since then.

The fact that the system will be government-run is also a bad omen. Giving the government the means to track every car in the country has a horrible potential for abuse. Even the assurance that the government will try to avoid making money out of road

charging is a sign of the wrong attitude. When a business makes a profit it is because people want its services. For the government to avoid making money means they will avoid making roads easy and pleasant to use and that won't benefit anybody.

Tue, 06/10/2003 - 06:11 | [permalink](#)

Unnecessarily Intrusive

I thought I remembered seeing articles in Reason magazine about toll roads that could read stickers on cars at the entrance. And a quick search found a reference from **1996**:

Today's electronic toll collection technology makes it possible to charge people in real time. A small electronic tag affixed to the car can be "read" by a radio signal as the car passes a toll collection point at normal speed. Depending on the type of account, the fee is charged either to the user's credit card or to the user's account with the toll company. This system makes it easy to charge prices which vary by time of day, permitting more sophisticated forms of road pricing, including congestion pricing. Such fully electronic congestion pricing is now in use on the (private) 91 Express Lanes on the Riverside Freeway in Southern California.

I assume that this technology has significantly improved since 1996. Tracking every vehicle's location via satellite seems unnecessary and intended for other purposes.

I am a bit confused, however, about **The World's** position on governmental motives. Sometimes you seem to assume that moral purity motivates the actions of the British and American governments, and at other times you exhibit skepticism about the motives (e.g. "A horrible potential for abuse").

I prefer the latter.

by **Gil** on Tue, 06/10/2003 - 16:46 | [reply](#)

No Contradiction

Gil wrote:

"I am a bit confused, however, about **The World's** position on governmental motives. Sometimes you seem to assume that moral purity motivates the actions of the British and American governments, and at other times you exhibit skepticism about the motives (e.g. "A horrible potential for abuse")."

It just happens that *in fact* the government has good theories in some areas and bad theories in others. Alastair Darling is clearly an idiot when it comes to roads and seems determined to set up a system that would give the government a large amount of unnecessary power which could be abused, and would be abused by this government since the pursuit of a screamingly stupid transport

policy like this is abused. Whether it would be abused in other ways only time would tell.

It's quite easy to discriminate between when they're being honest and when they're not quite a lot of the time. When it comes to terrorism you can tell that Blair and Bush mean what they say because it actually makes sense. When it comes to ID cards you can tell the British government are talking nonsense because they want to hide the fact that they're control freaks because the stated reasons for wanting ID cards are rubbish.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Tue, 06/10/2003 - 17:14 | [reply](#)

How To Ruin A Good Idea

Okay, perhaps I'm missing something obvious here. But if the British government wants to encourage people to travel during non-peak periods, what's wrong with setting up ordinary toll booths? Pick up a ticket when you enter the roadway, pay when you leave the roadway (with your ticket indicating how far you've traveled). Make the fees higher during peak periods, lower during offpeak periods.

Why is it necessary to track where specific cars go in order to collect money from them?

Daniel in Medford

by [Daniel in Medford](#) on Tue, 06/10/2003 - 20:02 | [reply](#)

"They take up negligible land...

"They take up negligible land and need do little or no damage to the environment. The idea that we can't build more of them is just silly: we did it in the past and we have become far more prosperous since then."

OK, armed with a pencil and a back of an envelope, some criticism.

A 4 lane divided highway requires about a 50 m wide right of way (Roughly, 4 lanes by 3 meters, another 10 for the median strip, 10 on either side of the right of way, 12 more for shoulders= over 50m). 20km of that accounts for a square kilometer of land, and one'll need a couple interchanges at least that take up land *at least* 200m on the side, for another 0.08km².

1.08km² of land isn't negligible, I think - particularly in an area where there is congestion - meaning there are people there - meaning the land is probably being used. Highways in the Mojave Desert aren't so congested.

Now, putting aside environmental concerns, which I am not qualified to address, we can go into the practicalities of actually building the thing.

The land (negligible or not) making up the right of way will be

privately owned. And will have to be obtained from the owner. Now, states mostly use eminent domain for this - but I think that this would count as a difficulty! I don't think libertarians like the idea of the state expropriating private property.

Now, if a private entity were building the highway they would have to encounter the truism that my perceived value of my property is $\max(\text{its utility to me, its utility to other people})$ - which makes it rather difficult to deal with Mr. Smith who figures if his filling station is on land key for a \$1bn expressway project that he ought to get at least \$10mn - even though if it were not on the key right of way he'd be happy to take \$1mn.

So I don't think that the quoted statement is valid. Moreover, arguing that in the past we built roads and have become more prosperous doesn't necessarily work now - the situation has changed. Mainly because where roads are property values have gone up, the land is being used (because of the roads!) and it's fairly useless to build a new road where nothing at all is right now - it has to connect to something at some point.

by a reader on Wed, 06/11/2003 - 16:56 | [reply](#)

um

a(nother) reader writes:

1.08km² of land isn't negligible, I think

Uh, by comparison to what? Nothing is "negligible, I think" if you don't compare it to anything else (or perhaps, only to itself). Yes of course if one sits and ponders a 1.08km² piece of land by itself, it Seems Large. But, by your calculation you've got this 1.08km² coming from a stretch of road 20 km long. Why can't I chime in and say don't worry, that 20 km road is crossing a square patch of land 20 x 20 or 400 km²? (Well, it is.) So we're really talking about carving out 0.25% of that patch for road. Zero-point-two-five-percent of a square patch *is* Negligible, I Think.

What's that? You don't want me to compare road to the square patch that it's crossing? What then? You gotta compare it to *something*.

by a reader on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 05:48 | [reply](#)

i know!

lets compare the road to 1/100th of the square patch it crosses. now it's 25% of the area, which is clearly lots. ^_~

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 05:54 | [reply](#)

Too many calculations for me!...

Too many calculations for me! What's the bottom line?

by [Sylvia Crombie](#) on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 08:34 | [reply](#)

The World right (*gasp*)

Sylvia,

The bottom line is that roads take very little space, as the original entry says.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 09:43 | [reply](#)

Not at all. To take an ext...

Not at all.

To take an extreme case, it's very difficult to drive into Manhattan. Ah, let us build another road. A square kilometer of land taken out of Manhattan, however arranged, up north or under the river into New Jersey, would take up an enormous amount of Manhattan.

Congested areas generally are congested with already-economically-productive land, not just road.

More to the point, nobody's bothered to address how such 'little' land is supposed to be purchased.

by a reader on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 16:33 | [reply](#)

wow good point

Well, it is true that a square kilometer coming from Manhattan is a more significant amount of space, relative to the size of Manhattan (about 59 km², and 21.5 km long, according to [this](#)). Almost 1.7% of its land area! So yes, to put a new 4-lane divided highway (your example) running the length of Manhattan would represent a slightly more significant amount of land. (1.7% is not an "enormous amount", though...) Wow good point!

Even better, just imagine carving that square kilometer for our 4-lane divided highway out of just the area between 23rd and 34th street. (It could curve back and forth like a snake, or something.) Even *more* less negligible!

Question: why are we still carving 1.08 square kilometers out of these smaller places?? Can't we make a shorter, skinnier new road? Do roads come quantized in 20 km, 4-lane-divided chunks? Is the issue *really* whether it is affordable (price-wise and area-wise) to put in a 4-lane divided highway running the length of Manhattan? *That's* the test of Whether Roads Take Up Negligible Land?

At some point if you want to start convincing people of something,

you're going to have to talk about concepts such as "density". Also about road usage: how much new road do we *need* to carve out of Manhattan? By continually insisting on carving this 20 km long 4-lane divided highway out of smaller and smaller areas (a shopping mall? my bedroom?), obviously you're eventually going to wind up with a conclusion that it's "not negligible, I think".

(P.S. The fact that land values and current usage vary from place to place have no bearing on the the rebuttal I was trying to make, nor on the original point of whether "roads take up negligible space" is a true statement, which it is, I reckon.)

by a reader on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 18:12 | [reply](#)

Not Always Negligible

The problem is that we shouldn't be talking about roads in terms of the space they consume. We should be referring to the cost of building them. A road through my suburban neighborhood will be cheap, in terms of cost to build, maintain, and lost economic output, compared to a same size road in Manhattan. This is because, if you are to build a road of any useful length in Manhattan, you'll have to move something else, which more than likely produces some economic output. It's all about displacement. That said, 99% of the time the best solution is probably to build another road.

by a reader on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 21:08 | [reply](#)

And one more time... from the same dude...

OK! So, the space taken up is not necessarily negligible. It can be expensive. Because there are things there!

All right. Now -for the third time- how do you get the road built without expropriating people's property for less than they feel like selling it? Recall $\max(\text{utility to me}, \text{utility to someone else})$ pricing function. I'm sure this kind of thing has been brought up before and I'm unfamiliar with the standard Libertarian approach to this situation.

My main point in bringing up all these things is that it really detracts like heck from a site that does a decent job of bringing up silly unqualified things that people say to be saying things that are themselves.... dubious...? Dubious to the point where in my opinion anyway it sort of negates the whole point the root post was attempting to make.

by a reader on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 22:49 | [reply](#)

Come again

A...whaaaa?!?!?

by a reader on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 23:31 | [reply](#)

The problem is that we sho...

The problem is that we shouldn't be talking about roads in terms of the space they consume. We should be referring to the cost of building them.

Well why not both? Yes, cost is an important consideration as well. Surely you are correct, some road projects cost more than others. And this changes World's original point.... how?

That said, 99% of the time the best solution is probably to build another road.

Well then it looks like we all agree. Splendid.

by a reader on Fri, 06/13/2003 - 01:03 | [reply](#)

taqveem

i have went on your site and i have been trying to find why is it a good idea for a motorway i needed it for monday why don't you write about the popullation will increase and i need a good a good idea for pollution is going to be there but something will happen... [what will happen]

by a reader on Sat, 10/16/2004 - 10:29 | [reply](#)

Iran Tries the Insanity Defence

North Korea's mass-murdering tyrants have been trying for many months to plead insanity ("we're not bad, we're mad") in the hope of getting handouts and a free pass to do their evil stuff with impunity. Their latest mad idea is to claim that they need their nuclear weapons to **reduce the size of their army**. Er ...

yeeeees. (An army, by the way, whose **sole use**, ever, has been to kill, rob and oppress (1) the people of North Korea, and (2) the people of South Korea.) The North Korean statement also cites two other weighty reasons why it is right for their mass-murdering dictator to have the power to slaughter millions more anywhere in the world at the touch of a button, namely (1) that US foreign policy isn't unilateralist enough:

But the Bush administration is adamantly insisting on the [sic] multilateral talks

and (2) that the US has accused them of having a nuclear weapons programme:

Such attitude [sic] from the US only more saliently reveals the sinister design of the Bush administration to dramatise the DPRK's "nuclear threat" before the world community.

OK that's impressively mad. But now Iran's tyrants – who have for decades been cultivating their reputation as mad mullahs by the effective method of being mullahs and behaving madly – have decided that they can't let North Korea out-mad them. So they have **claimed** that *their* sole reason for developing nuclear weapons (which, for good measure, they also **deny doing**) is that the United States is trying to prevent them from doing so:

Iran warned Monday that foreign pressure over its nuclear capabilities, branded a threat to peace by Washington, would backfire and harden Iran's position.

[...]

"Excessive pressure on Iran would untie the hands of those who do not believe in dialogue," said Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi. "Even those who

favor constructive talks would not accept the language of

force and threat.”

Uh huh. In other words, if the United States declares once and for all that it will do nothing if Iran acquires nuclear weapons, those in Iran who “favour constructive talks” will be strengthened and this will cause the ones who favour destructive action to give up their nuclear weapons programme. And the fairies at the bottom of the garden will do the weapons inspections.

He also had a friendly warning for President Bush:

“We are always alert about America's policies ... but we have no doubt the Americans won't be deluded into mistaking Iran for Iraq. Such a mistake would be irreparable,” he said.

Irreparable *for him*, yes. Had Mr Bush lived up to the urban-myth caricatures and mistaken Iran for Iraq recently, the mass-murdering tyrants of Iran would now be history. And that would have been a bad thing why?

Anyway, nice try Mr Asefi (and Mr Kim), but it's not going to work. In politics (as often in the courtroom too) those who try to get away with murder by pleading insanity are in fact both bad *and* mad. And it's obvious to everyone but them. Perhaps the maddest thing about the surviving Axis of Evil members is that they haven't yet noticed that blustering veiled threats to murder Americans is no longer good tactics.

Wed, 06/11/2003 - 07:27 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

What do we expect?

I don't get this. They aren't pleading insanity, they just have evil crap ideas. All evil ideas look like madness if you examine them closely enough, because they don't make real actual sense.

Basically, North Korea and Iran are both evil and ridiculously irrational. Well, yes, of course. What else do we expect? (Unless we're idiots; are we idiots?)

On the other hand, their madness does contain the method that has made them both relatively successful so far. Which it would be a serious mistake to *underestimate*.

Alice

http://libertarian_parent_in_the_countryside.blogspot.com/

by a reader on Wed, 06/11/2003 - 16:11 | [reply](#)

Bad Boys Behaving Like Bad Boys

Well, so far they're living up to their reputations... which includes stupidity, as Alice points out. They're engaging in precisely the behavior that got President Bush's attention in Iraq.

The difference is that, as near as anybody is saying, it seems

probable that North Korea already *has* a nuclear weapon (maybe even two)... while Iran doesn't yet.

I can think of no better way to ensure invasion than to say, "If we had nuclear weapons, we'd use them!! But we don't have them yet."

Daniel

by **Daniel in Medford** on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 00:39 | [reply](#)

Is Iran next? Or France North...

Is Iran next? Or ~~France~~ North Korea?

by **tony hutton** on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 08:40 | [reply](#)

Anthropomorphism

Sir David Attenborough thinks that dolphins are **deep thinkers**.

Why? Well, apparently they are able to herd fish:

Dusky dolphins use teamwork to corral huge shoals of anchovies into a tight ball, while some bottlenose dolphins use walls of mud or tail-thrashes to scare mullet out of the water. Off the coast of Brazil, dolphins have even formed a successful fishing partnership with humans.

Yeah, because inborn fish-herding behaviour could never evolve in a species that lives solely on fish, could it?

And isn't Sir David just a teeny bit fazed by the fact that it is possible to write zoology textbooks specifying which *species* uses which herding tactic?

They can communicate too:

As highly social mammals, dolphins possess amazing communication skills using sound and body language to keep in touch. In Hawaii, they can even understand us, through a special sign language that the scientists have developed.

But again, it doesn't seem to occur to Sir David that this is simply the dolphin using a program in its brain that evolved so that dolphins could send a fixed repertoire of signals under predetermined conditions. We humans might see their meaning as saying "food over here" or "Hey, baby! How about doin' the horizontal mambo?", but to them it's just ... well that's the point isn't it? What is the point of imagining that there is such a thing as what it is like *to them*? Why aren't similar documentaries made about the deep thoughts of our (or for that matter the dolphins') immune system, as it tracks down bad cells and spares the good, with a sophistication, ability to 'learn', and complexity of communication that makes a dolphin look like a floating beer can by comparison.

It might be fun to have a companion sentient species to talk to. But dolphins are dimwits, their immense intellectual achievements in the field of putting frisbees into baskets notwithstanding. They show

a very limited ability to **learn language** but the language always refers to moving objects around and putting them in specific places. If there was a dolphin that was capable of having a conversation about art, philosophy, music, physics, mathematics or even Big Brother, that would be a sign of intelligence. But there isn't. Thinking involves being able to create new and better ideas. There is no reason to think that dolphins learn, in the human sense of the word, any more than a word processor learns science when a scientist types a paper which it then reformats and prints out. Dolphins are just slotting parameters, provided by humans, into a program hardwired into the dolphin brain by evolution. The only creativity involved is that provided by the gullible humans who interpret the resulting behaviour.

Thu, 06/12/2003 - 07:56 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

I have to disagree strongly w...

I have to disagree strongly with this ignorant post. You would never say that if you had a dog. I know for a **fact** that my dog understands me and can communicate with me. A lot more than some **humans** I could name.

Sorry if this is a repeat. I tried posting this before but it hasn't shown up.

by [Sylvia Crombie](#) on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 08:44 | [reply](#)

d00d fribees pwn

I consider "But dolphins are dimwits, their immense intellectual achievements in the field of putting frisbees into baskets notwithstanding." an unfair attack on the value of frisbees.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 08:55 | [reply](#)

Not just dogs, warcraft III too

I (also) have to disagree with this ignorant post. You would never say that if you had warcraft III. I know for a **fact** that warcraft understands me and can communicate with me. A lot more than some **humans** I could name.

And unlike some people, I'm going to back this up!

Warcraft understands when I communicate with it: all my troops go just where I tell them. And it responds too. Every unit will acknowledge me when I address it, and warcraft announces various things that it thinks I might be interested in without prompting.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 09:52 | [reply](#)

heh...

Very funny, Elloit. So, like in Starcraft, is the sexy medic hitting on me when I click on her a lot? I hope so! That would make my evenings at home less boring knowing that a program has learned to flirt with me.

Suck that dolphins!

Kevin D.

by a reader on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 10:10 | [reply](#)

heh...

Kevin D:

The thing is, Elliot isn't just being funny. He's implicitly giving an argument in support of **The World's** post. Namely: what evidence does anyone have about dolphins or dogs being capable of having deep thoughts, that Elliot doesn't also have, in spades, about his Warcraft program?

by **David Deutsch** on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 13:40 | [reply](#)

anthropomorphising the relatives

Anyone got any ideas about why humans go all anthropomorphic about mammals? And why it's mostly *mammals* rather than other kinds of living creatures that get the oohs and aahs?

Did it originate with hunter-gatherer man teaming up with dog-ancestors? Or was it linked with the domestication of cows, sheep, goats, pigs, camels, llamas, whatever? And why on earth do we go gooey over cats - for their rat-catching abilities?

If I'd read Guns, Germs and Steel I might know the answer to this. *sigh*

I suppose if one spends a lifetime giving soft voiceovers in an anthropomorphic fashion, some of it will eventually rub off.

by **emma** on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 15:33 | [reply](#)

Um

I don't know whether animals have "deep thoughts" or not, because *I have no idea what you all mean by "deep thoughts"*.

Any clarification, at all, please?

Thanks,

Alice

http://libertarian_parent_in_the_countryside.blogspot.com/

Oh... darn...

I thought he was being sarcastic. Oh. Well, if your right I see what your saying.

Personally I feel it's all boiled down to a series of programmed responses. (Warcraft included.) How are dolphins trained to do those neat tricks with the frisbee? Their actions are reinforced with food. They're doing the trick because they've been programmed to "think" that "if I do this, I'll get that". That's why the programming needs to be reinforced from time to time. Even after the training is completed they'll still get that fish every once in awhile to make sure the behaviour is repeated. Same with house pets. You train an animal using food.

But that isn't to say that animals are robots. No, they possess emotions as well. Nowhere near as complex as human emotion but the basics are there and they sense changes. Tells your dog he's an idiot in a sweet tone and he'll wag his tail 'till the cows come home. Too often humans want to inflect human traits and characteristics upon animals to somehow make them more "human" than they are. Like Sigmund Freud said, "Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar."

I'll give you what I feel is a fine example of how different humans and the rest of nature really is. Humans produce no good for nature. Our very existance is a strain upon the natural system. Remove humanity from the world equation and nature would find it's perfect balance forever. Yet, humans are supposively a product of nature. Why would nature produce a creature who provided no value to it's system? It's like we were created to exist outside and above the natural system. I wonder why this is...

Shallow Thoughts

Alice wrote:

"I don't know whether animals have "deep thoughts" or not, because I have no idea what you all mean by "deep thoughts"."

Thinking = ability to create new ideas, deep thinking = ability to create deep new ideas, i.e. - ideas that explain a lot. Dolphins, and all other non-human animals that we know of do not exhibit this ability, they're stupid.

emma wrote:

"Anyone got any ideas about why humans go all anthropomorphic about mammals? And why it's mostly *mammals* rather than other kinds of living creatures that get the oohs and aahs?"

Basically anthropomorphisers think, "It looks a bit like me, it

exhibits complex behaviour, therefore it's smart."

and emma also wrote:

"If I'd read Guns, Germs and Steel I might know the answer to this."

You'd probably be better off with a book by Thomas Sowell if you want to actually understand the kinds of things Jared Diamond writes about in that book.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 16:38 | [reply](#)

relative intelligence

It's a good topic of conversation, and a controversy that we're not going to settle here.

Yeah, the anthropomorphic fallacy is present in spades here. But rejecting the idea out of hand doesn't help much either.

Personally, I think the jury is still out on this one. If dolphins are intelligent by our standards (e.g. can communicate meaningfully in ways that are not hard-wired, can come up with brand-new ideas and teach them to others, and so on) -- well, it may take us a while to prove it. DISproving their intelligence would be a lot harder to do convincingly.

There's a psychological desire, in some people, to project our 'selves' onto others, as inappropriate as it may seem to others. There's also an equally irrational desire, in some people, to assume without question that no one can measure up to ourselves. I don't think either viewpoint does anyone justice.

Try this as a thought experiment -- you're an intelligent dolphin. Say you're as bright as a human five-year-old, although naturally you don't have anything like a human five-year-old's upbringing. Say that you've discovered, more or less to your surprise, that HUMANS are intelligent, and you're interested in showing them that you are, too. How would you go about it? Remember that what looks like intelligent behavior to YOU might not look that way to others. (An intelligent dolphin, for example, might never get around to the idea of writing.)

If you think that demonstrating your human-five-year-old-equivalent intelligence would be easy, how about if you were as intelligent as a dog? How about as intelligent as a cat? (Do cats and dogs have roughly equal intelligence? If you think they do, how do you know?)

For better or for worse, we humans only know about gauging intelligence with those who think the way we do. (We're not even all that good at THAT; listen to a debate at the UN sometime.) Gauging the intelligence of a species that doesn't have much of ANYTHING in common with us -- well, I won't say it can't be done. But I wouldn't dismiss it casually either.

cheers,

Daniel

by **Daniel in Medford** on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 16:47 | [reply](#)

Mammals

It makes perfect sense to me to surmise that animals that are closest to us biologically probably share many of our cognitive experiences also. That the internal experience of a chimpanzee or a dog has a lot in common with that of a human is difficult to prove, but to assume that it doesn't is to place the burden of proof on the wrong side (it defies common sense).

Indeed, to take an extreme case, to assume that there was some kind of absolute qualitative distinction between the mind of the last ape and that of the first human smacks of superstition.

Of course, only an idiot would suggest that dolphins are "deep" thinkers in comparison with the average human. The dolphins have done nothing to suggest that they are capable of anything of the sort. But we should not take intelligence as the sole or even the main criterion for valuing life. There are humans (e.g. Stalin) who are very highly intelligent but whose contribution to the world has been a hefty minus. I think a kind-but-stupid person is more valuable than a cruel-but-intelligent one.

We should value higher animals as sentient beings.

by a reader on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 16:49 | [reply](#)

Dogs Are Idiots

Sylvia Crombie wrote:

"I have to disagree strongly with this ignorant post. You would never say that if you had a dog. I know for a **fact** that my dog understands me and can communicate with me. A lot more than some **humans** I could name."

I can't help but be reminded of an episode of *The Simpsons* where Mr Burns and Smithers are talking about dogs.

Mr Burns: Dogs are idiots. Think about it, if I came along and started slobbering on your crotch what would you think?

Smithers: If *you* did it sir?

by **Alan Forrester** on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 16:53 | [reply](#)

Shark dies after naked tank prank

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/england/southern_counties/2984936.stm

by **Tom Robinson** on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 18:49 | [reply](#)

thinking etc

"deep thinking = ability to create deep new ideas"

So, potential to think = thinking?

Confused.

Alice

by a reader on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 21:50 | [reply](#)

Anyone know if dolphins taste good?

A) David was right about what I meant

B) we aren't looking to *prove* animals aren't intelligent, but rather seeking the *best explanation*. proof is impossible.

C) when we say "animals aren't intelligent" we mean intelligence in the *boolean* sense. it's not matter of degree, an entity simply is or isn't. either it can learn, or it cannot. there is no inbetween.

D) the idea of "5 year old intelligence" is extremely disturbing. your average 5yo may not have a lot of *knowledge* but that's it.

E) Does anyone really think the only thing stopping dolphins building houses is they didn't get hands?

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 22:25 | [reply](#)

Takes a big man to call a dolphin a nitwit.

For someone who cites zoology textbooks, you certainly don't seem to have read many of them.

Behaviors such as mimicry, group hunting techniques, playing, and problem solving don't necessarily constitute deep thinking, it's true. But they do lead to it in many cases. They are precisely the behaviors that every human being first demonstrates when attempting to socialize and communicate.

Babies learn how to talk by mimicking. Does that make them stupid? Does the fact that they eventually learn to say certain things to achieve desirable results mean that they're just little survival machines? No. That's how it's supposed to work! Mimicry is the preamble to communication, and communication begins with reinforcement. We all learn different languages the same way, by first taking in lists of words for simple things that we want or need. (My Spanish is weak, but I still remember how to ask where the bathroom is... I'm a nitwit en Espanol.)

That is why we anthropomorphize machines and animals that demonstrate those kind of behaviors... because those behaviors are

instinctive to humans who are trying to learn, and instinctively

recognizable to other humans who are evolved to help them.

As far as putting frisbees in baskets goes, basic human IQ tests still use simple problems and analogies (because most abstract thought and "deep thinking" is too subjective to measure). You could say that college level engineers learn calculus in order to obtain material benefits later, on the same level that a pigeon learns to peck a certain button to get a drug. (I wouldn't recommend it though, because I'm sure most of them feel they're thinking pretty deeply most of the time.) It almost sounds as if you are saying that solving problems in order to get food relegates a creature to substandard intelligence. The opposite is true.

It's no coincidence that predators are the most "intelligent" animals there are. The evolution of group hunting behavior, to which you refer so slightly, is the prime suspect for the birth of our own big brains. Let's face it, we can eat almost any other animal there is... not because we're big or strong, but because we're smart enough to use many different hunting methods. "Thinking deep thoughts" may just be a side effect of this kind of mental activity, or it may be something specific to our makeup and circumstances. Regardless, the biological correlation between predation and brain complexity isn't in dispute. It's a pretty basic fact. That's why Attenborough is calling attention to the hunting behavior; not because he's so astounded that dolphins figured out how to hunt fish (golly gee), but because group hunting behavior is a prime indicator for a more evolved intelligence. Group hunters form communities; then you get social structures, communication, relationships, all sorts of nice brainfood.

And since it often seems that we're smarter than we really *need* to be (do we really need as much language as we've got?), it's a decent hypothesis that other creatures with high levels of hunting skills may have high levels of the other mental "tricks".

The claim that "dolphins are stupid" is completely irrelevant to the whole purpose of Attenborough's show. He's not studying dolphins in the desperate hopes that one of them will someday be able to give him financial advice. I doubt he's got high aspirations of dolphin art. He's doing this because learning about the intelligence of another species is extremely useful. We know so little about our own intelligence that any chance to study a contrast in behavior shouldn't be passed up. Dolphins in particular provide a handy test subject because their intelligence shows so many similarities to our own; we're not working from something so alien that we have no way to observe or quantify.

With regards to the article: I was very impressed by the fact that they can understand pointing. That means they can read semi-abstract human body language, expressed through fingers... pretty impressive for an animal who spends its entire life around things with fins. I don't doubt that given time and research, we'll be able to communicate with dolphins better than we do now. And I hope we don't neglect killer whales, either... who are possibly even more intelligent.

AND anuddah ting!

this is simply the dolphin using a program in its brain that evolved so that dolphins could send a fixed repertoire of signals under predetermined conditions.

This is known in scientific circles as communicating. (The program in its brain is known as thought.)

by a reader on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 22:58 | [reply](#)

ho hum

By your (author of "AND anuddah ting!") definitions, computer programs think.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 23:10 | [reply](#)

A phenomenon that cannot be defined is not nonexistent thereby.

I second "a reader"'s comments. Some of this thread strikes me as labouring something fairly obvious. It may be intensely difficult (and interesting) to **define** what makes us think some behaviour is at a particular point on the intelligence spectrum, but it's not that hard to just observe.

Here's an approximate order:

People
Dogs
monkeys
dolphins
cats
cows
mice
spiders
ants
viruses

We can argue till the viruses come home about the exact order, but no one's going to deny that it's something like that. (Except you, Mr Temple, though I suspect you are only playing.)

It is an interesting question where computer programmes would come in the hierarchy. Personally I'd say about at the level of spiders. It's also an interesting question, though not one I would raise in company where it would be likely to give offence, to ask where people at different levels of mental impairment would come.

by a reader on Fri, 06/13/2003 - 16:08 | [reply](#)

Not a matter of degree

Sombody wrote:

"It may be intensely difficult (and interesting) to **define** what makes us think some behaviour is at a particular point on the intelligence spectrum, but it's not that hard to just observe...

"We can argue till the viruses come home about the exact order, but no one's going to deny that it's something like that."

Thinking = ability to generate entirely new memes (as humans do), not following a programme in the brain predetermined by biology (as all known non-human animals do).

Your statement above is approximately as ridiculous as this statement: "It may be intensely difficult (and interesting) to **define** what makes us think that some object is able to evolve by natural selection but it's just not that hard to observe, here's an approximate order:

rocks
chairs
galaxies
viruses
bacteria
starfish
wolves"

It is NOT the case that the difference between these different objects is a matter of the degree to which they are able to evolve by natural selection, it is simply the case that some can and some can't and that's all there is to it.

It is not the case that dolphins (or any other animal) are able to create entirely new memes to some degree they cannot generate new memes beyond the programme in their brain AT ALL.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Fri, 06/13/2003 - 17:19 | [reply](#)

Culture threshold?

I don't think we're going to resolve all this until we've got some really good passive scanning technology and a heck of a lot of computing power. (Anybody know how SQUID magnetometers are coming along?) Then we can look inside active brains at all the stages of an organism's development and try to analyse computationally what's going on (assuming Roger Penrose is wrong about quantum stuff going on in microtubules).

The World's position is testable when it comes to humans, where it attributes all human behaviour to wholly culturally-received and self-generated knowledge. This is great, it sticks its neck out (but see my final paragraph below). Its position wrt dolphins, that **however** complicated their performance, it's all just parameters fed into a genetically pre-determined program, seems too dismissive. Why can't sets of parameters be regarded as primitive memes? After all, dolphins presumably can copy one another. One example from the show which grabbed me was when a dolphin was

given the impossible task of fetching some object from the floating basket that wasn't actually in there (perhaps it was the frisbee). Rather than just exploding, it helpfully(?) brought up the empty basket for inspection and nudged the 'no' button. This could be seen as a primitive kind of grammar, because the putative meaning ("what frisbee, dumbass") was independent of the expressive elements. I propose that we selectively breed dolphins for such "grammatical" intelligence for two hundred generations. If they cross a language threshold, using their sonic clicks as voices, then they may develop a simple culture. Consequently, if we turned them loose, there might then be selection pressure on their genes to provide some more brainspace. After another 10,000 generations, who knows? My guess is that intelligence is not all or nothing, but just a constant succession of overrides, which roughly speaking get less and less hardware dependent. If there is a boolean, it's the language threshold, because with a culture you don't have to start overriding from scratch. I don't see a fundamental difference between simple memes overriding genes and new meme's overriding old meme's.

When I sprain my ankle and my genes cause so much painful swelling that I choose not to run up the stairs, how is that not an example of genetic influence? OK, if my grandpa's in the attic and he's having a heart attack then I might choose to run up anyway, but the pain is still weighed up before I make the choice.

by **Tom Robinson** on Fri, 06/13/2003 - 20:43 | [reply](#)

Boolean

A Reader, (wanna give yourself numbers or something guys?)

"We can argue till the viruses come home about the exact order, but no one's going to deny that it's something like that. (Except you, Mr Temple, though I suspect you are only playing.)"

Although my style may be playful at times, I assure you my position is dead serious. *stares menacingly*

Tom,

"When I sprain my ankle and my genes cause so much painful swelling that I choose not to run up the stairs, how is that not an example of genetic influence?"

That's like saying genes encourage typing by giving us fingers. We don't deny genes can indirectly effect behavior in *that* manner.

Anyway, our best theories of intelligence say we have a conjecture machine in our brains, and a refutation/criticism machine too. Having those, or not, is boolean. Our best theories of dolphin brains say they have various hardwired behaviors just like a Warcraft III program (various units even carry out coordinated tasks, and if the code is object oriented, then we could say the various units communicate with each other to carry out complex, coordinated

battle manoeuvres... or in other words we could say Warcraft III

units have language as much as dolphins.)

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 06/13/2003 - 21:35 | [reply](#)

Re: Culture Threshold

The World's position ... attributes all human behaviour to wholly culturally-received and self-generated knowledge

I'd rather say: all *differences* in behaviour between humans. Also, "behaviour" here doesn't mean a particular set of muscle movements like running up stairs. It means a particular set of ways (rules, algorithms) of responding, with muscle movements etc, to given situations, where the 'situations' can include states of one's own body like swollen ankles.

by **David Deutsch** on Fri, 06/13/2003 - 21:37 | [reply](#)

Names!

Elliot suggested:

A Reader, (wanna give yourself numbers or something guys?)

How about names instead? If you want to remain anonymous, you could just choose a different name. Like I have on this comment:

Bettina Fotherington

by **Sarah Fitz-Claridge** on Sat, 06/14/2003 - 08:36 | [reply](#)

Jordan

Well I completely disagree like many others with this piece. I am known for my opinionative view, and in this (rare) case I am on the opposing team. Dolphins are obviously able to at least understand humans, or at least the ones in the show, as they did exactly what the instructors asked. But then again this just might be some circus act you say, well if it was then why would dolphins act in intelligence over instinct in the wild? Just a few things to consider.

by a reader on Thu, 06/17/2004 - 09:36 | [reply](#)

READ THIS! Dr. Cassandra Everthorn

My research has lead me to beleive that idoits who spend all day writing an opionative pieces of writing are actually are just unable to accept the possiblity that someone might actually know something more than them and that *maybe* what they are saying is right. Well to all the idoits who actually go through all of this misinterpreted and annoying replies, get out there and do

something. Exercise! Who knows maybe you could quit smoking and have a new positive view on life! So stop reading this crap and get out there.

by a reader on Thu, 06/17/2004 - 10:16 | [reply](#)

animals do have feelings

ok first of all if you think your going to tell my dog he's an idiot get ready to get bit or braked at cause it seems my animals does have feeling and of coures everyone has they own opinon but if you really pay attintion to animals you'll noticed to some are brought up to be like humans and like cats getting there nails clipped ok thats like us getting a leg cut of we have to get use to it you know what im saying but the deep thought's thing i dont know about but animals are in a way like humans so if anyone has a commet do email me and we shall chat but for now tata

by a reader on Wed, 04/20/2005 - 19:15 | [reply](#)

Some have probably got better

Some have probably got better English than you as well.

by a reader on Thu, 04/21/2005 - 16:02 | [reply](#)

Re: Some have probably got better English

There is a relevant "classic" cartoon -- hey, it's from July 1993, before September -- by Peter Steiner in the New Yorker. It is widely reproduced; copies that look like they might stick around for a while are [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#), and can probably always be found [here](#).

by [Kevin](#) on Thu, 04/21/2005 - 20:14 | [reply](#)

On Loyalty

1: True Allies, True Loyalty

2: Who? Whom?

3: The Individual and the Nation

Thu, 06/12/2003 - 09:12 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

7. Settlements

This is the seventh part of our acclaimed series, "A Short History of Israel". If you wish to read the preceding parts, see the **Table of Contents** for links to them. We welcome comments and criticisms. Do tell us what you think.

.....

Given that there was to be no land-for-peace deal in the immediate future, Israel faced the problem of what to do with that land, which had 1.2 million Arab inhabitants. A small minority of Jewish Israelis favoured returning it unconditionally to Jordan and Egypt, mainly on the grounds that anything less would cast Israel in the role of occupier and create increasing resentment among the population. Another small minority wanted Israel to annexe the captured territory. The great majority opposed both these ideas, because both of them would destroy the possibility of any future land-for-peace deal. Also, returning unconditionally to the situation that had just ended in a war seemed perverse and irresponsible, and in the meantime the territories constituted a much-needed buffer against attack. The closest Jordanian soldier or artillery piece was now separated from Tel Aviv by 40 miles, plus the River Jordan, as opposed to 12 before. The Egyptian army, which had been an hour's drive from Tel Aviv and within artillery range of Ashdod and Ashkelon, was now 200 miles away and across the Suez Canal. With the Syrian guns silenced, children and teenagers in Northern Israel who had seldom in their lives slept above ground, could now do so safely. This normalisation highlighted the blighted lifestyles that Israelis within range of those guns had been leading, and made returning the Golan Heights to the Syrian army unthinkable to many. And with Sharm-el-Sheikh in Israeli hands, the blockade of Eilat was lifted, and Israelis were in no mood to trust international promises on that issue again – indeed, none were offered this time.

The Jerusalem issue was especially uncontroversial among Jewish Israelis. Israel annexed East Jerusalem, reuniting the city. Arabs living there were given the option of becoming Israeli citizens or retaining their Jordanian nationality with a right of residence in Israel. Jewish sightseers and worshippers were able to visit the Old City for the first time in 19 years. The Jewish holy places had been desecrated and allowed to fall into disrepair. Work began on restoring them and the Jewish Quarter.

A military government was instituted in the West Bank and Gaza,

with orders to prevent violence but otherwise to interfere as little as possible in the lives of the residents. Residents were allowed to trade freely with Arab countries, and to visit them. They were also allowed to trade with, and seek jobs in, Israel, and many did so. Tens of thousands of Palestinian Arabs were allowed to return from Jordan to the West Bank, where businesses flourished under the influx of Israeli and foreign tourists. Arabs from the West Bank and Gaza became a common sight relaxing on Israeli beaches. The Palestinian Arab press became the freest in the Arab world, and institutions such as human-rights organisations and a competent civil service gradually developed.

One of the most controversial and complex issues raised by Israel's capture of the West Bank and Gaza was whether Jews should be allowed to live there, and if so, under what conditions. The Israeli government's initial attitude was to ban Jews altogether, except for day visits. However, within months, public opinion had forced them to make some exceptions. To the Jews of Hebron, for instance, the period between 1936 (when the last Jews had been forced to leave the city) and 1967 was no more than a brief interlude, of a familiar type, in their long history. Jews had lived near the holy sites in Hebron, and been expelled, and had returned, many times over the millennia. That some religious Jews wanted to live there again had nothing to do with Israel or Zionism. Indeed, the community massacred in 1929 had been largely anti-Zionist. But the prospect of the Israeli government joining the long list of rulers of Hebron who had attempted to keep the city forcibly Jew-free, was too much for the Israeli public to bear. So when a group of religious Jews, including some children of those who had been murdered in 1929, pretended to be Swedish tourists and checked in to a hotel in the centre of Hebron, and then refused to return to Israel, the Israeli government eventually relented and let them stay, on condition that they not live within the city, but build new houses on the outskirts, a short distance from the main Jewish holy site. These became Kiryat Arba, the first of what have come to be known as 'Jewish settlements'.

In the great majority of the settlements, the inhabitants have always gone to some lengths to be good neighbours to the local Arab communities, trading with them, employing them, providing services such as health care, and trying to maintain good relations even when this is not reciprocated and even when terrorist murders occur. But the Jews of Hebron have a programme of gradually re-taking possession of the ancient Jewish Quarter (most of which was razed and desecrated under the Jordanian occupation) from the existing occupants whom they regard as squatters. They have sometimes used intimidation and assault – not only against Arabs but also against Israeli police – to achieve this. Today, tension between the 6,000 Jews and the 150,000 Arabs of Hebron runs very high. There are frequent murders, mostly in the form of terrorist attacks on Jews, but in 1994 a Kiryat Arba doctor opened fire in a mosque in Hebron, murdering 29 Arabs before being killed himself.

An example of a very different type of settlement is Gush Etzion.

Established in 1970, it is built on land at the southern approaches to Jerusalem, which had been purchased by the Jewish Agency in the early days of the Mandate. It had first been a collective farm, which was abandoned during the riots of 1929. An attempt to re-settle it was cut short by the riots of 1936. In 1943, four villages were built there. Orchards were planted and the villages prospered. Five years later, just before the declaration of the State of Israel, Gush Etzion was attacked by the Jordanian Army and Arab irregulars, heading for Jerusalem. It was besieged, and the defenders radioed for reinforcements. The Haganah could spare only 35 men, but they were ambushed on the way there and all were killed. Further attempts to lift the siege failed too. This became one of the epic sieges of the War of Independence, with the defenders isolated for many months, beating off attack after attack but suffering terrible casualties. Finally, with Jordanian armoured vehicles inside the defences, the surviving defenders surrendered. At one of the villages, Kfar Etzion, there were only fifteen of them left. They were asked to stand in a row for a photograph and were murdered by machine gun fire. Some of the surviving civilians, including an Arab family who were friends of the Kfar Etzion people and had taken shelter there, were then murdered too, and the remainder were taken to captivity in Jordan together with the other Gush Etzion survivors. Despite its outcome, the battle is considered by Zionists to be a key event in their history, epitomising the permanent commitment of Jews to their land. Ben Gurion said: "I can think of no battle in the annals of the Israel Defense Forces which was more magnificent, more tragic or more heroic than the struggle for Gush Etzion ... If there exists a Jewish Jerusalem, our foremost thanks go to the defenders of Gush Etzion".

After the War of Independence, the Jordanians destroyed all trace of Gush Etzion, uprooting the orchards, razing the villages and building an army base there. They also built a refugee camp for Palestinian Arabs. This must have seemed appropriate to them – billeting expelled Arabs on the property of expelled Jews – as, indeed, the mirror-image of that policy seemed appropriate to the Israeli authorities during the same period: many Jewish refugees were billeted in former Arab homes. However, in other respects the two sides' policies were not symmetrical. Israel was, and had been throughout, seeking a negotiated solution to the issue of refugees, and other issues, based on partition, while the Arab countries were still rejecting both partition and negotiation on principle. Also, as Golda Meir, who had been Foreign Minister during Israel's brief occupation of Gaza in 1956, recalled:

Then I toured the Gaza Strip, from which the fedayeen had gone out on their murderous assignments for so many months and in which the Egyptians had kept a quarter of a million men, women and children (of whom nearly 60 percent were Arab refugees) in the most shameful poverty and destitution.

I was appalled by what I saw there and by the fact that these miserable people had been maintained in such a

degrading condition for over eight years only so that the

Arab leaders could show the refugee camps to visitors and make political capital out of them ...

I couldn't help comparing what I saw in the Gaza Strip to what we had done – even with all the mistakes we had made – for the Jews who had come to Israel in those same eight years.

When the survivors of Gush Etzion were released in 1950 and arrived in Israel, they were not confined to camps.

After the Six Day War, a group including some of the children of the original inhabitants of Kfar Etzion petitioned the Israeli government to be allowed to return to the village and rebuild it. The petition was granted.

During the following few years the escalating attacks on Israel (see Part 3), the continuing insistence of Arab governments on withdrawal without peace, and the consequent total lack of progress towards either peace or withdrawal, caused Israelis and Israeli political parties to re-think their policies on the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan Heights, and in particular on Jewish settlement there. For a period of at least a decade, all the major political groupings came to approve of some further Jewish settlement. Their positions were roughly as follows:

- So long as a negotiated peace was not on offer, Labour Party supporters and their allies wanted to impose viable and defensible borders unilaterally, as far as this was possible. To this end, they supported the building of new settlements close to the 1948 cease-fire line, in areas that they expected to be recognised as part of Israel in a future peace treaty. They also supported the establishment of settlements that could serve as military outposts in the Jordan valley, and some settlements in Sinai. They also sought to demonstrate, in this way, that the Arab governments' policy of relentless war would have long-term costs in addition to the short-term ones that the IDF was inflicting.
- Likud supporters were not expecting the Arab countries' implacable stance to change in the foreseeable future, regardless of what Israel did. They reasserted the Revised Zionist position that the whole of Palestine should become Israel, and that Jews should be free to purchase land anywhere. In addition, when in power, they favoured financial support for settlements. Few, however, advocated annexation of the West Bank and Gaza for the foreseeable future.
- Religious Jews underwent a fundamental reversal of attitude. They increasingly took the view that Jews had a religious duty to inhabit all sites of historical or religious Jewish significance in Palestine, and a right to be protected there by the IDF. Many of these sites were in or near Arab population centres.

No significant faction, in any of these groupings, advocated the confiscation of land or property belonging to individual Arabs. Nor was any such policy ever implemented, though it is alleged that Israeli adjudicators often made unjust decisions when determining

the ownership of unoccupied land, and that some Arab absentee landowners were prevented by bureaucratic means from claiming compensation for land seized for security purposes.

Within months of the end of the Six Day War, Israel was again under attack.

Part 8: The Yom Kippur War

Thu, 06/12/2003 - 17:39 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Part 7: Settlements

Very well written!

by [Daniel in Medford](#) on Thu, 06/12/2003 - 21:42 | [reply](#)

The Fourth Geneva Convention

Ever heard of it?

by a reader on Thu, 08/07/2003 - 18:26 | [reply](#)

Re: The Fourth Geneva Convention

International law being as vague as it is, and given the nature and political agendas of the UN and other elements of the international-law culture, it is perhaps not surprising that international conventions are routinely interpreted as de-legitimising Israel and justifying violence against Jews.

If there were indeed an international Convention establishing an absolute right to keep a territory Jew-free, so that systematically expelling Jews from their homes throughout any given territory would be an act of philanthropy meriting the Nobel Peace Prize, while any Jew returning to his home there, or buying a new home from a willing seller, would be committing a war crime that merits his being summarily shot or blown to pieces, then that Convention would be evil, would it not? But as it happens, contrary to what 'a reader' evidently thinks, there is no such Convention. We largely agree with the Israeli government's interpretation [here](#), that Israel's 'settlements' policy over the years has not violated the **Fourth Geneva Convention** or any other provision of international law. In particular, we agree that:

- The provisions of the Geneva Convention regarding forced population transfer to occupied sovereign territory cannot be viewed as prohibiting the voluntary return of individuals to the towns and villages from which they, or their ancestors, had been ousted. Nor does it prohibit the movement of individuals to land which was not under the legitimate sovereignty of any state and which is not subject to private ownership. In this regard, Israeli settlements have been established only after an exhaustive investigation process, under the supervision of the

Supreme Court of Israel, designed to ensure that no

communities are established on private Arab land.

- It should be emphasised that the movement of individuals to the territory is entirely voluntary, while the settlements themselves are not intended to displace Arab inhabitants, nor do they do so in practice.

We do admit, however, that the very existence of Israel violates various Declarations and Resolutions of international bodies, such as the UN General Assembly Resolution 3379 (since reluctantly reversed) that "Zionism is Racism". However, those Resolutions are evil too, and do not have the force of international law.

by [Editor](#) on Thu, 08/07/2003 - 19:38 | [reply](#)

(I also posted the "FGC" comment)

I've only skimmed over your writings here, but I have to say that I think they're awful.

The position you seem to be in is one of wanting to do some objective inquiry, but not to the extent that it might threaten that you accept the Israeli/Zionist position in most regards to begin with. Maybe I'm wrong, but that's what I see.

I see this because, even in my limited perusal, I can see what another commentator has noted: that you give reasons and excuses for Israeli misdeeds, but leave Palestinian and Arab misdeeds as being just naked, evil undertakings. One need only to look at your comments on the Irgun being a terrorist organization to see this -- I think you begin by essentially saying "Yes, Irgun was a terrorist organization, but it was also much more than that, unlike Palestinian terrorist organizations like the PLO, Islamic Jihad, and Hamas." It would not take any real research, Editor, but only a consistent reading of a decent newspaper for you to realize that Hamas, in particular, sponsors hospitals and schools more than it sponsors terror. If the Irgun ever sponsored a school, it was probably only a school for assassins.

I see your bias also in your omissions. Did you think it was responsible of you to have written about "Settlements" without once mentioning the Fourth Geneva Convention, regardless of your personal opinion on it? Does it count for nothing that the United States -- Israel's monolithic ally -- believes that the FGC does apply in the Occupied Territories? And your explanation of your position on the FGC is weak -- in fact, Israel holds that the FGC does not apply to the OT because the FGC applies only to the territories of signatory states, and the OT never rightfully belonged to a signatory state. In essence, this is a position that holds that there are no rights until states create them -- not a very American position, to say the least.

(As an aside, your bias is extremely evident in your extrapolation from my eight words your remarkable diatribe about how I "evidently think" that there is a convention promoting the ethnic cleansing of Jews. Even for the internet, your comments are incredibly low-brow. I might also note that the resolution that

created Israel was a General Assembly resolution [186], which did not have the force of international law. Whether or not it was evil is arguable.)

I see your bias also in your mischaracterizations. I note that someone else has beaten me to pointing out problems with your comments on "Arab immigration" in the Mandate period, but let me highlight one thing. You wrote, "The number of Arab immigrants to Palestine during the Mandate period is unknown and highly controversial, but the net increase in the Arab Palestinian population was about twice the net increase in the Jewish Palestinian population." (Should you have credited Joan Peters is some of your statistics??) Well, given that the Arab population was about eight times the Jewish population at the beginning of the period, we can expect that equal levels of natural growth would make the net increase in the Arab Palestinian population EIGHT TIMES the net increase in the Jewish Palestinian population, so that it was "about twice" that amount is remarkable in that the ratio is SO LOW. But of course your insinuation is something else entirely.

Again, I have only skimmed your report -- what I have seen leads me to believe there is no value to me in looking any further at it. I think you are ultimately embarrassing yourself in presenting this as anything other than a Israel-biased account of the situation. I would hope that you would just take it down -- it's that bad. Maybe you could try to take a fresh look at the situation, but I think you really need to take a fresh look at yourself and try to figure out exactly where you're coming from on this issue, and what baggage you might be bringing to it -- frankly, you are bringing an awful lot. Sorry.

(The most objective general history of the Israel-Palestine situation that I have found, in case anyone is reading, is "Righteous Victims" by Benny Morris. Morris is probably the foremost of the "New Historians," and, while he is a pretty staunch Zionist, he is also [and probably moreso] a committed historian.

Anyone who wants to write their own comments on the situation for the consumption of others should also look to the UNISPAL documents that are available on the internet. These are hardly all-encompassing, but they at least give a reasonably objective accounting of certain aspects of the history from the Mandate period and all the UN activities.)

by a reader on Fri, 08/08/2003 - 16:02 | [reply](#)

Speaking of Tendentious Propagandistic Bias

A reader wrote

'Should you have credited Joan Peters is some of your statistics??'

The statistics were not from Joan Peters, they were from an article that admits her book has rather more polemics than it does

common sense, although she happens to have found a good

argument about that one issue.

'The most objective general history of the Israel-Palestine situation that I have found, in case anyone is reading, is "Righteous Victims" by Benny Morris. Morris is probably the foremost of the "New Historians," and, while he is a pretty staunch Zionist, he is also [and probably moreso] a committed historian.'

Morris is a liar. Read **Fabricating Israeli History** by Efraim Karsh for his persistent, flagrant disregard for truth. This includes entirely deliberate misquotation of David Ben-Gurion with the sole purpose of utterly inverting the meaning of his words. He is rank charlatan, not an historian.

by **Alan Forrester** on Fri, 10/17/2003 - 20:50 | [reply](#)

Setting The World To Rights

Ideas have consequences.

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Settlements

The **seventh part** of our much acclaimed series, **A Short History of Israel**, is now up. If you want to read the series from the beginning, start **here**.

Thu, 06/12/2003 - 17:54 | [permalink](#)

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A Nuclear-Powered Spaceship!

At last, reason has found a way past the objections of the Environmental religion.

An ambitious and controversial mission to explore the other planets of the solar system using nuclear-powered spacecraft has come a step closer after Nasa gave a giant aerospace company the go-ahead to develop revolutionary new engines.

The aim is to build an interplanetary space probe powerful enough to fly vast distances and still to have enough power to collect scientific information and send it back to Earth.

Hurray!

Sat, 06/14/2003 - 02:48 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

FLASH: Several Physical Laws Yet To Be Repealed By Congress!

Nuclear power could indeed be used to provide the **energy** a spacecraft's propulsion requires, but there's another gotcha that the power of the atom cannot address, and which is perhaps the strongest reason for which chemical rockets have dominated space travel so far: conservation of momentum, a.k.a. Newton's Third Law. Until we learn how to finesse that law -- and I doubt we will -- a self-propelled spacecraft will need to eject reaction mass behind it to accelerate. A nuclear reactor doesn't naturally meet that need, whereas a chemical rocket propellant does.

This one is going to take some really hard thought.

Curmudgeon Emeritus, Palace Of Reason

by [fporretto](#) on Sat, 06/14/2003 - 11:16 | [reply](#)

Reaction mass isn't a 'gotcha'

I think there are straightforward ways of solving this problem. (At least, straightforward from the physics point of view.) Basically, to economise on reaction *mass* you have to use more reaction

velocity. The exhaust of chemical rockets travels at a few hundred metres per second relative to the rocket. For ion rockets it could in principle go up to a reasonable fraction of the speed of light. So I guess the new engine will be an ion rocket powered by a nuclear reactor.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Sat, 06/14/2003 - 13:51 | [reply](#)

Deep Space One

Nasa's **Deep space one** probe tested electrically driven Ion Propulsion. This system could provide much of the transit thrust, but would probably still need to be augmented with a chemical system.

The reactor proposal is exciting because it will provide the scientists with a great deal more power to drive a more complex and detailed set of experiments than could be performed with a solar powered craft.

by [mailleta](#) on Sat, 06/14/2003 - 13:51 | [reply](#)

New type of rocket

This new type of rocket could do the biz!

<http://dma.ing.uniroma1.it/users/bruno/Petro.prn.pdf>

It combines aspects of chemical rockets and ion drives.

Chemical rockets are limited because

- (a) there's only so much chemical energy in the fuel, and
- (b) if the exhaust gets too hot the nozzle starts to melt, which limits thermodynamic efficiency

OTOH ion drives are efficient but the thrust has hitherto been poor.

The new plasma rocket would use microwaves to heat the propellant to a scorching plasma, with a nozzle shaped out of a magnetic field.

It's not been tested yet but the plasma confinement bit should be helped by all that expensive fusion research that's been done in the past 50 years.

It probably needs bags of electricity to run, so great news about getting a fission reactor past the ecopuritans :-D

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Sat, 06/14/2003 - 17:59 | [reply](#)

David Kay

Dr David Kay was chief nuclear weapons inspector in Iraq during 1991-2. in his **evidence before the House Armed Services Committee** on September 10, 2002, which is worth reading in full, he said, of Iraq's *previous* WMD programme:

What is much less well understood is the impact that the discovery of the gigantic scope and indigenous nature of Saddam's weapons program had on the prospects of being able to eliminate this program by inspection alone. We now know that the Iraqi efforts to build an arsenal of weapons of mass destruction:

- Spanned more than a decade;
- Cost more than \$20 Billion;
- Involved more than 40,000 Iraqis and succeed in mastering all the technical and most of the productions steps necessary to acquire a devil's armory of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons as well as the missiles necessary to deliver them over vast distances.

[...]

The nuclear weapons secrets are now Iraqi secrets well understood by Iraq's technical elite, and the production capabilities necessary to turn these "secrets" into weapons are part and parcel of the domestic infrastructure of Iraq which will survive even the most draconian of sanctions regimes. Simply put, Iraq is not Libya, but very much like post-Versailles Germany in terms of its ability to maintain a weapons capability in the teeth of international inspections. As long as a government remains in Baghdad committed to acquiring WMD, that capability can be expected to become – and without much warning – a reality.

Anyway, the good news is that David Kay has **just been appointed** Special Advisor for Strategy regarding Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction Programs.

Dr. Kay, 63, will be based in Iraq and will be in charge of

refining the overall approach for the search for Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

Sat, 06/14/2003 - 19:24 | [permalink](#)

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What Caused This Death?

What is the explanation for **this**?:

An Egyptian woman married to a man with six daughters from previous marriages drowned herself Saturday just hours after giving birth to a girl because she feared her husband's reaction to fathering another daughter.

Our explanation is simple: the husband is a vile bastard.

But does everyone else agree? Keen to welcome other voices into the gentle bosom of **Setting The World To Rights**, we asked others what they think, and here, in their own words, are their answers:

Psychologist: Clearly, this tragic event was caused by a clinical depression brought on by a post-natal hormonal imbalance.

Sociobiologist: A certain mutant gene, activated by her pregnancy, gave her an increased tendency to commit suicide.

Astrologer: Jupiter's alignment with Venus, which represents motherhood, shortened her lifeline.

Leftist: When people live in such poverty, desperation is the natural result, and this sort of sad event is inevitable.

Palestinian: What a waste! If she was going to kill herself, she could have taken some Jews with her.

Egyptian Government: We are investigating the possibility that this was not a suicide, and have already captured several Mossad agents.

Environmentalist: This is a catastrophe: dead bodies in the canal endanger the water snails. We demand that earth barriers be put up alongside all canals to protect them from such attacks in future.

Postmodernist Idiotarian: By Western logic, this was a tragedy. But the West is too powerful, and should stop assuming that its values are the only truth. The West should stop trying to suppress the freedom of other

cultures to live according to their own values. It is wrong for us to denigrate Egypt's amazing culture.

Idiotarian Economist: An individual's preferences are revealed in his actions. This individual clearly preferred to die. It was her choice, based on her perception of the costs and benefits of her options.

Muslim cleric: She killed herself virtuously, out of recognition of her personal failure to fulfil her duty to obey her husband and bear him sons.

Libertarian: During this suicide, the only force initiated was by the woman against herself. She had a right to do this. Therefore, nothing bad happened.

Frank's Rumsfeld: Rarr!

So, gentle reader, what do *you* think? Your voice is welcome too, dear friend.

Sun, 06/15/2003 - 16:31 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Your explanation sucks too!

It seems to me that **The World's** real explanation:

Our explanation is simple: the husband is a vile bastard.

is as bad as the fake ones.

Why don't you assign most of the responsibility to the person who made the insanely stupid choices (to marry a bastard, to bear his child, to kill herself when something fairly likely came to pass, etc.)?

Are you denying free will and individual responsibility for decisions?

If so, as I said, it seems just as foolish as the others you've "quoted".

My explanation is a little less simple but a lot more accurate:

The woman was an idiot. This tragedy is mostly the result of her stupidity and partially the result of her association with a bastard of a husband and a backward culture.

by [Gil](#) on Sun, 06/15/2003 - 21:09 | [reply](#)

Loony feminist nonsense

Your explanation is the loony feminist one, right?

Of course the man *must* be evil and the woman *couldn't* have acted any more rationally, despite that none of the personal details are actually known?

I wonder if she thought about the baby's future, at any point.

Alice

http://libertarian_parent_in_the_countryside.blogspot.com/

by a reader on Sun, 06/15/2003 - 21:42 | [reply](#)

None of Henry VIII's wives resorted to suicide...

Gil said:

>insanely stupid choices (to marry a bastard, to bear his child, to kill herself when something fairly likely came to pass, etc.)

Marrying a bastard is not a such a difficult thing to do in a culture where arranged marriages are prevalent, and where bf-gf relationships are frowned upon or forbidden, so there's no prior experimentation.

As for bearing his child, well, in many parts of the West it was not a crime for a husband to rape his wife until fairly recently. And I suspect that in rural Egypt the education of girls is not seen as a priority.

Alice said:

>Of course the man must be evil and the woman couldn't have acted any more rationally, despite that none of the personal details are actually known?

Presumably *The World* is asking us for the most likely explanation based upon what we know.

People who have just given birth are usually exhausted. Most people who try to kill themselves are surely in the most horrendous state of anguish and aren't capable of making rational judgements. The person most responsible for helping her through this plight was probably her husband. However, not only did he fail to do so, it seems that he helped to cause it in the first place, with his cruel and stupid threat (stupid because he could have chosen to murder or divorce her without telling her beforehand).

Also, the husband had divorced previous wives for the blameless act of not bearing him any sons, despite the fact that a divorced woman in his locality is shunned, and may have no economic independence.

Clearly he was indeed a vile bastard. If he hadn't been so, even in his backward culture, the outcome would probably have been different.

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Sun, 06/15/2003 - 23:17 | [reply](#)

Egypt isn't the USA

Gil,

Living in Egypt is different than the US. She almost certainly had no

choice in the marriage, and did not have a choice in bearing his child. You don't withhold sex from someone who is supported by society in beating you within an inch of your life. You don't defy your father, when he tells you to marry, for the same reason. She didn't choose her situation. However, her husband did choose to marry her, intimidate her, beat her, blame her for the daughter thing, etc

"Think like an American woman" isn't a possible choice for girls in Egypt.

Alice,

Do you really think we arrived at our position by examining their genders!?

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sun, 06/15/2003 - 23:30 | [reply](#)

Reading this entry, what stood...

Reading this entry, what stood out at me the most was the similarity between the Astrologer's explanation and the "scientists'" explanation. Both are 100% blind to moral agency, so much so that they seem to be *motivated* by the desire to rid such situations as this one of any trace of morality. They seem to have constructed awkward, counter-intuitive explanations of the situation for the sole purpose of avoiding any mention of such things as blame, responsibility, choices, obligations etc. etc. etc.

Quite disturbing really.

by [Daniel Strimpel](#) on Mon, 06/16/2003 - 00:02 | [reply](#)

"Loony feminist nonsense", sc...

"Loony feminist nonsense", screeches Alice from the comfort of her Western life. "Of course the man *must* be evil and the woman *couldn't* have acted any more rationally, despite that none of the personal details are actually known?"

I wonder if she thought about the baby's future, at any point."

You can make such a harsh judgement of the woman if you want to but that judgement implicitly lets the husband off the hook, and that is a mistake. To say of the woman that she could have chosen differently is to assert that she should have been able to overcome the cultural pressures on her. While there is a grain of truth in that judgement--it would have been better all round if she had been able to resist the pressure--Alice's judgement implies that we have control over our unconscious minds. In fact we don't. Overcoming the sort of pressure that woman was under is not trivial as Alice

suggests. To get angry about this woman's "lack of rationality" is to

assert that knowledge creation is easy.

by a reader on Mon, 06/16/2003 - 09:10 | [reply](#)

Culture

In a sense, the husband was acting under pressure from their culture just as surely as the wife was. That does not exculpate him though, and it does not exculpate the wife either. Both must bear responsibility for their actions.

by **Chris** on Mon, 06/16/2003 - 10:00 | [reply](#)

Re; Culture

If a business man jumps off the roof, and someone said the cause of death was stress, we would rightly insist that his own bad theories also played a role, and if he had a fairly normal US life, we could say the suicide was his own fault, and also wrong of him.

However, the balance of factors in this case is different. There were very few opportunities in this woman's life to choose better theories, so she is very little to blame. On the other hand, the husband had plenty of chances to not marry her, not go psycho about having daughters, not intimidate her, not beat her, not divorce/shame former wives, etc

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 06/16/2003 - 10:13 | [reply](#)

Generalisations

If we want to learn about the world, we can and should draw generalisations from the evidence. What we shouldn't do is apply generalisations to individual situations as if they were iron laws.

Missing out a "probably" is blurring the line between rational judgement and bigotry.

The baby would be better off with a divorced mother than a dead one. I'm interested to see how entrenched the loony feminist meme actually is these days.

Alice

by a reader on Mon, 06/16/2003 - 10:18 | [reply](#)

Loony Feminist Explanation

The loony feminist explanation would be: "the man is to blame and the woman is the victim because society gives men all the power and all the choices and everything women do is caused by their situation which men have chosen to force them into".

The World's explanation is "given what we are told of this

particular situation and what we know of the society in question, it is overwhelmingly likely that this particular man is to blame because he made a series of egregiously (even by the standards of that society) immoral choices without which the whole thing would not have happened".

It's true that the woman must have made a choice to commit suicide, and that may have been morally wrong. But even if it was, suppose she had behaved rightly instead: the chances are that the situation would still be a catastrophic tragedy for her and the child (and the other six children), and that tragedy would have been caused by the immoral behaviour of the husband.

by **David Deutsch** on Mon, 06/16/2003 - 13:54 | [reply](#)

Loony Feminist Explanation

David,

I'm sorry but it seems to me that the only difference between the Loony Feminist Explanation and **The World's** explanation is that **The World** has applied the Loony Feminist Explanation framework to this particular case.

by **Gil** on Mon, 06/16/2003 - 16:17 | [reply](#)

Loony Feminist Explanation

Gil:

I'm sorry but it seems to me that the only difference between the Loony Feminist Explanation and **The World's** explanation is that **The World** has applied the Loony Feminist Explanation framework to this particular case.

It seems to me that the only difference between your comment and

The World never gets anything right

is that you have applied the latter explanation framework to this particular item.

(Actually it doesn't. But the logic would be the same as yours.)

by **David Deutsch** on Mon, 06/16/2003 - 16:46 | [reply](#)

So we agree?

David,

Since you don't dispute any fact or make any argument, do we agree that **The World** has applied The Loony Feminist Explanation framework to this case, and is wrong?

Great!

If this is not the case, then please explain what flaws in the Loony Feminist Explanation it has recognized and applied to this case.

Also, I hope **The World** prefers its readers to adopt the initial stance that:

The World is sometimes wrong, let me think of criticisms...

over:

The World is always right, I'll adopt their position and defend it reflexively.

Also, I realize that **The World** was trying to give a pithy explanation rather than a long-winded analysis. I just think that it should have recognized the primary responsibility of the woman for her actions as well as the significant influences of the husband, the culture, etc. Failure to do this is precisely the error that the ridiculed explanations commit (to varying degrees).

by **Gil** on Mon, 06/16/2003 - 18:05 | [reply](#)

Gil

I realize that **The World** was trying to give a pithy explanation rather than a long-winded analysis. I just think that it should have recognized the primary responsibility of the woman for her actions

Well you *would* say that, wouldn't you. Typical **man**.

by **Sarah Fitz-Claridge** on Mon, 06/16/2003 - 18:33 | [reply](#)

So We Agree?

Gil:

If this is not the case, then please explain what flaws in the Loony Feminist Explanation it has recognized and applied to this case.

The World's explanation is fundamentally different from that of the loony feminists. It is not "this particular man has done to this woman what the loony feminists mistakenly say all men do to all women, and for the same reasons" -- though that would be a fundamental difference in itself. Instead, **The World** locates the prime cause of the situation in a series of individual choices made by the husband, which he could have made differently. The loony feminist explanation ignores individual agency and explains the cause collectively, either in his nature as a man, or in the way society allocates power. Likewise with the woman, the loony feminist explanation exonerates her on principle, with the corresponding collectivist reason. **The World's** explanation is again

about the individual and does not fully exonerate the woman ("

[she] must have made a choice, [which] may have been morally wrong"), and makes clear that her exact causal and moral role in the situation depends on the individual choices she made, not on her sex or what society she was living in.

The nature of the society (and the sexes of the participants) appear in the loony feminist explanation as determinants of the participants' actions, whereas in **The World's** explanation it appears only as evidence of what the facts (regarding who decided what) were. If it turned out that that evidence was misleading and those facts were different, **The World's** way of explaining the situation could just as easily put the blame elsewhere. The loony feminists' explanation is simply incompatible with certain facts being different, or with the conclusion being other than to blame the man and regard the woman as his victim.

by **David Deutsch** on Mon, 06/16/2003 - 19:55 | [reply](#)

Sarah

Well you would say that, wouldn't you. Typical man.

I resent that! I'm an *exceptional* **man**.

by **Gil** on Mon, 06/16/2003 - 21:23 | [reply](#)

David

I accept your answer.

I just find it hard to believe that the meager evidence of that short article was sufficient for you to confidently assign primary blame to the husband. I would need a lot more information before reaching such a conclusion.

Perhaps it's that feminist intuition I've heard so much about.

by **Gil** on Mon, 06/16/2003 - 21:33 | [reply](#)

Sources

Gil,

If I were to find a source (two? three?) for "violence against women is the norm in Egypt" would you change your view?

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 06/17/2003 - 00:33 | [reply](#)

Norm?

Elliot,

By "the norm", do you mean that it's common, or virtually without

exception?

Unless it's the latter, or close, then it doesn't make sense to apply it to this case, does it?

All I know about this case is that somebody claims that the husband threatened to kill or divorce her if she bore a girl. And that he has a history of divorcing (not killing) wives who bear girls. And (I assume) that she knew that when she married him.

I don't know about violence in this family, I don't know about how the marriage came about, I don't know what the woman's motives were for any of her actions.

Yes, you can probably say "But for the husband, the woman would be alive." But that doesn't mean he's the primarily responsible agent here (with the information we have, including stats about Egypt). We could also say "But for Mohammed she would be alive" or "But for the position of the moon, she would be alive" (people might be more concerned about flooding than this baby's gender...).

My view is not "The husband had nothing to do with it." My view is that I don't know enough about the lives of these people to say how much of the responsibility is his vs. hers vs. other factors'.

In the absence of substantial (more than I've seen) evidence to the contrary, I think it's a good policy to assign responsibility to the person committing the act.

by **Gil** on Tue, 06/17/2003 - 00:53 | [reply](#)

Gil's flawed logic

My view is that I don't know enough about the lives of these people to say how much of the responsibility is his vs. hers vs. other factors'. In the absence of substantial (more than I've seen) evidence to the contrary, I think it's a good policy to assign responsibility to the person committing the act.

Gil, quit while you are ahead (figuratively speaking since you lost long ago). David is right and his explanation clarifies succinctly why. Also, there is plenty of information about how common, indeed, institutionalised is oppression of women and violence towards them in Egypt and other muslim countries. With internet at hand (and many books written about the subject), your insistence on lack of 'evidence' seems pretty feeble.

Also, there is a common fallacy perpetrated by those who argue against feminism and any position that is perceived as such. Feminism is collectivist, destructive and as such to be abhorred, however, its existence does not invalidate the reality that women have been oppressed by both the society and individual men (taking advantages of the legal and social rules) in the past. Women, as a rule, had no freedom of choice nor education to change their situation.

However, just because, despite these conditions, there were

examples of loving marriages or occasional respect for female mind in those time, that did not make it any easier for the womankind in general. (I am just reading a book about the woman's lot in 17th century Britain by Antonia Fraser. Both an informative and horrifying reading...)

Gil, there is plenty of information and evidence out there. Just go and get it, instead of building straw feminists on this blog...

Gabriel Syme at gabriel at samizdata dot net

by a reader on Tue, 06/17/2003 - 11:10 | [reply](#)

Gil's flawed logic

Ok, this is the last comment I'll make on this topic.

My only point in commenting at all here was to point out that assigning responsibility to the husband on such meager specific evidence as that in the referenced article seemed to discount the moral agency of the woman.

I'm well aware of the oppression of women in that society and others, but I'm reluctant to assume that things that are common must hold for a particular case. This seems prejudicial to me, and disrespectful to the woman at least as much as to the man.

David's "succinct" explanation of **The World's** pronouncement was that it was based on the specific facts of this individual case and the choices those individuals made. I didn't see enough such facts to warrant such a pronouncement.

Apparently the suggestion that people here are guilty of some of the mistakes of collectivist "loony feminism" has touched the nerves of many who fancy themselves as individualists.

Perhaps reflexive denial is not the best response to the suggestion.

These are easy mistakes to make. We all make them.

by **Gil** on Tue, 06/17/2003 - 18:53 | [reply](#)

Sexism & suicide

Gabriel,

If what you are saying is correct then female suicide rates in Egypt would be high. In fact according to this website (sorry I don't know how to do the linking): <http://www.uni-wuerzburg.de/IASR/suicide-rates.htm> it shows that Egypt has the lowest female suicide rate in the world. If the typical Egyptian male is a 'sexist pig' (who is likely to want a son much more than a daughter) it would still be highly untypical for his wife to commit suicide as a result.

I'd wager my house that there were other more significant factors

involved.

Paul P

by a reader on Thu, 06/19/2003 - 12:35 | [reply](#)

Something...

Something I agree with **The World**, how odd. And it's funny too.

And the Leonist says: Vile bastard husband indeed, death to all vile bastards!

Alice, Gil, shame on you! Get down of your pedestals!

Leo,

<http://eraserewind.blogspot.com>

by **Leo** on Wed, 06/25/2003 - 16:05 | [reply](#)

Sociobiology and scientific illiteracy.

"Sociobiology" is supposed to consist of blaming things on "mutant genes"? Sheesh. Now that's just sheer scientific illiteracy. I recommend **a remedial dose of Cosmides and Tooby**.

by a reader on Sat, 07/05/2003 - 22:21 | [reply](#)

Re: Sociobiology and scientific illiteracy.

Cosmides and Tooby say:

Evolutionary psychology is not behavior genetics.

Behavior geneticists are interested in the extent to which *differences* between people in a given environment can be accounted for by *differences* in their genes. EPs are interested in individual differences only insofar as these are the manifestation of an underlying architecture shared by all human beings. Because their genetic basis is universal and species-typical, the heritability of complex adaptations (of the eye, for example) is usually low, not high. Moreover, sexual recombination constrains the design of genetic systems, such that the genetic basis of any complex adaptation (such as a cognitive mechanism) *must* be universal and species-typical (Tooby and Cosmides, 1990b). This means the genetic basis for the human cognitive architecture is universal, creating what is sometimes called the **psychic unity of humankind**.

By that definition our criticism, and our mockery, are intended entirely for behaviour geneticists and not at all for 'evolutionary psychologists'. However, we doubt that the latter science, thus defined, can possibly discover anything of philosophical significance about human beings. It is on a par, in that respect, with the equally

worthy sciences of, say, botany or entomology.

Moreover, Cosmides and Tooby hint that they doubt the claim of *behaviour genetics* to have a subject matter in the case of humans. Though it is not clear that they doubt it strongly enough, we are not inclined to quibble.

by **Editor** on Wed, 05/18/2005 - 16:49 | [reply](#)

Ashamed to be Pro-American?

We were disgusted to discover **the cruel way** some Americans treated a group of French children:

A group of French schoolchildren has been forced to cancel a summer exchange trip to America after being told that the students were no longer welcome because of anti-French sentiment following opposition to war in Iraq.

"Makes you feel ashamed to be pro-American!" commented one chap we know. He seemed to think that Americans visiting France would be treated better than the French schoolchildren would have been treated in America.

According to the Telegraph,

Their parents had each paid £900 for the trip, which was abruptly called off last month in an email sent by Court van Rooten, a French teacher at Springside School. He also cancelled the return trip to France due to be made by American students next year.

"It is with great regret that we have decided to suspend the exchange for this summer and the next," he wrote. "The main reason for this is that we do not feel that we can ensure a truly comfortable or hospitable stay for your students as the anti-French sentiment here in the US is very strong."

Since our friend was misled, we expect others might be too, so we thought we'd better provide **The World's Exclusive Translation**, for those of you not totally fluent in Weasel:

"It is with great glee that we have decided to suspend the exchange for this summer and the next. The main reason for this is that we are callous, spiteful, idiotarian losers who feel not the slightest compunction about using children to make a political point. Making Americans look bad is our raison d'être, and we don't care who gets hurt in the process. We're teaching those American bastards a lesson for their failure to understand that the sun shines out of every French arse."

But wait! We didn't need to translate: Mr van Rooten just could not

resist spelling it out himself. The Telegraph story continues:

Mr van Rooten added that he and his colleagues at Springside had experienced "unpleasant moments (from colleagues, friends, students – and even family) because of our allegiance to the French." To bolster his argument, he wrote: "A Pennsylvania senator has introduced a bill in the state legislature to ban the sale of all French alcohol in the state liquor stores."

[...]

Mr van Rooten added: "It is unfortunate when the world situation dictates what we do in our schools and with our students, but I know you understand that this difficult decision was made with the best interests and well-being of your students and chaperones in mind."

Mais *oui*, mon ami, whatever made you think we might doubt your ~~political motives~~ intentions? *Naturellement* nous don't think que vous êtes a slimy Anti-American **macaque capitulard bouffeur de fromage** who couldn't wait to make the children suffer in this way.

"The parents are frankly scandalised by this xenophobic view. We don't understand it. We have been friends with this school for many years and I am disappointed with their attitude and the fact that they cancelled the visit without any consultation or discussion and informed me in an email."

...which is exactly the result the dimwitted low-life of a teacher *wanted*.

Victorine Robin, whose son Pierre, 16, was among the exchange group, said: "It was to have been his first trip to the US and he was so excited he'd been talking about it non-stop since September. It's every young person's dream to go to America, and as he will be 17 in August it was also a birthday present.

"Now he's desperately disappointed. I find it a great pity that, because of adults and politics, these youngsters are being punished. They had nothing to do with the war, and it went over the heads of most of them, so why should they suffer this injustice?"

A very good question, Madame Robin. But we doubt Mr van Rooten will deign to explain why he chose to deprive those children of the American holiday that certainly would have been enjoyable.

Mon, 06/16/2003 - 06:28 | [permalink](#)

Prejudiced

Are you sure your interpretation is not prejudiced? What evidence is there that your interpretation is correct? Aren't you being a bit cynical?

by a reader on Mon, 06/16/2003 - 08:52 | [reply](#)

What more evidence do you wan...

What more evidence do you want than what was in the Telegraph article?

by a reader on Mon, 06/16/2003 - 08:54 | [reply](#)

Cynical

Come now -- do you really think those kids would enjoy A SCHOOL EXCHANGE trip?

by a reader on Mon, 06/16/2003 - 09:15 | [reply](#)

Translation?

It would be nice to know what "macaque capitulard bouffeur de fromage" means.

by [Chris](#) on Mon, 06/16/2003 - 10:05 | [reply](#)

Re: Cynical

When you have normal parents, and you've never heard of TCS, and you go to school every day, and you probably like school about as much as being around your parents anyway, a school exchange trip might be quite nice. And when you live in France, and its a trip to the USA, :-D

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 06/16/2003 - 10:05 | [reply](#)

Discount translation services

The relevant cognate to *capitulard* is, to the surprise of all our Libertarian readers, not 'capitalist' but '**capitulate**'. *Fromage* (as every Canadian who has spent hours searching the fridge for items mistakenly placed upside down eventually learns) is **cheese**. And a *macaque* is a **macaque**, since we lack an Academy of the English Language to mandate a grauitously different term.

by [Kevin](#) on Mon, 06/16/2003 - 15:45 | [reply](#)

Mr van Rooten Replies on The World

That is – in another universe – the one in which [this](#) goes through.

by [Sarah Fitz-Claridge](#) on Tue, 06/17/2003 - 06:46 | [reply](#)

Sarah Fitz-Claridge

"That is ♦ in another universe ♦ the one in which this goes through."

Don't you think it will go through? You trust these bastards????
Anyone ever tell you you're naive?

by a reader on Tue, 06/17/2003 - 11:00 | [reply](#)

Mr van Rooten replies

"Everything on **The World** is a pack of lies. They're showing they're ignorance and xenophobia. Witch is not surprising when you consider their funded by the CIA, MI5, MI6, MI7 and the Bush/Blair Jewish conspiracy. If they were in my class I'd teach them better ideas. I wouldn't no how to make a political point and it gave me no pleasure to call off the trip.

The pleasure was in getting all that attention from the media. I'm in the papers! Have you seen me in the papers? Any other media outlets want to interview me?"

dvgbits bows

by [dvgbits](#) on Tue, 06/17/2003 - 11:41 | [reply](#)

Mr van Rooten's more likely reply

The article on **Setting The World To Rights** did not inspire confidence. Has there ever been a blog so misnamed? If the folks at **The World** think they are **setting the world to rights**, why don't they have the guts to include their bylines? What are they afraid of? The guy who wrote this article should check his facts before mouthing off about something and someone he knows nothing about.

by a reader on Tue, 06/17/2003 - 12:10 | [reply](#)

What will be the outcome of the Middle East Road Map to Peace?

[view](#)

[results](#)

- It will be just like Oslo.
- It would work if only the Jews would accept it, but the hard-liners won't let them.
- It would work if only the Palestinians would accept it, but they don't want to.
- It will lose its way because it has missed the boat and lost the moral high ground above the roadblocks.
- It's too early to tell; it depends on what Bush knows.
- That region is inherently violent. There will never be peace because the hatreds run too deep.
- It will cause a major catastrophe.
- It will work more or less as planned.

[Vote](#)

Mon, 06/16/2003 - 07:37 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Discussing this question

It hasn't got a chance in hell of working. Does anyone in their right mind think it will work??

by a reader on Mon, 06/16/2003 - 08:42 | [reply](#)

Let's not get too pessimistic!

It hasn't got a chance in hell of working. Does anyone in their right mind think it will work??

Call me out of my mind but I think it's too soon to say for sure it won't work.

by a reader on Mon, 06/16/2003 - 08:48 | [reply](#)

What possible way could it wo...

What possible way could it work? If anyone would like to say why

this time will be different from all the others, let's hear it.

by **Chris** on Mon, 06/16/2003 - 10:03 | [reply](#)

Reason For Hope

I am quite optimistic about the future for Israel, not exactly because of the Road Map, but perhaps the Road Map will help. Two reasons for hope are (1) the current more positive stance of the American government towards Israel and (2) the new Israeli government policy of increased force and the threat of force against the terrorists.

The Israeli government's announcement (sort of) that everyone in Hamas is the enemy of the peace process and is therefore going to be killed – and their showing that they mean business – will ratchet up the pressure on everyone in Hamas. Other terrorists will be experiencing increased pressure too: they will be next.

This is also going to increase the pressure on ordinary Hamas-supporting Palestinians. In the past, the Israeli government's policy of avoiding civilian casualties at all costs resulted in terrorists surrounding themselves with human shields. But their new, more forceful policy is such that ordinary Palestinians will now want to avoid having Hamas people in their cars and homes in case they too get killed in Israeli action against the terrorists. They will eventually start to complain when terrorists move next door, not because they have suddenly grown out of their hatred of Jews, but for the simple pragmatic reason of not wanting to get caught in the crossfire. Force and the threat of force is vital here, just as it was vital in Iraq. Reason doesn't work with terrorists and terrorist supporters. Force and the threat of force will concentrate their minds.

The other thing that gives me hope is that the Americans have not come out against this new Israeli policy. The effect of their praising the Palestinian so-called Prime Minister and deeming Hamas the enemy of the peace process provides a way for ordinary Palestinians (with a little push, as above) to jump over to the side of peace.

I just hope that they don't forget the importance of the true **democracy** bit. Natan Sharansky is right about that.

by **Sarah Fitz-Claridge** on Mon, 06/16/2003 - 11:00 | [reply](#)

Will Israel Attacking Hamas help Abbas?

Eugene Volokh passes along an **opinion** today that argues that the Israeli hard-line against Hamas will strengthen Abbas' position and the chances for peace.

by **Gil** on Mon, 06/16/2003 - 22:59 | [reply](#)

Question

To the people who voted for:

It will lose its way because it has missed the boat and lost the moral high ground above the roadblocks.

What does this mean?

~Woty

<http://woty.blogspot.com>

by **Woty** on Tue, 06/17/2003 - 20:48 | [reply](#)

What does this mean?

That they chose randomly?

That they voted accidentally when the cat jumped on their keyboard?

That they read just the first bit ("It will lose its way") and voted before reading the rest of the sentence?

--

Sarah Fitz-Claridge

<http://www.fitz-claridge.com/>

by **Sarah Fitz-Claridge** on Tue, 06/17/2003 - 21:07 | [reply](#)

mixed metaphors

I count about 4 mixed metaphors in that cryptic choice.

by **Daniel Strimpel** on Fri, 06/20/2003 - 02:13 | [reply](#)

Has it got "a chance in hell?"

How can you say it doesn't have "a chance in hell" of working?

This IS a chance in hell. A chance in hell is therefore the ONLY chance it has of working.

by a reader on Wed, 06/25/2003 - 14:06 | [reply](#)

Hell

Could you describe the boundaries of hell please?

My atlas seems to be out of date.

by **Gil** on Thu, 06/26/2003 - 00:06 | [reply](#)

Atlas

Gil, if you'd like it to be labelled 'Gehenna' your atlas is not *sufficiently* out of date, but it's immediately west/southwest of the walled city, and only a couple hundred yards wide. Apparently the

1949 UN Armistice line followed it, so A Reader's concern is understandable.

by [Kevin](#) on Thu, 06/26/2003 - 15:40 | [reply](#)

It won't until the Mullas are in power!

Until the Islamic Republic of Iran exists and pays the terrorists in Lebanon and among the Palestinians with the money that actually belongs to the Iranian people ,desprately in need of it I might add, NO peace map has any chance of survival.

*Editor's Note: We think that this commenter means **while**, not 'until'.*

by a reader on Sat, 07/19/2003 - 15:50 | [reply](#)

Israelis should defend themselves

Dear Sarah,

I didn't vote on this one. I can't see any option that I really like amongst the list. Voting in online polls is a bit silly, since there is no way to have a representative, random sample. The results may be interesting to some, but are statistically troubled by self-selection error. As well, voting isn't reason. It isn't like counting noses ever solved a problem, nor is it the case that one man standing alone is necessarily wrong while millions voting the other way must know what they are on about.

With particular respect to Israel, I do like the fact that the Israelis, or at least their government, are going about taking deliberate and forceful actions in self-defense. Defensive and retaliatory force are justified. I think it is a very bad idea to tolerate terrorists bombing cafes, malls, or flying aircraft into buildings.

Having said as much, I do think there are obligations on those who engage in defensive or retaliatory force. Doing so should obligate the force user to select their targets accurately.

I'm quite sure that al Qaeda hated Saddam Hussein's policies and politics just as much as they hated the USA. The inaccuracy of reports claiming that Saddam was behind the attacks on the World Trade Center remains an important issue. While I completely agree with Dana Carvey's choice quip, "If Saddam didn't have weapons of mass destruction, he was an idiot for not letting every inspector see every site they wanted," I'm not convinced that those weapons presented a clear and present danger to the USA. There was no evidence of uranium purchases from Africa, for example.

I use these items as sort of comparative literature. On the whole,

from what I've seen, Israel has done an adequate job of targeting terrorists and their direct accomplices and supporters. I think it is to the Israeli's credit that they have not invaded and occupied Syria or Egypt or Lebanon in this latest round of actions, and much to their credit that when they did agree that they were occupying a part of Egypt (the Sinai) they came to a peace conference at Camp David and returned that property to Egypt.

Unfortunately, I don't see much prospect for the USA leaving Afghanistan to be run by Afghans or leaving Iraq to be run by Iraqis, any more than I was able to see the USA leave Vietnam to be run by the Vietnamese except at the last instant, in the worst possible way. Talk about betrayals.

Regards,

Jim

davidson@net1.net

<http://www.ezez.com/free/freejim.html>

by [planetaryjim](#) on Fri, 11/07/2003 - 04:54 | [reply](#)

Sustainability through FMSL

FMSL is about a child-centric, self-sustainable approach to solving the problems of the world.

If we first ensure that there is enough for every child, we can then be sure that there will be enough for every adult. A child's future right to food, shelter and education is more important than its parents' immediate right to reproduce. A certain degree of financial security must be mandatory for marriage so that the children to be born are not denied their basic rights. Compulsory financial security of some kind, if required at marriage, by law, would significantly prevent birth into poverty and consequent evils. FMSL is a law that requires a predetermined level of financial security before a legal marriage can take place. Such a law would make it more likely that children live in sanitary conditions, are less likely to go hungry and shelter less and have access to quality education and information. Those children will be more likely to attain success in life and develop into useful citizens.

When the poor decrease in number, the government will not have to provide cheap transport, subsidized goods, free education and free healthcare. Money saved in this manner could be used instead to improve infrastructure and enforce law and order.

More prosperous people would mean that more people will be able to afford environmentally friendly resources and technologies. We can then continue our progress without causing a threat to our own survival or to the survival of other species.

I believe that the child centric approach is our best shot against overpopulation, poverty, environmental hazards and all other associated evils. All that is required is that proof of financial security

in any form - property, cash, income proof etc. be required in all

nations for legal marriage. Human life will flourish to only as much as can be sustained. A UN directive to implement the FMSL law would aid greatly in accomplishing this.

by [cooloften123](#) on Fri, 11/26/2004 - 13:19 | [reply](#)

Yeah, Right.

I'm not sure what the comment above has to do with the Middle East roadmap, but I'll respond anyway...

If you add restrictions to legal marriage, all you'll achieve is fewer legal marriages.

You won't inhibit many people from living together or having children. In fact, you'll probably cause more children to be born out of wedlock, perhaps reducing the percentage of fathers who feel a real obligation to support their children once their relationship sours.

I agree that it's good to promote the idea that people should have good economic prospects before taking on the awesome responsibility of having children. But, I don't think that laws will accomplish this. You have to change people's minds.

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Fri, 11/26/2004 - 22:24 | [reply](#)

words like terrorists

Terrorist is a word, not a person. It is used for people we want to fight and not help. Some of those people called terrorists believe they fight for justice, and more certainly many are people who's friends and children are killed by bombs. I have two children. I hate it when they cry. I have the pictures of children in body bags, and their mums, and young men in casual clothes. They have no medals and they have no planes. They fight in their own land, not abroad, and they are called insurgents.

He people we want to fight have been seen as dirty, sub-human, worthless, ugly, stupid etc., while we create puppet governments to lead them into poverty, steal their land= and giving gas to Sadaam to gas them.

Are you aware as we debate the 'road map' - which incidentally is not a road not a map, but a face-saving exercise for the harsh cruel Jewish State - that Palestinian farmers are having their wheat crops sprayed in the desert so they can be forcibly moved into 'conurbations', and the land appropriated. This is achievable, because their leaders, their rites are unrecognised, because they are 'worthless' - tradition is worthless. Instead gain, and pride can be made, as politicians we step in and out of the limelight. It is best left to them, and to their fighters. Israel should be prosecuted for war crimes, and their nuclear bombs confiscated (they should be invaded).

The modern army man is a spoilt, pampered civil servant in fancy-

dress uniform, who gets mad and complains when shot at by a rifle:
"Where was the support - the planes and bombs?"

by [a reader](#) on Fri, 05/06/2005 - 23:50 | [reply](#)

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A New Poll! Vote Now!

The question we are asking in this new poll is:

What will be the outcome of the **Road Map to Peace in the Middle East?**

Vote now!

Mon, 06/16/2003 - 07:56 | [permlink](#)

Against the Legitimacy of the Iranian Regime

Scrappleface has an excellent **argument** against the legitimacy of the current Iranian regime.

Mon, 06/16/2003 - 21:45 | [permalink](#)

Peter Snow Has Never Seen The Simpsons!

OK, maybe there's another explanation, but the way he said "D'oh!" this morning on the BBC1 breakfast programme was so wildly incorrect, it is difficult to believe he could ever have watched **The Simpsons**. Perhaps he should spend less time in front of the cameras and more time in front of **the box**.

Snow was reporting the virulently anti-American results of a massive international poll the BBC commissioned (never let it be said that British taxpayers' hard-earned cash is being misused) to ~~bolster their useless anti-American case~~ discuss in **this programme** tonight.

"What **The World** Thinks Of America" will be aired on BBC 2 at 2100 BST. For goodness' sake watch **The Simpsons** before tonight, Mr Plow, er, Snow.

N.B. We at **The World** wish to take this opportunity to object in the strongest possible terms to the implication that we endorse the anti-American views peddled on this programme.

Tue, 06/17/2003 - 07:04 | [permalink](#)

Which Reminds Me...

I am hoping that **Aeon Skoble** will write for **Setting The World To Rights** at some point. And not just about **The Simpsons**.

by **Sarah Fitz-Claridge** on Tue, 06/17/2003 - 08:14 | [reply](#)

What's he say?

points at subject line

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 06/17/2003 - 09:20 | [reply](#)

god dammit

what'd he say? *points at 's' and 'd' keys to indicate they are next

to each other*

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 06/17/2003 - 09:26 | [reply](#)

What he said

The line he was reading was: "D'oh!, as Homer Simpson would say" or words to that effect. The "D'oh!" was ... well... it is difficult to describe. It wasn't even *close* to the right tone/inflection, and he did not even pronounce it the way the master does. It did not sound as though he was merely refusing to stoop to Homer's level (as he might see it): it sounded as though he had simply no idea what this "D'oh!" was or how to pronounce it.

by **Sarah Fitz-Claridge** on Tue, 06/17/2003 - 10:47 | [reply](#)

I've seen the simpsons but i'...

I've seen the simpsons but i've not seen Homer saying "D'oh!" so I think you're being a bit unfair on Snow.

by a reader on Tue, 06/17/2003 - 10:49 | [reply](#)

How does he say it? I haven't...

How *does* he say it? I haven't watched that show in years.

by **dvgbits** on Tue, 06/17/2003 - 11:20 | [reply](#)

Try this

"How does he say it?"

Try this page:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/cult/simpsons/mania_tour/clip0.shtml

by a reader on Tue, 06/17/2003 - 12:00 | [reply](#)

"Im just proud to be part of ...

"Im just proud to be part of a country that gave the world The Simpsons" -- Jonathan Franzen

by a reader on Tue, 06/17/2003 - 12:18 | [reply](#)

"When asked who was the bigge...

"When asked who was the bigger threat, only Al Queda was considered more dangerous than the USA" -- Peter Snow, speaking about the poll which will be revealed tonight.

by a reader on Tue, 06/17/2003 - 12:22 | [reply](#)

"Victory?"

"We're French! We don't even have a word for it!"

- Homer Simpson, Episode DABF08, *Tales from the Public Domain*

by a reader on Tue, 06/17/2003 - 15:40 | [reply](#)

Re: "Victory?"

Not to mention originating *les macaques capitulards bouffeurs de fromage*, lo these **many years ago**.

(BTW, those still wondering how "D'oh" is pronounced can pop over [here](#).)

by **Kevin** on Tue, 06/17/2003 - 17:12 | [reply](#)

Someone Regrets the Passing of Saddam

Guess who...

Here's a clue. (Scroll up on the linked page to read our piece about this person.)

Wed, 06/18/2003 - 08:04 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Why We Use the Word 'Idiotarian'

Using the word 'idiotarian' has some obvious disadvantages. It is inherently insulting, and hence potentially misleading in a context where one is trying to make factual statements. It has unintended connotations: users of the word do not mean to imply that idiotarians necessarily have low intelligence. It looks frivolous, and is therefore distracting in any serious piece. It is new and may soon be obsolete. Also, as a general rule, consideration for the reader should make one reluctant to use terms with which many people are unfamiliar.

Nevertheless, we use the i-word from time to time here on **The World**. Why?

Because there is no alternative. The fact is, there is a huge and influential segment of Western public opinion which systematically sides with evil without itself **adopting the evildoers' objectives**. That's an approximate definition: as with other terms such as 'left-wing', 'right-wing' or 'anarchist', there are about as many definitions of 'idiotarian' as there are users of the term. But there can be no doubt that idiotarianism is a distinctive political stance playing a major role in contemporary politics. As we have **said before**, it is mind-boggling that such a significant strand of political thought did not even have a name before 2002 when Charles Johnson **coined the term** 'idiotarian'.

We don't see any option but to use it. For instance, although idiotarianism is predominantly associated with political parties of the left, 'idiotarian' is by no means synonymous with 'left-wing' or 'Democrat': one has only to consider the likes of **Tom Lantos** (or perhaps Tony Blair), or, on the right, **Pat Buchanan** or **Matthew Parris**. Likewise, idiotarianism usually involves, say, moral relativism, yet there are moral relativists who are anti-idiotarians, and there are people who believe in right and wrong but think that idiotarian policies are the morally right ones. The term "useful idiots", allegedly coined by Lenin, has a similar though narrower meaning, but it also has similar disadvantages; and the term "cicadas", coined by **Oriana Fallaci**, has gained little or no currency.

So until someone tells us a better idea, we are going to have to live with the disadvantages of 'idiotarian'. And there are consolations:

OK, it's insulting, but it's insulting something *bad*. (And even

idiotarians might take consolation from the fact that long-lived terms often become detached from their original meanings: 'Tory' was once a term of abuse meaning 'thief'; 'hysterical' meant 'affected by one's womb'.) Its psychological connotations are not wholly inappropriate: it *is* a psychological stratagem more than a political theory. A lighthearted touch is no bad thing in political writing. And as for the term being unfamiliar: well, this very item will put an end to that, won't it?

UPDATE: We're still hoping that someone will do **this** study.

UPDATE: We now have **a new word** for "idiotarian": "**villepinist**".

Wed, 06/18/2003 - 22:32 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

What it means

I think the biggest problem with using the term *idiotarian* is that so many people don't understand what it means.

So, I suggest that when you use the term you include a link to a page like **this one** that makes it clear. The definition used there is:

The species of delusion within the moral community of mankind that gives aid and comfort to terrorists and tyrants operating outside it.

There's a lot more than the definition worth reading there.

by [Gil](#) on Thu, 06/19/2003 - 00:06 | [reply](#)

What is the psychological stratagem?

I'm beginning to understand what idiotarianism is, and to recognise it, but I completely fail to understand what motivates idiotarians. Why do they 'seek to prevent the triumph of Good over Evil, at any price' (Kolya)

It's enormously frustrating not to understand, because on occasions one simply feels *beseiged*

Is it because they think it's sexy or wise (in a nodding, knowing sort of way) to rebel against whoever triumphs, in order to secure the love of others like themselves? Are they afraid of authority because of crushing defeats in their past? Do they have stuff in common with pacifists or even vegetarians? Why are they so slow to believe that people tend to want the right things?

Please can someone enlighten me as to what the psychological stratagem is, then we can work out how to fight it.

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Thu, 06/19/2003 - 00:10 | [reply](#)

Stratagem

Tom Robinson

I've heard a few good answers to your question. One theory (credited to David Deutsch) is that, after the trauma of WWII and the blotting out of Nazism, people wanted to blot out violence in general by pretending it doesn't exist. For children, violence is forbidden as a topic of conversation at the dinner table, forbidden on the TV and is **never** discussed in school. In fact, violence of any kind is punished in school, **regardless of who is at fault**. The result is systematic ignorance about the proper use of force, that is, idiotarianism.

Another possibility is that idiotarianism arises out of resentment of authority. If you grow up oppressed by your parents, you may end up seeing the world in terms of power relations, authorities trying to fuck you over. This could translate to a hatred of America, and of successful people and countries in general.

by [Daniel Strimpel](#) on Thu, 06/19/2003 - 04:09 | [reply](#)

The idiotarian stratagem

What motivates idiotarianism is the same impulse that motivates true morality: the quest for self-validation through identification with intrinsically worthwhile goals.

Where idiotarianism goes astray is in its pathological conception of what constitute worthwhile goals. Whereas moral people try to discover and embrace that which is conducive to human flourishing; idiotarianism perceives relative success as evidence of malfeasance, and relative failure as evidence of victimhood. The entire intellectual edifice that idiotarians construct is just a rationalisation of what is, at root, an unsavoury emotional disposition, namely a form of self-righteous resentment, writ large.

Put more succinctly, idiotarianism is a rationalisation of a pathological identification with people whose own bad values are the cause of their misfortune.

By the way, I think the term "idiotarianism" obscures more than it reveals. I prefer my own term, "moral inversion", because it brings out the fact that the cardinal error concerns morality rather than rationality, and it captures the Alice in Wonderland quality of idiotarian argumentation, which is characterised by a rational attempt at defending a moral falsehood, rather than by arbitrary irrationality.

by [Kolya](#) on Thu, 06/19/2003 - 15:34 | [reply](#)

Defining 'idiotarian'

Doesn't the definition quoted by Gil have the weakness that a certain class of actual evildoers and wannabe evildoers (those 'operating in a moral community', whatever that means) also count as 'idiotarians'? And doesn't that defeat the whole purpose of having a separate term?

And isn't the same true of Kolya's term 'moral inversion' as well?

Defining idiotarian

David,

I think being an evildoer or a wannabe evildoer places you outside of the "Moral community of mankind".

You'd be in the "Immoral community of mankind".

by [Gil](#) on Thu, 06/19/2003 - 19:16 | [reply](#)

Idiotarianism is part of the same continuum as evil

In terms of their psychology and philosophical content, idiotarianism and outright evil differ only in degree. Both are parts of the moral inversion continuum. Both are driven by a logic-of-situation imperative to deny the true explanation for human progress and to discredit those who live by it. That is the reason why idiotarians and evil-doers from widely diverse backgrounds all agree on hating and blaming the morally most progressive peoples, such as Americans and Jews.

Where an individual ends up on this moral inversion continuum depends more on contingent factors, than on their own philosophical commitments. Their moral and intellectual trajectory is largely shaped by the objective logical and epistemic constraints of trying to pin the blame for the failure of immoral cultures, at the feet of the most virtuous cultures.

Moral inverters learn what to think and how to argue partly from the intrinsic logic of this predicament, and partly by memic transmission from others who have trodden the same ground before them. Generally speaking, an individual moral inverter's only substantive contribution to his or her own stance is deciding how far to go down this road.

I think the transition of German culture from pre-WWII idiotarianism, to the extreme evil of Nazism, and then, following its defeat, back to idiotarianism again, bears out my thesis that evil and idiotarianism are parts of the same continuum, and can be inter-converted under suitable external circumstances.

Having said that, for many practical purposes the distinction between evil-doers and their mere apologists, is very real and very important. So I agree that having a separate term for the latter is useful. But I still think that "idiotarianism" works better as an in-jibe, than as a term that is conducive to the enlightenment of the uninitiated.

The reason is that it obscures the fundamental psychological and moral relationship between full-blown evil and its precursor stance, which we might more accurately call "proevil".

by [Kolya](#) on Thu, 06/19/2003 - 20:46 | [reply](#)

Idiotarianism is part of the same continuum as evil

I agree with Kolya here.

The differences between idiotarians and "full-blown evil" people is more a matter of degree than kind.

I think I said as much when commenting on Woty's blog.

I understand the desire to want to make the distinction. We want to say something like "They're not *bad*, they're just *mistaken*!" But what does "bad" mean, if not being mistaken about fundamental moral issues and being willing to act (or not act) based on those mistakes?

Nobody's perfect, but many people have made and acted on choices that place them on the road to evil.

by **Gil** on Thu, 06/19/2003 - 21:09 | [reply](#)

I agree

Im pleased to see that my previous intuition on the evil vs. misguided question is in fact in agreement with Kolya's and Gil's.

by **Daniel Strimpel** on Fri, 06/20/2003 - 17:41 | [reply](#)

terms

So should we call idiotarians "idiotarians", "moral inverters" or "proevil"?

Proevil sounds evil to me. Are we making too-fine distinctions here? Why the desire to have a term different than "evil" (tho' that sounds a bit too Biblical for me) or "bad"?

Is it because you're hoping your idiotarian friends and relations won't be so offended and you want to persuade them they're wrong? is there some denial here?

Sylvia

by **Sylvia Crombie** on Fri, 06/20/2003 - 19:09 | [reply](#)

Idiotarian/Evil Difference

A difference between idiotarians and evil people, is that idiotarians don't want us to die. I think this merits two terms.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 06/20/2003 - 22:23 | [reply](#)

Honest disagreement

Gil wrote:

I understand the desire to want to make the distinction. We want to say something like "They're not bad, they're just mistaken!" But what does "bad" mean, if not being mistaken about fundamental moral issues and being willing to act (or not act) based on those mistakes?

Sylvia wrote:

Is it because you're hoping your idiotarian friends and relations won't be so offended and you want to persuade them they're wrong? is there some denial here?

I think it's about as offensive to call someone an idiotarian as it is to call them evil. I don't want to make excuses for people who side with evil, and I think most of them ought to know better.

However, I think there is a difference between being complicit in evil, and actually being evil. One example: Some people opposed the US invasion of Iraq because they wanted to be able to continue torturing people. Some other people opposed the invasion of Iraq because it conflicted with their idea of what nations should do in a peaceful world, and these people did not consider the torture to be an important consideration.

Similarly -- some people say that in Nazi Germany, most people didn't actively agree with what was going on, but they had no choice and just did what they were told. This is idiotarian. Some people think the Nazis were right. This is evil.

People who are unable or unwilling to consider the torture in Iraq or the moral culpability of the Germans are unable to take the right side in many vital issues. But that is not the same as actively wanting evil to triumph.

~Woty

<http://woty.blogspot.com>

by **Woty** on Fri, 06/20/2003 - 22:30 | [reply](#)

Idiotarianism is similar to evil, but quite different

In case this wasn't clear from my last comment, I think that from a *causal* point of view what is important is the continuity between idiotarianism and evil. But from a *moral* point of view it is their difference that is important. "Moral inversion" is my name for the unified causal explanation for the psychological and cultural mechanisms that give rise to both phenomena.

But I fully agree with David and Woty that when discussing the morality of the two conditions, there is an important difference between them -- one which justifies having two separate terms. The distinction is important, not least, because evil people such as

Hamas operatives and Saddam Hussein can merit being killed in

extra-judicial ways, whereas idiotarians cannot.

I still don't like the word "idiotarianism" and have never used it except when debating the nuances of its meaning with other readers of LGF. We need a term whose meaning is more apparent and which has connotations of immorality, rather than irrationality.

To that end, I propose the term "morality denial". Chomsky, the French, The European Union, and all those who believe America to be guilty of unilateralism, are morality deniers.

by **Kolya** on Sun, 06/22/2003 - 09:46 | [reply](#)

Brilliant

What a very interesting and illuminating thread. Great stuff. Thank you.

Alice

by a reader on Sun, 06/22/2003 - 22:03 | [reply](#)

who are the idiots?

The author of this blog is right about two things: the term "idiotarian" is inherently insulting, and potentially, if not inevitably, misleading. As I understand it, the argument here is that one is an idiot if one supports evil, particularly while in a state of moral denial.

Historical moment: Donald Rumsfeld shakes hands with Saddam Hussein. Idiot?

Historical moment: Franklin Roosevelt allies with Stalin to beat Hitler. Idiot?

Historical moment: Man buys wife diamond, sold to support brutal civil war in Sierra Leone or Algeria. Idiot?

Historical moment: Catholic Church officials fail to dismiss known pedophiles. Idiots?

Historical moment: You or I or anyone buys carton of Tropicana orange juice, made with fruit picked by illegal immigrants working under slave-labor conditions. Or we buy clothes made in Chinese sweatshops, etc etc. Idiots?

Historical moment: GWBush choosing to spend Vietnam war stateside, not fighting evil in Southeast Asia. Idiot?

Historical moment: You or I put gas in car, and a portion of the money lands in Saudi Arabia, used to prop up repressive and arguably evil regime. Car perhaps made by Ford, whose founder once used his profits to disseminate anti-Semitic propaganda. Idiots?

Historical moment: US allies with Taliban to fight Russians in

Afghanistan. Idiots?

One man's opinion: for all the bile heaped on the hapless heads of the liberals of the world, they are far from the most powerful forces of moral relativism. That prize goes to business and government. History shows, without question, that either will ally with virtually anyone if the alliance advances their interests. While it's not inevitable that either will support evil, it happens all the time, whether with local governments and small businesses, or "big" gov't and big biz.

Certainly it is honorable to be infuriated by the presence of evil in the world. But it seems to me that the so-called left wing is a poor target - or at least, a potentially misleading one. Not only because the left has demonstrably acted as a force that countered evil in the past - fighting, for example, segregation and labor abuses when the mainstream was prepared to tolerate them - but because the left isn't all that powerful.

Thus the term "idiotarian" to me represents a facile and shortsighted interpretation of the role evil plays in the world - and the role we as Americans play in its support.

by a reader on Wed, 06/25/2003 - 13:39 | [reply](#)

My, if this isn't a case of...

...the pot calling the kettle "idiotarian".

by a reader on Wed, 06/25/2003 - 16:42 | [reply](#)

Idiotarian counter term.

Personally, I like "Idiotarian", at least as an internal shorthand - the fact that it's inherently insulting is a plus, not a minus - but I agree that it's not precise as a general use term that's intrinsically understandable by the casual reader.

I'd like to propose "antirational" [and "antirationalism" as descriptive of the phenomena]: describes someone who willfully pursues a counter rational philosophy, even though they're capable [in other areas] of applying rational thought to situations. The antirational person goes to great and often strident lengths to bolster arguments and positions that even casual observers can see on examination bear no resemblance to fact, data, evidence or any other basis other than "faith".

"Antirationalism" describes a philosophy of denial based upon adherence to viewing the world and reality as one would like it to be, rather than as it is.

I'm not sure that "evil" and "immoral" should be a part of the definitions: those are often by products of pursuing an antirational stance, rather than inherent to the antirationalist.

It has the benefit that "idiotarian" lacks: a casual reader can look at

the term in context, and deduce from the root words and context the definition, whereas idiotarian can be fuzzy even in contextual use.

Sherman Barnes

by [Ironbear](#) on Wed, 06/25/2003 - 23:17 | [reply](#)

I have the alternative

I posted about it [here](#).

by a reader on Fri, 06/27/2003 - 10:54 | [reply](#)

The Idiotarian vs. the merely Unprincipled

"business and government ... will ally with virtually anyone if the alliance advances their interests." - a reader

That to me is the key difference between the Idiotarian and the merely Unprincipled.

The unprincipled will cynically make choices that further his own interests.

The idiotarian will cynically make choices **that harm his own interests**. He'll cut off his nose to spite his face. Example: what small-L liberal would ever, **ever** defend the sovereignty of Taliban Afghanistan? What feminist? Answer: quite a few would, and did, because they wanted to deny Bush's will more than they wanted to bring the freedoms they claim to love to Afghanistan.

(And I agree that the motivation for this perversity can be traced to resentment, which Nietzsche saw as one of the great motivators of human thought.)

Reader X

by a reader on Sun, 06/29/2003 - 07:49 | [reply](#)

you're right

Listen, cats:

The bottom line here is that you all like calling people who disagree with you "idiots."

Being good smart people, you're constructing a series of rationales that justify this behavior. The writer above, for example, essentially is saying, "Idiotarians are people who deliberately chose wrong over right." Naturally such people deserve only scorn. And their behavior would indeed be a perversity if it worked like that, but I have news for you:

It doesn't.

The people you disagree with think they're right. And they may be

right. But that isn't important to this crowd; you're sure that you're right and they're idiots and so you call them "idiotarians," taking a smug, and dare I say resentful, satisfaction in your rhetorical bravery.

So here's what you should do: give up this flimsy pseudo-rationalism and go down to your local campus or your lefty bookstore and just shout, "You're all a bunch of god-damn idiots!" Go ahead. Roll in it. When someone asks you why, answer, "Because you're wrong!" If you think, like the guy at the top, that this makes them evil, go ahead and squeeze off a few rounds on 'em.

You know you want it. You do. You really, really do. That's what this is about. And that last guy is right - resentment is at the core of this - the smug bile of a bunch of wannabe supermen (and women) who feel that only the lilliputian minds of their fellow citizens prevent the arrival of The Good, The Just, and The Perfect.

I used to have a friend who would joke, "the world would be a great place if not for all the stupid people." That's the level that this debate operates at - without the joke.

by a reader on Wed, 07/02/2003 - 03:50 | [reply](#)

Logical Fallacies Are Fun

A Reader wrote "Being good smart people, you're constructing a series of rationales that justify this behavior."

Yup, we sure did! The thing is, this "criticism" applies to all the cases where we are right and explain why, in addition to applying to the cases A Reader intended. So, it applies regardless of whether we are right or wrong, and thus hasn't got any content as a criticism.

But I suppose I'm just rationalising...

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 07/02/2003 - 05:40 | [reply](#)

so then

.... what are you (to take one example) right about, and what are the "idiotarians" wrong about?

by a reader on Wed, 07/02/2003 - 15:17 | [reply](#)

What are idiotarians wrong about?

".... what are you (to take one example) right about, and what are the "idiotarians" wrong about?"

They typically blame Islamofascist terrorism on Western

colonialism. In reality, it has nothing to do with that and everything to do with their culture being evil, racist, anticapitalist, anti-freedom and self-destructive. There is no possibility that they will stop as a result of anything other than being devastatingly and comprehensively defeated, in particular ignoring them or making concessions to them will only lead to more death. They must be stopped, not coddled.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Wed, 07/02/2003 - 18:00 | [reply](#)

oh, I get it

See, you've got the same problem going on - you choose an argument based on articles of faith, not reality.

You argue that the left "typically" blames the West for Islamofascism. More accurately, the left is typically aware of the connections between the west and the Islamofascists - years of support to the Taliban (not to mention Saddam), years of support to repressive Arab regimes. This is not the same as "blaming." Do we bear some responsibility? Of course. Total responsibility? No. Your article of faith is "the idiotarians blame America" but it is more accurate to say that the left is willing to confront America's partial responsibility for the state of things. To deny that history is to deny reality.

Your second article of faith is that Islamofascism can be isolated and destroyed. Let's assume that you're correct that it is "inherently evil." I'll buy that. But what is this "Islamofascism"? And how can it be totally destroyed? Was it the Taliban? Now that they're gone, is it gone? Will it be gone if we kill Bin Laden? Or his "senior officials"? Suppose you nuked everyone in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Iran? Would it be gone then? How will you know when it's gone? What IS it? Have we been doing the right things to stop it? I don't know. Maybe what we're doing is fostering it. We coddled it for years, and we're still coddling it (see: Saudi Arabia), so how do we stop? Do we have to bomb everybody? Everywhere?

"Screw these silly sophist hairsplitters," you say. "It's evil and it must be destroyed." Good luck. Call me when you're done.

by a reader on Wed, 07/02/2003 - 21:10 | [reply](#)

Not leftists, idiotarians

A reader is outraged by what he or she deems criticism of "leftists", but the piece was not about "left" vs. "right", it was about the word "idiotarian", which is NOT synonymous with "leftist". There are plenty of "right-wing" idiotarians too. And there are plenty of left-wing people who are not at all idiotarian. Tony Blair does not strike me as being very idiotarian. That is why a new word is needed. We can argue about whether the word "idiotarian" is the one to use or not, but let us not obscure the point that we do need to be able to refer to this group somehow.

--

Sarah Fitz-Claridge

<http://www.fitz-claridge.com/>

by **Sarah Fitz-Claridge** on Thu, 07/03/2003 - 23:13 | [reply](#)

true, true

It's true that this particular web community is a little more reasoned than many online outposts of "left" or "right." Libertarianism is an important thread in the overall Western political tapestry, and like liberalism, conservatism, socialism and freemarketeerism it's home to intelligent people and fools alike.

Which is why the term "idiotarian" is useless, in addition to being insulting. To recap: the sum of the argument here seems to be that the "idiotarian" is a person who chooses wrong over right, evil over good, dumb over smart, etc etc. The group can't seem to decide whether they are hoodwinked (like Lenin's "useful idiots") or conscious cultural saboteurs, but the bottom line of the definition is that idiotarians support what the anti-idiotarian considers wrong.

By this definition, there is an idiot in every occupied chair. Everyone is doing something wrong by someone's definition. Just as every political philosophy becomes idiotic when extended to its logical extremes.

Personally, the word suggests to me a person who has reached the illogical fringe of his or her ideological passion, and remains unable to see it. This would include lefties who preach world revolution, or righties who preach world domination, or libertarians who rail against government, etc etc. But the words "extremist" or "fundamentalist" or "ideologue" are much more descriptive, accurate, and useful in these cases. "Idiotarian" is an insult, nothing more, telling me nothing about the individual referenced and everything about the speaker's opinion.

So back to my original point: "idiotarian" is primarily useful for insulting people with whom one disagrees. It is dismissive, reductive, and, while catchy, juvenile. It implies that the "right" positions are so self-evident that only an idiot would fail to embrace them.

In fact, the "right" positions - on everything from military intervention to abortion to taxation to internationalism - are anything but clear. The jury is still way, way out on the dominant neoconservative American ideology of the day, whose rabid anti-tax, anti-state domestic policies would seem to be on a collision course with its overtly interventionist, strong-state foreign and anti-terror policies. And that is only the tip of an iceberg of confusion. As we globalize, nothing is clear, besides the fact that the competition for wealth, power and resources will only get more intense.

Which leads me to conclude that anyone who walks around laying blanket terms like "idiotarian" on anyone is as likely to be an idiot as they are to be right. Why would someone take such a chance?

Because it is fun and a rush to insult people. It makes the user feel

large and in charge. It's a boner word. Some may use it in good faith and with reasoned justification (as there are, in fact, idiots in the world), but as I surf the net and the "anti-idiotarian" screeds that abound, it seems that the majority use it as a schoolyard dismissal for those whose opinions differ from their own.

by a reader on Wed, 07/09/2003 - 19:33 | [reply](#)

Idiotarian = someone we disagree with?

In reply to a reader above:

If you scan our posts, you will find that we use the term idiotarian quite rarely and very carefully, and only when no other term will convey the meaning. Our usage simply does not bear the interpretation

but the bottom line of the definition is that idiotarians support what the anti-idiotarian considers wrong

that you place on it. For instance, [here](#) we explicitly deny that a certain category of people with whom we disagree are all idiotarians:

But in any case, it's not just idiotarians. Why is nearly everyone, even the US administration, strangely subdued about this?

And as you scan our home page, you will see that we level vehement criticism at all sorts of people and schools of thought, without, in the great majority of cases, calling them idiotarians. Nor do we believe that they are.

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 07/09/2003 - 22:15 | [reply](#)

SO

... acknowledging that your site's use of the term is more measured than that of many others, what IS an idiotarian?

by a reader on Thu, 07/10/2003 - 00:51 | [reply](#)

what does the world think an idiotarian is? read the entry.....

quoting from the original entry:

The fact is, there is a huge and influential segment of Western public opinion which systematically sides with evil without itself adopting the evildoers' objectives.

back to my words, if you make excuses for terrorists, but do not want good people (or anyone at all, normally) to die, that's a good example

-- Elliot Temple

see, that's what's so frustrating

It sounds like a definition ... it looks like a definition ... but let's analyze it. A "huge segment" of society that "systematically sides with evil" ? That's not a definition, it's an accusation. Does that include the person who fills their car with Saudi gas? The person who voted for Reagan & through him supported the Taliban? The person who marched in New York to oppose Bush's war on Iraq because it didn't target Al Qaeda? The person who marched to demand a UN imprimatur on the Iraqi war? The person who marched because they believe killing is wrong?

Give me an example of someone (or some movement) you believe "systematically sides with evil."

Because, you see, everyone in America can be accused of that crime, just by virtue of our dependence on gasoline alone. Then there's all manner of arguably evil regimes which we either support (e.g. the Saudis, the Chinese communists) or ignore (e.g. Burma). Is our Congress entirely composed of idiotarians? Is our president an idiotarian?

by a reader on Thu, 07/10/2003 - 17:50 | [reply](#)

I love the internet...

...because nowadays I am sure to find someone who has bothered to write what I would have written, thus saving me the time and energy. So, thanks for that.

"Personally, the word suggests to me a person who has reached the illogical fringe of his or her ideological passion, and remains unable to see it."

Yes, "ideologue" is the word.

I suppose to people convinced of their Critical Righteousness, differentiating between the blind ideologue and the seeing bad guy is useful if one's project is to "Set to Right" someone who is wrong - and one wants to decide whether to use persuasion versus a shotgun...though Kolya's continuum theory is a little worrisome...especially if a shotgun-leaning crowd takes him a little too seriously...since, well, shoot them all, and be efficient, no?

The sad thing about this group of people is that they have, to my mind, always shared that "elementary school" tendency to name-call and form in-groups. Which is really too bad, because it means that they consistently lose the posters they need to challenge their theories so as to improve them; instead, they opt for in-group jokes and pseudo-criticism.

Thanks, again. A delightful read, your posts...

Siding with evil?

Someone wrote:

'everyone in American can be accused of that crime [siding with evil], just by virtue of our dependence on gasoline alone.'

How so?

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sat, 11/20/2004 - 02:33 | [reply](#)

I'm not capable of complex thought, but...

I don't think it is a difficult as some are making this out to be: an idiotarian is, by definition, someone who, when given the definition, still does not understand what an idiotarian is.

In other words, if you "get it" you use the word sparingly to illuminate a specific lapse in internal-external consistency. If you don't "get it" you try to make the term apply to every possible situation, thereby rendering it senseless.

A simple picture:

A man named Henry purchases an apple from an apple cart. The apple vendor is a rabid anti-abortionist who uses his apple funds to target doctors.

Henry is not an idiotarian.

A known criminal has access to legally-obtained funds. A woman named Sue swallows her disdain for the criminal and her unsubstantiated fears that there is a hidden evil in the collaboration, and works with the criminal to fund a relief effort for poor children. The poor children benefit, but later the criminal robs an orphanage.

Sue is not an idiotarian.

One night a man named Herbert hears screams coming from his neighbor's house. The next morning, Herbert discovers the bodies of his neighbors stacked like firewood on their front lawn, and the killer sitting in their kitchen, enjoying a breakfast of ham and eggs. Herbert invites the murderer back to his house for a sympathetic conversation about his motives and a light lunch, in the hopes that he won't be targeted next.

Herbert is an idiotarian.

by A passerby on Fri, 02/25/2005 - 23:16 | [reply](#)

Fighting the Minions of W.A.C.K.I.E.

What is an IDIOT? What is IDIOCY? How can one tell? Who is

fighting the war against them?

Good questions!

I'm glad I asked! :-)

Merriam-Websters has 2 answers:

IDIOT: A foolish or stupid person.

IDIOCY: Something notably stupid or foolish.

On IDIOTARIAN, IDIOTARIANS, and IDIOTARIANISM the compilers, and guardians of our beautiful and expanding language are sadly silent.

The snobbish nitpickers! Who appointed them to decide what constitutes a legitimate word in the English language?

Who in the hell do they think they are?

The freakin' French, for cryin' out loud??

My God! The Inhumanity!

I too have seen my share of idiots, and idiocy, and have written about it on MY Blog Sneakeasy's Joint over the past few years.

I, The Mad Macedonian, secure in my Branch MacejugoserbulgariGreekadonian Compound, on occasion expose the minions of the **World Allied Conspiratorial Kongress of Idiotarians Everywhere (better known as W.A.C.K.I.E.)**.

by **Kiril Kundurazieff** on Sun, 05/08/2005 - 08:09 | [reply](#)

I've been reading this over,

I've been reading this over, having very recently been intrigued in this group from reading the excellent Taking Children Seriously site.

First of all, I'd like to state that I fall into the category of "Moral relativist but not idiotarian" mentioned previously. To me, moral relativism is not a denial of morality- far from it. It is the belief that it is impossible for humans to know true morality, or even if it exists, so they create their relative morality. Since one creates one's own, there is no excuse for hypocrisy or moral cowardice.

Second, instead of "Idiotarian," how about just simply "Amoralists?"

by a reader on Sat, 06/18/2005 - 11:05 | [reply](#)

'can't know truth with certai

'can't know truth with certainty' is fallibility, not relativism

relativism denies there is a truth, and therefore that there is better or worse, more or less true. thus a relativist must insist there is no

such thing as progress, and discussion never gets anywhere (where

would it go?).

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 07/05/2005 - 22:41 | [reply](#)

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8. The Yom Kippur War

This is the eighth part of our acclaimed series, "A Short History of Israel". If you wish to read the preceding parts, see the **Table of Contents** for links to them. We welcome comments and criticisms. Do tell us what you think.

.....

Within months of the end of the Six Day War, Nasser embarked on the War of Attrition – a series of attacks by land, sea and air, predominantly on Israeli military targets. These were designed to be sufficiently frequent and deadly to force Israel to remain in a constant state of war-readiness, but on any particular occasion to be insufficient to provoke all-out war. Some of the aircraft participating in the war were flown by Soviet pilots who were among the 20,000 Soviet 'advisors' (in reality, soldiers and military technicians) who were stationed in Egypt.

Israel responded by shooting back, by building a line of massive fortifications along the Suez Canal, and also by retaliating harshly against both military targets and civilian infrastructure. Nevertheless the War of Attrition, which lasted from 1967 to 1970, cost Israel 1,524 dead and about 2,700 wounded.

Egypt sustained much higher casualties and enormous damage, and Israel showed no sign of withdrawing unconditionally. In 1970, Egypt and Israel agreed to a ceasefire proposed by the US, one of whose terms was that neither country would build new military installations within 50 kilometres of the Canal. Egypt immediately began doing so, installing state-of-the-art surface-to-air missile sites, supplied by the Soviet Union and manned by Soviet 'advisors'. A series of 'peace initiatives' by the UN and the US followed, all of which eventually dissipated because Egypt, supported by the Soviet Union, insisted on a promise of unconditional withdrawal as a precondition for negotiating. Nasser died suddenly, but his successor, Anwar Sadat, at first continued his policies unchanged.

Following the Six Day War, pan-Arab nationalism was in decline. Palestinian nationalism burgeoned. People who would previously have described themselves simply as 'Arabs', or 'Palestinian Arabs', became 'Palestinians', and most of them regarded the PLO as their national movement. A diplomatic and media campaign was launched in the West to legitimise the Palestinian nation, with the slogan 'a democratic and secular state in Palestine'. Arafat became

leader of the PLO. He said in 1970: "Our basic aim is to liberate the land from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River. We are not concerned with what took place in June 1967 or in eliminating the consequences of the June war. The Palestinian revolution's basic concern is the uprooting of the Zionist entity from our land".

In addition to murdering several hundred Israelis between 1967 and 1973, the PLO globalised its terrorist campaign. PLO terrorists attacked Jewish and Israeli targets in Europe. They hijacked Western airliners and held passengers hostage. They tried to take over Jordan, and the Syrian army entered Jordan intending to assist them. After King Hussein secretly appealed to Israel for help, Israeli aircraft flew low over the Syrian tanks and the Syrians turned back without a shot being fired. As a result the PLO were violently expelled from Jordan by the Jordanian army and fled to Lebanon.

Under the pseudonym 'Black September' (named after the month in which they had been expelled from Jordan), the PLO attacked the Olympic Games in Munich in 1972, holding eleven Israeli athletes hostage and then murdering them. Some of the terrorists were captured, but were released a few weeks later, allegedly in a secret deal between the PLO and the German government (under which Germany would be spared further terrorist attacks). Mossad tracked down the terrorists, and during the following years, killed all but two of them. One of those two was Abu Daoud, who in 1999 won the Palestine Prize for Culture for his autobiography, *Memoirs of a Palestinian Terrorist*.

In 1972, Sadat ordered all Soviet 'advisors' out of the country. Thus, in a move that was almost unparalleled during the Cold War, Egypt left the Soviet fold. Only four years earlier, Czechoslovakia's attempt to do something much more modest had been harshly suppressed by the Red Army. But on this occasion, the Soviets chose to comply. Syria now became, and remained until the end of the Cold War, the Soviet Union's principal client state in the Middle East. Sadat's immediate motive was to give himself more room for manoeuvre – and in particular, the option of making war in his own time and in his own way, without having to clear each decision with his superpower sponsor.

On October 6, 1973, in a brilliant and meticulously planned strike, the Egyptian army crossed the Suez Canal, overwhelming or bypassing the supposedly impregnable defences, and advanced into Sinai. At the same time, the Syrian army attacked the Golan Heights, recaptured them, and began advancing towards the Israeli border. Israel was caught completely by surprise.

Many factors had combined to bring this about. Intelligence about the Arabs' military build-up had been overlooked or misinterpreted. The Israeli defences were severely under-manned. In May of that year, a similar build-up had occurred, the IDF's Chief of Staff, David Elazar, had ordered a partial mobilisation, and when no invasion materialised, he and the government had been criticised for wasting public money. In August, Syria had massed a huge force on the border; Israel had ignored it and the force had been withdrawn.

October 6 was Yom Kippur, a public holiday in Israel and the holiest

day in the Jewish calendar (hence this war is often called the Yom Kippur War), when many soldiers were home on leave.

On the morning of October 6, when the Mossad at last reported that an invasion would take place that evening (it actually came at 2pm), the government had refused Elazar's recommendation to launch a pre-emptive strike like that of 1967, because the US had warned Israel to confine itself to clearly defensive operations. The government also refused Elazar's request for full mobilisation, on the grounds that this might be interpreted as provocative. Only a partial mobilisation of 50,000 reservists was authorised. Later in the day, this limit was increased to 100,000. Elazar disobeyed these orders and sent out immediate call-up notices to 150,000 reservists, but even that was too little, too late.

The IDF's contingency planning had assumed that the Israeli Air Force could slow any enemy advance during the first 48 hours of an invasion. But in the event, Israeli aircraft suffered severe losses from the Soviet-built missile batteries on the Egyptian side of the Canal, and were prevented from flying low enough to affect the battle on the ground. The Syrians, too, had installed mobile missile batteries on the Golan Heights, with similar effect in that much smaller area.

The Syrians and Egyptians had assembled huge armies – a total of 1,150,000 soldiers. Only a small fraction of these were yet committed: the initial Canal crossing had been accomplished by an elite force of only 8,000 (against defenders numbering fewer than 500) immediately followed by a few tens of thousands. Syria had attacked with 1,200 tanks against the defenders' 170. On both the Egyptian and the Syrian fronts, the advances were slowed by the tenacity and sacrifice of small IDF units – most of whom had never seen combat before – and by the skill of local IDF commanders.

Israel appealed to King Hussein not to join the fighting – reminding him of his misjudgement six years earlier. Though at first he seemed to be heeding the warning, the IDF still had to deploy some of its overstretched forces (which by the end of the second day had reached 200,000, two thirds of its fully-mobilised strength) to defend against possible attack from Jordan. The Lebanese armed forces remained inactive, though PLO forces in Lebanon shelled Israeli towns that lay in the path of the Syrian advance.

During the second day, IDF reinforcements reached the Golan Heights and began to drive the Syrians back, but at the cost of heavy losses in lives and equipment. In Sinai, complex battles raged, but the Israeli reinforcements made no headway, succeeding only in preventing the Egyptians from advancing beyond the range of their anti-aircraft missile sites.

Both sides were now using ammunition and supplies at a prodigious rate, but the Soviet Union was replenishing the Arab armies in massive airlifts. Israelis were shocked when Britain refused to meet even existing contracts for ammunition. Britain had imposed

another arms embargo 'on both sides', except that it continued to supply Jordan (which it considered a 'non-combatant'), and to train Egyptian military pilots.

About a week into the war, huge tank battles began – the second largest in history (the largest being the battle of Kursk in the Second World War). The Egyptian Army, having been reinforced and re-supplied, made a determined breakout from their positions on the eastern side of the Canal, heading for the passes through which Sinai could be crossed. The Syrians fighting on the Golan Heights were reinforced by 15,000 Iraqi troops and hundreds of tanks, as well as elite forces, with tanks, from Jordan.

The IDF eventually won both these battles, destroying a significant proportion of the Egyptian and Syrian tanks, and nearly all the Iraqi ones, though again at great cost in Israeli lives. But it had now run critically short of ammunition and equipment. In particular, its British-made Chieftain tanks, a key weapon on both fronts, were about to run out of ammunition and become useless. US President Richard Nixon, after long hesitation, decided to end his own embargo and re-supply Israel. However, Britain refused to allow its airfields or airspace to be used for this purpose. Portugal was persuaded to allow US aircraft to land en route to Israel, but most of these supplies arrived too late to be used.

IDF General Ariel Sharon, who had been urging an out-flanking counterattack across the Suez Canal since the second day of the war, was finally given permission to launch one on the ninth day. On its way to making the crossing, his force had the bad luck to run into two Egyptian divisions that had just been deployed there following the previous day's battle. It fought its way through and crossed on a pre-fabricated bridge. Its first priority then was to attack and destroy the missile batteries. The second was to cut off supplies to the Egyptian army on the east side of the Canal. This was eventually achieved, and with that, the war against Egypt was won.

Meanwhile a last, all-out counter-attack by the Syrians, Iraqis and Jordanians was defeated at the Golan Heights. The Arab armies were no longer capable of effective resistance. The roads to Damascus in the east, and to Cairo in the west, were open to the IDF. The UN Security Council convened and ordered an immediate ceasefire.

Despite the military victory, Israelis were profoundly shocked by the Yom Kippur War. 2,688 of them had been killed, thousands wounded, and it seemed to many that their world had come closer to being destroyed than at any time since the Holocaust. Israeli society and politics were permanently changed. Some concluded that the policy of retaining Sinai and the Golan as buffer zones had been vindicated, since a similar war starting at the 1948/9 ceasefire lines would have been fought out in Israel's cities, whose populations would have had nowhere to flee to. Others concluded that the war had proved that the concept of a 'buffer zone' was outdated and that the territories had no great military value: the enemy had crossed the border with apparent ease despite Israel's

massive fixed defences, and victory had been achieved not through any defences but through counterattack. The huge scale of the war, the role that had been played by the Soviet Union and the decisive effect of advanced weapons (such as anti-aircraft missiles), made it clear to most Israelis that for the foreseeable future Israel's security would depend on a close relationship with the US.

The cost of the war – the equivalent of Israel's entire gross national product for one year – forced Israel to apply to the US for loans and aid. All this was demoralising in a culture that deemed itself to be predicated on self-reliance and self-defence. The ruling Labour coalition suffered a severe loss of public confidence, which it has never fully regained. There was a mood of national pessimism.

The effect on the Arab world was in some ways the mirror image of the effect on Israel: despite the catastrophic military defeat, heavy casualties and stupendous economic cost, the consensus among Arabs was that honour had been regained and that a significant strategic victory had been won. But on the other hand, Sadat, along with many Egyptians, also concluded that if even this assault had been repelled, despite its good planning, good cooperation among Arab states, surprise, modern weapons, force of numbers, enthusiastic superpower assistance, and good luck, then Israel was there to stay. Also, Israel's new relationship with the US would make it all the stronger.

Four years later in 1977, after a series of successful US-brokered 'disengagement agreements' in which Israel returned parts of Sinai in return for Egyptian promises to keep it demilitarised, Sadat exploited the new mood in Egypt in a way that astounded the world: in a speech to the Egyptian Parliament, he declared his willingness to make peace with Israel.

Part 9: The Rise of the PLO

Thu, 06/19/2003 - 18:07 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

why?

The only comment that I have is that this website talks for Israel more than it does to the Arabs, and that is not a nice thing to do I think. If you guys like Israel that much the just at least do not say bad things at the Arabs because the Arabs are not just animals , but they are human just like you are. In my opinion, the Arab were fighting in the Yom Kippur war not because they hated Israel, but because they wanted to take their lands back. Thank you.

by [manar](#) on Wed, 04/13/2005 - 14:13 | [reply](#)

Re: why?

In this document we have done nothing other than summarise the history of factual events.

However, your opinion that "the Arabs were fighting in the Yom

Kippur war [...] because they wanted to take their lands back” – in other words, attributing to the Egyptian and Syrian governments in 1973 the basic Israeli position of land-for-peace – is completely ahistorical. It is incompatible with, for instance, the Declaration of Khartoum (see [Part 6](#)) and with the entire conduct of Egyptian and Syrian military and foreign policy during the run-up to that war and long afterwards.

by [Editor](#) on Fri, 06/03/2005 - 16:29 | [reply](#)

I think you should reconsider

I think you should reconsider your last comment, that the Arabs were fighting to recapture lost lands was completely ahistorical. Any student of Israeli-Arab history can see that the Arabs ventured to war in 1973 for two reasons: to erase the stigma of defeat after the 1967 war and to recapture the Sinai and the Golan. I think you should look again at the entire conduct of Syrian and Egyptian military and foreign policy leading up to the war. In fact, they differed immensely. Syria believed Nasser, that what had been taken by force could only be taken back by force. Egypt hoped instead to shock the Israelis into accepting his overtures for negotiations over the Sinai. These divergence of war aims led to the Arabs' ultimate defeat, as the Egyptians carried out only limited attacks into the Sinai after their initial crossing of the Suez and Israel could fight the Arabs piecemeal. At the end of the war, Israel had Egypt by the throat, but not Syria. Syria, in fact, made life very uncomfortable for the salient of Israeli forces had pushed into their front. But the war, as you mentioned, woke the Israelis up. After '67 they thought of themselves as a mini-superpower. But the war, far from shocking the Israelis to the negotiating table, alarmed them. They knew they could no longer let the Syrians and Egyptians wage a war against them on two fronts. This led Kissinger to include as a foreign policy objective the intention to drive a wedge between the two countries, for Arab independence and Arab unity, especially after Nasser turned apparent defeat in '56 into victory, was anathema to the IDF.

Dear Editor or Manar: If you disagree with my comment, please email me. I'll be glad to discuss this with you. If you issue a response, also email me please.

by James on Sat, 05/13/2006 - 02:28 | [reply](#)

Any assistance would be great

I am currently in my final year of high school and i am studying at the moment Arab-Israel history. I am presently completing an assignment on the Yom Kippur War and subsequently i am surfing the web looking for information. So my question is would you be able to guide me to some other sources of information if at all possible.

And by the way this site has been extremely helpful thus far in

regards to research.

Any assistance would be greatly appreciated.

Roy

by a reader on Mon, 07/24/2006 - 02:12 | [reply](#)

yom kippur war

this is good and has some sources listed at the bottom

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/myths2/1973War.html>

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 07/24/2006 - 04:59 | [reply](#)

Re: Any assistance would be great

Martin Gilbert's book is good. So is Elliot's link above.

<http://domino.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF> is an archive of documents relating to the UN/LoN and Israel/Palestine. Can be searched, but also browsed by date. So you can impress your examiners by citing primary sources.

by [Editor](#) on Mon, 07/24/2006 - 07:07 | [reply](#)

Assistance was very useful

I just wanted to thank you Mr Temple for your assistance and the site you guided me to was very helpful.

Thankyou

by a reader on Tue, 07/25/2006 - 13:09 | [reply](#)

YOM kippur

i just wanted to say that the main reason Egypt is said to have lost the Yom Kippur war is because of the US. The US provided the Israelis with enormous amounts of support. including the sat. pictures that stated to israeli generals that there was a gap between the 2nd and 3rd army. in addtion, If Saddat wanted to end the Israeli occupation of the Middle East he could have ended their existance if he had decided to eliminate his 3rd army along side the WHOLE israeli army. giving the arab nations involved an advantage because israel would have no defense and in at moment the world would notice the support that the US was giving Israel when they would immediatly defend israel with all their might.

by a reader on Mon, 11/13/2006 - 06:52 | [reply](#)

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The Yom Kippur War

The eighth installment in our acclaimed series, "A Short History of Israel", is now up. Here is a quote from **The Yom Kippur War**:

Under the pseudonym 'Black September' (named after the month in which they had been expelled from Jordan), the PLO attacked the Olympic Games in Munich in 1972, holding eleven Israeli athletes hostage and then murdering them. Some of the terrorists were captured, but were released a few weeks later, allegedly in a secret deal between the PLO and the German government (under which Germany would be spared further terrorist attacks). Mossad tracked down the terrorists, and during the following years, killed all but two of them. One of those two was Abu Daoud, who in 1999 won the Palestine Prize for Culture for his autobiography, *Memoirs of a Palestinian Terrorist*.

If you have not read the preceding parts, you can find them linked from the **Table of Contents**.

Thu, 06/19/2003 - 18:39 | [permalink](#)

Subdued Reactions to the Iranian Protests

Why are the current **protests in Iran**, which might seem to represent everything that the Left stands for, receiving little or no support from the Left? Why, given that they may be the beginning of an enormously important change in the geopolitical scene, are they receiving remarkably little coverage in the media? Many bloggers, including, for instance, **Andrew Sullivan** and **Meryl Yourish** (and references therein), have been commenting, but no one seems to have an explanation.

Also, is it really the Left, or is it idiotarians? Is their silence telling us something about the nature of idiotarianism? (Check out the excellent discussion about idiotarianism in the Comments on our item [here](#).) But in any case, it's not just idiotarians. Why is *nearly everyone*, even the **US administration**, strangely subdued about this?

Fri, 06/20/2003 - 20:50 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Is it Islam or the Axis Of Evil?

Probably, the Administration is playing Iran quietly because the president doesn't want to fuel the belief, still simmering in the Middle East, that our War On Terror is really a campaign against Islam. Iran is an explicit theocracy, so the connection would be too easily established.

Mind you, I think that 1) Washington ought to come out explicitly in support of the overthrow of the theocracy and 2) announce that its anti-terror campaign really *is* aimed at defanging and civilizing Islam. But the Administration doesn't hire a lot of hairy-eyed vendors of flamethrower rhetoric who advocate **nuking the Moon**, so my views are, ah, under-represented there.

Curmudgeon Emeritus, Palace Of Reason

by [fporretto](#) on Sat, 06/21/2003 - 01:14 | [reply](#)

Fiery protests in London

"Two more people have set themselves on fire outside the French Embassy in central London on Friday"

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/3006746.stm>

And the same has happened in other European cities.

Can you imagine the coverage this would have got if Iraqis in Europe had done this to protest the Iraq war? But if Iranians protest the Iranian regime, or France's complicity, that's not news.

by a reader on Sat, 06/21/2003 - 02:39 | [reply](#)

Some views from an Iranian Student

Someone has finally noticed it, Halleluyah!

Here are my views, as a participant in these demonstrations, concerning the reasons for this lack of coverage:

US administration: Well, since Carter's administration showed its superhuman lack of judgement in Iranian politics, we in Iran have been convinced through the years, that a major part of the US admin. simply doesn't know what to do with Iran. In these days, the actions of the US state department show clearly that it is the centre of the ignorants as far as Iran is concerned. We here are hoping the neo-conservatives finally win over the Iran policy to see , at last, some rational US policy in Iran.

The argument that US backing of the protests will jeopardize the 'purity' of Iranian protests and might back fire is utter RUBBISH! We in Iran have passed this stupidity , almost purified by suffering these past 25 years, of 'America is GUILTY for everything'. We, my generation ie. the youth, have FINALLY understood, that the west consists of different ideas and groups . that not all of it is pure goodness, but a major part of it represents actually the best of what humanity has been able to achieve, and that it should be ideas and actions of each group that determines whether or not they should be supported or trusted, not some worn prejudice! So we NEED U.S. active support for our struggle for freedom, believe us!

EU: well, I think you all know that EU policy is that of pure hypocrisy and near-sighted economical gains in the middle east. They are literally plundering Iran in return for their clandestine support for the regime. We have no expectations from THEM!

The Left and the Media: well, you know the answer already, as is clear from other posts in this webpage.

by a reader on Fri, 07/18/2003 - 23:06 | [reply](#)

Anti-Semitism Watch: European Union, Malaysia

In the early 20th century, the Tsarist Russian secret police distilled the essence of traditional anti-Semitic conspiracy theories into a document, the **Protocols of the Elders of Zion**, purporting to be the master plan for The Jews to take over the world. It has been a staple of anti-Semitism ever since – and also a red flag: for surprisingly often, as soon as casual anti-Semitism takes that additional step beyond snide remarks about ‘**a shitty little country**’ and crosses the line into out-and-out evil, you will find the Protocols.

The Protocols are cited in the **Charter of Hamas**, as one of the justifications for their objective of driving the Jews out of Israel through an uncompromising and unrelenting campaign of mass murder.

The European Union still **draws a distinction** between various branches of Hamas. Thus the EU's pretence of not being complicit in mass murder hinges on the idea that there is some sort of firewall within Hamas, such that when a murderer asks for funds, the administrator says “sorry, the Jew-killing will have to wait until more jihad-enabled funds come in; all the millions currently in the account are earmarked for **arms dumps** hospitals and **suicide-bomber indoctrination factories** primary schools”. And the murderer says “oh, OK then”.

In a speech at his Party's annual assembly last week, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad of Malaysia gave **one of his notorious diatribes**, touching on anti-Western, anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic themes. Party officials at the assembly handed out copies of *The International Jew*, the anti-Semitic tract written by Henry Ford (yes, the Henry Ford – though he later **renounced** it), which contains – guess what? – a version of the Protocols. To the best of our knowledge, no Western leader has criticized either the speech or the reading matter provided.

Former New York Mayor Rudi Giuliani was once again at the right place at the right time doing the right thing this week as he led the US delegation to an international **conference on anti-Semitism**. That such a conference took place at all is a very good sign. That many of the nations **participated unwillingly** is not so good.

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Embryology Authority Runs Amok, Tries to Kill Child

The Powers That Be are in a shameful state of moral confusion about embryos and stem cell research and all that sort of thing.

Take the case of **James Harry Whitaker** for example:

James Harry Whitaker was born on Monday after being genetically matched, while still an IVF embryo, to his four-year-old brother Charlie, who has a rare form of anaemia.

His parents Jayson and Michelle had to travel to the United States after UK authorities refused to give them permission for treatment

[...]

The [Human Fertility and Embryology Authority] defended its decision not to allow treatment, however. A spokeswoman said the outcome of the Whitaker's case would be considered as evidence for a future review of guidelines, but it was unlikely to lead to immediate changes in the authority's policy.

She said: "We have to look at the benefit for the embryo, not just the sibling. Perhaps some day in the future our policy will change. But at the moment we have to be quite strict in the way we issue licences, on a case-by-case basis, and looking at the scientific, medical, and moral issues before making any decision.

But what she really means is that they are *refusing* to take into account the moral issue, and are taking refuge in sticking to the Regulations, however odious and immoral. If a four-year-old child is thereby condemned to death, well, they are only following orders so they can't be doing anything wrong, right? And *maybe they'll change their policy some day in the future!* What kind of a moral defence is that, for killing a child?

"There is clear guidance. HFEA policy states that women are allowed to have treatment only for the benefit of the embryo. It is a tough decision to make."

The HFEA said Charlie's case differed from that of Zain

Hashmi, whose parents were granted permission to screen a new baby to save their son, because Zain's rare blood condition was hereditary.

The authority said in the Hashmi case the potential child was at risk from the disease, but in the Whitaker case, the primary purpose of the child would be as a donor and the child was at no extra risk of contracting the disease Charlie had by virtue of being his sibling.

So, just to make this clear: the British government's policy is that it is all right to have Child 2 via IVF and embryo-selection in order to try to save Child 1 from a horrible life-threatening disease if and only if there's a significant risk that Child 2 might get the same horrible life-threatening disease. However, if there is no such risk then the parents are *not* allowed to select Child 2 in order to save Child 1.

Take a deep breath and consider the Alice-in-Wonderland-type non-logic of this position. In the case where the parents could end up with two children with the disease, the treatment is deemed to be right. In the case where at least one child definitely won't have the disease it is deemed to be wrong. So wrong as to justify letting a child die for lack of it. If the policy were the other way round the government might have a point, but this is just insane.

The argument for it is supposed to be that it is wrong to have the embryo undergo a medical procedure that is not for his benefit without his consent. But first, embryos that do not yet have brains cannot think and so cannot give or withhold consent, nor can one get a person's consent to bring them into existence. As we said, if the procedure in question involved a significant risk to the 'saviour sibling' (as they are known in this field), there would be a moral issue here, but all the actual procedure involves is taking cord blood that would just have been thrown away anyway.

So this is an issue over which the US authorities are saner than the British ones. Note also that the American Medical Association seems to be **sensible** too – they support allowing stem cell research. Anti-abortionists object to such research since it involves small clusters of cells that come from dividing egg cells that might otherwise develop into people. Presumably since masturbation or contraception kill millions of sperm that might otherwise develop into new people, they are morally equivalent to mass murder. **All together now:**

Every sperm is sacred.

Every sperm is great.

If a sperm is wasted,

God gets quite irate.

Sun, 06/22/2003 - 14:45 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

You know...

As a pro-choicer with many friends and loved ones who are pro-life (most of them female), I get rather weary of the tired old "well aren't sperm and eggs human too?" chestnut. If you can find a pro-lifer on the planet who believes that, I'd be shocked.

There is a perfectly reasonable moral position that human life begins at conception--one which can be constructed on entirely non-theistic grounds, in fact, and there are a number of atheist pro-lifers. I tend to believe that, even in jest, rhetoric like yours here tends to make reasonable people roll their eyes rather than really think about the issue.

I think a lot of people interested in putting forward stem-cell research would get a lot farther if they stopped treating their opponents as irrational boobs and fools. It may be emotionally satisfying but I'm not sure it's going to get the results you want.

by a reader on Mon, 06/23/2003 - 15:40 | [reply](#)

The status of sperm

There is a perfectly reasonable moral position that human life begins at conception--one which can be constructed on entirely non-theistic grounds

So, please tell us what it is, briefly. Then we'll understand why pro-lifers shouldn't believe that sperm are sacred.

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Mon, 06/23/2003 - 19:00 | [reply](#)

Human Life -- The Prequel

Though the sperm is a nonviable product, and the egg is much the same, the sperm-egg combination is both viable and genetically distinct from either of its parents. Accidents and deliberate molestations notwithstanding, it will mature into recognizably protected human life. There is no qualitative change along the way that separates the zygote from the baby it will eventually become.

Aristotle would have had something to say here about "essence versus accident."

Now, before anyone puts words in my mouth, this is not an airtight case for banning all abortions. Among other considerations, that question must account for the enforceability of such a law, the cost of enforcement in terms of other rights sacrificed, and the loss of respect for all law that would follow if it were widely violated without penalty, as we have good reason to believe it would. (E.g., Brazil, which has the strongest anti-abortion laws in the world, suffers more than 1,000,000 abortions per year, by conservative estimates.)

However, it is a strong case against the deliberate creation of

zygotes and embryos for the purpose of sacrificing them for the benefit of others.

Curmudgeon Emeritus, Palace Of Reason

by [fporretto](#) on Mon, 06/23/2003 - 21:31 | [reply](#)

Or an alternative...

Would it be possible for sperm to be considered sacred while also acknowledging the fact that they typically do go to waste? Like, 99.999% (not sure how many nines to put there) of the time?

You can consider rain to be sacred without wishing to bottle up every drop of it that might hit infertile ground, after all. It's possible to respect the raw materials of life without taking it to Catholic levels.

Not that that's important, really... just remarking.

Stem cell research issues are different from pro-life issues in a subtle but essential way. You can go back and forth on whether or not a fetus is a human being for ages without coming to a definite conclusion, but you do need that definite conclusion before you can go creating a market for fetuses. Saying, "It's not human because we reeeeeally need it," is probably not going to work.

In a way, abortion actually makes the stem cell debate more difficult. If the only available fetuses were the ones lost naturally, then the few who raised a ruckus over them would be ignored. Sort of like that pesky medicinal marijuana issue: it wouldn't be a problem to legalize it if only people wouldn't keep getting high off the stuff. ;)

- Ewin

by a reader on Mon, 06/23/2003 - 21:45 | [reply](#)

Only a loon loves a spermatozoon

Though the sperm is a nonviable product, and the egg is much the same, the sperm-egg combination is both viable and genetically distinct from either of its parents.

Why is a lone sperm not viable, does it not thrash its tail with great purpose and competently carry its unpaired chromosomes?

If that doesn't persuade, why not rewind to the point where the successful sperm is *just* about to plink through the outermost membrane of the giant ovum. Here we have a viable physical system that's genetically distinct from the mother. But that description also applies to her chocolate labrador. In fact, until the fertilised egg has anchored to the womb wall, her chocolate labrador is *more* viable (assuming she remembers to feed it). And every time a virile man passes a fertile young woman on the street there are trillions of genetically distinct and viable sperm-egg combinations within a 3-metre radius. Are they then morally obliged

to go out for dinner that evening?

enforceability of such a law ... the loss of respect for all law that would follow if it were widely violated

Isn't the law to do with morality? Don't people want to be moral?

Would it be possible for sperm to be considered sacred while also acknowledging the fact that they typically do go to waste? Like, 99.999% (not sure how many nines to put there) of the time?

Not really. What if the Archbishop of Canterbury decided to dynamite all England's cathedrals except York Minster? Everyone in the Church of England would hate him, even the Bishop of Reading.

Sacred just means extremely valuable. It's used by some people because they're not allowed to value something unless it's loved by a supernatural being first. Something is either valuable to you or it isn't. I need water to survive. However, a particular raindrop would only be valuable to me if I was both about to die of thirst *and* I happened to pipped to the ground in exactly the right place at 3:17pm face up with my mouth open, etc.

There are some things that are supposedly sacred but in practice are not treated that way. For example, a scrawny cow wandering around a Delhi slum, chewing on cardboard.

If sperm are sacred they should all be frozen in sperm banks by law until some time in the future when we've constructed sperm paradise.

Saying, "It's not human because we reeeeeally need it," is probably not going to work

Has anybody actually said that?

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Tue, 06/24/2003 - 18:38 | [reply](#)

Where Does The Line Fall?

Your word games are rather silly, Tom. An individual sperm cell or ovum has no claim to anyone's indulgence. Unless sperm and ovum are mated under specially supportive circumstances, neither has a chance of ever acquiring the human status that would entitle it to rights. A purposive act committed under a narrow range of conditions is required to form a human zygote.

BUT... once the sperm and ovum have been allowed to form a zygote, you DO have a creature that, in the absence of violence or accident, would develop to human status. To create a human zygote for the purpose of killing it is to treat it as indistinguishable from a meat animal: a support to human life with no independent significance.

Here's a clarifying question: Imagine that the zygote was allowed to

mature beyond the usual few days at which stem cells are extracted from it. I think you'll grant that after 18 years, we'd all concede that the result possessed a right to life. Probably most of us would grant it a lot sooner. So when does that right actually attach to the developing zygote... embryo... fetus... baby... toddler... preteen... "Dad, can I borrow the car tonight?"

We're not talking about a "regular" gestation here, so the usual legal dividing line of emergence from the mother's body is absent. What age, event, or other discrete consideration would cause this creature to acquire a right to life? What is the qualitative change that brings about personhood?

Curmudgeon Emeritus, Palace Of Reason

by [fporretto](#) on Tue, 06/24/2003 - 22:07 | [reply](#)

Re: Where Does The Line Fall?

Curmudgeon:

"once the sperm and ovum have been allowed to form a zygote, you DO have a creature that, in the absence of violence or accident, would develop to human status."

Does a sperm-egg pair immediately prior to conception satisfy this criterion or not?

by [David Deutsch](#) on Tue, 06/24/2003 - 22:45 | [reply](#)

sigh

Okay, some facts (even if rule #32 of "Rules of abortion debates (derived from calvinball rules)" states "It is *halal* to weigh the facts cited by anti-abortionists as equal to the facts cited by pro-choicers.")

Sperm and Eggs are technically called gametes, and are said to be haploid, meaning that each has exactly one half of the genetic complement necessary for a human being. Neither is in a position to even multiply: Eggs are specialized cells, and the number that a female has are fixed while still in the womb. Sperm are generated by a process known as **meiosis**, a specialized form of cell division that results in cells having half the genetic complement of the original, which WAS a normal cell, and which are incapable of further division. Without the capability of division, they cannot multiply and sustain an organism themselves. Both are of human origin, with DNA that can be clearly identified as being human in origin. If not, then how else could authorities, using sperm samples from a raped woman, be able to positively identify her assailant? Conversely, several convicted "rapists" have been freed when DNA analysis of the sperm samples proved that the sperm didn't come from them.

But is the combination, before union and merging of the DNA, a

human? Alas, the very question betrays an earnest effort on the part of Mr. Deutsch to avoid the implications of the subsequent fusion which not only DOES have a full compliment of provably human DNA, but starts dividing and growing as if there was no tomorrow. This is done by insisting that pro-lifers have a focus that they do not possess, being an accusation that neither the author of this topic, nor the other supporting commenters thereof, have proven or demonstrated. Instead, a ditty from a non-prolife web site is uttered: It rhymes. It supports an unproven accusation tailored to ignore the facts and divert attention away from the interesting sleigh of hand that subtly changes the discussion from that of embryos, to eggs, to sperm, as if to imply that all are the same thing. Thus, TRUTH has also been uttered.

Hasn't it?

yeah, riiiiight.

The question is also rather pointless: ALL human beings alive today have come about by the fusion of a definite egg and a distinct sperm that FORMERLY were separate. If this obvious fact is supposed to raise suspicions about the humanity of those destined to be aborted, it also should raise suspicions about the humanity of those **not** aborted. It seems to me that the distinguishing characteristic between those that are aborted and those who are not, does not lie in the method of conception that ALL human beings share.

I am quite sure that, if one looks long and hard enough, you will be able to find a web site or some wild preacher who supports the sentiment that "sperm are sacred". Of course, I am way ahead of you already, since I have, quite providentially, already discovered a pro-abortion website whose authors and commenters demonstrate an abysmal knowledge of human biology that could only be explained by them having failed Sex ed in high school. They actually don't know the difference between sperm, eggs, and embryos! Can you imagine that? If they know so little about human biology, what makes them think they know anything about what God thinks about sperm, eggs, and growing embryos, much less about what He thinks about a practice that discriminates against a human being based on their age and possessing a **temporary** physical disability?

Back to the topic at hand. The incident cited is pretty much a demonstration of the failure of socialized, government run medicine. In such a structure, there are NO insurance companies doing screening for appropriate "interventions", so the government has to do the screening, so as to preserve resources for the truly needy, and not waste them on hypochondriacs. The confusion of the author is understandable, since it would involve entertaining the, probably astounding, concept that the **fetus is a patient**. If a fetus has a problem, then intervention is justified: if it helps someone else, then that's a bonus. But the fetus does not have a problem, then it does not qualify **as a patient**. Medical intervention is not required. Authorization denied.

Sure, the fetus can be a donor, but the rules currently require that

the donor give their informed consent. As with everything else, an exception to these rules has to be raised with respect to fetuses. If this exception is not honored, then The Basis For Abortion Is Mortally Threatened, And We Cannot Have That, Can We? (*nudge* *nudge* *wink* *wink*)

Unfortunately, if one has to consider the fetus as a patient of a human doctor, then it just might be because it itself is a human, deserving of patient rights. No one less than Dr. Bernard Nathanson, a staunch **promoter and defender of abortion rights** changed his opinion on abortion when he became a professor of pre-natal care and was forced to consider the implications of regarding beings he used to butcher as his patients!

I am not surprised that this thought did not occur to the editor: I am currently writing a conjecture **at my website** that postulates the possibility that pro-abortionists suffer from a fundamental inability to process the concept that a fetus is a human being "created equal, and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights," to the same extent and with the same efficiency as the concept that "a woman has the right to choose to kill an unborn human being." (yes, yes, I know the standard line is supposed to be that she has a right to choose an abortion. I took the liberty of substituting the definition of abortion in place of the word itself. That IS the definition of Abortion, isn't it? When it comes to **setting the world to rights**, clarity of definition and the eschewing of euphemisms would be helpful, no?)

Ugh, I forgot to sign up. My Nom-d'internet is Ptah Aegyptus, e-mail ptah at sixies dot net .

by a reader on Wed, 06/25/2003 - 02:09 | [reply](#)

Abortion

Ptah Aegyptus wrote:

Sperm and Eggs are technically called gametes, and are said to be haploid, meaning that each has exactly one half of the genetic complement necessary for a human being. Neither is in a position to even multiply: Eggs are specialized cells, and the number that a female has are fixed while still in the womb. Sperm are generated by a process known as meiosis, a specialized form of cell division that results in cells having half the genetic complement of the original, which WAS a normal cell, and which are incapable of further division. Without the capability of division, they cannot multiply and sustain an organism themselves.

No one is disputing that fetuses have distinct human DNA. That would be rather absurd. The debate is not over the facts, but rather the moral implications of the facts. "A fetus is a person" simply does not follow from "fetuses have unique human DNA that can develop into a person unless it is aborted". If it did, then it would convince people who think that abortion is wrong if and only if fetuses are

people. Since it doesn't, additional arguments are necessary.

Ptah Aegyptus also wrote:

Can you imagine that? If they know so little about human biology, what makes them think they know anything about what God thinks about sperm, eggs, and growing embryos, much less about what He thinks about a practice that discriminates against a human being based on their age and possessing a temporary physical disability?

Before humans had discovered the difference between sperm, ova, and growing embryos, was it wrong to have a position on abortion? If so, was it then wrong to oppose abortion?

~Woty

<http://woty.davidsj.com>

by **Woty** on Wed, 06/25/2003 - 03:04 | [reply](#)

Uh huh. Yeah...

Woty wrote:

No one is disputing that fetuses have distinct human DNA. That would be rather absurd. The debate is not over the facts...

Really? *takes another look at the initial topic and the subsequent comments, eyes big as saucers* Hmph. Sure fooled me. However, I will leave it to the judgment of the truly inquiring and open minds who will come after, read this topic and the comments, to decide if I could be forgiven for having taken literally the confessions of ignorance as to the differences between sperm, eggs, and embryos, or demonstrations indicating the lack of knowledge thereof.

but rather the moral implications of the facts. "A fetus is a person" simply does not follow from "fetuses have unique human DNA that can develop into a person unless it is aborted". If it did, then it would convince people who think that abortion is wrong if and only if fetuses are people. Since it doesn't, additional arguments are necessary.

Ah yes, the "human being is not a person" distinction, made sacred by the bald assertion of 7 old men in a building in Washington DC in 1973. Actually, the statement that "persons have unalienable rights" is equally in the same position: it depends on who sets the definitions, and whether there is a physical reality to "unalienable rights", on the same level as physical things and actions such as "human beings" and "abortion". Those things and actions can be pointed at and discussed without self-serving ambiguities. Retreating to a position deliberately rife with ambiguities is a good

defensive position, but does not lend itself to being regarded as a

person wanting to make a moral decision.

A bit of history: when the Dred Scott case was decided, **Chief Justice Taney made a distinction between persons and citizens**, ruling that Dred Scott couldn't sue for his freedom because he wasn't a citizen, and thus **had no standing to sue**.

When the 14th Amendment was added, the authors deliberately chose the word "person", instead of "citizen", precisely to avoid Chief Justice Taney's self-serving, artificial, loophole creating, distinction. No doubt, after it passed, they slapped the dust off their hands and thought smugly, "There! THAT problem won't come up again!"

And darned if, a century later, the Supreme Court went and did it AGAIN!

sighs Oh well, I suppose I shouldn't have been surprised that a society that vitally relies on the loophole creating assertion that "A human being is not a person", would eventually wind up with a debate on "what the meaning of the word 'is' is," should I?

But don't think that this charade hasn't been noticed.

Woty wrote:

Before humans had discovered the difference between sperm, ova, and growing embryos, was it wrong to have a position on abortion? If so, was it then wrong to oppose abortion?

Let's be blunt: Abortion is supported because it solves a set of problems posed by a woman who has an unwanted pregnancy that would come home to roost the moment the "fetus" (greek for "unborn child" BTW) becomes a born fetus.

Some more history: The set of problems arising from an unwanted pregnancy have existed since time immemorial, with abortion being the most modern "solution" that is deemed the "cleanest", most "sanitary", and "socially acceptable" alternative to the previously practiced solution of **infanticide**. Some cultures and societies accepted it as a valid solution to the aforementioned set of problems, and allowed its practice. Others did not. As a culture, we (apparently) decided it was "wrong", and chose to neither practice it nor tolerate its practice. (Before the development of the partial birth abortion method, the preferred method for aborting pregnancies beyond 8 months involved performing a C-section, removing the "product of conception", and leaving it squalling in a bucket in the operating room. Nurses were fired for raiding said buckets and taking said refuse to be adopted. In my mind, the distance between that and infanticide is **not** spacious.)

Alas, the problem of unwanted pregnancies, eventually resulting in the appearance of inconvenient human beings, still remained. It doesn't seem to matter to some that over 99.99% of the persons in the world are human beings. Extend the definition to 100%? Oh no!

Can't have that! An exception **must be raised** when it comes to

the human Fetus, and if this exception is not honored, then the Moral Basis For Abortion Is Mortally Threatened, And We Cannot Have That, Can We? (*nudge* *nudge* *wink* *wink*)

Ptah

by **ptah** on Wed, 06/25/2003 - 14:02 | [reply](#)

Confused (yet again)

I don't understand what this whole thing is about. Aren't the 2 children alive and well? I'm confused. So they had a baby designed to be as genetically close as his brother so they could use cord blood to save him, what does that have to do with abortions? Or am I missing something?

Also, how come sperm is the same thing as an embryo? And you forgot to mention menstruation, but they didn't make a song out of it :D

Leo,
<http://eraserewind.blogspot.com>

by **Leo** on Wed, 06/25/2003 - 15:34 | [reply](#)

Moral divide over moral dividing line.

Ptah wrote:

An individual sperm cell or ovum has no claim to anyone's indulgence. Unless sperm and ovum are mated under specially supportive circumstances, neither has a chance of ever acquiring the human status

An individual zygote or uterus has no claim to anyone's indulgence. Unless zygote and uterine wall are mated under specially supportive circumstances, neither has a chance of ever acquiring human status.

To create a human zygote for the purpose of killing it is to treat it as indistinguishable from a meat animal

The purpose of an unwanted pregnancy is not to terminate the foetus, the unwanted pregnancy is typically a byproduct of poor contraception. The original purpose was simply to make whoopee.

What does it mean to consider that whatever makes a human being important as a human being is present in a small cluster of cells? It means that a mature conscious human being is indistinguishable from a meat animal. It also brings much real misery into the world in countries where abortions are illegal or hugely frowned upon.

We don't yet agree on where the moral dividing line can be drawn. According to child psychologists long-term memory doesn't set in until the age of two. Thank goodness *they're* not in charge.

by **Tom Robinson** on Wed, 06/25/2003 - 15:52 | [reply](#)

blinks

Tom Robinson quotes:

Ptah wrote:

An individual sperm cell or ovum has no claim to anyone's indulgence....

I beg your pardon, Mr Robinson? Please check your references before posting, sir, for it was fporretto you quoted, not I.

And I suggest considering the differences between the categories of *kind* and *degree*. At least Woty agrees that, in principle, there is no difference in **kind** between a zygote and an octogenarian, in that they are the same *kind* of being. Terms such as zygote, embryo, fetus, baby, child, toddler, pre-teen, teen, and adult are terms of *degree*, distinguishing between stages of physical development driven by time. To look at an embryo and complain "it doesn't look like a human being to me!" is to be misled by appearances. We allowed science to disabuse us of the notion, when we looked up at the sky, that we were the center of the universe: "Look at how they all go around US!" Its about time we allowed science to disabuse us of other superficial notions as well.

I agree with your statement in one respect: The human zygote (being human by possession of human DNA, by the way, and thus does not need to "qualify" for that distinction) has many hurdles to leap before it meets the artificial criteria set forth to qualify for protection under the law as a more privileged "person". It is one thing for it to fail due to possessing genetic flaws or being unable to attach to the uterine wall, or some other NATURAL hurdle that ALL pre-born human beings must surmount. It is quite another for it to be proceeding along swimmingly, only to be premeditatively terminated to **prevent it from qualifying** under the artificial criteria now in vogue separating certain human beings from more "privileged" persons, and for reasons which, if appealed to when "premeditately terminating" a "person", would land them in jail. Or the electric chair.

BTW, blowing away a competitor who's threatening to qualify to run a race is clearly illegal, but am I the only one who has the nagging feeling that it's unsporting as well?

Ptah

by **ptah** on Wed, 06/25/2003 - 17:15 | [reply](#)

Interaction counts.

Sorry to Ptah and to Fporretto for my quotation error above.

Ptah,

Yes, the fertilised egg and the eighty-year-old person that it

develops into are the same kind of thing in terms of DNA. They are different stages of the same biological organism. However, they are not the same kind of thing from a moral perspective.

The moral status of something should not be based on what it might or probably will eventually become but on what it actually is now (including perhaps a record of its history). The point about abortions and stem cell research is that we can safely and effectively *change* what embryo cells can become.

It seems super-unlikely that a small lump of cells can think, hurt, make a choice, perceive colour, anything like that. The philosophy of mind emanating from *The World* accords with Karl Popper's theory of knowledge which implies that a mind develops by trial and error. For this trial and error to get underway you need ongoing interaction with a rich environment perceived by well-developed sense organs. Not much (in any) of this has happened before birth.

It's not so much

it doesn't look like a human being to me

It's more like

it doesn't *interact* like a human being to me

We don't yet have agreement on where to draw the line. The pro-lifers' DNA argument puts the line way too early. This wouldn't matter so much except for the fact that much conspicuous evil results from the sperm-meets-egg starting line or the related "ensoulment" idea. And also because we might be able to do so many good things with embryonic stem cells and by pre-screening frozen embryos. I don't see why we shouldn't eventually allow ourselves to alter germline DNA. Immunity to AIDS spliced in?

by **Tom Robinson** on Thu, 06/26/2003 - 00:52 | [reply](#)

Monkeys Are "Potential Humans"

Rocks too, btw. They just need to be effected in just the right way. If you're confused, there's a quote something like: practically anything can be a computer if you shine the right kind of light on it. and of course the being effected could involve re-shaping the rock, adding stuff, etc...

if you claim adding stuff is not allowed, i'd insist that an egg and sperm wouldn't be able to get larger in size w/out adding stuff from outside themselves. if you claim design is not allowed, well it's not impossible, just unlikely, with rocks and monkeys.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 06/26/2003 - 01:49 | [reply](#)

"...from a moral perspective": Tom Robinson

Moral perspective? MORAL PERSPECTIVE?

sighs

Well, I suppose, since the debate no longer revolves around what is now acknowledged as the known facts, that **some** progress has been made. However, you sounding a trumpet call to move the debate from the clear, sunny fields of known facts into the dark, boggy swamp of post modern American morals, where the only belief that certainly will be voiced, once within, will be the belief that nothing is certain, informs me that you do not share my opinion that we are making "progress".

sighs again

Well, if you **insist**.

Oh by the way, before we commence...

By what right, by what code, by what standard?

VOICE it, sir. Voice the particulars of the "moral" code that you are using to decide what is right and wrong in this debate. If we are to run into a swamp, hoping to lead others after us, let us at least demonstrate the quality of our maps and compasses to those who put their trust in us, so that they may decide if the paths have a chance of leading to light, rather than into an infestation of alligators.

All in favor of avoiding the alligators, fall in over there by the tree. All not in favor, please go back home to mommy before you hurt yourselves.

At the risk of being tedious and lengthy yet again, I shall assert mine.

I hold that, within the context of a **secular** society, that Human Life is the supreme value, and is the criterion upon which all other morals, laws, practices, beliefs, and behaviors, are to be judged. While I do not deny the existence of other values worthy of pursuit, I hold that, within the context of a secular society, they are LESSER values, and MUST YIELD as subservient when their pursuit involves the injury or death of another human being. Instead, they form a hierarchy, some more important than others, but with their status determined by the degree to which they advance and support the supreme value of Human Life. To believe that there exists some other value, moral, law, practice, belief or behavior as being higher than human life means that, in the event of conflict, that human life must yield, and may be taken if necessary for the sake of the higher value. I hold that the only thing worth killing for is to support the DIRECT preservation of Human life.

All in favor of the death penalty **only** in the case that human life is taken, and not when the violator has offended some practice, belief, behavior, or a person's finances or material "quality of life", please follow me.

I hold that *all men are created equal, that they are endowed by*

their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. Based on this, and understanding that the rhetorical use of the word "men" is shorthand for all members of the human race, I assert that the definition of a "lesser class" of human being is that they possess **fewer rights** than the "privileged class". For **all** humans to be created **equal, each** human must possess the **same** rights. This is not rhetoric. This is not opinion. This is Mathematical Set Theory. Any **mis**-distribution of rights is, by definition, discriminatory.

All in favor of **all** human beings having the **same** rights, please follow me.

However, I DO NOT hold that all discrimination is wrong. All issues of right and wrong are based on whether the society's key values are violated or upheld. In American society, a form of discrimination based on age is logically, yes necessarily and enthusiastically, pursued. Laws are passed excluding young members of the society from certain activities and duties, as well as prohibiting older members of the society from certain behaviors toward the young that would be otherwise permissible and defensible. These laws, invariably, can be demonstrated as having the goal of **protecting the life of the young**, in **deference to** the supreme value of Human Life, but in clear **opposition to** the important, but definitely lesser, value of "liberty". Nevertheless, society rightly deplors discrimination, and so all these laws have strict time limits to ensure that this discrimination is not a permanent feature in individual lives, and that "paternal laws" are not imposed on those who require no parents. So important is this principle that many bad laws are passed using the ruse that it "protects the young".

All who normally oppose discrimination, but favor a time limited form of discrimination in order to ensure that **the young are protected until they are ready to protect themselves**, please follow me.

Not a complete list, but a good start. The remainder won't make sense until we're in the swamp and at a fork in what passes for a path through it.

Ptah

by [ptah](#) on Thu, 06/26/2003 - 16:30 | [reply](#)

Crossing the line

Ptah wrote:

"I hold that, within the context of a secular society, that Human Life is the supreme value, and is the criterion upon which all other morals, laws, practices, beliefs, and behaviors, are to be judged. While I do not deny the existence of other values worthy of pursuit, I hold that, within the context of a secular society, they are LESSER values, and MUST YIELD as subservient when their pursuit involves the injury or death of another human being. "Instead, they form a hierarchy, some more important than others, but with their status

determined by the degree to which they advance and support the supreme value of Human Life. To believe that there exists some other value, moral, law, practice, belief or behavior as being higher than human life means that, in the event of conflict, that human life must yield, and may be taken if necessary for the sake of the higher value. I hold that the only thing worth killing for is to support the DIRECT preservation of Human life."

What counts as a human being? It can't simply something that's alive and has human genetic material, if it was blowing your nose or scratching your arse, both of which kill cells would be morally equivalent to mass murder. So what is the relevant criterion?

Well, let's think about this. Suppose that an AI were created by running suitable software on a silicon based computer with an architecture close to that of the human brain and that it was capable of having conversations, learning new things and so on. Would you feel comfortable with pulling the plug on it? I am going to presume that the answer to that question is no. It follows that the class of things one is allowed to kill is not dependent on biology but instead on thinking.

There is no particular reason to suppose that embryos think while they are in the womb and many reasons to presume otherwise. These include things like it would not be evolutionarily advantageous to think before leaving the womb, babies being very stupid when they pop out and so on. Whether this specific theory about when the child thinks or not is true is debatable, but there must be some point between conception and when the child starts to talk when the baby starts thinking before that point it is not a thinking person, after that point he is. Correspondingly the child's moral status changes after crossing that line, before it crosses the line it doesn't count morally, afterward he does.

One last thought experiment, one of the molecules that enables stem cells to grow into any kind of cell has been discovered. Sooner or later advances like this will make it possible to turn any cell into any other kind of cell and at some point we'll be able to turn any cell in the body into a new human being. Based on your policy of taking measures to make sure that any cells that are biologically human and could be grown into people are grown into people there are two responses to this. Either, we must force everybody to have cell samples taken and made into human beings at the maximum rate that can be done without killing them. Or we must stop the development of such technology. In either case we will be forced to turn the West into a closed society. Which policy should we adopt?

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Thu, 06/26/2003 - 18:17 | [reply](#)

Don't worry folks...

THIS won't take long.

Mr Forrester, let's do another thought experiment.

You scratch your arse.

NOW you scratch your boss's wife's arse.

Moral: the difference is only DNA.

Another thought experiment.

You shoot yourself.

NOW you shoot your bo-

Uhhh, skip that.

However, the difference is still only DNA.

Ptah

by [ptah](#) on Thu, 06/26/2003 - 22:29 | [reply](#)

What, Me Worry?

Ptah,

Your reply to Alan indicates to me that you didn't understand his comment.

His point is that DNA does NOT make the person, and you persist in asserting that it does.

If you and your boss' spouse were identical twins with identical DNA, it would still make a difference whose ass you scratched because you'd be different people!

A person is not DNA. A person is a *mind* that can grow knowledge. A bunch of cells that might someday become a person is not a person yet.

by [Gil](#) on Fri, 06/27/2003 - 23:48 | [reply](#)

Oh really?

Gil, I shall leave it to other readers, with a more questioning and impartial frame of mind, and who will bother to read ALL the posts AND who possess a memory to remember them between the time they start the page and the time they reach YOUR comment, to decide if I ever claimed that DNA was a person. It is to accuse me of ignorance of biology. Again, I will leave it to those other readers to decide who REALLY knows, demonstrates, and attempts to argue based on a knowledge of biology, and who does not.

Did YOU bother to read BOTH posts? I invited ALAN, a male, to scratch a female's arse. DNA would be the way to determine if the cells under his fingernails was his or his boss's wife's. I did not say, as you imply I claim, that his Boss's wife is now under his fingernails. And it is a known fact that identical twins are of the same sex. *Reducto ad absurdum* works against the question only if you show that MY supporting argument is contradictory by being absurd, not if you use the *Straw man fallacy*, assert I used different

premises (identical twins),
and THEN prove the resulting argument as absurd. Nor has Alan disproven the proposition that a zygote is deserving of the same protections as adults despite its stage of development by *Reducto* by merely DECLARING it absurd: The question of whether it is absurd or not is implied by the argument under question. Declaring it absurd and then claiming to have disproven it via *Reducto* is itself the fallacy of *Arguing in a circle*.

While on the subject of *Reducto*, I point out that, when responding to the proposition that a human zygote (fertilized egg) is deserving of the same protections as an adult human being (which, in the current legal environment is a synonym for being a "privileged" person),
it is NOT proving contradiction or absurdity to say that the **logical consequence** will be that it will be required that all human eggs and all human sperm MUST be joined into human zygotes. The question revolves around how a human zygote should be treated **after** it is created, not the irrelevant (and purposefully distracting) question of whether a human zygote is to be created in the first place, and whether failing to so is a violation of the rights of a human being that doesn't yet exist. For the record, I personally have no problems whatsoever violating the dignity, rights or sanctity of the minds or bodies of nonexistent human beings, and will vigorously defend the right of existing human beings to do the same against non-existent human beings.

However, just because you don't see it, doesn't PROVE that it doesn't exist. Hell, in science, sometimes even SEEING it **still** doesn't prove that it exists!

(And don't pull a dowsism by quoting my statement and removing "nonexistent" from the sentence. I don't think anyone here is that big of a prick, but don't disappoint me, please.)

While on the meta-subject of proof, I should point out the predilection of using the word "person" instead of "Human being" upon which you and others insist upon. Before *Roe Vs. Wade*, if you had bothered to ask anyone on the street, they would have said that the two were synonyms for the same set of human beings. The Supreme Court did not PROVE that there was a real difference. They DECLARED that the two terms were different. It was *argumentum ad baculum* appeal to the stick of their authority. I remind people that such arguments have declared fallacious, and that it is okay to ignore the "argument". (That doesn't mean that their proposition is right or wrong, just that they were lazy and took a stupid short cut.)

I have no objections to Alan blowing his nose or scratching his own arse and rendering havoc to his own cells, since they can be provably shown to be his own via their DNA. "I can do what I want with my own body" is axiomatic and is not being questioned here. PROVING its ONLY your own body you're mucking around with is a far different matter. Let us not resurrect the old chestnut that "The baby is part of the woman's body, and she can do what she wants with her own body, so abortion is not wrong." Please leave THAT old

nag where Biology shot and buried her. If you wish to debate the issue of "what if the mother cloned herself?", then you are free to do so, but how would any conclusions we reach debating THAT side issue apply in the (vast) majority of pregnancies where the mother did NOT clone herself?

I will leave it to others to decide if Alan's appeal to technology that **currently exists only in the future** as moral justification for behavior taking place in the here and now, is persuasive.

I suppress the temptation to make a snide comment about the cognitive facilities of pro-abortionists, and instead must marvel at the non-appearance of a pro-abortion derivative of the troll: Past experience on Usenet made me expect one to have popped up three days ago. This is a credit to the visitors to this site: We may disagree, and may try hard to push our viewpoints, but I, for one, feel that the discussion has been civil so far.

Ptah

by [ptah](#) on Sat, 06/28/2003 - 15:40 | [reply](#)

Calm down a bit, there

Well, Ptah, you did reference "...the implications of the subsequent fusion which not only DOES have a full compliment [*sic*] of provably human DNA, but starts dividing and growing as if there was no tomorrow" in your initial effort to counter the 'every sperm is scared' theory. I readily admit that this quote should not be interpreted as "a single cell is a person, simply because it has a full complement of DNA." I think that your capital-letter condemnation of Gil was a bit *uncivil*, though-- especially since I plucked that quote from your first post (unless you were the anonymous first poster). I waggle a reproving finger at you.

Fortunately, we all agree that gametes deserve no protection, and that children who have been born do. The pesky nine months in between, though, have been quite the bone of contention.

The original article actually was concerned with in vitro fertilization, and under what conditions the creation of fertilized eggs *not intended for gestation* is acceptable. Since Ptah believes that humanity begins at fertilization, it then follows that the creation of multiple zygotes from which to make a selection is wrong. Also, the extraction of embryonic stem cells from a zygote (which basically destroys it) is wrong.

I disagree. While there is some biologist bias at work in my case, I believe that (for example) an eight-cell embryo, which is no larger than the original egg and nominally undifferentiated, is not a person. Unfortunately for me, this view robs me of a convenient demarcation line for when humanity begins.

There is some confusion on the original subject of the seemingly absurd British view on embryo selection. The reasoning behind it was touched upon by Ptah, but I believe that I can clarify. The government policy does indeed ignore the health of Child 1 (who is

hardly a "hypochondriac")-- but by allowing embryo selection in the case of a heritable condition, the policy's intention is to *prevent* a "case where the parents could end up with two children with the disease" that the author feared.

I disagree with this policy, just as the author did. If it is moral to use embryo selection in order to ensure that Child 2 is disease-free, then it is at least as moral to use such selection to save the life of Child 1.

-Mitch

Rising Nucleotides

by **Mitch** on Mon, 06/30/2003 - 06:52 | [reply](#)

Hmm...

Mitch writes:

I think that your capital-letter condemnation of Gil was a bit uncivil, though-- especially since I plucked that quote from your first post (unless you were the anonymous first poster). I waggle a reproving finger at you.

You admit that it's quite a stretch from what I said to what Gil said I was saying. The question revolves around whether he made an honest mistake of interpretation of what I said, or tried to twist what I said into something else for the express purpose of creating a straw man upon which to argue *Reducto ad absurdum*. My conclusion, given the care I've tried to be clear, was that he was attempting the latter. My response was definitely not the customary way pro-lifers handle pro-abortion proponents like him, or Alan for that matter, and I thought a lot about the consequences before hitting the "post" button. Before you waggle your finger at me, however, ask yourself if you would have wagged it at a pro-abortionist smacking down, in the same way and manner, a pro-lifer who committed the same *faux pas*. Let me clue you in: pro-abortionists wouldn't have hesitated a microsecond if the victim was a pro-lifer, and would have used much more sarcastic terms to put them, and all other pro-lifers, into as unfavorable light as possible.

Somehow, I get the impression you would have smiled and given the pro-abortionist a pass.

Mitch also said (emphasis mine):

While there is some biologist bias at work in my case,

Thank you for stating your possible bias.

I believe that (for example) an eight-cell embryo, which is no larger than the original egg and nominally undifferentiated, is not a person. **Unfortunately for me, this view robs me of a convenient demarcation line for when humanity begins.**

That last sentence, which I bolded, precisely articulates my

concern: There **has** to be an undeniable, undisputable, unquestionable "demarcation line for when humanity begins." I will assume that your use of the word "convenient" means, "easy to identify".

Mitch continues:

I disagree with this policy, just as the author did. If it is moral to use embryo selection in order to ensure that Child 2 is disease-free, then it is at least as moral to use such selection to save the life of Child 1.

This is going to probably be misunderstood, but I'll try: I agree with Mitch that both statements are part of the same set of morals, and that it is contradictory to hold one to be valid and the other not valid. You accept one, you have to accept the other. My concern is that there are other moral statements that are "necessarily" part of the same set that, by the same reasoning, are decidedly unsavory. (such as "It is morally acceptable to exploit the body of one human being without permission to help another," and "The intentions held by one human being is sufficient justification to determine the destiny of another human being," among others.)

I put "necessarily" in quotes, since I am always willing and ready to re-evaluate my arguments and reasoning as to their moral kinship, and believe that "reasoning together", rather than "debating", is the preferable way of confirming or denying what I believe. Believe me, I've TRIED to do that, but it just seems to me that most pro-abortionists freak out when asked to evaluate arguments that entertain seriously, even if only for the sake of argument, the premise that their concept of personhood **doesn't scale**, or **shouldn't scale**.

To give credit where due, you, Mitch, are the most likely person I've encountered that's capable of doing that.

Ptah

by [ptah](#) on Tue, 07/01/2003 - 13:25 | [reply](#)

ahhh crumbs...

By that last line, I'm mean that Mitch is capable of entertaining seriously, even if only for the sake of argument, the premise that their concept of personhood doesn't scale, or shouldn't scale, without "freaking out". That's supposed to be a compliment.

Ptah

by [ptah](#) on Tue, 07/01/2003 - 13:28 | [reply](#)

Meta

Ptah,

I don't want to get involved in an elaborate meta-discussion about

who said/meant what, but in case you're interested, your conclusion:

The question revolves around whether he made an honest mistake of interpretation of what I said, or tried to twist what I said into something else for the express purpose of creating a straw man upon which to argue Reducto ad absurdum. My conclusion, given the care I've tried to be clear, was that he was attempting the latter.

was wrong.

Your "argument" was:

You scratch your arse.

NOW you scratch your boss's wife's arse.

Moral: the difference is only DNA.

By this I thought you were saying that these two actions, which yield radically different social repercussions, were different entirely because the skin cells under his fingernails would have different DNA after these actions. I was led to this conclusion, partly because you have asserted that the time of conception was a reasonable demarcation point largely because that's when the cells contain a full complement of DNA.

I changed the scenario, knowingly, to identical twins to show that it is NOT the DNA that makes the difference, but that in fact two people have completely separate identities independently of their DNA makeup. A small change to your scenario illustrates how wrong this approach of over-emphasizing the DNA is. I was not trying to imply that my scenario was yours. I was trying to imply that yours, as I understood it, proved nothing interesting, and that DNA does not constitute personhood, but, rather, minds do.

I also was not trying to characterize your position as saying that his boss's wife was under his fingernails, just that the DNA difference is somehow vital to this scenario rather than the identity of the scratchee. I was saying that the DNA and the identity of the scratchee are different things, and used the identical twins to show that.

If I have misunderstood your argument, perhaps you could state it more explicitly so that it would be clearer to me and, perhaps, others.

by [Gil](#) on Tue, 07/01/2003 - 17:40 | [reply](#)

The game is afoot!

I've been examined and analysed. Cool. :-)

In referring to the point at which humanity begins, I think that I meant 'convenient' in an intellectual sense. This is approximately the grayest gray area known to man, and here I am, only certain

that the transition to possessing individual rights occurs... somewhere... during gestation.

Moral issue #2: "The intentions held by one human being is sufficient justification to determine the destiny of another human being."

I'm interpreting the reference to destiny as referring to genetic makeup. This is certainly a moral issue. Anyone who agrees with the creation of 'spare' zygotes is likely to also accept screening of said zygotes for a Horrible Genetic Disease that the parents are known to carry. Intentional selection of a 'savior' child is the next moral step. Farther up the ladder, there are things like selecting for gender... and by that point, a decent portion of people will have strong reservations.

Moral issue #1: "It is morally acceptable to exploit the body of one human being without permission to help another."

This is, indeed, a bit... 'morally rude,' if you will. You cannot get the permission of a newborn baby, but neither can she deny it. This does not make a procedure automatically acceptable, of course. In the example in the original article, it seems that only a sample of cells from the cord was necessary, and I believe that would steer around this moral issue. If we had a theoretical situation where a tissue or organ had to be taken from the actual body of the infant, then a risk/benefit analysis would ensue. There could easily be situations where you could get most people to agree that the righteousness of the help trumped the moral concerns about permission to take a sample.

I don't think that I understand what you mean about the scaling of the concept of personhood. It takes an awful lot to make me freak out, though. And, for that matter, a shouting match serves no intellectual purpose. So, do write back.

Mitch

Rising Nucleotides

by **Mitch** on Wed, 07/02/2003 - 00:09 | [reply](#)

***Note to self...**

You're better as the straight man...* Given the nature and shortness of my post, I'll take responsibility for not being clear enough and causing confusion on Gil's part.

Gil first. Whether something is "interesting" or not is not only personal, but quite subjective: I don't think O.J. merely thought that the DNA evidence gathered at the crime scene pointing at him was merely "interesting". In fact, he had an incentive to make sure everyone agreed it "wasn't interesting". "Interesting" wasn't on his mind when he heard that.

You're probably thinking that I think that unique DNA defines personhood. Not my intent: Your Arse is yours, so you scratching it should have no consequences. Scratching an arse that's NOT yours

potentially DOES. The appeal to identical twins only means that there is one chance out of 6 billion plus that the identity test will fail. Not zero, but close enough to me. Heck, the DNA evidence against OJ was good to 1 out of a million: good enough to force the defense team to attack the chain of custody instead of the test itself.

Currently, this is not an issue: I would say that 100% of the people doing embryo research TODAY are not doing it on their identical twin's embryo. Neither are abortionists, nor their paying customers. Would you bet against a DNA match in those cases? I don't think so.

What happens when cloning becomes common? Good question, and I thank you for the initial question that helped me realize a few interesting episodes in Star Trek, Next Generation. There was one where a world full of clones took the cells of Riker and the substitute doctor (whose name I forget) to clone fresh bodies. Riker and the doctor went in and terminated their own clones. The leader called them murderers, but I wondered why they didn't think themselves so. It just became clear: There'd be all kinds of abuses of clones based on the "Its my DNA, so I should decide what to do with cells from my own body" argument. (Doesn't hold water for pregnant women, but does for clones) Slaves? Sources for body parts? Certainly there'd be laws governing the creation of clones and their disposition, since one can picture abuses of human beings that, by your definition, would be people. However, there should be no doubt that people who make clones of OTHER people to exploit for their own purposes would be guilty: Not the same DNA. Not THEIR DNA. (This is hypothetical, discussing laws of a fictional government governing a technology we don't have yet. Need to think about it, though.)

BTW, Here's a link to a reference on **birth rate of identical twins**, which puts the twinning rate at 4 per 1000. Thus, it works out that slightly more than 99.2% of the people DON'T suffer from this problem.

Now Mitch: "The game is afoot!"??? *looks around* what ARE we hunting for? If it's for the truth (or at least enough solid ground to base a realistic morality upon), then I'm game. No bag limit, I hope!

Firstly, on the question of "destiny". I used the term to refer to determining the future of the unborn human being in question. Will they live or die? What will they be used for? After they have served their purpose, what will they be their fate?

Let's think about this: the parents are NOT screening AGAINST the disease in question, but deliberately FOR the disease. One of the (I admit very strong) arguments FOR abortion is to PREVENT the birth of such children and their subsequent misery. If to save child A from X, they want to conceive child B WITH the Disease, then who's to save Child B? Another child C, also with X? A vicious cycle that can only be prevented by ABORTING child B before birth, but AFTER taking what they need to save Child A (Moral #1). If this was their

intention from the beginning, then they're deciding the destiny of B (Moral #2). I heard of one woman who sex selected and gave birth to a second child, for the express purpose of providing a compatible kidney for his brother.

It's very late, and I desperately need to get to bed since (speaking of arses),

I'm up to mine in alligators at work. What I mean by "scaling of personhood" is the notion that someone starts off with 0% personhood, and as it grows, gets more personhood, with it reaching 100% shortly before birth. *shakes head* What CAN you do with a 30% person that you can't do with an 80% person? Moral quagmire IMHO, since the vast majority of our experience has been with 100% persons, and the experience of treating negros as 2/3rds of a person wasn't what we would NOW call a raging success. "Human being" is more precise and scientific. Should we use HB instead because we want to save keystrokes?

G'night all. *gets bad feeling he left something out, though*

Ptah

by [ptah](#) on Thu, 07/03/2003 - 03:32 | [reply](#)

It was very sticky, and I couldn't move

I recall that episode of Star Trek: TNG, and my interpretation was that since the crewpeople hadn't given permission to be cloned, and duplicating a person without permission being a very bad thing, the only way to rectify the situation was to terminate the clone before he or she emerged from the tube. A standard 'lesser of two evils' sort of choice.

Later, on Deep Space Nine, Odo tells us that killing your own clone is still murder. In that case, the clone was already a walking, talking person, so we would all likely agree that person had rights as an individual. I do not feel that this is inconsistent with the earlier Star Trek example, and not just because I support abortion. The actions of Riker and co. were somewhat justified because the clones were wrongfully created in the first place. Quite the mess, really.

Back in the real world, I'm coming to the conclusion that anything which involves an unborn baby is, indeed, a moral quagmire. (Ah! I used the Q word) You bring up an interesting example on the subject of scalable personhood. The infamous "three-fifths compromise" in the US Constitution is, in fact, the only example I can think of where people are counted as a specific fraction of a whole person. Those were definitely unfortunate times in human history, but being 60% of a person in the eyes of Congress wasn't the crux of the matter. The central issue is that slaves were property, and therefore had no rights recognized by the government, so you could do whatever you wanted to them, and there was no legal recourse. Embryos and fetuses are in a similar situation today, since they lack legal personhood-- though there are laws on these matters. What I cannot tell you at this time, unfortunately, is how things **should** be.

I support the vague (and therefore vulnerable to attack) position on

abortion that after the fifth month or so, it shouldn't be done. "You didn't take responsibility, and get it over with when you should have." Pro-choice people generally disapprove of positions or laws like that, because it gives the pro-lifers an inch, when (by definition) they want the whole mile.

It would be easier to just pick up an "Abortion is always acceptable" placard, but I just don't believe that. At, say, eight months, I can't see a sufficient difference as compared to infanticide.

"sigh" I obviously need to think about this futher. I think I'll do a piece on some aspect of the matter over at [Nucleotides](#), especially since I haven't done anything on a biological subject yet.

by [Mitch](#) on Sat, 07/05/2003 - 22:19 | [reply](#)

nods

Sorry for the long delay: Still up to my hips in alligators at work.

Given the litigious nature of our society, I wouldn't be surprised if we eventually get some kind of legislation on cloning and the rights of the original owners of the cells from which the clones originate.

Personally, to me the problem is not as much that the situation is a quagmire (it certainly is), but that many don't seem to want to agree on what a signpost in the quagmire would look like. I'm not talking about disputing about particular signposts, but more like not wanting to adhere to any principles that would allow us to recognize a signpost if we happened to run into one.

For me, a helpful method has been to seek to avoid prejudice and hypocrisy. It means asking "do I want to discriminate against someone because of their age? Because of their physical appearance? Because of any temporary physical disability?" I couple these considerations with a healthy appreciation of the (historically proven) ability of human oppressors to rationalize and justify their behavior. In some correspondence with Leo (who commented earlier), he mentioned that, in the presence of doubt, one should err on the side of caution and prudence.

One of these days, I shall definitely have to pop by Nucleotides and see what you have, mitch.

Ptah

by [ptah](#) on Thu, 07/10/2003 - 18:53 | [reply](#)

Summary, Questions, and Meta

I'm trying to frame the arguments in a more concise way so I can understand them. Questions from me start with a B:

This might be wrong, missing some arguments, and some of this is

inferred, so feel free to correct:

Shared assumptions:

A human starts after a human sperm and human egg join to form an embryo. As soon as they're together, they're an embryo and they're human.

B: Side question from me, at what point of their joining is it a human?

Innocent persons should not be killed.

(Possibly also "Innocent intelligent beings should not be killed.")

Pro-embryo life:

A human is the same as a person.

An embryo if not interfered with will develop into a full-grown human and therefore should be considered human.

Pro-abortion/Pro-choice:

A human isn't the same thing as a person.

To be a person, a creature requires both human DNA and a mind.

An embryo doesn't have a mind and is therefore not a person.

An embryo requires sustenance and can't develop independently without it, so the idea that it will develop into a human without interference is questionable.

B: It seems that from the court case, that British law implies that an embryo + the agreement from a willing donor to provide sustenance (not to abort) is a person?

B: What exactly is a mind? How does one know whether another creature has a mind? A certain mass of brain cells? A certain demonstration of intelligence?

I'm putting the meta at the end so people can skip it if desired:

So far the argument has been very slow to come to actual explanations for believing one side or the other. I'm finding this a bit frustrating as I seem to have a very short attention span. It's not a mental illness so much as a not being eager to read lots of junk in order to get the point. I prefer more conciseness in arguments and for other stuff to be obviously separated so I can skip them if I want. Maybe follow this format and put meta at the end?

It doesn't seem right to ridicule those who disagree with one - to assume that one's evidence and arguments are so obviously clear that only an idiot would believe something else (I don't think even an idiot deserves ridicule. Pity maybe.) This seems counter-productive and just not very nice.

I think this could even apply to making fun of ideas. People get their self-image mixed up with their ideas pretty frequently, I think. Making fun of their ideas could make it more difficult for them to accept the potentially better idea. Accepting the better idea becomes linked with accepting that they are stupid idiots who deserve ridicule.

Of course, everyone is free to do what they want. I appreciate the

authors who have kindly provided this forum even if I don't always like the jokes.

Cheers,
Becky Moon

by [beckyam](#) on Sun, 07/17/2005 - 14:51 | [reply](#)

Define "viable"

A fertilized egg removed for the womb could not survive. At conception you have 1 1/2 cells. No organs, no brain, nothing distinguishable. 1 cell. Consider the second before conception - sperm a millimeter away from egg. Human? Consider a moment later - sperm touching egg. Human? Consider a moment later - sperm partially inside egg, but genetic material still separate. Human? How about when DNA has entered the egg, but not yet the nucleus? Or when it has entered the nucleus but not yet integrated with the egg DNA. Which of these events defines conception?

Just as there is no concrete point at which you can call an embryo a human, also conception itself is an arbitrary point in time. It seems to me that it makes more sense to define the development of a brain and the capacity to feel pain as defining human - even though that does not happen at any exact time.

Your concessions for incest and rape are proof that you recognize a fundamental difference between babies and embryos.

No one who supports exceptions to anti-abortion laws would ever suggest that it would be OK to kill an already born baby because of rape, incest, or health problems.

Just so you know, I used to be "pro-life" myself, and I held the same arguments you do. I do not, therefor, look down on your opinion as stupid. I respect atheist pro-lifers far more than religious people (who only know what's moral if a book tells them), especially when they are anti-war and anti-death penalty. It is at least consistent.

I believe, however, that it is misguided.

The basic principal for action should always be whether or not a particular action hurts an individual. An "individual-to-be" is no more capable of being hurt than an "individual-who-could-be" and therefor it is a reasonable comparison to say that abortion is no more or less moral than allowing a woman's period to pass without fertilizing her - as that is an egg which could develop into a human, if...

by [Jay Aziza](#) on Wed, 12/20/2006 - 19:54 | [reply](#)

“What The World Thinks”

As part of their ongoing campaign of anti-Americanism, the BBC recently presented a **programme** based on a worldwide poll of attitudes to the USA.

(Incidentally, in their trailers for this abomination, they happened to say something true: “It's time to hear what **The World** thinks.”

QuickTime movie

Sound only

OK we're kidding. The capitalisation of the link in the quote is ours. **Here** is the full context. Notice how the American flag casts an ominous shadow across the world as it passes overhead.)

Anyway, the poll was a pointless exercise. We already know what ‘the world’ (in that sense) thinks: it thinks that it would be a much better place if more aircraft were to hit American buildings. There is neither authority nor wisdom in this opinion, just spite.

Thu, 07/03/2003 - 13:37 | [permlink](#)

It Takes All Sorts

Frank's President is **abducted by Belgian agents**.

Woty has more to say about the nature of idiotarianism, including a discussion of **whether the Pope is an idiotarian**.

Apple Computer have announced some great new hardware and software.

Scrappleface has two characteristically **trenchant arguments** disguised as humour. Pity he's **opposed to abortion**.

James Randi rightly castigates the Canadian province of British Columbia for giving official credence to "Traditional Chinese Medicine".

All of them **Setting the World to Rights**, in their own way.

Mon, 06/23/2003 - 22:54 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

British Columbia

BC is an interesting place - its main exports are marijuana, timber, and gas (in that order); its main imports are heroin and unemployed Newfies.

The move to officially recognize "Traditional Chinese Medicine" is probably a consequence of the great increase in BC's Chinese population in the years since Thatcher munished Hong Kong. However, this blog demonstrates its unfamiliarity with BC politics in its assumption that the government is capable of giving *credence* to *anything*.

by a reader on Tue, 06/24/2003 - 18:33 | [reply](#)

Macblaspheny

See

http://www.thehoucks.com/happynowhere/Apple_Switch_Parody_DivX.avi

http://www.thehoucks.com/happynowhere/Apple_Switch_Parody_DivX.avi

by a reader on Wed, 06/25/2003 - 15:12 | [reply](#)

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9. The Rise of the PLO

This is the ninth part of our acclaimed series, "A Short History of Israel". If you wish to read the preceding parts, see the **Table of Contents** for links to them. We welcome comments and criticisms. Do tell us what you think.

.....

Six months before Sadat's historic policy change, a Likud-based coalition had taken power for the first time in Israel. So it now fell to the Likud leader, Menachem Begin, a former Irgun commander, longstanding champion of the cause of unrestricted Jewish settlement, and implacable opponent of any hint of appeasement, or trust, of Israel's enemies, to decide how to respond to Sadat's overture.

On the same evening, Begin invited Sadat to Jerusalem to address the Knesset.

The broad elements of the peace treaty – peace and recognition for Israel, in return for the Sinai peninsula, which Israel had captured from Egypt during the Six Day War – were agreed immediately. This was the first time that any Arab nation had agreed to the principle of the partition of Palestine. But the details became the subject of gruelling negotiations which lasted until 1979. For the Israelis, one of the most difficult of the Egyptian demands was that the Jewish settlements that had been built in Sinai be evacuated, but they eventually agreed to this. In an operation overseen by Ariel Sharon (then a member of the Cabinet), 2,800 bitterly resisting inhabitants were forcibly evicted by IDF soldiers, and their homes and orchards razed to the ground to make it impossible for them to return.

Sadat and Begin shared the Nobel Peace Prize for this treaty. To this day, Egypt and Israel have adhered to it. They maintain fully accredited embassies in each other's countries, trade is officially permitted, as are tourism and all other normal exchanges between neighbours. No threats of war, implicit, explicit or indirect, are issued. Egypt does not tolerate the launching of terrorist attacks on Israel from its soil (though Israel has a longstanding complaint that Egypt does not prevent the smuggling of weapons to terrorists operating from Gaza). However, although the treaty required the parties to "seek to foster mutual understanding and tolerance and ... abstain from hostile propaganda against each other", there was

no specific provision for a cessation of anti-Semitic incitement in the Egyptian press and other government-controlled media, or in the mosques and schools. Such incitement continued to increase. Today, very few Israeli businesspeople or tourists actually visit Egypt, because of the risk to their lives.

The rage of the Arab world was turned against Egypt. All Arab countries broke off or scaled back diplomatic and trading relations with it. Saudi aid was cut off. But the US made good the financial losses, and Egypt came to be regarded as a US ally in the region. Gradually, relations with the Arab world have been restored, so that by now, the only significant hostility that remains towards Egypt is from Islamic fundamentalists. However, Egypt has still not regained its former position as the generally accepted leader of the Arab world. Iraq under Saddam Hussein tried hard to take over that position.

With the assistance of France and Germany, Iraq began to build a nuclear reactor at Osirak, for the purpose of manufacturing nuclear weapons. When Iran (which was fighting a bitter war with Iraq at the time in which some one million people were to die) had attacked this reactor but failed to do much damage, Saddam Hussein had said that the attack had been futile anyway, because the target was Israel alone. In June 1981, Israeli aircraft attacked and destroyed the reactor, just before it was to have become operational. This action was ferociously criticised by every other nation and by almost every shade of opinion everywhere in the world, including the US government and including the Israeli Labour Party. The US determined that Israel had violated the terms of its purchase of US aircraft by using them for such a purpose, which they said "cannot but seriously add to the already tense situation in the area". As punishment, the US suspended deliveries of aircraft to Israel.

In an impassioned defence of his decision before the Knesset, Begin said:

Two European governments, in return for oil, have assisted the Iraqi tyrant in the construction of atomic weapons. We again call upon them to desist from this horrifying, inhuman deed. Under no circumstances will we allow an enemy to develop weapons of mass destruction against our people.

We shall defend the citizens of Israel in time, and with all the means at our disposal.

The Gulf War (Operation Desert Storm) a decade later changed the minds of many Americans about the morality of the Osirak raid, and about whether its effect was to increase or decrease tension in the area, and about whether the US should have opposed or supported it. Subsequently, US and world opinion has moved even further. In January 2000, when David Ivry, who had led the Israeli Air Force at the time of the Osirak raid, became Israeli Ambassador in Washington, he received a gift from Richard Cheney (now US Vice President). It was a satellite photograph of the Osirak site, with the

inscription: "For General David Ivry – With thanks and appreciation for the outstanding job he did on the Iraqi nuclear program in 1981, which made our job much easier in Desert Storm."

In October 1981, Sadat was murdered by Islamic fundamentalists for making peace with Israel. The Vice-President of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak, became President, which he remains to this day.

Terrorism, and the PLO in particular, had been playing an ever-increasing role in the region and in the world, and had become an accepted feature of the political scene. In May 1974, PLO terrorists took control of a school at Ma'alot in northern Israel, and murdered 22 children. In October 1974 an Arab summit conference at Rabat declared the PLO the 'sole representative' of the Palestinian people. In November 1974 the UN endorsed that decision by granting the PLO observer status – in effect, UN membership in all but name.

In many respects the PLO had (and continues to have) access to more privileges of membership of the UN than Israel. Arafat declared "The goal of our struggle is the end of Israel, and there can be no compromise or mediations. We don't want peace, we want victory. Peace for us means Israel's destruction, and nothing else." Eleven days later, armed with a pistol, he addressed the General Assembly of the UN, and received a standing ovation. The following year, the General Assembly, with 75 countries in favour and 35 dissenting, passed a resolution declaring Zionism to be a form of racism. This was not received with uniform enthusiasm everywhere – for instance, the centre-left *Observer* newspaper in Britain noted that all the states defined as 'Islamic' in their constitutions had voted for the resolution, while Israel's constitution guaranteed equal rights to all citizens regardless of religion or race – but nor was the resolution enthusiastically opposed by any nation or significant political faction outside Israel and the US. It took until 1991 for the General Assembly, under intense US pressure, to rescind the resolution, with 25 member states still voting to retain it and 13 abstaining. At the same time, continuous US pressure to recognise *anti-Semitism* as a form of racism was resisted until 1993. Over the years, Arab delegates to the UN have repeatedly, and sometimes successfully, attempted to introduce anti-Semitic blood libels into the official records of the UN. Israel has often been censured both by the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council, but neither body has ever censured the PLO or any Arab state for any attack on Israel.

In Lebanon, a civil war began in 1975. It centred on the tensions between Lebanese Christians and Lebanese Muslims, but, as order broke down, many different factions fought for turf and influence on behalf of many kinds of religion and ideology. Among the foreign parties to participate with armed forces were Syria and the PLO. The PLO established what was often called a 'state within a state' in southern Lebanon. By 1982, it maintained an army of some 15,000 there, with artillery and long-range rockets, with which they mounted a continuous bombardment of northern Israel. They were protected by an anti-aircraft missile network, and a range of other

weapons including tanks. Almost daily, they sent teams into Israel

to make terrorist attacks,

In 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon. The Syrian army and air force intervened with aircraft and tanks but were defeated – in the case of the air force, humiliatingly. The PLO retreated northwards, entered the city of Beirut and made a stand there. After holding out there for several months as the Israelis systematically shelled or bombed every building containing PLO fighters, an operation that cost many civilian as well as PLO lives, they agreed to leave Lebanon, and set up a new base in Tunisia.

Israel withdrew from most of Lebanon, retaining a 25-mile buffer zone to protect its northern border.

The Israelis had been welcomed in Lebanon by the Christian factions, who held the PLO responsible for destabilising the fragile balance that had previously existed between them and the Muslims. The Christian militias became allies of the IDF. During the Israeli advance northwards, one of those militias, the Phalangists, was assigned the task of rooting out PLO fighters in two Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, Sabra and Shatila. The Phalangist leader, Lebanese President Bashir Gemayel, and 25 of his followers, had just been assassinated in a bomb attack widely attributed to the PLO. The Phalangists took revenge on the civilian inhabitants of the camps, murdering hundreds. An Israeli commission of inquiry subsequently found that Ariel Sharon, then Israel's Defence Minister, had been negligent in not foreseeing such an event, and he was forced to resign from that post.

The Israeli political movement *Peace Now*, which had been founded in 1978 and advocated unconditional withdrawal from the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan Heights (and now from the Lebanon buffer zone) followed by negotiations suing for peace, received a surge of support. On September 25, 1982, a Peace Now demonstration in Tel Aviv attracted 400,000 participants, 10% of Israel's population at that time.

In 1981, Israel had annexed the Golan Heights, but although Begin mooted a plan to give the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza full Israeli citizenship and then to annexe those territories, no serious steps were ever taken to implement it because there was insufficient support for it from almost any side in Israel, including the Likud Party itself. Israel had become deeply split on the issue of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The right-wing and religious parties, though they could agree on no long term policy for the territories, were nevertheless enthusiastically in favour of Jewish settlement. Thanks, again, to the electoral system, the settlement movement attracted more and more government assistance – to the extent that the traditional Zionist project of building settlements in Israel proper all but ceased. New immigrants and people on low incomes were now being attracted in large numbers to the settlements, not out of any prior connections, religious feelings, or nationalistic zeal, but because they received heavily subsidised housing and a living standard not available to

them elsewhere. And every additional settler enlarged the

constituency for more subsidies.

Part 10 **...And Then The World Changed**

Wed, 06/25/2003 - 05:07 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

The 1982 September War

What would your response be to Martin Gilbert's reading of the war in Lebanon in 1982? It seems to me that this is the turning point in his book away from a sympathetic account of Israeli history to something openly disapproving (I wonder whether it is contributed to by the rise of Likud which is not where his political sympathies lie?)

by [emma](#) on Thu, 08/23/2007 - 21:56 | [reply](#)

The Rise of the PLO

The ninth installment in our highly acclaimed series, "A Short History of Israel", is now **available**.

If you have not read the preceding parts, you can find them linked from the **Table of Contents**.

Wed, 06/25/2003 - 05:53 | [permalink](#)

More Significant Than a Smoking Gun

A 'smoking gun' in Iraq (namely, nuclear, biological or chemical weapons, or incontrovertible evidence that they were recently destroyed or smuggled out) has yet to be found.

This is more significant than any find of chemical or even biological weapons could be.

It shows that Saddam was planning to resume building nuclear weapons the moment the pressure was off.

Wed, 06/25/2003 - 22:57 | [permalink](#)

Shame On You, Sci Fi Channel

It is the twenty-first century and we are living in the most advanced, rational civilisation that has ever existed. And yet, a substantial proportion of our fellow citizens still **waste** their sense of wonder on rubbish like telepathy, astrology and UFO sightings.

One of the most blatantly irrational aspects of contemporary culture is the cynical way in which institutions that should and do know better (particularly the media, though **governments** are not blameless either) pander to this tendency. Browse the so-called 'documentary' channels on your cable TV, and you are more likely to find a program on astrology than on astronomy.

It should not be necessary for us to stress – but let's do so anyway – that we are not calling for regulation or censorship (even self-censorship) as a means of replacing bad television by good. In fact we are implacably opposed to any such measure, which would be rather like trying to cure pneumonia by firing a Gatling gun at the patient's head. The problem originates in the foolish audiences, not the venal producers, and we have no objection to bad programmes being produced and aired whenever there is a market for them. But it is one thing to show bad programmes, and quite another to endorse their content, either explicitly or by associating them with genuine science or genuine news reporting. It is *dishonest* to present notorious falsehoods or silly urban myths as if they were true. It is *irresponsible* to treat nonsense with the respect due to genuine discovery. And it is *wilfully stupid* to claim that one does not know, or need not take a position on, the difference.

The Sci Fi Channel shows such programmes too, but at least it has the (thin) defence that most of its other programmes are avowedly fictional. But now they too have crossed the red line. They are sponsoring a campaign to have the US government be "**more forthcoming and aggressive in investigating UFO sightings**" and to **reveal** "what the Pentagon knows" about them.

"The Sci-Fi channel has had an interest in [UFOs] for some time. The difference here is that they are focusing attention on the serious, factual side of the issue, and that scientists have not had a chance to thoroughly examine it," Rothschild said.

"Of course it could help programming. But Sci-Fi thought

they had some resources they could bring to the table.”

Shame on you, Sci-Fi Channel.

Sun, 06/29/2003 - 00:12 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

UFO? Cui Bono?

As absurd as the SciFi Channel's exhortation seems on the surface, examination of its campaign ought not to stop there.

Follow the money, friends. Follow the money.

Curmudgeon Emeritus, Palace Of Reason

by [fporretto](#) on Sun, 06/29/2003 - 12:09 | [reply](#)

The Real Shame...

is that SciFi cancelled MST3K. The bastards.

by a reader on Sun, 06/29/2003 - 21:39 | [reply](#)

Do you know of any actual "no...

Do you know of any actual "notorious falsehoods or silly urban myths" being presented by SciFi or it is just your practice to paint any sort of program on UFOs with ad hominem attacks?

The way you present it here, it sounds like you haven't seen anything beyond these two edited press releases and have automatically assumed that there is absolutely nothing to learn. It is logical to go to the state to try to figure what people are seeing -- most of the time, they are seeing military projects.

"UFO sightings" have led to the discovery of high-altitude sprites and ball lightning, in addition to blowing the cover off of the SR-71 (or RS-71) and the F-117 deployments. Dismissing observations out of hand is not science; it is the exact sort of mysticism that you profess to oppose.

by [Phelps](#) on Mon, 06/30/2003 - 20:32 | [reply](#)

What We Mean By "UFOs"

Phelps:

"UFO sightings" have led to the discovery of high-altitude sprites and ball lightning, in addition to blowing the cover off of the SR-71 (or RS-71) and the F-117 deployments.

LOL. Yes you're quite right: we should have made it clear that by "UFO sightings" we mean purported sightings of technology of extraterrestrial origin, and not the kind of unidentified flying object that hits you on the back of the head during a football match.

However, if anything, a campaign to make the government reveal

the attributes of secret military aircraft before they deem that the time is right would be even more reprehensible than one to make it reveal its alleged knowledge of extraterrestrial intelligence, and almost as futile.

by **Editor** on Mon, 06/30/2003 - 20:49 | [reply](#)

Bookshops included.

I'm sure I'm not alone in being annoyed and depressed by the way small bookshops often put wicca-pyramids-on-Mars type codswallop on the same shelf as popular science titles.

by **Tom Robinson** on Tue, 07/01/2003 - 01:12 | [reply](#)

_Felix

Well, I *enjoy* all this crap. I mean I do admit that it's crap and don't think it should have any repercussions on the real world, but I enjoy pretending that things exist, like, say, giant birds of prey unknown to science, or super-fast cold-war-era russian saucer-shaped vehicles, or global hi-tec stone-age societies, or talking ghosts of mongooses, for the duration of a TV program or while I'm reading a book (and not beyond that).

Imaginary mysteries and fantasies of lost or hidden knowledge and things like that are wonderfully enjoyable. (If you know of any real ones, kindly present them to me instead of all this boring politics.)

Yes, pseudoscience sucks, but imagination is fun. I'm not sure what you can do about that; putting a disclaimer before these programs that says "the following is all bullshit" doesn't appeal to me, as a consumer of them, nor presumably to the program makers.

I also think James Randi is a lot of fun. Probably your best tactic is to follow in his footsteps and debunk things hilariously, rather than grouching about the Sci-Fi channel and its kin, at least if they don't cross any "red line". Like I say, I enjoy them, they're good.

by a reader on Tue, 07/01/2003 - 06:07 | [reply](#)

oops

Excuse me... I forgot to log in, and put my name on the subject line. Must have been distracted by the aliens landing in my garden.

by **_Felix** on Tue, 07/01/2003 - 06:13 | [reply](#)

Bullshit!

Speaking of bullshit, Penn & Teller had a great series on Showtime called "Bullshit!" where they exposed lots of paranormal, junk science claims.

Check out if it airs again in your area.

by **Gil** on Tue, 07/01/2003 - 18:04 | [reply](#)

People..

..have the **RIGHT** to waste **THEIR** time. Coz its **THEIR** time.

by [Phylo](#) on Thu, 04/19/2007 - 12:47 | [reply](#)

"Not Right" does not mean "No Rights"

It's not about rights. (Obviously, people have a right to...)

It's about what people ought to do.

by a reader on Thu, 04/19/2007 - 21:54 | [reply](#)

Silly Holy Man

Some people have wondered why we did not mention religion when we **wrote**:

And yet, a substantial proportion of our fellow citizens still waste their sense of wonder on rubbish like telepathy, astrology and UFO sightings.

Isn't all that true of religions too?

Well, it is and it isn't. Religions share with those beliefs the property of being factually false, and of defining a sub-culture of uncritical believers. On the other hand, some religious traditions also contain evolved, mostly inexplicit, knowledge which is highly valuable. While atheists nowadays can obtain all those deep truths elsewhere, and in **most** cases better, that does not make religion rubbish in the sense that telepathy, astrology and sightings of extraterrestrial spaceships are. And religions have all sorts of cultural resonances and historical significance, to say nothing of their more contingent connections with things like the arts. **Even if** it is true that UFO-loonies once contributed to the discovery of some meteorological phenomenon or other, that is not quite in the same league as having delivered the concept of objective right and wrong, or of the unity of mankind, to Western civilization. To dismiss all that just because the religion isn't actually *true* is like saying that Shakespeare is worthless because his descriptions of Macbeth or Richard III are historically inaccurate. So in short, when religious people marvel at their religion, they are not necessarily "wasting their sense of wonder" at all.

But now – wouldn't you know it? – just as we atheists are drawing these fine distinctions to distinguish religion from pure rubbish, some Holy Man (or more precisely, Silly Man) in Scotland is busily trying to **erase them again**:

An exorcist yesterday called for a 'crusade from the pulpits' against the growing power of the occult.

Father Jim McManus said paganism and witchcraft were intertwined with evil and needed to be stamped out.

[...]

The 62-year-old priest - the only Catholic clergyman to

perform the service of "deliverance" regularly - said devil worship could only lead to tragedy.

Fr McManus said: "Witchcraft has as its basis an evil source - devil worship..."

Presumably, unlike the cynical TV executives we spoke of, he *doesn't* know better. Perhaps he hasn't thought about it - not thinking about such things being an occupational hazard of the Faithful. But nevertheless, by speaking in this manner of the non-existent "source" of non-existent "witchcraft", what he is doing is endorsing the claims of the lunatics. (So are **these people who object to Harry Potter**, by the way.) Lunatics who, incidentally, adhere to a rival religion.

Oh well. It's not really our job to set religion to rights, is it? So - as you were, everyone: here endeth the sermon.

Tue, 07/01/2003 - 16:50 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

We Bow To Your Superior (?) Intellect, O Wise One!

"Religions share with those beliefs the property of being factually false, and of defining a sub-culture of uncritical believers."

Oh? That's news to me -- a practicing Roman Catholic (who used to be an agnostic) who holds a doctorate in astrophysics.

The arrogance with which atheists approach religious conviction amazes me. You can no more prove your convictions than I can prove mine. Neither of us can **disprove** the other's creed, either. That's in the nature of religious belief, which occupies the realm of things which can neither be proved nor disproved on this side of the grave. Yet you find it perfectly acceptable to deride my convictions, and me for holding them, even so.

There's a quality called "humility," and another called "tact." Over the centuries they've proved both useful and attractive. **Verbum sat sapienti.**

Curmudgeon Emeritus, Palace Of Reason

by [fporretto](#) on Tue, 07/01/2003 - 20:56 | [reply](#)

Stories contain meaning

I think all those things like telepathy, astrology, etc are fun games. I think they make sense in the sphere of imaginative story-telling. I don't think they should compete with the world of facts and science. Nor should religion, which is also a kind of fun story.

Stories can contain significant moral meaning (witness Harry Potter) without having to pass themselves off as history. They mean something to people, and influence them for the better.

So there's no excuse for religion to continue getting metaphor and

fact mixed up, but recreational superstitious nonsense may have imaginative/other value, if understood for what it actually is; art.

Alice

by a reader on Tue, 07/01/2003 - 22:45 | [reply](#)

proof

we're fallibilists here. we know that you can't have *certain* knowledge. IOW, you can't prove *anything*. but this doesn't mean we don't know anything. we certainly do have (tentative) best theories that we hold true. the basic argument against God is: postulating God solves no problem, and doesn't explain anything. that's pretty damning.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 07/02/2003 - 01:34 | [reply](#)

Commercials

You complain at "cynical" TV executives and accuse them of "pandering". I don't like pandas but I still think this is an unfair thing to say about people who are just making entertaining and misleading TV programs. *You might as well say it about adverts.*

Astrophysics is all about spheres, and Catholicism is a load of balls, so I can see how an interest in one might lead to the other. O physics, preserve us from metaphysics.

by [_Felix](#) on Wed, 07/02/2003 - 07:40 | [reply](#)

Fleshing Out

Elliot wrote:

"we're fallibilists here. we know that you can't have *certain* knowledge. IOW, you can't prove *anything*. but this doesn't mean we don't know anything. we certainly do have (tentative) best theories that we hold true. the basic argument against God is: postulating God solves no problem, and doesn't explain anything. that's pretty damning."

Just going to be slightly more specific about why the whole God idea is a non-starter. God is all-powerful, therefore God could make the world act in any way he liked and so the idea of God can't explain why the world behaves one way rather than another. So as an explanation God doesn't work. Note that bringing up the idea that God couldn't disobey the laws of logic does nothing to alleviate this problem, because the explanation for why God couldn't break such laws has nothing to do with God himself, nor does it come anywhere near to restraining God's abilities strictly enough to explain anything about the world in which we live.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Wed, 07/02/2003 - 12:44 | [reply](#)

Documentaries = Commercials?

"You complain at "cynical" TV executives and accuse them of "pandering". I don't like pandas but I still think this is an unfair thing to say about people who are just making entertaining and misleading TV programs. *You might as well say it about adverts.*"

I don't think anyone really expects adverts to make true factual claims, they do expect it from documentaries.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Wed, 07/02/2003 - 12:47 | [reply](#)

Hubris

Why does god have to be all powerful? The Greek gods weren't. The Greeks also had a word for the position you hold: hubris.

I believe in mathematics and it shows us that no matter what axioms we choose, there will always be something unprovable with our axioms. That is the fault I find with most agnostic people. They think their axioms can explain everything.

by a reader on Wed, 07/02/2003 - 14:46 | [reply](#)

You've Missed The Point

I know of very few Christians who claim that God's purpose is to "make the world act in any way he liked." The mere fact that He could but does not use His omnipotence to influence the world into behaving one way or the other is not relevant to His existence.

You conclude, "the idea of God cannot explain why the world behaves in a certain way rather than others." I'm sitting here reading this and trying to figure out why that statement bothers me. Slowly, I realize that I don't use God as an explanation for the day-to-day action of the world. In fact, it seems that one would have to be irrational to think that God controls everything. When a tree limb blows down in a storm and falls on my car, I think "Gee, gravity works..." I don't think "God, why did you do that???" Christians (most of them, anyways) believe that events are part of a plan in which we are actors capable of choice in a defined system. This is a step removed from what you're saying. You seem to be saying that Christians irrationally believe that God controls the behaviors of the world, for instance, gravity. Most Christians wouldn't say that God's making gravity. They believe that He set the laws of the universe, for instance, gravitational attraction, and then set events in motion -- to be undisturbed by His hand (for the most part).

Basically, who gives a hoot that the idea of God can't explain why the world behaves a certain way? People tend to think that Newtonian physics (and maybe more exotic formulations, too) explain why the world behaves as it does. Does that mean that God couldn't have set up Newtonian physics? At this point, it turns on

what a previous poster was talking about -- observable fact. As he said, there is no way to tell one way or the other, which puts us on pretty equal footing. Christianity isn't like the Greek and Roman religions with gods of nature, used as explanation for observable events. My question: what gives you the idea that the idea of God should explain events?

Forgive me if I have misunderstood your post. I welcome further conversation on this topic.

by **Rob Michael** on Wed, 07/02/2003 - 15:23 | [reply](#)

Objective right and wrong

"that is not quite in the same league as having delivered the concept of objective right and wrong, or of the unity of mankind, to Western civilization."

ob◆jec◆tive

adj.

1. Of or having to do with a material object.
2. Having actual existence or reality.
3.
 - a. Uninfluenced by emotions or personal prejudices: an objective critic.
 - b. Based on observable phenomena; presented factually: an objective appraisal.

Religion didn't give Western civilization the concept of objective right and wrong, it gave Western civilization the concept of a collective standard of right and wrong.

by a reader on Wed, 07/02/2003 - 18:45 | [reply](#)

Re: Objective right and wrong

A reader wrote:

Religion didn't give Western civilization the concept of objective right and wrong, it gave Western civilization the concept of a collective standard of right and wrong.

No. Many people think that's what it did. But that doesn't make them right.

by **David Deutsch** on Wed, 07/02/2003 - 20:07 | [reply](#)

Re :You've Missed the Point

Rob Michael wrote:

"I know of very few Christians who claim that God's purpose is to "make the world act in any way he liked." The mere fact that He

could but does not use His omnipotence to influence the world into

behaving one way or the other is not relevant to His existence."

It's really very simple. The only reason to adopt a theory is that it solves some problem. God is inherently incapable of doing that, His existence literally cannot explain anything at all. This includes moral explanations, moral explanations of the form "X is right because God said so," are junk, worthless and utterly useless. God could have made X right or wrong or morally neutral or given it any other moral status he wanted, so God can't be the explanation of the moral status of X. There will be an explanation of the moral status of X but it will have nothing at all to do with God. (Unless it's a question like "Should we teach children that God exists?" The answer is no.)

Given that God is totally incapable of explaining anything at all, including morality, there is no reason to think that he exists. Just because the notion of God is frequently associated with some good moral ideas is no reason to accept his existence. Sociobiology (very bad explanation) is often lauded by people who work on evolutionary biology (very good explanation). This association should not restrain us from trashing sociobiology as not being worth the ink that is wasted on it, similarly there is no reason to hold back on criticising the idea of God as being rubbish.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Thu, 07/03/2003 - 15:21 | [reply](#)

You've Missed The Point, Again

Alan writes: "The only reason to adopt a theory is that it solves some problem."

That may be true for some, but I think you'd be hard pressed to find the Christian who regards God as a 'theory.' Most Christians (I might as well keep speaking for most of them -- they haven't complained so far) wouldn't describe their belief in God as belief in a theory that they believe solves some moral, supermoral, or literal problems.

An important distinction: A theory is some general principle that explains observed phenomena. A belief is an article of faith/conviction that is held to be true. The theory relies on evidence of some sort. The belief can be corroborated by evidence but does not necessarily rely on it.

You note that His existence literally explains nothing. I'm confused as to your use of the word "literally." Is it just emphasis? In any case, for Christians, God provides the answer to the question "Why?" And, though there is not literal proof lying around as to His existence, there is also nothing lying around that says that He does not exist.

Your argument boils down (again) to proof, where, as has been noted before, Christians and athiests are on pretty even footing.

by [Rob Michael](#) on Thu, 07/03/2003 - 18:02 | [reply](#)

Even Footing?

Rob Michael says (to Alan):

Your argument boils down (again) to proof, where, as has been noted before, Christians and athiests are on pretty even footing.

This is very misleading. While it's true that neither can be proven, their footing as far as what a reasonable person should believe is **far** from even.

We cannot prove or disprove the theory "Undetectable turtles control the weather on Tuesdays". But, is it equally reasonable to believe it or not? Does it really answer the question "Why?" (e.g. Why did it rain last Tuesday?)

I don't think so.

While the original article took some license by saying that religions have the "property of being factually false", I think saying that "Religion is untenable to a person with a good epistemology" is fair. And they amount to the same thing in terms of whether we should adopt it.

by [Gil](#) on Thu, 07/03/2003 - 18:35 | [reply](#)

I'm not missing the point

Rob Michael wrote:

"Alan writes: "The only reason to adopt a theory is that it solves some problem.""

"That may be true for some, but I think you'd be hard pressed to find the Christian who regards God as a 'theory.' Most Christians (I might as well keep speaking for most of them -- they haven't complained so far) wouldn't describe their belief in God as belief in a theory that they believe solves some moral, supermoral, or literal problems..."

"You note that His existence literally explains nothing. I'm confused as to your use of the word "literally." Is it just emphasis? In any case, for Christians, God provides the answer to the question "Why?" And, though there is not literal proof lying around as to His existence, there is also nothing lying around that says that He does not exist."

You have now started talking nonsense. First you say that the idea of God doesn't solve any problem and that no Christian wants the idea of God to do so and then you say it answers the question "Why?" You can't have it both ways, "Why?", which presumably means "What is the meaning of life?" or something like that IS A PROBLEM. A problem is simply some feature of our current worldview that seems unsatisfactory. If your idea that for Christians God is the answer to the question "Why?" is correct, then it follows that Christians think the idea of God solves the "Why?" problem. As I have argued the idea of God is incapable of solving any problem

and so it cannot be a solution, or even the general gist of a solution to the "Why?" problem and Christians are simply mistaken when they think that God can answer this question.

It is not conceivable that some of the stuff in the Bible or in Christian or Jewish tradition (such as the idea of objective morality and maybe other stuff but I don't really know) has a bearing on the "why?" problem but that is entirely separate from the idea that the existence of God solves the "Why?" problem.

I am not asking for proof I am pointing that nobody who has the slightest interest in explanation should invoke the idea of God.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Fri, 07/04/2003 - 02:20 | [reply](#)

Gullible viewers

"I don't think anyone really expects adverts to make true factual claims, they do expect it from documentaries."

Surely this is their own problem?

Possibly a hundred years or so ago at the dawn of advertising, many people were taken in by bogus adverts. Should the advertisers have stopped advertising, rather than the people getting wiser?

by [_Felix](#) on Fri, 07/04/2003 - 06:13 | [reply](#)

Factually True Religions?

Curmudgeon and Gil: At most one religion can be factually true. Hence the overwhelming majority of religions are factually false (though, as the article pointed out, some of them *contain* truths).

Curmudgeon: Surely a practicing Catholic in particular is not permitted to deny the above.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Sat, 07/05/2003 - 04:14 | [reply](#)

Still Missing It

Alan writes: "First you say that the idea of God doesn't solve any problem and that no Christian wants the idea of God to do so and then you say it answers the question 'Why?'"

No, actually, read farther up and notice that you said that the idea of God doesn't solve any problem, not I. I responded to your statement that theories are adopted to solve problems by saying that God is not a theory for Christians -- please note how I didn't even address the God solving a problem issue. Read the next paragraph down from that and you'll see where I talked about theories and beliefs. That is the difference between what you're saying and what Christians are saying regarding God. It would be

helpful if you'd read what I'm writing instead of what you think I'm

writing.

David, the Catholic Church does not practice exclusivism. It maintains like the article that all religions contain some truth:

CCC 843

The Catholic Church recognizes in other religions that search, among shadows and images, for the God who is unknown yet near since he gives life and breath in all things and wants all men to be saved. Thus, the Church considers all goodness and truth found in these religions as "a preparation for the Gospel and given by him who enlightens all men that they may at length have life.

by **Rob Michael** on Mon, 07/07/2003 - 15:20 | [reply](#)

Re: Factually True Religions?

Rob Michael:

David, the Catholic Church does not practice exclusivism. It maintains like the article that all religions contain some truth

And does it (or do you) maintain that containing some truth is the same as being true? Does it (or do you) deny that not being true is the same as being false?

If it does, it is not rejecting "exclusivism", it is rejecting logic.

If it doesn't, then I don't see how what you have said contradicts the proposition that the overwhelming majority of religions are false, and that this is trivially provable.

by **David Deutsch** on Mon, 07/07/2003 - 16:01 | [reply](#)

True Religions

To answer David's questions:

I do not maintain that containing some truth is the same as being true, nor would I expect the Catholic Church to do so, for as you put it, such an act would be a rejection of logic.

I also believe that every proposition is either true or false. However, there is a difference between the actual truth value of something and whether or not we can *know* the truth value. This is why one often sees people talking about relative truths. In many cases it is easier to say that one proposition is clearly more true than others without saying that it is absolutely true.

Nowhere is this more clear than in discussion about ethics. Philosophers have been frustratingly unable to pin down right and wrong; truth and untruth are similarly slippery labels. And yet we speak in terms of more right, more wrong all the time. In ethics we do that to skip over the impossible calculation of whether an act is absolutely right and absolutely wrong. With regard to religion, a similar assumption is made regarding what is true and what is not.

They call that faith and, as you say, it has very little to do with logic.

by **Rob Michael** on Mon, 07/07/2003 - 23:05 | [reply](#)

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Elegance Against Ignorance

Several good posts in a row on Alan Forrester's **Elegance Against Ignorance**, some of them on themes that we have touched on here recently:

This one is about the futility of trying to make horror films more effective by pretending that they are true stories:

it is with *The Mothman Prophecies*, a film that repeatedly made me want to remove all my skin with a potato peeler and jump in a vat of piranha infested hydrochloric acid just to relieve the boredom.

This one briefly links luminous fish with Republicans.

This one is about schoolteachers being "thieving bastards".

And **this one** is about the "coolest plane ever".

Wed, 07/02/2003 - 20:25 | [permalink](#)

Happy America Day

Go and read Bill Whittle's essay **Trinity (Part 1)** now.

When you've done that, you won't need any urging to read **Trinity (Part 2)**.

And after that ... Onwards, America, and all who share her values:
onwards to the stars!

Sat, 07/05/2003 - 01:08 | [permalink](#)

Announcing a New Blog: Taking Children Seriously (The TCS Blog)

The other day, we **urged** you to read Bill Whittle's **latest essay**. In one part of that essay, he mentioned optimism and its role in a creative capitalist society. On the brand new blog, **Taking Children Seriously** you will find a **fascinating piece** on this. Don't miss it!

Sun, 07/06/2003 - 18:05 | [permalink](#)

Slavery

Slavery – the ownership of one person by another – was an accepted feature of almost every society, everywhere in the world, for most of human history. This was one of the greatest of all evils. One of the many interrelated glories of our own society (The West) is that it has eradicated this evil within itself, fought it with great (but not yet total) success elsewhere, and put it permanently on the defensive morally and intellectually.

President Bush, visiting Senegal today, made some [comments](#) about slavery:

“Liberty and life were stolen and sold,” Bush said after touring a centuries-old house that was used as a processing center for countless thousands of Africans who were herded aboard ships that took them into slavery in America.

“Human beings delivered, sorted, weighed, branded with marks of commercial enterprises and loaded as cargo on a voyage without return,” Bush said. “One of the largest migrations in history was also one of the greatest crimes of history.”

There can be no doubt that this is the literal truth. And yet, in context, there is something misleading about the last sentence. For it seems to endorse a theory of historical causality which, though widespread, is a wicked calumny, namely that slavery was essentially a Western institution, a Western crime against the peoples of other societies. Speaking about the evil of slavery in terms of the historical actions of America in particular was a magnanimous and arguably appropriate thing for a US President to do while standing in this terrible place, where Americans committed appalling crimes against humanity on a massive scale. Nevertheless it will give comfort to those who would place a similar, and now utterly erroneous, interpretation on present-day events. We, who are not standing in that place, need to incorporate the broader context into our world view as well. It is very well known that Westerners took several million slaves from Africa; but, for instance, the history of Africa and slavery is not complete without the story of the African Arabs who [kidnapped and enslaved an](#)

[estimated million Westerners](#), and of how *that* evil tradition [was](#)

ended.

Most importantly, though the West perpetrated slavery, it also (particularly Britain and the US, unlike others) rejected slavery, chose to abolish slavery, fought bitter wars against slavery, and created the arguments, the conceptual framework – including the very concept of a ‘crime against humanity’ – and the way of life that is incompatible with slavery and is the only real protection against its return.

Tue, 07/08/2003 - 21:02 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

I could not agree more

One of the things that has irritated me for years is how, in America, the word "slavery" is almost universally used to refer to enslavement of Africans in the United States.

Any history text used by a public school will inevitably use the word "slavery" *only in that context*. I agree that it was big part of our history, but big enough to redefine the word?

by [Ewin](#) on Thu, 07/10/2003 - 23:53 | [reply](#)

10: ... And Then the World Changed

This is the tenth and final part of our series, "A Short History of Israel". If you wish to read the preceding parts, see the **Table of Contents** for links to them. We welcome comments and criticisms. Do tell us what you think.

The fundamentalist Islamic terrorist organisations, Hamas (founded in 1982) and Islamic Jihad (founded in 1979) began to compete with the PLO for support and power. Violence against Jews was one of the principal means of acquiring both.

In 1987, a campaign of relatively low-level but non-stop violence, known as the Intifada, began in the West Bank and Gaza. Often presented by the Western media as 'children throwing stones at tanks, and being shot at in return', it was actually quite a complex war. Rioting crowds of youths throwing rocks and sometimes petrol bombs kept Israeli soldiers on the streets to protect their bases, Jewish settlements, and Jerusalem. Stabbings and occasionally sniping and grenade throwing caused deaths among Israelis, but during the Intifada, Arabs murdered far more Arabs than Israelis: Between 1987 and 1991, about 20 Israelis were murdered in the Intifada, about half of them civilians (though thousands were injured), but during the same period, 528 Arabs were murdered by the PLO, Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The victims were 'collaborators' – which in practice could mean not only any Arab who warned Jews of impending attacks, but any Arab who had any sort of friendly dealings with Jews. Personal and political scores were also settled. Also during those four years, 697 Arabs were killed by Israeli soldiers, the overwhelming majority of them during riots. 78 of them were under 15 years old.

Throughout the Intifada period (and to this day), terrorist murders by Hamas and Islamic Jihad, including suicide bombings, continued. Some analysts believed that support among Palestinians for these Islamic organisations might soon exceed that of the secular PLO; furthermore, a new generation of young radicals, the local leaders of the Intifada, were also challenging the ageing PLO leadership who were in exile with Arafat in Tunisia. For

the first time, it appeared that the PLO and Israel might have a

common interest, in counteracting those forces.

The Israeli elections of 1992 brought in a Labour-led coalition under Yitzchak Rabin. In January 1993, in total secrecy, Israeli and PLO negotiators met in Oslo to begin what later came to be known as the 'Oslo Peace Process'. This culminated in 1994 and 1995 with the Cairo Treaty and an agreement known as 'Oslo II'. These brought an end to Israeli rule in Gaza (excluding only the Jewish settlements there),

plus an area to be known as 'Area A', which contained all the Arab cities of the West Bank with the exception of the small Jewish enclave at the centre of Hebron. Israeli forces would withdraw completely from those areas. A new organisation, the Palestine Authority, with the triumphantly returning Arafat as its Chairman, would have "legislative, executive and judicial powers and responsibilities", with complete control over the internal affairs of Gaza and Area A, including control over a Palestinian police force, armed by Israel. It would also exert civilian control over another area of the West Bank, 'Area B', which contained most of the Arab villages, but Israel would retain its military presence there. The IDF would retain control over the remainder of the territory, Area C, which contained 4% of the Arab inhabitants of the West Bank and all the Jewish settlements. The PLO, in return, renounced terrorism, agreed to prevent terrorism by other organisations, cease anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli incitement, and alter the term in its Constitution that called for the destruction of Israel. Free and fair elections would be held. Negotiations about the 'final status' would begin immediately, and a timetable was agreed for settling all the disputed issues, including the status of Jerusalem and of Palestinian refugees, culminating in the creation of a State of Palestine alongside Israel.

In the Oslo agreements the PLO accepted the principle of partition – a 'two-state solution' – which the Arabs had rejected in 1947 and which previously only Egypt had accepted. Arafat won the Nobel Peace Prize for this, along with Rabin and Shimon Peres, Israel's foreign minister and architect of the Oslo agreements. However, within a few days of the Cairo treaty, Arafat had made a speech in a mosque saying that the Palestinians would 'continue their jihad until they had liberated Jerusalem'. This was dismissed by many as mere rhetoric, but from then on, Arafat and other PLO leaders began making systematically different statements when they were speaking in Arabic from when they were addressing Western audiences. In the latter case, they maintained the line that they had taken the historic decision to renounce violence and accept the partition of Palestine; in the former, they said that the Oslo peace process was merely a stepping stone to their original objective of a unitary Arab state in the whole of Palestine. The PLO's renunciation of the relevant item in its Constitution was equivocal. The PLO's emblem remained a map of the whole of pre-1947 Palestine. The emblem of Fatah (Arafat's faction which is the principal constituent of the PLO) remained a similar map covered by crossed rifles and a grenade. Palestinian schools in Gaza and Areas A and B taught the doctrine of a unitary Arab state following the destruction of Israel.

Anti-Semitic incitement and blood libels became part of the culture

to an extent not previously known in history with the possible exception of Nazi Germany. In 1999 Arafat's wife Suha, in a speech in the presence of US First Lady Hillary Clinton, accused Israel of using poison gas on Arab children, and of causing "cancer and other horrible diseases". In Hamas-run schools and nurseries, **children were taught** that their purpose in life was to kill Jews and to become 'martyrs' (i.e. suicide murderers). The PLO swept aside the structures of civil society, such as the civil service and free press, and established totalitarian control with all positions of even the slightest influence filled by PLO loyalists and controlled ultimately by Arafat alone. Opponents were systematically intimidated or murdered. Only Hamas and Islamic Jihad survived to oppose the PLO, and even they had many members imprisoned.

Israel and Jordan signed a peace treaty with similar provisions to the treaty with Egypt. The treaty has been scrupulously adhered to, and in practice, Israel's relations with Jordan are somewhat warmer than the 'cold peace' that prevails with Egypt. Several other Arab countries have established trading, but not full diplomatic, links with Israel. Other Arab countries, notably Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Libya, remain implacably opposed to Israel and maintain the old boycotts and support for terrorism.

Following the fall of the Soviet Union in about 1989, Russia and former Communist Bloc states had re-established full diplomatic and other relations with Israel (and the Czech Republic resumed a fairly warm friendship). Now, another batch of states such as India, China and the Vatican, which had previously been hostile to Israel, followed suit.

One of the provisions of the Israel-Jordan treaty was that Jordan abolished its law that had in effect made selling land to Jews punishable by death. Ironically, the incoming Palestine Authority revived that law. Property owners who had sold their land to Jewish settlements, and real-estate agents who had brokered such deals, were executed. The new Mufti of Jerusalem (now a PLO appointee) ruled that such criminals must be denied a Muslim burial.

In 1995, Rabin was murdered by a religious Jew opposed to the Oslo peace process.

He was succeeded as Israeli Prime Minister by Peres, who lost the subsequent election and a Likud-led coalition took power.

An election in the Palestinian-controlled areas confirmed Arafat in power with 90% of the vote and no serious opposition. Terrorist violence and murders of Israelis by Hamas and Islamic Jihad, including occasional spectacular mass murders, increased.

In 1999, Ehud Barak was elected Prime Minister (under a slightly altered electoral system that elected the Prime Minister directly and hence gave him a powerful mandate) at the head of a new Labour-led coalition. Barak embarked aggressively upon a quest for peace. He ordered a unilateral withdrawal from the buffer zone in Lebanon. The Lebanese terrorist group Hizbollah, which had previously specialised in suicide bombings against Israeli forces in the buffer

zone, now concentrated on terrorism across the Israeli border.

Israeli and Syrian ministers met under US auspices to 'talk about talks'. Syria demanded a promise of unconditional withdrawal from the Golan Heights as a precondition for negotiations. No progress was made.

Barak, together with US President Clinton, constructed a peace plan under which all Jewish settlements except those contiguous with Israel would be forcibly evacuated. The whole of Gaza and some 96% of the West Bank (including some border adjustments in which West Bank land would be swapped for equal areas of Israeli land), plus East Jerusalem including the Jewish holy sites, would form a new State of Palestine.

In reply, the Palestinian negotiators demanded that every person of Palestinian descent be allowed the 'right of return' to Israel. The negotiations broke up.

The PLO initiated a 'second Intifada', this time based on terrorism and suicide bombings. The Barak government continued to press for peace. Under a previously negotiated agreement, the IDF transferred control of Jacob's Tomb (an ancient Jewish shrine) to the Palestinian police force. Immediately, the tomb was desecrated and then destroyed stone by stone by an Arab mob which included the Palestinian policemen guarding it. Two Israeli reservists who lost their way near Ramallah were captured by the PLO. An Arab mob entered the building where they were being held and tore them apart. Their murderers appeared on the balcony waving their bloodied hands to the cheers of the crowd and then threw the bodies to the crowd for further desecration. A Palestinian policeman murdered his Israeli counterpart on one of the joint patrols that had been agreed. Gunmen entered a joint security meeting and murdered the Israeli policemen taking part. Widespread violence continued.

With elections imminent in which Barak faced defeat, last-ditch peace talks were held at Egyptian town of Taba. Arafat gave a vitriolic speech accusing Israel of being "fascist". The talks broke up and terrorist murders of Israelis increased further, with Arafat now taking a leading role. All Hamas and Islamic Jihad prisoners in PLO custody were released.

On February 6, 2001, Ariel Sharon became Prime Minister of Israel. He appointed Natan Sharansky as one of his Deputy Prime Ministers. He declared that Israel would make 'painful concessions' in return for peace, but only in return for peace.

On September 11, terrorists attacked the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., murdering thousands of Americans. Palestinians took to the streets to celebrate.

The world changed.

Thu, 07/10/2003 - 08:32 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Loretta

Excellent. Much of this I had forgotten, and some of it I did not even know. A good read, well done and concise.

Since 9/11 and the Iraq conflict, the UN has shown itself to be a useless, impotent, and obsolete institution, and certainly western appreciation of Israel (now in hindsight) has been vastly changed.

Better late than never.

by a reader on Sun, 07/13/2003 - 23:36 | [reply](#)

continuous murder of men women and children

your murdering people on land stolen from them how can you deny that.

the appreciation of israel is vastly changed who are you trying to persuade ? for those of us who have spent time in palestine attempting to improve the health of children know better we were taken into a home and shown pools of urine from you soldiers on the roof you know its true.

so what do my comments make me ? an anti-semite i despise most of the human race without favor

by dan lyn on Fri, 07/29/2005 - 18:38 | [reply](#)

Anti-Human

If you prefer anti-human to anti-semite, I'm fine with calling you that.

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 08/02/2005 - 22:22 | [reply](#)

Let the truth ring!

I am so glad that there is something out there to dispell the Arab propaganda and the biased Western media against Israel. There has NEVER been a "Palestinian" nation, society, or country. The word Palestine itself is a made up word by the Romans when they took the Jews' land away. The Arab invasions which deposited the Arabs in the Jewish kingdom DOES NOT make it Arab. I really though Bush had the guts to stand up to the Jew-hating Arabs and deny a terrorist state next to innocent Israelis, but I guess not. I fear America is losing her nerve folks...

by Christopher on Fri, 09/09/2005 - 16:23 | [reply](#)

Arafat

More questions prompted by reading Gilbert, whose account of Rabin and Arafat's negotiations is very positive (gushing, almost).

Was Rabin wrong to negotiate with Arafat at all?

Should he have taken a step-by-step line in which the PLO would be held responsible for stopping terrorism against Israelis before they were given various kinds of economic and political autonomy within the occupied territories?

by [emma](#) on Thu, 08/23/2007 - 22:02 | [reply](#)

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...And Then The World Changed

Here is the tenth and final part of our series, **A Short History of Israel**. And here is a quote from it:

Barak, together with US President Clinton, constructed a peace plan under which all Jewish settlements except those contiguous with Israel would be forcibly evacuated. The whole of Gaza and some 96% of the West Bank (including some border adjustments in which West Bank land would be swapped for equal areas of Israeli land), plus East Jerusalem including the Jewish holy sites, would form a new State of Palestine.

In reply, the Palestinian negotiators demanded that every person of Palestinian descent be allowed the 'right of return' to Israel. The negotiations broke up.

The PLO initiated a "second Intifada", this time based on terrorism and suicide bombings. The Barak government continued to press for peace.

So, what do you think of this series? Would you like to suggest any changes? Keep in mind that the aim was to produce a short, facts-only history.

Thu, 07/10/2003 - 08:49 | [permlink](#)

Allied Complicity in the Holocaust

It has been known for some time that President Franklin D. Roosevelt was suspicious of Jews and uncritically **believed** anti-Semitic myths of astonishing (to present-day eyes) crudeness. This may have contributed to his behaviour before and during the Holocaust, when the United States **participated enthusiastically** in the seamless international effort to prevent most of the Jews of Europe from escaping.

His successor, President Truman, has been regarded as a saner and better man in this regard, because he put pressure on the British to treat Holocaust survivors less harshly, and because he was the first to recognise the State of Israel. Yet despite the fact that he seems genuinely to have sympathised with the Holocaust survivors, some recently-discovered **diary entries** suggest that as far as personal anti-Semitism goes, he was the equal of Roosevelt, if not worse:

On July 21, 1947, Truman wrote about a conversation he had with Henry Morgenthau, the former treasury secretary under President Franklin D. Roosevelt and a Jew.

"Had ten minutes conversation with Henry Morgenthau about Jewish ship in Palistine [sic]," Truman wrote. "Told him I would talk to Gen[eral] Marshall about it."

"He'd no business, whatever to call me. The Jews have no sense of proportion nor do they have any judgement on world affairs."

In the same entry Truman goes on to say, "The Jews, I find are very, very selfish. They care not how many Estonians, Latvians, Finns, Poles, Yugoslavs or Greeks get murdered or mistreated as D[isplaced] P[ersons] as long as the Jews get special treatment.

(As if there are such things as 'unselfish' groups of genocide victims. As if the wartime representatives of those European nations had campaigned against the Holocaust with the same enthusiasm with which they pursued their own agendas and grievances – or, indeed, as if they had spoken out against the Holocaust at all. And as if, to a person with a true "sense of proportion [and] judgement", the treatment of non-Jewish Estonians, Latvians, Finns, Poles, Yugoslavs or Greeks during the war should have

seemed similar to what happened to the Jews.)

Truman's stereotype of the selfish Jew incapable of subtlety, his re-interpretation of commonplace events in sinister terms when Jews are involved, and the impression of visceral spite only imperfectly held in check by reason and morality, are all ancient **themes of anti-Semitism**. So is the technique of the Big Lie:

Yet when they have power, physical, financial or political neither Hitler nor Stalin has anything on them for cruelty or mistreatment to the under dog.

Note that Truman wrote this at a time when Israel was still a dream, when most European Jews were still imprisoned in internment camps, and when many had just been murdered *after* the Holocaust by Europeans who were themselves victims of the Nazis.

Allied complicity in the Holocaust is a difficult and painful issue to contemplate, even today. That is not only because it involves coming to terms with a history of wrongdoing by earlier generations of our own society, but also because that wrongdoing, important though it is, is only a small part of a bigger picture. As with the era of **slavery** in the US, no account of American or British complicity in the Holocaust can be complete without a full acknowledgement that their culpability was of an entirely different order from that of the European collaborators, let alone from that of the murderers themselves and of the society and culture that authorised the murders. To make reasonable judgements in these matters, we need to remember the context. With Western civilisation fearing, and then fighting, for its own survival, it was a different age. The idea of the Holocaust, of genocide and crimes against humanity, had yet to come into focus as central concepts in political morality. One indication of this is that American Jews did not, at the time, judge Roosevelt harshly, and continued to support him overwhelmingly just as they had throughout his term of office. Yes, the British and Americans did not care to rescue the Jews; they even thought that the Germans had a point in hating them. They treated the survivors shamefully – *but it would not have occurred to them to kill them*. Such an idea would have occasioned revulsion much deeper than that of having nouveau-riche Jews trying to join the Country Club or children with skullcaps being top of the class. With the Germans it was the other way round, and that is the measure of the difference.

Nevertheless, the issue of Allied complicity in the Holocaust does have to be addressed and understood, because the remnants of the implicitly anti-Semitic ideas and attitudes that caused it are still a living part of present-day Western culture. They are still doing harm. They are all the harder to address because of the overlay of self-deception, denial and double-talk that 'political correctness' has forced on this and other issues.

Fri, 07/11/2003 - 16:42 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Different age?

"With Western civilisation fearing, and then fighting, for its own survival, it was a different age."

Doing the same thing now. The more things change, the more they stay the same?

by a reader on Sat, 07/12/2003 - 20:08 | [reply](#)

Learn More About Truman Before Making Judgments

If you go back to Harry Truman's personal history, allegations of anti-Semitism are awfully difficult to sustain.

It's entirely possible for his diary entry to be a normal sort of exasperation rather than hate. Morgenthau almost certainly was WAY out of the chain of command when he called. I'm quite sure the overall approach re: Israel was not diplomatically polished (hard, when you have no diplomats), and that its focus did not include the "big picture" Truman had to deal with at the time. To someone facing Truman's burdens and in his position, this would be exasperating.

Looks like an issue out of nothing to me.

Joe Katzman

Winds of Change.NET

"Liberty. Discovery. Humanity. Victory."

by a reader on Mon, 07/14/2003 - 12:39 | [reply](#)

Truman and Morgenthau

Truman was being pestered by Morgenthau and other Jewish pressure group representatives about Palestine at the time, and it would only get more intensive and annoying the more things heated up over the partition. I'm not at all surprised that he blew off steam in the privacy of his own diary. Also keep in mind that Morgenthau was not exactly the most temperate of men - he was the author of the Morgenthau plan that would have left Germany a permanent agricultural colony, and from all accounts played heavily to Roosevelt's anti-German bigotry, which was, if anything, even more monumental than Roosevelt's WASPish anti-Semitism.

Finally, there's the rest of the passage:

"Put an underdog on top and it makes no difference whether his name is Russian, Jewish, Negro, Management, Labor, Mormon, Baptist he goes haywire. I've found very, very few who remember their past condition when prosperity comes."

That is, in fact, the opposite of particularist prejudice - he was classifying Jewish behavior as part of a general human trait that he deplored.

In the end, Truman did recognize Israel. He also desegregated the

Army in spite of his personal racism. I respect men who don't let their personal prejudices (whatever they might be) dictate their actions.

Saw Bamford on CNN yesterday, going on again about the USS Liberty. Now **that** is an anti-Semite.

by a reader on Mon, 07/14/2003 - 12:49 | [reply](#)

Twin Ruler

The whole "holocaust" narrative is getting rather bizaire: now, they are saying that the Poles and the Russians were even more antiSemitic than the Germans.

by a reader on Tue, 09/02/2003 - 12:34 | [reply](#)

What Was Found First?

Late last month, **Baghdad Bob** turned up safe but **not so well-looking** on our **TV screens**:

Arabiya news TV transmitted night an interview with Mohammad Saeed Al-Sahaf, information minister of the deposed Iraqi regime.

[...]



He said he will never return to politics and will focus on taking care of his family and on writing about the war.



He expressed sorrow for seeing coalition forces capture the Capital city of Iraq, Baghdad. He said he was not considering leaving Iraq to the USA or Britain, and asserted time will reveal more about the circumstances of war.



In another interview with Abu Dhabi TV, aired Thursday, Al-Sahaf has blamed "slow battle reports" for being misinformed about the situation in Baghdad shortly before U.S.-led coalition forces manage to capture the city.

So the correct answer in our **poll** asking what would be found first following the coalition's victory, was Baghdad Bob.



What percentage of the voters guessed correctly? Only 24%. Six per cent thought that Saddam would be more likely to be found first. The most popular answer was "the smoking gun", with 39% of the vote. The least popular answers were the quagmire and Janeane Garofalo's apology, each receiving 3%. Evidently some of our readers have a sense of humour. A quarter of the voters were sceptical that any of these things would be found within one year.

Sat, 07/12/2003 - 11:27 | [permalink](#)

Where to Find The Carnival of The Vanities

As we have not been part of the **blogosphere** for very **long**, we were at first **baffled** by references to the **Carnival of the Vanities**. Somewhere, we read that this 'Carnival' is a way for brilliant but unknown bloggers to get noticed. 'That's us!', we thought. So we decided that a bit of detective work was in order. Several glasses of **Champagne** later, we discovered that the Carnival of the Vanities was conceived by Bigwig of **Silflay Hraka** in September last year. He **solicited** bloggers' best work of the week (or ever, if they preferred), and then published them as a list. After several weeks of compiling the list himself, Bigwig hit on the idea of getting a different blog to host it each week, presumably to avoid burnout. The Carnival of the Vanities is now a splendid way to find high-quality blog content with very little effort, and we think it is worth visiting every week to find hitherto undiscovered gems.

There is only one problem: it is not always easy to find out where the next Carnival is unless you know where the current one is. Not any more! From now on, there will be **permanent links** in the sidebar of **Setting The World To Rights** (below the list of blogs) to the current Carnival of the Vanities, and to the host of the next one, for the benefit of any of you bloggers who might want to submit your work.

Re the Champagne: We hasten to add that this was purchased before the current boycott.

Mon, 07/14/2003 - 01:26 | [permalink](#)

champagne

That's the answer! To avoid disappointment, buy up a lifetime's supply of valued merchandise from any country or other grouping that you fear you may shortly need to boycott on moral grounds. :)

by a reader on Fri, 07/25/2003 - 22:04 | [reply](#)

Champagne

Luckily, there are some absolutely fabulous New World equivalents,

so it is not too traumatic.

by **Sarah Fitz-Claridge** on Thu, 07/31/2003 - 09:36 | [reply](#)

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‘villepinism’?

We have **previously noted** that, while the term ‘idiotarianism’ has several obvious disadvantages, we occasionally have to use it because there is no alternative with the same meaning in common use.

Now, a reader of **Woty Freeman's** blog, Kolya Wolf, has suggested a new term to replace ‘idiotarianism’, namely **villepinism** (and ‘villepinist’ to replace ‘idiotarian’), after the current French foreign minister, Dominique de Villepin.

A few notes on this proposal:

- We think the word should begin with a lower-case ‘v’ because de Villepin was not the originator of villepinism, only a prominent exponent. We capitalize ‘Stalinism’ and ‘Thatcherism’, but not ‘quisling’ or ‘boycott’.
- It is ‘villepinism’ and not ‘villepinisme’ because it is an English word. The French translation might well be ‘villepinisme’.
- Recall our definition: “systematically siding with evil without actually adopting the evildoers’ objectives” and then look at **this** description of current French foreign policy.

What do our readers think?

UPDATE: Do you think we need a new word for “idiotarian”? Vote in our **poll**.

Thu, 07/17/2003 - 00:33 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Excellent

I like it a lot! Very clever. Unlike idiotarian, it's not a term that can easily be subverted.

by a reader on Thu, 07/17/2003 - 09:09 | [reply](#)

I love it! Go go go...

I love it!

Go go go

by a reader on Thu, 07/17/2003 - 11:25 | [reply](#)

Silly villies

From another [post](#) by Woty:

Villepinists know that some ideas are morally invalid – but they do not realize that these sort of ideas can drive people [.....] they can't know that Islamic fundamentalism is an ideology that people live for and center their lives around. They think it is impossible for this to be the case, since it is clearly immoral and unreasonable to choose such a life

Interesting, huh?

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Thu, 07/17/2003 - 18:32 | [reply](#)

IDIOTARIAN: (n) 1. (archaic) ...

IDIOTARIAN: (n) 1. (archaic) An idiot. 2. Someone who has offended an idiot.

http://jessewalker.blogspot.com/2003_07_13_jessewalker_archive.html#105846354996467544

by a reader on Thu, 07/17/2003 - 18:53 | [reply](#)

New word for idiotarian

The term "idiotarian" exemplifies an ad hominem attack, and for that reason should be dropped. It has a despising/hateful/taunting quality, in common with all ad hominem attacks. "Villepinist" is too bound to the current situation and in a few years is likely to be forgotten. "Fool" is an old four-letter word that has fallen out of favor, and was often used like "idiotarian" has been used since 9/11. **It got a bad rap in the New Testament.**

http://www.gospelchapel.com/Devotions/10_97/devotion_10-13-97.html "Heedless" is a nice, neutral term, which, I think, captures the essence of the issue.

by a reader on Tue, 07/29/2003 - 20:08 | [reply](#)

what?

heedless is not neutral, it's bad. and no string of letters if *inherently* ad hominem.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 07/29/2003 - 20:30 | [reply](#)

Ad hominem

Nothing is inherently anything. I stand by my statement about what

sort of statement is ad hominem. Reasoning argumentation will often involve describing key points that the opposing side has ignored, as a way of strengthening one side of an argument at the expense of the other. Arguments ad hominem ridicule/put down/denigrate the other side, contributing only emotional energy/excitement to the discussion. Usage of the term "idiotarian" functions this way. Showing how the opposition is "heedless" of various points and then describing the relation of these points to the issue at hand is an entirely valid way of reasoning.

Example:SOLDIER #1:

Where'd you get the coconuts?

ARTHUR:

We found them.

SOLDIER #1:

Found them? In Mercia? The coconut's tropical!

ARTHUR:

What do you mean?

SOLDIER #1:

Well, this is a temperate zone.

ARTHUR:

The swallow may fly south with the sun or the house martin or the plover may seek warmer climes in winter, yet these are not strangers to our land?

SOLDIER #1:

Are you suggesting coconuts migrate?

...

I guess you could call finding fault with an opposing argument "bad" but then you would seem to deny the utility of argumentation reasoning altogether.

by a reader on Tue, 07/29/2003 - 21:04 | [reply](#)

sigh

idiotarian has an established meaning that is not ad hominem. heedless does not.

idiotarian refers to a certain politic philosophy. it helps facillitate communication between clueful people. it is not intended as an argument. it refers to the sort that side with evil, but do not want evil things to happen. that is a phrase with content. whether any given person *is* in fact an idiotarian is an open question, and calling someone one won't cut it when that's in dispute. but hell,

calling someone a democrat doesn't prove they are one either.
labeling people is useful anyway, cause it helps us communicate.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 07/29/2003 - 21:31 | [reply](#)

Gone but not Forgotten

"'Villepinist" is too bound to the current situation and in a few years is likely to be forgotten.'

Villepin won't be forgotten, anymore than Quisling or Neville Chamberlain was forgotten.

by a reader on Wed, 07/30/2003 - 14:39 | [reply](#)

There we go again

Arguing over words rather than substance. Make up a word and attach it to a meaningful descriptive sentence. It is done all the time. If it is a good word and the description sufficiently summarizes the issue the word will come to mean what it means. Wrongheaded.

by a reader on Sat, 10/11/2003 - 14:44 | [reply](#)

encourage thinking

Dear Friends,

I think villepinism is a dangerous term because it promotes thinking. Thus, I am for it.

It seems very likely that many people will read idiotarian and immediately suppose they know what it means. Whereas, with villepinism, some may be tempted to look it up, do a Google search, or find places where it is talked about.

Regards,

Jim

davidson@net1.net

<http://www.ezez.com/free/freejim.html>

by **planetaryjim** on Fri, 11/07/2003 - 03:24 | [reply](#)

A Reader

IDIOT, n.

A member of a large and powerful tribe whose influence in human affairs has always been dominant and controlling. The Idiot's activity is not confined to any special field of thought or action, but "pervades and regulates the whole." He has the last word in

everything; his decision is unappealable. He sets the fashions and opinion of taste, dictates the limitations of speech and circumscribes conduct with a dead-line.

A.B.

The Devil's Dictionary

(although, in 1906 they made him call it the Cynic's Wordbook, because they were idiots).

by a reader on Wed, 09/29/2004 - 03:30 | [reply](#)

Don't use a current figure. P

Don't use a current figure. Perhaps something like chamberlainist would be better.

by a reader on Sat, 06/18/2005 - 11:52 | [reply](#)

Pre-Emptying Pre-Emption

The media and the Left are currently gripped by an extraordinary obsession with the non-story of "Bush's Lie" – his **allegation** prior to the liberation of Iraq that Saddam had tried to obtain uranium from Africa.

Joel Mowbray's concise **analysis** (via **LGF**) hits the nail on the head. Aside from journalists and others who are merely interested in sensationalising stories, there's a more important group in the Bush-lied brigade:

Somewhat less self-interested – though no less pernicious – are the folks who are perpetuating the myth because they want to torpedo any future pre-emptive attacks. On CNN last week (debating this columnist), Nation editor Katrina vanden Heuvel was clear about her motives for assailing Bush: "The preemptive doctrine... has now turned out to be an abysmal failure based on the fact that it is predicated on having 100 percent reliable intelligence – and we've seen an administration which clearly manipulated intelligence to take us into war."

If vanden Heuvel and her cohorts can convince enough voters that the war was based on a lie, a President's ability to defend America with pre-emptive strikes will be seriously diminished. And that's exactly what the left wants.

In other words, this is all about pre-emptying pre-emption: making it prohibitively expensive politically for any US President to use military action in future to prevent mass murders.

Since, as Joel Mowbray also remarks, "not a day goes by when terrorists and other thugs aren't plotting to murder Americans and our way of life", and since no purely defensive measures against terrorist mass murder can be effective indefinitely, the only possible alternatives to taking military action in advance of a preventable attack are taking it after the attack or not taking it at all. Either way, the attack itself is then guaranteed: successfully pre-empting pre-emption *means* successfully guaranteeing a mass murder that could have been prevented.

You will recall that we define **idiotarians** (**villepinists**?) as those

who systematically side with evil without themselves adopting the evildoers' objectives. The campaign against pre-emption is a textbook example of that, is it not?

Fri, 07/18/2003 - 12:07 | [permalink](#)

the only pre-emption ...

that I am in principle opposed to is the Bush admin's pre-emption of our democratic process. If he did indeed knowingly mislead the American public and Congress in order to garner Congressional authorization for a war, then that is a grave offense indeed.

For more see: <http://radio.weblogs.com/0126471/2003/07/17.html>

by a reader on Fri, 07/18/2003 - 13:51 | [reply](#)

Pre-Emptive Strikes Have Costs, Too

While I agree with [The World](#) that pre-emptive strikes are sometimes justified and proper, I disagree with the implication that any attempts to ensure that the standards of evidence used in such a decision be quite high are "idiotarian" or "villepinist".

Yes, pre-emptive strikes can prevent tragedies, but mistaken pre-emptive strikes can cause them. There *should* be a high standard before taking such actions.

When you discuss pre-emption and its potential benefits, it's misleading if you don't also consider its potential costs.

If every policy that makes crime prevention more difficult than a tyrant can imagine is "idiotarian" (because it sides with hypothetical criminals), then every decent person in the world is idiotarian. In order to be a bad thing, this "siding with evil" must be unreasonable after considering all of the relevant factors, not just because it fits a simplistic pattern of making some evil easier.

It could very well be that these people are on the wrong side of the idiotarian line, but it's important to remember that some people who want to make pre-emption difficult are on the good side of it.

by [Gil](#) on Fri, 07/18/2003 - 19:20 | [reply](#)

Re: Pre-Emptive Strikes Have Costs, Too

Gil wrote:

When you discuss pre-emption and its potential benefits, it's misleading if you don't also consider its potential costs.

Very good point. I guess it definitely becomes idiotarian/villepinist when it, in effect, amounts to trying to prevent pre-emptive military action altogether.

by **David Deutsch** on Fri, 07/18/2003 - 20:06 | [reply](#)

Re: Pre-Emptive Strikes Have Costs, Too

we **have** very high standards. people arguing for high standards are almost always looking for **higher** standards, especially ones that are infeasible to meet, because they are in fact idiotarians.

There is no credible threat for the standards to be lowered much (from people who like bloodbaths, I guess), btw, so they don't have that excuse.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 07/19/2003 - 02:52 | [reply](#)

Are these standards falsifiable?

Is there any evidence that would convince you that taking the pre-emptive action was a mistake ? (such as failing to find WMD)

by a reader on Sat, 07/19/2003 - 20:03 | [reply](#)

Of course these standards are falsifiable

Is there any evidence that would convince you that taking the pre-emptive action was a mistake ? (such as failing to find WMD)

Of course there is. If it turns out that Saddam was not in fact an evil tyrant, and that Bush and Blair knew this but faked all those threats that were coming from him, and that they faked the evidence of all those people he murdered and tortured and oppressed, and that it was really US forces all along who attacked Iran, Kuwait and Israel, then I for one will seriously consider not voting Bush in for a second term.

Also, if it turns out that World War 2 actually preceded World War 1, and that Napoleon was really a garden gnome, I will have to make other, albeit smaller, revisions in my conception of world history.

by a reader on Sat, 07/19/2003 - 22:23 | [reply](#)

Re: Of course these standards are falsifiable

So the standard is not: This government poses an immediate threat to your life and liberty. The standard is: This government murdered, tortured and oppressed it's citizens.

Isn't this true of most of the governments of South America, Africa and Asia? So these regimes must be overthrown as well.

by a reader on Sun, 07/20/2003 - 01:48 | [reply](#)

no no no

stop trying to put words in our mouths. it's not a mechanical criterion thing. rather we must use argument on a case by case basis.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 07/20/2003 - 16:27 | [reply](#)

Re: Gil

Gil writes:

When you discuss pre-emption and its potential benefits, it's misleading if you don't also consider its potential costs.

Yes, it is misleading if one doesn't consider the potential costs of pre-emption. That's why I'm so glad that those costs were indeed considered and taken into account.

Remember: the statement "but you should take X into account", true or not, does not constitute an argument that we **didn't** take X into account - even if you think we didn't. Say I wanna drive to the mall. You: "but remember you should take the cost of gas into account." But maybe I did. Even if I still end up driving to the mall. In any event the fact that I choose to drive to the mall doesn't mean I **didn't** take the price of gas into account.

Many if not most of the people who use the "but you should take into account" line seem strangely incapable of comprehending that I can take their concern X into account and **still** decide that doing the opposite of what they want is the best course of action overall. To such people, if I disagree with them, I must not have thought about the issue enough, not as deeply as them! I hope you're not one of these arrogant people.

by a reader on Mon, 07/21/2003 - 21:54 | [reply](#)

further discussion on pre-emptive strikes

> Is there any evidence that would convince you that taking the
> pre-emptive action was a mistake ? (such as failing to find WMD)

You say "the pre-emptive action", so I presume the question relates to the pre-emptive American attack on Iraq (and not the pre-emptive attack on Afghanistan, or proposed pre-emptive strikes in the future)...

The reader who wrote "of course these standards are falsifiable" was, to my way of thinking, being a bit too flip on a serious subject. A strong and valid point was made, however -- pre-emptive action in Iraq was justified on several counts. Most of them have not changed a bit; some of them, by their very nature, CANNOT

change.

For example, UNSC Resolution 1441 required Saddam to comply completely, unreservedly, and immediately to a list of inspection-related activities. He did not. His actions made it quite clear that he was jerking the world around, and that, whatever his WMD activities might have been, he had no slightest intention of being forthcoming about them. It was known that he HAD had WMD, and that no credible evidence had been presented for him having destroyed all of them; the obvious conclusion was that he still had some of them. It was known that he had no compunctions against USING his WMD, for he had done so before. It was known that he provided financial and material aid to terrorists, including terrorists hostile to the United States. It was known that he himself was hostile to the United States.

The inescapable conclusion from these facts, in early 2003, was that Saddam's regime posed a significant threat to the United States. He had an interest in helping terror attacks against the United States, and it could not be proven that he did NOT have WMD; what we DID know was that, if he had them, and saw an opportunity to use them (or to encourage others to use them) against the United States, he would do so.

No new revelations can possibly change what we knew in early 2003, which were more than sufficient to justify an American pre-emptive strike against Iraq.

Let's try a personal example. If you threaten me every day or so; if sometimes your insults include vague death threats; if one day those threats expand to include my family; and if, one dusky evening, I spot you lurking on my property, carrying something that looks very much like a weapon, what do I do? If I'm smart, I act on the information I have, and I call the police immediately. Perhaps I take action myself to stop you.

Now, suppose that, after I tackle you to the ground and hold you until the police arrive, it turns out that you're unarmed. You were carrying a water pistol, because you enjoy carrying them; it was unloaded. You were on my property looking for a shortcut to the local YMCA. You were wearing dark clothing because you've run out of clean laundry. Would that make my "pre-emptive attack" on you unjustified?

I would argue that, no, my attack would be eminently justifiable, IN TERMS OF WHAT I KNEW AT THE TIME. It was not my choice, in this hypothetical scenario, to be threatened; it was not my choice to be trespassed upon. But the prospect of tackling someone unnecessarily, from my point of view, is infinitely preferable to the other alternative -- doing nothing, and watching helplessly as you visit mayhem on me and my family, precisely as you threatened to do. (Yes, in this scenario, you are unarmed. But I don't know that yet, so these two alternatives will seem equally probable to me.)

(I'll ignore the legal issues -- what if I break your arm in the process of tackling you? Can you, and should you, sue me? -- because they're not relevant, and because I don't live in Britain...)

In short, I believe the pre-emptive strike against Iraq was the correct thing to do, BASED ON WHAT WAS KNOWN AT THE TIME. Yes, it was also an extremely humanitarian thing to do; there have been other benefits after the fact. But the primary reason for attacking Iraq, in my opinion, was that there was plenty of cause to see him as a threat -- a view Saddam himself seemed to enjoy encouraging.

In re pre-emptive strikes as a general tactic -- yes, of course, the standards for going ahead with one must be quite high. David Deutsch and Elliot Temple have the right idea, in my opinion; set the standards high, and, when those standards are met, DON'T HESITATE.

sincerely,
Daniel in Medford

by a reader on Mon, 07/21/2003 - 22:02 | [reply](#)

to expand

a choice is right or it is not right. period. what happens has no effect on this. a simple way to see that what happens can have no bearing: physics is **deterministic** so the outcome was predetermined when the choice was made anyway.

another point is: we cannot choose based on information we do not have; we are not wrong to make choices without being omniscient. so if you oppose some choice you have 2 lines of attack: 1) the choice was best possible under circumstances, BUT the person was wrongly negligent in allowing himself to be ignorant and make such bad choices 2) the person chose wrong given what he knew

"it turned out badly" cannot cut it as a direct argument.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 07/21/2003 - 22:31 | [reply](#)

Re: Gil

A reader wrote:

Many if not most of the people who use the "but you should take into account" line seem strangely incapable of comprehending that I can take their concern X into account and **still** decide that doing the opposite of what they want is the best course of action overall. To such people, if I disagree with them, I must not have thought about the issue enough, not as deeply as them! I hope you're not one of these arrogant people.

No, I'm not one of *those* arrogant people.

I was not criticizing the campaign in Iraq (of which I approve). I'm

satisfied that the costs and benefits were weighed, and that the actions taken were reasonable and justified.

I was just pointing out that the argument in the original post could be interpreted as implying that any argument that seeks to have high standards of evidence before engaging in pre-emptive strikes necessarily makes things easier on the bad guys and is thus idiotarian. It seemed to only examine one side of the ledger.

I wanted to point out that it isn't enough to only examine whether bad people might be helped, but whether the proposal makes it more likely that the right thing will happen, considering both the benefits *and* the costs.

by **Gil** on Tue, 07/22/2003 - 17:28 | [reply](#)

More about why the lie matters ...

<http://radio.weblogs.com/0126471/2003/07/22.html#a86>

by a reader on Tue, 07/22/2003 - 23:46 | [reply](#)

yes but

Gil,

good points, except you've forgotten the point (or assertion, let's say) made in the original post: that the critics are trying to "pre-empt pre-emption" itself. That is, take pre-emption off the table completely as an option (because it's predicated on 100 percent knowledge and you can never have that, or similar arguments). You can disagree with that assertion and say "no they're not, they're just demanding high/higher standards", and indeed that is probably true of some people. But apparently not Katrina Vandenheuvel if the excerpt quoted from her is any indication: "the preemptive doctrine" is a "failure", in her view. In other words, no pre-emption. Sure sounds like a villipenism to me. But you're right, this statement being a villipenism doesn't mean that all requests for high/higher standards of evidence on these matters are. On the other hand, I don't think anyone said otherwise in the first place. best,

by a reader on Wed, 07/23/2003 - 00:37 | [reply](#)

In a Nearby Universe: EU Drops Cuba Sanctions

Following an announcement by Cuban leader Fidel Castro that the **three dissidents he executed** were Jews, the EU immediately abandoned the policy of **cultural sanctions** that it had planned against Cuba. (Namely, reducing the number of operas to which Castro is invited when he visits European capitals.)

"Castro's regime may murder people but we can't deny that it is **partly a political organisation** that builds hospitals and performs other good works, so it would be wrong to impose sanctions," said an EU spokesman. "After all, we wouldn't want to give the impression that the EU is run by **slimy, hypocritical, lying scumbags.**"

Sat, 07/19/2003 - 21:29 | [permalink](#)

A new word for “idiotarian”?

No, let's keep the word “idiotarian”.

37% (152 votes)

Fallaci's term “cicada”;

1% (6 votes)

Kolya Wolf's term “[villepinist](node.php?id=160)”;

23% (92 votes)

There is no such thing so no word is necessary.

5% (20 votes)

“Leftist”;

6% (25 votes)

“Idiot”;

4% (17 votes)

“antirational”;

7% (27 votes)

“French” (Just kidding!)

17% (69 votes)

Total votes: 408

Sun, 07/20/2003 - 14:50 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

A random villepinism

French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin led the pro-Palestinian line during the talks between Shalom and the European ministers.

"It is not possible to ignore the historic place and standing of Arafat," he said, "and he has the popular support of most of the Palestinian community."

<http://www.haaretzdaily.com/hasen/spages/320439.html>

by a reader on Mon, 07/21/2003 - 17:37 | [reply](#)

Hmmm.

Contramericans?

Ptah

by **ptah** on Wed, 07/23/2003 - 15:49 | [reply](#)

The anti-idiotarian and the drunk

The trouble with "idiotarianism" is that it's used just like the drunk uses the lamppost: more for propping up one's position, than for the illumination it provides.

by a reader on Sun, 07/27/2003 - 06:31 | [reply](#)

Villepin doesn't deserve ANY recognition.

The trouble with "villepinist" is that it acknowledges Villepin - he (like France in general),

is better left ignored.

by a reader on Thu, 07/31/2003 - 23:20 | [reply](#)

Another "It is not possible..." from the French?

America can - America will!

by a reader on Thu, 07/31/2003 - 23:23 | [reply](#)

Villepin embodies a widespread pseudo-liberal fallacy

Modern philosophy lacks a coherent explanation for the nature of morality. There are roughly three kinds of response to this predicament: the religious, the objective, and the anti-objective.

The religious response is intellectually indefensible, but in some of its more evolved forms contains considerable moral wisdom. The objective approach shares with the religious approach a commitment to the existence of an objective right and wrong, but freely admits that the philosophical justification for this commitment remains to be elucidated. The anti-objective approach is founded on the denial of the existence of an objective right and wrong; and on looking instead to procedural mechanisms for developing a consensus about moral values.

The most notable feature of this anti-objective approach is that its adherents hate their pro-objective opponents, more than they hate outright doers of evil. That is how they come to be systematic apologists for evil -- time and again they conclude that their enemy's enemy is their friend.

This is the underlying explanation for the political morality of a great swath of Western intellectuals, including most academics. We need a succinct descriptive term in order to facilitate discussion of this widespread and culturally malign mentality, of which Dominique

de Villepin is such a shining paragon.

In the service of this cause, Villepin deserves all the recognition we can give him.

by [Kolya](#) on Fri, 08/01/2003 - 07:32 | [reply](#)

One problem with keeping it "idiotarian"

The problem I have with keeping the word "idiotarian" (even though I think it's the right word to use) is the fact that the left is notorious for redefining words to suit themselves. Just like they've strived since Bush took office to redefine "patriotic" as being against the country or government. That's just one example though. I'm sure they'd try and redefine "idiotarian" too.

by a reader on Mon, 08/11/2003 - 20:29 | [reply](#)

Understanding it

In order to give "idiotarianism" (or Villepinism, or whatever) the right name it would help if we understood where this pathological conception of morality comes from. I just spent another exhausting after-dinner conversation trying to persuade an anti-war friend that Bush was right to take us to war in Iraq when he did, and something struck me afterward.

Instead of trying to persuade her to switch sides by criticising her position, I should have been encouraging her to criticise **my** position. I suppose this would be like leading a horse to water, but anyway:

Some think tank should set up a call centre next time there's a just war on the cards. Each idiotarian caller is paid 25 cence on their credit card for every good question or criticism they make to the well-trained telephone moralist. (The telemoralist has access to detailed computer files citing arguments, counterarguments, newspaper sources, etc). These 25 cence payments keep stacking up until the caller repeats a circular argument, or falls back on "peace is better than war", or "Bush is slimy and he pollutes rivers", "we need more information before rushing to judgement" or "the Catholics were just as bad in Northern Ireland" or whatever.

In this way,

- (a) we get to know far more about idiotarians
- (b) idiotarians are forced to confront reality

Actually, maybe it would be more effective to make the payments to charity (the charity would be selected by agreement from a list).

The caller must answer 4 or 5 questions before the critical session begins in order to establish his credentials as a Villepinist. (As an extra guide, lie detecting software would be installed on the call centre's computers)

I know this scheme has about as much chance of being

implemented as every Palestinian kid getting a free trip to Disneyland, but what the heck. Someone slap me down...

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Tue, 08/12/2003 - 03:57 | [reply](#)

From the horse's mouth

Villepin makes new call to end "tragic cycle" in Middle East

Fri Aug 22, 5:38 AM ET

PARIS (AFP) - French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin urged Israel and the Palestinians must try to break out of their "tragic cycle" of violence as the region appeared headed for even more violence.

Speaking on the privately-owned RTL radio station, De Villepin said both sides needed to make concessions to stop the cycle of violence, and he called for a new effort by the European Union to get involved.

The Israelis had to promise to pull out of the Palestinian territories to give their inhabitants "the feeling that their life is going to change," while the Palestinians had to "very clearly give up carrying out attacks," he said.

The French official also called for the international community to broaden its efforts for peace, and said the United States could not act on its own.

"Europe must get involved again," he added.

The statement came as the Palestinian militant groups Islamic Jihad and Hamas issued a joint statement formally ending their seven-week-old truce with Israel.

by a reader on Sun, 08/24/2003 - 15:02 | [reply](#)

Keep both words

I suggest keeping both words (idiotarian and villepinist). Use **idiotarian** for the broad category of someone who is generally an idiot, with various kinds of incorrect reasoning. And use **villepinist** for the subcategory of idiotarians who are characterized by the more specific reasoning error of siding with evil without wanting the consequences.

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Thu, 08/28/2003 - 12:30 | [reply](#)

More From de Villepin

"We are all aware of the gravity and the urgency of the moment," de Villepin told France-Inter radio. "We must act. It's the duty of the international community."

What is?

by **Gil** on Tue, 09/16/2003 - 00:01 | [reply](#)

De Villepin: Terrorism exploded in postwar Iraq

PARIS - Iraq has gone from being a terrorist-free country under Saddam Hussein to seeing an "explosion" of terrorism since the US-led war this year, French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin said Thursday in a speech directly contradicting White House assertions.

"There was no verified link between al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein's regime, no terrorism before the regime fell," de Villepin told a Paris conference of diplomats, scientists and businessmen focusing on religion and politics in Asia.

"And yet, afterwards, there has been an explosion of terrorism, an increase in opportunities of attacks and a more fragile situation," he said. ...

"We must make sure that each crisis on the international stage is well looked after, which explains the French position which strongly believes that, rather than treat the Iraqi crisis urgently and hastily, it would be better to first tackle a settlement of the Palestinian conflict," he said.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=7236>

by a reader on Sun, 10/12/2003 - 07:41 | [reply](#)

Villepin compares domestic critics to Nazi collaborators

Having recently emerged battered from national education strikes and months of street demonstrations over reduced retirement benefits, Jacques Chirac's administration is looking on with dismay at media encouragement for right-wing intellectual claims that France is now the weak man of Europe, mired in hypocrisy nationally and internationally, indifferent to popular needs such as care of the aged, and shaken by the aftershocks of vain defiance of the US-led war in Iraq. In short, that France is going down the pan.

"Reading these books, France is in agony, powerless and irretrievably condemned to decline," Dominique de Villepin, the suave but widely mistrusted Foreign Minister, complained over two pages in *Le Monde* last week, comparing today's prophets of doom to anti-republicans who collaborated with the Nazis.

<http://observer.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,6903,1061130,00.html>

by a reader on Sun, 10/12/2003 - 07:49 | [reply](#)

miggle's ghost

I would like to know just what "historic place and standing" that

inbred gentleman is talking about.

by a reader on Tue, 03/16/2004 - 16:56 | [reply](#)

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A New Word For “Idiotarian”?

In the light of recent **discussions** on **Setting The World To Rights**, our latest **poll** asks whether we need a new word for “idiotarian”. Vote now!

Sun, 07/20/2003 - 15:20 | [permalink](#)

Oliver Kamm

Oliver Kamm is one of the most trenchant writers and consistently clear thinkers on a wide variety of issues. Do not let the fact that he says he's left-wing put you off, for he is the opposite of loony. He is the opposite of idiotarian/villepinist. He is no friend to tyranny on the small scale or the large. And he does not spare anyone who is any of those things.

Yesterday's concise, rueful comment about one facet of contemporary anti-Semitism is a good **example** of his work. But then you should also read **this** about the current BBC/David Kelly scandal. And **this** about the alliance between far-left socialists and Islamofascists, and **this** about the moral bankruptcy of the once-proud *New Statesman* magazine. And **this**, and **this** ... oh just go and read the whole site.

Mon, 07/21/2003 - 16:17 | [permalink](#)

Indeed, an interesting blog. ...

Indeed, an interesting blog.
I didn't find anything in it to
justify the "left-wing" label.

by **Boris A.Kupersmidt** on Sat, 08/09/2003 - 20:52 | [reply](#)

Anti-Life

Why would *Life*, a group that opposes abortion because they see themselves as "pro-life", also **oppose in-vitro fertilisation (IVF)**? IVF is a medical technique which, for some couples, makes the difference between their being able to have a child or not. One might think that simple arithmetic would say that the forces of good and life are one up on such a deal since one life is more than none. But not according to *Life*. Why?

Life director Nuala Scarisbrick says that even the fulfilment of a couple's dream of parenthood does not justify what goes on inside the fertility clinic...

Guidelines limit the number of embryos that can be implanted into a patient at two, or three in exceptional circumstance - but often, a woman can produce many more than this number.

Once those considered to have the "best chance" of producing a pregnancy are selected, the rest are either frozen for later use, donated for research, or simply destroyed.

To most infertile couples, their desperation makes this an uncomfortable, but in the end unavoidable trade-off.

Nuala told BBC News Online: "You are deliberately setting out to create human beings - and then destroy them..."

The woman in charge of regulating IVF treatments in UK for much of the last decade, Dame Ruth Deech said that the argument was not necessarily so clear-cut.

She told BBC News Online: "I was told by one of the leading fertility researchers that, in nature, a sexually active woman will produce many fertilised embryos that fail to implant and are lost.

"When I heard that, I found it quite comforting with regard to this question."

Nevertheless, say *Life*, it presents a terrible ethical dilemma for any woman contemplating IVF - and one in which her desperation for a child may cloud her

judgment.

Life is similarly outraged by the idea of using **eggs from aborted fetuses** for fertility treatment and also disapproves of **stem cell research**.

Do you begin to see a pattern here? Can you think of an appropriate name for this pattern? **IVF, embryonic stem cell research** and similar treatments have the potential greatly to increase the quality of life of thinking human beings with hopes, dreams and aspirations and to create new thinking human beings where none would have existed otherwise. We find it chilling that some people are willing to sacrifice this for the sake of an entity with no more humanity than a nail clipping or a used condom.

Their position is anti-life.

Wed, 07/23/2003 - 20:50 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Sides are talking past each other

Groups and individuals like *Life* feel that it is immoral to kill one, many, or any human beings in order to give life to one. Their opinion is that "killing for life" is a contradiction. You write that the "entity" has no more life than any piece of human DNA lying around. Pro-life groups disagree.

by [Rob Michael](#) on Thu, 07/24/2003 - 19:48 | [reply](#)

Yuck.

Rob is right in the title of his response:

Only through a particular understanding of what "life" means--yours, naturally--does your conclusion make sense. But that conceptual understanding of what constitutes life is the very thing at issue. Your reasoning there is a bit circular. (You also mischaracterize the pro-life position as one whose aim it is to promote the highest sheer number of warm bodies, which isn't the case.)

It's also more than a little self-serving. I should emphasize that I'm pro-choice myself, before going on.

Even the most liberal availability of fertility services, like in vitro, will never outweigh the number of abortions that happen in a given year. The demand for the former won't ever outweigh that of the latter. So even your factual claim--that fertility services of the kind you mention will bring on a new era of life, life, everywhere--seems to be suspect.

The reasons for this are simple, and obvious. We are, individually, far more likely to be fertile than not, and far more likely to produce an unwanted pregnancy than to be unable to produce one at all. To

call their position "anti-life" is empirically and conceptually

dishonest.

Compare places which have very liberal law concerning birth control and widely available fertility services to places which have neither of those things. Whose rate of population growth is higher?

To pro-lifers, the value of life isn't a numbers game, and it says nothing good about the pro-choice position that its adherents can't even separate out these simple conceptual issues without loading them down with their own presuppositions. As a pro-choice person myself, I'm dismayed at how incoherent a moral and philosophical position is in evidence in posts like these. It is one reason among many that the pro-choice movement is starting to lose ground.

by a reader on Thu, 07/24/2003 - 20:22 | [reply](#)

Slippery Slopes

It might not apply to this group, but I think many people oppose advanced research with human embryos because they are afraid that even good techniques today might make "bad" techniques more likely to be acceptable in the future.

This is the "Slippery Slope" argument. There *are* cases where these sorts of arguments are valid. I agree with **The World** that *this is certainly not one of them*.

Eugene Volokh wrote a lengthy [analysis of slippery slope arguments](#) that might interest some readers.

by [Gil](#) on Thu, 07/24/2003 - 21:04 | [reply](#)

Mischaracterization

"A reader" above is correct, and it's strange to see such a bizarre mischaracterization of the pro-life position on this normally rational site.

Master of None

by [Michael Williams](#) on Thu, 07/24/2003 - 21:40 | [reply](#)

A story

"Mummy, where do I come from?"

"Well, dear... I was hoping you would ask that one day. Are you sitting comfortably? (Mummy starts) Once upon a time there was this dead abnormal foetus which is a creature that is not quite a baby yet (shows picture) and they sliced it in bits, took some eggs from it, mixed them with a bit of random sperm, and you got to be one of the lucky eggs that was fertilised, isn't it wonderful?"

by a reader on Thu, 07/24/2003 - 22:27 | [reply](#)

Re: "Mummy, where do I come from?"

there was this dead abnormal foetus which is a creature that is not quite a baby yet (shows picture) and they sliced it in bits, took some eggs from it, mixed them with a bit of random sperm, and you got to be one of the lucky eggs that was fertilised, isn't it wonderful?"

And before it was a yucky abnormal creature that was not quite a baby yet, it was a bunch of chemicals. And before that, it was various pieces of chewed-up cow. And before that, grass. And before that, mostly just air and water. And out of all that miscellaneous stuff which otherwise no one would give tuppence for, because of the knowledge and creativity and skill of various people, a couple who would otherwise not have been able to have a child, now do.

And yes, all of that *is* absolutely wonderful. What part of it isn't?

by [David Deutsch](#) on Thu, 07/24/2003 - 22:56 | [reply](#)

Re: "Mummy, where do I come from?"

Hmmm....I suppose that in the case of ordinary conception this cheerful little tale would go something like:

"Once upon a time there were two special gametes(which are really little creatures that aren't quite a baby, yet(shows diagram), so Mommy and Daddy joined their bodies together just below the belly, made a lot of noise, caused the neighbors to wonder if someone was being tortured, and, at the end of all this, Daddy managed to squirt his little creature into Mommy(along with about 100 million similar ones that just ended up being discarded), where it joined with Mommy's little creature (thus preventing that creature's excretion about two weeks later) and started growing and dividing and eventually became you."

So? What is the point here? It is conceivable(pun only slightly intended;-) that this story is what it appears to be on the surface(a simple explanation of how the child came to be) but, given the use of rather loaded terms and the sarcastic tone of the whole thing, it is probably meant to implicitly reinforce the idea that This is A Very Bad Thing That Was Done, and we should press our all-wise shepards in DC, London, Brussels or wherever to Do Something About It, preferably with huge fines and long prison terms attached for Evil People who dare to defy The People's Will in the matter. Apart from being an atrocious message to give a child who was conceived in such a way, it promotes the now-commonplace silliness about stem cells/cloning/biotech/anything remotely similar or related. It promotes the idea that there is something inherently mysterious or incomprehensible about how humans develop, and that nothing good can come from modifying or interfering with the process in any way.

And this is perniciously wrong, since it gets in the way of creating very important knowledge, namely how to create new people under

various circumstances, and keep them(and already-existing people)

alive, happy, and healthy for longer and longer.

Brian

by [bk_2112](#) on Fri, 07/25/2003 - 01:25 | [reply](#)

The Strange Ironies of Life

'Only through a particular understanding of what "life" means--yours, naturally--does your conclusion make sense. But that conceptual understanding of what constitutes life is the very thing at issue. Your reasoning there is a bit circular. (You also mischaracterize the pro-life position as one whose aim it is to promote the highest sheer number of warm bodies, which isn't the case.)'

You don't find it even a little bit ironic that a group that chooses to name itself *Life* is undertaking a policy that systematically makes the quality of life of many people a lot poorer than it would be otherwise? (For such is the real point if you had bothered to read it closely enough.)

To quote:

'IVF, embryonic stem cell research and similar treatments have the potential greatly *to increase the quality of life* of thinking human beings with hopes, dreams and aspirations *and* to create new thinking human beings where none would have existed otherwise.'

'To pro-lifers, the value of life isn't a numbers game, and it says nothing good about the pro-choice position that its adherents can't even separate out these simple conceptual issues without loading them down with their own presuppositions. As a pro-choice person myself, I'm dismayed at how incoherent a moral and philosophical position is in evidence in posts like these. It is one reason among many that the pro-choice movement is starting to lose ground.'

The pro-choice position is not incoherent. Anything that thinks, i.e. - creates new knowledge, counts morally anything that doesn't think doesn't count morally. Hence, embryos, cows and rocks don't count, but thinking people do.

Nor would anyone sensible deny that anti-abortion types don't see morality as a numbers game, the argument above counts on them not seeing it that way, since quality of life comes into the argument. However, since they draw the moral line in the wrong place their views have rather uncomfortable moral consequences, like being willing to allow people to die or go childless rather than destroy a small clump of cells, hence the characterisation of their position as pro-life seems a bit inappropriate.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Fri, 07/25/2003 - 01:31 | [reply](#)

Re: Ironies

Alan, by your reckoning of what "counts morally" children and

mentally disabled people don't count. It isn't a stretch at all to say that the same requirement - creating new knowledge - would rule out people who are comatose or senile. Are you really ready to say that children, Down syndrom people, and the elderly don't have moral worth?

And, since you used the ability to create knowledge as a measure of when something has moral worth, could you perhaps tell me when an embryo is advanced enough to have crossed that line and attained enough worth to deserve the protections we afford other moral worthies?

by **Rob Michael** on Fri, 07/25/2003 - 02:46 | [reply](#)

my fucking god

have you noticed the point of IVF is to take sperm and egg cells that would NOT become a person and put them 2gether to make a person?

if that's not sufficient, then i have a question for the pro-lifers (so i won't mischaracterise your position :-D): are condoms murder?

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 07/25/2003 - 06:48 | [reply](#)

children don't think????

Dear Rob Michael,

Are you seriously suggesting that children, Down's Syndrome people and the elderly don't think? People start creating knowledge the moment they emerge from the womb, and stop when their hearts stop beating. Not all of them are writing novels or splitting atoms, but that doesn't mean they aren't thinking.

Sheesh.

Emma

by a reader on Fri, 07/25/2003 - 09:33 | [reply](#)

Elliot and reader

Elliot,

Pro-lifer's aren't objecting to making and carrying to term one fertilized egg. They're objecting because IVF requires the making of many fertilized eggs that are then destroyed while only one are two are implanted. Pro-lifers believe that each conceived person (fertilized egg) deserves to be brought to term.

Oh, and Elliot, using a condom wouldn't be murder because its use doesn't kill a human being. It only prevents the conception of one (which is also regarded as morally wrong, though less wrong than

murder).

Emma,

How do you know babies start creating knowledge from the moment they emerge from the womb?? They can't show it. Why is a baby outside the womb creating knowledge and a baby at the beginning of the third trimester not creating knowledge? You, like Alan, are drawing a line at birth that does not exist.

by **Rob Michael** on Fri, 07/25/2003 - 14:29 | [reply](#)

A Question

Are "pro-life" women queueing up to host and raise the fertilized embryos that would otherwise be discarded?

It seems to me that if they really believed that these are human beings, if they had any interest in being parents they'd want to rescue these children and prevent their murders. Since adoptive parents prefer to get children as young as possible, this seems ideal.

Are they doing this?

I realize that the natural parents might object to this, but I suspect that many wouldn't.

by **Gil** on Fri, 07/25/2003 - 16:41 | [reply](#)

fertilised eggs

Can you explain why the moment the egg becomes fertilised was chosen for when pro-lifers consider it a person? It seems arbitrary to me.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 07/25/2003 - 18:25 | [reply](#)

Roe, Roe, Roe Your Boat....

Gil,

You write that pro-lifers don't actually believe that embryos are children. You proceed to that conclusion by stating that if pro-lifers did believe, then they would be clamoring to "adopt" the embryos in order to preserve them. Even if we were to set aside the question of who "owns" those embryos and who has rights over those embryos (such as the court-created right to interact with one's genetic offspring),

you would still face the question of responsibility. If I were to go to a town hall meeting and shoot at the mayor, no one would support my defense that my fellow townspeople should had a responsibility

disarm me and that I am therefore not responsible for the moral

harm that I have caused (whether I hit him or not).

It would be a charitable act to "adopt" the embryos and charitable acts are *by definition* not a duty or responsibility owed to society at large. Your contention that a charitable act would prove the integrity of pro-lifers does not support the position that IVF is morally permissible.

And it seems a rather nasty policy to attack a group's sincerity in order to cast doubt on their message. I see very few pro-lifers attempting to say that "everyone really knows that humanity begins at birth, those pro-choice folks are just too wrapped up in being right to admit it." An attack like that on the group *Life* or even on the Catholic Church through the ongoing scandal is not just an attack on the integrity of the organization, but an attempt to nullify in the public eye the values and point-of-view that underlie it.

Elliot,

The moment of conception (chosen by pro-lifers as the starting of personhood) is no more arbitrarily chosen than the moment of birth (chosen by pro-choicers and others as the point at which we acknowledge basic human rights owed). Christian pro-lifers who rely on the scripture as a source of guidance would refer you to Jeremiah 1:5 "*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.*" For non-Christian pro-lifers, it becomes a question of what rights are owed to whom and when. The general answers are that human rights are possessed by *humans* (duh) and that they possess these during their life, but not before it and not after it. The endpoint of life is perhaps less difficult to pin down than the beginning, owing to technology that helps us pinpoint heart failure and brain-death and cessation of activity, but even then our doctors and health-care providers find opportunity to delineate the point at which a person no longer has the right to control their own destiny (as when hospitals and insurance providers order the removal of feeding tubes and hydrating drips to save money).

So, human rights are possessed by *living* humans. The relevant question for us is: are embryos alive and are they human. They are unquestionably alive. The smallest bacteria (and viruses too, say some scientists) are accorded the label "life." If you're willing to grant that an embryo is alive then the question is narrowed even further to whether or not it is human. Clearly a single piece of DNA is not human. It is a piece of a human. How many pieces make up a human? This is an unanswerable trick question -- after all, a person does not lose rights if he loses a piece of himself, say a toe or a hand. He doesn't even lose rights if he loses a piece of his brain or ceases brain-functioning completely (in many cases it is said that such people can be "brought back" from the edge). Even total disruption of brain processes does not remove a human from his or her rights (as in an epileptic fit). The reason I took the time to point all this out is to demonstrate that humanity does not rest solely on one body part or any sum total of human pieces. In the absence, then, of any clear biological guide to when a human life begins, many people err on the side of caution, deciding that it is better to not accidentally kill people. Even unknowingly killing someone is

generally frowned upon in our society. Along similar lines, I personally believe that a duty is owed to (or a right possessed by) any probable-humans (such as embryos). So many times when referring to someone who has died young we hear that "They had such a life in store for them that they will never get the chance to have..." Clearly, the potential for life is valued in our society. This is an even better indicator that potential humans (like embryos) possess some right.

by [Rob Michael](#) on Fri, 07/25/2003 - 20:25 | [reply](#)

My Question

Rob,

I didn't write what you say I wrote. I understand how you could infer what you did, but I was genuinely curious if this was happening.

I didn't mean to suggest that a lack of this adoption would prove that "pro-lifers" don't believe what they say. I just thought that such a belief would lead to an interest in such adoption, and if it isn't happening, that would require some explanation (and I can think of a few, but none incredibly compelling).

So, again. Is it happening? And if not, why not?

by [Gil](#) on Fri, 07/25/2003 - 21:00 | [reply](#)

who does the thinking?

Dear Rob Michael,

Leaving aside the question of EXACTLY when life begins (I said that humans are thinking as soon as they leave the womb not so much to define a starting point for life, but because all of us can agree that we can see them doing it from that point on), may I ask the question again that I really wanted an answer to?

Were you suggesting that children, Down's Syndrome people and the elderly don't create new knowledge? [way up in a comment entitled Ironies]

Emma

by a reader on Fri, 07/25/2003 - 22:01 | [reply](#)

Thinking as a rule...

Gil,

I'm sorry I took your comments the wrong way. To my knowledge, no attempts to "adopt" unwanted embryos have been made. As for explanations, the most readily that come to mind are (as I mentioned above) questions of ownership of embryos and the

possibility that the genetic parents may come to feel that they have

a right to see their genetic offspring. Also, it is not generally recognized that people who advocate conventional adoption should adopt every home-less child they can. That in no way diminishes their advocacy of adoption. For instance, though I support adoption, I am in no position to raise a child. Though I lack the opportunity to raise a child, my support of adoption as a general principle is not diminished.

Emma,

My comments in "Re:Ironies" were directed at Alan who claimed that anything that thinks (creates knowledge) has moral worth. I think its arguable that babies, the mentally infirm (through disability or age), and the comatose don't have thoughts like the rest of humanity. The difference may be in brain structure or brain function, but in either case the brain is not functioning normally. I wrote that to point out that the lack of normal brain function does not mean those people do not have rights. In the same way, people having epileptic fits are also regarded as human life that has rights, even though they are not thinking during their fits and their brains lose all "normal" functioning. All of my discussion of thoughts and thinking is to provide examples of why thinking as a general rule of the measure of moral worth is not a particularly defensible principle. Using "thinking" as the rule may have unintended consequences for people who want to declare birth the point at which human life begins. In fact, our technologies are advanced enough to get EEGs of unborn babies. These show that there is brain activity very early in the development of a foetus. Thus, Alan's rule that thinking marks moral worth would extend moral worth to unborn children at least to some point father back in their development than birth.

by **Rob Michael** on Sat, 07/26/2003 - 06:48 | [reply](#)

abortion

Rob Michael,

i agree pro-choicers who think birth = human are arbitrary. however, some of us prefer thinking=human, because that is the defining characteristic of humanity.

i also agree we should err on the side of caution. but if a foetus doesn't yet have a brain with electrical impulses in it, we know it doesn't think yet, so we are erring on the side of caution very strongly.

if it does not yet think, it is just a mishmash of chemicals that can't be upset by being destroyed anymore than a rock. its moral value, until it does think, comes only from actual people (namely its parents) wanting to have a child. if they don't, as a libertarian, i acknowledge they have a legal right to have an abortion (just like my neighbors could destroy their TV instead of keeping it, or instead of giving it to me, even if I want it). whether this was the right decision is another question (but in the general case of

accidental/unwanted pregnancy, i say it *is* the right answer).

to disagree I'm fairly sure you need to believe in souls or somesuch...

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sat, 07/26/2003 - 18:53 | [reply](#)

Quick! Kill it before it thinks!

Somewhere during this discussion two qualifiers were established in order to determine if a foetus possessed the rights afforded to living humans. The fact that a foetus is a living organism was not questioned. The second qualification was discussed in Rob Michael's post 'Roe Roe...' above. From that it has now been asserted by Elliot that a foetus does not possess thought and thus does not have moral worth. This is, in my opinion, a bad deduction for two reasons.

The first reason is a catch twenty-two scenario. Elliot demonstrated that a foetus doesn't think and thus has no moral value other than the value placed on it by wanting parents. This doesn't change the fact that the foetus will grow, will develop a brain, and will think. By killing the foetus before it can think doesn't mean it was never going to think. Given time, the foetus will develop thought and be of worth to more than just wanting parents. To absolve a person from wrongdoing concerning the destruction of a foetus simply because it was not thinking at the time does not allow that the foetus was eventually going to think. A harsher understanding; killing an undeveloped foetus who doesn't think and killing a five-year-old child who does think accomplish the same thing: the destruction of a living organism **capable** of thought.

The second reason involves an understanding of moral worth. Both Rob and Elliot fail to address the possibility that an organism/animal/human might have moral worth simply because it is alive and not because of any inalienable rights. For instance, who among pro-lifers would kill a stray dog? The dog has no owner who values the cast out. It is even debatable that the beast has thought, at least in the manner that makes human thought valuable. Despite this apparent lack of value most people would find it morally wrong to kill the dog. Why? Because the killing of an animal (except for food) is unarguably wrong. It has been ingrained into most people that it is wrong to kill anything. Some go as far as to say that ending a tree's life is wrong. Obviously trees can't possess thought and yet they have an apparent worth.

For these two reasons I reject Elliot's assertion that unwanted fetuses can be aborted simply because they are mishmashes of chemicals that can't be upset. I attest that a foetus will become **capable** of thought and is worth more than dogs, trees, or Elliot. I'm just kidding Elliot. I apologize. I couldn't resist.

by [Tom Anthony](#) on Sun, 07/27/2003 - 07:30 | [reply](#)

Can fetuses become human alone?

no, they can't. they need active help from the mother.

"this doesn't change the fact that the fetus will grow, will develop a brain, and will think." -- no, all it takes to kill one is to fail to help it w/ nutrients, housing, etc

also i don't see the content in the claim that a fetus is "alive". are computers alive? cats? what's it matter? the standard use of the word has a lot to do with motion, but in an age of cars that seems kinda silly.

"Because the killing of an animal (except for food) is unarguably wrong." -- oh, well if it's *unarguable* i guess you win...

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 07/27/2003 - 18:50 | [reply](#)

Good Point

Tom Anthony makes a very strong case against the idea that a fetus starts to have moral value when it begins to think like a human.

After all, if he himself "couldn't resist" insulting Elliot in an online post that permits previewing and editing before posting, then perhaps humans don't have a mind that can create knowledge and control the actions of the body. Perhaps they *are* just slaves to simple electro-chemical reactions just like trees and stray dogs.

by **Gil** on Sun, 07/27/2003 - 19:17 | [reply](#)

I can't leave for a minute...

Maybe we could get back on track.

Specifically, I'd like to address Elliot's post "abortion." He writes that "thinking is the defining characteristic of humanity." I only have a slight problem with his formulation and I promise I won't resort to the existence of souls to disagree. When you say "thinking" I'm pretty sure you are referring to "human thinking" and maybe even "normal human thinking." After all, dogs, rats, and apes think, but they don't possess rights. This idea that human thinking should entitle one to human rights is a bad standard for several reasons. I mention many of them above, but it seems that I wasn't clear enough.

According to the "human thinking" standard, one has to fulfill two requirements to have human rights. They must be human and they must be thinking. The question of whether a fetus is human was addressed in the last paragraph of my comment "Roe, Roe, Roe your boat...." and was not met with any opposing comments. I will

simply refer you there for consideration of this first part of the "human thinking" standard.

The second part of this standard is the most important. Basically, it states that thinking things possess rights in accordance with their type. Thus, thinking humans have human rights (and maybe thinking dogs have canine rights -- whatever they may be). The reason I phrase it like this is because it is not clear whether proponents of this standard believe that thinking humans possess rights *because* they are thinking or that the fact that they are thinking is merely an indicator that they have rights and the thinking part is not necessarily the source of the rights. On the one hand, I am inclined to believe that proponents believe the latter because obviously people retain their rights when they are sleeping/comatose/vegetative/having an epileptic fit (and thus not thinking) and therefore the source of the rights is not in their thought. On the other hand, it could be that we're playing a little fast and loose with words and when proponents of the standard wrote "thinking" for "human thinking" they meant "human brain activity." With this clarification, human rights would then be possessed by things by reason of their human brain activity. As I mentioned in a previous comment, legal rights are still retained by people in a vegetative state -- in other words, *when they have no brain activity*. It seems that most people believe that human rights are retained as well.

This, at the very least, makes clear that rights are not associated with human thinking/brain activity *alone*. It is much more reasonable to believe there is something else either by itself or in addition to human thinking that indicates the possession of human rights.

As for Elliot's comments on life in his post "Can fetuses become human alone?", I don't seriously believe that his position rests on the idea that fetuses are not alive. This, too, has already been covered without rejection in my post "Roe, Roe, Roe your boat." Fetuses clearly are alive. The real question that Thomas was trying to address was whether the state of being alive gets them anything (like rights). I'm also puzzled by Elliot's remark that fetuses rely on the mother and therefore do not possess rights. That is equally true of a baby and yet the baby has rights. It is a real stretch to say that dependency on another negates rights.

by [Rob Michael](#) on Mon, 07/28/2003 - 00:57 | [reply](#)

Life or Something Like It

In Rob Michael's post 'I can't leave for a minute...' he briefly touches on a concept of animal rights (though his post is in no way is about animal rights.) In his words,

'...maybe thinking dogs have canine rights -- whatever they may be.'

I bring this up because I think it is important to note that in our

fifty states and the District of Columbia animals are afforded anti-cruelty statutes. All fifty states and the District have these statutes that are intended to prevent the mistreatment of animals, wild or tame. While these statutes don't confer any rights upon animals, they do indicate that the mistreatment or destruction of a living organism will not go unpunished. It is from these statutes that I gather the population of the United States believes in the inviolability of living creatures as I stated in a previous post.

'...the killing of an animal (except for food) is unarguably wrong.'

A refusal to see a fetus as a living organism, even one lacking humanity, is a way in which people can assuage their inherent dislike of killing living things. Those that don't outright disregard fetuses as being alive find other methods of assuaging their feelings. For example, the flippant manner in which Elliot disregards the importance of whether a fetus is alive or not.

by **Tom Anthony** on Mon, 07/28/2003 - 06:26 | [reply](#)

Logical Fallacies Are Fun

the subject line auto-completed *g*

anyway, the majority of ppl in the USA thinking somethign doesn't make it true.

and you haven't told me A) what "alive" means and B) what that matters

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 07/28/2003 - 08:27 | [reply](#)

Who said anything about truth???

Life is a property of all plants and animals until the time of their death. Life is a period of time, from creation until death. 'Alive' means life in existence or operation, though not in the sense that computers and cars operate. This is important because, like I said earlier, killing living things is wrong, human or animal or other. This is not something new or unheard of. Thousands of years of religious morals and hundreds of years of American statute indicate that this concept isn't unusual. In case you didn't know, the majority rules in this country (in general) and statutes that reflect the majority opinion are upheld as 'right' in this country.

That's what I mean when I say alive and why it is important.

by **Tom Anthony** on Tue, 07/29/2003 - 19:10 | [reply](#)

truth

oh, my bad about truth. next time you assert something i'll just

assume you mean it's *false* instead.

anyway, A) how do you decide what is or is not alive?

B) if 'majority rules' is how we decide what is true, how do we decide which propositions got a majority? it can't be by taking a vote on that, because of the infinite regress issue.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 07/29/2003 - 19:53 | [reply](#)

Sanctity of life? Really?

The question of "life" is ridiculous. Plenty of things that we do not hesitate to kill are "alive." Bacteria are alive. Mosquitos are alive. Cockroaches are alive. Ticks and mites and tapeworms... all life. Only certain people on the fringes revere this life so vehemently that they refuse to kill these innocent creatures.

The only difference between the life of a cockroach and the life of a zygote, embryo, or early stage fetus is genetic makeup. Please argue the relevant points and not broad concepts like "life" that have no specific bearing. Everyone knows that a fetus is comprised of living cells. So what?

by **grs** on Wed, 07/30/2003 - 05:24 | [reply](#)

i think ur being being a bit

i think ur being being a bit one sided and selective in your description there. asshole.

by a reader on Tue, 05/17/2005 - 02:12 | [reply](#)

Further Thoughts on the Death Penalty

We recently **remarked**, in regard to the World War 2 spy Augustin Preucil, that "We are, as a rule, opposed to the death penalty". More specifically, although we do not oppose the death penalty on principle, we are opposed to its use in advanced countries under present conditions. An anonymous reader asked **why**.

It is because human beings are valuable. Destroying one requires justification. We do not mean that as a pious slogan or aspiration. Even very bad people are valuable in the literal sense that their brains contain irreplaceable knowledge from which innocent people might benefit. This might range from practical information about crimes that others might be planning, to memories of the experiences and bad decisions that made them criminals (which might interest historians and psychologists in the future), to the knowledge of how to put a smile on their own children's faces.

This value is finite, but it might be large, and paradoxically, sometimes bad people are valuable precisely because they are so bad. A couple of days ago, as **Bill Whittle** put it: "two of the most malignant and cruel mass murderers, rapists and torturers to ever walk the earth have departed the planet". Saddam Hussein's sons. Since they apparently chose to die rather than be arrested, the issue of the death penalty does not arise, but suppose they had been captured alive. Surely taking such prisoners would have been much like finding a stack of fat dossiers marked "WMD Concealment Plans", "Our Agents in the US", and "Secret Deals With France". Could it be right to burn such dossiers half read, just to give some bad people "what they deserve"?

Yes, sometimes it could. Sometimes the trial and judicial execution of the tyrant is a legitimate war aim. But it also seems obvious that at other times there is more to be gained by using the information in the tyrant's brain to save lives, prevent future wars and advance human knowledge. And what is true of great tyrants can be true of petty murderers too. Moreover, if we accept that sometimes it is right to keep bad people alive precisely because they have committed terrible crimes, then we have a further argument that the death penalty should be reserved not just for exceptional crimes but for exceptional situations: for can it be right to say to two murderers: "you will be spared because an evil as great as yours needs to be studied, but you will die for your crime because it was

not evil enough”?

Fri, 07/25/2003 - 23:48 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Huh?

I find this post quite confusing.

I don't see any support in it for the assertion that we might want to keep someone alive indefinitely just because his crime was so evil. You have only described the value of extracting certain specialized knowledge that he might have. This is not the same thing (although there is some psychological and historical value that might correlate with this).

But, surely, this is only a reason to keep him alive *temporarily*. At some point, we're unlikely to get anything more useful from him than from a typical murderer.

And choosing to not execute some because we might not execute others as quickly doesn't make any sense to me. We want to treat people fairly, not equally. If one person deserves execution, then another person's treatment should be irrelevant.

I expected **The World's** reason to avoid executions to have something to do with our fallibility and the moral horror of executing the innocent.

by [Gil](#) on Sat, 07/26/2003 - 00:28 | [reply](#)

Reasons

Responding to Gil's comments:

I don't see any support in it for the assertion that we might want to keep someone alive indefinitely just because his crime was so evil. You have only described the value of extracting certain specialized knowledge that he might have. This is not the same thing (although there is some psychological and historical value that might correlate with this).

Well, if the psychological and historical value might correlate with the degree of evil, then it can happen that it is right to keep a criminal alive because his crime was so evil, can't it?

But, surely, this is only a reason to keep him alive temporarily.

How long is temporarily? A criminal might reveal decades years later that he had committed additional crimes (thus exonerating someone else who had been under suspicion). A researcher might want to interview all murderers in a given category, to test the theory that a certain type of childhood experience predisposes a person to murder. A historian might want to interview a tyrant

decades later to test a startling new theory about the events in

which the tyrant too part.

We want to treat people fairly, not equally. If one person deserves execution, then another person's treatment should be irrelevant.

No it shouldn't. If a penal system gives incentives to evil people to commit worse crimes than they otherwise would, that is an undesirable property.

I expected **The World's** reason to avoid executions to have something to do with our fallibility and the moral horror of executing the innocent.

Well, the title is "Further Thoughts on the Death Penalty", not "The Complete Case Against the Death Penalty".

by **David Deutsch** on Sat, 07/26/2003 - 17:24 | [reply](#)

Who Should Pay?

Who does **The World** think should pay for keeping murderers alive for the potential research value of some of them?

Do you say that this cost should be socialized and borne by the unwilling? Today, this seems to be the only option.

Or, should just those who think it's worthwhile to maintain the health and confinement of murderers bear the full cost of doing so?

If it's the latter, do you expect researchers (and their voluntary benefactors) to be willing to pay for this themselves?

And again, today we don't really have a mechanism for transferring these costs to those who want to bear them. So is **The World** advocating, in the current political system, stealing from the unwilling to finance the research interests of others?

by **Gil** on Sat, 07/26/2003 - 21:16 | [reply](#)

Reductio Ad Absurdum

Gil,

You could say the same thing about the war, couldn't you?

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 07/26/2003 - 22:07 | [reply](#)

Public Goods

I could, but I wouldn't.

I recognize a difference between government activities that are

necessary and sufficient to protect our liberty in ways that require force vs. engaging in all other imaginable activities that purport to provide public goods.

I can see an argument for requiring people to support (financially) the former activity to some extent (although I'd like to move away from this involuntary support as soon as possible) but I can't see any such moral argument for the latter.

by [Gil](#) on Sun, 07/27/2003 - 19:02 | [reply](#)

Harm-preventing versus Benefit-conferring

Gil is right on target when he separates government activity that seeks to prevent harm to the state and activity that seeks to confer a benefit on the state. In fact, our legal system also makes a distinction between the two. When determining if the government has performed a taking of property requiring compensation according to the Fifth Amendment, the courts have noted that when the government acts to prevent harm, no compensation is required, but when the government acts merely to create a benefit, compensation to the owner *is* required. If the same standard were applied to David's argument above, the benefit-conferring act of preserving prisoners' lives would be set apart from the harm-preventing act of the war on terror. This is why the rationale proposed for opposing the death penalty in the original post and in David's response are wrong. Were it true that there is a sufficient benefit to prolonging people's lives, it would mean that killing anyone *ever* would be a bad thing. And I doubt very much that the author believes that (killing in self-defense and in war come to mind).

If capital punishment is a bad thing, it's bad not because there is some benefit to society still to be gained in the prisoners (after all, it would be beneficial to society to ban smoking and alcohol altogether and few libertarians are arguing for MORE government restriction) but because of something else. David's rationale are utilitarian in their entirety. They are based only on how much good can be gained or how much harm can be prevented by preserving prisoners' lives. The utilitarian conception is *completely lacking* in room for human rights. The very definition of a right is something that is possessed and retained by a person *even though* such possession may not be good for society as a whole. I personally, and a great many other people, do believe in things like legal and human rights. One of them is the right to life. And unlike the rights to freedom and autonomy which can be curtailed in individuals who too greatly infringe other peoples rights (like criminals), the right to life is not one that is capable of being limited without killing the person. Thus, the object of the death penalty is not to prevent further infringement of a person of other people's rights, but to punish, to take revenge on a criminal. And I am not willing to support punishment or revenge as an object.

If the death penalty were the only solution for preventing the

infringement of others' rights, then it would serve a purpose other than revenge. But, since life imprisonment does fulfill that objective, capital punishment infringes too much upon the rights of the criminal.

by [Rob Michael](#) on Mon, 07/28/2003 - 01:30 | [reply](#)

purposes other than revenge

Rob Michael makes some important and thought-provoking points. I'd like to address one in particular: that the death penalty is immoral if no purpose is served other than revenge, and that prevention of the infringement of the rights of others is insufficient by itself, since life imprisonment can handle that.

Good as far as it goes. But there are circumstances where life imprisonment is simply not good enough. To cite a case that's surely been brought up on this site before, consider life imprisonment for convicted terrorists.

Historically speaking, terrorists under a life sentence typically do not serve out their terms; they are traded, as part of "negotiation" or under the threat of more terror. (Right now, for example, Palestinian terrorists, with blood on their hands, are being released from Israeli prisons -- in part because the United States insisted on it, as a "good-will gesture".)

It hardly needs to be said that this gives no incentive for convicted terrorists to fear a life sentence. And released terrorists have gone on to commit more crimes, over and over again.

In other words, a strong case can be made for the execution of convicted terrorists with blood on their hands. (Yes, in some cases, intelligence benefits may be gained from them; they certainly will share no secrets once they are dead. But they will likewise share no secrets if they are released... and releasing them has its own dangers.)

I am not trying to make the case for a death penalty, for I am by no means certain I have made up my own mind on the subject. I do wish to point out other possibilities than those mentioned so far in this forum.

One other thought. It has long been my view that, by violating the rules of civilized conduct in a society, a criminal to some degree is relieved of the privileges of that society. (For example, a consistent traffic offender may have his license revoked, and have to do without a luxury his fellows take for granted. A more serious offense might be punishable by imprisonment; the criminal's right to freedom is temporarily revoked.)

A more serious punishment (one rarely used in the West anymore) would be eviction -- revocation of one's citizenship, and forcible relocation outside the nation's borders. (Perhaps one reason this is no longer used much is the question of where to send them. Once it could safely be assumed that territory outside one's own borders was lawless no-man's-land; this is no longer true, and forcing one's

own malcontents on others, friend or foe, has consequences.)

The pattern is simple: by violating the rules that hold our society together, one has given up claim to enjoying the privileges of that society. Ideally, such privileges should be withheld in proportion to the crime that was committed; more serious crimes would result in fewer rights held by the criminal.

Apply this to the death penalty. Under what circumstances would a criminal have violated the rules of civilized society to such a degree that, not simply his liberty, but his life, becomes forfeit? What crimes would justify such a response? And if you believe that NO crimes warrant that response, why not?

respectfully yours,
Daniel in Medford

by a reader on Mon, 07/28/2003 - 20:19 | [reply](#)

Do we have rights?

Great post Daniel. You've touched on some issues I wanted to address, but didn't for lack of time. You wrote that it may be right to execute convicted terrorists (and maybe other so-called political prisoners). But, to be perfectly clear, support for the death penalty in that instance is contingent upon the failure of a life-sentence without possibility of parole to take a criminal out of society. Even I would support capital punishment in that specific situation.

You correctly note that rights are denied to criminals, often in proportion to their crimes. I mentioned this in my comment, "Harm-preventing versus Benefit-conferring," when I noted that denial of the right of freedom and right of autonomy are central to our justice system. Those rights can be ignored for a set amount of time or indefinitely (in a life sentence) depending on the nature of the crime. But the right of living is, in my opinion, very different from one of autonomy and freedom simply because the any neglect of that right *simultaneously* and *permanently* denies every other right possessed by a human. Society when imprisoning someone is collectively saying to the criminal, "We no longer recognize your right of autonomy because you infringe too much on the rights of others and by your captivity for so many years such infringement will be prevented and deterred in the future." The key here is that the right is still possessed by the criminal even though he has lost the recognition of that right by his community. When society executes someone, it is denying the *very* existence of the right of

living (and concurrently every other right possessed

by that person).

Human rights are not something that are contingent upon society. They are possessed by fact of our humanity, not because we belong to a particularly liberal civilization. The Founders knew that rights weren't something bestowed by a government. In fact, they were so concerned that strong government would infringe upon rights that some of them insisted on a Bill of Rights that limited government action. I cannot emphasize enough that I am human and therefore in possession of human rights. Were we to deny a person's human rights we would in actuality be denying their humanity. We would be saying to that person, "You are no better than the beasts."

by a reader on Tue, 07/29/2003 - 13:36 | [reply](#)

Good knowledge, maybe good future too

Even very bad people are valuable in the literal sense that their brains contain irreplaceable knowledge from which innocent people might benefit.

I used to think that murderers' lives should be spared because they had the *potential* to reform and lead good lives after their jail sentence was over (which might benefit the lives of others, but let's not go there..)

Of course, in believing this I was assigning moral worth on the basis of possible futures rather than on present status. So in that respect my understanding was no better than that of the "pro-life" gene freaks!

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Sat, 08/02/2003 - 00:10 | [reply](#)

Death Penalty, Costs, Regulations

I'm a bit out of place here, not being a libertarian, but I have a few comments.

Re **Who Should Pay?** Imposing death is a cheap, quick and easy way of dealing with an individual who presents a problem, so it's always a temptation, even the first resort rather than the last. There is always a political constituency for any proposal to expand the use of death as a solution. And any use of death which is legitimized tends to outgrow the limits the original enactors had in mind. The end state of progress in that direction could be horrific.

Back in the 1970s, opponents of legalized abortion predicted that it would lead to euthanasia and other more casual applications of death. Those of us, like myself, who believed in a woman's right to control her own body disputed this. But it looks like the abortion precedent has indeed emboldened other advocates of death. Some are pushing to open the door to the horror of widespread legal euthanasia, by way of so-called "physician assisted suicide". And

the death penalty for criminals is reaching new heights of popularity in America.

George R. Stewart, in a famous passage of the novel *Earth Abides*, tells of a post-apocalyptic community which votes unanimously to put a miscreant to death. He portrays this decision as the beginning of "the state". But the difference between that isolated and vulnerable settlement and our current society, with its elaborate justice system and prisons, could hardly be greater. Apart perhaps from certain wartime situations described elsewhere on this page, it is hardly ever "necessary" for us to kill a convicted criminal.

Moreover, to give our judges and juries and governors the authority to put a person to death is, in my view, deeply corrupting to the political system.

Re **Harm-preventing versus Benefit-conferring**: This isn't an accurate statement of the law on this point. Ordinarily, government actions under the police power (i.e., laws or regulations to protect the public health, safety and welfare) may have economic consequences to individuals, but they are not owed any compensation. Government action to take real estate require compensation to the property owner under the 5th Amendment.

(Obviously police power actions are usually harm-preventing, and taking real estate is usually benefit-conferring, but that is not the distinction between the two concepts. For example, a regulation may promote a benefit, or eminent domain can be used to abate a hazard.)

The *Pennsylvania Coal* case in 1922 created the concept that a regulation may equal a taking of real estate, invoking the 5th amendment compensation requirement (or an invalidation of the regulation). Subsequent cases clarified that mere diminution in value of a property (e.g., by zoning it for residential rather than commercial use) is not a 5th Amendment "taking". Indeed, it is rare for property owners to successfully claim a regulatory taking.

Moreover, there are many other kinds of economic interests, besides ownership of interests in real estate, which may be negatively affected by a regulatory action. You could have a warehouse full of valuable widgets which a new regulation suddenly makes worthless. A traffic control order could make a street one-way and put your gas station out of business. A restaurant inspector could force you to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars buying new refrigerators. None of these have even the theoretical basis for a legal claim against the government for compensation. Nor should they.

by [Larry Kestenbaum](#) on Sat, 08/02/2003 - 06:07 | [reply](#)

Some are pushing to open the ...

Some are pushing to open the door to the horror of widespread legal euthanasia, by way of so-called

"physician assisted suicide". And the death penalty for

criminals is reaching new heights of popularity in America.

What bad is there in euthanasia? I for one, find it horrifying that such measures are illegal.

There are groups of people who are freezing human bodies after death, to enable their revival at a later time, when their bodies can be fixed and revived. If I were to catch a dangerous brain destroying disease now that would surely lead to my death in say a year, I would rather take my chances with cryonics now than wait my brain and self to rot for the whole year (after which there would probably be nothing left to save of me).

So the true horror is that euthanasia is illegal.

by [id](#) on Mon, 08/04/2003 - 10:32 | [reply](#)

Euthanasia, Suicide and All That

Voluntary euthanasia is the same thing as suicide with a little help. Involuntary euthanasia is the same thing as murder. These two categories of "gentle death" should be opposed just as suicide and murder are opposed. The grounds used to justify voluntary euthanasia are often capable of supporting involuntary euthanasia. For example, proponents of voluntary euthanasia say that it will save medical resources, the financial resources of the families involved and relieve suffering. These justifications also hold true for compulsory euthanasia.

There are several objections to those justifications. The first and most obvious is that the role of medicine is to preserve life, not to prevent suffering. In fact, many life-preserving medical techniques are quite painful. Were we to decide that our system should be one of pain-prevention, then there is no longer a reason to pursue uncomfortable treatments that may yet save lives -- the underlying justification for such treatments (like chemotherapy or even a simple colonoscopy) is lost.

A second objection is that in establishing the legitimacy of voluntary euthanasia, we also establish an expectation that the elderly and infirm will choose that option. After all, euthanasia will be regarded as a positively moral action that preserves the dignity of the person, prevents the suffering of age or disease, prevents the prolonged suffering of the family, and ultimately saves money and medical resources. All these justifications for euthanasia leave the elderly and infirm that do want to prolong their lives with no way of saying so that is not regarded as selfish.

Finally, by categorizing voluntary euthanasia under "medical care" we give it the illusion that a doctor can help in the decision to die. The term "physician assisted suicide" reveals how necessary the medical caregiver is to the act. Proponents of voluntary euthanasia say that it is their own decision to make, but clearly that decision cannot be made alone. It isn't hard to imagine the scenario where an elderly patient asks her doctor of many years to help her die,

that she misses her husband. (The asking in itself makes the act not just her own) The doctor refuses, saying that he is a life-preserver, not a bringer of death. (Here, too, the act could not be her own, he must help) Fine, she says, I will *find a doctor who will kill me*. And here we see the reality of the situation. She would not die but for the actions of another person. And a new market has opened, one in which death doctors are sought out not because of their skill at preserving life or even their skill in medically preventing suffering, but because they have been given legal authority to deal death. That authority to deal death has very little, in reality, with preventing suffering and a great deal to do with providing a legal method of opting out of life.

by **Rob Michael** on Mon, 08/04/2003 - 17:00 | [reply](#)

suicide

"The grounds used to justify voluntary euthanasia are often capable of supporting involuntary euthanasia. For example, proponents of voluntary euthanasia say that it will save medical resources, the financial resources of the families involved and relieve suffering. These justifications also hold true for compulsory euthanasia."

To translate, **some** of the arguments used to justify.....etc etc.....valid example.....and this concludes to: **some** of the supporters of euthanasia are idiots. however, if you want to win the argument, you need to do more than counter **some** rival theories.

"The term "physician assisted suicide" reveals how necessary the medical caregiver is to the act. Proponents of voluntary euthanasia say that it is their own decision to make, but clearly that decision cannot be made alone."

The term "plumber assisted toilet-repair" reveals how necessary the plumber is to the act. Proponents of voluntary toilet-repair say that it is their own decision to make (as long as they can pay for it), but clearly that decision cannot be made alone.

anyway, suicide is a "victimless crime" right? what's your counter to the standard point of "If there is no victim, how can it be a crime?" (works with euthanasia too, but **not** compulsory euthanasia)

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 08/04/2003 - 18:18 | [reply](#)

Suicide and Euthanasia

This is a great issue to use to test whether somebody takes individual rights seriously.

If you think that people have individual rights to their lives and to pursue their goals without the permission or approval of others, then you must acknowledge their right to make an informed

decision to choose death; and that physicians assisting them are

helping, not hurting, their patients (because their job is not to prolong life; but, rather, to help their patients solve their health-related problems by their own lights).

If not, then you really think that people are slaves of the state, or society, or the religious or some other tyrants.

The right to die is fundamental. If you don't have it, then your life does not belong to you; your existence is under the control of others.

Gil

by **Gil** on Mon, 08/04/2003 - 20:42 | [reply](#)

Body Mechanic

Gil above stated it very eloquently: it's a simple matter of self-ownership, which to me is self-evident. the objector's arguments against physician-assisted suicide is based on assumptions underpinned by nothing more than tradition at best.

as the owner of my body, what i want from a doctor is for them to be a facilitator of my will regarding the physical aspect of my life. not a moral captor holding me hostage to society and whatever it is from which i might be seeking to deliver myself, but a physical service provider: a body mechanic - and i decide when i get scrapped, not the mechanic.

i wouldn't advocate forcing anyone to assist, but it being illegal is morally indefensible. the line between vice and virtue is one which can only be drawn by the individual. to do so robs individuals of the ability to make moral decisions "by their own lights", as Gil put it. some prioritise pain minimisation over longevity and that is the individual's right, as it is to define the acceptable parameters. this right is a fact, the denial of which is simply the denial of it, not a moral pillar. indeed for the reasons given above it's the opposite.

regarding the death penalty i'm in the human-fallibility camp. i'd have no qualms if convictions were 100% accurate but the only person who can be absolutely certain whodunnit is the victim..

by susan28 on Wed, 09/12/2007 - 01:00 | [reply](#)

I am in agreement

I am in agreement with the general article and with Gil about the horror of applying the death penalty to an innocent person.

One other reason I would put forth for avoiding the use of the death penalty is that it requires someone else (not someone who is a murderer) to do the killing. It seems like there would be some increased risk that the innocent killer would come to have less regard for human life and also might be more prone to having some emotional or psychological problems.

I suppose one way to avoid this would be to have only death row

inmates doing the actual killing. Perhaps by allowing one of the inmates to stay at the 'end' of the row, so to speak, so long as they were willing to perform the deed? That seems pretty twisted... nevermind.

Becky

by **Becky Moon** on Thu, 09/13/2007 - 17:07 | [reply](#)

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Piracy

We tend to think of piracy on the high seas as an archaic crime, but in fact, according to the **International Maritime Bureau**, it is very much still with us:

There were 234 actual and attempted attacks in the period, against 171 in the first half of 2002 and just 79 in 1992 when the centre began collating data.

Six areas accounted for two-thirds of the incidents: Indonesia, Bangladesh, Nigeria, India, the Malacca Strait and the Gulf of Aden. Some areas are so dangerous that the IMB advises vessels simply to avoid them.

Ships' masters should keep 50 or 100 miles off Somalia and avoid anchoring off the Indonesian coast in the Malacca Strait, the IMB says in a report published on Thursday.

Ships are attacked when they are berthed, at anchorage and steaming. Attacks are frequently violent. In the first six months of the year 16 seafarers were killed, 20 are missing, 116 were injured, assaulted or threatened and 193 held hostage.

One can hardly trade with the people of a country when it is inadvisable for ships to get within a hundred miles of their shores. As long as there are places in the world where the rule of law is absent, trade **will not be entirely free**, which is one of the reasons why it is important for the West to promote the ideals of the Open Society in other areas of the world.

Sat, 07/26/2003 - 17:49 | [permlink](#)

The Twilight of the Villepinist Libertarians

You are about to enter another dimension, a dimension of sight and sound but not of mind. A journey into an ugly land of imaginary facts and twisted argument where the normal rules of logic do not apply. Next stop, the **Butler Shaffer Zone!**

To illustrate just how at variance with reality Mr Shaffer's views are, we have added links to the following quotes from him. Now follow us, gentle readers, into the BS Zone:

It is interesting to observe so many Americans trying to find "meaning" in the Bush administration's war against an endless parade of "enemies." From **Afghanistan** to **Iraq** to **North Korea**, the state continues to concoct "threats" for the consumption of a public that is neither empirically nor analytically demanding.

The **media** are quick to play their assigned roles, providing state-generated "information" and self-styled "experts" to convince the rest of us that everything the White House tells us is "just so," and that anyone who dissents from – or even questions – the state's purposes or policies is likely an apologist for terrorism!

Shaffer continues in this vein for a while and then proceeds to the real (or should we say surreal?) point:

Of course, it is not in the interests of the state – or of those who profit from statism – to have the nature of political systems explored; for to do so, might cause even the institutionally-deferential students to catch on to the vicious game being played at their expense. It is not enough to understand that the state often resorts to war: war is its fundamental nature. Every political institution from the local Weed Control Authority to the United States of America – depends, for its existence, upon men and women being conditioned to submit to the force and violence exercised by government authorities. The state is nothing more than institutionalized violence that we have become conditioned to revere.

But, back in reality, Western states aren't really like that. As libertarians, we have a lot of sympathy for the idea that taxation is theft. If the government takes the view that you have to pay tax,

you don't get to decline. It would be better if there were many organisations offering the services provided by governments enabling people to choose a policy that suits them. However, there is plenty of critical discussion of governments in the media and on the internet, and democracy provides a way to get rid of the government if people think somebody else might do better, which amounts to another way of criticising government policy. The same is true for **trial by jury**. The fact is that Western politics is overwhelmingly less violent than any other political system in human history. **The World** is sometimes critical of government policy but we do not fear the knock at the door. Nor is Shaffer at any risk of being bumped off or censored. To secure this peace we must be willing to fight against terrorists who would disrupt it, and the states that sponsor them. Backing away from this responsibility will not bring about peace – let alone a perfect libertarian paradise. Nor will the twilight ramblings of Mr Shaffer bring us one millimetre closer to a better society.

Mon, 07/28/2003 - 10:47 | [permlink](#)

Villepinist

Villepinist (n) - a term made up by right-wing neocon warmongers to smear valid arguments by pro-peace, true libertarians.

(credit to Jesse Walker for inspiration)

by a reader on Tue, 07/29/2003 - 20:13 | [reply](#)

if the labels fit, wear them

murders (warmongering) A Reader with a gun (right-wing) and makes pastries with his blood (neocon) leaving just some smears (smeared him good!)

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 07/29/2003 - 20:38 | [reply](#)

How is the name of a diplomatic pinup, a smear?

French Foreign Envoy a Diplomatic Pinup (AP Online)

He is everything France likes about itself: cultured, literary, eloquent and more than a little dashing. As the government's point man in efforts to slow Washington's drive for war against Iraq, Dominique de Villepin has used his charm to full effect.

At the U.N. Security Council, the French foreign minister has faced down Secretary of State Colin Powell in pressing for more U.N. weapons inspections. In a rare move, U.N. delegates broke protocol to applaud de

Villepin after his impassioned appeal last week that war

should be a last resort.

by **Kolya** on Tue, 07/29/2003 - 22:12 | [reply](#)

Libertarian traditions

It seems to me that "**The World**" despite it's claims of having respect for traditions does not have a respect for libertarian traditions. One of these traditions is a skepticism that the intentions of those in power are the same as what they claim. Another of these traditions is a skepticism that even when intentions are not in question the results of a governmental action will be as intended. Traditions such as these did not start with Rothbard. They are at least 200 years old. As with all traditions the knowledge contained within them is not explicit. (Sometimes this knowledge is made explicit. E.g. : Tullock and Buchanan's examination of the democratic process)

As for Shaffer it seems that in part he is simply reiterating George Washington when he said: "Government is not reason, it is not eloquence, it is force; like a fire, a troublesome servant and a fearful master."

by a reader on Wed, 07/30/2003 - 02:25 | [reply](#)

Conjecture

Conjecture: The majority of European libertarians are pro-war.

The majority of North American libertarians are anti-war.

by a reader on Wed, 07/30/2003 - 03:20 | [reply](#)

manifest truth?

we disagree with the libertarian insistence that government leaders persistently lie about their views and motives. but i assure you we have taken that view into consideration.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 07/30/2003 - 03:38 | [reply](#)

Who are "We"?

Um...Elliot, you might want to reconsider your disagreement with the "insistence that government leaders persistently lie about their views and motives." I think overwhelming historical evidence is against you on this one (as well as Public Choice theory, which was referenced earlier). In fact, I think that persistently lying about one's views and motives has become a prerequisite to electability in most democracies.

Would all those who agree that government leaders DO NOT

persistently lie about their views and motives please come forward and defend this remarkable claim?

And I'm not interested in a semantic game about what "persistently" means. No libertarian claims that politicians ALWAYS lie. Just that they do it often, when it suits their purposes, and these purposes are not the same as the interests of the public.

by **Gil** on Wed, 07/30/2003 - 17:26 | [reply](#)

apparently not you...

even people like terrorist leaders who are just asking to be KILLED for it, tell the truth about their worldviews frequently and loudly.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 07/30/2003 - 18:11 | [reply](#)

Conjecture = false, I think

Conjecture: The majority of European libertarians are pro-war. The majority of North American libertarians are anti-war.

British, quite possibly; European: sadly not true (at least, in my vast experience of European libertarians).

--

Sarah Fitz-Claridge

<http://www.fitz-claridge.com/>

by **Sarah Fitz-Claridge** on Tue, 08/05/2003 - 21:13 | [reply](#)

Villepinist is not a smear

A reader wrote:

'Villepinist (n) - a term made up by right-wing neocon warmongers to smear valid arguments by pro-peace, true libertarians.'

First of all, villepinist doesn't just apply to libertarians, it also applies to many lefties, like most of the Democratic Party, a substantial chunk of Labour in Britain and some right wing bastards like Kenneth Clarke of the British Conservative Party. None of these people are libertarian, all of them are villepinists.

Second, it isn't a smear of any kind. Villepin opposed the war on Iraq, so did villepinist libertarians. From whence does the smeariness originate?

by **Alan Forrester** on Wed, 08/06/2003 - 23:59 | [reply](#)

Respect for Tradition

'It seems to me that "**The World**" despite it's claims of having

respect for traditions does not have a respect for libertarian traditions.'

I do have respect for the libertarian tradition, it contains a lot of valuable knowledge, it is also flawed and respect does not consist of mindlessly cleaving to traditions but of trying to improve them.

'One of these traditions is a skepticism that the intentions of those in power are the same as what they claim.'

Government officials often do tell the truth about their intentions. I don't doubt that Tony Blair's intentions of, say, making the NHS work are sincere, it's just that they are hopelessly flawed and utterly unworkable, he just doesn't have the knowledge available to realise that. I'll take cockup over conspiracy in the vast majority of cases.

'Another of these traditions is a skepticism that even when intentions are not in question the results of a governmental action will be as intended.'

In some cases the outcomes of some specific policies will be more or less what the government intends. The Iraq war happens to be one of them, the NHS is not. The NHS is inherently unworkable and based on fundamental misconceptions about politics, economics, human nature and so on. The Iraq war was based on a relatively clear understanding of the situation that required the removal of Saddam and how that can be accomplished.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Thu, 08/07/2003 - 00:15 | [reply](#)

Outcomes

The very existence of Israel is an example of how very powerful governments cannot control the outcome of the actions they take.

What allied or axis power visualised a Jewish state as one of the outcomes of WWII ? The U.S. has a very powerful military, but it ultimately has no control over what happens in Iraq (unless mass genocide is an option).

by a reader on Thu, 08/07/2003 - 01:07 | [reply](#)

The Line Between Villepinism and Evil

Israeli Guy has written an **interesting post** about the International Solidarity Movement. The ISM is trying to demolish the wall that the Israeli government is erecting to protect Israelis from terrorism. More significantly:

The news item in Channel 1 showed a video from the scene, it showed a bunch of Palestinians marching with ISM people in front. The ISM members were shouting in English a very familiar Arab slogan:

*"From the river to the sea
Palestine will be free"*

He goes on to translate this for the benefit of readers who are unfamiliar with the region's **history**. The "river" is the Jordan River which marks the eastern border of Israel and the West Bank. The "sea" is the Mediterranean Sea to the west of Israel.

"From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" means *abolish Israel and include its territory in a unitary Arab state*. This is the position of non-compromise and non-coexistence that made peace between the Arabs and Israel impossible for decades because it was, for all practical purposes, a call to genocide. It is a position that even the PLO ostensibly renounced over a decade ago and is today openly advocated only by the likes of Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

And Al Qaeda. And the ISM.

So at the very least the ISM are **villepinists (idiotarians)**, but is that too charitable a word for them? They are calling for the destruction of Israel, they are **actively sabotaging** Israeli security, and **giving aid** to murderers... Are the ISM merely **villepinists** or have they crossed the line that separates mere fellow-travelling from evil?

Wed, 07/30/2003 - 23:49 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Villepinism

in what dictionary did you pull the word villepinism out of?

by a reader on Mon, 10/25/2004 - 01:32 | [reply](#)

Re: villeepinism

Follow the links above.

by **Editor** on Mon, 10/25/2004 - 01:44 | [reply](#)

Discussion on Rantburg.com

This post and our current poll proposing the word **villepinism** as a replacement for **idiotarianism** is being discussed on **Rantburg.com**.

Wed, 07/30/2003 - 18:24 | [permalink](#)

Better living through neologisms

"Villepinist" is good, but "Villepinhead" is better.

by a reader on Thu, 07/31/2003 - 15:16 | [reply](#)

Vas "ist"?

I am thinking that "villepin" is to be preferred, since villepins simply share a notable attribute with the person; they are not his followers, and would themselves be no different did he not exist (c.f. "quisling", "leninist").

by a reader on Sun, 08/03/2003 - 16:15 | [reply](#)

About Korea

InstaPundit calls **this** “a memorable Korean fiscing”. We agree: we're going to remember it. (But watch out for the formatting which, on our browser, goes wrong near the end and fails to distinguish the fisker from the fished. Still, you're unlikely to be confused: by that point you won't need formatting clues to distinguish true from false!)

Meanwhile, rumour **has it** that, in regard to North Korea's weapons of mass destruction, North Korea is about to drop its demand for the US to address the problem unilaterally, and is caving in to the American plan for multilateral talks. By the way, the **villepinists** are tied in all sorts of knots over this issue: among other things, they'd love to side *with* North Korea against American *unilateralism*. But then, evil dictators never do follow the script that villepinists fondly imagine for them.

Thu, 07/31/2003 - 23:44 | [permalink](#)

Sullivan Inflicts Collateral Damage

We are fans of Andrew Sullivan's blog, and have been watching in admiration as, with his usual clear-sighted rationality and humanity, he has been destroying all the arguments against legalising gay marriage. But now he has drawn a **most unfortunate and unfair comparison**:

Now the Israeli government is intent on breaking up marriages it doesn't like. A new law would prevent Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip who marry Israeli Arabs from living with their spouses in Israel.

Now, whatever one may think of this proposed law, to characterize it in terms of an intention to *break up marriages* that a government "doesn't like" is a bit like saying that the US invaded Iraq because it didn't like the design of its statues: this measure has nothing to do with anyone liking one type of marriage and disliking another. It has to do with life and death. The Israeli government is considering taking the power to prevent certain people from entering Israel, not because it can't bear the thought of Israeli Arabs cavorting beneath the sheets with non-Israeli Arabs, but because it can't bear the thought of people getting a free pass into the country and blowing Jewish children to pieces.

This new law is a horrifying attack on a basic freedom - to marry the person you love;

No, it is not about attacking basic freedoms either. It is a temporary wartime measure that is distinctly less draconian than those taken by, say, Britain when it was at war. If it is passed at all, it will expire automatically after one year unless it is specifically renewed by the Knesset for a further one-year period. Contentious even today, there is zero chance that it would ever be renewed if and when the danger that it addresses no longer exists.

Nor is it about forbidden love. It is about forbidden hatred. No – not even that: for hatred remains legal. This is about forbidden murder. The fact is that the existing right of non-Israelis to gain citizenship, with its automatic right of entry and freedom of movement in Israel, by the expedient of marrying an Israeli Arab, has already been used many times as a means of murdering people. For

instance, **this** murder of sixteen people was carried out by a Hamas

man who had gained entry to Israel by marrying an Israeli Arab woman. The Israeli security services say that there have been **nineteen such cases** so far, involving 87 murders. To do nothing about this situation out of deference to 'Love' would be an obscenity.

and it smacks of racism of the worst sort.

It may be the wrong law. It may even be a bad law. But it is not racism, nor does it smack of racism. It would be racism to ban marriage (and indeed sex) between races, as the Nazis did – and as the Americans did, within living memory, but which Israel never has done. It would be racism to give Israeli Arab marriages an inferior legal status to Israeli Jewish marriages – but Israelis of all races have, and have always had, full legal equality. (And by the way, although same-sex marriages are not yet allowed in Israel, Israel is making progress in that direction at a time when America seems to be regressing: for instance, same-sex couples in Tel Aviv are now eligible for the **same benefits as married couples**, according to new Tel Aviv municipality regulations.) But even those leftist and politically-correct **opponents** of the proposed measure who do call it "racist" in some contrived and tenuous sense, cannot in all conscience or reason call it racism *of the worst sort*. We all know what racism of the worst sort is, and to use that term here is exaggeration of the worst sort: crude, spiteful, and, one could say with much greater justice, smacking of anti-Semitism. And here is some more:

Israel contends it is protecting itself from terrorists using the law to get into Israel to attack Israelis.

There are surely better ways of doing that.

Now, we don't know whether this new law would be effective at saving lives or whether there are "better ways of doing that". That depends on information and expertise which, frankly, we do not have. We're not even going to take a position, at the moment, on whether the number of lives saved would indeed be worth the inconvenience inflicted on innocent people. Perhaps they wouldn't. But the fact is that Israel's people, including Israeli Arabs, are in danger of violent death every day (despite the current "ceasefire"), from murderers who are trying desperately to enter the country by every conceivable means. And the only reason that many times the current number are not being killed and maimed is that Israel's Defence Forces have been keeping those murderers out through extraordinary skill and heroism, and, yes, by extraordinary measures that also impinge on the lives of innocent people.

Whenever you see an argument of the form "Israel contends that it is doing so-and-so in self-defence, but that is not its real motive", think carefully. For as Fiamma Nirenstein said recently in a superb **reflection on contemporary anti-Semitism**, the onus should be on anyone who makes such an argument to substantiate it: "you cannot use false stereotypes. You must demonstrate what you assert: that the army ruthlessly storms poor Arab villages that have nothing to do with terrorism; that it shoots children on purpose;

that it kills journalists with pleasure". Andrew Sullivan's allegation that Israel's purported reason for these new immigration restrictions is a lie and that its real reason is racism, is just as unsubstantiated and just as false as those.

Morally, we have now passed the low point of Sullivan's piece. Logically, he saves the worst for last:

One of the more brilliant insights of Orwell's "Nineteen Eighty-Four" is that one sign of freedom is the ability to construct human relationships without the state intervening. With this new law, Israel's presence in the West Bank corrupts its own democracy one little bit more.

Israel's democracy is not corrupt, nor is this law part of Israel's policy in the West Bank. This is an internal Israeli measure, concerning the interaction between immigration law and counter-terrorism. It may be an effective measure or an ineffective one. It may, for various reasons, be unwise or perhaps wrong. But it is not a corrupt policy or an undemocratic one, any more than it is racist. Criticising it in such terms is just a mistake.

In the matter of gay marriages, Andrew Sullivan is currently engaged in a titanic battle against institutions – the Catholic Church, and political institutions of the right such as the Republican party – with which he fundamentally identifies. The fact that he is absolutely right and they absolutely wrong (as well as terrifyingly irrational) in that matter cannot make this experience any less lonely or any less bruising for him. We guess that as a tiny side-effect of it, he has lost concentration for a moment and let off a broadside against an innocent bystander who, in the heat and confusion of battle, seemed to resemble his enemy. A bystander which just happens to be Israel. And yet we shall not do him the discourtesy of making allowances. He deserves better.

Fri, 08/01/2003 - 19:50 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

only in Israel...

Perhaps I'm misinterpreting the law here... but my understanding was that the new law, if enacted, would NOT forbid marriages between Israeli Arabs and Palestinians. All that would happen is that such Palestinians would not **automatically** get Israeli citizenship, as they had in the past. (Nor are they categorically denied Israeli citizenship; the Israeli Interior Minister would decide each one on a case-by-case basis.)

In any event, there's certainly nothing (except financial issues, maybe) to stop an Israeli Arab and a Palestinian from marrying elsewhere.

Israel has, to the best of my knowledge, an amazingly broad standard for accepting prospective new citizens. If we include its unique Law Of Return, which grants automatic Israeli citizenship to anyone with at least one Jewish grandparent, I'd argue that Israel is

more accepting of new citizens than most countries, if not all, worldwide.

To accuse Israel of racism, because such amazingly liberal policies have been tightened up a bit (under strictly temporary emergency conditions), is disingenuous.

And yes, this pains me too, for I've also become a voracious reader of Andrew Sullivan's writing.

Daniel in Medford

by a reader on Fri, 08/01/2003 - 23:35 | [reply](#)

bravo

very nice piece

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sat, 08/02/2003 - 00:33 | [reply](#)

Right on

Brilliant. I hope you sent it to Sullivan, and I hope he has the decency to respond. If not, I'll lose a lot of respect for him.

by a reader on Wed, 08/06/2003 - 20:32 | [reply](#)

We Did Send It To Sullivan

Brilliant. I hope you sent it to Sullivan, and I hope he has the decency to respond.

Thank you. Yes, we did send it to Andrew Sullivan, but instead of replying, he simply upped and **went on holiday**! Can you imagine? It's almost as though he thought there were things more important than blogging or even politics itself! Doesn't he know there's a war on?

by [Editor](#) on Thu, 08/07/2003 - 00:57 | [reply](#)

oh dear

man, i didn't know sullivan was so openly ~~gay~~ religious. *sigh*

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 08/07/2003 - 01:10 | [reply](#)

Cool Down, Folks

JunkScience.com tries to cool down the global-warming debate by explaining why **global warming is not a weapon of mass destruction**. A prominent British scientist recently **claimed** that it was, citing as evidence the 1500 Indians who died in a 120° pre-monsoon heat wave and comparing them with the victims of 9/11. JunkScience concludes:

As to India's killer heat wave, it sounds like the Indians need more economic development so that they can afford better living conditions and better medical care.

In contrast to India, temperatures hit 127 degrees in Palm Springs, Calif., this year with no reported heat-related deaths. You figure out what the difference is.

If there is a "weapon of mass destruction" associated with global warming, it's the global warmers themselves. Their preferred policy of energy regulation and restriction would reduce economic progress and development, especially in the third world.

Since "wealth is health," it's easy to see who and what the real threat is.

Yes indeed. Meanwhile Samizdata **quotes** the newsletter of the 1st Battalion The Queen's Lancashire Regiment to tell us just how hot it is in Basra. Ironic, isn't it, that these admirable and competent professionals, who helped save the world from a real WMD threat, have to suffer in the heat while eminent professors sip lemonade in cool offices in England exploiting the issue to promote their favourite fad.

Sun, 08/03/2003 - 13:12 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Euro Gerrymandering

The Labour Party's apparent desperation to foist the Euro on Britain has plumbed new depths: they are contemplating **extending the franchise** for the Euro Referendum to EU nationals resident in the UK:

There are more than 725,000 people from elsewhere in the EU living in the UK, with the number set to increase dramatically once the union is enlarged from 15 to 25 member states next year...

A Whitehall insider said: "They're allowed to vote in local elections. You might say Europeans do have a vested interest in voting in the European elections. The same could be said to apply for a euro referendum."

This is a transparent ploy to boost numbers in favour of the Euro. It may yet backfire, for not all EU citizens yearn for a **Super-State**, and those who choose to reside in Britain may well include more than the average proportion of Anglophiles. But in any case, this proposal is indefensible. There is only one place in the world that has the Pound as a currency and that is Britain, and if Britain adopts the Euro it will be extremely difficult to reverse that decision. Hence a "yes" vote and a "no" vote are not symmetrical, so any attempt to bias the vote in favour of "yes" is not only reprehensible, but endangers the very purpose of the referendum, which is surely to provide legitimacy for this momentous constitutional change. What legitimacy would it have, if the Euro replaces the Pound on the basis that British citizens were outvoted on the issue by large numbers of visitors from the EU? Even those who do not accept the devastating **economic** and **political** arguments against the Euro must surely agree that this is vote is too important to be fiddled or rigged in any way.

Tue, 08/05/2003 - 21:01 | [permalink](#)

A frivolous point, but..

Both Cyprus and Lebanon have (different) Pounds for their currency.

by a reader on Wed, 08/06/2003 - 11:46 | [reply](#)

not frivolous point

"Even those who do not accept the devastating economic and political arguments against the Euro must surely agree that this is vote is too important to [be -- typo guys...] fiddled or rigged in any way."

I don't agree the importance of the vote is *why* it shouldn't be rigged. Or that it's right to rig less important votes.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

[**Editor's note:** Typo corrected. Thank you.]

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 08/07/2003 - 01:06 | [reply](#)

Idiotarian No Longer

Two of the participants in [this discussion on Rantburg](#) suggest that there is room for *both* terms 'idiotarian' and 'villepinist', because they have slightly different shades of meaning. Even though they do not seem to agree on what the distinction is, they may have a point. Maybe a distinction will evolve.

Anyway, these [Confessions of an Anti-Sanctions Activist](#) (via [Elegance Against Ignorance](#)) are a must-read for anyone who is interested in the nature of the phenomenon, under any name.

Thu, 08/07/2003 - 03:05 | [permalink](#)

Khomeini in Exile

An Iranian religious dissident who enjoys a special status and influence in Iranian society flees from his home in the holy city of Qom and **goes into exile**, describing the Iranian regime as “the world's worst dictatorship”. As sinister agents of the regime search for him abroad, fearing that he may become a focus of religious resistance to their rule, he expresses the hope that Iran's escalating protest movement, “would in not too long develop into a popular revolution”. The dissident's name? *Khomeini*.

Anyone who can remember the political scene in 1978, or knows its history, will find the above eerily familiar. Is it a description of the key events preceding the **Iranian revolution**? No. This is today, and this is a different Khomeini. Not Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini the founder of the Islamic Republic, but his grandson, Hussein Khomeini.

So, as the undercover death squads of the Revolutionary Guard scour Najaf for Khomeini, and the student protests on the streets in Iran are brutally suppressed, why isn't he (and **why aren't they?**) getting the intense press coverage and publicity for his cause that his grandfather enjoyed? Why is he not a trendy icon already? Why are there no mountains of multi-cultural excuses being made for him? Where is the relentless demonisation of the government whose overthrow he seeks? And perhaps not least, why is he not being harboured by France?

Simple. What's different this time is that *this* devoutly Islamic Khomeini is not a murderous throwback to the fourteenth century. This Khomeini is not an utterly implacable enemy of the West. This Khomeini, who apparently sensed that something might be amiss when his favourite uncle was murdered after refusing to endorse the regime, has called for the separation of religion and state, and for “a democratic regime that does not make use of religion as a means of oppressing the people and strangling society”. But all those sins, though they disqualify him from automatic adulation by the trendies, lefties, journalists and villepinists, are not enough to get him ignored as completely as he has been. *This*, we bet, is what really puts him beyond the pale:

“Freedom is more important than bread. If the Americans will provide it, let them come ...”

You are absolutely right !

As an Iranian student living in Iran now (that's why i don't put my name here) I wanted to thank you for this post. Here for the first time I see the correct view of all the tragedy that has been going on in Iran, expressed in a western blog.

The way Khomeini (senior) was endorsed and made to a prophet like figure by western media, especially the lefties, the French government and the Democrats in the US, not to mention the BBC Farsi Radio that acted as his mouthpiece during the months before the revolution, and comparing it with all the crimes he and his followers committed after coming to power, all the executions, mass graves, murders and torture chambers you haven't even heard of going on to this very day, and its consequences for the region and the world, presents a truly horrifying picture.

It is a fact that Islamic fundamentalism couldn't have grown in to such a monster if it wasn't for the success of that dark revolution 25 years ago-this is one of the responsibilities Iranian people must accept and help amend in the future , after the liberation of Iran. (By the way, I propose giving Mr. Carter another Nobel prize for his accomplishments as well!)

The fact that Khomeini's grandson is not getting much attention is worsened by the kind of attention the so-called reformist(!) president Khatami is getting from the west.

As one who unfortunately voted for him in 1997 under the illusion that he was a new Gorbachev, I can say with utmost certainty that he is nothing but a political prostitute of this regime, breaking more and more business deals with the west and giving the mullas a false respectable face they do not have (and the EU an excuse for their plunderings of Iranian wealth)

Many Iranian youth are in prisons facing torture at this moment for shouting death to Khamenei and asking Khatami to resign more than a month ago, and yet still in many western media the demonstration are presented as pro-reform. What can one say to this?

Actually we in Iran might be the only people who understand Israelis frustrations with this attention paid to Arafat, because we have one here ourselves.

By the way, after reading your excellent history of Israel and as a very pro-Israeli Iranian (though I am officially a Moslem!) there is a question that bothers me and I wish to ask you:

I have read a lot of reports, including in the Iranian resistance groups publications abroad, about Israel's alleged 4 billion dollars arms deal with the Iranian regime.

Is that true? What was really going on?

This is very disturbing news for me.

Thanks again for this excellent post.

An Iranian Student

by a reader on Mon, 08/11/2003 - 09:57 | [reply](#)

Wow

If the previous post is legitimate, then it's very heartening that there are Iranian students with internet access and such a great political perspective.

Even if it isn't, those who are battling the current regime are very brave and I wish them the best. It's a shame that the vast majority of people in Iran don't join them and topple the government. There are a lot of American forces nearby that I suspect would be mobilized to help if it appeared that a vast, popular, uprising in Iran was being brutally repressed.

Gil

by **Gil** on Mon, 08/11/2003 - 18:33 | [reply](#)

It is a legitimate post!

As far as I can tell, I am legitimately real! :)

But I have to explain a few things perhaps, about the situation inside Iran:

My position towards Israel constitutes, unfortunately, a small minority (as far as I can tell).

American ideals however have a much wider appeal, especially for my generation. But still many of the philosophical foundations of democratic thinking is widely missing.

There exist also a lot of paranoia, mostly among our parents, like elsewhere in the middle east. (It is especially directed towards Britain for some historical reasons and it's quite funny sometimes!)

However what *is* heartening about Iran is the fact that for the first time, the vast majority of people have really understood what a religious system means and are *looking* for something new.

They know what they don't want, but not still what they want.

So there is a great *potential* here, whether it can lead to something concrete is the big challenge, and here the West can help a lot if it wanted to.

The case of Israel is a good example.

Unlike Arabs, Iranians have nothing personal against Israel, and actually Palestinians are even more disliked, especially after the revolution.

The real reason for anathema is simply ignorance. Most people still think that since the land was named Palestine and the Arabs in it are called Palestinians, they were the true owners and Israelis are outsiders. They simply don't know much about the real history.

On the other hand, there has always been vicious conflict between Iran and the Arabic world. Arabic countries call the Persian Gulf, Arabic Gulf- they call Iranians 'Ajam' which means something like goat (for the way they pronounced Arabic words) - Iranians also have very bitter memories of Arabs, they conquered Iran, killed, burnt and took Iranians as slaves and treated Iranians as second class citizens, together with Jews and Christians...

That is also why Iranians actually invented Shiitism (though I wished they hadn't), actually to separate themselves from the rest of the

Arabic world. (Many Sunni fundamentalists consider Shiites as

heretics)

There are also historical ties with Israel , dating back to the time of Cyrus, and the more Iranians are turning towards their historical heritage and moving away from Islamic identity, the more such historical ties could gain importance.

Before Israel , Iran was the only land in the middle east that kept its ancient identity and refused to become Arabic. Now there are two such countries! :)

Saddam once expressed the situation very clearly: "Two people shouldn't have been born, the Ajams and the Zionists".

So here is natural potential for future allegiance. What would come of it depends on us all.

We in Iran also have seen the result of idealistic left and vellepinist intellectualism and policies: the 1979 revolution.

We see how demonstration after demonstration is held in Europe in support of Palestinians , but no one even bothers about all that is happening in Iran. We see human shields going to Iraq to prevent *American Crimes* but this regime inside Iran is portrayed as moving towards democracy, even though it stones women, takes out eye bulbs and cuts hand and feet to this day. We see how Bush is portrayed as a villain but Khatami is given a PhD by a Belgian University...And that makes many of us here to think and to rethink popular and fashionable political trends, and some of us understand something. :)

That's why you see people here light candles after 9/11. That's why I hear people in taxis support American invasion of Iraq....

As for a popular uprising, there are a lot of difficulties. Iran is a country with more than 16 centuries of religious tyranny. There are simply not much culture of cooperation left after all these years. People learn that if they don't care for themselves no one will. A lot of damage has been done to this culture during centuries, the fact that it still exists at all is really quite remarkable.

The regime is also *very* brutal. Yet you see demonstrations every once in a while-it shows the degree of desperation- but it is unfortunately not very organized.

This is Iran now: a mainly muslim land whose majority are ,for the first time, looking for something new, for something that makes more sense, who are not satisfied with what they have been told, who want change...but they are just at the beginning of this road.

An Iranian Student

by a reader on Tue, 08/12/2003 - 08:13 | [reply](#)

Wow

It saddens my heart to read how things are going in Iran. I personally never truly understood how bad things are there, and I suspect that I still don't. It has been very good to hear about how things are going in there - one cannot here much about Iran in the main media, and what one hears is usually so faulty that it isn't worth listening to.

Have you considered blogging more about how things are going in

Iran? I'm sure there are lots of people who would want to know how things are there, and how they might be able to help. I'm sure there are ways we can help you make Iran a better place, I just don't quite know how.

by [id](#) on Tue, 08/12/2003 - 11:27 | [reply](#)

Iranian Blogs

Id,

[Jeff Jarvis](#) has been doing a good job of publicizing the situation in Iran and referencing Iranian weblogs and other sources. Check out some of the Middle East links on his sidebar, and some of those will lead you to even more.

Iranian blogging exists, and it's a great thing.

[Gil](#)

by [Gil](#) on Tue, 08/12/2003 - 16:36 | [reply](#)

Reply to 'An Iranian Student'

"Israel's alleged 4 billion dollars arms deal with the Iranian regime."

In the early years of the regime, Israel did try to build bridges to it by selling weapons, rather as the US did (with Israel's help) in the Iran-Contra affair. Remember that at that time even many of those in the West who most despised and feared the Iranian regime did not want it to be overthrown *by Saddam*. However, any talk of an arms deal under present-day circumstances, and such a massive one at that, can only be a crazy conspiracy theory. It's not one we've heard of though. Can you provide a hyperlink?

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 08/13/2003 - 22:45 | [reply](#)

Iranian anti-semitism

I have to say I don't agree with "Iranian Student" about the potential of Iran-Israel cultural future alligence. Besides the Islamic anti-semitism, which has much diminished after 25 years of theocracy, there are the usual conspiracy theories of how the zioninst control the world, lead american policies and the like.

There abounds also the view of jews as moineylenders and materialists full of greed.

Besides all of this, Iran has its own brand of anti-semitism, even before the revolution, which is now increasing as its islamic counterpart is losing ground. According to it, both Chrsitianity and Islam, being semitic religions, are offsprings of Judaism from whome they inherit their violance and inhumanity. Then this is usually contrasted with the iranian (sometimes even called the 'aryan') religions and mentalities such as Zoroastrianism and

Mithraism which are portrayed as very moral, non violent and humanistic.

I appreciate the goodwill in his comments above, but it is more wishfull thinking than an analysis of the facts.

by a reader on Thu, 08/14/2003 - 07:49 | [reply](#)

some links

I also meant during the Iran-Iraq war.

Here is a good article about the economical side of Mulla mafia:
http://www.forbes.com/free_forbes/2003/0721/056.html

Here are some other links about Iran's struggles for freedom:

<http://www.krsi.net/us-en/>
read especially this article:
<http://krsi.net/news/detail.asp?NewsID=316>

<http://www.daneshjoo.org>
<http://www.mehr.org>

AIS

by a reader on Fri, 08/15/2003 - 10:12 | [reply](#)

Re: Iranian anti-semitism

I have come across that brand of anti-semitism, but it is not yet prevalent among ordinary poeple. However after the experience of the 20th century, I agree that ignoring or taking lightley anything of this sort no matter how stupid or small and unimportant it might seem at the time could be dangerous.

AIS

by a reader on Fri, 08/15/2003 - 10:37 | [reply](#)

World Class Hypocrisy

Sha!'s permalinks don't work, so we'll reproduce the item below. But before you read it, try guessing: what reason has the Arab League just given for not recognising the current provisional government of Iraq? Is it because...

- Iraq is a predominantly Arab country?
- Iraq is a predominantly Muslim country?
- Iraq is a member of the UN?
- It's quite hot in Iraq right now?
- ...

It couldn't be any of those, could it? And it's not even:

- Iraq was liberated by the United States.

Well...

In a completely unsurprising move, The Arab League yesterday decided that it would not recognize Iraq's recently appointed Governing Council. In his statements explaining why, Amr Moussa, Egypt's Foreign Minister and the current Secretary-General of the Arab League, said that although the Council is a good start, it isn't elected and thus lacks a certain amount of credibility.

Er, what? Could you say that again Mr Moussa? We're not sure whether to believe you.

In his column today, Tom Friedman points out the pot-calling-the-kettle-black aspect of this statement:

I love that quote. I love it, first of all, for its bold, gutsy, shameless, world-class hypocrisy. Mr. Moussa presides over an Arab League in which not one of the 22 member states has a leader elected in a free and fair election. On top of it, before the war, Mr. Moussa did all he could to shield Saddam Hussein from attack, although Saddam had never held a real election in his life. Yet, there was Mr. Moussa questioning the new U.S.-appointed Iraqi Council, which, even in its infant form, is already the most representative government

Iraq has ever had.

Friedman uses this as a jumping-off point to demonstrate, once again, that the Arab world is shitting itself at the possibility of democracy actually coming to the neighborhood. Although why anyone should be so concerned about statements from the Arab League is anybody's guess. Moussa heads a pathetic, toothless organization. In more than 50-years of activity, the League has done absolutely nothing, other than to serve as a debating society wherein Arab tyrants condemn Israel and condemn other Arabs for not condemning Israel strongly enough.

If a new wave of democracy also succeeds in doing away with the Arab League, it will only be icing on the cake.

True. But why do away with it? Regime-change it! Turn it away from the Dark Side. *Last one to become democratic doesn't get recognised.* This shall be called the Moussa Doctrine in honour of its originator.

Sat, 08/09/2003 - 22:19 | [permalink](#)

Limbaugh v Arnie - We Tentatively Endorse Arnie

Knowing little about California politics and less about Arnold Schwarzenegger's politics, we were going to pass on this momentous issue of the day – until **Rush Limbaugh** told us just enough:

Here [sic] me now and believe me later, my friends: all these conservative orgasms over Arnold Schwarzenegger are - like the "Gorbasm" liberals experienced over Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev - fake. I know that (R) next to Schwarzenegger's name excites the White House, but his own words prove he's not a conservative.

Hmm. Well, not a *Limbaugh* conservative ... that may not be a fatal flaw. We're **not conservatives** either. Let's hear more.

[...]

He said that he wanted businesses to come back to California so that the state government could collect enough tax revenues to provide social programs. This is the sort of obtuse comment middle-of-the-road Democrats always make, forgetting that businesses are leaving the state because they are tired of paying high taxes for those big government social programs."

Yeah, well politicians talk like that. What are you going to do? For what it's worth, he put it better when talking to **Fox News**:

"[We have to] bring businesses back to California. We have the most unfriendly business environment right now in California of any state. Businesses are leaving every day. They're expanding outside of the state. That means that people are getting laid off. Jobs are lost."

And if he believes in balanced budgets and is an **admirer** of **Milton Friedman**...

Anyway, back to Rush:

[...] "He has told the press he is 'very liberal' about social programs

Again, does that mean increased programmes entrenching poverty?

Or:

supports abortion

Hurray!

and homosexual adoption,

Cool.

and advocates 'sensible gun controls.'

Well, we're not going to shoot a guy for that, are we?

His entree into politics last year was a proposition Democrats endorsed because it raised state spending for what amounted to state babysitting - before-school and after-school programs that cost the state up to \$455 million a year.

"Up to" \$455 million? That means "less than", right? Well, taxation is far too high already, that's for sure. But ... well, in some countries, \$455 million is a lot of money. In California it's the cost of the extra air conditioning needed for right-wingers to cool down after hearing about it. Peanuts. Let's move on.

He has complained openly about the party's conservatism....

Good.

Talk magazine described him as 'impatient' with the religious right....

Wahoo!

[H]e expressed disgust with the Republicans who impeached Clinton. 'That was another thing I will never forgive the Republican Party for,' he said. 'We spent one year wasting time because there was a human failure. I was ashamed to call myself a Republican during that period.'^

Yes, yes! So were we! (No wait, we're not Republicans in the first place, but you know what we mean.)

(No, those weren't Gorbasmis. We just got a little carried away.)

OK Rush, you convinced us. Californians: if this is the worst that can be said by way of trashing Arnie, you're not going to find a better Governor anywhere.

Tue, 08/12/2003 - 13:10 | [permalink](#)

Arnie

For abortion? boo. For homosexual adoption? boo. Arnie is a liberal

claiming to be a Republican. A fake.

by a reader on Tue, 08/12/2003 - 18:17 | [reply](#)

Gay adoption

A reader wrote:

'For homosexual adoption? boo.'

Quite right! Those evil fags, they take our jobs, they take our children, they take our women, oh, wait, nah, strike that last bit, they don't take our women, that's the problem, us heteros are getting all henpecked, it's evil I tells ya, evil!!!

But seriously, what's wrong with gay adoption?

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Wed, 08/13/2003 - 00:20 | [reply](#)

What a weird entry. The Wo...

What a weird entry.

The World says "Hurray!" to the fact that AS "supports abortion", indicating that supporting abortion is prominent or at least significant on **The World**'s list of priorities for the next governor of the state of California. The reason why that's weird is that, given Roe v. Wade, in the US as things stand there's not a damn thing the governor of the state of California (or any other state for that matter) can do about *abortion*, so why the heck does **The World** *care*? (By the way, yes: I also think it's weird that social-conservatives care about this position in gubernatorial candidates, as well.)

But overall it's also a weird entry because of the simple fact that it's not at all clear why **The World** would care who becomes governor of California or poo-poo the "Peanuts" which California's taxpayers are shelling out for this or that social program which, as far as I can tell, **The World** knows absolutely nothing about.

I mean, unless I'm wrong in assuming that **The World** does not live in California.

by a reader on Wed, 08/13/2003 - 00:43 | [reply](#)

why care?

we care if he is for or against abortion because it tells us about his views, esp on morality and superstition.

the point of the peanuts comment was simply that any mistake Arnold made on that issue wasn't all that damning.

The World also does have readers who live in California, btw. and even for those who don't live there, it's still interesting. i mean, I

don't live in Israeli, but I didn't object to the history of the region.

nor do i object to posts about the political situation in Iran.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 08/13/2003 - 02:09 | [reply](#)

Well, it IS the WORLD, neh?

The place may be in disrepair, but California is still a part of it, is it not? I mean, why discuss Iraq, or Israel? **The World** is hardly based out of the Middle East, is it? Very odd happenings are in the works in CA, with the recall, and it's an interesting topic.

Why so weird?

-Dan Frank

by a reader on Wed, 08/13/2003 - 02:10 | [reply](#)

Hmmm...maybe The World is ...

Hmmm...maybe **The World** is glad to see that the current front-runner to replace Davis is quite sensible, not another of the bible-thumping wastes of scarce protoplasm that have well-established parasitic relationships w/ the RP in most of the U.S. Someone who is "economically conservative & socially moderate"- in other words, inclined to allow individual choices in social/cultural matters as long as those involved are consenting and responsible (adults only, but hey, you gotta start somewhere),

and to leave market players free to discover/create/exploit/trade valuable subjective-preferences data to the long-term benefit of all(more widely known as "conducting business for profit") without too much interference.

Someone who will oversee the 4th largest economy on Earth, who will probably not join(at least not too actively) the appalling crusade to deny us all access to proper regenerative medicine. Who does not believe that being elected means that the whole electorate shares his religious/moral/cultural beliefs. Sounds perfectly reasonable for **The World** to take an interest...because, longer term, a "moderate trend" could help loosen the Religious Right's parasitic grip on the RP, and help take the advocacy of truly progressive positions (such as being pro-choice, pro-families of affinity, pro-stem-cell/therapeutic cloning research, pro-sex-without-hangups-and-guilt, pro-autonomy, pro-child, etc.) out of the hands of some of the nuttiest idiotarians in existence, and help place such positions within a more consistent market-oriented framework that will allow individuals to maximize their fulfillment in every conceivable direction, with a minimum of undesired impact on others.

Oh, by the way, you can be a Republican & liberal, or a Democrat & conservative.

Brian

by [bk_2112](#) on Wed, 08/13/2003 - 02:38 | [reply](#)

[curi/Elliot] we care if he i...

[curi/Elliot] we care if he is for or against abortion because it tells us about his views, esp on morality and superstition.

In other words, Support For Abortion is sort of a semi-religious piety test on which you (and **The World**?) find the Correct answer to be essential in all political candidates whether or not "abortion" as such has relevance to the post in question. I understand.

[curi/Elliot] the point of the peanuts comment was simply that any mistake Arnold made on that issue wasn't all that damning.

Right - from **The World**'s perch outside of California, the public outlays Arnold caused us inside of California to pay by that Proposition looks like "Peanuts" to **The World**. Yes, that I understood. It's just that I don't appreciate this kind of comment. (easy for **The World** to say, and all, not helping to pick up the tab..)

P.S. I'm not saying I'm against Arnie's candidacy. Just that these are silly reasons for supporting it let alone caring about the whole thing. Sure I take an interest in Israeli elections, but my opinion is guided by factors of more import than which candidate worships the correct Go.... er, "supports abortion".

by a reader on Wed, 08/13/2003 - 18:11 | [reply](#)

Straw Man

"A Reader", in his/her enthusiasm to get righteously angry, purposely misconstrued what Elliot said.

Posts that respond to imaginary straw men tend not to be particularly illuminating. And no, being indignant doesn't raise your intellectual stature.

by [Daniel Strimpel](#) on Thu, 08/14/2003 - 16:26 | [reply](#)

455 million dollars might be ...

455 million dollars might be peanut for a surplus economy but it could break your neck when you could not find money to pay for all your spending. My advice to you is try to spend MUCH MUCH more than you earn and when billing statement comes, see how \$100 more spending which I assume that is peanut to your income, can break your kneecap. Make sense?

Words can fool men but nature doesn't give a damn!

by [Lan Nguyen](#) on Thu, 08/14/2003 - 18:02 | [reply](#)

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Conspiracy Theories – 1: The Basics

According to a recent **poll** in the German newspaper *Die Zeit*, one in five Germans believes that the U.S. government may have sponsored the 9-11 attacks. Among those under 30, the proportion is one in three. Conspiracy theories **as insane** as that one, or **worse**, currently corrupt the political thinking of the great majority of people in the world, including a substantial and influential minority in the West.

A conspiracy theory is

- an explanation of observed events in current affairs and history ... which
- alleges that those events were planned and caused in secret by powerful (or allegedly powerful) conspirators, who thereby...
- benefit at the expense of others, and who therefore...
- lie, and suppress evidence, about their secret actions, and...
- lie about the motives for their public actions.

Conspiracy theories are widely regarded as characteristic of irrational modes of thinking. The very term 'conspiracy theory' is usually reserved for *irrational* explanations meeting the above criteria. For conspiracies do happen. Criminal conspiracies are proved every day in courts. Political conspiracies are **discovered** from time to time. If we can rationally explain a bank robbery as being the consequence of a conspiracy, why not a war? Or the world economic system? What distinguishes a conspiracy theory (irrational, by definition) from a sane opinion that a particular group of people worked in secret to bring about certain observed events for their own immoral purposes?

Here, the *irrefutability* of conspiracy theories is usually cited: to a conspiracy theorist, everything that happens, or could possibly happen, constitutes evidence for the conspiracy. If the alleged conspirators seem to benefit, then that is evidence against them. If they do not, then that is just evidence that the media and/or other conspirators are concealing the facts, or that something much more valuable is **secretly at stake**.

But there is more to it than irrefutability. There is more to it even than the tendency to **invent** (rather than merely reinterpret)

evidence to conform to the conspiracy theory. For it is no

coincidence that every (irrational) conspiracy theory is in fact false. Underlying their invalid arguments and mishandling of evidence in judging explanations, there is a pathological mistake in the conspiracy theorists' conception of what constitutes an explanation in the first place.

Part 2

Wed, 08/13/2003 - 21:49 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Low-rent creationism

Conspiracism is to political science and economics as creationism is to evolutionary biology: an intellectually indolent quest for a nice pat answer without having to learn how things actually happen, usually in broad daylight.

by [Alan Furman](#) on Thu, 08/14/2003 - 06:01 | [reply](#)

You neocons are posting this ...

You neocons are posting this to hide your conspiracy.

by a reader on Thu, 08/14/2003 - 11:29 | [reply](#)

who do you work for, a reader...

who do you work for, a reader? WHO DO YOU WORK FOR?

by a reader on Thu, 08/14/2003 - 16:10 | [reply](#)

They are not dumb, they are just driven by their motives

In absent of an absolute truth, we judge and reason by weighting evidences on a relative scale. Intellectual honest people are VERY aware of their premises' short coming hence more likely they will not fall into the conspiracy camp easily. On the other hand, conspiracy theorists are driven by their motives so they do not bother to utilize the critical thinking tools that they have learned and used well in their day-to-day professional career or they would be un-employed for the rest of their life. The tools have been there in their world 3 library, they just block it with their motives when falling in love with the conspiracy theorem.

Words can fool men but nature doesn't give a damn!

by [Lan Nguyen](#) on Fri, 08/15/2003 - 18:22 | [reply](#)

Is that counting for Bush also?

Bush also told the world his Conspiracy theorie. and started WAR with it. Well the FBI hasnt updated theyr website yet, how come?

There are many false Conspirancys in the WWW, but on TV there is

only 1 false Conspiracy Theorie, but its ok cause its the goverment that telling that theorie.

<http://www.fbi.gov/mostwant/terrorists/terubl.htm>

CAUTION

Usama Bin Laden is wanted in connection with the August 7, 1998, bombings of the United States Embassies in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and Nairobi, Kenya. These attacks killed over 200 people. In addition, Bin Laden is a suspect in other terrorist attacks throughout the world.

by a reader on Fri, 08/22/2003 - 17:28 | [reply](#)

A theory is only a theory because it hasn't been proven

Had someone suggested in 1972 that the president of the United States personally knew about and authorized secret agents to literally break into his political opponents hotel room in order to find information to be used against him in the coming campaign, most ordinary people would have called them a "conspiracy theorist". But they would have been right. Had some one suggested that the US government sent CIA officials to assassinate the democratically elected rulers of socialist South American countries, or that the administration was making arms trade deals with Iran to fund insurgents in a democratic society, they would be labeled a "conspiracy theorist". But these things happened. There is this stigma attached to the word "conspiracy" as though it belief in one automatically makes them insane or at least without credibility. But the fact remains that conspiracies exist. A conspiracy is just a group of people getting together to discuss the details of a crime. The rich and powerful commit crime just as often as anyone else. And often times they work together. Watergate, the Iran-Contra affair, and CIA support of military coups against the democratically elected governments in Chile, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, including the murder of their leaders, as well as the many unsuccessful attempts to do the same in Cuba, were all conspiracies. The only reason some ideas are conspiracy "theories" is because insufficient evidence exists to prove them. Which you would expect, if the conspirators had covered their tracks well.

We know these things happened, and yet, being so long ago (20 years?) we conclude they are no longer relevant, and choose to continue to believe that something like that could never happen.

What is important is not proving whether or not the official version of 9/11 - physically - is accurate. To say that one should never question the purity of the American government is to insure that if they ever tried to do something like that, they would succeed. Indeed, if they were in anyway involved, the best way to prevent any real investigation, to prevent being questioned, is to accuse anyone who doubts them of being unpatriotic. This is exactly what Pop Mekanics and McCain have said (and I used to really like him). This is what millions of American citizens think to themselves. This is what is written as if it went without saying in the original article here.

"Conspiracy theories as insane as that one, or worse, currently corrupt the political thinking of the great majority of people in the world"

Insane, as though it were not only false, but as if it were unthinkable.

Perhaps physically everything happened on 9/11 as the official version says. That doesn't mean the CIA couldn't have trained the hijackers, or provided funding, or even just suggested the idea in the first place.

I'm not saying those things happened. But to call belief in that possibility "insane" is dangerously close minded.

It is acknowledged that conspiracies actually happen, in politics as in organized crime. Considering that we must look at every possibility in as much detail as we can and not discount certain things as "conspiracy theories" just because we really really don't want to believe them.

by [Jay Aziza](#) on Wed, 12/20/2006 - 16:53 | [reply](#)

Motive, opportunity, will

Obviously there are some theories out there which are born of hearsay, conjecture, misinformation, and ignorance.

Others have not really been addressed in any serious way - and probably could not be, because no one would have written out documents.

The people who object to them, (Popular Mechanics, John McCain, 9/11myths.com) tend to point out the reasons why such and such could have physically happened the way the official version says it did, or why such and such theory is impossible.

They then also say something along the lines of it being both unscientific and and detrimental to America to suggest such things. But how it happened is not the point, and never was.

Never mind that they were supposedly unable to find any of 4 blackboxes at the WTC center site (which are specifically designed to withstand a crash - that is the entire point of their existence - and give of a signal to aid in their recovery) but they were able to find a passport made of paper within hours - which happened to belong to one of the "terrorists"; it **could** happen.

Never mind that the damage to the pentagon was substantially smaller than the size of the plane which was supposed to have hit it, and that there was no sign of pieces of wing, engine or other plane parts visible anywhere on the site (or that video of the event was confiscated, or that it just happened to hit the one wing of the building which had just been reinforced and was largely empty due to the renovation), perhaps the engines vaporized but the fuselage punched through, it **could** happen.

Never mind that WTC 7 (which housed the FBI, CIA, and SEC - including the files on prosecuting Enron and dozens of other corrupt corporations) collapsed entirely due to fire and being hit with falling debris - unlike WTC 3, 4, 5, 6 and every other building in the area -

which is unprecedented in all the rest of history. That too **could** be a coincidence.

If every thing physically happened exactly the way the official version says, that does not in anyway make it less likely Americans - and specifically the government - was directly involved.

If they were, we would likely never know. They certainly had a lot to gain from it, much more than the Islamists did.

It would not have taken much.

Say a few core members of the PNAC (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PNAC> , <http://www.newamericancentury.org/>), a couple high level, trusted CIA agents, and 2 or three trusted Saudi Arabians, Bin Ladens perhaps.

The PNAC is a primary think tank of the neocon movement, and includes people who have held high government positions for the past half century and other rich and powerful people, including Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, Jeb Bush, Zalmay Khalilzad, Richard Perle, Richard Armitage, Dan Quayle, and Steve Forbes.

I am not saying this happened. Just consider the possibility.

Say, hypothetically, they plan what the targets should be, maximum effect, minimum actual damage, and believable. Something symbolic, but not catastrophic. A military target to justify a military response, and plenty of civilian deaths to get the American people agitated. They maybe provide limited cash, but that's it, for fear of ever being caught.

Mostly what they would have provided was the idea, what to do, how to do it. They would have wanted clues planted well in advance - for example, having the volunteers train at a US flight school, when they could just as easily trained in their own country, or a neutral one. They might have made sure to set up certain military training exercises, certain security camera angles, stuff which could seem perfectly innocent, but which would help make it easier to carry out, and easier to know who to blame. Bin Laden's original idea was to hit some 10-20 targets at once, on both coasts, but they would have shot that idea down, because they wanted to limit the actual damage. Then, through the Arab contacts, they found some people looking to martyr themselves. The actual hijackers have no idea that they are actually enacting a plan partially developed by and for the US leadership, they feel they are doing God's work by killing thousands of corrupt infidels. And the end result is the Islamists are able to up their recruiting a million percent, and the PNAC gets almost absolute power and one step closer to their stated goal of world domination.

Their principals (emphasis mine):

- we [the US] need to *increase* defense spending *significantly* if we

are to carry out our global responsibilities today and modernize our armed forces for the future;

- we need to strengthen our ties to democratic allies and to challenge regimes hostile to our *interests* and values;
- we need to promote the cause of political and *economic* freedom abroad;
- we need to accept responsibility for America's unique role in preserving and extending an international order friendly to our security, *our prosperity*, and our principles.

<http://www.newamericancentury.org/statementofprinciples.htm>

They spelled out in better detail how to achieve this in a report they released in 2000:

(<http://www.newamericancentury.org/RebuildingAmericasDefenses.pdf>)

"while the unresolved conflict in Iraq provides the immediate justification [for US military presence], the need for a substantial American force presence in the Gulf transcends the issue of the regime of Saddam Hussein"

"Over the long term, Iran may well prove as large a threat to U.S. interests in the Gulf as Iraq has. And even should U.S.-Iranian relations improve, retaining forward-based forces in the region would still be an essential element in U.S. security strategy given the longstanding American interests in the region".

"...advanced forms of biological warfare that can target specific genotypes may transform biological warfare from the realm of terror to a politically useful tool"

"...the process of transformation, even if it brings revolutionary change, is likely to be a long one, absent some catastrophic and catalyzing event — like a new Pearl Harbor."

This last one is most telling, since there is strong evidence that the US government, including possibly President Roosevelt, knew that the Japanese were planning the attack, and deliberately failed to warn the base because a surprise attack would better appal the American people and build their support for the war.

(
<http://www.thenewamerican.com/departments/feature/1999/070499.htm>
<http://www.fff.org/freedom/1291c.asp>
<http://www.independent.org/events/transcript.asp?eventID=28>)

by David Craig Hiser on Wed, 12/20/2006 - 17:04 | [reply](#)

Perhaps YOU suggested the idea to the hijackers

Prove me wrong.

by a reader on Thu, 12/21/2006 - 00:34 | [reply](#)

Conspiracies, rational and irrational

Jay and David argue that there is something cynical, perhaps uncritical about those who reject the notion of a conspiracy by the US government in the happenings of 9/11. If all these people were saying was that nothing other than the official version could ever, even in principle, happen, Jay and David would be correct. But, in the real world, it is Jay and David who are cynical and uncritical, as evident from their methodology.

For instance, Jay says

The only reason some ideas are conspiracy "theories" is because insufficient evidence exists to prove them. Which you would expect, if the conspirators had covered their tracks well.

This is the tip of the iceberg of the false methodology used by Jay, David and their like-minded conspiracists. The truth is that a theory is, logically, never *proven*; they are *disproven*. A conspiracy theory, however, is never disproven, even in principle. Just read a bit more, and you'd see that Jay and David confirm this. Jay writes,

Perhaps physically everything happened on 9/11 as the official version says. That doesn't mean the CIA couldn't have trained the hijackers, or provided funding, or even just suggested the idea in the first place.

David similarly writes,

If every thing physically happened exactly the way the official version says, that does not in anyway make it less likely Americans - and specifically the government - was directly involved. If they were, we would likely never know.

That is, even if we disprove the central claim of the 9/11 conspiracists, i.e. that the events of 9/11 did not take place according to the official description, Jay and David will inform us that is not *in the least* sufficient to discard their conspiracy version of events. This central feature, that their theories are in principle *unfalsifiable* is what makes them *unscientific*, and what's more, *irrational*. So when Jay replies to calling such conspiracy theories "insane" by **The World** by "as though it were not only false, but as if it were unthinkable" he gets it right despite his sarcasm--if we take "thinkable" to mean "rationally thinkable."

Jay and David also share the irrational assumption that discovering truth and uncovering realities is a matter of *belief*. The truth is, however, that the growth of knowledge comes about through trial and the *elimination* of error. Jay says,

Considering that we must look at every possibility in as much detail as we can and not discount certain things as "conspiracy theories" just because we really really don't want to believe them. [Emphasis mine]

But how can we, logically, consider *every* possibility, of which there

is an infinite number? And why should we at all *believe* in a theory, as though we have no better way of examining, criticizing, and discarding the wrong ones? Real conspiracies, like the CIA involvement in coups, or the Watergate and Iran-contra were all uncovered in this rational way, not by irrational beliefs and false methodologies. So, presenting them as examples by Jay is at best irrelevant to his approach.

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by **Liberal Iranian** on Thu, 12/28/2006 - 02:50 | [reply](#)

Excellent Points, Appalling Metaphors

American Digest gives a succinct, point-by-point account of how bad government, responding to silly people, caused yesterday's blackout. But spoils it by referring to that process as "Self-Inflicted Terrorism". It is not terrorism: none of those responsible intended the blackout to happen. None of them wanted any harm to come to its victims. None of them are today dancing in the streets. None are planning how to cause bigger and more painful blackouts in the future.

Steven Milloy of junkscience.com is rightly angry about the millions of poor people who have died of malaria and other insect-borne diseases because of the ban on DDT. (By the way, **Americans** are now starting to die of this policy too, through the West Nile virus.) So angry is he, that he can't resist an uncalled-for and utterly false closing remark:

Let's hope that in the 21st century our society comes to realize that genocide by junk science is no different than genocide by the gas chamber.

First of all, it was not genocide: the DDT ban was not intended to exterminate any ethnic or cultural group, nor did it in fact do so. And second, causing deaths through foolish negligence in the belief that one is saving lives and preventing other massive harm *is* different, very different, morally, from causing deaths wilfully and maliciously. The instigators of the DDT ban may have been unforgivably casual about the possibility of such deaths (some regarded them as a form of population control), but if another way had been found to prevent malaria, they would not have campaigned against it; nor did they send in death squads armed with mosquitos to forcibly infect any survivors.

This sort of metaphor is quite rare from anyone who, as in the above cases, is in other respects talking sense and making excellent points. But it is very common in idiotarian writing. (We noted **an example** recently; and see also **this one**.) For idiotarians have a dual motive: they not only want to attract the readers' attention to their boring pet issue by using a startling metaphor of evil violence, they also want to diminish evil violence itself by comparing it with their boring pet issue.

Blacked Out

American Digest gives a succinct, point-by-point account of how bad government, responding to silly people, caused yesterday's blackout.

How does American Digest know what caused the blackout before anyone else does? It seems to me that they are simply jumping to a conclusion based on their ideas about politics, and that **The World** (while clearly not of the opinion that *all* problems are due to "bad government, responding to silly people") is, being broadly in agreement, repeating it uncritically. I can certainly think of plausible events that I would argue do not fit this theory at all, but I wonder whether American Digest would not try hard to *make* them fit. Let me put it another way: once what actually happened becomes known, might the evidence refute this theory? If so, why treat it as established beyond reasonable doubt? If not, well....

by **Kevin** on Fri, 08/15/2003 - 20:21 | [reply](#)

Re: Blacked Out

Kevin said:

once what actually happened becomes known, might the evidence refute this theory?

Yes.

If so, why treat it as established beyond reasonable doubt?

Good point. We should have said: "a succinct, point-by-point account of the sort of behaviour by bad government, responding to silly people, which impedes problem-solving and sometimes causes systems to break down, and which might be responsible in this case".

by **Editor** on Fri, 08/15/2003 - 20:42 | [reply](#)

Metaphor appropriate

I think:

Let's hope that in the 21st century our society comes to realize that genocide by junk science is no different than genocide by the gas chamber.

is an excellent way to end that article. First of all, the DDT ban did in fact more or less target a specific ethnic or cultural group. Namely black people in Africa. The fact that it didn't exterminate all of them, or that not all victims were black, doesn't make the term genocide incorrect. Just as the fact that the Nazis didn't kill all Jews

and the fact that not all their victims were Jews makes the term

genocide incorrect.

Second, the result **was** intended by some, by their own admission. So for those, the term genocide is literally correct. For those people the act meets both criteria to be a proper genocide: a specific population was targeted and the result was intended.

Third, most proponents surely know about the result, or would have been able to learn about the result. Not changing their mind with that knowledge makes the result as good as intended.

That leaves those people who really didn't intend the result and who really were (justifiably?) unaware of the result. Well, a metaphor is just that, a metaphor. It's a comparison to make a point, in bold language, without claiming that one is exactly the same as the other. Some intelligence is assumed in the reader, to be able to read behind the lines. Language is not as exact as mathematics. I don't think doing that is necessarily wrong. I think that when the author makes the point there's no difference, he doesn't literally mean there's no difference. He means there's no difference in terms of an important aspect: for the victims it makes no difference whether they were killed intentionally or by foolishness.

The road to hell is paved with good intentions. And good intentions form a far greater danger than bad intentions. For it is far more common for people to do evil things (well, things with unintended horrible results) with good intentions than evil things with bad intentions.

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Sun, 08/24/2003 - 14:45 | [reply](#)

DDT myths

Sorry to comment on such an old issue, I hope you will let this comment through anyway.

There quite an important point in the DDT debate that nobody here seems aware of: It is nothing but a persistent myth that the US ban on DDT in 1972 has caused any deaths due to malaria.

The 1972 ban on DDT in the US had specific exceptions for campaigns against disease-carrying insects (as well as for agricultural uses where no other means were effective), and it had no direct consequences at all in the developing countries - where DDT has been used over all the years - and still is being used today inside the houses, where it poses no threat to wildlife.

It is thus not only Steven Milloy's comparison of DDT with genocide which is appallingly ridiculous - his claims about 80 millions "preventable" deaths is exactly as wrong.

The US ban has not cost a single african life - and if you took the time to check your sorces, you would immediately realise that it

simply could not possibly have done so due to the nature of both

the ban as well as the very spraying being done inside the houses.

Steven Milloy knows this perfectly well, but getting serious information out clearly has never been the thrust of his various astroturf groups.

A more proper title of your remark could have been "Missing points, ridiculous metaphors". You might justly add willfully misleading as well.

Robert Schultz

by Robert Schultz on Mon, 03/06/2006 - 00:45 | [reply](#)

Re: DDT Myths

Thank you for the comment.

Of course the US *ban* "has not cost a single African life", because it does not have the force of law in Africa. However, one of the allegations is that various forms of pressure from Western governments and NGOs have caused anti-malaria campaigns to become far less effective through hostility to DDT.

We make no claim to be experts on the history or present status of anti-malaria campaigns. One problem with "checking sources" in this field is that the conclusions reached by various sources seem to be largely predictable from their political philosophies – right-wingers being broadly opposed to the anti-DDT campaign and concluding that it has resulted in many deaths, and left-wingers disagreeing on one or both of those points. However, as you rightly imply, this should not be an insuperable problem to those who want to discover the truth.

To this end, could you please set us right about the purely factual statements expressed in [this](#) open letter, in which the organisation "Africa Fighting Malaria" claims that

WHO's 1979 global strategy for malaria control called on countries to de-emphasize IRS

[That's 'indoor residual spraying' – presumably the very thing you say has continued unimpeded]

and to increase emphasis on case detection and treatment. In 1985, the World Health Assembly (WHA) resolution 38.24 called on malaria-endemic countries to move away from IRS and to dismantle the vertical malaria control programmes and move towards a more horizontal "community-based" system of malaria control. The 1979 strategy and the WHA resolution effectively destroyed organized malaria control programs in many developing countries. WHA resolution 38.24 caused a devastating loss of talented malaria control personnel and a loss of strict scientific guidance over malaria control programs. This immensely destructive resolution was based on a false assumption that a community-

based system is the only framework within which malaria control can be sustained. Acceptance of the resolution ignored the fact that many highly successful and long lasting malaria control programmes are run vertically and have been sustained for decades.

Countries that chose not to decentralise their malaria control activities and chose to retain IRS for malaria control have not witnessed the rise in malaria cases experienced by those countries that complied with the WHO's resolution.

If that is true, and if this WHO policy and similar Western policies were indeed influenced by environmentalism, then Western environmental politics have indeed caused many deaths from malaria in other countries.

But is it true? Is Africa Against Malaria being "wilfully misleading" in your opinion? If so, why do you think that is? And more importantly, could you direct us to the sources that explain what the truth of the matter is?

by **Editor** on Mon, 03/06/2006 - 10:35 | [reply](#)

DDT

Sorry if I interfere with a discussion, but you ask for evidence on DDT. How about Tim Lambert's page?

<http://timlambert.org/2005/12/ddt-ban-myth-bingo/>

It offers refutations of all of Steven Milloys claims, including the ones also made by the front group "Africa fighting malaria".

Best regards,

Christoffer Harder

by Christoffer Bugge Harder on Thu, 05/18/2006 - 13:53 | [reply](#)

Re: DDT

Thank you for the link! Far from "interfering with the discussion", you have provided exactly what we asked for.

Unfortunately, the only mention we can see of Africa Fighting Malaria on that web page is a link to [this](#) page, which does not purport to refute any claim of Africa Fighting Malaria. (Have we missed the passage containing the refutation? Please let us know.)

Nor does it call it a "front group". Perhaps you could enlighten us: for whom is Africa Against Malaria a front group, and what does that tell us about its claims which we quoted above?

by **Editor** on Thu, 05/18/2006 - 15:23 | [reply](#)

Thank you for the answer.

Thank you for the answer.

Most of the numerous claims of AFM - that WHO and other international fora are imposing a kind of "de-facto" ban on DDT, that it could eradicate malaria, that resistance is a small or nonexistant problem, that South Africa reduced malaria by 95% and so on - are in my opinion quite effectively refuted by the other links that Tim Lambert offers in his "Bingo" game, if you follow them.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the decisions of international organisation to lobby for a phaseout of DDT does not mean that spraying against malaria mosquitoes are ended - they are simply promoting a shift to pyrethroids or other poisons, which are just as effective, but often more expensive. Another claim of the AFM is that the EU is threatening with sanctions against Uganda because of their use of DDT - but the EU actions are only directed against agricultural use of DDT. Not only does this use of DDT pose a threat to raptors, but it also could destroy the effect of DDT in the fight against malaria because of the rapid resurgence of resistant mosquitos always associated with excessive spraying.

Furthermore, Roger Bate from AFM advocated the use of DDT in Sri Lanka after the Tsunami, even though it is well known that DDT is useless in Sri Lanka because of widespread resistance. The DDT use was voluntarily given up in Sri Lanka exactly because of that more than 30 years ago.

Steven Milloys claims about 90 mio. deaths on this page

http://www.junkscience.com/malaria_clock.htm

are apparently completely unfounded, since the US ban on DDT had no effect in Africa and furthermore contained specific exceptions for uses of DDT related to disease controlling.

Why do they purport such false claims? I cannot really see other reasons for doing so than to smear environmentalists. Since both AFM and Junkscience receive significant fundings from industry groups critical to environmental movements, and since AFMs only real goal seems to be advocating excessive use of DDT (a strategy positively known to be of no use in many places), I think that the term Astro turf (or front group is appropriate.

Best regards

Christoffer

by Christoffer Bugge Harder on Thu, 05/18/2006 - 20:02 | [reply](#)

Addition

Just to point that out,

I know that this topic is a little technical, and that many people simply tend to side with the position on their political wing, as you

correctly note.

I will make no claim to be "unbiased", since I am generally pro-environment as well as left-leaning.

But I consider myself a somewhat reasonable human being. As a biology student having taken classes in toxicology, organic chemistry, ornithology and majoring in evolutionary biology, I will also make the vain claim to have some kind of grasp on the facts in this debate. To be explicit, my opinion on the whole DDT matter is

1: The ban in most countries on agricultural use of DDT was fully justified by well-documented environmental hazards. As mentioned, such spraying would very likely contribute to the rise of resistance and be a much greater danger to the usefulness of DDT in the antimalaria fight

2: this resistance problem was and is the main reason for the halting use of DDT as an antimalarial drug

3: The claims of Milloy and others about millions of deaths resulting from a nonexisting DDT ban are absolutely bogus, to say the least - Milloy is not "justly angry", he is just angry.

4: However, if there is no alternative, just as effective and less dangerous insecticide than DDT, poor countries where malaria is endemic should continue to use DDT in IRS - if this is likely to be effective (which is not the case in many countries)

5: Finally, if environmentalists or Western governments want the developing countries to abandon their use of DDT in the antimalarial fight, they should compensate them for any costs and provide a guaranteed just as effective alternative toxin.

This is also the position of almost all environmental organisations I have ever heard speaking out in this matter. I consider this a somewhat balanced point of view. I hope you do not see it as merely propaganda.

Best regards,

Christoffer

by Christoffer Bugge Harder on Thu, 05/18/2006 - 20:33 | [reply](#)

A factual issue and a terminological cone

Perhaps we could focus on one factual issue:

AFP says that the WHO and other such organisations called on malaria-endemic countries to move away from 'indoor residual spraying' with DDT. Are you saying that this is (1) simply a lie: they only campaigned against agricultural use of DDT; or (2) true but misleading, because 'indoor residual spraying' continued just as effectively with different chemicals?

And a terminological one:

Are you saying that any group that is financed by people who agree

with its policies is fairly called a "front group"? Surely by that standard, all campaigning groups are front groups. Wouldn't a front group usually have the additional attribute that it is set up for one ostensible purpose, by people who actually have a different agenda, usually a less popular or attractive one. This is, for instance, how Oliver Kamm uses the term when he says that "**Respect** is a front organisation for the Socialist Workers' Party".

by **Editor** on Thu, 05/18/2006 - 22:54 | [reply](#)

Concerning the factual issue

Concerning the factual issue: AFMs statement about the WHO position is more or less "true but misleading". I do not know exactly when IRS with pyrethroids and other DDTalternatives started out - but the main reason for the cease in the use of DDT is mosquito resistance, not environmental pressure, a fact that AFM systematically omits. In this article(<http://www.fightingmalaria.org/news.php?ID=360>), AFM advocates spraying of DDT in Sri Lanka, even though everyone in the field knows very well that DDT is useless in Sri Lanka exactly because of this. Check WHO's DDT and Malaria pages <http://malaria.who.int/>

Regarding the terminology - I agree to your terminology, I certainly do not see every lobby group as a front or astroturf group. www.malaria.org is an example of an honest group getting industry funds. It actually is fighting malaria and is run by qualified scientists in the field.

But AFM is no such anti-malaria group. Its almost sole objective seems to be promoting DDT use, and it clearly has little idea about the factual stuff. It is established by two ideologues (Bate and Tren), and it seems to have little interest in other topics than to hurl accusations against environmentalist groups. It is established not to fight malaria, but to fight environmental groups, and it is financed by well known antienvironmental interests - these characteristics qualify it as a front group.

Best regards,

Christoffer

by Christoffer Bugge Harder on Mon, 05/22/2006 - 10:11 | [reply](#)

Any answers from the editors?

Dear Editors,

have you no answers at all to Christoffer Bugge Harders facts? Does this mean that you acknowledge what he says.

by Kaspar Jørgensen on Thu, 06/22/2006 - 12:57 | [reply](#)

Answers

Which of his facts do you want to see a comment on?

-- Elliot Temple
My Blog

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 06/22/2006 - 18:45 | [reply](#)

What is right and what is wrong about DDT?

Dear Editors,

I don't know that much about the DDT issues, but judging from this debate, I would say that Christopher Bugge Harder has me convinced here. I checked some of the sources he quotes, and I checked the homepage "Junk Science". The first ones seem quite reliable and with many facts, while the latter seems to be full of half-truths, op-eds and clearly propagandistic notions, such as the clock showing the costs of the Kyoto Protocol. John Quiggins homepage also, in my view, rebuts many of the allegations presented on Junk Science, and quite effectively. I studied the death clock counting malaria deaths presented on Junk Science thoroughly, but nowhere did it offer any links whatsoever between the US ban on DDT in the 70s and the deaths from malaria in Africa. That seems quite a weak basis for such harsh allegations, don't you think?

Is there such a ban on DDT that you seem to presuppose, or isn't there? That shouldn't be that complicated to sort out.

Has EU or US policies on DDT cost lives in Africa? Does WHO advocate DDT spraying or not? What effect has the US ban on DDT had in Africa?

Yours sincerely,

Kaspar Jørgensen

by Kaspar Jørgensen on Mon, 06/26/2006 - 11:01 | [reply](#)

Re: Concerning the factual issue

But AFM is no such anti-malaria group. Its almost sole objective seems to be promoting DDT use, and it clearly has little idea about the factual stuff. It is established by two ideologues (Bate and Tren), and it seems to have little interest in other topics than to hurl accusations against environmentalist groups. It is established not to fight malaria, but to fight environmental groups, and it is financed by well known antienvironmental interests

But how would hurling false accusations against environmentalist groups serve to promote DDT use?

And are these 'antienvironmental interests' companies who want to sell more DDT, or what?

by **Editor** on Mon, 06/26/2006 - 19:08 | [reply](#)

www.malaria.org

www.malaria.org is an example of an honest group getting industry funds. It actually is fighting malaria and is run by qualified scientists in the field.

Near the top of www.malaria.org's **DDT page** is an endorsement of Africa Fighting Malaria. In fact the endorsement appears to refer to the very campaign by AFM that we linked to above. Has this honest group run by qualified scientists in the field been duped by the dishonest one which has little idea about the factual stuff?

by **Editor** on Mon, 06/26/2006 - 19:22 | [reply](#)

AFM and DDT

Dear editors,

you asked: "...how would hurling false accusations against environmentalist groups serve to promote DDT use"?

The immediate answer to this is very straightforward: If you succeed in depicting your opponants as naive, "GAIA"-fanatics, religious pagans and anti-man treehuggers unaware of scientific facts, it will be much easier for organisations like AFM to stand forward as the rational, cool-headed and considerate part in the case. If you actually manage to make people believe that the unspecified environmental movement has been guilty in the death of 90 million African children and that DDT would have saved them were it not for this evil movement, it will not be difficult convincing people that DDT should be sprayed everywhere.

It is at the core of the antienvironmental movement to depict its opponants as religious, anti-man people unaffected by facts. Check publications by e.g. Dixy Lee Ray, Michael Sanera, Gregg Easterbrook and Steven Milloy, if you do not believe me. The DDT case is a very important such "battlefield".

It is hardly necessary to argue neither about Roger Bate's or Steven Milloy's well-known anti-environmental positions nor about their many earlier fraudulent claims. Are you seriously challenging the fact that these people can be fairly described as "antienvironmentalists"? Can you point out any remote connection between the US 1972 agriculture ban on DDT on one side and malaria deaths in Africa on the other, as alleged on Milloys "Death clock" page? Why make such an obviously false claim if not to smear environmental movements?

As both AFM and most environmental groups acknowledge, DDT has become the epitome of an "evil pesticide". The rise of the environmental movements was very much linked to the struggle against DDT - and the US agriculture ban of 1972 was one of its first great "victories". If Roger Bate, Steven Milloy or other "junk scientists" could cast doubts upon the validity of the US DDT ban, they believe that they can also cast doubt about the motifs and the honesty of the environmental movement.

You may, of course, disagree, but I do not think that I have to

descend into conspiracy theories to drive these points home, neither in your view.

Concerning the resistance development: If you are doubting that resistance to DDT is a major problem, you can check this homepage (http://www.pesticideresistance.org/DB/pesticide_profile.php?pageNum_rstPesticides=10&totalRows_rstPesticides=448&formulationid=97)

This article (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/06/04/AR2005060400130.html>) also does a good job in explaining the rise of resistance as the main problem and reason for switching away from DDT use.

AFM advocates DDT spraying almost everywhere as if it were some kind of miracle medicine. Why do they suggest DDT spraying in areas where it is known to everybody with some knowledge in the field that it will be of no use (like in Sri Lanka, as quoted formerly)? Surely, they cannot possibly have much idea about the factual stuff (which is scarcely surprising since none of them are scientists) when they argue like that. I assume you will grant this.

Will you accuse me of being a conspiracy theorist if I make the claim that the primary goal of AFM is to promote DDT use because it is a convenient way to attack environmental movements at their original core - and not because of consideration for Asian or African malaria victims? And if you disagree, can you then suggest any other plausible reason for loudly endorsing spraying treatments which are known beforehand to be completely ineffective?

I do consider malaria.org a lobby group, and I do not agree with their points of view, but they are honest about the resistance problem, and they make the distinction between agricultural use (which is indeed banned) of DDT, and the disease control (which is not banned and never has been). I have not seen them accuse environmental groups of being responsible for millions of deaths, either. If you want to prevent something, you often side with just about everybody, but you can ask themselves why they link to AFM. However, I still find it difficult to honestly describe AFM as anything but ideological with little knowledge about the factual stuff. As said above, if you do not agree to this, could you then answer the question why they, then, are advocating DDT spraying in areas where it is positively known to have no effect and furthermore be a waste of money?

Best regards,

Christoffer Bugge Harder

P.S: If you acknowledge that DDT is not banned, as you seem to do, then why do you claim above that "Steven Milloy is justly angry about the millions of poor people who have died of malaria and other insect-borne diseases because of the ban on DDT"?

by Christoffer Bugge Harder on Sat, 07/08/2006 - 19:06 | [reply](#)

Regarding my last comment: I

Regarding my last comment: I hope I did not sound too indignant or

rude - I am not too familiar with colloquial English. I did not intend to insult you by any means. I am also sorry for the poor spelling.

Still, I would like to see you comment on the claims of AFM and Steven Milloy in the light of the information I linked to. Do you maintain that some kind of DDT ban has cost millions of lives, that WHO are opposed to DDT spraying, that they do not fund IRS spraying with other chemicals, or that development of resistance was not the main reason for switching away from DDT?

Best regards

Christoffer Bugge Harder

by Christoffer Bugge Harder on Fri, 07/14/2006 - 10:43 | [reply](#)

Some other interesting posts

Some other interesting posts about claims of possible wonders of DDT spraying in Sri Lanka and India:

<http://info-pollution.com/ddtban.htm>

This is the indian doctor V.P. Sharma:

<http://www.ias.ac.in/currsci/dec102003/1532.pdf>

Does the editor still believe the claims of AFM or Steven Milloy?

Regards,

Christoffer Harder

by Christoffer Bugge Harder on Tue, 07/18/2006 - 14:53 | [reply](#)

AFM and DDT

If you actually manage to make people believe that the unspecified environmental movement has been guilty in the death of 90 million African children and that DDT would have saved them were it not for this evil movement, it will not be difficult convincing people that DDT should be sprayed everywhere.

Presumably when you say 'everywhere', this is hyperbole. What places do you mean specifically? And does the AFM advocate spraying in those places, or is this a secret agenda of theirs which they will only begin to advocate once sufficiently many people believe that the unspecified environmental movement has been guilty in the death of 90 million African children and that DDT would have saved them were it not for this evil movement?

by [Editor](#) on Tue, 07/18/2006 - 15:14 | [reply](#)

Dear editors, first of al

Dear editors,

first of all, I am not sure if I get the mood of your reply right. I am not a native English speaker, so if I am missing completely out on something, it is my mistake. Are you being ironic or thinking that I am promoting conspiracy theories?

"Presumably when you say 'everywhere', this is hyperbole".

You are right; "Everywhere" is somewhat polemical. However, I have never (and I do mean never in the literary sense) read any longer pieces from AFM about how to fight malaria that have not contained lots of recommendations to spray DDT, no matter where in the world.

"What places do you mean specifically"?

There are quite a few places, but to begin with, we can look on this page, to which have referred previously:

<http://www.fightingmalaria.org/news.php?ID=360>

Here, AFM suggests spraying with DDT in Sri Lanka, as well as in Southeast Asia as well. (They also quote Charles Wurster of EDF for a fake quote about malaria as an efficient population control mechanism).

It has long been known that the malaria-carrying mosquitoes in Sri Lanka as well as in most of India are resistant to DDT. In fact, DDT was used excessively in Sri Lanka both before and after 1963, but when malaria resurged in the late 1960 and the singhalese went back to the DDT sprayguns, DDT had lost it efficiency. So Sri Lanka abandoned DDT spraying in the 60ies and 70ies - because it did not work anymore. I cannot find any link whatsoever to supposedly green pressure in this process.

Can you suggest any sensible reasons for AFM to suggest DDT spraying in e.g. Sri Lanka? They do not even mention the fact that malaria mosquitoes in Sri Lanka are resistant, or that DDT use quickly leads to resistance development anyway.

In another article (http://www.aei.org/publications/pubID.21911,filter.all/pub_detail.asp), Roger Bate has moderated this point of view a little - here, he does recognise the possibility of resistance to DDT, but soon after claims that the major role of DDT is as a repellent, not as insecticide. But Bate fails to recognise that resistance of the mosquitoes is a two-way system: Physiological resistance (the poison is ingested but causes no harm) and behavioural resistance (the insect tend to avoid DDT sprayed surfaces). In either case, DDT becomes useless because the mosquitoes are either unaffected or simply decide to rest outside houses. AFM's suggestion has already been tried without success.

If AFM claims to have a grasp on reality, they should not post such an utterly false allegation.

I hope it answers your question,

Regards,

Christoffer

by a reader on Sun, 07/23/2006 - 01:21 | [reply](#)

"Presumably when you say 'eve

"Presumably when you say 'everywhere', this is hyperbole".

You are right; "Everywhere" is somewhat polemical. However, I have never (and I do mean never in the literary sense) read any longer pieces from AFM about how to fight malaria that have not contained lots of recommendations to spray DDT, no matter where in the world.

Perhaps they only brought up DDT spraying regarding places they advocate it?

I think what the editor was getting at is they don't advocate DDT spraying everywhere. For example, not in my house. There is a logic to where they do and do not advocate spraying DDT. This logic includes that they only advocate spraying DDT in places where it will do something useful such as kill mosquitos. Saying they advocate spraying "everywhere" does not consider and address the actual logic of their position.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sun, 07/23/2006 - 01:42 | [reply](#)

"I think what the editor was

"I think what the editor was getting at is they don't advocate DDT spraying everywhere. For example, not in my house".

I do not know if I do not express myself sufficiently clearly, but I do, of course, understand what the Editor hinted at.

And of course, I do not suggest that the AFM are literally advocating spraying DDT "everywhere" - like in your house (in the U.S.A, I suppose).

Rather, AFM seems to me to advocate spraying with DDT almost everywhere where malaria is endemic. Furthermore, they almost never seem to consider alternative solutions and are always accompanying their spraying suggestions with harsh attacks on governments and environmental organisations.

"There is a logic to where they do and do not advocate spraying DDT. This logic includes that they only advocate spraying DDT in places where it will do something useful such as kill mosquitos".

You do not seem to actually having read my last post. If there indeed is such a logic, as you claim, could you be so kind to explain the logic in suggesting spraying DDT in e.g. India or Sri Lanka after the last tsunami?

In these places, it is well known by all relevant experts (like V.P. Sharma, Indias leading malaria expert) to be futile, because the

mosquitoes are genetically as well as behaviourally resistant to DDT.

"Saying they advocate spraying "everywhere" does not consider and address the actual logic of their position".

As said before, if you add everywhere "where malaria is endemic", it is, in my view, very close to the truth.

AFM is a subdivision of the American Enterprise Institute, and it is not run by qualified scientists in the field. It can be fairly described as an organisation established to fight environmentalists and government intervention disrupting free market economies. This is, of course, a perfectly legitimate political goal, but it is not respectable to hide it under a thin veil of science, especially not when you are unaware (willingly or not) of central scientific problems in the DDT approach.

I repeat that I do not oppose spraying with DDT in places where it can be expected to be effective, and where no other remedy is likely to be effective or can be afforded. But it is foolish to launch it as a miracle medicine in the way that the AFM is doing it.

Regards

Christoffer

by Christoffer Bugge Harder on Tue, 08/01/2006 - 17:34 | [reply](#)

Everywhere where malaria is endemic

Does the open letter from AFM that we **cited**, and which initiated this entire discussion of them, advocate spraying "almost everywhere where malaria is endemic"?

Does it "almost never consider alternative solutions" to DDT?

Does it misrepresent their true agenda?

by **Editor** on Tue, 08/01/2006 - 18:47 | [reply](#)

DDT and libertarian think tanks

Dear editors,

you have asked me many times about both the factual and the terminological issues, and I have adressed all your questions repeatedly and posed some counter-questions. This far, you have been evading a little.

I will briefly answer your last questions:

1: "Does the open letter from AFM that we cited, and which initiated this entire discussion of them, advocate spraying "almost everywhere where malaria is endemic"?"

Yes. The sense of the letter is to give the impression that DDT

would work wonders if only the eco-lobbyists or WHO would allow it. Of course, they do not mention every single country in the world, but it is a specific and uncritical endorsement of the necessity of DDT. And of course, they fail to mention any problems regarding DDT resistance (as usual), as I have written to you three times.

"Does it "almost never consider alternative solutions" to DDT"?

Yes and no. They do mention ITN (bednets) and other strategies as important, but they also always add that ITN alone is not sufficient and that IRS with DDT is essential in combination. They also seem to imply that "IRS" simply means "DDT spraying".

"Does it misrepresent their true agenda"?

To answer this question, you have to make inferences about Roger Bate's and his fellows' motives. Honestly, my immediate answer is "yes".

If you think I am too harsh or promoting conspiracy theories, you can check this page for more on the libertarian think tanks and the DDT issue: http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Malaria_and_DDT

I do not doubt that many libertarians are honestly interested in fighting malaria and believe that misguided or careless environmentalists are impeding this fight (and they are indeed right in claiming that some environmentalists are severely misguided). I hope you do not feel patronised if I would group you in this segment - I mean it as a sincere compliment.

However, Roger Bate is, like Steven Milloy, renowned for obviously disingenuous claims about environmental or health issues and for the founding of and participation in dubious astroturf groups like "European Science and Environment Forum" or "Tech Central Station" and the likes. And, like Milloy, he simply cannot be ignorant about the falsity of many of the claims he makes. I can provide you with a multitude of such examples if you are interested.

So, quite honestly, I will argue that Bate's primary agenda is to attack environmentalists, liberals, UN, WHO and other groups he sees as enemies and anti-market groups, and that AFM and the DDT fight is simply a convenient battlefield. I do not think that neither Bate nor Milloy care much for sick African children.

Regards,

Christoffer

P.S: Now when I have answered your questions: I would appreciate if you, too, would answer these questions that I have posed repeatedly:

1: When you say that Milloy is "justly angry....because of the ban on DDT", then to which DDT ban are you referring?

2: Can you point out any link whatsoever on Milloy's "Death Clock"

page that offers a connection between the 1972 US agriculture ban and malaria deaths in Africa?

3: Can you explain the presumed logic of advocating spraying of DDT in India and Sri Lanka, where it is known to be of little or no use?

4: If you think AFM has a good grasp on the realities, then why do they fail to mention the resistance in Sri Lanka as mentioned, when their promoted strategy there (IRS spraying with DDT) has already been tried repeatedly, has failed and subsequently been abandoned years ago? If they are unaware of this, then are they not quite poorly informed for malaria eradication experts in your view? And if they are aware of the problem, do you then agree that their claims can be fairly described as "dishonest"?

by Christoffer Bugge Harder on Tue, 08/01/2006 - 23:19 | [reply](#)

Comments?

To the editors,

have you come up with any answers to my questions?

Regards,

Christoffer

by Christoffer Bugge Harder on Sat, 08/05/2006 - 10:53 | [reply](#)

Everywhere

1: "Does the open letter from AFM that we cited, and which initiated this entire discussion of them, advocate spraying "almost everywhere where malaria is endemic"?"

Yes.

Does it advocate using DDT outside houses? Or other than in coordinated spraying campaigns?

by [Editor](#) on Sat, 08/05/2006 - 15:12 | [reply](#)

Re: DDT and libertarian think tanks

In reply to your questions.

Question 1 (what DDT ban): We answered that in the second paragraph of [this](#) comment above.

Question 2 (any link whatsoever between US DDT ban and malaria deaths in Africa): See answer to Question 1.

Question 3: (Logic of advocating DDT spraying where it is known to be of no use): None. But could you provide a link to someone

advocating this? Do you mean the reference to Sri Lanka in that

open letter?

Question 4 (Could one be honest, knowledgeable, and still advocate the above): No, not honest, knowledgeable and sane. Unless one had a hidden agenda.

The trouble with the specific hidden agenda you propose is that it implies that the critics have some reasons for being opposed to environmental movement (and the anti-DDT campaign in particular), which have filled them with passion for their cause, but about which they (and you) are staying silent, and they are instead trying to promote that cause with arguments they know to be invalid and allegations they know to be false.

This *could* happen, in some exotic set of circumstances. We are open to the possibility that it has happened to those people for reasons of which we as yet have no inkling. But their opponents, including, so far, you, show no sign of acknowledgement that they are alleging any such thing, or have anything a priori bizarre to explain.

by **Editor** on Sat, 08/05/2006 - 15:25 | [reply](#)

Africa fighting malaria does

Africa fighting malaria does suggest spraying with DDT in Sri Lanka and India - there is about 100 hits on google with the search words ""africa fighting malaria" Sri lanka tsunami ddt".

You can read this AFM article, if you still doubt what I say:
<http://www.fightingmalaria.org/news.php?ID=360>

This article repeats Steve Milloys charges (90 mio. deaths due to a "de facto ban". How can you have a de facto DDT ban when it is still being used in 23 countries?

It fails to notice that the mosquitoes in Sri Lanka are resistant to DDT and that spraying with DDT has been tried and subsequently abandoned, not because of environmental pressure, but because it was not effective anymore.

Check this source out for the whole story: <http://info-pollution.com/ddtban.htm>

It furthermore spreads the fake quote about EDF executive Charles Wurster praising DDT for helping to reduce the population pressure.

Do you maintain that the AFM is a well informed, unpartisan group only devoted to save human lives? Then why do they endorse spraying DDT in Sri Lanka? You answered yourself that it was not possible to suggest spraying DDT where mosquitoes are resistant and still be "honest, knowledgeable and sane. Unless one had a hidden agenda".

Do you think that it is "exotic" to suggest that AFM or Junkscience could have a hidden agenda? They are both funded by industries with conflicting interests, and they are both trying their best to hide

their sources. In my view, their hidden agenda is patent and obvious.

As I wrote, both Steve Milloy and Roger Bate has a long history of membership of other Astroturf groups also slamming environmental or health groups for advocating restrictions on the chemical industries or tobacco firms.

Everybody who regularly read libertarian/conservative manifestos will know that they are sceptical about environmentalists because they often advocate legislation or regulation interfering with the free market economy. Is this an exotic accusation in your view?

It does seem to me that you are seriously interested in getting this right, and I respect a libertarian point of view. But from a somewhat balanced point of view, it is hard to respect people like Roger Bate and Steve Milloy - at least if you have some knowledge about both science and propaganda. It seems to me that you are, excuse me, displaying a bit of naiveté in your approach to the astroturf machinery and its motifs as well as to the amount of propaganda in the case. Are you struggling to imagine that people apparently making wellmeaning and humane appeals could have such dubious agendas?

Regards,

Christoffer

by Christoffer Bugge Harder on Tue, 08/08/2006 - 11:41 | [reply](#)

Dear editors, does this ar

Dear editors,

does this article

<http://www.fightingmalaria.org/news.php?ID=360>

from AFM clearly endorse spraying in a resistant neighbourhood, or does it not?

Could you explain the presumed logic in AFM's spraying suggestions you claimed to exist to me, in this article? As a person academically trained in science, I frankly do not see it.

And if you do not see it either, could you then suggest a reason for suggesting futile spraying you consider likely?

Regards,

Christoffer

by Christoffer Bugge Harder on Thu, 08/10/2006 - 06:41 | [reply](#)

answer

Does the article clearly endorse spraying DDT where mosquitos are resistant? No. I searched "resist" and only found: "Worse yet, area mosquitoes have built up a resistance to anti-malarial drugs,

rendering them useless." which is referring to anti-malarial drug resistance, not DDT resistance.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 08/10/2006 - 16:30 | [reply](#)

Re: answer

I think the idea is that, although the article doesn't explicitly say so, it's hard to read it as not endorsing spraying DDT *in Sri Lanka*, and we are also assured that spraying DDT in Sri Lanka is known to all reputable scientists in the field to be futile. Is that correct, Christoffer?

by **David Deutsch** on Thu, 08/10/2006 - 17:38 | [reply](#)

Re: answer

Searching "sri lanka" i don't see where the article tells us Sri Lanka has resistant mosquitos. BTW I also searched "spray".

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 08/10/2006 - 18:18 | [reply](#)

Elliott, of course the c

Elliott,

of course the cited AFM article does not mention the fact that the mosquitoes of Sri Lanka are resistant to DDT - you do not seem to realise that this is exactly my point? They just endorse spraying it there without mentioning this inconvenient fact.

However, the mosquitoes in Sri Lanka are indeed resistant to DDT. I have posted other links with documentation, but if you do not believe them, read WHO's note on malaria and the tsunami about Sri Lanka:

http://www.who.int/malaria/docs/Asia_tsunami_malaria_risk-v1-5Jan.pdf

You can also check this page about widespread DDT resistance in many disease-transmitting insects all over the world:

http://www.pesticideresistance.org/DB/pesticide_profile.php?pageNum_rstPesticides=10&totalRows_rstPesticides=448&formulationid=97

And David, you have got it quite right. The cited AFM article quite explicitly argues that spraying DDT in Sri Lanka could prevent lots of needless deaths. As said before, DDT has never been banned for disease-control in Sri Lanka, and it was actually sprayed after the resurgence of malaria there in the late 60ies. But now it did not work anymore because of the build-up of resistance - therefore, it

was subsequently abandoned. As also shown in my above comments, AFM and Roger Bate know this perfectly well.

As I have said repeatedly, AFM wants to generate the impression that DDT could work wonders if only Western environmentalists, governments or lobby groups would let it. Apparently, it is much more important for AFM to attack environmentalists, WHO or governments than getting the facts right.

Elliot, could you answer these questions directly:

Does the cited article endorse spraying in Sri Lanka?

Are the malaria vector in Sri Lanka resistant to DDT?

Why does AFM then suggest spraying DDT in Sri Lanka?

Regards,

Christoffer

by Christoffer Bugge Harder on Fri, 08/11/2006 - 22:04 | [reply](#)

sri lanka resistance

I didn't mean to deny the mosquitos in Sri Lanka are resistant. I don't know and I'll look at your links. I thought you were saying that by reading just the AFM article we could see they endorse spraying in resistant neighborhoods. Now I see that your argument is that the article says to spray in Sri Lanka, and independent sources say DDT won't work in Sri Lanka.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sat, 08/12/2006 - 04:39 | [reply](#)

sri lanka

<http://www.malaria.org/ddtlancet.html> seems to be in agreement with your pdf that one species of mosquito in Sri Lanka was considered resistant many years ago.

i don't see how resistant (100%, 90%, or what?), whether there are other types of mosquitos in the area, or anything about how long it takes resistances to evolve away when not used.

So I can't tell if it will work. One way to find out would be to try it. others ways to find out that take time would be possibly condemning a lot of people to die.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sun, 08/13/2006 - 16:40 | [reply](#)

Elliot, the document h

Elliot,

the document

http://www.who.int/malaria/docs/Asia_tsunami_malaria_risk-v1-5Jan.pdf

very explicitly shows that the "one DDT resistant mosquito species" you refer to is the only malaria vector in Sri Lanka (Anopheles culifacies) - check the map of vector species.

You seem to think that the alternative to spraying DDT is doing nothing. As matter of fact, DDT is not the only insecticide available (though one would be excused for believing so if one only gets its information from AFM or other libertarian/conservative groups).

The WHO page also states boldly that this species has been "considered resistant to DDT for many years, but is still sensitive to organophosphates, such as malathion, and pyrethroids". Since these insecticides are actually known to be effective, while DDT most likely will not be, could it then be an idea to try these compounds out, if one really want to save lives in Sri Lanka (and not just use the topic to rant and rave about misanthropic environmentalists or silly governments like the AFM)?

As the previously posted links show, DDT spraying has been tried against resurging malaria in the 70ies in Sri Lanka - and it failed. Why waste time to wait and see with DDT when we have better (and less environmentally toxic) insecticides? Well, it surely cannot be because of worries about Sri Lankan lives.

As a soggy liberal by american standars, I will be happy if WHO, WWF and my government spend some of my tax money to finance effective spraying with insecticides in Sri Lanka. This is not DDT. The only unqualified advantage of DDT is that it is cheap. I do not mind if the politicians raise my taxes to pay the difference. I would recommend them to consult some other "experts" than AFM on the topic, if they want maximum value for their money.

Regards,

Christoffer

by Christoffer Bugge Harder on Tue, 08/15/2006 - 01:58 | [reply](#)

Hello, editors?

So, have you checked the comments? And do you maintain that AFM is a well-informed group, or that my accusations are "exotic"? Do you still not see any link between AFM and the other libertarian think tanks?

Regards,

Christoffer

by Christoffer Bugge Harder on Wed, 08/23/2006 - 22:35 | [reply](#)

Re: Hello, editors?

Patience. There's a war on, you know.

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 08/23/2006 - 22:45 | [reply](#)

Still no comments? Just aski

Still no comments? Just asking in your own interest, of course. I do not know if the war is over.

It's just, you know, that nasty or naive liberal hypocrites reading this page might get the impression that you did not happen to have any qualified answers to the posed questions and had spoken out without bothering to check your sources. Some liberals might even discredit Steven Milloy as a typical example of an idiotarian writer (financed by dubious troubled industries) with a boring pet issue, as you so eloquently put it.

Since I cannot possibly imagine this to be the case, I just wanted to hear if you could submit the comments and supporting evidence you undoubtedly have.

Best regards,

Christoffer

by Christoffer Bugge Harder on Fri, 09/08/2006 - 14:39 | [reply](#)

DDT

I agree with most of what you say, Christoffer.

But:

Finally, if environmentalists or Western governments want the developing countries to abandon their use of DDT in the antimalarial fight, they should compensate them for any costs ...

Why? Why 'should' they? Why is it always the responsibility of the West? Why do you treat Africans as children who can never take responsibility for themselves? If you do, they will indeed never take responsibility and will behave like children.

Which is pretty much where Africa is today, largely as a result of the actions of idiots like Geldof and Bono and their ilk (I only mention them as examples!).

by [Yoni](#) on Sun, 09/10/2006 - 11:12 | [reply](#)

Children

What do you have against children?

Surely children are the worst possible example of people who can

"*never* take responsibility for themselves", because every responsible person ever was once a child.

Couldn't you have chosen, say, African Americans, who have been criticized for having a culture of dependence? Or Palestinians who won't take responsibility for their actions, and blame the occupation (OK, that's not very true. That's just what the Western media says. Palestinian terror organizations actually like to claim credit for killings.)

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 09/10/2006 - 18:47 | [reply](#)

No, I couldn't

First of all, my use of 'children' was rhetorical, while yours is absurdly literal. Surprisingly, I do know that children do eventually grow up; but while they are still children between certain ages - typically, up to around age 6 in emotionally healthy ones - they are still learning the concept of responsibility.

I love children; perhaps that is related to the fact that I understand them quite well. I wasn't accusing them of anything, but only pointing out a fact, namely that they are not adults. Children behaving like children are lovable; adults consistently behaving like 3-year olds are suffering from some serious disorder.

I don't know enough about African Americans; your comment about them may or may not be correct.

There are no 'Palestinians'.

by **Yoni** on Sun, 09/10/2006 - 23:19 | [reply](#)

Evolving Away

Christoffer,

Could you cite research addressing how long it takes for resistance to DDT to evolve away when it is not in use? Or if that is unknown, confirm as such.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 09/12/2006 - 00:14 | [reply](#)

Ageism

Yoni,

Tell me if I understand you properly.

Children are naturally childish and infantile. They do things that

would be immoral if an adult did them. Sometimes they are even immoral for children, and that's when they must be punished. But generally, when children act in those ways, it's lovable. But when adults do, it's unforgivably immoral.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 09/12/2006 - 00:41 | [reply](#)

"Finally, if environmentalist

"Finally, if environmentalists or Western governments want the developing countries to abandon their use of DDT in the antimalarial fight, they should compensate them for any costs ..."

Yoni, I did not mean to imply that the West is responsible for any ills in Africa with this phrase, or that Africans are like children. (Actually, in the DDT case it appears to be conservatives/libertarians blaming the West, i.e. the environmentalists, for ills in Africa)!

I am simply saying that since DDT does still work against malaria-carrying mosquitoes in some places when used in IRS, and since DDT is usually cheaper than most other remedies, it will naturally be the chemical of choice of poor Africans - or other people in the quite few remaining poor places where DDT is still effective.

DDT will be used by African people in their own houses, someone will be willing to sell DDT to them, and the Africans have a fully legitimate right to seek protection from malaria. This is a perfectly understandable transaction.

And then - IF environmentalists and/or governments want DDT banned in such cases, THEY should pay the Africans the difference. THEY are the ones wanting to interfere with a transaction in which they have a much smaller business than the other people involved. To me, this seems right up the alley even of a libertarian perspective.

To simply ban DDT without securing an alternative strategy economically available for average Africans would be exactly what libertarian/conservative lobby groups are always blaming the environmentalists for in the DDT debate -risking poor peoples lives just because of worries about wildlife and relatively minor health concerns. That is exactly why DDT is not banned and never has been in the antimalarial fight, contrary to popular belief in far right-circles.

Hope this was clarifying.

Regards,

Christoffer

by Christoffer Bugge Harder on Tue, 09/12/2006 - 08:18 | [reply](#)

Who Pays?

If DDT is wrong to use because of catastrophic environmental damage, then it is wrong for Africans, or anyone, to use it, whether they are poor or not. They have no right to money for a different chemical that would be right to use.

If the environmentalists object to DDT on purely grounds of personal taste, then they should indeed offer to pay Africans to do something other than use DDT.

This is the same as:

If a company wants to dump toxic waste in the river, then environmentalists who object don't have to pay for alternative toxic waste disposal.

But if environmentalists like parks, and object to the owner of a park turning it into a mall, then they should buy the land or pay him not to do that.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 09/12/2006 - 08:25 | [reply](#)

Alternatives to DDT

Hi Elliot,

DDT can do and has done much harm to the environment (i.e. raptors, grebes, herons and non-pest insects) when sprayed carelessly, but apparently it is not toxic to humans - at least, the minor health concerns (premature births and a extremely remote and never substantially supported link to cancer) are nothing to talk about in the shadow of the clear and present health problems with millions of deaths due to malaria in e.g. tropical Africa. The environmentalists opposes the use of DDT because it almost wiped out all raptors and other large birds on top of the food chain in Western Europe and the U.S.A.

However, if we were to choose between saving wildlife and saving poor Africans, no reasonable person would prohibit Africans from spraying their own homes with DDT because of worries about raptors - as Rachel Carson boldly stated in "The silent spring"! IRS spraying inside houses poses very little threat to wildlife, but it has been shown numerous times that once DDT is on the market, it can be very difficult to limit its use to certain fields when spaying is done by uneducated people in poorly functioning states.

Therefore, if DDT is effective against malaria and governments or environmentalists want to protect wildlife, governments or environmentalists should definitely pay the poor Africans, if they want them to use another insecticide.

Regarding the resistance problem: Normally, resistant rats, bacteria or bugs are deficient in some other respect. If so, the mutant phenotypes will quickly be subject to counterselection once the

treatment with penicillin, anticoagulants or other remedies ceases, because they are less fit than normal rats under normal circumstances. If the mutation is dominant, it will usually be eliminated rapidly.

The problem is that DDT resistant flies and mosquitoes do not seem to suffer any particular disadvantage to normal mosquitoes and flies - i.e., the mutation is selectively neutral without treatment and highly advantageous when DDT is sprayed. Therefore, it will remain in the population and only be eliminated slowly by "genetic drift". Since Sri Lanka virtually bathed themselves in DDT in the sixties, it is fair to assume that almost all mosquitoes who have survived this are resistant. Thus, all descendants are from resistant stocks and the mutation could be fixed or at least widespread for many hundreds or thousand years thereafter. Certainly, an even mild new spraying effort would spark a new wave of resistance, because you would give the resistant mosquitoes a big selective advantage, and selection always works very strongly on big populations.

I do not think any large-scale surveys about DDT resistance in Sri Lanka has been done in the last 25 years, but at that time, it was of completely no use at all, and there is every reason to believe that DDT would at best have a minor effect, if any at all.

If I were a Sinhalese, I would try something else than DDT. I would furthermore recommend anyone not to listen to Africa Fighting Malaria, because it is very easy to see that the real goal of this organisation is to use the DDT debate as a weapon in their fight against environmental regulation, environmentalists and governments generally. They do not care about Sinhalese, malaria victims or resistance mechanisms, and they obviously do not care about any scientific facts or whether their allegations against environmental group has any string of truth to them. They are making arguments that are supposed to sound reasonable in the ears of lay readers unfamiliar with the scientific facts, but which collapses at a closer examination.

You can check this article about DDT resistance in fruit flies, a model organism closely related to Anopheles mosquitoes:

<http://www.news-medical.net/?id=12329>

Regards,

Christoffer

by Christoffer Bugge Harder on Tue, 09/12/2006 - 21:34 | [reply](#)

DDT Resistance

As I read your link, it says that it was a widely held belief among scientists that resistance would evolve away, and they've only just discovered that this is sometimes false, at least for fruit flies.

If that's the case, shouldn't your position be, "I know your view seems reasonable, and your motivations are rational, however there is this new information you may be interested in. It's far from

conclusive, but take a look."

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 09/12/2006 - 22:11 | [reply](#)

Elliot, you have apparent

Elliot,

you have apparently not fully understood the article, especially regarding the consequences if there is a cost to mutants. This is understandable, since the topic is somewhat technical. Let me try to explain the best I can.

It is indeed a wildly held belief that resistant mutants will suffer a cost under normal circumstances and that these will tend to evolve away subsequently. But "evolving away" does not mean that ALL resistant mosquitoes will be quickly eliminated after treatment ceases. Normally, a "mutation-selection-drift-equilibrium" will arise, in which the mutant gene will still be present, but in small numbers.

As the article says and as I said, the model organisms most widely studied with respect to resistance - rats and bacteria - have been deficient in some other respect. Rats resistant to warfarin (an anticoagulant rat poison) were deficient in vitamin K synthesis, and therefore, the mutation causing the resistance will tend to be eliminated by the course of time - however slowly - from the population when the selective agent, the poison, is no longer there.

But if this is the case, the proper strategy when dealing with e.g. DDT on mosquitoes is to change the insecticide once resistance has emerged! This is what has been done when dealing with rats, and this is also exactly what the article also says. Resistance is very difficult to get rid of again, and because mosquitoes are fast breeders, they will quickly reach a large population size when treatment ceases. To have any chance of eradicating malaria, you must act very fast and coordinatedly with a new drug, before the inevitable resistance gets any chance to spread.

The speed at which the mutant phenotype disappears depend much on the dominance interactions.

Is the mutant

1: Recessive (you have to be homozygous (have two copies of the mutant gene) to display the mutant phenotype)?

2: Codominant (the heterozygote shows both characteristics),

3: Incompletely dominant (the heterozygote shows some but not all features of both homozygotes) or

4: fully dominant (both heterozygotes and the mutant homozygotes show the mutant phenotype)?

It is by far the most common that a newly arisen mutant gene be

recessive with respect to the wildtype. In the three first cases, the resistance mutation will only be removed slowly, because it can "hide" in the heterozygotes (you know, like cystic fibrosis, dwarfism and albinism in humans). When this is the case, there is no selection against heterozygotes, either because they do not display the mutant phenotype, or because the cost associated with the mutant gene is only present in the homozygous mutant, which will always be much rarer than heterozygotes.

Even when the mutant is fully dominant (scenario 4) and counterselection applies to all carriers of just a single copy of the mutant gene, it still depends on the size of the population and the strength of the counterselection under normal circumstances - coupled with the frequency of the recurrent treatments.

This does not mean that once resistance has developed, ALL members of a population will necessarily be resistant long thereafter. The resistance genes will most likely only be present in some or a few individuals after some time without treatment, as said. But as long as they are present, they will rise to high frequencies once the treatment with the respective remedy starts over again - and since many pest species are reproducing themselves rapidly, they will only need a short time to reach the same population size as before the treatment started.

And all this is of the above is written under the assumption that resistance conveys some kind of cost when the relevant toxic treatment is not present.

But DDT resistant flies and mosquitoes do not seem to suffer any particular disadvantage to normal mosquitoes and flies - i.e., the mutation is selectively neutral or weakly advantageous even without treatment and, of course, highly advantageous when DDT is sprayed.

In this case, large populations will remain resistant to DDT long after cessation of spraying - there is no evolutionary pressure causing the resistance to evolve away at population level. This seems to be the case with DDT.

DDT can thus be expected to be of very limited value, if any at all, in such places where resistance has been known to be widespread, like Sri Lanka. If one truly cares about preventing malaria in these countries, one should help them getting the more expensive but still effective malathion and pyrethroids. With our present knowledge, it is much more likely that this will be effective.

It is understandable that lay persons do not know these things. I find it much more difficult to accept that professional rants like Roger Bate and Steven Milloy are deliberately trying to generate the impression that DDT could work wonders or eradicate malaria in the Third World if only environmentalists would let it, constantly and spuriously referring to some kind of unspecified "ban", spreading fake quotes about the American EPA wanting to get rid of people and citing death losses of 90 mio. due to the US 1972 ban, which in

any case could not possibly have had any effect in Africa since it

only applied to agricultural use.

Steven Milloy and Roger Bate cannot possibly be ignorant about these mentioned facts - but they hope that their listeners are. Their claims about DDT can only be termed as disingenious. They know perfectly well that they are deliberately misleading people.

You never see requests for malathion or pyrethroid spraying on "junkscience" or "Africa fighting malaria". One is logically left to conclude that their real issue has absolutely nothing to do with fighting malaria and everything to do with speading false accusations against scientists, governments and environmentalists, and that DDT simply serves as a convenient weapon in this fight.

Bate and Milloy are exactly such examples of idiotarians with a boring pet issue, as the editors put it. As a scientist, I must say that it escapes me how any reasonable person, regardless of political observation, can possibly think that Steven Milloy is "talking sense and making excellent points".

Regards,

Christoffer

by Christoffer Bugge Harder on Wed, 09/13/2006 - 13:23 | [reply](#)

AFM's position

Christoffer wrote:

And of course, they fail to mention any problems regarding DDT resistance (as usual), as I have written to you three times.

[...]

why do [AFM] fail to mention the resistance in Sri Lanka

But the thing is, they do. It's just that they also give arguments that the problem of resistance has been misinterpreted and has resulted in a less-than optimal use of DDT. For instance, in [this](#) article on their web site Roger Bate claims that "Aid agencies' failure to fund DDT was defended by studies that showed that Sri Lankan mosquitoes were developing resistance to DDT, an argument which ignores the chemical's main benefit. Treated houses repel mosquitoes better than any other insecticide yet tested..."

Now, this may all be false. But unfortunately, arguments of the form "AFM are funded by XYZ", or "Roger Bate is only saying that because..." do not bear on the issue of whether the two claims he makes there are true or false. Nor has anything yet cited here.

It seems that the two claims go together: aid agencies have failed to fund DDT (entirely? or sufficiently? he doesn't say); and the DDT-resistance argument (and other arguments such as the environmental one) have been used to justify this, and have helped

to cause it.

Christoffer wrote:

You never see requests for malathion or pyrethroid spraying on "junkscience" or "Africa fighting malaria".

But the thing is, you do. On their **FAQ**, for instance, they say: "DDT is ... significantly cheaper ... That said, alternative insecticides can and should be used for a number of reasons ... DDT is only suitable on traditional mud structures. As people build more western style houses with painted and plastered walls, malaria control programmes will need suitable alternatives ... In order to control for the development of insecticide resistance, malaria control programmes should use alternative insecticides either on an annual rotational basis or sprayed in a mosaic pattern. DDT will kill the mosquitoes resistant to pyrethroid insecticides and vice versa. Rotational and mosaic spraying has proved effective at controlling insecticide resistance in various parts of the world. Good malaria control programmes should always be seeking alternative insecticides for use in IRS. DDT is still much needed because it forms part of resistance management strategies."

Christoffer wrote:

AFM advocates DDT spraying almost everywhere as if it were some kind of miracle medicine

Yet in the above FAQ quote, AFM are not only advocating the use of pyrethroids (and, by the way, presenting a separate argument why DDT can be useful despite the resistance problem), they also acknowledge that DDT can be ineffective in many situations and are also envisaging that the usefulness of DDT will decline in the future.

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 09/13/2006 - 15:02 | [reply](#)

DDT Resistance

Christoffer,

You have misrepresented the article which you cited. It begins

the conventional wisdom of evolution offers a reassuring word: In the absence of the original chemical threat, most resistance mutations would cause a disadvantage to their hosts and might be expected to **quickly leave** the genetic landscape once the use of a drug or insecticide is suspended or withdrawn.

(my emphasis)

You argue that, **in fact**, resistance will not leave quickly. But that is beside the point, as far as discussion of AFM being guilty. As I said above, if you have new evidence/arguments, which go against the conventional wisdom, then it's great to share them, but you

would be wrong to blast people who don't know about them yet for

being irrational or politically motivated.

Further, as Editor has explained, even if the new ideas about resistance are true, and apply to mosquitos, DDT is still useful.

PS I am not incapable of understanding the technical details of evolution.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 09/14/2006 - 01:08 | [reply](#)

Resistance

Elliot,

I am not sure that you understand the expression "genetic landscape". To "quickly leave the genetic landscape" in evolutionary terms does not usually mean that the gene will be purged altogether once treatment has ceased - rather, it means that it will no longer be widespread in the population and only very rarely be found.

The mutation causing human cystic fibrosis, for example, is highly deleterious and subject to counterselection. But it is not a part of the human genetic landscape, which means that you will, by a random search, almost never find it. But it is still present in the population and could, theoretically, resurge rapidly, should some hardly imaginable evolutionary advantage suddenly arise in connection with it. It has an allele frequency in Denmark of about 0,015, meaning that about 1 in 4200 children will be born with the disease, and it appears to be quite stable, because it has reached an mutation-selection equilibrium, as I said. Still, this mutant is not a part of the genetic landscape, as a geneticist would put it.

If there is no indication that a mutant causes a deleterious phenotype, it will, as the article says, neither be subject to counterselection nor disappear from the genetic landscape.

This is completely conventional wisdom. If AFM do not know about this, they should leave the field to people who do.

I have already in a previous post answered the claims of the Editors and AFM about DDT as a repellent:

"In another article

(http://www.aei.org/publications/pubID.21911,filter.all/pub_detail.asp), Roger Bate has moderated this point of view a little - here, he does recognise the possibility of resistance to DDT, but soon after claims that the major role of DDT is as a repellent, not as insecticide. But Bate fails to recognise that resistance of the mosquitoes is a two-way system: Physiological resistance (the poison is ingested but causes no harm) and behavioural resistance (the insect tend to avoid DDT sprayed surfaces). In either case, DDT becomes useless because the mosquitoes are either unaffected or simply decide to rest outside houses. AFM's suggestion has already been tried

without success".

I have also provided a source explaining this:
<http://www.ias.ac.in/currsci/dec102003/1532.pdf>

Resistance is a two-way system: Behavioural and physiological. Behavioural resistance simply means that DDT in IRS do cause the mosquitoes to rest somewhere else, but that its effect on malaria is simply to make the mosquitoes rest outside and fly directly in to bite, or making transmission take place outside.

I have written another lengthy answer to all the Editor's claims, but apparently, it was rejected as spam. Could the editors please check it and post it, please?

regards,

Christoffer

by Christoffer Bugge Harder on Thu, 09/14/2006 - 10:41 | [reply](#)

Dear editors, you do not s

Note from Editor: *We apologise that the following comment was held up in our spam filter for a while. We rescued and re-posted it on September 15.*

Dear editors,

you do not seem to really read neither what I write nor the links I provide you with. Just a few inches above, I have answered your questions based on this AFM article

(<http://www.fightingmalaria.org/article.php?min=60&max=75>).

"[T]he chemical's (DDT's) main benefit" according to Roger Bate, repellancy, is not recognised because it is also subject to resistance.

I have written this to you once, but I will happily repeat it. I wrote:

"In another article

(http://www.aei.org/publications/pubID.21911,filter.all/pub_detail.asp),

Roger Bate has moderated this point of view a little - here, he does recognise the possibility of resistance to DDT, but soon after claims that the major role of DDT is as a repellent, not as insecticide. But Bate fails to recognise that resistance of the mosquitoes is a two-way system: Physiological resistance (the poison is ingested but causes no harm) and behavioural resistance (the insect tend to avoid DDT sprayed surfaces). In either case, DDT becomes useless because the mosquitoes are either unaffected or simply decide to rest outside houses. AFM's suggestion has already been tried without success".

The thing is, that mosquitoes can quickly develop behavioural resistance to DDT, as Dr. Sharma, as I have also quoted, mentions:

"[Failure of DDT against malaria] is partly due to six decades of spraying resulting in physiological resistance to DDT and/or pronounced exophilic vector behaviour encouraging extra-domiciliary transmission".

"The excito-repellent effect

of DDT, often reported useful in other countries, actually promotes outdoor transmission and therefore helps maintain

a huge malaria burden under the influence of An. culicifacies, An. dirus and An. sondaicus".

(from <http://www.ias.ac.in/currsci/dec102003/1532.pdf>)

In this latter case (exophilic vector behaviour), the mosquitoes simply learn not to rest on DDT-sprayed surfaces, but sit on the exterior of the houses and fly directly in to bite or transmit it to people outside houses. In this case, IRS spraying with DDT is futile. I have already answered this claim and provided you with a link to an expert supporting this many weeks ago. It is beyond me why you insist on making the same claims repeatedly without actually reading my posts or checking any of the very same sources I quote, which you have asked me for yourselves.

My comment about AFM failing to mention any problems regarding DDT resistance (as usual) was a comment to the open letter you referred to in your first answer (<http://www.fightingmalaria.org/petition.php>). As I said, this does not mention resistance.

But of course, the AFM has many different articles, and some of them are more elaborated than others. I know that in some articles, the AFM do mention other insecticides. I realise that my comment about this was a bit harsh. But they always make sure to mention DDT, and their overall picture is very misleading. The AFM FAQ quoted by you (<http://www.fightingmalaria.org/faq.php>) e.g. says: "Limited use of DDT for public health has continued to be effective in areas where it is used inside homes. As DDT's chief property is repellency, mosquitoes often avoid the DDT treated homes altogether. In so doing, they avoid the exposure that promotes resistance as well".

But in so doing, the mosquitoes are displaying exactly the avoidance behaviour or behavioural resistance I was referring to. This just means that the mosquitoes will rest outside and fly directly inside to bite, or that the propagation will take place outside instead of inside houses.

The FAQ also claims that IRS spraying is not affecting the exterior environment. Yet, Dr. Sharma continues:

"DDT and its metabolites exceeded the maximum permissible limits in human breast milk and bovine milk. DDT residues in soil were 74 times higher and in whole blood, eight times higher. In groundwater, no DDT was detectable when alternatives were used against the presence of 0.18 to 0.07 mg/l in sprayed areas^{18,19}. Obviously, either DDT sprayed on walls eventually contaminates the environment or it ends up in the environment through diversion for illegal uses".

As I said, AFM practically never write about anything without mentioning that DDT could work wonders.

In this article (<http://www.fightingmalaria.org/news.php?ID=360>), there is many false claims and fake quotes, as I have pointed out a number of times, e.g. the fake Charles Wurster quote. A serious organisation would care not to yield to such sensationalism.

On the same page you link to

(<http://www.fightingmalaria.org/article.php?min=60&max=75>)

Richard Tren is spreading the false claim that EU is threatening Uganda with sanctions if they use DDT. But the EU warnings apply only to agricultural use, not to malaria control - as I have also pointed out to you a number of times.

And the article by Roger Bate on this page repeats the false claim that DDT spraying was stopped in 1963 because of environmental pressure, when (as I have also pointed out) it was in fact due to such a simple fact that the authorities on Sri Lanka simply thought that it was not necessary anymore, because malaria rates had declined so rapidly. As I have also pointed out and provided links to (sorry for repeating myself), DDT WAS tried and sprayed on Sri Lanka after the resurgence of malaria in the 70ies, but now it failed because of resistance. Environmental pressure played no role whatsoever in this process on Sri Lanka - and the environmentalist 's bible, Rachel Carson 's "The silent spring", explicitly made a distinction between the use of DDT in the agriculture and the use against disease vectors like malaria mosquitoes - as I have pointed out numerous times here.....

Dear editors - could you please check the sources I provide you with upon your very own request and read the articles I quote? There is no point in keeping up this debate if you keep making the same claims no matter what I provide.

Regards,

Christoffer

by Christoffer Harder on Thu, 09/14/2006 - 10:57 | [reply](#)

Behavioural resistance

"Behavioural resistance simply means that DDT in IRS do cause the mosquitoes to rest somewhere else, but that its effect on malaria is simply to make the mosquitoes rest outside and fly directly in to bite, or making transmission take place outside".

To clarify this: This means that DDT spraying, even when only used as a repellent, will have no impact on malaria transmission. Other chemicals will be much better suited.

I am not out on an "anti-chemical" crusade, it is simply about finding the best chemical solution.

Christoffer

by Christoffer Bugge Harder on Thu, 09/14/2006 - 12:19 | [reply](#)

Re: Behavioural resistance

The behavioural resistance to DDT you speak of is otherwise known as the effectiveness of DDT as a mosquito repellent. Is that correct?

Malaria-carrying mosquitoes usually feed only at night. Is that correct? Does their DDT-avoiding behaviour cause them to feed by day?

The paper you cite

<http://www.ias.ac.in/currsci/dec102003/1532.pdf> (thanks for the reference: peer reviewed science is presumably our best guide to

what the facts are) says that this behavioural resistance is often

reported useful [in fighting malaria] in other countries, but not in India for the following reasons: many of the target population sleep outside their houses or work at night or re-plaster treated walls or refuse to have their walls treated, and coverage rates are too low and the monitoring system is grossly understaffed. Is that correct?

Note added on September 15: Now that we have received your comment that was held up by the spam filter, the significance of this question is increased. This facet of the argument seems to go:

- AFM faction says DDT can be useful even where there is resistance to its insecticidal effects, because it is also a repellent.
- Anti-AFM faction says that this is not so, because the repellent effect merely causes the mosquitoes to avoid houses, but all they do then is feed outside.
- AFM faction acknowledges that this is true in some areas, but notes that it depends on there being people outside the houses at night to feed on. So in some areas, and for some people in every area, DDT is still useful despite both chemical and behavioural resistance.
- Anti-AFM faction replies that this is not so because ... the DDT-avoiding behaviour includes changing from night-time to daytime feeding? Or what?

by **Editor** on Thu, 09/14/2006 - 16:22 | [reply](#)

Genetic Landscape

Christoffer

If a DDT resistance gene leaves the genetic landscape in your sense, ie becomes rare, then DDT would kill most mosquitos, leaving the few resistant ones. And thus using only DDT wouldn't work out very well, but using DDT followed by something else would be wise. Correct?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 09/14/2006 - 18:28 | [reply](#)

Children

"Children are naturally childish and infantile. They do things that would be immoral if an adult did them. Sometimes they are even immoral for children, and that's when they must be punished. But generally, when children act in those ways, it's lovable. But when adults do, it's unforgivably immoral"

I would love to know how you managed to deduce this misreading of my words. Nowhere did I mention morality, imply an aspect of morality, hint at any shade of anything remotely to do with morality ...

What I actually WROTE was that childish behaviour is healthy in

children, but indicative of some (often serious) disorder when exhibited by adults.

Disorders are not moral or immoral: they are damaging to the individual, and often to the individual's human and other environment.

by **Yoni** on Sat, 09/16/2006 - 16:22 | [reply](#)

Genetic landscape

Elliot,

"If a DDT resistance gene leaves the genetic landscape in your sense, ie becomes rare, then DDT would kill most mosquitos, leaving the few resistant ones".

To begin with, "my sense" of the term "genetic landscape" is completely trivial according to anything I have ever read in the technical press. It is not something I have pulled from the sleeve - just to point that out.

But if we assume that DDT is sprayed excessively (ie. not only IRS) AND if we assume that resistance has a selective cost when DDT is not there, then you are most likely right.

The problem is that mosquitoes are fast breeders, and that they will quickly rise to high numbers again after the initial blow from DDT - in a matter of months, the effects of DDT spraying could be barely visible.

And if DDT-resistance, as it seems, is indeed a gain-of-function mutation with no clear disadvantages without treatment, there will be no effect at all. In this case, the whole population might get fixed for resistance, and the mutation will dominate the genetic landscape even in the absence of DDT.

"And thus using only DDT wouldn't work out very well, but using DDT followed by something else would be wise. Correct"?

Not in Sri Lanka. The main problem is that no poison is likely to be able to eradicate malaria - DDT was sprayed everywhere on Sri Lanka in the 60ies and 70ies, and it did not eradicate neither malaria nor the mosquitoes. Using DDT now in a more limited IRS programme would most likely not contribute to fight malaria in Sri Lanka.

But in other places, your strategy might work well. Therefore, it is important to keep one's cool in the DDT debate - it is not the most deadly and evil all pesticides as some extremists put it, but certainly it is neither a miracle medicine, as AFM will have us believe. Their advice about DDT in Sri Lanka is worthless, and its main point seem to be lobbying for DDT use rather than fighting malaria in this case.

You can read on here:

<http://timlambert.org/2005/02/ddt2/>

by Christoffer Bugge Harder on Tue, 09/26/2006 - 19:23 | [reply](#)

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Open Letter

Today we are taking the unusual step of publishing an attributed article on this page. It is an open letter from Jeanie Kennedy, Director of *Free Exchange*, to Vince Miller, President of the **International Society for Individual Liberty**, about the debate within the Libertarian movement about the war. We believe that what Jeanie Kennedy has to say has a significance far beyond the dispute between these two Libertarian organisations over the conduct of a conference. It is about **setting the world to rights**.

Open Letter to Vince Miller, President of the International Society for Individual Liberty

Dear Vince,

As you know, I was extremely upset by the conduct of the recent conference of the International Society for Individual Liberty.

The segment entitled, "*Panel Discussion – Liberty and War. US Foreign Policy Today. What is the nature of the order the US government is trying to implement around the world?*" had been advertised in the ISIL Peace Institute webpage as a debate. It was nothing of the kind. What ensued was a 'debate' exclusively between different shades of anti-war opinion: the first presentation a family skit which acted embarrassed for the U.S. President and Nation, and the second – astoundingly – a polemic for Islam by a Palestinian, which made outrageously false statements about, and showed an incredible bias against, Zionism and Israel. This was an unbelievably sad and embarrassing presentation for ISIL to have been any part of.

Skits are great for educating people about simple ideas and English dialogue. But they aren't good for the presentation of complex ideas and facts in dispute. By using this technique at an ISIL conference, serious discussion is by-passed, implying that all libertarians are in agreement on the matter. It's okay to have fun lampooning US foreign policy, but wrong to imply that one is either a dove or a simpleton Bush fan. By presenting only one side of the Islamic-Jewish dispute in Palestine/Israel, the implication again is that the truth of the matter is self-evident, and that no one may disagree and be considered libertarian.

One of the presentations ran way overtime. Several of us asked for

more time for the Question and Answer section, but only one person got to ask a question and then the session was cut off, with half a dozen people in the line, waiting their turns at the microphone! There was no "debate" as advertised, not even in the Q&A!

Through ISIL's **Peace Institute** website, you have clearly and explicitly aligned ISIL with the anti-war point of view. And moreover, as President of ISIL, you are responsible for the sidelining of the pro-defense point of view at a major international conference of libertarians.

I cried – I cried because I was experiencing the emotion of extreme frustration. I continued to cry for over a week afterwards, every time I thought of it. Can you imagine a person being appalled at how an unfair, undeserved attack on the reputation of a nation s/he respects, was carried on effectively in her name?

In response to others' similar objections, you wrote:

"Sorry about Dean. It wasn't so much the content, but his style [!] - which I found to be rather inflammatory. An equally powerful opponent who would have been able to counter his arguments would have been much better. And actually we tried to do that but we had a batch of last minute cancelations and we were left scrambling."

Actually, his style was not ranting. What I questioned was the content. Who were those other speakers with opposing viewpoints you say were previously scheduled and who canceled at the last minute? Seriously, I'd like to know; they could be used as future speakers. You had the opportunity to include at least one very knowledgeable opponent on the panel but didn't do so. Tim Starr, a well-known writer and self-defense proponent, had volunteered to be on the panel. Jim Elwood, your Vice President, told him that the subject was being, or had been discussed at a meeting. Why was Tim led to hope that he was going to be asked to join the panel right up until the time of the presentation?

Later that day, when I sat at the speaker's corners, I tearfully told the first speaker, an American citizen himself, that maybe I was old-fashioned, but that I was brought up to believe that when I went abroad, I was to be a proud representative of my country (the USA), and I felt that his whole presentation was anti-U.S. and that I was very upset. At this point, one girl at the table (from the Ukraine, I believe) also became tearful, as it was apparent she understood my reaction. I never thought that to participate an ISIL conference you had to check – not your guns – but your *citizenship* at the door!

It has become clear to me from this and other experiences that the world political spectrum has had a massive shakeup, such that not only left-right but even Libertarian-non-Libertarian is not currently as important as what, for lack of a better term, might be called the Hawk (or as I prefer, "Eagle") vs. Dove debate.

Lenin used to say of liberal-leftists, that they were "useful idiots."

Have you heard of the new term among some libertarians, "idiotarian" or "villepinism?" Idiotarians or villepinists are those people who systematically side with evil without themselves adopting the evildoers' objectives. Villepinists sneer at what they consider "simplistic" flag-waving Americans, and their libertarian contingent are not exceptions. I consider my own sense of patriotism bound up with core libertarian principles: America's practice of, and cultural respect for, liberty, especially in comparison to the countries where our terrorist enemies breed. The U.S. cannot defend against every possible terrorist attack on U.S. soil, and must take their war on us, to them.

I believe that the villepinist branch of Libertarianism is going to die, and the sooner we step away from it, the better off we will be. It is important to libertarians who are in favor of victory over terrorism to promote their ideas, facilitating the evolution of those ideas into even better ideas. If we do not, people out there who would be open to our ideas will never find us, and that will not help the ideas develop.

When it is clear that it is going to be a constant uphill struggle to get one's ideas on the table in the organization, because in good faith, that organization's leaders/members are strongly opposed to that position and thus can't really do more than pay lip service to giving one's ideas a forum, then, without any need for personal rancor or hostility, it may well make the most sense to create a new focus for all those who might be interested in one's ideas. There is a good reason to strike out in a new organization – not to hurt the old organization or brand anyone evil, but, by offering people a choice, to facilitate the full and open competition of ideas that will lead to the growth of knowledge. If being true to anti-idiotarian libertarianism means we are *initially* a small movement, well, so be it. But if we do not step away we will never grow, because others who feel like us will not be able to find us. We have to speak out.

If ISIL is to flourish, then it should be a coalition of hawks and doves, Americans and non-Americans, men and women. To cut off one polarity would not be the act of a world-wide freedom movement. I hope and expect that ISIL will publish an opposing article in the FNN newsletter, and have real foreign policy debates at future conferences.

Very truly yours,

Jeanie Kennedy, MBA
Director, Free Exchange
A San Francisco Supper Club
Dedicated to Secular Individualism

Fri, 08/15/2003 - 17:24 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Thanks for this!

I've found myself distancing from the libertarian organizations, because of the anti-Bush and anti-Iraq and anti-defense ideas they are wholeheartedly embracing. Thanks for letting me know that I

am not alone.

by a reader on Sat, 08/16/2003 - 16:21 | [reply](#)

To Sarah, David, and et al,

Do you really think that no one feels a similar sense of betrayal from your position on the war?

by a reader on Sat, 08/16/2003 - 16:55 | [reply](#)

A sense of betrayal

Speaking for myself, I see no indication that anyone has betrayed anyone in this matter. Libertarians have always held diverse views about all sorts of issues, and one of them has always been the issue of war, its causes, and its morality. Recent events such as the 9-11 attack have caused many people on all sides of this issue to elevate its priority in their minds, and to devote more effort to arguing for their side. This raises a purely practical problem, not only for Libertarians but for all sorts of movements and organisations, of whether the movement or organisation as a whole should take a position on the war (in which case, members who take the opposite view have to choose whether to continue to identify themselves as supporters of that group or to support or form rival groups), or not (in which case the organisation chooses to refrain from influencing a debate which, both sides agree, now has increased importance and urgency).

There already are many different organisations and movements that are broadly in the libertarian camp. Being separate means, among other things, that they have the flexibility to oppose each other on some issues, while remaining allies on others. Organisations split all the time, and merge all the time, for perfectly sound and decent reasons: betrayal seldom comes into it.

So if anyone feels betrayed at the line being taken by Jeanie Kennedy (or for that matter by Vince Miller), or by us at ***Setting the World to Rights***, I think they are making a serious mistake. I would remind them that libertarians, like rational people generally, do not claim jurisdiction over each other's opinions. As for betrayal, I would direct them to our series **On Loyalty**.

by **David Deutsch** on Sat, 08/16/2003 - 17:39 | [reply](#)

Anonymous Coward response

Interesting that a person suggesting Sarah and David have betrayed the Libertarian cause would choose to remain anonymous. Why not come out and write under your own name? What are you afraid of?

John Frank

by a reader on Sat, 08/16/2003 - 20:34 | [reply](#)

So not all 'Libertarians' are bad then

I must admit, I have a problem with so-called 'Libertarians'. They talk a lot about freedom but when it comes down to it they are a bunch of hypocrites. I was therefore pleased to read Ms Kennedy's Open Letter as it clearly distinguishes the sad and sorry dross of 'Liberia' from the Libertarians who are busy **Setting The World to Rights**. I wish you well and look forward to seeing how this plays out in the world at large.

- David Anderson

by a reader on Sat, 08/16/2003 - 20:42 | [reply](#)

Perhaps betrayal was the wrong word.....

I agree that no such betrayal took place. Feeling a sense of betrayal is not the same as actually being betrayed.

However, as someone who has a fairly high regard for the TCS philosophy, I find it very disappointing that many of the people advocating TCS would take a pro-war position. (Based on what I consider shoddy arguments)

The "Open Letter" conveys Jeanie Kennedy's disappointment with the ISIL.

I am disappointed with "**The World**".

My comment was just a reminder that those living in glass houses might want to do something more productive than throw stones.

P.S. I was not "suggesting Sarah and David have betrayed the Libertarian cause".

by a reader on Sat, 08/16/2003 - 22:39 | [reply](#)

The First Use of the Word, Betrayal

The first use of the word "betrayal" was in a reader's comment, wherein he wrote, "Do you really think that no one feels a similar sense of betrayal from your position on the war?" Betrayal was not a word used in the entirety of my letter. The writer was attributing or projecting his own feelings of betrayal onto me, and/or Sarah and/or David.

Toward a civil society,

Jeanie Kennedy, MBA
Director of Free Exchange
A San Francisco Supper Club

by [jeanie kennedy](#) on Sun, 08/17/2003 - 23:01 | [reply](#)

Seen the first of the presentation too

That was in Switzerland with many pro-war libertarians...

Unfortunately we did not have the time to debate it. This is the kind of stuff we expect from our ideological enemies: caricature, logical fallacies, narrow view of the world... The kind of presentation also is prone to caricature: you can not sum up all the arguments in some of kind of "humorous dialog" (whatever that was).

I'm glad someone writes about it, and I'll send your letter to people who felt the same in Switzerland.

by [liberte](#) on Mon, 08/18/2003 - 08:02 | [reply](#)

Libertarianism is anti-war. J...

Libertarianism is anti-war. Just admit you are neocons you fascist dogs!

by a reader on Mon, 08/18/2003 - 13:14 | [reply](#)

Essentialism is an error...

...It consists of a cluster of theories and practices which deflect discourse from matters of truth and falsity, or whether to pursue this policy or that, into arguments about the meaning of terms. This converts substantial problems into merely verbal ones...

<http://www.the-rathouse.com/popessent.html>

by [Editor](#) on Mon, 08/18/2003 - 13:54 | [reply](#)

Damn, foiled again!

A reader wrote:

"Libertarianism is anti-war. Just admit you are neocons you fascist dogs!"

Dammit, he's got us there! (Sarcasm on) To be honest I never really backed war on Iraq to liberate a country under a Stalinist tyrant, or to stop Saddam from rearming and going to war, or to remove a source of backing for international terrorism, I'd just run out of red paint and wanted the blood of Iraqi children to paint the walls of my house. (sarcasm off)

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Tue, 08/19/2003 - 01:35 | [reply](#)

lol, this is kinda funny. It...

lol, this is kinda funny. It seems like another case of people agreeing with each other, and then building respect for each other based on that agreement, then disagreeing with each other. Some know how to deal with that disagreement, others do not.

If anything it's the indication of healthy minds who think for

themselves, even if they are sometimes "wrong." I'd be worried if everyone had the same feelings and thoughts on the war, Bush, and all those other things.

by [entivore](#) on Tue, 08/19/2003 - 05:30 | [reply](#)

Collectivist Thinking and Criminal Gangs

Jeanie Kennedy tells us that "I was brought up to believe that when I went abroad, I was to be a proud representative of my country (the USA)." Many of us were, Jeanie. Later, some of us grew up, cast aside collectivist thinking, and realized that we are *individuals* and don't "represent" anything but ourselves. It is unfortunate but true that the world has been divided up into geographical areas dominated by gangs of criminals who call themselves "the government." If I were to travel abroad and hear someone ridiculing or demeaning the criminals who dominate the area of the world in which I live, I would not cry; I would cheer.

by a reader on Fri, 08/22/2003 - 01:39 | [reply](#)

Collectivist Anti-Government "Thinking"

A Reader criticizes Jeanie Kennedy for saying: "I was brought up to believe that when I went abroad, I was to be a proud representative of my country (the USA)."

The reader accuses her of being insufficiently individualistic for supporting "the gang of criminals" dominating her geographical area. But Kennedy made it explicitly clear that: *"I consider my own sense of patriotism bound up with core libertarian principles: America's practice of, and cultural respect for, liberty, especially in comparison to the countries where our terrorist enemies breed."* She is clearly supporting those aspects of her government that reflect her highest political values, rather than a reflexive support for whatever policies they happen to have.

This is consistent with individualism.

On the other hand, the reader summarizes:

If I were to travel abroad and hear someone ridiculing or demeaning the criminals who dominate the area of the world in which I live, I would not cry; I would cheer.

The reader's opposition to his government seems to be independent of its policies. He has not used his independent judgment about the merits of its policies, but has aligned himself with the collective of government-haters who do not think for themselves about the merits of the policies.

Pot - Kettle

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Fri, 08/22/2003 - 17:14 | [reply](#)

yay gil

exactly right

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 08/22/2003 - 18:55 | [reply](#)

Government Is an Extortion Racket

If a criminal gang extorts my wealth with threats of violence and incarceration, then, no, I **don't** care what use that criminal gang makes of the money it extorted. I realize that much of it is used to buy the votes and support of dimwitted sheep, by spending it to advance causes they approve of. Perhaps "Gil" is one of these dimwitted sheep?

by a reader on Fri, 08/22/2003 - 21:42 | [reply](#)

Separate Issues

I agree with the reader that government funding via compulsory taxation is immoral. And I can assure him that my vote has never been purchased by any politician.

But it seems that even "dimwitted sheep" have a greater capacity than he does to separate issues. While I object to my money being extorted, I am not indifferent to that money being used to save my life vs. to gas my neighbors. The reader's apparent indifference between these possibilities strikes me as quite troubling.

Gil

by **Gil** on Fri, 08/22/2003 - 23:50 | [reply](#)

irony

i've said in the past, and Gil is well aware of this I'm sure, that one of the rifts among libertarians goes something like: they all see the truth in the statement "taxes are theft". that's what makes them libertarians. but the difference is, some libertarians don't know anything else (and some do). i think it's ironic you would repeat The One Truth at me...

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 08/23/2003 - 00:02 | [reply](#)

".....where our terrorist enemies breed."

They breed in our schools (Dylan Klebold & Eric Harris),

our universities (Theodore Kaczynski) and our military (Timothy McVeigh) Who will be the next Timothy McVeigh to come out of this gulf war?

by a reader on Sat, 08/23/2003 - 03:48 | [reply](#)

Government & the Mafia

"Gil" and his cheerleader "Elliot" are much impressed that the gang of criminals that extorted their wealth is now using that wealth to "save their lives." This is particularly amusing in light of the fact that, as with the extortion racket run by the Mafia, those who create and sustain the threat to their victims' lives are the very same extortionists who are running the racket. Truly, human gullibility knows no bounds.

by a reader on Mon, 08/25/2003 - 07:06 | [reply](#)

Gullibility

It would be convenient for anti-government ideology if it were true that all security threats were caused by those (the government) who extort money for security protection.

Convenience and ideological dogmatism seem sufficient to control the reader's interpretation of the facts of reality.

My standards are a bit higher, and I recognize threats to liberty that are unrelated to government activity.

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Mon, 08/25/2003 - 16:43 | [reply](#)

Gullibility 2

And another thing...

Even if it were the case (which it isn't!) that all of our security woes were caused by actions of the government, **it would still not follow** that the government should immediately cease all of its activities, or that one of its recent activities wasn't the best possible thing for us (or, at least, good).

It's *good* to think about what the best possible political system would be. And, I agree that this ideal involves a severely-limited, or perhaps non-existent government (as we know it).

But it's *bad* to confuse that with the notion that the best possible first step towards that ideal is to press the stop-all-government-activity-now-button, or to condemn everything government has done. Such notions lead people to the correct conclusion that the holder is ridiculous.

Convincing people that advocates of liberty are ridiculous is another bad first step.

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Mon, 08/25/2003 - 19:54 | [reply](#)

Gullibility

One of the later installments of this series will be about the conspiracy theorists' belief that non-conspiracy-theorists are gullible.

by **Editor** on Mon, 08/25/2003 - 23:20 | [reply](#)

more on the criminal gang and separating issues

The U.S Government...

Extracts (steals) over 20% of the nation's wealth, and uses its state and municipal tentacles -- which it essentially, by this point, controls -- to steal another 30% of everything we earn.

It intrudes in every aspect of our personal and financial lives. It tells us the nature of what we can ingest, read, and of the structures in which we live, work, and defecate.

It takes people rightfully and constitutionally pursuing their own happiness and puts them in cages, in greater numbers and for longer durations than murders and rapists.

It once gassed, burned and machinegunned to death 80 innocent people, in violation of nearly the entire Bill of Rights, covered up the truth, and commended those responsible for the mass slaughter.

It once handed over to Stalin two million innocent refugees to be murdered. Two million. That's more than Saddam. That's Pol Pot proportions.

What's its record been in the War on Terrorism?

9/11 happened because of government inadequacy and criminality. The FBI's incompetence in responding to warning signs, and the U.S. government's illegal deprivation of the essential human right of Americans to arm themselves on airplanes caused 9/11 -- regardless of whether the attacks were motivated by America's imperialist foreign policy, or by America's alleged surplus of freedom and Western values.

Thousands were killed in Afghanistan, but bin Laden wasn't found.

Thousands were killed in Iraq, but Saddam and his weapons weren't found.

Americans are being killed there to this day.

The airports have become great places for sexual abuse on the part of security personnel, evacuations happen often over the stupidest things, and terrorists can still bring weapons on planes -- but the pilots and passengers who would want to practice their inalienable right to do so openly can't.

Are you more likely to die from a terrorist attack, or the FDA

depriving you of your medicine? Who's really a bigger threat to your life?

Everything the government does might not be wrong or bad according to some odd neoObjectivist definition. But everything it does, so long as it is funded by taxation and applied through the initiation of force, is immoral.

All else aside, it is contradictory for libertarians or Objectivists to advocate war as it exists today, because doing so is advocating the forceful exaction of property from their neighbors for purposes considered inimical by those very people. You can believe that not everything the government does is bad, but you cannot, under libertarian constraints, support the imposition of these policies on your fellow libertarians, whether you consider them idiots or not. If the policies themselves necessitate the use of heavy involuntary funding, which they do, then those policies are inescapably in conflict with the very core of libertarian principles. You can't separate the issues any more than you can separate the intentions of the welfare state from its methods, or the legitimacy of Saddam's 100% election results from the brutal tactics he used to acquire them.

by a reader on Thu, 08/28/2003 - 15:51 | [reply](#)

Separating Issues

Ok, let me get this straight.

Should I oppose police investigating burglaries and assaults and murders (and arresting the perpetrators) because they are funded by taxes and because gun control made it harder for individuals to defend themselves?

If not, why should I oppose military actions I judge to be reasonable attempts to use those resources to protect liberty?

Doesn't it make sense to approve of these things, *while at the same time* advocating changes that increase individual liberty?

Gil

by **Gil** on Thu, 08/28/2003 - 16:52 | [reply](#)

Police investigations and war

Saying something like "should I oppose police investigating burglaries," much like saying "should I oppose the military defending the U.S.", misses the point.

The police don't simply investigate burglaries. They brutalize people, disarm innocents, and cause more crime than they deter. The military, or more accurately the civilian chickenhawks who control them, doesn't just defend the United States. Military action

blows children to bits, incites terrorism and causes more problems

than it solves.

I support a free market in the industry of justice and a volunteer militia to defend the United States. We would have far less crime and fewer wars and more freedom if this were the case.

That being said, I admit we don't live in an anarcho-capitalist society. I admit we have a government and as libertarians we should ask practical questions as to what's appropriate for them to do and what isn't.

If the government can do something that could be done in a libertarian society, maybe it's appropriate. If, for instance, China invaded us, I would support the military defending us. But I still think that would be better done by an armed, vigilant populace than by a bureaucratic socialist institution like the U.S. military. Everyone would be willing to defend his own home, so there wouldn't be much of a conflict.

An aggressive war on Iraq, like what was last executed, could not have, and would not have, been initiated by the private sector, or by voluntary action. If the slight majority of Americans who supported the war tried to do it on their own, it would have cost them way too much, they would have looked into its true costs and benefits more carefully, and I doubt it would have happened. Wars like the last one happen only because the system privatizes the benefits and socializes the costs. I very much doubt even the most hawkish warmongers I've talked to would have wanted to contribute a thousand dollars each to disarm Saddam, hiring a firm with the reputation of the U.S. government to get the job done. I do think they would -- as would almost every peacenik I've talked with -- do whatever it took to defend their home and country against invasion.

Whereas socialists like to say that those things that the private sector can't or won't do must be done by the state, principled libertarians should only rely on government actions that the private sector would do, but can't because the state won't allow it to. Like investigating crimes and delivering mail -- two things that would happen in anarchy, but we must depend on the government for because it has declared a monopoly in those areas.

Another thing: The police already "investigate" crime. But if they didn't, I certainly would never advocate that the government take on that new function. Libertarians should be careful not to blindly call all past government action fascist, I agree. The U.S. government's horrific record stands alone without need of hyperbole.

But we should also never advocate a new government activity, program, or function. We should never support the government in taking on more power, authority, and responsibility.

by a reader on Thu, 08/28/2003 - 18:44 | [reply](#)

Lack of Freedom Breeds Terrorism

Yes, terrorists "breed" in US government schools, which are among

the least free institutions within the USA (there haven't been any shootings in non-government schools in America). That is a good argument against those institutions being so unfree, not an argument that the USA is no freer than Afghanistan under the Taliban, Iraq under Saddam, etc.

McVeigh's terrorism was not "bred" into him while he was in the U.S. Army, as he didn't take up terrorism until he was well out of the service. John Allen Mohammed, one of the two beltway snipers, was honorably discharged from the Army because he was suspected of sabotage during Gulf War I but the charges against him could be proved. It's hard to say that the Army actually "bred" terrorism in him, when it inflicted the maximum penalty it could upon him for his anti-US activities. The same goes for the American Muslim who was in the US Army Rangers and murdered some of his fellow Rangers while they were stationed in Kuwait right before Gulf War II. He had expressed reservations about being sent into Iraq to kill his fellow Muslims, so he was relieved of that duty. He then went on to murder some of his fellow Rangers, anyways. He clearly didn't get his motivation to engage in this act of terrorism from the U.S. Army.

Not only is this anonymous coward engaging in a vile equivocation between the relatively high level of freedom in America and that of Taliban-Afghanistan, Saddamite-Iraq, Syria, Iran, etc., he is also grossly equivocating between a few isolated Americans who commit terrorist acts against their fellow Americans entirely of their own initiative, and countries which actively recruit, fund, train, equip, and dispatch terrorists against Americans. That is the sort of country that Iraq was under Saddam, that Afghanistan was under the Taliban, that Pakistan was until Musharraf started cleaning house, and that Iran and Syria still are.

America does not have a "breeding" program for terrorists. There are no US government agencies recruiting, funding, training, equipping, and dispatching people to engage in secret attacks upon innocent civilians in other countries. Yes, we do have covert and clandestine operations through the CIA and the Special Operations Command of the U.S. military, but they don't target innocent civilians. Yes, some innocent civilians do inevitably get killed when the US attacks some legitimate military targets, but the US tries to avoid such collateral damage as much as reasonably possible.

That is totally different, morally, from governments which breed terrorists for the primary purpose of sneak attacks upon innocent civilians.

by [timstarr](#) on Fri, 08/29/2003 - 19:48 | [reply](#)

terrorist breeding in America

"There are no US government agencies recruiting, funding, training, equipping, and dispatching people to engage in secret attacks upon innocent civilians in other countries. "

What about the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security

Cooperation, formerly known as the School of the Americas? The attacks they encourage might not be secret, but they are specifically against civilians.

by a reader on Sat, 08/30/2003 - 00:21 | [reply](#)

School Freedom

Yes, terrorists "breed" in US government schools, which are among the least free institutions within the USA (there haven't been any shootings in non-government schools in America). That is a good argument against those institutions being so unfree, not an argument that the USA is no freer than Afghanistan under the Taliban, Iraq under Saddam, etc. Are you seriously arguing that students in most private schools are freer than students in most public schools?

~Woty
<http://woty.davidsj.com>

by [Woty](#) on Sat, 08/30/2003 - 10:14 | [reply](#)

Missing the point

timstar misses the point. There are people willing to kill him (and anyone else reading this) just as readily in the U.S. as there are in the Muslim world. There are people in all parts of the world willing to embrace ideologies that tell them they are justified in taking terrorist actions. It is more important to understand and refute these ideologies and the psychological roles they play in people lives than it is to wage a military campaign within a certain geographic area.

by a reader on Sat, 08/30/2003 - 15:36 | [reply](#)

Soon to be missing in action? I hope not.

A reader writes: "It is more important to understand and refute these ideologies..." So you'll be going to Iran or Saudi Arabia to refute militant Islam? Thanks so much. And it's been nice knowing you.

Six months ago, your plight in attempting such a mission was no better in Iraq, a country then ruled by a Stalinist tyrant whose flag bore the words "God is great" in his handwriting. Your odds of survival are considerably better now, and improving. But to get to this situation it was necessary "to wage a military campaign."

by [Alan Furman](#) on Sat, 08/30/2003 - 18:31 | [reply](#)

Students Are Freer in Private Schools

Yes, students in private schools are freer than students in public schools. There is a lot of choice in private schools to attend, while there is virtually no choice in public schools to attend.

by [timstarr](#) on Sat, 08/30/2003 - 18:34 | [reply](#)

No Substitute for Victory

Yes, there are "people willing to kill" me in the US as well as in the rest of the world. The difference is that those in the U.S. do not have State sponsorship, and thus have considerably less resources with which to try to kill me. Not only is the U.S. government not sponsoring them those who wish to kill me, it is trying to stop them from killing me.

As for whether it is "more important to understand and refute" terrorist ideologies, I have yet to hear of a terrorist attack that was stopped by a refutation. "Excuse me, Mr. Terrorist, but the theory you're enacting by mass-murdering innocent civilians is false." "Oh, it is? Well, I guess I'll just have to quit, then."

It is important to understand and refute terrorist ideologies, but understanding and refutation are no substitute for military defeat of terrorists. If anything, their military defeat is a form of refutation of them, since their ideas include the prediction that they will not be defeated militarily.

by [timstarr](#) on Sat, 08/30/2003 - 18:42 | [reply](#)

WHISC/SOA Doesn't Teach Attacks on Civilians

The notion that the WHISC/SOA "encourages" attacks on civilians is a myth of the anti-American Left, with no truth in it whatsoever. The closest it comes to having a factual basis is that some of the Latin American soldiers who took classes (in things like radio operations) at the SOA were later implicated in attacks on civilians. However, the curriculum at that school does not teach that it is acceptable to make civilians primary targets; quite the opposite, respect for the rights of non-combatants is taught at that school.

by [timstarr](#) on Sat, 08/30/2003 - 18:47 | [reply](#)

Change of motto

Re: "Soon to be missing in action?" & "No Substitute for Victory"

So perhaps the motto of this web site should be changed to: "Bullets have consequences, ideas really don't matter" or "Ideas have consequences, but bullets have better ones."

By the way what ideologies are being introducing to Afganistan and Iraq by the U.S. forces? Non-militant Islam? Christianity ? The philosophies of Popper? or Plato? or Hegel? or Nietzsche?

I have seen more evidence that Americans are adopting Afgani culture than the other way around.

e.g.: <http://www.hamptonroads.com/pilotonline/military/ml0728fol.html>

by a reader on Sun, 08/31/2003 - 03:54 | [reply](#)

Re: No Substitute for Victory

It is important to understand and refute terrorist ideologies, but understanding and refutation are no substitute for military defeat of terrorists. If anything, their military defeat is a form of refutation of them, since their ideas include the prediction that they will not be defeated militarily.

This is a very important point. And here are two further aspects of that form of refutation:

- Often their ideas include the prediction that the West, because of various attributes that they think (mostly erroneously but to some extent accurately) that it must have, will not seriously *attempt* to defeat them militarily. So the attempt itself, once it is seen to be serious, already has some persuasive effect.
- The war against the West can be seen as an attempt to refute the idea that the Western way of life (with its unique ability to make progress peacefully and resolve moral differences through persuasion) is viable. by introducing cynicism and defeatism into the West's political decision making. Again, a serious attempt to fight back vitiates this attempted refutation.

And to 'a reader' who wants to change our motto: it was not the Americans who introduced bullets into the debate between the West and radical Islam, but yes, sometimes events can refute an idea. Sometimes only events can. This should not be news to anyone.

by [Editor](#) on Sun, 08/31/2003 - 04:20 | [reply](#)

Ideas do have consequences

Like, the idea that you can get American foreign policy to become more favorable to you if you blow up large buildings containing Americans has had a lot of consequences. First, for Americans, and later, for some of the evil bastards who believed that idea. Until that idea is thoroughly refuted though, more Americans will die, but argument alone can't refute it. With an idea like that, you can argue till the cows come home, but the only way to actually refute it is to demonstrate in practice that it is very very false.

by a reader on Sun, 08/31/2003 - 04:48 | [reply](#)

Re: Ideas do have consequences

Do you really think the terrorist were trying to change American foreign policy? I think the payoff for the terrorist was to themselves i.e.: That they could see themselves as heroic and virtuous by striking a blow against "the great satan"

by a reader on Sun, 08/31/2003 - 15:59 | [reply](#)

Re: Re: No Substitute for Victory

So wouldn't an H-bomb on Mecca or Bagdad or Kabul be a much better refutation of their theory than a conventional war?

by a reader on Sun, 08/31/2003 - 16:19 | [reply](#)

So?

Yes, students in private schools are freer than students in public schools. There is a lot of choice in private schools to attend, while there is virtually no choice in public schools to attend.

This means that private schools are potentially freer, because parents can choose free environments for their kids. It does not mean that the kids who are sent to unfree schools by their parents are any freer.

So I ask again: are you seriously arguing that students who are sent to private schools by their parents are generally freer than students sent to public schools by their parents?

~Woty
<http://woty.davidsj.com>

by [Woty](#) on Sun, 08/31/2003 - 19:28 | [reply](#)

Al Qaeda's Fantasy Ideology

You're definitely on the right track with the idea that 9-11 was done by the Islamofascists for themselves. I refer you to the article on the right side of this webpage, the first one just under the heading, "Off-Site." It was written by Lee Harris of the Hoover Institution. Mr. Harris says, much more eloquently than I do here, that the 9-11 perpetrators were not out to change our foreign policy, or our government, only to essentially have a morality play for themselves. He points out that this fact does not make these people any less dangerous, however.

I would also like to refer everyone to a great, fairly short article by the heroic Thomas Sowell entitled, "A Tale of Two Wars and their 'Fifth Column' Enemies," which can be found at the following link: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/fightforliberty/message/25>. Mr. Sowell's perspective, which I respect immensely, is that the current situation regarding The War on Terror is the greatest crisis America has ever faced.

Toward a civil society,
Jeanie Kennedy
Director, Free Exchange
A San Francisco Supper Club
Dedicated to Secular Individualism

by a reader on Sun, 08/31/2003 - 22:20 | [reply](#)

Thomas Sowell article

For those who don't want to join the Yahoo group to read the Thomas Sowell article referenced above, it can also be found [here](#):

<http://www.townhall.com/columnists/thomassowell/ts20030821.shtml>

Gil

by **Gil** on Sun, 08/31/2003 - 22:48 | [reply](#)

Americans Becoming Afghanized?

Funny, the only evidence you cite of Americans "adopting Afgani [sic] culture" is that a couple of soldiers killed their wives, then themselves, as if it were somehow uniquely Afghan for husbands to kill their wives, and as if it were unheard of for Americans to kill their wives before we overthrew the Taliban. That's both insulting to Afghans, and unrealistic about the rest of the world. Unfortunately, murderers exist in all societies.

As for what ideas are being introduced to Afghanistan and Iraq, how about the ideas of freedom of speech, freedom of education, freedom for women to not wear burkhas in public, freedom for women to work outside the home, etc.?

by a reader on Mon, 09/01/2003 - 02:04 | [reply](#)

BBC Sexes up Another Story?

According to the urban-legends analysis experts **Snopes**:

It is a common belief that the number of conceptions increases during natural disasters or crises that keep people confined within their homes for unexpectedly long periods of times. Nine months after such events — blackouts, blizzards, earthquakes, erupting volcanoes, ice storms, and even strikes by professional football players — reports about "baby booms" in local hospitals invariably appear in the media. However, these "booms" always turn out to be nothing more than natural fluctuations in the birth rate (or, in many cases, no variation in the birth rate at all).

In particular, the story, widely believed and cited as fact, that there was a 'baby boom' nine months after the great blackout of 1965, is false:

Despite initial reports of New York City hospitals' seeing a dramatic increase in the number of births nine months after the 1965 blackout, later analyses showed the birth rate during that period to be well within the norm.

A series of three articles appearing in The New York Times from August 10-12 in 1966 reported larger-than-average numbers of births at several area hospitals, leading many to declare that the ten-hour overnight blackout the city experienced nine months earlier had led to an unusually high number of conceptions that evening. As often happens, however, people formed predetermined conclusions and then tried to fit the data to them. The birth rate nine months after the blackout did not show a statistically significant difference from the rate of birth recorded during the same period in any of the five previous years.

Earlier today a BBC journalist (if we were adopting the BBC's **standards**, we should say 'journalist'), Nick Bryant, stated in a *BBC News 24* report from New York:

The only talk of boom here is the baby variety. During

the last blackout in the 1970s, there was a spike in the birth rate.

Should we believe him? Did he check the story with hospital records? Did he make it up? Did he confuse the 1977 blackout with the 1965 one *and* fail to check whether it was true?

Is it really true that no one in New York is talking of an economic boom ahead, but only a baby boom? Or is this just gratuitous, spiteful, anti-American wishful thinking?

We just don't know. This is what happens when a news organisation squanders its reputation for getting the facts right.

Presumably this is the same Nick Bryant who recently **accused** the US Government of "richly embroidering" the Jessica Lynch story.

And we know that this is the same BBC that is currently **in disgrace** with everyone who cares about standards in journalism and in public service.

Sun, 08/17/2003 - 02:19 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

BBC baby bilge

Forgive me for sounding like a frowsty old crab, but I almost found the not noticeably credible "blackout baby boom" item from the BBC WORSE than the Dr. Kelly scandal. I'm an ex-UK newspaper hack, living in the US, and generally keeping a worried eye on the Beeb as it snaps and foams at the US. This story wouldn't have got past a semi-competent provincial newspaper news editor twenty bloody years ago. "Great idea" - pause, wry smile "but does it stand up?". Chastened reporter goes off to check. Don't they do this anymore?

by a reader on Mon, 08/18/2003 - 16:48 | [reply](#)

We're Doomed, Doomed I Tell You!

The venerable left-wing group The Fabian Society has released a report saying that unless a worldwide superstate **intervenes** to impose stern but fair limits on consumption we will drown in our own filth. Okay, we're paraphrasing slightly:

And acting locally - perhaps by recycling that drinks can or buying locally-grown produce - has little effect unless governments do better at acting globally, says the report's author, Roger Levett. "Individual actions can't make a difference without a regulatory framework to underpin the good done."

In typical anticapitalist style, the Fabian Society blames markets for this 'crisis':

One problem is that economic growth is taken as a key measure of policy success and of a country's development. Instead the priority should be sustainability. "Markets are superb at setting prices, but incapable of recognising costs."

Oh dear, it seems that there is a lot that Fabians are incapable of recognising. One of the key mistakes underlying both environmentalism and socialism is perfectly showcased by this worthless warning, namely the idea that there is such a thing as a 'resource' that is independent of our knowledge about the world. As long as our knowledge about how to make use of the world around us continues to increase so will our "resources". If it should ever cease to grow, then, not to put too fine a point on it, regardless of how earnestly we recycle or how firmly we regulate or how deeply we trust the Fabians and the Government to Know Best - we're doomed.

Tue, 08/19/2003 - 15:25 | [permalink](#)

You're forgetting something h...

You're forgetting something here. You don't have to have fixed resources to believe you'll run out. If you are using resources faster than you can discover new ones, you'll run out. Running out isn't good as a general rule. Conservation reduces the consumption of the resources we know about, increasing the amount of time they'll

last. More time = greater chances of finding new resources before running out. You seem to not be considering this in your logic, which would make it flawed.

What's concerning a lot of people is the numbers. Higher consumption means greater chances of not finding new solutions in time. Human creativity isn't automagical, and you can't always create new things as you need em. It is very much possible to overdo it and poison yourself or use up all of a resource. Whether there is a significant risk of that at this time is arbitrary, but it's certainly not unreasonable to suspect it.

by [entivore](#) on Tue, 08/19/2003 - 17:41 | [reply](#)

Not forgetting

'You're forgetting something here. You don't have to have fixed resources to believe you'll run out.'

I would be extremely surprised if the Fabians didn't believe in fixed resources.

'If you are using resources faster than you can discover new ones, you'll run out. Running out isn't good as a general rule. Conservation reduces the consumption of the resources we know about, increasing the amount of time they'll last. More time = greater chances of finding new resources before running out. You seem to not be considering this in your logic, which would make it flawed.'

It's possible this is happening but I don't think it's true and anyway the post isn't about that, it's about what the Fabians think.

Also, higher consumption doesn't necessarily mean running out sooner since the resources don't just spiral down a black hole but are used to keep people as satisfied with their lives as possible so that they can come up with new ideas. Not buying little Jonny a new Nintendo or whatever could be the very thing that prevents him from coming up with a new scientific advance to save the world.

Also, government regulated recycling, as opposed to free market recycling, would suck.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Wed, 08/20/2003 - 00:50 | [reply](#)

resources

In a free market, any increase in scarcity of resources will raise their price relative to other things, leading **spontaneously** to recycling, conservation, use of substitutes, etc. (since the higher prices will make such measures economically rational) and increasing the amount of wealth spent on finding/creating more of the resource in question. No hand-wringing, statist intervention, guilt-tripping, or soapbox evangelizing required.: -)

The restrictions/regulations/costs most often proposed in the name

of "conserving scarce resources" or "avoiding (questionable) environmental risks" are also likely to throw up roadblocks in the way of long-term solutions, by restricting the creation of wealth and limiting what can be done with it.

by [bk_2112](#) on Wed, 08/20/2003 - 01:20 | [reply](#)

While it is true that scarcit...

While it is true that scarcity of resources will raise their relative price, leading to all that you say, often there are unpredictable spikes in demand or cuts in supply that become more dangerous as the resource nears it's full usage capacity. When it happens to food, we call it a famine, but it can happen to other resources as well. Even if flat out using up a resource without finding another is unlikely to occur, being "maxed out" raises the chances of a sudden blow to supply or spike in demand causing problems.

As far as this post being about the Fabians, I dunno anything about them. However your original post very much appears to attribute the flaw to environmentalism in general. Well anyway, I definantly agree about the government thing. They pretty much can't do anything in an efficient manner. Of course that's not surprising because of all the politics.

by [entivore](#) on Wed, 08/20/2003 - 20:10 | [reply](#)

Statism makes it better?

'While it is true that scarcity of resources will raise their relative price, leading to all that you say, often there are unpredictable spikes in demand or cuts in supply that become more dangerous as the resource nears it's full usage capacity. When it happens to food, we call it a famine, but it can happen to other resources as well. Even if flat out using up a resource without finding another is unlikely to occur, being "maxed out" raises the chances of a sudden blow to supply or spike in demand causing problems.'

A more poorly coordinated state run system will only exacerbate the problem.

by a reader on Wed, 09/24/2003 - 22:32 | [reply](#)

Conspiracy Theories – 2: Lying About Motives

Here's a fairly classic conspiracy theory. It is that the Bush Administration's foreign policy is part of a plot to impose Fascism on America. We don't especially recommend reading it (unless you are entertained by that sort of thing) but look at this passage:

I will examine exactly what the Bush Administration *in fact* stands for, which is in stark contrast to the claims of Bush's mindless chorus of fawning acolytes.

This "stark contrast" between the conspirators' *purported motives* and their *real motives* is at the heart of every political conspiracy theory. For if a conspiracy theory is to **explain observed events in current affairs and history**, the conspirators' hidden actions must somehow be translated into something significant and visible – a war, a major change in the law, the enrichment of some group and the impoverishment of another – which requires visible actions and efforts by large numbers of people. If, for whatever reason, the real objective of those efforts cannot be acknowledged openly, then many of those people must believe that they are furthering some different objective.

Now, consider a person who favours that ostensible objective and works towards it, but opposes the conspirators' true objective. Such a person is a dupe of the conspirators. Conspiracy theorists always believe in the existence of dupes because they see themselves as desperately warning them to open their eyes and see what would be "blinding ... in its clarity" if they did; but also, the alleged conspiracy itself usually depends on the cooperation of many dupes, such as journalists and political commentators ("Bush's mindless chorus of fawning acolytes") and soldiers and civil servants and of course ordinary voters.

It is in the interests of the conspirators to enlist as many dupes as possible. Every lie the conspirators tell, every secret meeting they hold, every secret decision they take and every secret message they share, incurs a risk of exposure. Therefore, the more dupes are willing to further the aims of the conspiracy without having to participate in the secret planning and without having to conceal their real reasons for supporting the plans, the safer the secret is. Also, the more dupes spontaneously work hard on the conspirators' behalf without wanting a payoff, the fewer real conspirators are needed to achieve the objective. And if there are spoils (there

usually are!) the larger the share each conspirator will receive.

So there are lots of dupes. But the question arises: *are there any politicians among them?*

It is in the nature of conspiracy theories that there is no immediate way of telling. Since the conspiracy depends on the conspirators behaving, in public, exactly as if they were dupes, it must be true that any duped politicians would be behaving in public exactly as if they were conspirators: arguing for the policy, voting for it, trying to discredit its opponents, cutting deals to promote it and so on.

You can see where this is going, can't you? *How high are the dupes allowed to rise?* For all we know, even some of the highest-ranking Neo-Cons are dupes. Even some members of the Cabinet might be outside the Conspiracy and genuinely be motivated by the arguments and objectives they advance in public.

Could the President himself be a dupe? If he was lying about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction then he was a Conspirator, and of course nothing could ever prove that he wasn't. But there again, there is no evidence that he *was* lying.

The fact is, *all* supporters of the Administration's policy could be 'dupes' – or rather, honest holders of the opinions they purport to hold – and still behave exactly as we see them behave. In other words, if there were no conspiracy there at all, we'd never know.

Well, obviously.

And therefore, the conspiracy theory explains exactly nothing. Yet it appends layers of weirdness and complexity to the commonsense picture of the world. There is an unlimited supply of such (non-)explanations, all postulating invisible complexity and all contradicting each other. Even if one of them were true, it would be vanishingly unlikely that anyone would happen to hit on it by a method that was impervious to evidence.

That is one reason why, in practice, conspiracy theories are always false.

But there is also another, more important reason.

Part 3

Thu, 08/21/2003 - 13:51 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Conspirancys

The strangest Conspiracy i heard about 9/11 is:

A Ex-CIA agent in a Cave in Afghanistan was planning these atack with help of his world wide terror network El-Qaida. He was able to get VISA's for guys that where watched by the CIA. But there where no insider in the CIA. And sure no insiders in the US goverment.

Thats strange stuff, but with that theorie they started a WAR on afghanistan.

by a reader on Fri, 08/22/2003 - 17:19 | [reply](#)

Not so strange

-The "ex-CIA agent" in question did, after all, admit to the planning on a widely-broadcast videotape. So what's so strange about ascribing the conspiracy to him?

-Nobody ever said there were no insiders in the CIA and/or US government. Maybe there were. "No insiders" is not an essential part of the true conspiracy theory.

by a reader on Fri, 08/22/2003 - 17:31 | [reply](#)

we know who the paleos/social...

we know who the paleos/socialists are referring to with their theories...J-E-W-S.

by a reader on Fri, 08/22/2003 - 19:43 | [reply](#)

smile

that's spelled N-E-O-C-O-N now ;p

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 08/22/2003 - 21:21 | [reply](#)

Theories

All such theories exist on a continuum, from the absurd, to the plausible, to the "official" view. (None of which may be true)

by a reader on Fri, 08/22/2003 - 22:38 | [reply](#)

Conspirancys

To blame the Jews or any other religion for this is nuts i think. But its clever to be critical about those who benefits most of those attacks, Some ppl with strong influence in the US goverment, ppl with strong influence in the CIA. Remember Operation Northwoods and what happend to the man that sopped it, mister John F. Kennedy. I think some company owners have to much influence on the US goverment and also links to some dubios middle east companys. Who benefits most of this attacks? Folow the Money. There are many ppl from difrent Nations and diffrent religions behind this. The Official is not true, so we have to keep searching the trueth, its out there folow the money

by a reader on Sat, 08/23/2003 - 00:50 | [reply](#)

mmmhhhhh

<http://www.ericblumrich.com/buddy.html>

by a reader on Sat, 08/23/2003 - 11:43 | [reply](#)

Keep open your eyes.

... for irrational conspiracy theories (but I repeat myself):

<http://www.conspiracyplanet.com/channel.cfm?channelid=89&contentid=481>

[Editor's Note:

Please don't post lengthy material in comments and especially not lengthy non-original material; please post links instead.]

by a reader on Sun, 08/24/2003 - 19:15 | [reply](#)

ok Links

http://www.unansweredquestions.org/images/Small_9-11_Chart.gif

by a reader on Sun, 08/24/2003 - 22:57 | [reply](#)

The Likelihood of an America Fascism

The author of the article referenced above is indeed mistaken that Bush is a Fascist. But there is no question that proto-fascist memes are ambient in American political culture and that these memes have been growing stronger for some time now. These memes are transmitted by the likes of Rush Limbaugh, Ann Coulter, the Freepers, Jerry Falwell etc. **This article** provides a sober assessment of the danger that is posed by these people and their memes and how that danger is all the greater post 9-11. As the author notes: "European fascism was a terrible thing. An American fascism, though, could very well devastate the world". It always pays to be vigilant. And it doesn't take a conspiracy for fascism to arise.

by a reader on Wed, 05/26/2004 - 05:41 | [reply](#)

Conspiracy theory (with a lot of prejudice)

I am not surprised to hear that in a recent newspaper poll 20% of Germans believe that the U.S. government may have sponsored the 9-11 attacks

In my view conspiracy theories are particularly popular between two classes of people. 1) Those who could be described as not very well informed (or 'clueless'), the sort of people that one expect to find in countries of the 'Less Developed World' –In Buenos Aires one of the top best selling (non fiction) title "Hitler Won the War" by the economist W. Graziano, describes how the events of September 11, were part of a plan hatched between President Bush and Bin Laden to take Control of the Globe - And 2) those well educated, like the Germans or the French who are too lazy to look beyond their own back yard and just react out of malice, envy and prejudice. To all of them the more grotesque the theory the more attractive turns out

to be.

By South American reader

by a reader on Wed, 09/22/2004 - 02:13 | [reply](#)

This example isn't really a conspiracy theory

I can see calling it that, but it seems like a bit of a stretch.

Anyway, it is a misguided version of reality.

The goal of the US is not now and never has been spreading democracy, it is spreading capitalism.

Hence the CIA's participation is overthrowing democratically elected socialist South American leaders. Hence the fight against communism, which is an economic, not political system.

What we want is free markets, which has nothing to do with democracy.

In a democracy the people decide what happens in society.

In a market economy the market - IE those with money - decide what happens in society.

This is an example of the government saying one thing while having an ulterior motive - and the American people do buy it.

It is to the majority of Americans' advantage to go along with it, since our exploitation of other countries (NAFTA) means cheap goods. However, we are still more likely to support government actions if we believe it is an issue of "good vs evil" instead of "might makes right."

By the standards above what I wrote here might be considered a "conspiracy theory" but what is the conspiracy? Who are the conspirators?

A collective blind eye to the emperor's nakedness is not a conspiracy. That corporations have influence over government policy, or that they wish to maximize profits at all costs are not conspiracies.

Fascism is absolute control of individuals by government.

We are working towards an economic version of that.

The number of companies is reduced while their ties to government are increased. Economic freedom is the stated goal, and economic freedom means unrestricted power for those with the most money.

by **Robert Paulson** on Wed, 12/20/2006 - 17:22 | [reply](#)

Free exchange of ideas and goods

"What we want is free markets, which has nothing to do with democracy."

How can one exchange goods freely, if one cannot exchange ideas freely?

by a reader on Thu, 12/21/2006 - 00:30 | [reply](#)

Freedom, Capitalism, and Democracy

Mr. Paulson's remarks mistake the relationship between freedom, capitalism and democracy. He denies that free market (capitalism) is related to democracy. He even goes as far as saying that by spreading free markets, Americans are "working toward an economic version" of Fascism, which he defines as "absolute control of individuals by government." Now, how could *free* market be a version of government control? He believes that is so because in a free market those with money rule, and they control the government too. This last statement is what makes this theory a conspiracy theory, for to do so, those with money (the conspirators) have to rule without violating anyone's freedom in the market, which requires a vast and coordinated conspiracy, hidden motives, and many dupes.

In reality, capitalism is the necessary condition of freedom and liberal democracy and the rule of law is the best system we have come up with in order to realize and protect individual freedoms (including economic freedoms) in our societies. Even if all the US did was to spread free markets, she would be spreading an essential component of any democracy worthy of the name and more importantly freedom.

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by **Liberal Iranian** on Thu, 12/28/2006 - 08:37 | [reply](#)

What Is Wrong With These People?

We don't mean the terrorists: we know what is wrong with them.
We mean the media.

Here's what happened **in chronological order**:

- The terrorist organization Hamas sent a suicide murderer to Israel to perpetrate one of the biggest and most vicious **bombings** that Israel has ever suffered. It killed eighteen innocent civilians on their way back from a Bar Mitzvah celebration, including five children. It maimed, blinded or scarred over a hundred more, about forty of them children.
- The Israel Defence Forces killed a senior Hamas leader and his two bodyguards.
- Hamas and the other terrorist organizations declared that in retaliation for this act, they are now ending their ceasefire.

The media reported the latter statement as fact:

- **Reuters**: *Israel Kills Hamas Leader, Militants Abandon Truce*
- **BBC**: Palestinian militants have called off their truce and vowed to take revenge for the killing by Israel of one of their leaders in Gaza.
- **CNN**: *Palestinian militant groups Thursday declared an end to their temporary cease-fire with Israel shortly after a senior Hamas leader was killed in an Israeli missile attack in Gaza.*
- **Associated Press**: Palestinian militants called off a tattered two-month-old truce on Thursday after an Israeli helicopter killed a senior Hamas political leader with a volley of missiles.

What could possibly make all these major news organisations (we could not find a single exception) think that blowing up a bus full of Jews isn't "breaking the cease fire"?

Fri, 08/22/2003 - 22:08 | [permlink](#)

No this time it was Sharons fault

After the Hamas and other terrorist organisations didnt attack israel anymore sharon didnt stop the attacks on the terrorist, so now they feel offended again, that was not very clever. Those terrorist belong death, but it was the wrong time. Both sides are wrong.

by a reader on Sat, 08/23/2003 - 01:23 | [reply](#)

Try Fox News...

...for a little bit better coverage. For example, they refuse to use the term "suicide bomber" and instead use "homicide bomber".

Pat

by **Pat** on Sat, 08/23/2003 - 04:32 | [reply](#)

Suicide or homicide?

'For example, they refuse to use the term "suicide bomber" and instead use "homicide bomber".'

Charles Johnson wrote in a recent post on LGF that suicide bomber is a better term and I agree with him (not that I want to get hung up, use whatever terms you like). Suicide bomber captures the strangely perverse nature of what the Islamonazis are doing. It isn't necessary for them to die in order to kill people they could just plant a bomb, walk away and blow it up safely from a good distance away. Instead they choose to destroy themselves as well. This is spectacularly perverse and evil in a way that just isn't captured by the term homicide bomber. It's a bit like calling the kamikazes fighter pilots. Lastly, it is important for the War on Terror to understand that Islamic terrorists are willing to destroy themselves, we can't afford to think 'no they wouldn't do that cause they'd be killed too,' when contemplating some heinous act the fact is they would do precisely that and worse if at all possible.

by **Alan Forrester** on Sat, 08/23/2003 - 13:22 | [reply](#)

Even Ha'aretz did it

" **Hamas ends hudna after assassination**"

by a reader on Sat, 08/23/2003 - 22:40 | [reply](#)

Re: Try Fox News...

Pat:

Fox News picked up the Associated Press story, including the passage we quoted above:

<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,95303,00.html>.

by **Editor** on Sat, 08/23/2003 - 22:47 | [reply](#)

I know, I know...

I didn't claim that they were perfect, I just said "...for a little bit better coverage."

I just got back from visiting my right-wing in-laws in Isreal and they

refused to watch CNN, whereas they could at least tolerate Fox News. As I said, it is a little bit better.

Pat

by **Pat** on Sun, 08/24/2003 - 01:31 | [reply](#)

what to call them

i like suicide murderer myself. i think it better captures the idea they are evil murdering fucks, while keeping the suicide aspect. the use of a *bomb* doesn't seem important enough to have priority over these other 2 aspects of what they do, IMO

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 08/24/2003 - 18:44 | [reply](#)

It will never end, but I find...

It will never end, but I find it fascinating that everyone that kills an American or Jew now is labeled as a 'terrorist.'

If another country invaded the U.S. and tried to set up a puppet government while having their armed soldiers all over the place, would I be a terrorist if I did whatever it took to try to kill them? If by blowing myself up or planting bombs to kill enemy soldiers I was able to build on the momentum of the occupying force's home populace being against the occupation, would I not have a reasonable purpose in what I was doing?

Is the U.S. always right?

The killings will continue in Isreal, Iraq, Afghanistan, etc. And the cowboy refuses to 'back down,' so it is going to continue as long as he's in office. It is because he sees any action other than staying in Iraq and thumbing our noses at the enemy as 'backing down' that we are going to get nowhere.

by a reader on Wed, 08/27/2003 - 19:27 | [reply](#)

Terrorists

I think the way we're using "terrorist" here is to refer to people who intentionally target innocents in order to change the minds of other people to lead to political change.

If you did that, you'd be a terrorist.

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 08/27/2003 - 20:26 | [reply](#)

Fox News idiocy

On FoxNews, the craziest things are said in (dis)respect to civil

liberties. Recently, a commentator said that someone with an unfavorable picture of George W. Bush in his place of business should be investigated by the FBI, and that we might have to "bruise the rights" of Middle Easterners and they should just "indulge us" because terrorists hide among them.

Once Neil Cavuto (sp?) complained about the Spiderman movie, saying it was anti-business in that the bad guy was a businessman. He said that the comics were overwhelmingly anti-business and he challenged anyone to think up a single good example of a businessman portrayed in the comics in a good light. I responded with a pithy email: "I can think of one obvious example: Batman." No reply.

FoxNews is not a liberty friendly media source. They are anti-immigrant and rabidly pro-drug war. Bill O'Reilly is a dimwit fascist who can dish it out but can't take it. They're suing Al Franken for his use of the words "fair and balanced," for God's sake!

And they have Geraldo.

Interventionists should consider all the flaws of FoxNews when giving them praise for being so "good" on the war.

by a reader on Fri, 08/29/2003 - 02:27 | [reply](#)

Fox News idiocy?

a commentator said that someone with an unfavorable picture of George W. Bush in his place of business should be investigated by the FBI

Just how "unfavorable" was this picture? Complete the following sentence: "Well OK, it was more than unfavorable, it incited..."

they should just "indulge us" because terrorists hide among them.

No, they should not "indulge" us. They should actually embrace measures to find those terrorists who hide among them, even when this gives them extra inconvenience. They should do this not as a favor to us but because it is right.

he challenged anyone to think up a single good example of a businessman portrayed in the comics in a good light. I responded with a pithy email: "I can think of one obvious example: Batman." No reply.

Well here's your reply: Batman is not a businessman. He is a playboy living on inherited wealth, which he spends selflessly, epitomizing what left wingers imagine rich people ought to do. He never earns anything, because earning is exploiting and epitomizes what left wingers hate rich people for.

rabidly pro-drug war

Yeah that's bad.

And they have Geraldo.

Ewww. Yeah you have a point there.

by a reader on Fri, 08/29/2003 - 02:55 | [reply](#)

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Mark Steyn On The Weather

Do not be misled by memories of your youth when, on the Continent, wanting to describe someone as exceptionally dull, you remarked: "He is the type who would discuss the weather with you." In England this is an ever-interesting, even thrilling topic

said George Mikes in **How To Be An Alien**. As of today, there is a second place in which the weather is a fascinating and deep topic: the writing of **Mark Steyn**, in which the dark prophesies of **George Galloway**, the pissoirs of the Paris Metro, the Afghan Winter and the Iraqi summer, French Bureaucracy and other nightmares of our time are compared with the humane efficiency of...

Read it and be enlightened.

Sat, 08/23/2003 - 22:42 | [permlink](#)

What about France?

I read Mark Steyn's article *Iraq may be on the edge but France has hit rock bottom abyss* linked above. It has some interesting points and is eloquently written, but I have to admit I don't really understand the point made about the heat deaths in France. Or is there a point? It certainly is sad if so many people died of heat, but why would that mean there's something wrong in France?

I also wonder how significant these 10,000 deaths are and to what extent they are really heat related. Remember that in a country the size of France about 200,000 people die every Summer anyway of natural causes. And I'd also like to know whether these are mainly people that might have died anyway in a few months, or whether there are a lot of them who could have lived for years.

Does the author think the French are stupid not to buy air conditioners for their houses? Does the author somehow blame government for this? Does he believe it's governments responsibility to take of its citizens' temperature exposure rather than their own? Or does he just want to make a point about the inefficiency of the funeral services and the bad state of health care in France? If so, I would have liked to see his argument of the link between bad health care and the heat deaths, if there is any, if that

is his point anyway. I'm not saying there isn't any, I don't know

anything about this event, I'm just saying that if there is some point to be made, I would have been interested in that point.

Or is it only that he wishes to claim that the French don't care about their relatives dying, which I find hard to believe? My apologies, but I haven't been following the news about the heat deaths in France, so maybe that's why I'm missing something. I'm just curious to know what this is about.

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Tue, 08/26/2003 - 09:55 | [reply](#)

Eric Hobsbawm Pushes the Envelope

...but not in a good way. Most **villeepinists** don't say that it is all right for tyrants like Saddam to murder people, just that it is wrong for us to do anything about it other than talk to them sternly (though not so sternly as to hurt their feelings since that would be an act of cultural imperialism).

However, communist 'historian' Eric Hobsawm descended to the next level way back in 1994 when he said that it was **acceptable** for the Communist Party to have murdered millions of people in Russia before World War Two:

HOBBSAWM: You didn't have the option. You see, either there was going to be a future or there wasn't going to be a future and this [the Communist Party] was the only thing that offered an acceptable future.

IGNATIEFF: In 1934, millions of people are dying in the Soviet experiment. If you had known that, would it have made a difference to you at that time? To your commitment? To being a Communist?

HOBBSAWM: This is the sort of academic question to which an answer is simply not possible...I don't actually know that it has any bearing on the history that I have written. If I were to give you a retrospective answer which is not the answer of a historian, I would have said, 'Probably not.'

IGNATIEFF: Why?

HOBBSAWM: Because in a period in which, as you might imagine, mass murder and mass suffering are absolutely universal, the chance of a new world being born in great suffering would still have been worth backing. Now the point is, looking back as an historian, I would say that the sacrifices made by the Russian people were probably only marginally worthwhile. The sacrifices were enormous; they were excessive by almost any standard and excessively great. But I'm looking back at it now and I'm saying that because it turns out that the Soviet Union was not the beginning of the world revolution. Had it been, I'm not sure.

IGNATIEFF: What that comes down to is saying that had

the radiant tomorrow actually been created, the loss of fifteen, twenty million people might have been justified?

HOBBSAWM: Yes.

(Thanks to [Samizdata](#) for the link.)

Of course, it's not at all surprising that Hobsbawm is on the **wrong side** yet again. The US can't win with Hobsbawm, or the rest of the loony left, no matter what happens. If the US wins a stunning military victory against an evil dictator then the evil US empire has again crushed "someone they didn't like" with their iron fist. If a US soldier dies – or even pauses for a rest on his way to victory – then it's the greatest reverse in military history since Stalingrad.

Hobsbawm's views have nothing to do with facts like the number of people who are going to die, or anything like that. Instead they are all derived from an inner sense of morality that is so twisted that a tyrant slaughtering fifteen million innocent people is acceptable while a free society conducting a war against terrorism is evil.

Tue, 08/26/2003 - 15:23 | [permalink](#)

Conspiracy Theories – 3: Unseen Events

When George Mikes (the humourist and author of **How to be an Alien**) was very young and not yet able to read, he formulated a theory to explain his experiences. It was that *no one can read*: older people were merely pretending to see meaning in random squiggles of ink on paper, and were secretly laughing at his gullibility.

This had all the formal **attributes of a conspiracy theory**: it alleged that significant events in Mikes' life (adults reading to him, and trying to teach him to read) were part of a secret plan that involved the conspirators' lying to him about facts and about their own motives, in order to benefit at his expense (in this case merely by being amused). It also explained away his own relative *ineffectiveness* (his inability to read, compared with other people's apparent ability to), in terms of his *powerlessness* and their power over him. This is another very common theme of conspiracy theories. His theory differed from a standard conspiracy theory mainly in the way he held it: in particular, in the way he abandoned it.

He did not say how he first came to doubt it, but we can guess what must have been involved: simply *taking it seriously as an explanation of reality*. Perhaps at some point he noticed that different adults were able to read the same story out of a given book. Such observations would not have proved anything, but they would have multiplied the invisible events that must have been happening if the no-one-can-read theory was true: now, instead of merely laughing at him behind his back, the adults must have been learning stories by heart, and coordinating which ones they were going to pretend were contained in which book. They must have been pretending to find their way to unfamiliar places by reading road signs, feigning frustration when they left the shopping list at home, pretending that mail contained information from distant relatives, and so on. To maintain all those pretences would have involved hidden processes of great complexity, centring on the young Mikes, and laboriously hidden from him.

So what? Nature is full of hidden processes of great complexity; people do often hide things laboriously from other people – not least from children. Mikes was not wrong to be sceptical: initially, he could not have distinguished what he was told about reading from what he was told about Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy. What

was essential, though, was that he be just as sceptical of his own alternative explanation. And more: he needed to be seeking a true explanation, to care whether reality did or did not conform, even in unseen ways, to whatever explanation he adopted. Though his no-one-can-read explanation could never have been *proved* false, he was not looking for proof. He had not proposed it in order to create an unassailable dogma, but simply because he had a problem imagining a reality in which all those squiggles meant something. But then, given the role that he could see that alleged meaning playing in the lives of the people around him, he would soon have realised that postulating a further slew of apparently meaningless behaviour (the conspiracy) in the reality beyond his immediate perceptions did nothing to solve that problem. In effect it merely raised it again, but all the worse for being projected off the page and out into the wider world.

So, when he thought about the evidence available to him, though he would never have faced disproof, he would have faced a choice: try again to understand the hidden meanings in the squiggles – which might be difficult and, for all he knew, might never work – or attribute everything he saw to the hidden conspiracy. The latter option was guaranteed always to be available. Yet, at some point, he must have realised that the world could not be understood in those terms.

This is the choice which conspiracy theorists make differently and irrationally. They do care about *some* invisible events: the relatively small number that they love to think about, such as President Bush and his inner circle discussing their evil plan to seize the Iraqi oil fields. But they don't care enough to follow through the implications for the host of other invisible events that would also have to be happening if those were – such as how the conspiracy would recruit its members and how it would agree upon a new plan, and what exactly the conspirators' reward is and how it gets to them. We shall say more about this in the next instalment, but in general terms: conspiracy theorists chronically fail to form a serious model of what reality would be like if their theory of it were true. They paint on a large canvas with only a tiny area of detail, always preferring the security of familiar patterns of thought that are guaranteed to provide the semblance of an explanation, to the uncertainty and difficulty of trying to understand what the facts really are.

Part 4

Thu, 08/28/2003 - 08:39 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

When will 9.11

be Investigated?

Sur UBL was it, but WHO HELPED HIM??????

America WAS never that DEFENCELESS like it was on 9.11.

WAKE UP.

Ask question, dont try to protect the terrorist, but try to find those who helped the terrorist.

by a reader on Fri, 08/29/2003 - 07:05 | [reply](#)

Clean, Clear and Incisive

I thank you for your excellent dissection and (pre-autopsy?) of Conspiracy Theories.

I've sensed various aspects of your explanations myself, but I never felt moved to trace the rational path you've taken here, to such powerful and positive ends!

Very fine work, and I really appreciate it, although I'm okay[ⓐ]
knu2.com

by a reader on Mon, 09/01/2003 - 06:20 | [reply](#)

Nice work

<http://www.ericblumrich.com/buddy.html>

Also a nice about the same thing.

by a reader on Mon, 09/01/2003 - 12:25 | [reply](#)

When will 9/11 be investigated

The investigation is done. The result is easy and clear : USA is the lone government who is able to make that kind of huge action and to hide it from the world. More details and proofs are on my web page <http://users.swing.be/muhammadcolumbo/>

Your comments are wellcome

When you will be sure on the autors of 9/11, you will be able to stop its repeat.

by **Muhammad Columbo** on Thu, 05/12/2005 - 17:47 | [reply](#)

i disagree!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

i think you're projecting the above anecdote on everyone who has thought for themselves about 9-11, and you've got it backwards. might i suggest that YOU are the baby; you are the one with the pre-set conclusion ("there's no conspiracy") and you refuse to acknowledge that we adults can indeed read for ourselves!

i am a very rational american and i have seen enough to know that i can point the finger at george tenet and a slew of bush administration officials. i know the way i've been told to think by the new york times et al. i have read enough to know not to buy that programming.

i have heard your smug argument before. have you considered that

you're labeling a lot of people you have never met as "conspiracy theorists" and calling them all crazy. that's nuts! how large does that group have to be before you see that YOU'RE the insane one here?

YOU are the person who labels the views of people who ARE thinking for themselves "insane". we don't call ourselves "conspiracy theorists", we who have looked a little deeper than you have so far dared to look. and we don't have disrespect for other views; we INVITE skeptics to challenge our alternative hypothesis (didn't that one guy offer a \$100,000 reward if the OFFICIAL explanation could be proven?)

some of the people in your comments have it right:
BEGIN A REAL INVESTIGATION OF 9-11!!!!
AND NOTICE WHO HAS BEEN BLOCKING ONE!!!!

-j

by hmddd on Sat, 12/03/2005 - 17:34 | [reply](#)

Does a '9-11 conspiracy' theory pass 'the test'?

Here's another test that all potential conspiracy theories should be able to pass:

Put yourself in the position of the beneficiary, before the alleged event takes place (e.g. Bush before 9-11).

Assume that you wish to achieve his/her aims (e.g. to 'get your hands on Iraqi oil', or 'start a war with Afganistan', etc. etc.)

What possible courses of action are available to you? Which are likely to work, and would be quick, easy, safe, cheap? Which course of action would you take?

Would the alleged 'conspiracy' be anywhere near the top of the list of possible plans you would come up with?

E.g. - if Bush wanted to get his hands on Iraqi oil - what could he do? Why not cut a deal with Iraq? America stops maintaining sanctions, and leans on the UN to lift them completely. In return, Iraq has to ditch all existing agreements and sign up long-term deals with certain American oil companies on American terms...

If you can come up with half a dozen alternate plans to your 'conspiracy theory', which are:

- (a) much simpler
- (b) much more likely to succeed
- (c) less politically damaging if you are found out
- (d) much 'cheaper' (financially, politically, etc.)
- (e) in character (i.e. the course of action has been taken in the past by this group of people - publically and successfully)

then you must conclude that it is highly unlikely that smart, powerful, careful world leaders would choose the more dangerous, more difficult 'conspiracy' plan!

And before you question the intelligence of the 'conspiracy' leaders - if you credit them with enough intelligency, foresight and power to fool or manipulate everybody in the world over a period of years, then you have to credit them with the intelligence to pick the right plan in the first place!

by Mark on Mon, 08/21/2006 - 09:46 | [reply](#)

Re: Here's another test

Good point.

by **Editor** on Mon, 08/21/2006 - 10:54 | [reply](#)

Disrespect and sanity (or not)

"YOU are the person who labels the views of people who ARE thinking for themselves "insane". we don't call ourselves "conspiracy theorists", we who have looked a little deeper than you have so far dared to look. and we don't have disrespect for other views"

LOL. You can't have visited Dewdney's rantings on this matter. Dewdney isn't a scientist, but he mocks scientists who take apart his pathetic attempts to 'prove' by way of 'physics' that the CIA (or sometimes Mossad) organised 9/11.

by **Yoni** on Sat, 09/09/2006 - 22:50 | [reply](#)

Syllogisms

"USA is the lone government who is able to make that kind of huge action and to hide it from the world"

So the syllogism goes:

A can do B

Hence, A must have done B.

Yees ... right ...

Nobody says it was done by any one particular government.

Capish?

by **Yoni** on Sat, 09/09/2006 - 22:52 | [reply](#)

both sides of this argument are doing exactly what...

the article says people who believe in conspiracy theories do.

Neither of you are willing to consider evidence which doesn't fit into your already drawn conclusion.

by **Jay Aziza** on Wed, 12/20/2006 - 17:30 | [reply](#)

The test.

We could have negotiated with the USSR and Cuba, too.
Oil may be a major factor, but its not the only one.
If they want more power, both domestically and internationally, a weak showing of negotiating with Saddam would not further that goal.

Please list the 6 alternate plans which are: simpler, more likely to succeed (if the conspiracy theory turned out to be true, then it did succeeded), less politically damaging (if it was all verbal agreements, how could anyone ever "find out"?), cheaper, and in character?

I would ask that you apply the same standard to the Islamic hijackers.

If they were smart enough to execute this plan against the richest most powerful country in the world, would they not have been smart enough to realize the consequences? Would they have wanted to have the US destroy thier entire way of life? Would that have been the best way to achieve thier goals of less US presence in the mid-east?

In the long run, who gained more of thier goals from 9/11, Islamic fundamentalists or the PNAC?

-What history teaches is this – that people and governments have never learnt anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it.

by **Jay Aziza** on Wed, 12/20/2006 - 17:37 | [reply](#)

Not Analogous

It's easier for a few hijackers to keep a secret than a president working to attack his own country!

And more likely for a few hijackers to be wrong about how to achieve their ends.

by a reader on Wed, 12/20/2006 - 23:57 | [reply](#)

Failed test?

Jay tried to apply the same test as **Mark's** to Islamic fundamentalists' conspiracy to hijack and crash the planes on 9/11. But he did not reach the right answer.

The hijackers had declared their motives before, so there are no hidden motives. This is plainly on display for all to see. In fact, they are trying to convert the world to it. They had also announced their intentions to attack the US. They honour dying in order to achieve this goal, which they hold to be for Allah and sacred. And they believe that they will be rewarded for their actions in Heaven. So there is no "conspiracy theory" here. The conspiracy only exists before 9/11 for what the hijackers had to do in order to make it happen.

What other ways did they have to achieve their goal? More or less

nothing else! Their goal was to attack the US. With no army, they were rationally reduced to using isolated acts of violence with whatever they can make do. So they indeed pass Mark's test.

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by **Liberal Iranian** on Thu, 12/28/2006 - 09:06 | [reply](#)

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Anti-Semitism Today

It is 2003. The extermination camps of Europe ceased murdering 58 years ago and ever since then the ideologies that created and justified them have been a byword for evil in civilised circles – and even in most uncivilised ones. That anti-Semitism is once again a significant causal force in international politics, and in the internal politics of Western nations, is an idea grotesque almost beyond belief. But believe it we must, for it is a cold fact.

Here are some recent articles on the phenomenon, which everyone should read:

The demonology of SE Asian Islamists by **Michael Danby**:

Sue and Donna lived in Elwood and Port Melbourne respectively, suburbs in my constituency in Melbourne, where I serve as a federal member of parliament. Sue and Donna were killed whilst enjoying a holiday in Bali, and now Donna leaves behind a disabled four-year-old.

As justification for their murderous acts in Bali, two of the known perpetrators, Amrozi bin Nurhasyim and Imam Samudra, have focused their rhetoric on revenge “against the Jews,” despite the fact that, to the best of my knowledge, there are no Jews in Indonesia.

Fiamma Nirenstein:

If Israel is, and it is indeed, the focal point of anti-Semitic attacks, our attention must be concentrated there. We must measure the moral character of the person we are speaking to on that basis: if you lie about Israel, if you cover it with bias, you are an anti-Semite. If you're prejudiced against Israel, then, you're against the Jews.

This doesn't mean criticizing Israel and its policies is forbidden. However, very little of what we hear about Israel has to do with lucid criticism. Prejudice and bias, not Sharon's personality is the major reason for criticism. The self-defined critics are not the pious interlocutors for the Jews that they pretend to be. So we must tell them: from now on you cannot use the human rights passport for free; you cannot use false stereotypes. You must demonstrate what you assert: that the army ruthlessly storms poor Arab villages that have nothing to do with terrorism; that it shoots children on purpose; that it kills journalists with pleasure. You cannot? You called Jenin a slaughter? Then you are an anti-Semite, just like the old anti-Semites you pretend to hate. You have to convince

me that you are not an anti-Semite, now that we know that you do not condemn terrorism, that you have never said a word against the contemporary caricatures of hooked-nosed Jews with a bag of dollars in one hand and a machine gun in the other.

Solomon:

Jewish bank ownership, media ownership, personal flaws...they stand out because they hate you and they don't hate you because of the "occupation" – they hate the "occupation" because they...hate...you.

On Ignoring Anti-Semitism by **Ruth R. Wisse**:

No extract can sum up this careful and comprehensive analysis. Go and read it all.

Mon, 09/01/2003 - 20:26 | [permalink](#)

That's some company to be in...

...thank you for the link - and the pointers. Good stuff.

by **Solomon** on Tue, 09/02/2003 - 20:38 | [reply](#)

Here's Another Interesting One

http://europundits.blogspot.com/2003_09_01_europundits_archive.html#106267265194636376
(except that the PS is, as he says himself, too conspiratorial.)

(Via **InstaPundit**.)

by **Editor** on Fri, 09/05/2003 - 03:34 | [reply](#)

Bias about bias

Yes, there's a lot of anti-semitism, and many critics of Israel are anti-semitic, and that's very bad. However, Fiamma Nirenstein writes:

[...] if you lie about Israel, if you cover it with bias, you are an anti-Semite. If you're prejudiced against Israel, then, you're against the Jews.

This is of course entirely a non-sequitur. Yes, many of those biased against Israel will be anti-semitic. But by no means all. There are many other reasons people can be biased against Israel. The most important reason for people to be biased against Israel, I would guess, is not anti-semitism but anti-Westism or cultural relativism. Jews mostly belong to the European culture. And Israel is a Western type state, with emphasis on individual rights and rule of law. And that is something that is hated by those who would favor oppression and backwardness, or the "freedom" non-Westerners to enjoy the benefits of a culture of oppression and backwardness (why should only non-Westerners have this "freedom"?).

Also, Israel is seen as a form of Western colonialism in the East. And they are hated for that just as Americans are hated for being in Iraq (by leftist Westerners and non-Iraqi muslims, mostly not by Iraqis themselves). It's not all about anti-semitism, even if part of it is.

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Sun, 09/07/2003 - 10:52 | [reply](#)

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Wolfowitz on the War Against Terror

The war against terror is being fought - and won - in Iraq, says Paul Wolfowitz, placing the current Iraq campaign in its strategic context. And here's **David Schneider-Joseph** on the same subject. They are right.

Wed, 09/03/2003 - 02:21 | [permalink](#)

I understand now.....

So we are going to make Iraq into a liberal democracy while we give billions to dictatorships like Egypt, Pakistan, Uzbekistan etc. Makes perfect sense.

by a reader on Thu, 09/04/2003 - 00:07 | [reply](#)

It Does Make Sense

Mr A. Nonymous wrote:

"So we are going to make Iraq into a liberal democracy while we give billions to dictatorships like Egypt, Pakistan, Uzbekistan etc. Makes perfect sense."

Yes, it does make perfect sense. We can only deal with one country at a time. We'll get around to telling the Egyptians, Saudis and so on that their support for terrorism is intolerable and must end but right now we need to deal with Iraq.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Thu, 09/04/2003 - 00:59 | [reply](#)

The Most Appropriate Thing Ever

Tomorrow, as part of the celebrations to mark the 85th anniversary of the Polish Air Force, three visiting Israeli F-15 aircraft are going to fly low along the railway tracks leading to the Auschwitz death camp. The pilots, who are descendants of Holocaust survivors, will read the names of victims who were arriving at the camp at that time exactly sixty years earlier. "They will fly over the camp for about a second to honor the ashes of their fathers and grandfathers", said the Israeli ambassador to Poland.

But the Auschwitz museum is **opposed** to this form of commemoration. It issued a statement saying it "felt such a display was inappropriate" and that it "deplores the demonstration of Israeli military might in this place".

They do not know what they are talking about. This is arguably the most appropriate thing to have happened anywhere, ever. How can someone work at Auschwitz and not know that?

Wed, 09/03/2003 - 21:40 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Violence

I think this is an example of the "Violence Is Bad" meme that I discussed in a recent post on my blog. Many people have drawn the wrong conclusions from the Holocaust.

Some people refuse to recognize that, while violence is often wrong and bad, it is sometimes right and good. They are offended by any "demonstrations of might". They prefer to declare all violence as wrong and imagine that if enough of us demonstrate that we are unwilling and unable to defend ourselves with force, then nobody will take advantage of that.

They are wrong.

Gil

by **Gil** on Thu, 09/04/2003 - 02:29 | [reply](#)

PC rot loses!

The "sheep led to slaughter" model has been tried and found

wanting. What part of "Never again!" don't they understand?

by [Alan Furman](#) on Thu, 09/04/2003 - 18:59 | [reply](#)

The "never" part. They under...

The "never" part. They understand the "again" part just fine. ;-)

by a reader on Thu, 09/04/2003 - 20:43 | [reply](#)

Simplicity is not always a virtue...

"deplores the demonstration of Israeli military might in this place"...

The adjective "Israeli" makes me wonder. Are we to assume that, for example, GERMAN military might in Auschwitz was more appropriate?

I agree with Gil. The one virtue of the "all violence is bad" concept is that it's easy to understand. And, as with many other concepts that are easy to understand, it is dead wrong.

Daniel in Medford

by a reader on Thu, 09/04/2003 - 21:23 | [reply](#)

They are afraid to look at pa...

They are afraid to look at past sin and hope that bad memory will just fade away if nobody notice.

Words can fool men but nature doesn't give a damn!

by [Lan Nguyen](#) on Thu, 09/04/2003 - 21:43 | [reply](#)

Not quite

They are afraid to look at past sin and hope that bad memory will just fade away if nobody notice.

I don't think this is a reasonable interpretation of the perspective of people who want to treat the site as a cemetery and think flying over it disturbs the concentration of mourners.

They're wrong, not because they don't want people to remember, but because they think remembering is enough.

~Woty

<http://woty.davidsj.com>

by [Woty](#) on Fri, 09/05/2003 - 11:41 | [reply](#)

Interesting Quote

There's a pretty good [NY Times Magazine article](#) about anti-

semitism available online that contains this interesting quote:

"The Germans will never forgive the Jews for Auschwitz."

Gil

by **Gil** on Fri, 09/05/2003 - 16:21 | [reply](#)

Re: Violence

1. If celebrating the anniversary of the Polish Air Force is appropriate then such a fly over certainly is.
2. This fly over seems to be more a celebration of life than of military might.
3. Unfortunately our conclusion that our enemies are wrong & immoral and that we are right & moral is ultimately based on a leap of faith.

by a reader on Fri, 09/05/2003 - 22:30 | [reply](#)

All violence **is** bad

There is a large grain of truth in Pacifism. It **is** true that war and violence is a very terrible thing even for the good guys. Many of them die or suffer for the rest of their lives, after all. And it is true that there are alternatives to war and violence and that if there is a way for good and truth to win out over evil without having to fight about it, then that is the way we should take.

Pacifists are just wrong in their idea that war and violence is **always** wrong, and that there are **always** better ways to deal with evil, and that violence is **never** right.

Stephen (who can't remember his password and username probably due to almost never using it)

by a reader on Fri, 09/05/2003 - 22:42 | [reply](#)

> Since you & I will never...

< I don't think this is a reasonable interpretation of the perspective of people who want to treat the site as a cemetery and think flying over it disturbs the concentration of mourners.

They're wrong, not because they don't want people to remember, but because they think remembering is enough.>>

Since you & I will never be able to glimpse in the soul of the people described above, then interpretation is all depending on your perspective. It's possible that they might think remembering is enough but it's also possible that people want to rewrite the history and they do not want to resurrect the memory of the holocaust. In absence of an absolute truth, my interpretation is very possible and

reasonable unless you can prove otherwise. Of course, I can be

wrong and so are you.

Words can fool men but nature doesn't give a damn!

by [Lan Nguyen](#) on Fri, 09/05/2003 - 23:22 | [reply](#)

violence!?

ya really think this is about violence and anti-military memes!? it's 3 planes not shooting at anyone...

aww, c'mon, why did i skim through the TEN comments and not see THEY ARE FUCKING ANTI-SEMITES spelled out a bit more loudly? (yeah yeah, someone noticed the adjective 'israeli'). jews with guns on near germany is inappropriate cause they jews were supposed to die, and the germans failed.

btw i liked the '~~never~~ again' post. and the notion the germans are just afraid to remember their sin seems silly when they're acting like they don't think it was a sin. it seems more like they don't want their Great Attempt tarnished by this act which would show that it failed.

-- Elliot Temple
<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by a reader on Mon, 09/08/2003 - 20:28 | [reply](#)

Of Inquiries

Villepinists like to hold fake inquiries. So the Stop the War Coalition (yes, they still exist – we were surprised too) are planning to hold an **inquiry** into the conduct of the Iraq war, along the lines of the so-called **International War Crimes Tribunal of 1967** dedicated to demonising the Americans and their allies for their conduct in the Vietnam war. No doubt the same mixture of daft **conspiracy theories**, facts taken out of all context and wilful ignorance of the evils of the totalitarian enemies against whom America and her allies were fighting will be on display. So while any act by American forces will be picked and worried to death by this inquiry, one can be sure that they won't pay much attention to the **record** of Saddam's regime, just as the left has largely **ignored** the **crimes** of the communist regime in Vietnam before, during and after the Vietnam war.

It's not going to be an 'inquiry' in the sense of a quest to discover what really happened. Everybody knows in advance what its conclusion will be, it is as foregone as the result of one of Stalin's show trials. This makes an interesting contrast with another inquiry that is going on right now – **the Hutton Inquiry**. Despite attempts to forecast that the government will be **exonerated** or **damned** nobody really knows what the outcome will be. The reason is simple: genuine inquiries are held when the truth is hard to find and one wants to make every possible effort to find it. Since we don't know the truth about the circumstances surrounding Kelly's death we don't know what the inquiry will find. A real inquiry requires an interest in the truth, whether or not it fits one's preconceptions, and that is absent from everything the Stop the War Coalition and other Villepinists do.

Fri, 09/05/2003 - 12:23 | [permalink](#)

War in Irak

By the way, where is Bin Laden?

by a reader on Sat, 09/06/2003 - 11:29 | [reply](#)

Bin Laden? Probably dead - why'd you ask?

FWIW, I reckon Bin Laden is dead: probably scorched onto the walls

of a cave somewhere in his Impregnable Mountain Fortress (TM). Funny how we haven't actually seen anything of him since around the time we started bombing his Impregnable Mountain Fortress (TM) at Tora-Bora. There've been a few audio tapes of someone who sounds like him, but nothing unambiguous. Until we get solid evidence he's alive I'm betting he's dead. But what does that have to do with Iraq, anyway?

by a reader on Mon, 09/08/2003 - 15:51 | [reply](#)

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Is There A Diabetes Epidemic?

In recent years the prevailing wisdom both among **journalists** and among **experts** and **scientists** in the field has been that the incidence of diabetes has increased sharply and that there is currently an epidemic of the disease. Of course diabetes is not infectious, but the word 'epidemic' is **used**, by extension, to include any health-related events that are occurring at a significantly higher rate than before.

About a year ago, for instance, there was an epidemic of stories in the media claiming that a diabetes epidemic is in progress.

Now, further studies seem to show that this was based on a misinterpretation of data. The headline now is: **Diabetes epidemic fails to arrive:**

The prevalence of type 2 diabetes may have risen mainly because people are being picked up and treated earlier or are living longer

In other words, people are getting the disease at much the same rate as before, but there are more diabetics because they are being detected younger and living longer. The 'epidemic' was actually caused by a combination of two *good* developments!

That study was done in Denmark on 470,000 people. A **study in the US** (much smaller but perhaps more significant because it is the only study addressing this issue which has measured both diagnosed and undiagnosed diabetes) came to a similar conclusion:

The findings in this report indicate that the prevalence of diabetes, either diagnosed or undiagnosed, and impaired fasting glucose did not appear to increase substantially during the 1990s.

Yet we know (or at least, our best theories say) that (1) obesity is on the increase and (2) obesity does precipitate diabetes in a proportion of people. So there *should* have been an epidemic:

The apparent lack of increase in prevalence is unexpected in light of the increasing prevalence of obesity and overweight in U.S. adults documented by the NHANES surveys.

So there's something rather puzzling going on. What? We don't

know.

We just don't know. But research will continue and we will find out. And, probably, the answer will contain something else puzzling. This is the usual way in science. New knowledge takes us from puzzle to puzzle, never to a secure point from which we can speak authoritatively.

Sat, 09/06/2003 - 23:43 | [permalink](#)

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Hatred

Oriana Fallaci, author of **The Rage and the Pride**, a passionate response to 9/11, is on trial for **hatred**.

We doubt that the people putting her on trial would recognise hatred if it jumped up and killed them in the name of Sharia law.

When Islamofascist terrorists crash three planes full of innocent people into three buildings full of innocent people, that is hatred.

When Islamofascist thugs **stone women to death** for the crime of travelling with a male other than a relative, or chop off their fingertips for the crime of using nail polish; when Islamofascist terrorists want so badly to kill Jewish children that they are prepared to **die** for the privilege and **train their own children to do the same**, that is hatred.

When a person of Oriana Fallaci's insight and bravery draws on her extensive knowledge to condemn the culture that produces people who commit such crimes, that is sanity.

Racial or religious hatred is no part of either the motivation or the intention of this book. Yes, it is unvarnished and uncompromising. It disdains the taboos of 'political correctness', and in particular, the taboo against criticising cultures. It pulls no punches; but nor does it deliver them indiscriminately: her criticisms are specific and they are rooted in the starkly practical problem of what caused the attacks of September 11, 2001 and what can be done about it. She criticises Western culture as well as Islamic for setting up the conditions in which violent Islamofascism has thrived. We do not share her whole analysis, but the core of it is well judged and timely and should be taken on board by everyone who cares about the future of civilisation.

Mon, 09/08/2003 - 17:26 | [permalink](#)

The Rage and The Pride

I agree that her book is not racist, and that it contains vital truths. I agree with most of its content.

However, I think that she makes a mistake that we ought to be careful to avoid. She seems to think that Islamic cultures can't **ever** be modern and will **always** be enemies, because Islam is

too corrupt to reform. I think that taking this attitude makes it more difficult to find solutions, even though she is correct that we will not become more peaceful or secure by pretending that existing Islamic culture is as good as existing Western culture.

But if we think that Islam is incapable of reform, how can we possibly stop people from wanting to kill us?

~Woty

<http://woty.davidsj.com>

by **Woty** on Wed, 09/10/2003 - 16:18 | [reply](#)

Did They Cheer Yesterday As Well?

Shaare Zedek Medical Center, Jerusalem, yesterday:

As the hospital's doctors and nurses waited to treat the wounded, they received word that the attack had killed the head of their emergency room, Dr. David Appelbaum.

Dr Appelbaum was **murdered** together with his 20-year-old daughter, Naava, who was to have been married that evening.

When the humorist Larry Miller **visited** the emergency room of another Jerusalem hospital last year, one of the staff told him that her job is hard sometimes:

Downstairs, before we left, the head of the hospital, an Israeli named Audrey, was showing me the children's waiting room. I couldn't help but notice, all around, an Arab woman with her son, an Arab family over there checking in, Arab children playing with the toys while waiting. The doctor saw the look on my face and laughed. "Oh, yes, we treat everyone." I guess I was astonished. She just shrugged. "We're Jews. This is how we live. It's also for the future. They're not going anywhere, and we're not going anywhere. There will eventually be peace. There has to be." When? A month? A year? A hundred years? More? She didn't know. I had to say it. You're incredible. You take everyone, you treat everyone, no one goes first, no one goes last, you just go in order of who needs help. That's, like, Mother Teresa stuff. "We're not saints, we're just doing our jobs. It's not easy, I admit. And it gets hard when they cheer when the bodies are brought in." I looked at her. What did you say? She sighed. "Yes, it gets hard when they cheer." This was one of the times during my trip when I held up my hands and said, "Stop. Wait." I turned and walked away to breathe deeply for a minute. I wonder if they've restocked that mini-bar. Yeah, probably. It's a good hotel.

I didn't meet one Jew the whole trip who didn't think there would be peace, not one. "We can work it out. We have to. They're not going anywhere. Neither are we."

Of course, it gets hard when they cheer.

I guess it does.

But last night will have been even harder.

Wed, 09/10/2003 - 18:48 | [permalink](#)

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2003-09-11

We have nothing to add to what has already been said by many **others**. We are at war. It is a war of those who value and celebrate human life against those who worship death.

Go out and be happy.

Thu, 09/11/2003 - 17:09 | [permalink](#)

BLOG-IRAN

Dear Sarah, David & Kevin,

Please join with us and bloggers around the world in supporting the Iranian people against a brutal fanatic terrorist clerical regime that continues to support terror and make problems for not only peace but also for American soldiers and others who are trying to assist the Iraqi people!

Join BLOG-IRAN at <http://www.activistchat.com/blogiran> and help free the Iranian people... LETS BE THE VOICE when everyone else is SILENT!

In Unity & Struggle,
Haleh

by a reader on Fri, 09/12/2003 - 15:43 | [reply](#)

Re: BLOG-IRAN

We of course wholeheartedly approve of the efforts of Iranians to free themselves from tyranny, and we approve of BlogIran. But we have to blog about what we know, and frankly we do not know enough about the details of the situation in Iran to comment regularly about it. On this subject we are more usually blog readers than writers.

But we are honoured by your invitation and wish you the best of luck in your noble cause.

by [Editor](#) on Fri, 09/12/2003 - 19:40 | [reply](#)

The Man Who Should Be Prime Minister

In a Parliamentary system, wartime presents special challenges to the Opposition party. The present Leader of the Opposition in Britain (Iain Duncan-Smith – 'IDS') has sadly failed to meet these challenges. He has engaged in pointless, opportunistic sniping at the Prime Minister's conduct of the war that has no effect but to undermine the policy that they both agree on, without bringing to bear any coherent criticism either on that or most other issues.

For instance, at the last Prime Minister's Question Time, IDS devoted his questions to speculations based on a leaked report of a Parliamentary Committee which, he said, was "another nail in the coffin of this government". On this, as on other occasions, he not only indulged in meaningless pomposity, but came very close to endorsing the idiotarian/villepinist conspiracy theory that the government had lied about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction: "the lying and the spinning won't stop until we get rid of this Prime Minister". The following day the report was published and, although it made some minor criticisms, **cleared** the government of any such wrongdoing.

Here, for comparison, is how the man who *should* be Leader of the Opposition (or, indeed, Prime Minister), Michael Portillo, responded to the same challenge (Sky News, September 14 2003), when an interviewer tried to trip him up on this very tricky ground:

"The question that is being debated here is trust in the Prime Minister. I'm one of these people who feels that the Prime Minister outrageously span and manipulated information for five or six years at the beginning of his premiership. I also feel that he was more straightforward and more honest over Iraq than he'd been over anything else. This is like a man who was unconvicted for five years and is now accused of a crime he didn't actually commit. And correspondingly my sympathy at this outrageous miscarriage of justice is somewhat limited."

A near-perfect statement combining full-hearted opposition to the Prime Minister's style of government in general, with uncompromising support for him, not only on the issue of the war, but against the scurrilous conspiracy-theoretic bandwagon with which IDS had not been able to resist associating himself and his

party, to the detriment of all.

Sun, 09/14/2003 - 15:00 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

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Congratulations

Congratulations to the people of Sweden for taking the historic step of **saying No to the Euro** despite the advice of their ruling elites.

Congratulations to the people of Hong Kong for **standing up for their own freedom** against their totalitarian overlords, even though they know that no one would lift a finger to help them if the events of **Tiananmen Square**, or worse, were to be re-enacted in their city.

Congratulations to the people of Israel for maintaining the **vibrant creativity of their culture** as well as the world's highest standards of morality in the way they defend themselves, under circumstances where mere survival as a nation would be cause enough for congratulation.

Congratulations to the people, armed forces and government of the United States for taking a stand against evil and having achieved the liberation of two nations in two years, despite widespread and vicious opposition from those who ought to have been helping.

Mon, 09/15/2003 - 17:56 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Thanks

I watch and/or read news every day and I didn't even know until now that there had been pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong.

by a reader on Mon, 09/15/2003 - 18:18 | [reply](#)

A small example

Here is a small example of "the world's highest standards of morality in the way they defend themselves":

http://littlegreenfootballs.com/weblog/?entry=8203_Reservist_Mom_Foils_Stabbing.

As LGF said:

"Once again we see the difference between the Palestinian Arabs, who readily sacrifice everything - even their own children - to commit murder, and the Israelis, who take pride in avoiding violence even against those who try to kill them. "

by a reader on Mon, 09/15/2003 - 23:17 | [reply](#)

China

Kind of hypocritical to say that China is ruled by "totalitarian overlords". This "reader" is willing to bet that the author of this post owns items produced in the land "totalitarian overlords". Also, curiously, many corporation have left the "land of the free" to set up shop in this land of "totalitarian overlords". Apparently the author of this post thinks that if there were a "magic button" to transform Chinese society that we should push it. That is the epitome of the approach this "reader" repudiates. The perfect Chinese society will have to evolve.

by a reader on Tue, 09/16/2003 - 03:42 | [reply](#)

China

I don't understand this criticism.

What does the reader think is the appropriate, non-hypocritical, way to deal with China?

Does the reader think that engaging with China economically is hindering its evolution?

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Tue, 09/16/2003 - 05:49 | [reply](#)

Congratulations

And congratulations to you for maintaning this blog at this level.

An Iranian Student

by a reader on Tue, 09/16/2003 - 08:06 | [reply](#)

Totalitarian overlords

I object to the use of the term "totalitarian overlords". While this term would have been appropriate to China twenty years ago (and North Korea today)it seems inaccurate today. If your standards are such that you need refer to the Chinese government as "totalitarian overlords" then you should refer to the U.S. government as our "oligarchic Christian-Socialist overlords"

by a reader on Wed, 09/17/2003 - 01:12 | [reply](#)

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Conspiracy Theories

Conspiracy Theories – 1: The Basics

Conspiracy Theories – 2: Lying About Motives

Conspiracy Theories – 3: Unseen Events

Conspiracy Theories – 4: Collectivism

Conspiracy Theories – 5: Paranoia As Faith

Conspiracy Theories – 6: Theories That Are Merely False

Part 7 coming soon!

Further articles on conspiracy theories:

The War Against Conspiracy Theories

Conspiracy Theories In The Mainstream

Insane Conspiracy Theories In Influential Circles

Islamism, Lunatic Conspiracy Theories, And Death

Tue, 09/16/2003 - 10:08 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Setting The World To Rights

Ideas have consequences.

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In a Nearby Universe...

In a Nearby Universe... 1

In a Nearby Universe... 2

In a Nearby Universe: EU Drops Cuba Sanctions

Tue, 09/16/2003 - 10:17 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

“This Game of Legitimizing Mr. Arafat”

The Israeli Ambassador's speech yesterday to the UN Security Council in the debate on Arafat was a superb, towering indictment of that organisation and of the international community in general. It should have been a historic event, like the **speech of Haile Selassie to the League of Nations** in 1936. But it won't be, because it went virtually unreported and undiscussed.

You can read it [here](#), though.

The Palestinian representative walked out and told journalists that the speech was “trash”.

By the way, note also the continuing disgraceful adherence of M. Dominique de Villepin to his eponymous **doctrine**, as pointed out in [this comment by Gil](#).

Tue, 09/16/2003 - 14:59 | [permalink](#)

How Reuters reported it

Reuters reported it like this:

Israeli Ambassador Dan Gillerman, dismissing Arafat as a liar and a "professional terrorist," predicted his removal would swiftly lead to an end to the conflict.

Arafat "is at the helm of those who have been supporting mega-terror attacks in the style of the bombing of the twin towers, to bring the region to the brink of catastrophe," Gillerman said, prompting al-Kidwa to walk out of the chamber.

The phrase "predicted his removal would swiftly lead to an end to the conflict" does not refer to anything in the speech. Perhaps the hack who writes Reuters' UN reports tends to **go out for a smoke** during Israeli speeches, since he knows there's no market for reporting them.

by [Editor](#) on Tue, 09/16/2003 - 16:47 | [reply](#)

Palestinian

The Palestinian representative walked out and told

journalists that the speech was "trash".

What was the Palestinian representative representing? The PLO?
The Palestinian Authority? Arafat? Hamas?

What were they doing there?

~Woty

<http://woty.davidsj.com>

by **Woty** on Wed, 09/17/2003 - 01:22 | [reply](#)

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How Cosy Is The Iron Security Blanket?

The director of the German Christian Democrats' youth wing has found the temerity to **point out** that the emperor's social insurance system has no clothes:

Philipp Missfelder, chairman of the youth wing of the center-right Christian Democrats, griped that medical care for old folks was creating an intolerable financial burden for the young. It's about time 85-year-olds started paying for their own hip replacements and false teeth, Missfelder declared in an August interview with the Berlin daily Tagesspiegel that was widely quoted by other news media. "In the old days, people got around on crutches," he said.

Chile has substantially cleaned up its system; in the USA one may utter "social security" and "privatization" in the same sentence without being crucified; even EdenSweden has confronted the need for reform. But in the parasitocracies of France and Germany, even to raise the point is taboo. Though the Iron Curtain may have fallen, the Iron Security Blanket remains. Its twilight may be approaching.

Wed, 09/17/2003 - 06:58 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

Amanpour Insists the Sky is Green

Many stories are told about the eccentric Kaiser Franz-Josef I, penultimate Emperor of Austria-Hungary. Most of them are presumably urban legends, including this one – but that doesn't matter for present purposes: the story is that the Kaiser was visiting an exhibition of modern art. And he said to one of the artists standing proudly by his painting: "well, that isn't bad, but tell me, young man, why have you painted the sky green, and the grass pink?"

"Because that is how I see them, your Majesty", replied the painter.

The Kaiser nodded sympathetically and turned away. But then turned back in puzzlement to ask a supplementary question: "But in that case – how the devil did you happen to choose *painting* as your profession?"

Likewise Christiane Amanpour sees the world like **this**:

"I think the press was muzzled, and I think the press self-muzzled. I'm sorry to say, but certainly television and, perhaps, to a certain extent, my station was intimidated by the administration and its foot soldiers at **Fox News**. And it did, in fact, put a climate of fear and self-censorship, in my view, in terms of the kind of broadcast work we did."

Now, clearly she is a talented and cultured woman. She must have had a choice of many careers. But since she is capable of giving credence to such a whopper of a **conspiracy theory** (intimidated by *Fox News*?), and since she seems to have no more understanding of the meanings of the terms "**press was muzzled**", "**intimidated**", and "**climate of fear**" than a deep-sea oyster, one has to wonder how on earth she came to choose *journalism* as her profession.

Fri, 09/19/2003 - 00:23 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

An Iranian Student

And she used to advertise for Khatami for free...aaah everything adds up now! :)

by a reader on Fri, 09/19/2003 - 07:50 | [reply](#)

i would have to say the same ...

i would have to say the same about helen thomas...in fact, i have!

<http://www.all-encompassingly.com/archives/000167.html>

by [travis](#) on Tue, 09/30/2003 - 21:04 | [reply](#)

Violence in Brazil - A Cry for Help

Dear Sir/Madam:

My name is Maria Enedina Bezerra and I am writing you from Fortaleza, Brazil. I want to inform you about the violence in Brazil. The cities of Brazil are taken by criminals and the population is being terrorized and tortured in the hands these criminals and the government is doing absolutely nothing about it. To be taken at gun point by criminals at broad daylight here has become a common experience for Brazilians. I would like to ask your institution to come down here and make an inquiry about this situation here in Brazil. The world has to know the state of violence in which Brazilians live nowadays. I think that if the international media/press would come down here and make an inquiry or a documentary to show to the world this terrible situation, the Brazilian government would start doing something to change this.

Every day hundreds of motor drivers are assaulted at street crossing at gunpoint and taken to ATM machines. Bandits at daylight also sack houses and apartment buildings. Buses are stopped on far off roads and passengers are herded out of their seats and forced to give all their belongings. Then they are forced to take off their clothes and are put in the luggage compartment of the bus while the bandits leave scotch free with the passengers' money and belongings. This and much more needs to be shown to the world so that some serious measure can be taken to stop this unbearable condition. The population lives terrorized and this is happening in all the major cities of Brazil, such as Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Salvador, Recife, Fortaleza, Belo Horizonte, etc.

I was taken at gunpoint this past week and it was the most frightening experience I have ever gone through. I want to make something to change this situation here in Brazil and I need help from a serious institution that is willing to come down here to make an inquiry and possibly a documentary to show to the world what is happening here in Brazil. This violence has to stop, but I think only intense international pressure on the Brazilian government will make this situation change.

You can count on me as a translator if you are coming down here to make a documentary on the state of violence in which we Brazilians live in here. My e-mail address is "neda@unifor.br". I am a professor of Anthropology at the University of Fortaleza and I live in

fear 24 hours a day, fear of being killed by the thousands of

criminals who roam the streets of Brazil.

Sincerely,
Maria Enedina Bezerra.

by Maria E. Bezerra on Sun, 05/22/2005 - 02:49 | [reply](#)

Where are all the parents gone (HIV/AIDS in Kenya)

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Natanael Nuulimba, I am working with an organisation that works with minority groups in Botswana www.kuru.co.bw . I once watched a program on the TV on the scourge of AIDS in Africa titled :Where are all the parents gone, by Christiane Amanpour. I would like to have access to this material so that we can use it for our information and outreach program. I would like to thank Christiane for the good work that she has done. Please can some one get back to me

Regards

Natanael

by a [reader Natanael Nuulimba](#) on Tue, 10/17/2006 - 12:43 | [reply](#)

I have read your story and he

I have read your story and hear in your words the trauma you have suffered. You sound injured and terrorized. I hope you receive treatment for the psychological wounds this incident seems to have caused, so that this perpetrator will not continue to cause you harm for the rest of your life. It sounds like counseling would do you much good.

by a concerned reader on Wed, 09/12/2007 - 02:37 | [reply](#)

A Spy at Guantanamo Bay?

Let's hope that Captain Lee is innocent and that **this** is not a major disaster in the War on Terrorism.

An Army Islamic chaplain, who counseled al Qaeda prisoners at the Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, naval base, has been charged with espionage

(Via **LGF**.) And let's also hope that the media – in all other respects eager to seek out and highlight every possible setback in the war, real or imaginary – are going to report this case thoroughly.

Update: There has been a **second such case**.

Further update: And now the group that the US military relies on to train Muslim chaplains is **under investigation** by the Justice Department for allegedly supporting terrorism.

Sat, 09/20/2003 - 14:56 | [permalink](#)

is it not clear how Americas'

is it not clear how Americas' actions in Guantanamo are inflaming the anger of the Arab world. America has yet again displayed to the world how selective it is in complying with international law. Guantanamo bay is in breach of the Geneva War Convention and the Universal Humans Rights Act to name but a few. How can it then implore others to treat their prisoners of war humanly.

by a reader on Sat, 12/11/2004 - 19:00 | [reply](#)

Bad v Worse?

Alan Forrester has **had it** with the British Conservative Party. Why? Just as the government and the Eurocrats are showing signs of ending their Luddite, anti-American, **starvation-promoting** tactic of banning genetically modified foods, what does the Conservative Party do? It emerges briefly from hibernation to speak out *in favour* of the ban. On what grounds? Mainly that (1) the ban is popular; and (2) it is opposed by (wait for it...) *the government's friends in business*. OK they do also make the legitimate conservative point that the introduction of GM crops would be hard to reverse; but under the circumstances, given the benefits of such crops and the fact that there has already been a lengthy delay during which intensive efforts have failed to discover a single danger or disadvantage, this argument is mere window-dressing. In reality there is nothing here but the "**pointless, opportunistic sniping** ... without bringing to bear any coherent criticism either on that or most other issues" of which we have complained before.

It seems likely now that at the next British election there will be no party that one could unequivocally say was the least bad of the bunch. Therefore one should vote for candidates on their individual merits. In this regard, Alan has come to a radical conclusion:

My local MP voted against the war on Iraq and I would *still* vote for him in preference to the bunch of oily, weasel brained, political runts that is the Conservative Party. From this moment on, the Conservatives are dead to me.

Given that the war on terror is still in progress, we have to doubt that conclusion, though we do sympathise with the sentiment.

But how did things get this bad?

Mon, 09/22/2003 - 11:51 | [permalink](#)

What Are Iran's Missiles For?

What are Iran's new long-range missiles for? Well, suppose that the Mad Mullahs were to paint the answer to that question in giant letters **on the missiles themselves**. Would anyone take any notice even then?

Meanwhile, Iran is **scaling back its "co-operation"** with the International Atomic Energy Agency's attempts to "verify" that Iran's nuclear program is peaceful. Has the IAEA considered checking whether anything is painted in large letters on Iran's nuclear installations? You never know.

By the way, let us take this opportunity to express our solidarity with **BlogIran** and with all those struggling for freedom in Iran.

Wed, 09/24/2003 - 07:22 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Iranian blogs

Here is a link where you can find links to almost all Iranian blogs, especially those from inside Iran (as a late response to a question in the comments' section of another post):
<http://hoder.com/weblog/>

And thanks for the solidarity. I'm still hoping to see a day when a free Iran and Israel are very close allies in the region. This could become the reality!

An Iranian Student

by a reader on Thu, 09/25/2003 - 07:59 | [reply](#)

Blog-Iran

Thank you for your strong support and solidarity - if you would like, please grab a BLOG-IRAN banner/logo from <http://www.activistchat.com/blogiran/join.html> and show it proudly :) take care and feel free to email..!

Haleh,
ActivistChat.com

by a reader on Fri, 09/26/2003 - 13:35 | [reply](#)

Iranian Blogs (continued)

Actually this is where you can find them all in one page, from the above given blog:
<http://blogsbyiranians.com/>

An Iranian Student

by a reader on Sat, 10/04/2003 - 07:17 | [reply](#)

Or alternatively what are the

Or alternatively what are the United States missiles for? Or Russia's or China's or Israel's? Deterrence probably. If you can hit us we are going to hit you. Next question.

by a reader on Thu, 03/17/2005 - 14:55 | [reply](#)

Re: Or alternatively what are the

Wrong. Iran's missiles are primarily for the purpose that is painted on them.

Not all governments have the same purpose. And so not all missiles do. Just like **not all armies do**.

by [Editor](#) on Thu, 03/17/2005 - 15:13 | [reply](#)

No. Iran is a titch compared

No. Iran is a titch compared to Israel. Israel has what? ..a hundred nuclear weapons..advanced aircraft provided by the US.. and God knows what else in their armoury. You must know that if Iran attacked Israel they would invite their own destruction. You mistake Iranian propaganda for their intent..which seems to be at the moment to survive...just like Syria - I don't want them to survive by the way, they are horrible regime...I think we can both agree on that at least.

by a reader on Fri, 03/18/2005 - 20:40 | [reply](#)

Agreed, but...

Yes, they want to survive. Most people want to survive, even most homicidal lunatics. But that is no guarantee that they will act reasonably and not attempt Holocausts at the risk of their own lives. Fear regimes, which are inherently unstable, have to do certain things in order to survive. Things which are inherently dangerous to themselves as well as others and which do not always result in survival. A common one is to wage wars of naked aggression against other countries. The history of the twentieth century has many examples – from World War 2 to the invasion of the Falkland Islands – of tyrannical regimes embarking on actions because of the logic of their ideology, which itself was essential to their remaining in power, and nevertheless failing to survive.

Moreover, the rulers of Iran believe that they *will* survive – in

paradise – if they die in the course of a holy war.

by [Editor](#) on Fri, 03/18/2005 - 21:16 | [reply](#)

Totally disagree. The Iranian

Totally disagree. The Iranians are rational planners - all that 'paradise' stuff is a lot of baloney and propaganda. All this is doing is ramping up the drums of war kind of thing. There is no evidence that they're planning anything as you kind of suggested.

The only reason they are being targeted by the US at the moment is because they are independent and the US wants them out. All the human rights stuff and links to terrorism is just used instrumentally to this end.

They are a fear regime at the moment..not in the way you suggested - although to reiterate they are horrible. The regime is frightened of what the US is going to do.

by a reader on Fri, 03/18/2005 - 23:08 | [reply](#)

The mullahs or anyone else in

The mullahs or anyone else in their shoes would do precisely the same. Need to remind you that in fact it was the Shah who started the nuclear research program. Besides, why is it that U.S.'s national interests always take priority over that of anyone else's?

I mean, as a concerned Iranian, just what tune of theirs do we have to dance to next? We had a perfectly democratically elected government in Mossadegue, then they go and topple him and bring back a despot who treats the country as his personal possession and buggers everything up to the inevitable miserable end of a revolution and a perfectly predictable power struggle creating the entity of an Islamic Republic.

Seems the needle has been stuck on the same tune for quite a while; look at Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait,.... all despotic regimes subjugating their people's will, finally something will have to give. Freedom is not the possession of the U.S to give, all humans aspire to it inately; such unjust regimes will fall, as they have done so in the past.

Most Iranians are sick to death of outside interference, starting with the Brits taking our oil for next to nothing and now the Americans selling us their brand of how we should think and live our lives.

They may bomb us, kill and mame us, but the knowledge can never be destroyed. Any rational leader of a country surrounded by foes, some with nuclear weapons, including Pakistan and Israel, will have no option but to consider the ultimate deterrent. Our history is marred with foriegn invaders for nothing more than our natural resources. It's time to put out people's interests first and not that of the American Stock Markets.

Freedom at last, freedom at last.....

by a reader on Sun, 09/25/2005 - 21:20 | [reply](#)

Yeah, right

Rational planners, purely defensive.

Not our enemies at all. Yeah, right.

by a reader on Wed, 09/28/2005 - 22:25 | [reply](#)

Iran and Democracy

I think that if we expect nations not to produce nuclear bombs (and surely that is desirable) we must include all nations, including those who have them at present. As for democracy Western style I think it's an illusion. It's a place where mafia's rule. You can't foist it on other more moral societies, Mr Bush. Free speech is an illusion. If I sign my name to this I'm liable to be targeted by one of the mafia's (even a young gang) so where is the free speech? As for Islam, it is obviously based on violence. The threat to kill unbelievers, critics of Mahommed, women whose behaviour deviates from the mullah's reading of the Koran etc. render it one of the great tyrannies of all time...I don't know if that can ever change..???

by a reader on Thu, 05/31/2007 - 17:26 | [reply](#)

Rationale of Tyranny

This piece was first published at my blog, [here](#). It was provoked by this thread's comments.

There is a great confusion in the way people think about a tyrannical regime like the Islamic Republic of Iran. Does the regime really mean all the hateful propaganda they spread about the West? Do they mean it when they express a desire to "wipe Israel off the map" or "crush America under their feet"? Or when they write them on the missiles paraded in the streets? Aren't they just trying to survive? Wouldn't everyone else in their shoes do the same? Shouldn't we separate the "intent" (survival) from propaganda? Isn't the Islamic regime just another rational player?

Some of the answers are "yes", and some "no". But the point is these questions miss the actual rationale of tyranny.

I don't have a problem with accepting the Islamic regime, as a whole, as a rational player. But so what? Even rational players have assumptions that go into their decision making. And there is always room for questioning the moral justifications of those assumptions. Yes, even a tyrant could be rational. But does that somehow make his tyranny okay?

Would anyone in a tyrant's shoes do the same under external pressure? No! Why should they? If the outsiders have reasonable demands, one could adequately assure them that their demands are

met. One doesn't *need* to be a violent and abrasive dictator even in an authoritarian system. Even a tyrant really does have options. In particular there is always the option of accepting to dismantle the dictatorship altogether. This has been demonstrated many times in recent history of non-violent revolutions, be it in Eastern Europe or in Chile.

But what about the intent and the propaganda? It is a major (and sometimes deliberate) confusion of logic to claim that the fact that a tyranny's intent is to survive would somehow make the propaganda it spreads less lethal and dangerous. It is the complete opposite. Tyrannies spread hateful and false propaganda *because* they want to survive. Survival is *why* they do what they do and **propaganda (and repression)** is *how*. And when the why demands that they actually act on the how they won't cringe. There is ample historical evidence for this. Here's one relevant to Iran:

In the second half of the Iran-Iraq war (more or less after Khorramshahr was liberated by the Iranian forces) when Iraq was in a defensive position and was seeking a ceasefire, the Islamic Republic continued the war and said it would not accept the UN resolution No. 598 for a ceasefire. So the war continued for another 4-5 years during which hundreds of thousands of Iranians were killed and the economy was shattered even more.

How did they convince the people to do this? Propaganda, of course, besides a cycle of repression and fear. The walls of Tehran were covered with slogans such as: "War, War, Till Victory!" or "The Path to Quds Goes Through Karbala" or "War, War, Till Mahdi's Revolution!". The only two TV stations were filled with stories of martyrdom, etc. Saddam was *kafir* (nonbeliever) and the war was one against *kufr* (nonbelief). Classic tyrannical propaganda methods were practiced. Moreover, almost any voice of dissent was brutally silenced. Those who had differing ideas from the head of the power pyramid, from all stripes and colors even many early supporters, were silenced, jailed and/or executed.

Why did they do this? To survive. Did they believe in all they said? Probably not. In fact, after the intent for survival forced the weakening regime to finally accept the ceasefire in 1988 (or "drink the potion of death" in the words of Khomeini), it was suddenly as if Saddam was no longer *kafir* or the path to Quds did not go through Karbala.

In short, the strategy of tyranny is set by the intent for survival and its tactics by the propaganda. They go hand in hand. So the question of whether they believe in their own propaganda becomes irrelevant to what they would actually do. They'd do as they see fit for their survival and this could include acting on existing propaganda, or creating new ones. But what is for certain is that we on the outside should never dismiss or devalue the dangers of their propaganda.

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by **Liberal Iranian** on Tue, 06/05/2007 - 09:55 | [reply](#)

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Where We Oppose US Foreign Policy

We cheered when the US confronted and defeated the Taliban, and then Saddam Hussein. We fully support the US-led War on Terror. We endorsed America's opposition to European anti-GM-food measures and President Bush's assertion that they were based on **"unfounded, unscientific fears"**, and we likewise side with the US on the issue of the **Kyoto Protocol**. Yet there is a respect in which we now find ourselves vehemently and conscientiously opposing US foreign policy.

The US is now pushing for a UN Resolution to **ban human cloning**. Why? The Bush Administration thinks that even newly fertilised eggs deserve to be treated like human beings because **"We should not as a society grow life to destroy it, and that's exactly what's taking place"**. This appalling equivocation between the different meanings of the word 'life' is, like the other arguments presented in defence of this policy, so crude that *simplisme* hardly begins to describe it. **We** think that newly fertilised eggs can't think and that destroying them during medical research is morally unproblematic. Further legal impediments to such research will lead to the deaths of thinking human beings and so is a **terrible evil**. This policy was bad enough when it was limited to the United States. A ban throughout the world would be a catastrophe.

Thu, 09/25/2003 - 23:44 | [permalink](#)

Luckily...

We are fortunate in this case that a UN resolution would not actually amount to a global ban.

~Woty
<http://woty.davidsj.com>

by **Woty** on Fri, 09/26/2003 - 02:29 | [reply](#)

Picking and choosing

Certainly the resolution is not a positive move, but who is it likely to attract in the form of specific countries that would oppose it? Who has the most to gain from exploring and exploiting a technology that is banned in America?

Given the present US stand on GM-Food, it would be a

tough/hypocritical position to take if they refused to allow the benefits derived from cloning and its spinoff technologies into the country when it becomes convenient, or when the people make an informed choice.

This is business versus morals; which one do you think wins the higher % of coin tosses?

Howard

by [Howard Frank](#) on Sun, 09/28/2003 - 20:38 | [reply](#)

Consider

Vegitarians who are for abortion... they can depersonalize a human genus, but not a pork chop...

That aside, it's not quite like intentionally making a life which runs a high risk of being malformed, in pain, diminished from what it could be - that's more than merely regrettable, or something to avoid - it's wilfully harming a person.

It really isn't all that hard to dope out - the moral absolutes are limited to simply not causing pain.....

by a reader on Mon, 09/29/2003 - 22:34 | [reply](#)

Business vs. Morals?

Howard Frank wrote:

'This is business versus morals; which one do you think wins the higher % of coin tosses?'

Er, what? Could you explain a little further why you think it's business vs morals?

Also, businesses really aren't any worse than anyone else on average morally speaking, imo, since they are groups of people who come together to make money by providing a product or service. One might as well ask 'Out of morality and people who wins most of the time?' Even if you were to pose the question as business vs. moral improvements I don't think it would make much more sense.

Another problem with your question is that it's the wrong question. The appropriate question to ask in most cases is not whether a given person or group makes the right decision most of the time, it is instead whether they are able and willing to correct mistakes when they realise they have made them. It's a bit like asking whether scientists are right or wrong about factual matters most of the time.

Finally, when a person or group is trying to decide between right and wrong they don't use a coin toss, they think.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Tue, 09/30/2003 - 00:34 | [reply](#)

Lobbying.

I agree entirely with the World on the issue of the immorality of such a ban and feel strongly enough about it to want to sign up to any organisation that resists such action.

Whilst so-called "pro-lifers" have a very public face and a group to sign up to, what are genuine pro-lifers to do?

Anyone got any ideas?

by a reader on Sun, 10/05/2003 - 13:20 | [reply](#)

Bush is an idiot

I'm ashamed to be an American and I'm scared to death of Bush.

by a reader on Wed, 10/08/2003 - 05:11 | [reply](#)

Ashamed to be an American?

I hear this a lot.

It always strikes me as strange that one's pride in being an american can be pinned to the actions of the current president.

Should I have been ashamed to be an american if a foolish, technocratic, enviro-idiot like Gore had been elected?

Presidents come and go. Their mistakes don't change what being an american is all about. America is about individual liberty. I'm proud to be a part of that tradition.

If you're ashamed to be an american then maybe you should just be ashamed to be *you*.

Bush has made many mistakes; but he's gotten the crucial things right. While I think it's foolish to be guided by religious faith (as I think is is on the human cloning issue), he's certainly *not* an idiot.

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 10/08/2003 - 18:42 | [reply](#)

Villepin Demands

French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin has **demanded that the Coalition transfer power to an Iraqi government by the end of this year.**

Steven Den Beste replies:

Stick your demands where the sun doesn't shine.

We'll leave Iraq when we, and the Iraqi people, are ready.

A full and valid *rebuttal*, in our opinion.

And the wonderful thing is, that is likely to be the response of the Coalition too. Though they will express it in even fewer words. None, to be exact. Just actions.

Mon, 09/29/2003 - 14:25 | [permalink](#)

Sticking or Staying?

Do you mean the actions of sticking his demands where the sun doesn't shine? Or, staying in Iraq until we and the Iraqi people are ready?

I suspect putting the former on Pay-Per-View might finance the latter.

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 09/30/2003 - 06:13 | [reply](#)

Pay-Per-View

I suspect putting the former on Pay-Per-View might finance the latter.

Yes, but Foggy Bottom might consider this a bum idea.

by a reader on Tue, 09/30/2003 - 14:29 | [reply](#)

The David Kelly Affair

Governments are allowed to 'spin' – i.e. to place the most favourable interpretation that they can on the facts. In fact, in our system of government, spinning is an essential part of their job, just as it is the job of any advocate in any adversarial system. What they are not allowed to do is *lie*. And they **did not lie**.

The BBC, on the other hand, is a public-service broadcaster and has a duty not to spin. But not only did it spin, it **lied. Repeatedly.**

That's all there is to this affair.

Mon, 09/29/2003 - 17:19 | [permalink](#)

One What?

From the **User's Manual** of a Philips television:

Your TV consumes energy in the standby mode. Energy consumption contributes to air and water pollution.

Power consumption 1 W.

One Watt!

Getting on one's moral high horse over such a minuscule amount of power has nothing to do with preventing air and water pollution. This is religious ritual. And the religion in question, which systematically seeks and obtains state enforcement of its taboos and has the colossal gall simply to *assume* that you have nothing more valuable to do with your time and attention than scurry around saving Watts one at a time, stinks.

Thu, 10/02/2003 - 20:41 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Read The Report

You're probably thinking "they haven't found any actual weapons of mass destruction (yet) in Iraq, but they have found the next best thing, namely evidence of WMD *programmes*".

You must read **David Kay's interim report**. It cannot be adequately summarised, so you will not understand what has been happening unless you read it.

Update: Andrew Sullivan **came to the same conclusion** before us.

Fri, 10/03/2003 - 12:27 | [permalink](#)

Quiz:

Who first advocated the use of chemical weapons against opposition Kurds and Arabs in Iraq?

- A.Saddam
- B.Chemical Ali
- C.Winston Churchill
- D.The C.I.A.

by a reader on Sun, 10/05/2003 - 16:18 | [reply](#)

Quiz on Chemical Weapons

In answer to "a reader"'s question.

The first leader In the Middle East to use chemical weapons may well have been Saladin, who happened to be a Kurd:
<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/1189barbarossa-lets.html>
But Saladin was a humane and honorable man and, if the story is true, he will undoubtedly have targeted only enemy soldiers. This is in stark contrast to his nemesis King Richard of England, who massacred civilians as a matter of policy, though without using chemical weapons:
<http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/Saladin.htm>

The morality of British leaders improved greatly over the centuries,

and by the early twentieth century, it would have been unthinkable for a British army to target civilians at all, let alone with chemicals. However, chemical weapons were still used on combatants in warfare, notably in the First World War, and immediately afterwards, Churchill is said to have advocated using them in that way in Iraq. However, this was never done.

Later, the international community decided to ban such weapons, even against soldiers. America and Britain played a leading role in promoting this ban.

The morality of Middle Eastern leaders, however, did not improve. The first leader in the Middle East to use chemical weapons against civilians was probably Gamal Abdul Nasser:
<http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/egypt/cw/>

Nasser was idolized and emulated in many ways, including this way, by Saddam Hussein and other Ba'athists such as Chemical Ali.

And your point is?

by a reader on Sun, 10/05/2003 - 17:27 | [reply](#)

Re: Quiz on Chemical Weapons

Actually Nasser only used chemical weapons against combatants, as far as we know. If we're wrong, can someone correct us on this?

by [Editor](#) on Sun, 10/05/2003 - 18:09 | [reply](#)

Churchill

Clearly Saladin didn't use chemical weapons that were in any way like the weapons that have been in use from W.W.I to the present. (If you have any evidence to the contrary please cite it.)

"it would have been unthinkable for a British army to target civilians at all" What was the military objective in Dresden?

I believe Churchill's words were: "I do not understand this squeamishness about the use of gas. I am strongly in favour of using poison gas against uncivilised tribes." And apparently poison gas was used in artillery shells though not in bombs. (again if you have any evidence to the contrary please cite it.)

My point is: it seems odd to apparently have in your Pantheon of heroes someone who advocated exactly what Saddam implemented

by a reader on Tue, 10/07/2003 - 03:51 | [reply](#)

Evil resides more in the ends, than in the means

I don't think any weapon, or any military tactic, is necessarily evil under all possible circumstances. It is therefore a mistake to focus our criticism of evil individuals and movements, on their chosen tactics. We should criticise them first and foremost for their intended ends, and only secondarily for the compounding offence of employing means that are not justifiable by the objective merit of

those ends.

by **Kolya** on Wed, 10/08/2003 - 23:12 | [reply](#)

Not ends, choices

Evil isn't in the results of an action. Nor the 'means' (I don't think 'means' is very precise/coherent). It's in the choices made.

Sometimes doctors try their very best to save lives, but do things that are physically guaranteed to kill the patient due to imperfect medical knowledge. But this isn't evil murder. The choice the doctor made was to help the patient as best he could.

And it's possible for an assassin to try to wrongly murder a good man, but miss and hit another assassin instead. This act, attempted assassination, was the wrong choice, and evil, but had good results.

-- Elliot Temple

by a reader on Thu, 10/09/2003 - 03:21 | [reply](#)

Re: What was the military objective at Dresden?

The irony in that rhetorical question is not justified. Dresden was bombed because it was in the path of the advancing Red Army, which was fighting its way into Nazi Germany. German resistance was still intense and Soviet losses were still heavy. There was no justification for the Western Allies to let up. For a brief description of the situation see

http://www.greenhillbooks.com/extracts/Bomber_harris.html

"Martin Gilbert goes so far as to call the raid a direct result of the Yalta agreement – to make emergency use of Anglo-American air power in order to disrupt German reinforcements moving eastward to the Russian front.

...

Those who contend that it was unnecessary, indeed wrong, to attack the city centre ignore the practicalities of trying to bomb with high precision at great distance and in conditions that were not only hard to predict but might conceivably lead to another Nuremberg. If the job was to be done at all it was essential to go for the city as a whole"

by a reader on Thu, 10/09/2003 - 04:51 | [reply](#)

Re: Evil resides more in the ends

So what was the end goal for Churchill? Were the Kurds and Arabs an eminent danger to British citizens? No. The goal was to control a

newly acquired piece of the British empire. (Acquired from the

Ottoman empire after W.W.I.)

by a reader on Sat, 10/11/2003 - 21:39 | [reply](#)

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Russian Academy of Sciences Bitchslaps Environmental Movement

(via InstaPundit:)

Iain Murray is somewhat overstating the case when he says that **this** is "probably the biggest story in the world right now".

A senior adviser to President Vladimir Putin has cast further doubt on whether Russia will ever ratify the Kyoto agreement on limiting emissions of the greenhouse gases linked to global warming.

Andrei Illarionov, who advises the president on economic policy, was speaking the day after Mr Putin refused to set a timetable for Russian ratification, angering supporters of Kyoto around the world.

So long as Russia stays out, the UN protocol setting targets for cutting emissions from the burning of fossil fuels cannot take legal effect.

But it is indeed a significant and under-reported story. Russia is about to help the US to save the world again. To save it **several trillion dollars**, that is.

Tue, 10/07/2003 - 01:32 | [permalink](#)

Hooray for Putin! His gove...

Hooray for Putin!

His government has behaved rather badly over the Iraq war, weapons sales to Iran, but this time he's done something right.

Kyoto is a dreadful document and the sooner it is dead and buried the better off the world - including the environment - will be. Except perhaps for Europe, which was attempting to use Kyoto for its own economic advantage. But who really cares about Europe anymore - its a lost cause!

by a reader on Wed, 10/08/2003 - 07:10 | [reply](#)

What's with "bitchslaps" anyway?

I am the only one who finds this offensive? What if this was

"kidspansks" or "jewkills"?

Or should I just start taking my "anti-PC" pills again?

by **Pat** on Tue, 10/14/2003 - 20:40 | [reply](#)

Re: What's with "bitchslaps" anyway?

We were intentionally speaking out of character for the sake of
ironical emphasis, as was Iain Murray whom we were echoing.

We apologise to Pat and any other dog lovers who may have been
offended by the metaphor, and assure them that no animals were
harmed in the making of this blog.

by **Editor** on Wed, 10/15/2003 - 00:09 | [reply](#)

Horrors

Our civilisation has fought some horrors recently and even defeated some. Others continue, partly because we have left it far too long and they are now objectively hard to defeat, but mainly because we have yet to find enough common ground amongst ourselves on the morality of opposing them at all. Notably:

Tyranny, torture, starvation and ruin in **North Korea**. And of course belligerent, **genocidal threats**.

Mass-murder of Jews in Israel – and the **Final Solution of the Israel Problem** being planned, **unimpeded**.

Shame on us.

Sat, 10/04/2003 - 16:12 | [permalink](#)

CNN's Mission Accomplished

CNN Newsnight, 3:15am BST today, John King reporting:

The new [public-relations] push coincides with a number of difficulties and setbacks. 91 Americans killed in action since Mr Bush visited an aircraft carrier to declare mission accomplished...

Did he really? Read **what the President actually said** on that aircraft carrier:

major combat operations in Iraq have ended. In the battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed

The word "mission" occurs twice in the speech, on both occasions referring to the *uncompleted* mission facing the coalition in the War on Terror. He **did say** a month later to troops in Qatar:

I am happy to see you, and so are the long-suffering people of Iraq. America sent you on a mission to remove a grave threat and to liberate an oppressed people, and that mission has been accomplished.

But that's a different issue, and an undeniably true comment.

Incidentally, more US soldiers than that have died of *non-combat* causes in Iraq during the same period.

Thu, 10/09/2003 - 02:23 | [permlink](#)

Nobel Peace Prize for Saddam

The Pope is **tipped to win** this year's Nobel Peace Prize for doing everything in his power to keep Saddam Hussein's peaceful regime peacefully in place.

There is no doubt that if the Pope's **profound moral insights** had been heeded by President Bush, Saddam would still be peacefully in power today. It has been pointed out that the Pope's candidacy faces the obstacle that

the jury "is majority female and the pope's position on abortion, contraception, the role of women in the church and homosexuality are well known."

– not to mention other **controversial decisions**. But it is thought that his decision to speak out at this critical moment in history, as well as his **decision not to speak out** on a certain other issue, will outweigh all those factors. Indeed, why should they disqualify him, since even being a **mass murderer and bloodthirsty dictator** has not previously been deemed to disqualify a person from receiving the Peace Prize?

That being so, the Pope's candidacy should nevertheless be set aside, for his contribution to the maintenance of Saddam's Peace is clearly less than that of Saddam himself, so it is Saddam who deserves the Prize.

Thu, 10/09/2003 - 15:17 | [permalink](#)

Nobel Peace Prize Deserved

Occasionally a monkey with a typewriter will type something worth saying. Occasionally the Nobel Peace Prize Committee awards the prize to **someone who deserves it**. This is one of those times.

Bravo to Shirin Ebadi. In receiving the prize, she honours them far more than they honour her.

Update: **D'Oh!** Perhaps not.

Further Update:

Iranian Nobel peace laureate Shirin Ebadi **said** Sunday she hoped there would be no military strike on Iran, the focus of US and Israeli concern over its nuclear programme.

"We hope that there will be no attack against Iran, because Iran doesn't have the atomic bomb

How does she know? The Mullahs may be mad, but they're surely not so mad that they reveal their nuclear plans to prominent dissidents. In fact, what on earth is she talking about?

and the Iranian people are peaceful.

Yes. But it's not the Iranian *people* who will have their finger on the nuclear button. Shouldn't a human-rights activist have noticed the distinct lack of people-power in Iran at the moment? Again, what is she talking about?

After so many years of war, they are tired of conflict."

The people are tired, therefore the rulers are entitled to develop weapons of mass destruction in peace? We don't think so, Shirin Ebadi.

Yes, the Iranian people are tired of war. They are tired of tyranny too. But are they tired enough? Are they asking themselves sufficiently seriously whether they are really going to allow their rulers to threaten Israel and others with nuclear weapons?

obviously not. :(
(sigh)

AIS

by a reader on Tue, 10/14/2003 - 04:07 | [reply](#)

Uh-oh...

...Headscarf 'strengthens women'

by **Pat** on Tue, 10/14/2003 - 04:18 | [reply](#)

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Three Threats

This week:

- A ten-year-old boy in a small town in Texas **phoned in a hoax warning** to the police that his school was going to be blown up.
- A famous American holy man advocated **blowing up the US State Department's** headquarters with a nuclear weapon.
- Syria **threatened the security of the world:**

Undersecretary of State John Bolton who outlined the administration's case against Damascus to a Senate subcommittee on Tuesday ... reiterated U.S. accusations that Syria is developing chemical, biological and nuclear weapons.

He accused Damascus of taking "a series of hostile actions," including allowing military equipment to flow into Iraq, and "permitting volunteers to pass into Iraq to attack and kill service members during the war", a practice which he says is continuing.

All three threats naturally caused consternation. What was done about them?

- The 10-year-old boy was arrested and will be charged with a felony.
- The holy man got his just deserts: he received a complaint from the State Department and was roundly ridiculed by the media.
- The Syrian regime was gently admonished and informed (with the greatest care not to damage its fragile dignity) that its present behaviour was wrong and unacceptable and might, if continued, incur consequences not including violence.

A world upside-down.

Meanwhile the nations of the world **flocked to the defence** of the Syrian regime's right to operate terrorist training camps. That's contemptible.

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Update to Nobel Prize Story

We have **updated** our reaction to Shirin Ebadi's Nobel Peace Prize.

Tue, 10/14/2003 - 02:15 | [permalink](#)

Tim Starr Replies to Dean Ahmad

What follows is a letter from Tim Starr to the Editor of Freedom Network News. For those who believe it is just for us to defend ourselves against terrorism, Tim has created a new e-mail list called "Fight For Liberty!" which you are invited to join. You can do so either by sending an email message to

fightforliberty-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

or at the Yahoo web site [here](#).

Editor:

I very much enjoyed this year's ISIL conference in Vilnius, Lithuania. It was my tenth one in a row, and each one seems to keep on getting better than the last.

Unfortunately, the conference was marred by the lack of representation for the "hawk" side on the panel discussion of war and foreign policy. I would like to try to make up for that deficiency by replying to Dean Ahmad's presentation in this letter.

Ahmad began by pointing out that traditional Islam made great contributions to science, philosophy, and the rule of law. This is true. However, those contributions stopped centuries ago. Also, Ahmad did not mention the "dark side" of Islam. Perhaps this is because he personally rejects those elements of traditional Islam, as do most moderate Muslims today. However, today's militant Islamists intend to restore traditional Islam in its entirety, including its more unlibertarian elements.

This was demonstrated by what militant Islamists did within the regime where they had the most power, Afghanistan, where the Taliban banned music, kite-flying, chess, movies, and carrying guns without a permit (issued at the discretion of the Taliban, of course). Men were forbidden to shave their beards. Women were forbidden to go have professions outside the home or to leave home without wearing a burkha and being accompanied by a male relative. The Taliban also blew up the historic giant statues of Buddha at Bamiyan because they considered them to be pagan and because they considered all representational art to be contrary to Islam. The

Taliban imposed the death penalty for homosexuality, for

proselytizing non-Islamic religions, and had special religious police to enforce such laws. This is the sort of thing we have in store for us if the Islamists get their way, and it would be a grave mistake for us to ignore the roots of their vision in traditional Islam.

The most unlibertarian aspect of traditional Islam is Jihad. While the literal meaning of the word "jihad" is merely "struggle" or "striving," its meaning in traditional Islam is much more than that. Ibn Khaldun, who is sometimes cited by libertarians as the Islamic Adam Smith, summarized the meaning of "Jihad" according to all schools of Islamic thought thusly:

"In the Muslim community, the holy war is a religious duty, because of the universalism of the (Muslim) mission and (the obligation to) convert everybody to Islam either by persuasion or by force. Therefore, caliphate and royal authority are united in (Islam), so that the person in charge can devote the available strength to both of them."

That clearly says that Jihad means holy war to convert everyone to Islam, and, historically, the spread of Islam was largely by wars of aggression. In the West, Islamic conquerors were only stopped by military force, first at the battle of Poitiers in southern France, and then later at the gates of Vienna, where the Austrians along with their Polish and Lithuanian allies stopped them. In the East, Moslems conquered their way through India, establishing the Mughal Empire. In the West, Islamic civilization culminated in the Ottoman Empire. Traditional Islam is not opposed to imperialist aggression, so long as it is Islamic imperialist aggression.

The history of traditional Islamic civilization is also plagued by democide (mass-murder). When Mohammed conquered Arabia in the 7th century, he massacred and expelled the Jews. When Tamerlane conquered India in 1398, he executed 100,000 prisoners of war in one action alone. Even in Islamic Spain, which has often been cited as an example of tolerance under Islamic rule, Christians and Jews were massacred by the thousands. The Ottomans massacred thousands of Armenians as late as the 1890s.

Since Islamic law permits enslavement of non-Moslems, many of those who were conquered by Moslems were enslaved. For centuries, Serbian boys were enslaved into the Janissaries, the elite soldiers of the Ottoman Sultan. The Islamic slave trade began long before the Western slave trade, and continued long after the West led the world in abolishing slavery. Slavery wasn't officially abolished in Saudi Arabia until the 1960s, and unofficially continues there today, as well as in other Islamic countries like Sudan.

Jews and Christians who were spared execution and enslavement, but failed to convert to Islam, were subject to a form of religious apartheid called "dhimmitude." It is illegal under Islamic law to force people to convert to Islam, but "dhimmi" are obliged to pay a special head tax that is not imposed upon Moslems, and are forbidden to proselytize, to repair old churches/temples, or to build new ones. Their testimony is not admissible in Islamic courts. This

"privileged" status was reserved only for Jews and Christians, since

Islam considers them "People of the Book". Islamic law does not require the extension of these privileges to pagans, Hindus, Buddhists, atheists, etc.

The combined effect over time of these Islamic policies of mass-murdering, enslaving, and subjugating non-Moslems was to radically reduce the numbers of non-Moslems living under Islamic rule, until the nineteenth century when the European powers got the Ottoman Empire to improve its treatment of its Jewish and Christian subjects. That is the reality of what Ahmad described as Jews and Christians living "peacefully" under Islamic rule.

Ahmad blamed Western intervention for the lack of freedom in Arab countries, saying that they imitated the socialism of their former colonizers, and that it was racist to hold Arab culture responsible for the lack of freedom in those countries. However, racism is based upon biology, not culture, and there are reasons to think that Arab culture bears some responsibility for the lack of freedom in the Arab world.

The political regimes of the Arab world range from authoritarian monarchies to totalitarian dictatorships, and yet none of the European colonizers of the Middle East were authoritarian monarchies or totalitarian dictatorships. The Arab countries did not imitate the social democracy of their former colonizers, the British and the French; they imitated the totalitarian socialism of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. The Arab countries did not imitate the freedom of religion, freedom of expression, and separation of powers of Western Europe; they imitated the orthodoxy, censorship, and autocracy of Eastern Europe. It is no surprise that traditional Islamic rulers were also autocrats who censored unorthodox ideas.

Ahmad then turned to Iraq, and attributed the overthrow of Saddam Hussein to the influence of neoconservatives and falsified intelligence. However, there is no need to fabricate evidence that Saddam Hussein was a fascist dictator with a history of reckless aggression, sponsorship of terrorism, and the development and use of weapons of mass destruction. Saddam Hussein initiated two wars of aggression against Iran and one against Kuwait, launched missiles at Israel, paid \$25,000 checks to the families of Palestinian suicide bombers, used chemical weapons against the Iranians and the Kurds, and pursued nuclear power despite having enough oil to provide for all the energy Iraq could have possibly needed for any civilian purpose. These are well-known facts, not a bunch of lies cooked up by some neoconservative conspiracy.

Furthermore, for every piece of pre-war intelligence that has turned out to be false, many more have been confirmed. US inspectors found a nuclear centrifuge buried in the backyard of an Iraqi nuclear scientist. Western journalists found Iraqi intelligence files detailing the Saddam-Osama Pact. Sources considered "highly credible" by the CIA have confirmed meetings between Iraqi intelligence and Ayman al-Zawahiri, Al Qaeda's second-in-command, and that the

former head of Iraqi external intelligence, Farouk Hijazi, gave a

significant amount of money to Al Qaeda.

Ahmad claimed that neoconservatives want the US to forcibly impose their views upon the rest of the world. The leading neoconservative, William Kristol, denied this when I heard him speak at the World Affairs Council in San Francisco. Only dictatorships that sponsor terrorism and pursue weapons of mass destruction are to be targeted for regime change according to President Bush's National Security Strategy, and even then military force is only a last resort. Ahmad also made much of the fact that some neoconservatives called for the overthrow of Saddam's Ba'athist dictatorship back in 1998. Does that make them "premature anti-Ba'athists"? What's so bad about advocating the overthrow of a ruthless dictator responsible for the death of more Moslems than anyone else in the whole twentieth century?

Finally, Dr. Ahmad turned to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, claiming that more Palestinian than Israeli civilians have been killed in the current Intifada, at a ratio of three to one. He didn't cite any source, so it's impossible to verify this claim. However, the Israelis try to avoid killing Palestinian civilians, and issue statements of apology and regret when they accidentally kill civilians. The Palestinians deliberately try to kill as many Israeli civilians as possible, and celebrate when they succeed. Palestinian terrorists also use civilians as human shields, so as to make it as difficult as possible for the Israelis to attack the terrorists without killing civilians. Many of those Palestinian civilians were killed when the Israelis attacked Palestinian terrorists who were about to kill Israeli civilians. If those attacks had not been prevented, a lot more Israeli civilians would have been killed.

Ahmad singled out Israel for its alleged militarism, racism, and collectivism. However, Israel has never been a military dictatorship, unlike many other countries in the Middle East. Ahmad failed to mention that Israel has about a million Arab citizens whose legal rights are equal to those of Israeli Jews, and much greater than the legal rights of Arabs in Arab countries. For example, Israel is the only country in the Middle East in which Arab women have the right to vote.

Ahmad also failed to mention any of the anti-Jewish policies of the Arab regimes, such as the Palestinian Authority making it a death penalty offense for Palestinians to sell land to Jews and the specific exclusion of Jews from Jordan's Law of Return. Since Israel's founding, hundreds of thousands of Jews have fled to Israel from anti-Semitic persecution in Arab countries. There have been about as many of these Jewish refugees as there were Palestinian refugees from the Israeli War of Independence.

As for Israel's socialism, the only Middle Eastern countries with more economic freedom than Israel are Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, according to the Heritage Foundation's 2003 Index of Economic Freedom. Compared to Europe, Israel has more economic freedom than Latvia, the Czech Republic, France, and Armenia.

Ahmad blamed Israel alone for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,

saying that it was only Israeli refusal to discuss the Palestinian "Right of Return" that prevented the alleged Palestinian moderates from controlling the hard-liners. However, the history of refugee problems shows that a "right of return" for refugees is not a necessary precondition for the establishment of peace. For instance, more than 15 million Germans were expelled from Czechoslovakia and Poland at the end of WWII. Yet we do not see millions of German refugees from Poland and Czechoslovakia (and their children and grandchildren) living in refugee camps, committing acts of terrorism against Poland and Czechia, and demanding their "right of return." German claims to lost property are being pursued peacefully by lawsuits, not mass-murder. What explains the difference? Germany allowed its refugees to integrate into mainstream German society. The Palestinian refugees have never been allowed to do that. Their Arab rulers have kept them in refugee camps for decades, in order to maintain a permanently disgruntled army of "innocent victims" from which to recruit terrorists to murder Israeli civilians.

Arab political leaders have had at least three opportunities to accept a peaceful settlement in the Middle East in which the Palestinians would have gotten their own state – in 1937, in 1947, and in 2000. Each time, the Arab leaders have refused, because they would have had to accept Jewish sovereignty on "their" land. The Arab leaders refused to accept Jewish independence of Islamic rule before there were any Palestinian refugees from the Israeli War of Independence, and ever since then they have been inflating the number of refugees as much as possible and demanding their right to return in numbers large enough to demographically overwhelm the Israelis, thus eliminating Israel as a bastion of Jewish independence.

In 1967, Israel fought and won the Six Day War, then offered to trade the land it won in that defensive war for peace with its enemies. Egypt and Jordan did eventually take Israel up on this offer, and Israel kept its promises, dismantling settlements in the Sinai Desert and relinquishing territory to Egypt and Jordan. Yet Islamists assassinated Egyptian President Anwar Sadat for the "treason" of making peace with Israel, and Egypt still allows weapons to be smuggled through its territory into Gaza to arm the Islamist terrorists of Hamas, who reject the very existence of Israel.

In 2000, the Barak government of Israel offered Arafat virtually everything he could reasonably want, including \$30 billion in compensation for the Palestinian refugees, but Arafat still refused the offer and launched the current wave of terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians, instead.

The militant Islamic terrorists who have declared war on the USA, Israel, all of their allies around the world, and who call for the killing of all Americans, Jews, and those Moslems they consider "apostates" are not animated by an essentially libertarian worldview, or by opposition to imperialism and colonialism. Theirs is a vision of conquest, enslavement and religious apartheid for the whole world that makes Puritanism look mild in comparison, and they have repeatedly demonstrated their willingness to mass-

murder anyone who stands in their way, even if they have to commit suicide in the process. It is a mystery to me how anyone who considers himself a libertarian can blame this terrorism upon its intended victims, and characterize the measures taken to defend against it as imperialist aggression.

Tim Starr

Tue, 10/14/2003 - 08:33 | [permalink](#)

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Who “Invented Human Rights” And For What Purpose?

E. Nough reports that according to Mahathir Mohamad, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, it was “The Jews” that did it. And why? “So the persecuting them would appear to be wrong”, so that they could continue to “rule the world by proxy”...

[In case the E. Nough link doesn't work, [here](#) is the news report of the speech.]

Why are Mahathir Mohamad's evil **delusions** almost never reported in the mainstream media? Why is he almost invariably described as a “**moderate Muslim leader**”?

Update: Read [Charles Johnson's](#) comments on the speech.

Thu, 10/16/2003 - 13:29 | [permalink](#)

Chirac Blocks EU Criticism of Anti-Semitic Statements

According to [this](#) story:

At their own summit in Brussels, Belgium, European Union leaders had drafted a harshly worded statement condemning Mahathir's remarks, but French President Jacques Chirac blocked the wording from becoming a part of a final declaration.

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Fri, 10/17/2003 - 20:18 | [reply](#)

More interesting

More interesting were the comments of our new “ally” Hamid Karzai:

Asked by the AP whether he thought the speech was anti-Semitic, Afghan President Hamid Karzai said: “I don't think so.”

“Dr. Mahathir spoke of the inhibitions within the Islamic world and that those inhibitions must go away, and I entirely agree with that,” Karzai said.

What are the chances that the new leadership of Iraq would be any

different?

by a reader on Sat, 10/18/2003 - 04:00 | [reply](#)

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Arms Control: What Not To Do

The left has some remarkably silly ideas about law, international law and guns. Now Amnesty International, Oxfam and the International Action Network on Small Arms (Iansa) have banded together to campaign for **strict controls** on national and international arms trades. They call this the Control Arms campaign.

Under the treaty they propose, governments would be held accountable for not having gun control laws in their own country. Never mind that, as we have written before, gun control **does not reduce** gun crime and does reduce personal freedom. But why should things like facts and arguments be allowed to get in the way of such a ~~pointless, stupid waste of paper~~ necessary security measure?

The treaty would also make it an offence to sell weapons to countries that might use them to commit atrocities, as well as restricting certain weapons such as landmines that would be banned according to the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty. The US has not signed that Treaty because it is **fatally flawed** as such proposals very often are.

So who exactly is going to decide which weapons transfers constitute a risk? The answer implicitly given in their ~~unintentionally entertaining~~ highly cogent document *Shattered Lives* (available [here](#)) is: the United Nations. So in summary: the Control Arms campaign wants to take control of the flow of arms away from democratic states and hand it over to a **corrupt** organisation that **encourages terrorism** and is dominated by the very governments whose existence depends on the misuse of weapons. Israel, for instance, wouldn't be able to buy so much as a peashooter, while the UN would be falling over itself to give Yasser Arafat nuclear bombs – or at least F-16s – in the name of fairness. Fortunately the campaign is unlikely to succeed, since too many of the UN's influential members are themselves **enthusiastic sellers of weapons to corrupt dictatorships**.

By the way, selling arms to dictatorships is not always wrong. It may be the right thing to do if the dictator is **an ally in the destruction of a more dangerous dictator**, or of more dangerous terrorists. This is because it is not guns that cause human rights abuses: they are physical objects that can be used for good or bad purposes. The lion's share of human rights abuses are

the result of evil, failed ideologies like Islamism and Communism which seek to eliminate the institutions of rational and peaceful decision making. By seeking a UN monopoly on decisions about who gets to be armed and who has to be disarmed, the Control Arms campaign is trying to do exactly the same.

Fri, 10/17/2003 - 21:39 | [permalink](#)

UN Gun Control: Enabler of Genocide

Those who advocate UN gun control don't seem to have learned the lesson of the UN's previous great experiment in gun control - the arms embargo upon the former Yugoslavia. Since the Serbs had already grabbed the contents of the Yugoslavian national army, the main effect of the arms embargo was to prevent the Bosnian Moslems from getting enough heavy weapons to defend themselves. The result was 'ethnic cleansing,' in which the Bosnian Serbs would simply shell a Bosnian Moslem city with artillery, well out of the range of any small arms the Bosnian Moslems might have had, reduce it to rubble, then send in the infantry to exterminate those remaining alive.

by [timstarr](#) on Sat, 10/18/2003 - 18:25 | [reply](#)

E. Nough on Bush

The **Emperor Misha** has decided that the President's decision to **exempt the PLO from the provisions of the Anti-Terrorism Act 1987** is an amoral step too far, and will not vote for him again. He won't vote Democrat, he'll abstain. **Amish Tech Support**, unaccountably, agrees.

They're just being silly. Too silly to be worth arguing against, really. But **E. Nough**, in the course of doing so, makes some wise remarks on a variety of related topics, including an interesting speculation on what might have happened if Al Gore had won the last election. It's not what you think!

Oh, and while you're there at E. Nough's blog, check out **his post on the significance of Mahathir Mohamad's recent antisemitic speech**.

Mon, 10/20/2003 - 00:14 | [permalink](#)

An Amusing Musing on Epistemology

Educational videos usually aren't.

This one is: **The Theory of Knowledge.**

Update: Note that this is a 25MB QuickTime file.

Wed, 10/22/2003 - 14:07 | [permalink](#)

Finding Hidden Weapons in Iraq

US forces have found a major **cache of weapons** adjacent to a mosque in Iraq, including 317 4-foot rockets and 220 anti-tank mines.

Had Iraq's weapons of mass destruction been hidden there too, they would have been discovered today.

They would not have been discovered *until* today.

Moreover, these weapons were much easier to find than WMD because these weapons were in a tunnel system hidden underneath another weapons cache (is that smart, or dumb?), which was *in use*, so bad guys must have been coming and going there from time to time.

Thu, 10/23/2003 - 21:18 | [permalink](#)

Silliness

James Randi has invented a “**paranormal pyramid**”. (Yes, really.) And for good measure, he has performed a very impressive card trick in space without leaving the ground. (By the way, can any of our readers tell us how it was done?)

Meanwhile Princess Diana, dead these six years, has succeeded in **becoming sillier**.

We have now called three apparently unrelated things “silly” in the past week or so. Coincidence? We don't think so.

Sat, 10/25/2003 - 00:15 | [permlink](#)

Terrorist Lacks Credibility

We trust you can all remember Osama Bin Laden's **categorical denial** on September 16, 2001, that he perpetrated the September 11 attacks. And the respectful credence that these cynical lies were given in the press?

After a suicide bombing in Gaza killed three Americans, **Reuters** managed to find a member of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) with something interesting to say:

“We view it as inappropriate to target Europeans, Americans or any nationality other than the occupation forces,” top Jihad member Nafez Azzam told Reuters, referring to Israel and its hold on the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

By the way, here's a member of the **occupation forces** being carried from the battlefield after being successfully targeted by Islamic Jihad.

Now let's take a trip down memory lane to February 2003, when four of Palestinian Islamic Jihad members were **arrested**. Among the items found in their flat were a manifesto for the PIJ:

A written PIJ “manifesto” uncovered during the course of the investigation outlines the goals and command structure of the group. The manifesto stated that the PIJ was led by a Secretary General and a Shura Council, a central advisory committee. The manifesto rejected “any peaceful solution to the Palestinian cause, and the affirmation of the Jihad solution and the martyrdom style as the only choice for liberation.” The manifesto indicated that the only purpose of PIJ was to destroy Israel and end all Western influence (of the “Great Satan-America”) in the region regardless to the cost of the inhabitants.

We wonder how the PIJ intend to end Western influence in the region. Are they planning to do this by asking nicely? Whether or not the PIJ are responsible for this specific bombing, we have no doubt that they will continue to kill Westerners without compunction. But when will the Western media acquire the compunction to stop reporting cynical lies as fact?

Update: E. Nough mentions the PFLP's (and Syrian government's)

most recent public lie at the end of **this** interesting piece.

Sun, 10/26/2003 - 15:19 | [permalink](#)

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Reluctant Experts

During the Second World War, many British people who in peacetime barely knew that “**faraway**” Czechoslovakia existed, now found themselves keeping world maps on their walls and annotating them meticulously. The location of Czechoslovakia as well as even farther-away places like Manchuria, Cyrenaica and the Coral Sea became as familiar to them as that of the local pub.

Geography was not the only subject in which they became reluctant experts. They had to learn some history too. And military strategy and tactics. And logistics and aeronautics and weapons technology. Worst of all, understanding the day-to-day news required a working knowledge of such inherently worthless and boring ideas as ‘**Lebensraum**’ and the ‘**Master Race**’.

The sudden need to assimilate large quantities of information in which they would otherwise have had no interest was a burden. Fear was diverting people's attention and creativity away from the positive endeavours that normally move the human race forwards, and into a holding pattern of self-defence. Causing this waste was part of the damage done by the Nazis to the human race.

It may seem inappropriate to dwell on this intangible, psychological injury when the perpetrators also committed some of the worst physical aggression, tyranny and genocide in history. But they are connected. People do not lightly seek out knowledge in subjects that are alien and uncongenial to them.

Today, as citizens in wartime, it is once again incumbent on us to think carefully and rationally about the morality of large-scale violence, and take refuge neither in comforting illusions nor in comforting self-abnegation. That this loss of innocence is necessary is an ugly fact. This, too, is something on which, in a better world, only specialist historians and philosophers would be experts. That every decent person has now developed a sophisticated stance on such things as collateral damage, human shields, weapons of mass destruction and unlawful combat is one of the many psychological injuries that the enemies of civilisation have inflicted on us.

It is often said that Westerners’ indifference to other cultures was a “root cause” of the present war. It was **not**. Almost the contrary is true: when, one day, the average prudent Westerner no longer feels obliged to be aware of the nuances of the term *jihad*, or the tenets of Ba'athism, or the intentions behind North Korea's latest

military procurement programme, as well as the difference between unmilitarised and **militarised anthrax**, then the war will be over. Not before.

Mon, 10/27/2003 - 17:19 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

The nuisance of learning

Does the last paragraph mean that when terrorism occurs so infrequently as to become a NUISANCE, then the war will be over? Not before. Hmm. I think I heard something like this once, but not from someone **The World** seems to have much use for.

by a reader on Tue, 11/02/2004 - 13:25 | [reply](#)

Re: The nuisance of learning

Excellent question. We may respond in a post soon.

by **Editor** on Tue, 11/02/2004 - 14:29 | [reply](#)

“The Most Important Task for Liberals Today”

Oliver Kamm, a liberal in the original sense of being in favour of human freedom and institutions that promote it, rightly **remarks**:

It is no exaggeration that the most important task for liberals in the world order today is to give unreserved support to British and American troops in [their aim of militarily defeating the terrorists in Iraq].

It is odd that both he and Andrew Sullivan (whom he quotes) seem to think that there is a serious possibility that the enemy in Iraq will prevent the emergence of a stable and successful Iraqi democracy. Well, better safe than sorry, but in fact such an outcome could only happen if the US disengages – which would be a betrayal on a scale that would rival that of Munich, 1938. It isn't going to happen.

This article is also worth reading for its excellent summary of the historic failure, and moral emptiness, of French foreign policy.

Tue, 10/28/2003 - 21:52 | [permalink](#)

Re:It isn't going to happen.

So you've gone from Popperian fallibilism to predicting the future?

by a reader on Wed, 10/29/2003 - 04:59 | [reply](#)

Fallibilism and Prediction

A reader asks:

So you've gone from Popperian fallibilism to predicting the future?

If Popperian fallibilism were incompatible with making predictions, it would be in a fine old mess. The whole of science would be ruled out, for a start.

Fallibilism is not the denial of the possibility of knowledge.

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 10/29/2003 - 05:31 | [reply](#)

Prediction

So are you claiming to "know" that the U.S. will not disengage?

Do you also "know" what my IBM stock will do this year?

by a reader on Wed, 10/29/2003 - 14:34 | [reply](#)

Prediction

I don't understand this criticism.

I think that saying things like "It isn't going to happen." is a perfectly reasonable usage and in no way contradicts fallibilism. It doesn't mean "The probability of this happening is 0." It means that the speaker thinks he has very strong reasons to believe that it isn't going to happen. New events or information could change this belief, but it currently doesn't seem likely enough to consider significant, and he suggests that we proceed under the assumption that it won't happen.

Would you object to: "The sun will rise tomorrow."?

I really don't want everybody to qualify everything they say. We know what they mean, we know they aren't omniscient, they know they aren't omniscient. What would lots of qualifications add to the discussion other than bits and distractions?

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 10/29/2003 - 19:17 | [reply](#)

Prediction

How is the prediction "it isn't going to happen" any different from Marx's claim that socialism is inevitable ?

Actually I suspect that the intent of the editor wasn't to put forward a prediction so much as to have a rallying cry for the faithful. "It isn't going to happen." really means "We won't let it happen!"

by a reader on Thu, 10/30/2003 - 03:33 | [reply](#)

Prediction

I don't think "We" (meaning the readers of this blog) are in a position to determine whether it happens or not. I think the editor *was* making a prediction.

If you don't share the editor's confidence that it won't happen, why not just ask what the reasons for that confidence are, rather than criticizing predictions in general?

Gil

by **Gil** on Thu, 10/30/2003 - 17:43 | [reply](#)

Prediction

I am not criticizing predictions in general. I am criticizing a prediction as it is being applied to social phenomena. It is impossible, in practice, to predict the behavior of one individual let alone the behavior of all parties in such a conflict. See Hayek's lecture "The Pretense of Knowledge" While he is discussing economics, the arguments are valid in this instance as well.

by a reader on Fri, 10/31/2003 - 03:22 | [reply](#)

Prediction

Yes, *certain* knowledge about how people will behave is impossible.

But, that doesn't mean we have *no* knowledge at all in this area, or have no reason to be confident about anything that anybody might (or might not) do.

Again, is your point that you disagree with this particular prediction, or do you have a problem with fallibilists making any claim about human behavior without qualifying it with "I think" or "might"?

Gil

by **Gil** on Fri, 10/31/2003 - 17:42 | [reply](#)

Prediction

Britain will never

- Launch a nuclear attack on South Korea in support of a North Korean invasion.
- Introduce Shari'a law.
- Outlaw hats.
- Elect a government of trained snails.

We predict these things – or at least, we think we predict them. But we could be wrong, perhaps we only think we think we predict them. Or perhaps we *couldn't* be wrong – we only think we could. Or do we?

by **Editor** on Fri, 10/31/2003 - 21:52 | [reply](#)

trained snails

LOL

by **Tom Robinson** on Sat, 11/01/2003 - 00:08 | [reply](#)

If It isn't going to happen.....

then surely the editor is going to buy in real estate in Iraq. What an incredible investment opportunity! and you would also be helping the Iraqi people! When the stable and successful Iraqi democracy emerges the money will come rolling in!

by a reader on Sat, 11/01/2003 - 04:09 | [reply](#)

Real estate

Current (i.e. inherited Baath socialist) Iraqi law prohibits foreign ownership of real estate; if you have a pointer to a futures market, please post it.

by [Kevin](#) on Sat, 11/01/2003 - 21:11 | [reply](#)

How is it different?

Marxism is an attempt to predict the entire course of human history. Predicting the Americans will stay in Iraq till they're done with establishing a vaguely civilised government is not a prediction about the whole of human history, nor does it resemble such a prediction in any important way.

Try looking at [The Poverty of Historicism](#) chapter 15.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sun, 11/02/2003 - 01:44 | [reply](#)

Prediction

As long as George W. Bush is in control of the strategy, the prediction **seems** pretty good:

"The enemy in Iraq believes America will run," Bush said.
"That's why they're willing to kill innocent civilians, relief workers, coalition troops. **America will never run.**"

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Mon, 11/03/2003 - 22:35 | [reply](#)

Which is it going to be?

The editor predicts: "a stable and successful Iraqi democracy"

Alan Forrester predicts "a vaguely civilised government"

by a reader on Tue, 11/04/2003 - 03:59 | [reply](#)

At the cost of draft?

Dear Editor,

The Pentagon is now making a concerted effort to fill all the draft board and appeals board positions throughout the USA. It appears that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are going to require military conscription, a highly coercive institution which seems thoroughly in contrast to **setting the world to rights**.

As long as the military units in Iraq remain all volunteers, it is not for me to tell them what to do with their time. They did volunteer to be in the military, being shot at whilst on garrison duty comes with that job description, and there is some possibility

that some good may come of it. I'm frankly not enthusiastic about the expense to the taxpayers, but as those are also allegedly volunteers, what is it to me?

However, when this goal of a stable and successful Iraqi democracy is used to justify conscription, enslavement, and other forms of coercion I'll give it a pass. Since conscription appears to be predicated on the assumption that Bush is again able to pretend to be elected, perhaps it is a moot point.

Regards,

Jim

davidson@net1.net

<http://www.ezez.com/free/freejim.html>

by [planetaryjim](#) on Fri, 11/07/2003 - 03:43 | [reply](#)

Cuban Irony

The Communist dictator of Cuba is, naturally enough, **opposed to free markets**.

The Cuban president went on to condemn free market neoliberalism as creating what he called "savage societies," where people are not taken into account.

In particular, he has been at the forefront of **opposition** to free trade. Today he **urged** nations to seek their own alternatives to free trade. Not necessarily Cuban communism, he generously conceded. After all:

"One should not be dogmatic; that is one of the secrets of revolution," said Castro, who led the Cuban revolution that brought him to power in 1959.

Ah yes, lack of dogmatism: the invariable hallmark of blood-soaked tyrants throughout the ages. Of course if any *Cubans* should seek any such alternatives they'll encounter something **a little worse** than mere dogmatism.

"Every one of the movements will have different things. There will be things that are similar but not exactly the same," he said.

And what might the common thread be between these similar-but-not-exactly-the-same alternatives to freedom? Why, **hatred for America** of course:

If Latin American opponents of Washington's free trade policies join forces, they could deal the United States a blow as serious as its loss in the Vietnam War, Bolivian opposition leader Evo Morales said on Thursday.

[...]

"Very soon we could celebrate in Latin America another Vietnam for the United States"

Given this visceral hatred of free trade, isn't it ironic that Castro's chief complaint against the United States is its **trade embargo** against his regime?

And more ironic is the US doe...

And more ironic is the US doesn't realize the embargo is making Cuba people miserable and Castro more powerful.

by a reader on Thu, 11/06/2003 - 10:00 | [reply](#)

No, it's less ironic

Yes, it's ironic that a nation founded on the principle of economic freedom should impose a trade embargo. But it's not *that* ironic. And the more you think about it, the less ironic it gets. After all, it's ironic that a nation founded on the values of peace may sometimes be compelled to go to war in self-defense, yet sometimes that is necessary and it's not inconsistent.

For a regime founded on the principle of outlawing free trade, not just in special circumstances but as an absolute philosophical conviction worth killing, dying, and being poor for, to complain about trade barriers *that's* irony.

As for it making Castro more powerful, he could not be more powerful, he is an absolute dictator. However, you may have a point that it makes him more secure in power. Perhaps that's what you meant. Yes, trade sanctions rarely seem to do any good - see Saddam as an example - especially compared with the only moral alternative: righteous violence. Is that what you are advocating?

by a reader on Thu, 11/06/2003 - 23:48 | [reply](#)

Why Does the BBC Make These Little ‘Mistakes’?

It's not a big thing in itself. But it has a very big **context**. Anyway, judge for yourselves.

First, the facts: Engineers at the Technion Institute of Technology in Israel have designed a remote-controlled version of the D-9 armoured bulldozer. In the Technion's **press release** last week, they explained the purpose of this modification:

Engineering Corps officers and those from the Technological-Logistical Unit of the IDF's Technology Division stated that this innovative development is intended to enable the bulldozer to be operated under fire while the operator controlling it from afar remains behind safe cover. Today, bulldozer operators are exposed to high risks when they demolish buildings in which **terrorists** are hiding ...

(Boldface ours.)

But the BBC **reported the story with a different quote**:

“Today the bulldozer drivers are exposed to great danger when they knock down buildings that have **militants** hiding in them,” Israel's Technion Institute of Technology, which developed the robot version, quoted an unnamed army officer as saying.

(Boldface ours; quotes in original.)

Did the Technion report the officer as saying “militants” or “terrorists”?

The BBC claims to be quoting the Technion. So, did the Technion make two contradictory claims about what the officer said, one to the BBC and one in their own press release? Or is there some innocent explanation for the BBC changing the quote – such as a translation error that just happened to introduce a politically significant change? Or was the BBC flat-out lying? If so, why? Seriously: why would they lie? Note our **previous posts** on this issue, and the comments on them.

when people enter lists of names into the computer, Elliot often becomes Elliott

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 05/13/2004 - 18:42 | [reply](#)

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Government Offices Full of Monkeys

No, **really!**

In a capital city where cows roam the streets and elephants plod along in the bus lanes, it's no surprise to find government buildings overrun with monkeys.

But the officials who work there are fed up. They've been bitten, robbed and otherwise tormented by monkeys that ransack files, bring down power lines, screech at visitors and bang on office windows.

The Supreme Court has stepped in, decreeing that New Delhi should be a monkey-free city after citizens filed a lawsuit demanding protection from the animals.

[...]

Last year the monkeys made their presence felt by hanging from window ledges and screeching at reporters arriving for a news conference with visiting U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

Pity he didn't have **Chomps** with him.

Mon, 11/03/2003 - 01:57 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

It Really Is Happening Again

Antisemitism. "It really is happening again" says **Andrew Sullivan**.

Hope that he is wrong. Be prepared for him to be right.

And, right now, take his advice and read Natan Sharansky's latest masterpiece **On Hating the Jews**, which we have already put permanently in our sidebar.

Mon, 11/03/2003 - 19:38 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Happening again in Europe

Happening again in Europe:

<http://www.policyreview.org/oct03/rosenthal.html>

and of course in the Muslim world:

<http://frontpagemag.com/Articles/ReadArticle.asp?ID=10581>

by **Alan Furman** on Tue, 11/04/2003 - 04:54 | [reply](#)

Correction

As a friend of Israel and an admirer of Natan Sharansky, I feel it is my duty to point out -- before someone else who is neither does so -- that the supposed quote from Dr Martin Luther King in the Commentary article is a fabrication. See [this Wikipedia article](#).

by a reader on Tue, 11/04/2003 - 16:48 | [reply](#)

On Loving the...

I might be well roasted for saying this, but it is about time we get off the topic of hating Peoples. Sure, there are so many anti-semites. Sure, it is dangerous and unreasonable. However, with all the specific hates and haters in the world, it does not get us very far to generalize first and look for evidence after. Just round up all the usual suspects. Or don't.

Seriously, more usefully, get to the specifics, take action where it is

warranted. People aren't blind, but they are all too easily polarized. Instead, work with change. Develop allies. Work with Reason. Call a spade a spade. Forge Alliances. Act together. If there is any opportunity for overlap at the fringes or the center, go for it. Do not love or hate or segregate or integrate with labels. They don't work for any useful long term purpose or gain.

Howard Dean, a Democratic candidate for U.S. president is a good current example of this not so useful debate, and is being criticized for it. Sure the confederate flag is a racist symbol, for some people anyway. So are all flags and causes in general if used that way. Regardless, poor southerners as individuals should not be labeled, other than self-identified poor and southern, and that does not exclude them from the larger debate, reach out, Dean's main point. Criticize not, until you can make lots of elbow room for criticism back. Critique is the better, more useful word. By all means act. Less talk at, more act with. Enough said.

by a reader on Wed, 11/05/2003 - 20:27 | [reply](#)

Why?

I might be well roasted for saying this, but it is about time we get off the topic of hating Peoples. Sure, there are so many anti-semites. Sure, it is dangerous and unreasonable.

It's unreasonable and **dangerous**, but we should stop thinking about it? Why?

~Woty
<http://woty.davidsj.com>

by [Woty](#) on Thu, 11/06/2003 - 00:13 | [reply](#)

Why

We should not stop thinking about it. That is right, you and I should not stop thinking about it. What makes us different? What gives us common ground? We, you and I, should do whatever we can to deal with it, truth about humanity. All prejudice is based on fear and misunderstanding of the other, barriers to knowing, playing one against the other for gain.

Act to change it, see the evil of prejudice in all its group labels and contested borders and vile histories. Get energized. You have the tools. Do more.

Go beyond identifying or responding only to the hate. Work with people and forces that do not hate. Do not play into the hands of anti-semitism, do not play into the hands of racism, do not play into the hands of those who benefit by all polarizations of the other, fear or hate. There is no room for anti-people. Find ways to triumph over what someone might call us, label us, group us, misunderstand or misuse us.

As you say, Set **The World** To Rights.

What I read here is worthwhile to think about. The first question is always how do we change it. The other is you and me, how we see. Why do we buy into being categorized? We must believe something about the category. Do not fear The Other. It is tangible and always changing. For one, I believe we must be individuals first, never labels or categories, ourselves or others.

It is always the individual where we meet. Live that.

by a reader on Thu, 11/06/2003 - 02:55 | [reply](#)

Think First, Act Later

A Reader exhorts us to "Act", and "Do more", and "Go beyond identifying or responding only to hate." etc.

But, how is one to know what actions to take without having a good theory about his obstacles?

A Reader seems to think that all prejudices are alike, but I disagree and think that anti-semitism is different from the others. We need to try to understand it in order to avoid repeating mistakes.

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Thu, 11/06/2003 - 03:51 | [reply](#)

Think and Act

Gil, you are right: But, how is one to know what actions to take without having a good theory about his obstacles?

A rhetorical question, which can also be said as a statement: One needs good theories in order to know what action to take.

My theory is that all prejudices are alike in their essence of how they distort thinking, and all prejudices have their personal and individual basis of perpetuation. Prejudices thrive on labels and stereotypes and at their core reveal deep mistrust, fear, anger, hurt, and misunderstanding.

Group prejudices are fostered by group images of who the enemy is. The enemy is/are those whom we fear and who we have feared. Fear and mistrust is a big blind spot and barrier to clear thinking. It is a contagion if left untouched. Lack of contact with those persons we might have prejudices about tends to foster a breeding ground for stereotypes and pat hateful, fearful answers. This is group-think, which paradoxically is not rational thinking, but rather rationalizing or sloganeering or segregating thought.

Predjudice breeds in a vacuum of ideas and inaction. It is critical to break into the group-think of the group, as well as our own tendencies to group-think. It is critical to act. If we do, some will hold to their ideological prejudice. Some will be shaken. Some will change.

Acting to break through prejudice has many ways and many

specifics. Causing fear or perpetuating stereotypes only reinforces those who hate and/or fear. **Setting the world to rights** is a good start at breaking through. The discussion needs to broaden and also needs to offer ideas to be tested and tried.

You each have your own theory about prejudices, no matter what the labels and history of it. Share them. Share it.

by a reader on Thu, 11/06/2003 - 15:05 | [reply](#)

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President Bush Knows

Today, President Bush has given another in his series of excellent speeches that show that he is the right person for the job:

Remarks by the President at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy, November 6, 2003.

Highlights:

In June of 1982, President Ronald Reagan spoke at Westminster Palace and declared, the turning point had arrived in history. He argued that Soviet communism had failed, precisely because it did not respect its own people -- their creativity, their genius and their rights.

President Reagan said that the day of Soviet tyranny was passing, that freedom had a momentum which would not be halted.

[...]

A number of critics were dismissive of that speech by the President. According to one editorial of the time, "It seems hard to be a sophisticated European and also an admirer of Ronald Reagan." (Laughter.) Some observers on both sides of the Atlantic pronounced the speech simplistic and naive, and even dangerous. In fact, Ronald Reagan's words were courageous and optimistic and entirely correct. (Applause.)

[...]

We've witnessed, in little over a generation, the swiftest advance of freedom in the 2,500 year story of democracy.

[...]

Our commitment to democracy is also tested in the Middle East, which is my focus today, and must be a focus of American policy for decades to come. In many nations of the Middle East -- countries of great strategic importance -- democracy has not yet taken root. And the questions arise: Are the peoples of the Middle East somehow beyond the reach of liberty? Are millions of

men and women and children condemned by history or culture to live in despotism? Are they alone never to know freedom, and never even to have a choice in the matter? I, for one, do not believe it. I believe every person has the ability and the right to be free. (Applause.)

Some skeptics of democracy assert that the traditions of Islam are inhospitable to the representative government. This "cultural condescension," as Ronald Reagan termed it, has a long history. After the Japanese surrender in 1945, a so-called Japan expert asserted that democracy in that former empire would "never work." Another observer declared the prospects for democracy in post-Hitler Germany are, and I quote, "most uncertain at best" -- he made that claim in 1957.

[...]

For the Palestinian people, the only path to independence and dignity and progress is the path of democracy. (Applause.) And the Palestinian leaders who block and undermine democratic reform, and feed hatred and encourage violence are not leaders at all. They're the main obstacles to peace, and to the success of the Palestinian people.

But read it all. It is quite heartening.

Thu, 11/06/2003 - 22:48 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

BBC Tells Truth about Arafat

This is a highly significant story. Not because it is news (to anyone whose head has not been buried deeply in the sand – or elsewhere – for the last decade), but because of who is reporting it: the **BBC**:

Palestinian Authority funds go to militants

The Palestinian Authority, headed by Yasser Arafat, is paying members of a Palestinian militant organisation which has been responsible for carrying out suicide attacks against Israeli soldiers and civilians, a BBC investigation has found.

A total of up to \$50,000 a month is being sent to members of the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, an armed group that emerged shortly after the outbreak of the current Palestinian intifada, a BBC Correspondent programme reveals.

Let us hope that these revelations, from this source, have at least as salutary an effect on world opinion – and on US Government opinion in particular – as the **Karine A incident**.

Sat, 11/08/2003 - 03:53 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

A Paying Membership

It is worthwhile to consider how and why the Middle East greases palms. No pun intended. In a nomadic, non-democratic hierarchy of tribes, loyalties run on deferences, tribal alliances, and money. There is an old phrase in the english language, "blood money". There must certainly be an equivalent in aramaic and the root languages of the Middle East and in all old cultures of the world because that is the way tribal control has been maintained from generation to generation since ancient times. Blood money. Words reveal thoughts and thoughts reveal beliefs about how the world always works. Violence or peace breeds around tribal handshakes, and these are symbols of deference just like words. Follow the blood money, follow the handshakes, follow who watches whose back, and see the subtleties of control. The way control over people is maintained in such societies is by the most simple alliances of power symbolized by money and handshake relationships. If a high

priority is placed not losing tribal power, there will be a paying membership. A paying deferential membership represents the thoughts, beliefs, and intentions of a man in his tribe. In tribal memberships multiplied a man represents how both he and his society see the world.

by a reader on Sat, 11/08/2003 - 14:37 | [reply](#)

It works the same way in Europe, N. America

Dear Reader,

- > It is worthwhile to consider how and why the Middle East
- > greases palms. No pun intended.

Palm tree oil is very greasy. Since it is worthwhile to consider the how and why of Middle East palm greasing, perhaps you'd be willing to consider how, say, defense contracts are allocated in the military industrial complex of the USA? Or would that not be worth doing, since it would challenge your notions of Western democracies having moral superiority?

- > In a nomadic, non-democratic hierarchy of tribes, loyalties
- > run on deferences, tribal alliances, and money.

Whereas in Europe or the USA, loyalties run on deferences, tribal alliances, and money. Or were you thinking all that deference to the royal family in the UK was something vastly different from the deference to, say, the Saudi royals? Were you thinking that the "our thing" or "cosa nostra" was operating on some other basis?

What is Western democracy but a sham where the votes are counted selectively if at all? There is so much evidence for vote fraud in the USA that nobody with any sense ought to take it seriously. Even groups which have no history of finding conspiracies under every floorboard, such as the Texas Republican Party, have reported hundreds of instances of vote fraud and abuse. E.g., in 1998 that party reported 206 instances, none of which have ever been resolved by the authorities. The evidence of the new Diebold voting machines casting up to 16,000 "negative votes" in certain audited precinct voting is really cool stuff.

- > There is an old phrase in the english language, "blood money".

Indeed. It is a very old tradition in all clan societies. The English had clans before they were conquered by the Romans, and retained many of these important traditions after the Romans went away and before the Norman conquest.

Blood money refers to the money paid to avoid a blood feud. It refers to the compensatory concept of justice, which is different

from the punishment concept. Under compensatory law, a person is

fined the equivalent of an eye if his crime harmed a victim's eye, the equivalent of a tooth if his crime harmed a victim's tooth, and so forth. Mosaic law worked out a detailed set of these fines and other compensation issues, along with fundamentals of common law justice such as rights of the accused, etc.

- > There must certainly be an equivalent in aramaic and the root
- > languages of the Middle East and in all old cultures of the
- > world

Indeed. Such as the old culture of Europe, which was Celtic before the Romans came with their roads and their gladii to replace the European system of clan rule, largely rule by judges or kritarchy, with the Roman legislative rules (and the corruption which naturally followed).

- > because that is the way tribal control has been maintained
- > from generation to generation since ancient times. Blood money.

Actually, blood money refers to the payment of compensation for a killing which is made, in part, to avoid a blood feud in which the offended clan goes and kills someone from the killer's clan in retribution. Blood money can be a fairly sophisticated tool for avoiding conflict.

- > Words reveal thoughts and thoughts reveal beliefs about how
- > the world always works.

That would appear to be true of, say, your words.

- > Violence or peace breeds around tribal handshakes,

Whereas violence and peace breed around executive handshakes in your much vaunted Western sham democracies.

- > and these are symbols of deference just like words.

So, if you are contemptuous of words as symbols of deference, why are you using words?

- > Follow the blood money, follow the handshakes, follow who
- > watches whose back, and see the subtleties of control.

The interesting thing about clan society is that it is inherently unstable politically. I don't think any differently of Western sham democracies, of course. Clan society is not a culture of hierarchy or control, any more than your Western sham democracies.

Rather, in a clan society each individual forms and breaks alliances to suit his own best interests. The notion that there is a government which should be respected is very foreign to clan participants. The government, to people raised in a clan society, is obviously just some individuals. If they are members of the same clan, they will naturally be expected to wash each other's hands. The notion that such favoritism is unexpected or corrupt is a very Western notion, and one that has not changed the nature or extent of nepotism.

- > The way control over people is maintained in such societies is

- > by the most simple alliances of power symbolized by money
- > and handshake relationships.

And how is that any different from how control is maintained in, say, a society like Washington, DC? Don't the power brokers shake hands and exchange money? Isn't the military industrial complex famous for the ways in which it can allocate subcontracts among the Congressional districts to divide the pork barrel?

- > If a high priority is placed not losing tribal power, there
- > will be a paying membership.

Can you not think of corollaries in party politics?

- > A paying deferential membership represents the thoughts,
- > beliefs, and intentions of a man in his tribe. In tribal
- > memberships multiplied a man represents how both he and
- > his society see the world.

I think much the same is true of chosen affiliations (rather than inherited ones) such as party political membership.

Regards,

Jim
<http://www.awdal.com/>

by [planetaryjim](#) on Tue, 11/11/2003 - 05:04 | [reply](#)

Commentary on Greasy Palms

You assume alot about my notions. Sounds like Arafat is just one of the Texas good old boys. Assume what you will, it makes interesting commentary.

by a reader on Tue, 11/11/2003 - 06:49 | [reply](#)

Moral detergent acts swiftly on palm grease

Planetary Jim,

Please accept that in addition to loyalties and mafia-style 'friendships', there is such a thing as the rule of law.

Aren't some rules better than others? Isn't the difference to do with morality and better traditions?

If the USA is no different from the Middle East, howcome more people want to live there? Howcome immigrants who settle in America become like other Americans within a generation or two, but, say, Europeans working in the Middle East retain their culture?

And if you think that the answer is solely to do with wealth, power, and military might, please tell us how the excess wealth was generated in the first place.

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Tue, 11/11/2003 - 23:34 | [reply](#)

excess wealth

clearly it was stolen

- curi

by a reader on Fri, 11/14/2003 - 17:44 | [reply](#)

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BBC Does Something Right – Again

Two swallows do not a summer make. Nevertheless, it has to be admitted that the BBC has **done something right again** in regard to its Middle-East News coverage:

The BBC has appointed a "Middle East policeman" to oversee its coverage of the region amid mounting allegations of anti-Israeli bias.

Malcolm Balen, a former editor of the Nine O'Clock News, has been recruited in an attempt to improve the corporation's reporting of the Middle East and its relationship with the main political players.

[...]

Relations between the corporation and the Israeli government hit a low point this summer when the latter "withdrew co-operation" in protest at a BBC documentary about the country's weapons of mass destruction.

Ariel Sharon, the Israeli prime minister, later barred the BBC from his meeting with the British press during a visit to London.

The BBC has also been the target of Downing Street accusations that it toed a pro-Baghdad line over the Iraq war and that it influenced the Today programme's handling of the dossier story that is the subject of the Hutton Inquiry.

[...]

The BBC denied that the appointment amounted to an admission that it had "got its coverage wrong" but conceded the corporation was sensitive to criticism. He said it was "no longer the case" that the Israelis were refusing to co-operate with BBC journalists.

An accusation frequently levelled against the corporation is that it reports the Arab-Israeli conflict too much from a Palestinian point of view.

Its reluctance to describe suicide bombers as "terrorists"

has proved particularly controversial, recently prompting the Simon Wiesenthal Centre to pull out of a BBC series about Nazi genocide.

The corporation faces increasing scrutiny of all areas of its activities during the run-up to the renewal of its royal charter in 2006.

It's of course too early to tell whether there is anything of substance in this step. And the BBC has a long way to go, both morally and factually. But, taken together with **this** story, it is a hopeful sign.

Tue, 11/11/2003 - 23:07 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Curiosity Provides Some Answers

At the new location of **Curiosity**, Elliot Temple explains **the value of government, from an anarchist perspective.**

He also investigates **epistemology** and **charity.**

Wed, 11/12/2003 - 21:28 | [permalink](#)

Oliver Kamm Takes Down...

During the last day, our favourite liberal **Oliver Kamm** has taken down:

- **Melanie Phillips** who is often right but not when she confuses liberalism with moral relativism!
- **John Pilger**, for whom 'invariably wrong' would be far too kind a designation.
- **The BBC** – if only 'amazingly sloppy and ignorant of history' were the worst criticism they deserved.
- The **Stop The War Coalition** (who intend to organise protests against President Bush in London during his forthcoming State Visit): "a front organisation for a totalitarian and antisemitic party of the Fascist Left ... dedicated to the overthrow of parliamentary democracy and to military victory for Saddam Hussein" (Or rather, the Liberal Party's shameful association with that organisation.)

A nice day's blogging, Mr Kamm.

Thu, 11/13/2003 - 01:26 | [permalink](#)

An Allegation That Cannot Rationally Be Made Twice.

Andrew Sullivan **quotes** from two New York Times editorials, one from just before the Liberation of Iraq, and one from yesterday:

"President Bush sketched an expansive vision last night [at his American Enterprise Institute speech] of what he expects to accomplish by a war in Iraq. Instead of focusing on eliminating weapons of mass destruction, or reducing the threat of terror to the United States, Mr. Bush talked about establishing a 'free and peaceful Iraq' that would serve as a 'dramatic and inspiring example' to the entire Arab and Muslim world, provide a stabilizing influence in the Middle East and even help end the Arab-Israeli conflict. The idea of turning Iraq into a model democracy in the Arab world is one some members of the administration have been discussing for a long time." -- New York Times editorial, February 27, 2003.

"The White House recently began shifting its case for the Iraq war from the embarrassing unconventional weapons issue to the lofty vision of creating an exemplary democracy in Iraq." -- New York Times editorial, **today**.

The NYT's compulsive attempts to fit a square peg into a round hole are irrational and shameful.

Fri, 11/14/2003 - 05:10 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

It's as if they haven't yet r...

It's as if they haven't yet realized the blogosphere exists.

by a reader on Sun, 11/16/2003 - 00:30 | [reply](#)

Welcome, President Bush

We join **Alan Forrester** and **Oliver Kamm** in welcoming President Bush to Britain on his forthcoming State Visit.

Against a background of “**tense rows**” between Scotland Yard and the US Secret Service about security measures, some British commentators are playing nasty little word games, in effect complaining about the **very fact** that the President is to be protected from murder during his visit. Their argument runs something like this: “bloody paranoid Americans seeing non-existent terrorists behind every tree just like they used to see reds under beds how dare they tell us how to run our own security services they just want to suppress legitimate dissent after all why shouldn't thousands of peace marchers be allowed to mob Bush then he'll see how much the world hates him because he's the number one threat to peace and freedom and if he gets assassinated he'll have only himself to blame and it won't be a moment too soon”.

But as **Andrew Sullivan** says:

I don't believe that the Brits are, as a whole, that hostile either to the war or to Bush. The minority who hates him appeals to the ignorance of those who condescend to him. And the BBC has whipped up anti-Americanism to fever pitch. But my native country isn't renowned for its common sense for nothing. I have faith that the majority will eventually see through the propaganda to the truth.

Indeed.

Sat, 11/15/2003 - 15:12 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Advice On Failure From An Expert

Saddam Hussein says that the Coalition has “misjudged the difficulty” of occupying Iraq.

Well, of course *he* thinks it's an impossible task. As the only living person ever to have lost power in Iraq, a man whose judgement on this subject has proved **spectacularly inaccurate** in the past, Saddam is arguably the least qualified person in the world to give such advice.

Unless, perhaps, he means to advise the Coalition: “if you want to succeed in Iraq, on no account do **what I did**”. Don't worry, Saddam, they won't. They are doing **something entirely different**, of which you have literally no conception.

Sun, 11/16/2003 - 22:08 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Least qualified?

- (1) One other living person has lost power in Iraq, namely General Jay Garner
(<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/05/13/iraq/main553573.shtml>).
- (2) Failing at something doesn't necessarily make you unqualified to give advice on how to do it well.
- (3) Saddam did manage to 'occupy' Iraq for over two decades.

Pedantic Reader

by a reader on Mon, 11/17/2003 - 21:01 | [reply](#)

Carnival of the Vanities 62

We have done our best to include every entry we have received, including the ones that our spam filters put in the Junk Mail box. Sadly, we did not receive any **pornographic ones**, or they would have had pride of place in the carnival. If your entry is missing, it is not surprising. This is a huge job for which we were quite ill-prepared. So if you are in this unlucky(?) position, instead of leaping to the conclusion that it is a plot to deprive you of your rightful place in the carnival of the vanities, realise that it is just a technical glitch or a mistake, and that we will be mortified to learn that we have missed a further opportunity for editorial fun. And don't despair, simply write to carnival -at- settingtheworldtorights [dot] com, giving us the details again, and we will add your entry in an extra special UPDATE section. (So everyone, just in case our carnival-posting systems turn out to have been fallible – and in case one or two naughty bloggers use this opportunity to slip another post in – be sure to visit the carnival again in a few days to catch any entries that you may have missed the first time.)

Bigwig has set up a list for Carnival announcements. You can subscribe to it by sending an email message to cotvanities-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. But we can tell you that the next carnival will be hosted by **Begging to Differ**. Get your entries in now! Don't wait until the last minute!

If you haven't read our post, **Richard Dawkins, George W. Bush, and Morality**, read it now!

Enough of this! Let's get to **The World Carnival** without further ado:

Have you ever wondered if parenting has to be such a ghastly battle? Whether there could be a better way to interact with children? A way that would be better for you too? Then read **this post about Taking Children Seriously**.

And to understand why **Sarah Fitz-Claridge** thinks that the future of liberty depends on **taking children seriously**, read **this post**.

Jolly good stuff from fellow optimist, Bruce Hill. Bring the Revolution home!

White Pebble sits in **Memory Street** and tells a touching little story

of chemistry, childhood, and the moment when she ceased to be an omniscient mommy. And she **muses** on the sharing of national tragedy through live television.

In **Amnesty International and Britain...Silly, Overwrought...and Sad**, Solomon unlawfully detains Kate Allen of Amnesty International UK, and, without any regard for her human rights, gives her a jolly good fiscing on the subject of why being nice to terrorists is probably not the best way to avoid another 9/11.

Pete of The Smarter Cop **amusingly fisks** a comment by a member of TruthOut, a group having the dubious distinction of using a 10-foot-tall burning pair of pants as a visual aid.

As James **struggles hilariously with a laptop that was presumably manufactured somewhere in the deeper recesses of hell**, we cannot help but wonder if he was thinking, "If only Apple made a **reasonably-priced range of user-friendly machines** that I could be using instead."

Do you enjoy domestic violence discipline? Blush explains how **regular beatings can be the cornerstone of a healthy relationship**, helping him unwind after a hard day in the office.

Unbillable Hours has a **long essay** on how wrong Kim Du Toit is about something or other. Oh yes – it was about his position on women and homosexuals. Did we mention it was long?

Chuck has some advice about what not to say out loud to a woman: **Did I Say That Outloud?** It's a guy thing, he says. So, um ... it's OK for a woman to turn to her best friend Joe, and say "You know I love you, Fred", is it?

BoiFromTroy, the gay, Republican sports fan, is in favour of gay marriage but expects to be "reamed for not being politically correct". Why? Because of his **rather queer reason** for taking that view.

Bill Wallo asks whether suicide bombers are really avenging angels – or just morally reprehensible: **Suicide Bombers and Moral Legitimacy**.

PC Watch says that in Australia, Muslim criminals were allowed to **go free** after stealing, intimidating police officers and destroying police property. Clearly a severe case of victimisation of Muslims. After all, some of the property they stole probably had sharp corners, and shouting that they were going to kill police officers and "fuck their girlfriends" might give them sore throats.

Jack Cluth exposes a shocking case of apathy in regard to the importance of traditional education. A child shuns schooling in favour of frivolous pursuits whilst the parents mock the efforts of dedicated social workers to put the child back on track.

Bryan is **furious** that a Christian music download service is stealing Apple's **iTunes idea** and that they have not yet made it possible for **Mac people** to use the service. The question is: why would we

want to?

Madeleine Begun **suspects** that Bush has security in order to shoot protesters. Little does she know that the real target is unruly *bloggers* bwahahahaha...

Riverbend **explains** why America shouldn't bomb Tikrit – because he knows some of the people there and they certainly aren't terrorists. In fact, it is America's brutal treatment that has turned these people into suicide bombers. Erm...

Charles Hill exposes **Wal-Mart as a wicked capitalist company** that forces people to work for wages lower than those offered by other shops. Evidently Mr Hill doesn't approve of plentiful cheap food and thinks that non-English-speaking illiterates and the like should starve rather than be allowed to do honest work paid at the rate they are worth.

In **American Beauty meets The Surrendered Wife**, MamaKat says that “for controlling women, ... there is help.” Let's hope she is right!

Gordie is gravely worried about hunger in.... Oregon. No really! That's not a joke!

Jon Henke sets the record straight on the **Resume of George W Bush**.

Tim Dunlop cheerily declares that “Nothing says *fuck you* more plainly to Islamofascist terrorists than a couple of men or women publicly and with liberal-democratic state sanction declaring their love for each other and then going off and living nice, normal, middle class lives.”

Carey Gage says: “Somehow I don't think that the ‘laws and customs of war’ include driving a truck filled with explosives into a clearly marked Red Cross building and pushing the detonator, or the use of marked ambulances to transport weapons and personnel.” Quite.

Fringe battles a fellow radio enthusiast over Israel and Palestine. It's a doozy.

Priorities and Frivolities wonders whether Al Qaeda's decentralisation, brought about by the War on Terror, has **made it more vulnerable** or not.

Blackfive - The Paratrooper of Love has a perceptive discussion of the nature of the Muslim, Arab and European *humiliation* which is the reason why many people hate America: **The Cost of Humiliation**.

Supergenius has written about the **resignation** of Eduard Shevardnadze, now ex-President of the ex-Soviet state of Georgia, following a large and impressive demonstration of people power.

Bill Adams reveals a number of bizarre facts about Kyrgyztan, not

least of which is that their unit of measurement for human corpses is the metric ton. The question of why they cannot make do with a simple headcount is perhaps answered by the works of Prof. Gunther Von Hagens, whose artwork challenges traditional ideas of where human limbs and organs should be located in relation to the rest of the body.

If you are fat, oops, sorry, 'have a weight problem', Dean Esmay suggests that you might want to **try the Atkins diet** or one of the other low-carbohydrate diets.

Here is an amusingly politically correct version of **Winter Wonderland**.

There is an interesting parallel between **this post about hunting** and our old post about **George Mikes**.

In her **Political Update**, Lynn says: "If you want my vote, don't just tell me what Bush is doing wrong; tell me what you would do right. And I'm sorry but if you compare Bush to Hitler you invalidate anything you say after that."

John Rosenberg writes that the Democrats like talking about states' rights but don't actually mean it.

Feste provides **pictures and a little good news from Iraq**. These kids, she says, are the hearts and minds we must win to bring real change to the region.

Michael Kantor on how he **passed** the New York Bar Exam. Anyone who has taken an exam will sympathise with his plight. We know someone who has also passed the bar exam – and been awarded the distinction of Beermeister: Almighty King of the Bar.

Wicked Thoughts has the first Christmas joke of the year – but it is short and did raise a smile.

Many were surprised at President Bush's reference to the Puritans in his recent Whitehall speech. For Mark Pierce it triggered a long but interesting series of thoughts on Thanksgiving, and about the similarities between the situation of the first Pilgrims at Plymouth Colony and that of Iraq today: **A Puritan Idealism In Iraq**.

For reasons best known to himself, Steven Taylor gives a **roundup** of the democratic nominees by comparing them to different types of toast. Just remember folks, you heard it here first...

If it's true that in hell the punishment fits the crime then we can only wonder what exactly it is that **Josh Fielek** thinks Michael Jackson has been *doing* to trees. Ugh!

Dustin Frelich explains how two approaches to Conservatism have led to a Republican split on the vote to expand Medicare: **Conservatives debate Medicare**.

Dodgeblogium points out that "the Iraq war has had at least one salutary effect, and that is in smoking out the outright dishonesty and bias of much of the Western media". Did that *need* smoking

out?

Interested Participant tracks the origin of **doctors' waiting rooms** to Heidelberg, Germany in the 19th century.

OTB announces a rival to the Carnival: the **Beltway Traffic Jam**. Yes, what today's blogosphere readers really need is a place to find more links to more blogs.

And if that wasn't enough, **Sean Hackbarth** provides links to some old stories on his site.

Harvey says that **this** is the relationship advice he *wishes* his father had given him. God help him!

Patriot Paradox on the silliness of claiming that the police are prosecuting Michael Jackson for child molestation because he's black rather than because their current best theory is that he's actually a child molester. Besides, Michael Jackson hasn't been black for a while now.

How to adapt to the breakneck pace of technological and social **change**.

King of Fools focuses on the inconvenience of bizarre and irrational laws in Arkansas that require children to **wear shoes** while shopping.

Daisy argues that you should **throw out any house rules that might be causing resentment**. That is, rules for your wife! We say: while you're at it, throw out the rules for your children too.

Brian Noggle is worried that the **computers** in his doctor's office are going to get hacked, or something.

Richard Baker is a physicist who thinks that "Physics is not the search for truth. Instead, it is the search for useful theories." Judge whether that theory is itself either true or useful by reading his **Maps of Physics**.

Dissecting Leftism says that GWB's relative inarticulateness may be one of his biggest assets.

In days of old/When knights were bold/And paper weren't invented/They wiped their arse/On a blade of grass/And walked away contented. Well, now at last we have reached the age of the next giant advance in wiping technology, and in **Wet Vs. Dry**, Joe Kelley bravely investigates. Or does he?

Attaboy righteously ~~flattens~~ criticises an uninformed letter writer to his local newspaper, who made the unfortunate mistake of **comparing Jessica Lynch to Rachel Corrie**.

Peaktalk explains how crime and homelessness have become a political playball between the left and right in the nuclear-weapon-free city of Vancouver: **Wrong Point, Wrong Time**.

Gunther, in an **update** on a boycott going on in Austin Texas,

where anti-abortion activists have stopped construction of a Planned Parenthood clinic, takes a disturbing look at who is behind the action.

Patterico, a conservative himself, takes on some pet conservative beliefs with which he disagrees: **RIGHT-WINGERS** (you may have to scroll down to find it).

Curiosity **expresses solidarity with Jews**.

Admiral Quixote on the problem of compulsory unionism.

Sorge is worried about his sanity. And so he should be.

Reviewing the Bush Administration's record both domestic and foreign, Arthur Silber finds it "almost impossible to comprehend how completely and consistently destructive a single administration could be in less than three years." Test *your* comprehension skills **here**.

Wed, 11/26/2003 - 11:07 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Sorry about the length of the...

Sorry about the length of the post; I'm a lawyer, we aren't exactly trained for brevity. - TPB, Esq. <http://unbillablehours.typepad.com>

by a reader on Wed, 11/26/2003 - 18:29 | [reply](#)

Length

Long doesn't mean bad. One of our **favourite bloggers** writes posts that are so long that by the time one has read his masterful analysis of, say, an impending war, it has already started, ended, and been the subject of outrageous revisionist histories. Obligatory reading nevertheless, but it's nice to be forewarned, so that before clicking the link one can put out the cat, the wine, a cigar ... and install broadband.

Update: He's planning to **invent a 72-hour day** (warning: long!) to cope with this very problem. Excellent news! The only trouble is, it'll be 2104 before the Patent Office reaches the end of his application.

by **Editor** on Wed, 11/26/2003 - 19:02 | [reply](#)

Harsh

Gee, some of your comments are a little harsh. Is that the right spirit for the carnival of the vanities?

by a reader on Wed, 11/26/2003 - 19:43 | [reply](#)

Thanks & Re: Harsh

1) Many thanks for hosting - I know it takes a lot of work.

2) I had to laugh at your comment on length - I knew you were linking to the USS Clueless before I clicked on the URL.

3) The last person to comment has a point that this COV was more critical than the others. This is not a bad thing - since bloggers most commonly post their own opinions anyway, there is nothing wrong with posting your opinions, but it was different. For my part, I am OK with it, but prepare for people to comment on it. I will probably be remarking on one of your slams myself at [Admiral Quixote's Roundtable](#) ;-)

by [Admiral Quixote](#) on Wed, 11/26/2003 - 21:07 | [reply](#)

Comment question

BTW, how should we post URLs in your comments? I believe I used standard HTML for my above post, but the URL goes back to your site instead of to www.solport.com.

by [Admiral Quixote](#) on Wed, 11/26/2003 - 21:09 | [reply](#)

Re: Comment Question

Standard HTML is correct for URLs. You omitted the "http://" at the start of the URL. We've inserted it now.

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 11/26/2003 - 22:03 | [reply](#)

Re: harsh

You may well be right.

The thing is, the Carnival is supposed to be the Carnival of the *Vanities*, and people may be reluctant to post to it if they think the host is going to comment less than enthusiastically their work. But on the other hand, if the Carnival is just a lifeless list of links, with only bland content added by each host, it's that much less fun to read (and to host). We did discuss this issue and tried to find the right balance with a very small amount of added spice. Maybe we still didn't get it right.

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 11/26/2003 - 22:18 | [reply](#)

Thanks

OK - good to know your site requires that. I'll try to remember for next time. BTW, I did go ahead and post about [one of your minor digs](#).

Despite my comments on that particular bias, I think your style of hosting is quite interesting.

by [Admiral Quixote](#) on Wed, 11/26/2003 - 22:22 | [reply](#)

Commentary

The commentary on the links makes the Carnival worth reading, instead of just scrolling down and looking for post titles that are interesting.

It may deter some people from sending links, but this is Carnival of the Vanities, not The Carnival of Ego-Stroking, surely nobody in the blogosphere is REALLY trying to please everybody... and I don't see a problem with it... there was no ridicule, just some pointed and tongue-in-cheek comments.

Great read... future hosts should take pointers.

by a reader on Wed, 11/26/2003 - 23:50 | [reply](#)

Looks good

I didn't notice anything too bad here. Just enough to give some spice as mentioned. Great job, and it must have been a lot of work just reading all the submissions. Maybe I'm biased, though. I was amused by my blurb and am enjoying the mini avalanche of hits - is that an Instalanche once removed?

by [Solomon](#) on Thu, 11/27/2003 - 00:37 | [reply](#)

Has everyone lost their sense of humour?

I know our sense of humour is a bit English and dry but really, lighten up, people. As my fellow editor said, we were just trying to make it a bit more fun to put together and a bit more fun for the reader. And surely, allowing our biases to show in our comments gives more information about the posts than the titles alone would give.

--

Sarah Fitz-Claridge

<http://www.fitz-claridge.com/>

<http://www.settingtheworldtorights.com/>

by [Sarah Fitz-Claridge](#) on Thu, 11/27/2003 - 14:23 | [reply](#)

Remarks...

I don't think any of the comments here were too harsh. Very nice round-up as well. Thanks so much for hosting.

[Andrew Ian Dodge](#)

by a reader on Thu, 11/27/2003 - 17:09 | [reply](#)

Digs Deeper

Following Admiral Quixote's link, I read that Apple has only 3% of the personal computer market. Interestingly, our web server logs show 16% of identifiable hits come from Macs. Perhaps MS Windows owners are unwilling or unable (in either case quite

understandably) to actually use their computers as much.

by **Kevin** on Thu, 11/27/2003 - 19:47 | [reply](#)

Or, perhaps...

Or, perhaps since PC owners have so many other applications to choose from, they're more likely to be using their computers for something other than surfing the web.

Gil

by **Gil** on Thu, 11/27/2003 - 20:24 | [reply](#)

PC nonsense and “anti-Christian bigotry” (WTF?!)

Or, perhaps since PC owners have so many other applications to choose from, they're more likely to be using their computers for something other than surfing the web.

Personally, I'd rather spend my time actually doing something useful than spend it going through thousands of applications trying to find ONE that will actually not crash the system, work, and do what you need it to do, and not take days and days to learn. But if you like that kind of thing, obviously, stick to Windows. 8-)

Oh, and about us being “anti-Christian bigots”, Admiral Quixote -- you don't think that that is a teensy bit of an over-reaction to a little joke? Yes, we are **atheists**, but all we did was make a little joke, and one that was actually more about Christian music than Christianity per se (though what would be wrong with a little joke about that too?!). It is the same kind of joke one might make about, say, Country & Western music, if one dislikes that (as indeed, we do). Goodness! Whatever will we be accused of next?!

(Gil may be a PC type, but at least he has a good sense of humour. Of course being a PC type, he *needs* that. ;-)

--

Sarah Fitz-Claridge

<http://www.fitz-claridge.com/>

<http://www.takingchildrenseriously.com/>

by **Sarah Fitz-Claridge** on Fri, 11/28/2003 - 02:11 | [reply](#)

You People are Mean - take two

I tried posting this before and somehow my comments are no longer here. I'll try once again.

I agree with the first critic and disagree with the Admiral. Your attempts to spice things up failed and are indeed harsh. Not only are you mean, you are hypocrits. I noticed this is a group blog and

your posted links to your other sites at the top - without any

sarcastic comments.

Life is too short to waste time with crude writers - especially when there are so many decent blogs out there. The COV lets me see a lot of new blogs, but it also allows me to rule out revisiting hypocrits like you. Good-bye.

by a reader on Mon, 12/01/2003 - 18:39 | [reply](#)

logic is neat

if the policy is to criticise blogs the authors think are wrong, then not criticising their own stuff isn't hypocritical, it fits the policy perfectly.

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

by a reader on Tue, 12/02/2003 - 00:39 | [reply](#)

The Brownshirts Of Our Time

The Brownshirts of our Time:

Here's what's sad. Clearly, my speech touched hearts and minds; there was room for common ground and for civilized discourse. But not once the word "Palestine" was uttered, not when "Palestine" is seen as a symbol for every downtrodden group of color who are "resisting" the racist-imperialist American and Zionist Empires. Once the "Palestine" litmus test of political respectability was raised, everyone responded on cue, as if programmed and brainwashed. It immediately became a "white" versus "brown" thing, an "oppressed" versus an "oppressor" thing.

These are the Brownshirts of our time. The fact that they are women of color, womanists/feminists is all the more chilling and tragic. And unbelievable. And to me: Practically unbearable.

Yes, **something nasty** is happening. Something with countless precedents since time immemorial. But something else is happening too, something *without* precedent in human history. Though still very far from being a majority sentiment, there is nevertheless an unmistakable *large-scale, mainstream, gut-level solidarity with Jews* (and with Israel), especially in the United States. Consider **Charles, founder of LGF**, and **Frank, and Misha, and Elliot**, and **Alan**, and **countless others**. Could it be that this difference will make the difference? That the current brownshirts will be the last to have any significant effect on the world?

Thu, 11/20/2003 - 02:44 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

dan truly

consider me too a friend of the Jews.

a person ashamed for not getting it years ago, for letting the TV reports of attacks and suicide bombings blur by in the background, of feeling vaguely connected to the Palestinians because they of course were the "underdogs" and the "oppressed" ones.

no longer.

never again.

not on my watch.

by a reader on Thu, 11/20/2003 - 03:56 | [reply](#)

Me too

Turning the gut reaction into useful arguments, that's the thing. I find it hard.

Alice

<http://www.alicebachini.com/>

by a reader on Fri, 11/21/2003 - 17:32 | [reply](#)

umm

useful arguments against which coherent rival theories?

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sat, 11/22/2003 - 16:41 | [reply](#)

umm

Why do the rival theories have to be coherent?

It seems to me that they only have to be attractive and (potentially) popular to be a problem against which arguments could be useful.

Many people hold incoherent theories. Perhaps many of these people will not be swayed by argument, but I suspect many of them can be; if the argument is well-suited to them and they're ready for it.

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Sat, 11/22/2003 - 22:05 | [reply](#)

shrug

fine, arguments against which competitive rival theories? or which relevant rival theories? or which rival theories at all? since when are there any that we lacked arguments against? i know there's out-and-out Jews Are Evil, but we could already defeat that one in an argument no problem, and that's not the solution to it.

-- Elliot

by a reader on Mon, 11/24/2003 - 03:47 | [reply](#)

Israel V Jews

I reserve the right to think whatever I want of the Jewish religion, and the people who profess the Jewish faith, and still think Israel, the State, are a bunch of Nazis.

If they were putting up a wall around a bunch of Jews...

by a reader on Mon, 11/24/2003 - 16:17 | [reply](#)

A Wall Around A Bunch Of Jews

They *are* putting up a wall around a bunch of Jews.

They're trying to keep them from getting blown up.

How would *you* protect people from getting murdered by enemies who have long taken "credit" for just that as their strategy and goal?

Gil

by **Gil** on Mon, 11/24/2003 - 18:54 | [reply](#)

Thinking

I reserve the right to think whatever I want of the Jewish religion, and the people who profess the Jewish faith, and still think Israel, the State, are a bunch of Nazis.

If they were putting up a wall around a bunch of Jews...

You have the right to think whatever you want, but not to be free of the moral consequences of your position. As it stands now, you are standing with evil against good. That you are called on it is not a violation of your rights.

~Woty

<http://woty.davidsj.com>

by **Woty** on Tue, 11/25/2003 - 03:09 | [reply](#)

Richard Dawkins, George W. Bush, and Morality

The Guardian chose sixty people, mostly prominent British thinkers, to give President Bush the benefit of their advice on the occasion of his State Visit. There are some letters of welcome among their contributions, but their predominant tone is just as sneering, angry and empty as you might expect, given the venue. One of the most extreme is, predictably, from **Harold Pinter** (scroll down), who offers the "war criminal" President a glass of blood to wash down his cucumber sandwiches. But perhaps the most shocking was from the great evolution theorist Richard Dawkins. Readers of his books will be aware of his attention to detail and his nuanced arguments – in his own field. They will not find any of that in his **letter** to "Mr Bush":

Dear Mr Bush (I'd say President Bush if you had actually been elected),

Such things are often said in jest. But the rest of the letter makes it clear that Dawkins is serious. He really does believe that George W. Bush "stole" the Presidency – though he never states specifically which alleged actions by Bush constitute that theft. And that is our first clue that what we are seeing here is a **conspiracy theory**.

I've been asked to give advice to you on touching down in Britain. It is this. Go home. You aren't wanted here.

That is false. *The Guardian's* own opinion poll on that issue **reported** that in the real Britain, only 36% would have preferred President Bush not to visit, while 43% welcomed his visit.

You aren't wanted anywhere else either,

One pertinent counter-example to this is Iraq, where a **majority** are in favour of the Americans staying to finish the job. We suspect that Dawkins knows perfectly well that Britain is not the only country in which Bush would be welcome: there are many, but somehow he discounts them all. None of them count as 'anywhere', and people who respect President Bush don't count as 'anyone'. And that holds especially for the people of the United States, as we'll see in a moment.

but you may have been misinformed that Britain was the one place where you would be welcomed.

Once again, a mocking tone is used for what Dawkins intends as a

serious factual allegation – that President Bush is a stupid, inarticulate country bumpkin. That this claim is false is clear from overwhelming **evidence**, most recently the **testimony** of Dawkins' fellow campaigner against the liberation of Iraq, Menzies Campbell, the Liberal Democrat foreign affairs spokesman.

Wrong. Well, presumably your best pal Tony welcomes you.

It's not that they are "best pals". It's that they have **shared values**.

But that's about it. Your motorcades, your helicopters, your triggerhappy guards

There is no denying that the President uses motorcades and helicopters (though it is unusual for this to be levelled as a criticism: what is he supposed to use, camels?). But "triggerhappy guards"? What shred of factual substance is there in that allegation? Are US Presidential bodyguards known for opening fire on innocent people? Indeed, have they ever been known to fall short of the highest standards of professionalism? Calling them "triggerhappy" is a fantasy and a libel against honourable and highly competent people.

will try to protect you from the people of Britain, who would otherwise spoil the photo-ops for the folks back home.

Superficially, this is another joke: Dawkins is jocularly pretending that the Americans' concern for the President's safety is feigned, and that its real purpose is to suppress evidence that he is not welcome in Britain. But like all the jokes in this letter, it would not be relevant, and he would not have included it, if the underlying allegation were not intended seriously. And that allegation is, yet again, false. First of all, the President was, in fact, welcome. Second, the degree of totalitarian control that would be necessary to substitute a message different from what the media themselves think is true, is far beyond the real powers of the US Government (though not, of course, beyond the imaginary powers of imaginary conspirators engaging in unspecified skulduggery). Third, the precise location of the demonstrations (which was, of course, all that was at issue) is completely irrelevant to what "photo-ops" there will be for the "folks back home" to see – unless the protestors were allowed close enough to tear the President limb from limb.

But be in no doubt. We despise you here too.

Indeed there can be no doubt that Dawkins despises President Bush, and that he is not the only one. Yet his picture of a Bush-despising nation is yet another fantasy. If there is a grain of truth in it, it is that many in Britain take a rather condescending view of the President. As **Andrew Sullivan put it recently**: "I don't believe that the Brits are, as a whole, that hostile either to the war or to

Bush. The minority who hates him appeals to the ignorance of those

who condescend to him.”

After you and Jeb stole the election (by a margin smaller than the number of folks you executed in Texas)

Now, what is the relevance of that comparison? Perhaps it is a matter of symbolism: Bush won by a margin smaller than the number of people whom he ‘killed’ (by refusing to commute their sentences); and let us suppose that all those murderers would have voted for Gore, had they lived (and been released, and registered to vote in Florida). If, in addition, we forget that the people in question were executed for murder and not for their political opinions, then we discover a pleasant symmetry between Bush and the likes of Saddam Hussein, who also retained power by killing those who would otherwise vote against him.

However, if that is the intention, Dawkins himself spoils the symmetry by recognising the legitimacy of Saddam's rule while denying Bush's.

you were rightly written off as a one-term president: a fair advertisement for Drunks For Jesus but otherwise an idle nonentity; inarticulate, unintelligent, an ignorant hick. September 11 changed all that.

Dawkins doesn't intend this to mean that Bush is no longer an ignorant hick. But the accidental meaning is interesting. Many people do seem to have become wiser on that day. In others, it seems to have brought out the worst.

Not that you covered yourself with glory that day. You are said to admire Churchill. Can you imagine Churchill, at such a moment, panicking all around the country from airbase to airbase? Even nasty old Rummy bunkered down where he belonged.

Churchill was known for his **physical courage** which sometimes crossed the line into recklessness. But he was also known for his grasp of the big picture and for his sense of personal responsibility. So the idea that, as Prime Minister, he would have pointlessly risked his life – and risked conceding a major victory to the enemy – by staying at a location that might be under enemy fire is ludicrous and insulting. The parallel insult to Bush is meaningless and petty.

Now, finally, after many hints, we reach the mother lode of conspiracy theory:

Never mind, your puppeteers from the Project for the New American Century recognised the opportunity they had been waiting for.

Ah, the puppeteers. The **Project for a New American Century** is a recent favourite for the role of Conspirators, among people who **think that way**.

September 11 was your golden Pearl Harbor.

Yes, Conspirators traditionally rejoice in the shedding of innocent

blood, when it promotes their Sinister Agenda.

This was how you'd get elected in 2004 (not re-elected, elected).

Sigh. Yes, we got the joke the first two times. Except that it wasn't just a joke.

The secret means by which these terrifying Puppeteers rig elections, control the media, pull President Bush's strings and reap their ill-gotten rewards afterwards are not specified, but the overt means by which they get their Agenda implemented are:

You would announce a War on Terror. American troops would win. And you would be the victorious warlord, swaggering in a flight suit before a Mission Accomplished banner.

It worked in Afghanistan. But then those puppeteers moved on to their long-term project: Iraq. Never mind that you had to lie about weapons of mass destruction.

There is no evidence of any such lie.

Never mind that Iraq had not the smallest connection with 9/11.

What? Not even the smallest connection? What about **this**? Or **this**? Moreover, might not a regime that **rejoiced** at the destruction of 9/11, and had already **murdered hundreds of thousands**, be legitimately considered a **threat to the well-being of [its] people, the peace of [the] region, the security of the world**?

The good folks back home would never know the difference between Saddam and Osama.

Note the sweeping contempt for the American people that is inherent in this theory.

You would ride the paranoid patriotism aroused by 9/11 all the way into Iraq, and hand out oil and reconstruction contracts to Dick Cheney's boys.

This further conspiracy theory ('it's all about oil') is, as we have noted **before**, an unusually illogical one (see also **this link**). "*Dick Cheney's boys*"? What is the allegation here? That a company that Vice President Cheney once worked for will inflate the invoices for their reconstruction contracts and give a share of the markup to Cheney, who will then pass on a kickback to President Bush? But if they were that open to bribery, what difference would it make that Cheney once worked for the company in question?

Or is the idea that Cheney caused the puppet Bush to start a war as an act of pure friendship for his former colleagues, because they needed the work?

That escapade is now backfiring horribly, as many of us

said it would.

Many **hoped** it would. It **hasn't**.

No wonder young American travellers are sewing Canadian flags to their rucksacks. What we in Britain won't forgive is that you have dragged us down too.

The means by which Bush "dragged" Mr Blair into liberating Iraq is, again, unspecified, the evidence that any such dragging occurred, again, absent.

Go home.

He has gone home, with the praise of many Britons ringing in his ears.

And the letter is signed:

Richard Dawkins
Scientist

Scientists care about facts. In our comments above, we have addressed mainly the errors of fact throughout Dawkins' letter, even though the real issue is a moral one. We have chosen to do that because the two are connected. Dawkins was one of the great thinkers of the twentieth century. When someone of that calibre goes out of his way to publish a stream of factual falsehoods and muddled arguments – and with such passion too – it is not because he is stupid, and it is unlikely to be because he hasn't thought about the issue. It is probably because he is in the wrong about something.

Yet paradoxically, we believe, this wrongness is intimately bound up with an issue on which Dawkins is fundamentally in the right: his objection to religion, and in particular, to the religious conception of morality. Any attempt to base morality on God's alleged words or wishes is indeed invalid. For even if God exists, given human fallibility, we can only ever conclude that an idea is God's through a prior rational argument that it is good, never vice versa.

However, it does not follow from the fact that religious justifications for morality are fallacious, or from atheism itself, that there are no objective moral values, or that all values espoused by religious believers are wrong.

Indeed, the belief that all purportedly objective moral values are necessarily rooted in the supernatural is one which, ironically, Dawkins shares with President Bush and nearly all religious people. And many religious people, especially religious fanatics, share with Dawkins the view that the purportedly objective moral values of *other religions* are no more than myths and verbal tricks to frighten believers into submission to the priests of false gods.

An *atheist* who makes that mistake is therefore likely to be especially alienated from morality. Such a person must construct, and distort, their moral view around the non-objectivity of all moral

views, and their passion comes from the conviction that people who deem moral questions to be susceptible of true answers are the epitome of evil – indeed, the *only* evil. That fact that this stance is self-contradictory only serves to increase that passion.

And thence to the **dark logic of moral relativism** which is that a refusal to take sides between right and wrong always entails siding with wrong against right. And so, those who are committed to the proposition that Bush's morality is no better than that of Saddam or Bin Laden inevitably find their real passion directed against Bush.

Yet the truth is that despite what Bush and Dawkins both think, the morality behind US foreign policy is not actually derived from supposedly revealed knowledge. It comes from the mainstream of our centuries-old secular tradition, as represented, for instance, in the US Declaration of Independence, and in the Common-Law legal systems, of applying reason and criticism to the question "how ought we to live?", and judging practical issues of right and wrong against our evolving understanding of the objectively true answer to that question.

Tue, 11/25/2003 - 02:21 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

praise

Very nice.

- Elliot

by a reader on Tue, 11/25/2003 - 05:15 | [reply](#)

more praise

Well done. Sarah

by a reader on Tue, 11/25/2003 - 12:41 | [reply](#)

Awesome

Despite the pain of reading Richard Dawkins' letter. Awesome post.

Earlier this year I attended a public lecture given by him at the Oxford Union, promoting a freshly published essay collection. He made it clear that, on moral issues, he wanted to deny religious leaders the automatic right to media coverage. In the Q&A session, he was pressed on this point. Surely priests knew a thing or two about debating right and wrong? He defended his position, and stated that in such matters we should look first to the moral philosophers.

Well, I hope he looks over here at some point!

He's a great scientist, thinker and communicator. Looking back recently, I counted his book 'The Blind Watchmaker' as the beginning of my **real** education. He is now among the Great And The Good. So his letter deserves an uncompromising, detailed and

humane fisting. Looks like this is it.

by **Tom Robinson** on Tue, 11/25/2003 - 13:11 | [reply](#)

Awesome with knobs on

I agree with Tom's appraisal of this post.

I would just add that the "secular tradition" referred to in the last paragraph has been largely sustained by monotheism's gift of the metaphysical assumption that the moral world is real and knowable.

As regards Tom's report that Dawkins wants us to look to moral philosophers for guidance about matters of right and wrong, I wonder which philosophers Dawkins has in mind? Does he mean Karl Marx, who wrote in the Communist Manifesto:

Communism abolishes eternal truths, it abolishes all religion, and all morality, instead of constituting them on a new basis.

Or does he mean Nietzsche, who proclaimed that "God is dead" and that "Morality is the herd-instinct in the individual"? Or perhaps he is thinking of Peter Singer, a self-proclaimed moral rationalist whose reason has led him to conclude that chimpanzees have rights similar to those of human beings?

by **Kolya** on Tue, 11/25/2003 - 15:27 | [reply](#)

Why shouldn't chimpanzees be ...

Why shouldn't chimpanzees be granted rights similar to (if less comprehensive than) those of humans? And, for any given argument against such rights, why wouldn't a similar argument reach the conclusion that humans should have rights considerably less broad in scope than those of a putative superintelligent machine?

by **Rich** on Tue, 11/25/2003 - 19:48 | [reply](#)

monkeys

humans can learn anything.

monkeys can learn nothing not in their genes.

spot the difference.

-- Elliot

by a reader on Tue, 11/25/2003 - 20:50 | [reply](#)

There's a significant amount ...

There's a significant amount of evidence for the cultural

transmission of tool use in chimpanzees and orangutans in the wild, not to mention the evidence that chimpanzees in captivity can learn symbols that represent concepts. So that criterion isn't going to hold water, unless you argue that it's a matter of degree: in which case, why are humans necessarily on the "rights" rather than "no rights" side?

by **Rich** on Tue, 11/25/2003 - 21:03 | [reply](#)

more praise

Well done. David

by a reader on Tue, 11/25/2003 - 21:11 | [reply](#)

what evidence?

what evidence? and how does it prove they didn't have the ability inborn?

meanwhile, do you have an argument with the theory humans can learn anything? or with the theory chimps can't?

- Elliot

by a reader on Tue, 11/25/2003 - 21:13 | [reply](#)

A quick google turns up many,...

A quick google turns up many, many pages on cultural transmission in chimpanzees. Here's a review article:

<http://138.251.146.69/cultures3/articles/download/cultures.pdf>

Also, just to be different, here's a page on cultural transmission in orangutans:

<http://www.dukenews.duke.edu/news/newsrelease.asp?p=all&id=1286&catid=2>

The ability can't be inborn if it can spread from one individual to another after birth (unless you claim that the external stimulus is activating inborn skills, which seems highly unlikely to me).

I don't think either humans or chimps can learn "anything". For example, I don't think that either could learn to memorise trillion digit pseudo-random numbers.

by **Rich** on Tue, 11/25/2003 - 21:27 | [reply](#)

why is activation unlikely?

in your scheme, chimps construct from various patterns of photons hitting their eyes a whole behavioral script. they, in their brain,

have a behavioral script constructor of some sort. that's all very

complicated.

in my scheme, chimps have inborn various behaviors that depend on the contents of certain variables (memory locations), and also have inborn instructions to set the variables based on what they see, hear etc this is all very possible, isn't it?

as to big numbers, that's simply a hardware issue (limited memory). that has nothing to do with how our brains work. in principle, we could give our brains extra memory. then we could memorise big numbers.

chimps, given unlimited extra memory, still couldn't do philosophy.

by a reader on Tue, 11/25/2003 - 22:18 | [reply](#)

It's possible in some cases -...

It's possible in some cases - it's roughly comparable to the way humans learn grammars - but not if the diversity of possible behaviours is too high. For example, cultural transmission of words or methods for solving new problems would fall, I would imagine, outside the scope of possible inborn instructions.

How about the ability to visualise rotations of objects in five dimensions (as opposed to just deducing such properties)? (I think the evidence suggests that people can't even visualise general rotations of objects in three dimensions, although I don't have such evidence to hand.)

I agree that there are some things that humans can do that chimps can't even in principle learn to do, but do we really want to say that rights inhere only in entities that can do philosophy?

by [Rich](#) on Tue, 11/25/2003 - 22:32 | [reply](#)

cubes are enough for me

we can't visualise objects in 5 spacial dimensions because there aren't that many..?

i *do* want to say only entities that do philosophy have rights, yes. well, it's not just philosophy. but how can one suffer if one doesn't have wants? one can't..... moral entities are entities that make choices. making choices requires being able to consider the options and have values to choose by and such. monkeys don't do that.

look if we could build a metal robot to act like a monkey, and could build it only using the methods i say (inborn instructions and variables), you would agree the robot had no rights, yes? and if such a robot is possible, and could do what monkeys do, then it's a better explanation than deciding monkeys are semi-human. so now you need to point to something convincing to say my model is insufficient.

- Elliot

by a reader on Tue, 11/25/2003 - 23:21 | [reply](#)

Setting monkeys to rights?

Rich writes:

Why shouldn't chimpanzees be granted rights similar to (if less comprehensive than) those of humans?

To turn your question around, what quality do you believe entitles an entity to be granted rights?

by [Kolya](#) on Tue, 11/25/2003 - 23:31 | [reply](#)

The Dimming of Dawkins

That the thread descended (with modification!) from Dawkins to chimps somehow seems appropriate. As I read his letter's excerpts (along with the excellent fisking), this Bright man dimmed, dimmed, dimmed before my eyes. I better not hear about this kind of thing from Daniel Dennett, or I shall have to fall upon my copy of *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*.

An excellent posting.

Jerome du Bois

by [Jerome du Bois](#) on Wed, 11/26/2003 - 02:21 | [reply](#)

Humans...

have a hard time sticking to the point.

by a reader on Wed, 11/26/2003 - 02:33 | [reply](#)

So what is the "objectively true answer "

to the question "how ought we to live?"

And why is it collective? (You did use the word "we" not "I") Indeed, how can there be a collective answer?

Perhaps you have some intuitive idea of what the answer is, but unless you can answer it explicitly, why would you expect anyone else (e.g.:Mr. Dawkins) to agree with your view of morality?

by a reader on Wed, 11/26/2003 - 03:10 | [reply](#)

Objective Knowledge

The collective nature of the question "How ought we to live?" is no different from the collective nature of the question "What ought we to believe about the laws of nature?". In neither case does the legitimacy of the question depend on our prevailing ability to answer it explicitly.

But in both cases it is incoherent to argue that such questions are

meaningless, while at the same time maintaining that one or more of the proposed answers are actually false. Yet that is precisely Dawkins' position. He believes both that there is no objective morality, and that Bush's moral theories are actually wrong.

by [Kolya](#) on Wed, 11/26/2003 - 04:03 | [reply](#)

we

in this case, 'we' = 'people'

s e m a n t i c s

- Elliot

by a reader on Wed, 11/26/2003 - 04:44 | [reply](#)

Too many questions

Eliot said:

we can't visualise objects in 5 spacial dimensions
because there aren't that many..?

So you're revising your position to: humans can learn anything,
where by "anything" we mean "things that humans can learn"? ;)

i *do* want to say only entities that do philosophy have
rights, yes.

Then you'd deny rights to newborn babies, people with profound
learning disabilities, people in comas and so on?

so now you need to point to something convincing to say
my model is insufficient.

Would pointing to the lack of any such robot show that it's at least
too early to say whether such a model is sufficient?

by a reader on Wed, 11/26/2003 - 19:34 | [reply](#)

Pleading ignorance

Kolya said:

To turn your question around, what quality do you
believe entitles an entity to be granted rights?

I really don't know, and it's this lack of knowledge that leads me to
think that we should err on the side of inclusivity.

But I do think that rights are not an inherent property of the
universe, but come down to what can be defended, supported or
enforced by a sufficiently large subset of a society.

by a reader on Wed, 11/26/2003 - 19:38 | [reply](#)

Postscript

Those last two comments were by me. And I clearly meant Elliot.
It's been one of those days...

by **Rich** on Wed, 11/26/2003 - 20:17 | [reply](#)

anything and more

learn anything -- anything would only include physically possible things..?

learning disabilities and babies -- they **do** philosophy. comparing babies and animals well they don't compare. babies soon learn language. this doesn't happen all of a sudden. they've been human for a long time before they speak. and people with "learning disabilities" ummm they might be a little dense but that's no big deal.

comas -- well, they used to be human, and may be again. that counts for something. you shouldn't lose all rights if you put yourself in stasis for a while.

robot -- umm, pick a monkey behavior and give an argument why that sort of robot couldn't do it. if we can't find any such arguments, then we can tentatively say my model is sufficient.

- Elliot

by a reader on Wed, 11/26/2003 - 20:18 | [reply](#)

The limits of ignorance

Rich said:

I do think that rights are not an inherent property of the universe, but come down to what can be defended, supported or enforced by a sufficiently large subset of a society.

I note that the Koran declares monkeys to be **despicable**:

So when [the Jews] exceeded the limits of what they were prohibited, We said to them: "Be you monkeys, despised and rejected."

Does it not follow from your position that if militant Islam succeeds in its declared aim of conquering the world, apes *ought not* be granted rights, because such rights could not be "supported or enforced by a sufficiently large subset of a society"?

And what about the rights of women? If bin Laden has his way with the world, would it not follow that women *ought not* be granted rights, either?

by **Kolya** on Wed, 11/26/2003 - 22:46 | [reply](#)

Chimp Rights.

I don't know how Socrates did it. Having these discussions day in, day out.

I had a dorm neighbor advocate teaching Chimps how to make fire and setting them loose. At least they'd be able to fight for their rights.

They arm bears don't they?

by a reader on Wed, 11/26/2003 - 23:53 | [reply](#)

Arming Bears

They arm bears don't they?

No, but they bear arms.

David Schneider-Joseph

by [DavidSJ](#) on Thu, 11/27/2003 - 00:25 | [reply](#)

Dawkins

Is a cretin as his letter reveals.

by a reader on Thu, 11/27/2003 - 01:17 | [reply](#)

Flying President Bush to Omaha

Dawkins and others presuppose that Bush flying to Little Rock (I believe Barksdale is the current home of the Big Ugly Fat Fellow) and on to Omaha (command center of the Apocalypse) was cowardice.

From the beginning I thought it was making a less-than-subtle diplomatic point, and that point was to threaten nuclear war. At the time we did not know the magnitude of the attack or the conspiracy, and to the extent that we were threatened with "decapitation" (i.e. a possible coordinated attack against our leadership),

our side was going to 1) protect the leadership, and 2) remind our enemy whom they were dealing with.

A nuclear retaliation would have been of minimal value in dealing with the ragtag miscreants in Afghanistan. But just as the beat cop wears a gun in a holster in plain view, I somehow think that sending the President to Omaha was a polite reminder to our enemy of the powers presidents control.

by a reader on Thu, 11/27/2003 - 01:37 | [reply](#)

The Great Thinker

A world-reknown biologist, intellectual and professor at a leading

university writes:

After you and Jeb stole the election (by a margin smaller than the number of folks you executed in Texas)...

Ye gods! I hope he holds his students to higher standards of logic and accuracy. Will someone point out to the great thinker the glaring internal contradiction in this single sentence alone? By mocking the small margin of victory, he concedes there *was* a margin of victory. (By comparing the "margin" to the Death Row population, we can assume that he's thinking about voter margin and not the margin of consenting opinion in the Supreme Court). Well, which is it, Richie? A laughable margin of victory in the vote or a stolen election by judicial appointment?

We've all heard these canards about the Florida Recount as well as capital punishment in Texas 100 times before. But I've never seen someone claim the election was stolen, then concede it wasn't, and then work in the 'Bush the Executioner' meme all in one sentence. The combination of sheer intellectual torpor and ideological fervor is awe-inspiring.

by a reader on Thu, 11/27/2003 - 03:56 | [reply](#)

Dawkins ultimate sin..

was to disagree with the editor on his pet issue. So the editor responds: "I cast you into the pits of hell, ye Judas, Richard Dawkins." (failing that I will refer to you in the past tense). The editor's disciples sing his praise: "Very nice!" "Well done!" "Awesome!" "Awesome with knobs on!"

by a reader on Thu, 11/27/2003 - 19:04 | [reply](#)

Ultimate Sin?

What was the point of that "Dawkins ultimate sin.." comment?

If the reader thinks that Dawkins was right and the World was wrong, then he should make an argument to support it. I don't see one.

If he thinks that **The World** is wrong to criticize Dawkins strongly when they think he is wrong (and that the readers who agree are wrong to say so), then he's unclear on the concept of a weblog (and probably many others, as well).

Gil

by **Gil** on Thu, 11/27/2003 - 20:19 | [reply](#)

It's sad

It's sad to hear such nonsense from an important thinker. It's

simply sad....One thing I find funny about this epidemic of conspiracy theories is that more people seem to believe in them than not. Then *who* is being manipulated by these conspirators?

One point about animal rights.

How can you be sure they can't learn? based on what can you be certain they can't feel pain or suffer? And if they do, and they seem to do if you open your eyes, then denying them any rights is an immoral act, a crime. Simple.

An Iranian Student

by a reader on Fri, 11/28/2003 - 03:28 | [reply](#)

Kolya said: I note that th...

Kolya said:

I note that the Koran declares monkeys to be despicable

Well, perhaps it does in the original arabic, but that quote could just mean "Be you (monkeys) and (despised) and (rejected)", rather than saying that monkeys are necessarily despised and rejected.

Does it not follow from your position that if militant Islam succeeds in its declared aim of conquering the world, apes ought not be granted rights, because such rights could not be "supported or enforced by a sufficiently large subset of a society"?

No, but it does mean that they wouldn't be granted rights. What I was trying to say is that "ought" is a matter of opinion, and which of those opinions wins out in practice comes down to the ability of those opinions to influence the people with the power; or, in practice, the ability of people with those opinions to preserve and extend their power, which isn't quite the same thing in the short term and certainly not the same thing in the long run.

Perhaps what I ought to have said is that the truth value of abstract moral statements is perhaps unknowable and in any case almost irrelevant to the development of the world. So we can't know the truth value of "X is morally wrong", but only of "Alice believes X is morally wrong" or "Bob doesn't believe X is morally wrong".

- **Rich**, who often worries that his moral viewpoint is full of contradictions.

by **Rich** on Fri, 11/28/2003 - 13:25 | [reply](#)

Do you really believe this?

Rich said:

Perhaps what I ought to have said is that the truth value of abstract moral statements is perhaps unknowable and

in any case almost irrelevant to the development of the

world.

Do you believe that the truth value of the statement "slavery is wrong" is unknowable, and that it has been "almost irrelevant" to the development of the world?

To put this another way, do you believe that the statement "slavery is right" is morally just as valid, and that therefore the actual wrongness of slavery has played no causal role in its abolition?

by **Kolya** on Fri, 11/28/2003 - 14:08 | [reply](#)

Yes, actually I think I do

Kolya said:

Do you believe that the truth value of the statement "slavery is wrong" is unknowable, and that it has been "almost irrelevant" to the development of the world?

Yes, actually I think I do. I also think that I believe that slavery is wrong, even though I don't know that this is absolutely true; that an increasing number of people believe that slavery is wrong; that this has tended towards the abolition of slavery; and that this has increased the general felicity of the world.

What would it mean for "slavery is wrong" to be absolutely true? Where in the quarks and gluons and curved spacetime of the world is this wrongness encoded? *Nowhere!* All that there is are patterns of matter that encode *beliefs* about the relative rightness or wrongness of such statements, where beliefs are things that can be accessed using heterophenomenological methods, and which make a difference in the world by their consequences outside our skulls.

- **Rich**

by **Rich** on Fri, 11/28/2003 - 15:57 | [reply](#)

Re: Yes, actually I think I do

Rich said:

that an increasing number of people believe that slavery is wrong; that this has tended towards the abolition of slavery; and that this has increased the general felicity of the world.

The problem with that theory is this: if an increasing number of people had instead tended *against* the abolition of slavery, and it had therefore not been abolished but further entrenched, then you would still be saying that the "general felicity" had been increased by what had happened, and would still be offering this as an explanation of why it had. Therefore the fact that it 'increased the general felicity' is vacuous as an explanation of why people

converged on that opinion, for it means nothing other than that

people converged on that opinion.

By contrast, my explanation would run something like this (of course this is a highly telescoped summary, which suffices for present purposes): people were looking for the truth about whether slavery is right or wrong. They were doing this in the context of traditions of rational behaviour and interactions, which facilitate successful truth-seeking. They converged on similar opinions about slavery, because they were all converging on the objective truth about slavery, which is that it is wrong.

If one adopts this explanation, then one is faced with a challenge whenever people, especially in our truth-seeking society, seem to be converging on what one believes is a falsehood. Say - the popularity of appeasement in the inter-war years would be a good example. And this challenge is a good thing in three ways, all of which are unavailable to someone who denies that moral truths can be objective. First, it causes one to question the objective truth of one's own views: if there is no such thing, then the existence of truth-seeking people in large numbers converging on a different opinion is no reason to think about anything. Second, it makes it meaningful to say: they are all agreed on X, but X is still false. The inability of moral relativists to make sense of such a statement is an absolute disaster for their moral thinking - as I think Kolya was trying to point out. And third, it identifies the challenge that one is facing in regard to persuasion, in the case where one is right. For the only way to change the situation of the majority being wrong about something, is to persuade them that they are *in fact* wrong.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Fri, 11/28/2003 - 21:02 | [reply](#)

David said:They converged...

David said:

They converged on similar opinions about slavery, because they were all converging on the objective truth about slavery, which is that it is wrong.

I don't accept that they were converging on the objective truth about slavery. In fact, I think that by saying this you're falling into the very fallacy of which I have been accused. At most we can say that there are some particular arrangements of society and circumstances of history in which increasing numbers of people tend to believe that slavery is wrong. There are, for example, other circumstances of history and society in which, as you note, people converge on ideas about morality that we might find reprehensible, such as the tenets of National Socialism.

There is *no* objective means to determine which of the many sets of moral ideas on which people converge are objectively true and which are objectively false. At most we can say that such-and-such a set of moral ideas will have this or that as necessary consequences if sufficiently many people believe in them, for those sorts of statements are the sorts of things that are amenable to objective investigations. We can also say that this person or that

person would like or dislike those consequences. We can find theories (perhaps from evolutionary psychology) that are useful in explaining why people have differing predilections. But what we cannot do is deduce from these preferences or social developments anything whatsoever about the objective truth of the moral assertions.

(And, furthermore, the relative probabilities of all such convergences for human populations are highly contingent, which means any ideas of morality will be highly parochial when we take a wider view. For example, consider an intelligent species whose mode of reproduction necessarily involves the parasitisation of a host of another, equally intelligent, species and consequently the death of said host. Would it then be morally wrong for the first species to reproduce? How are we to balance this with our idea that killing conscious entities is in general wrong?)

Despite all this, I'm not a moral relativist. Instead, I have my own beliefs about what is right and what is wrong, and will argue in favour of these beliefs. My view is that regardless of the absolute truth or falsity of these beliefs (or, indeed, the meaninglessness of the very idea truth or falsity of them), they will tend to produce the sort of society in which I would like to live. And, for me, my beliefs and desires are very important, regardless of how utterly indifferent the greater cosmos might be to them.

- **Rich**, who thinks he should now immediately go to read "**How are Moral Assertions Connected with the World of Facts?**"

by **Rich** on Fri, 11/28/2003 - 21:42 | [reply](#)

How do you explain moral progress?

Rich said:

I believe ... the abolition of slavery ... has increased the general felicity of the world

Would you agree that the rule of law, political and religious toleration, representative democracy, and women's emancipation have also tended to increase the general felicity of the world?

Would you also agree that the promoters of the abolition of slavery and the other cause I mentioned have generally tended to argue for them on the grounds that these causes were *actually right*?

If these people were mistaken, if there is no moral truth towards which modern world has been evolving, how do you explain the amazing coincidence that most of changes brought about by these self-deluded moralists have, *by your own subjective standards*, "increased the general felicity of the world"?

by **Kolya** on Sat, 11/29/2003 - 15:18 | [reply](#)

More answers than questions

Kolya said:

Would you agree that the rule of law, political and religious toleration, representative democracy, and women's emancipation have also tended to increase the general felicity of the world?

Yes, I think that is undoubtedly the case.

Would you also agree that the promoters of the abolition of slavery and the other cause I mentioned have generally tended to argue for them on the grounds that these causes were actually right?

No, I would say that some of the promoters of those ideas have argued for them on the grounds that *they believe* that these causes were morally right. Others have argued for them on the grounds that they would naturally lead to consequences that would be beneficial to said promoters. Still others have argued that their consequences would be beneficial to society as a whole, and have believed that this is a good end.

If these people were mistaken, if there is no moral truth towards which modern world has been evolving, how do you explain the amazing coincidence that most of changes brought about by these self-deluded moralists have, by your own subjective standards, "increased the general felicity of the world"?

Because, as it says at the top of this very weblog, ideas have consequences. Even in the absence of any absolute moral truth towards which social and political evolution can be directed, people are still able to judge the likely consequences of their moral beliefs, and to judge that these might be beneficial in the various ways I've noted above. In still other cases, people have argued for things without such motivations, but using arguments or supporting causes that have been consistent with arguments or causes that on general grounds have been expected to cause such improvements or have been found in the past to produce such improvements.

"If people believe X, or if society is based around principle X, then Y will be a consequence" is a statement whose truth or falsity can be established (or at least investigated) using rational methods. "X is morally right" isn't such a statement. "If people want outcome Y and become convinced that X will result in such an outcome then they will tend to believe in X" is also a statement about the way things could be; "Wanting outcome Y is morally right" isn't.

Once again, you are very nearly approaching exactly that variant of the naturalistic fallacy into which you think I've fallen (but into which I *haven't*). If you think that the modern world necessarily approaches moral truths, how would you explain National Socialism or Communism? From my viewpoint these movements are rather easy to explain: people have at various times tended to be seriously mistaken about the likely outcomes of acting on their beliefs. The

ways in which we might avoid such horrible situations in the future are also rather obvious: by improving our methods to rationally deduce the likely outcomes of putting into action our beliefs. Hence, the scientific method, rationalism in general, the open society, the rule of law, widespread education etc. Regardless of the truth or falsity of moral assertions, these are things that will tend to lead to outcomes that are more nearly congruent with people's desires, and so, given that people have such desires and the faculty of rational insight, will be generally supported by most people who understand them.

- **Rich**, who hasn't forgotten the animal rights subthread; and who thinks he should write up a more coherent version of the ideas he's been putting forward here as an essay on his own weblog.

by **Rich** on Sun, 11/30/2003 - 19:58 | [reply](#)

Re: More answers than questions

Rich wrote:

No, I would say that some of the promoters of those ideas have argued for them on the grounds that they *believe* that these causes were morally right.

There's a difference, isn't there, between:

- Believe this on the grounds that I believe it; and
- Believe this on the grounds that it is true.

Are you really denying that any of the promoters of those causes ever argued in the second way?

Well, I think that the great majority of arguments for (and indeed against) those causes have been of the second form. A minority have been on grounds of practicality. Few, if any, have ever been, as you claim, of the first form. Arguments of the first form are of course logically nonsense.

by **David Deutsch** on Sun, 11/30/2003 - 21:23 | [reply](#)

Minor retraction

Yes, you are in fact right here, and I was much too sloppy in what I'd written. I am not denying that promoters of those causes ever argued in the second way. Well, actually I *did* deny that, but I didn't mean to and wouldn't have done if I'd been less tired. What I had intended to say was that people had advanced arguments for the truth of some moral positions because those people believed in those moral positions, but this (clearly) does not make those moral positions true or false.

But although the argument "believe this on the grounds that it is true" may be elaborated upon in superficially persuasive ways, it also, in the case of moral principles, reduces to a vacuous

argument: "this is true because it's true". It's similar to the

situation in mathematics: we might be able to prove that some theorem is true given some (consistent) set of axioms, but that says nothing at all about the truth of the axioms themselves. (Indeed, I don't really see what it might mean for a set of mathematical axioms to be true in any absolute sense.)

So far as I can tell, nobody in this discussion has yet presented any reasonable objective test for the truth or falsity of moral principles. The idea of the convergence of lots of people on a principle isn't one, for example, because you yourself have suggested that it's meaningful for lots of people to converge on a *false* position.

- **Rich**, who is concurrently arguing elsewhere that moral relativism is a bad idea, and now feels the way he did when he stumbled into an argument between people who thought science was the path to absolute truth and others who thought it was all socially constructed theories of no more validity than any others, and then argued against both sides.

by **Rich** on Sun, 11/30/2003 - 21:53 | [reply](#)

Objective vs absolute knowledge

In an earlier comment Rich said:

What would it mean for "slavery is wrong" to be absolutely true? Where in the quarks and gluons and curved spacetime of the world is this wrongness encoded? Nowhere! All that there is are patterns of matter that encode beliefs about the relative rightness or wrongness of such statements, where beliefs are things that can be accessed using heterophenomenological methods, and which make a difference in the world by their consequences outside our skulls.

In his last comment he said:

So far as I can tell, nobody in this discussion has yet presented any reasonable objective test for the truth or falsity of moral principles.

And he signed that comment:

Rich, who is concurrently arguing elsewhere that moral relativism is a bad idea, and now feels the way he did when he stumbled into an argument between people who thought science was the path to absolute truth and others who thought it was all socially constructed theories of no more validity than any others, and then argued against both sides.

It is notable that, whereas the critics of Dawkins' conception of morality have spoken of the possibility of *objective* moral knowledge, Rich criticises their stance in terms of the impossibility of *absolute* moral knowledge. The difference between the two is

that the term "absolute knowledge" implies certitude derived from

the application of some *criterion of truth or falsity*, whereas "objective knowledge" carries no such connotation.

I hold that knowledge of morality can be objective in exactly the same sense as can knowledge of physical reality. What I mean by this is that there exist *non-arbitrary explanations* of the phenomena in the respective domains, and that we can search for understanding of those phenomena in ways that tend to lead us closer towards the true explanations.

These objective explanations, whether of physics or morality, are not themselves "encoded" anywhere in the universe, until and unless we or some other sentient beings create them in the course of trying to understand reality. But the underlying realities, both physical and moral, are independent of the existence and state of mind of any sentient beings.

In both cases, the pursuit of seemingly subjective goals, namely seeking better explanations and better ways to live, tends to lead us towards truer knowledge. The nature of the relationship between reality and our knowledge of it, is philosophically somewhat problematic. But Rich has offered no argument why it is more problematic in the moral domain than in the physical domain.

It would be useful if Rich could clarify whether he believes in the possibility of objective knowledge in general, for instance with regard to the physical world, and, if so, in what way that belief is on a sounder philosophical footing than the belief in the possibility of objective moral knowledge.

by [Kolya](#) on Wed, 12/03/2003 - 10:56 | [reply](#)

Usefulness, not truth

Before I say anything, I'd like to say that I've been thoroughly enjoying this discussion.

Kolya said:

But Rich has offered no argument why it is more problematic in the moral domain than in the physical domain.

As might be clear from my article [Maps of Physics](#), I don't think that science is the search for truth. Instead, science is about inventing theories that make useful predictions about the behaviour of reality. I don't think that scientific theories form successive approximations to some kind of truth, but rather that their domains of applicability successively enlarge into they cover all of reality. (I will argue about this at greater length if anyone is interested.)

However, whereas in the scientific domain we have an "external" test of the usefulness of a theory - if it fails to predict the outcomes of experiments it must be discarded or at least be no longer considered a theory of universal applicability - we don't have such an "external" test of a moral theory. We might be able to fit moral theories into a larger framework (for example, by saying that in

application they tend to increase some utility function), but that doesn't remove the central problem (in this example, "Why is increasing the utility function good?").

The best we can do with moral theories, so far as I can tell, is to say that they tend to lead to the sorts of outcomes that we'd like or perhaps that they fit with the innate moral sentiments wired into our brains by natural selection. But this doesn't mean that they are *true*. At best, we might find that there are such moral sentiments that really are common to all people, and then invent moral theories that are consistent with those sentiments. But that still leaves the issue of extending those moral theories to other sentient beings, which perhaps have evolved quite radically different moral sentiments (as would have the putative aliens I described earlier in the thread).

(As an aside: when I say "true" or "false", I mean *absolutely* true or false, in the way that mathematical statements might be theorems or else falsehoods.)

- Rich

by Rich on Wed, 12/03/2003 - 13:15 | [reply](#)

That conclusion probably woul...

That conclusion probably would follow from such an argument. That seems perfectly fair to me: that conclusion does not invalidate the argument. Or to put it another way, I don't claim that such a putative superintelligent machine is bound to grant me the same rights it might grant its putative brethren.

-Marcus-

by a reader on Wed, 12/03/2003 - 13:34 | [reply](#)

The Basis for Science and for and Morality

Rich said

Instead, science is about inventing theories that make useful predictions about the behaviour of reality.

I would argue that this is a bit strong. IMHO, science is about modeling what we observe. There is no way to determine the inherent limitations of our observations. Indeed, idealism is a perfectly respectable philosophy for a physicist to have. Wheeler, for example, stated that the universe could not exist without a primitive act of registration.

Rich also said:

The best we can do with moral theories, so far as I can tell, is to say that they tend to lead to the sorts of outcomes that we'd like or perhaps that they fit with the innate moral sentiments wired into our brains by natural selection.

I differ here too. I think the best we can do is accept that morality

is inherently based on faith. It might be faith in God, it might be faith in the existence of self-evident truths. (e.g. We hold these truths to be self-evident....) But, any attempt to derive morality either through pure reasons or from observations ends up faltering.

I have no problem with the requirement of having to have faith. I'm not sure why others find this distressing.

Dan M.

by [Dan M.](#) on Wed, 12/03/2003 - 20:01 | [reply](#)

amusing

i believe rich, david, kolya and I all agree faith-based truth is no truth at all. we shouldn't believe something without a good reason.

- Elliot

by a reader on Wed, 12/03/2003 - 23:24 | [reply](#)

What is "a good reason."

Eliot wrote

I believe rich, david, kolya and I all agree faith-based truth is no truth at all. we shouldn't believe something without a good reason.

So, you are arguing that the truth of a statement is dependant on human beings having good reason to believe it? I've always thought of truth as something that is true whether we know enough to say anything about it or not. For example, either "Jesus was less than or equal to 5 feet in height" or "Jesus was over 5 feet in height" is a true statement. I really don't know which statement is true, but one is.

I'm also not sure what "a good reason" means. For at least some of the major actors in the Enlightenment, the self evident nature of the rights of man was good enough reason for them to base "their lives their fortunes and their sacred honor" on that principal. I'm guessing you differ with that, but I'm wondering what constitutes "a good reason" for you. If it is emperical proof, then there is a wealth of things we take for granted that we have no basis for accepting as true.

Dan M.

by [Dan M.](#) on Thu, 12/04/2003 - 00:31 | [reply](#)

Truth, not usefulness

Rich said:

I don't think that science is the search for truth. Instead, science is about inventing theories that make useful predictions about the behaviour of reality.

This view of science may be a true description of the mental attitude of the majority of scientists. But it is generally not true of those scientists who make fruitful theoretical discoveries. Whatever *Rich* may think they are doing, *they* think they are searching for the truth.

For instance, that is what Einstein thought he was doing when he created the theory of special relativity. The alternative explanation, namely that the problem Einstein was working on at the time was how to "make useful predictions about the behaviour of reality", is factually false. Einstein is known to have been a hard epistemic realist.

Rich can argue that Einstein's perception that he was seeking the truth, does not constitute an argument for the proposition that the truth exists. But I think it does suggest an opening for such an argument. The easiest way to explain this is with a thought experiment.

Consider two AI systems running rival algorithms for doing physics research:

- a non-realist algorithm that operates on past observational data searching for new mathematical formalisms that better fit the existing data; and
- a realist algorithm that seeks to create new, more powerful models of reality, which it tests against existing uncontentious models of reality, and also against past observational data.

I believe that the realist algorithm would outperform its non-realist rival by orders of magnitude. This conjecture is no more an argument for realism than are Einstein's beliefs on the subject. But it does show that the difference between epistemic realism and non-realism is in principle testable, and it creates an opening for a substantive argument for the realist stance. If the assumption of realism proved operationally necessary for the creation of successful new theories, epistemic realism would be corroborated, if for no other reason, by the application of Occam's razor.

by [Kolya](#) on Thu, 12/04/2003 - 01:16 | [reply](#)

ummmm i didn't say that

So, you are arguing that the truth of a statement is dependant on human beings having good reason to believe it?

no.

what we should believe is dependent on what we have good reason to believe. what's true isn't effected by whether we happen to be right about our beliefs or not.

as to what a good reason is. that's really another subject. all the matters for now is that we can argue over that, and change our

mind over that. there is one truth, but our search for truth must

not be monistic. there isn't a single golden road to the truth. our search, rather, gets to involve many approaches.

- Elliot

by a reader on Thu, 12/04/2003 - 02:49 | [reply](#)

the best way to do physics

Koyla wrote:

{quote}

For instance, that is what Einstein thought he was doing when he created the theory of special relativity. The alternative explanation, namely that the problem Einstein was working on at the time was how to "make useful predictions about the behaviour of reality", is factually false. Einstein is known to have been a hard epistemic realist.

{end quote}

I wouldn't argue with that, but Einstein can be considered the last of the great old physicists. He had strong disagreements with Bohr and the Copenhagen school concerning QM. He was convinced that there was a layer of real, local, hidden variables underlying QM.

At the time, it was a very reasonable position. But, with Bell and Wigner's work, supported by experimentation over the last 30 years, local realistic hidden theories of QM have been shown to be inconsistent with observations. If you look at the foundation of the progress in QM since the '20s, including things like renormalization, you see a tendency to ignore the question of realism. As Feynman said, "shut up and calculate."

So, while, on paper, your proposition sounds reasonable, the data from the last 75 years or so is inconsistent with that understanding.

Dan M.

by [Dan M.](#) on Thu, 12/04/2003 - 19:53 | [reply](#)

Realism does not reside in hidden variables

Dan said:

So, while, on paper, your proposition sounds reasonable, the data from the last 75 years or so is inconsistent with that understanding.

What's at issue here is the metaphysical proposition that scientific enquiry yields genuine knowledge of the objective world. Nothing that is discovered about the laws of *physics*, can logically have any bearing on whether that proposition is true.

Speaking of progress in quantum theory – which you mistakenly claim has refuted epistemic realism – I believe that many, if not most, of the workers who have created the subject of quantum

computation, have subscribed to the realist conception of the multiverse. This supports my earlier conjecture that the process of scientific discovery is highly dependent on scientists actually seeking the truth.

To paraphrase George Bernard Shaw, those who believe in the truth find it, those who don't make instrumental use of truths discovered by others.

by **Kolya** on Fri, 12/05/2003 - 02:09 | [reply](#)

Local realism is not the only realism

Dan M said:

At the time, it was a very reasonable position. But, with Bell and Wigner's work, supported by experimentation over the last 30 years, local realistic hidden theories of QM have been shown to be inconsistent with observations.

Yes, this is undoubtedly the case. However, I think you're conflating two positions if you're using this to argue against realism in general. That experimental results have violated the Bell inequality by quite a few standard deviations might show that no locally real theory can accurately describe nature, but this doesn't mean that there are *no* theories that can, and it certainly doesn't mean that there isn't some kind of reality "out there". A world running according to the principles of quantum mechanics (putting aside, for now, difficulties about what constitutes a "measurement") is just as real, by my standards, as a world running by classical mechanics.

- **Rich**, who'll have more to say about such matters later.

by **Rich** on Fri, 12/05/2003 - 21:37 | [reply](#)

read Fabric of Reality by David Deutsch

read The Fabric of Reality by David Deutsch

we **have** a local, realist interpretation of QM

or on the web see: <http://www.hedweb.com/manworld.htm>

- Elliot

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

by a reader on Fri, 12/05/2003 - 23:09 | [reply](#)

Terminological tangle

Elliot said:

we **have** a local, realist interpretation of QM

Yes, but we don't have a locally realist interpretation of QM. The

MWI is certainly a realist interpretation (in the sense that it is based on physical things rather than ideas or consciousness as fundamental entities). It's also, given a suitable Hamiltonian, a local interpretation (that is, one in which causal influences travel at the speed of light or slower). (Also, given the right Hamiltonian, we can make a quantum mechanical theory that cluster-decomposes, which means that the universe can be broken down into [not necessarily local] subsystems whose behaviours can be independently analysed.) However, the MWI is not a locally realist interpretation in the sense of Einstein, Podolsky and Rosen: that would require that the state of the system determines fully the results of any experiments on local sub-parts of the system.

Of course, it's very possible that I've misunderstood the meanings of various terms under consideration (whose definitions are a real mess, to the point at which one can subscribe to, for example, a locally realist idealism or whatever) or overlooked some aspect of the MWI.

- **Rich**

by **Rich** on Sat, 12/06/2003 - 11:27 | [reply](#)

Re: Terminological tangle

Rich's definition of 'local' contains the phrase:

the state of the system determines fully the results of any experiments

This is indeed a terminological tangle, but it is easily untangled:

If "determines ... the results of any experiments" is intended to imply that each experiment has exactly one outcome in reality, then it rules out many-universes interpretations and hence cannot be used to determine properties, such as locality or otherwise, of such interpretations.

If it isn't, then in (many-universes-)quantum theory the state of the system *does* fully determine the results of any experiments (and everything else that happens in reality), and therefore that theory qualifies as local and deterministic under the definition.

All of which is a long way of saying that quantum theory in the many-universes interpretation is local and deterministic, period. Which includes locally realistic, realistically local, globally realistic, realistically deterministic, deterministically realist, locally deterministic, deterministically local, and uncle Tom Cobley and all.

Now, enough of this mysticism. Richard Dawkins would be appalled. :)

by **David Deutsch** on Sat, 12/06/2003 - 23:08 | [reply](#)

David said: If "determines..."

David said:

If "determines ... the results of any experiments" is intended to imply that each experiment has exactly one outcome in reality, then it rules out many-universes interpretations and hence cannot be used to determine properties, such as locality or otherwise, of such interpretations.

Yes, indeed. It seems to me that in Einstein's arguments he's concerned with what we observe being uniquely determined by the state of the system, hence the efforts of those in agreement with him to make local hidden variable theories. But, as I've said, this isn't the only kind of realism and so Dan M, by using the disproof by experiment of all theories based on local hidden variables to dismiss *all* realistic interpretations of physics, is taking a step too far.

All of which is a long way of saying that quantum theory in the many-universes interpretation is local and deterministic, period. Which includes locally realistic, realistically local, globally realistic, realistically deterministic, deterministically realist, locally deterministic, deterministically local, and uncle Tom Cobby and all.

In his ***Incompleteness, Nonlocality and Realism***, Michael Redhead describes seven different types of locality :)

- **Rich**, who still hasn't read or digested all of that book it despite it having been on his shelf for many years.

by **Rich** on Sun, 12/07/2003 - 09:05 | [reply](#)

Representations

As a non-physicist (last time I did physics was when I was at school with Rich) I'd like to make a contribution to this discussion.

This discussion seems to hinge around the relationship between representations and "reality" and is negotiating the idea that there is a class of ideas that might work as a causal model outside of any specific context. That is what a universal realist position on morality implies.

You could take it at the level of "in a society characterised by the interaction of human organisms such and such rules always hold true." This in turn assumes that there are characteristics of human societies that are universally true, and that these characteristics can serve as the basis of specific linguistic formulations which will hold true for any of the possible (context dependent) interpretations of that rule in the super complex and changing circumstances that all societies find themselves in.

If this were true, then evidently it would mean that evolutionary fitness would be vastly increased were organisms already provided

with these rules internalised. Like a sort of "Universal moral

grammar."

But in the face of the imprecision which all formalisations imply due to the gross simplification they represent in relation to a complex and changing world, we have instead evolved with a flexible mind, sensitive to the contingencies of real life. It is sometimes called a conscience. To say that moral universals exist is to deny that morality is fundamentally a specific act of conscience, where an agent is put in the position of relating generalisations to their specific, unique and often surprising circumstances.

The specific, complex, unique and surprising quality of the real is the argument that is used to reassert a form of realism in the face of solipsistic or relativistic arguments (David Deutsch uses this position himself in *Fabric of Reality*, Roy Bhaskar gives a slightly less Sci-Fi treatment of this form of realism in "Reclaiming Reality.") : It is real because it is capable of surprising you, or in other words, of challenging your assumptions. But if this is a strong criteria for reality, then fixed formulations of moral universals clearly do not fit very well with it.

It is not that reality does not exist, it is that moral universals do not fit very well with it. To privilege the way one thinks and perceives above the complex and indeterminate character of reality leads to a fragmented and unrealistic perspective, of a reality which is far more continuous, complex and causally intermeshed than any of us can imagine, let alone measure.

This implies that all truths are context dependent to an extent, and are all contingent on acts of definition. To illustrate this point how do we draw the distinction, in any absolute universal way, between slavery and economic coercion? Many people exist in a situation of waged labour where physical force will be applied to them if they attempt to join a union. Others exist in a situation of bonded labour in order to pay off debts. Nations can also face such a predicament. At the same time slaves were often controlled by the threat of withholding of their livelihood as much as by physical force.

I am not saying there are no differences between these situations. But it is unhelpful to attempt to analyse them on the basis of one distinction. Also it is politically suspect. To focus solely on the moral universality of the statement "slavery is wrong" is a political act that glosses over the moral complexities and ambiguities of our current situation, where slavery may be marginal by our definitions, but is in substance (by which I broadly mean the concept of unacceptable levels of coercion and economic exploitation being a part of business as usual) very much alive and kicking by the criteria of many others.

A hubris of precision can be highly misleading, especially in social life.

by a reader on Sun, 12/07/2003 - 16:22 | [reply](#)

QM and Realism

Rich wrote

Yes, this is undoubtedly the case. However, I think you're conflating two positions if you're using this to argue against realism in general. That experimental results have violated the Bell inequality by quite a few standard deviations might show that no locally real theory can accurately describe nature, but this doesn't mean that there are no theories that can, and it certainly doesn't mean that there isn't some kind of reality "out there". A world running according to the principles of quantum mechanics (putting aside, for now, difficulties about what constitutes a "measurement") is just as real, by my standards, as a world running by classical mechanics.

First of all, the specific point that I was making in my post was that people who dropped or tabled the question of reconciling QM with realism made the most progress in physics. The work of the Copenhagen school, the development of QED and the standard model involved people who dropped, tabled, and tabled the question of realism, respectively.

With all due respect to those attempting to develop quantum computing, I wouldn't rank their work as nearly as critical in the development of physics as the development of QM, QED and the standard model. It is quite possible that some of them accept all the metaphysical implications of MWI, but I know that at least some folks regard it as a convenient fiction.

Having said that, let's go on to realism. I think that I have a stronger definition of realism than you do. If you look at the history of philosophy, you can see realists not just arguing that there are real things apart from us. They argue that the objects of our observations, such as books, tables, or chairs exist apart from us.

As I mentioned elsewhere, Kant has a philosophical view that occupies the middle ground between realism and idealism. Nonenon exists apart from our minds, but it is not the world we live in. Rather we live in the world of phenomenon that is the interface between nomenon and our minds.

Going back to the MWI and non-local "realistic" interpretations, let us see what they require for acceptance. Both require things that are both very real and unseen. In MWI, there is a rich infinity of universes created every attosecond. Indeed, there is a rich infinity of Dan's and Rich's created every attosecond. Both of us will do everything it is theoretically possible for us to do. Each of us will kill millions of people, torture children by the score, etc.

None of this is subject to empirical testing, of course. As far as I can tell, it's all there in the name of symmetry. While I tend to like symmetry as well as the next fellow, the improvable claims of MWI are a bit much for me to swallow in order to obtain this symmetry.

You also mentioned that there could be hidden non-locality. Certainly there could. But, as I'm sure you know, accepting real, hidden violations of well-verified theories has difficulties of its own.

With this type of latitude, I can develop a nifty argument for creationism, bring back the aether, and even develop a fine argument in support of "Last Thursdayism."

Realistic philosophical systems always argued against postulating the reality of things unseen and unseeable. Take for example, the extreme modern realism of Popper. Now, it appears that the only way to keep realism is to refer to the real existence of the unseeable, or what might yet be discovered that will overturn theories that have not been falsified in tens of thousands of experiments over a hundred years.

I'll be happy to admit that this does not falsify realism. But, I think it is very reasonable to point out how problematic it is for realistic interpretations of QM to require the reference to either unseen violations of well-verified theories, such as SR, or unseeable but very real things that strain credibility.

Dan M.

by **Dan M.** on Mon, 12/08/2003 - 21:13 | [reply](#)

Hello World! you!=world

1. None of the positions in the letter and in this article are unbiased.
2. This has to be the funniest political rant I read this year.
3. Fact - there are many people in **The World** who don't like Mr. Bush.
4. I'm one of them. (And I like FOXNEWS :) the funniest "news chanel")
5. Even slashdot sounds more unbiased than this article - witch sounds more like - Chewbaka Defense.

MOD: Funny +5!

by a reader on Wed, 01/14/2004 - 03:14 | [reply](#)

Re: Hello World! you!=world

a reader wrote (in summary):

You're biased.
funny, funny;
biased. (Biased.)

You seem to be saying that our article is biased in some comical way, though it's hard to tell without any specific assertion. The closest you come to being specific is to imply that we claim that no one in the World dislikes Mr Bush. However, we explicitly said the opposite. Several times. So you must have had something else in mind.

More importantly, though, you didn't mention, even indirectly, whether you think that anything we said in this article is false.

Is the article entirely true, but biased; or does it contain any false

assertion, in your opinion?

by **Editor** on Wed, 01/14/2004 - 08:49 | [reply](#)

Hello world! (2)

I must apologize for not signing my last message (Hello World! you!=world) as well for any mistakes I have made due to the fact that English is not my native language.

My name is Osman Ergean and my e-mail is: ergean@yaho.com (this is my signature).

First Dawkins is very emotional and out sync with his scientific activity, and makes a huge mistake signing his letter as Scientist. A letter that is more a personal rant in which he expresses his personal opinion. (I won't enter a debate about the view that even a scientific position is based on a personal view of the world.) That doesn't mean he is not a scientist anymore, and those who starting from this letter begin to reconsider his work should reconsider their "way of thinking".

Some of the issues that jumped in my view are:

- 1) Mr. Bush was elected in a debatable election! He is the president according to the constitution. Dawkins has a point, Bush election was in no way a clear and classical win. "The aristocracy" of Leo Strauss has shown its power. Any way Dawkins is walking a thin line here. The point about number of people killed is symbolic in other way, Europe is uneasy with death penalty, no political connection here, just plain ethics.
- 2) Churchill was not reckless, he played his cards well, just like the royal family did, and that was a strong message for all the people at that time. The point of Dawkins, I believe, was that Mr. Bush sent the wrong message - I don't know what the hell is going on, so I'll fly until I find out. Be calm, everything is OK!?!?!? (As someone above pointed Bush was rushed to a central command to send the world a message - Don't mess with us I have WMD. - I don't think that was an appropriate message: panicked and uninformed.)
- 3) The Iraq-9/11 connection, there is no official proof for that, and there is no sign of WMD from Iraq - even with the "convincing" Dick Cheney show-the-photos-show last year at UN. "Dick Cheney's boys" - well is hard not to believe that when all GSM contractors except the Americans were banned from auction (and the rules of the auction were changed several times).
- 4) At the end of the article is an attack on Dawkins religious beliefs, even when in his letter there is no such mention of religion, at least none I could find.

Thank you for your attention and Have a nice day!

by a reader on Wed, 01/14/2004 - 15:03 | [reply](#)

In defence of Dawkins

I think that Mr Deutsch is taking Dawkins' letter much too seriously,

and delving much too deeply into the hidden innuendoes (I'll illustrate this claim shortly).

Yes, Dawkins' tone is one of belittlement and contempt. As I see it, the letter was written to amuse and entertain like-minded people (such as Guardian readers) depressed and angry at what they see as the stupidity and corruption of the present US administration and the flawed election that brought it into being. I think Dawkins did a smashing job - as usual his attack is hilarious thanks to the combination of its 'fanatical' zeal and the eloquence of its expression. It put a smile on my face in these troubling times, and of course I knew not to take it all literally. I neither knew nor thought it relevant what proportion of people welcomed Bush's state visit. Myself and more-or-less everyone I know feel much the same as Dawkins. My suspicion (wholly unjustified by hard evidence, but I'll state it anyway) is that the vast majority of the 'intelligentsia' in this country think of Bush as being somewhere in between a shockingly ignorant statesman and a dangerous psychopath.

To give an example of your (Deutsch's) overliteralism, consider your response to Dawkins' reference to Bush's 'triggerhappy' guards. I think you have to give Dawkins some poetic license here.

(1) Everyone knows that the real US president's bodyguards could hardly be called 'triggerhappy'. The notion is absurd. Hence, we should look for a non-literal interpretation of Dawkins' remark.

(2) In the Iraq war, the number of 'friendly fire' incidents was needlessly high, and in particular a number of journalists were killed (including, incidentally, the Al Jazeera man Tariq Ayoub, who died after the Al Jazeera offices received a direct hit from an American rocket).

The president's own guards may not be triggerhappy, but they are affiliated with the US armed forces, who are.

Also, the comment about Bush's winning margin being smaller than the number of people executed in the state of Texas is basically a throwaway remark. I think it's silly to try to reconstruct a hidden argument where clearly none was intended, and especially if what you finally come up with (that Dawkins regarded Saddam as a more legitimate leader than Bush) is so clearly absurd. All Dawkins wanted to do here was remind us, in a memorable way, of (a) the narrowness of Bush's (nominal) victory and (b) the fact that under Bush's governorship, a relatively high number of people were executed. Once again, I think he succeeded.

by Neil Fitzgerald on Sat, 11/27/2004 - 02:30 | [reply](#)

You're right

I think Neil Fitzgerald is right.

Dawkins succeeded in amusing those like-minded people who care less about whether their ideas are true than that those false and contemptuous ideas get reinforced.

How rude to criticize such a noble effort!

Gil

by **Gil** on Sat, 11/27/2004 - 07:28 | [reply](#)

Gil: Nothing Dawkins says in

Gil: Nothing Dawkins says in the letter is outright false. Much of it is just common knowledge (e.g. that lies were told about weapons of mass destruction.)

Anyway why do you think a like-minded person would not care about whether their ideas are true? Do you think we think the way we do just because of short, incendiary pieces like that letter? Do you think if people like Dawkins stopped writing them then everyone would agree with you? Think again.

by a reader on Sat, 11/27/2004 - 13:11 | [reply](#)

Wrong

Reader,

No, many things Dawkins says are outright false. Read this post (again?) for some examples.

Well, Neil Fitzgerald seems to be an example of a like-minded person who didn't care much about whether the ideas were true.

But, in general, I admit that most people who agree with Dawkins would prefer to believe that their ideas were true. But, not so much that they are willing to subject those ideas to serious criticism. They seem to find it much more comfortable to shrug all criticisms off as unworthy of consideration, or coming from unworthy sources.

And, no, I think there will always be a subset of humanity that thinks the way Dawkins does whether he continues to write this drivel or not. Morality will always have to be learned, and many won't learn it. Many will prefer to act on envy and illusions of superiority, rather than adopting a proper respect for the autonomy of other individuals and their right to defend themselves and to be defended by surrogates.

I'm not saying that George W. Bush's strategy in Iraq is obviously correct; but I *am* saying that Dawkins' attitude towards Bush and his actions is pretty obviously wrong.

Gil

by **Gil** on Sat, 11/27/2004 - 20:41 | [reply](#)

Rereading what my first messa

Rereading what my first message, one might say I came to bury

Dawkins rather than praise him, but I'd like to explain something.

What I knew all along is that a sizeable chunk of the British population are so vehemently opposed to the policies of Bush's administration, and so deeply unimpressed by Bush as a man, that they despise him. This I know from reading many polls that have been carried out. Now, Dawkins claimed that Bush would be unwelcome if he came to Britain, which was supposedly shot down by pointing to a survey where 'only' 36% wanted him not to come. Bear in mind that it's a somewhat extreme opinion to have in the first place, to think that a statesman is so awful - that so little can be gained by negotiating with them - that you'd think it better that they cancelled their visit. Now suppose someone had invited you to a big party as the guest of honour, but then you found out that 'only' 36% of the other partygoers despised you. Surely you'd feel unwelcome, even if 43% of them felt OK with you being there.

Anyway, here's a more recent poll (I bet I could find you several more with enough patience) saying that 60% of British voters 'dislike' Bush.

60% of British voters 'dislike' Bush

(The increase from 36% to 60% is likely accounted for by Bush's growing unpopularity, and also the fact that one has to 'dislike' Bush quite a lot to want him to cancel state visits.)

In saying that Bush would be unwelcome in Britain, Dawkins was right, no matter how you spin it. It's not at all controversial.

This is what I meant when I said I thought the numbers in the poll you quoted were 'irrelevant'.

(I'm also the previous 'a reader' by the way.)

by Neil Fitzgerald on Sun, 11/28/2004 - 10:14 | [reply](#)

Not Wanted Here

Neil,

How many people would need to welcome Bush's visit for Dawkins' "You aren't wanted here" to qualify as false, in your opinion?

In my opinion, the number is 1. But 43% is far more than enough to qualify the statement as a falsehood.

If "You aren't wanted here" means "You aren't wanted here by me and other intellectual snobs and closed-minded people whom I know", then I suspect that everyone who has ever done anything controversial would qualify as "not wanted" in most places.

And, if that's the criterion, it's the statement "You aren't wanted here" that's irrelevant. Why bother saying it if it's always true? Why imply that it supports the case for why Bush should "Go Home"?

I think that if Dawkins were being reasonable, he would agree that

"You aren't wanted here" is false. It's true in the same sense that "You aren't the President of the United States" is true: not at all.

What I think he was trying to say was: "A lot of people with whom I identify hate you and don't want you here." Of course, I think he realizes that Bush doesn't and shouldn't care about that (certainly not enough to change his plans), so he expressed himself in a way that was strictly false; so that he could continue his confused rant.

Gil

by **Gil** on Mon, 11/29/2004 - 05:48 | [reply](#)

Twisted

Any statement ever made can be hideously misconstrued. You can defend Bush irrevocably, as I can Dawkins. However Bush can most discernably be bracketed as a poor politician and a paltry human being. Bush has diminished any bouncebackability the U.S could have ensued, appeasing that little place called 'the rest of the world' His and his countries reputation has been utterly and for the foreseeable future irreversibly destroyed. Dawkins for PM !

by Luke on Mon, 12/27/2004 - 14:07 | [reply](#)

Here Here!

Bush's 'religious principals' utterly contradict his actions. He gives a bad name to America, Christianity and freedom in general. Yes, freedom is worth fighting for but you do not have to spend billions of dollars on murdering and torturing the inhabitants of another country, which had nothing to do with what supposedly started the war in the first place.

You cannot honestly say that everything Dawkins said is false. You said that only 43% actually wanted Bush in Britain, that's still millions who didn't want him there; it's not exactly a small minority. Dawkins actually represents the view that many people in many countries have. Facts and figures don't mean a thing; he was exaggerating to express a point of view, a point of view that many will support.

by a reader on Mon, 02/28/2005 - 06:09 | [reply](#)

letter

I don't think Dawkin's letter was intended as a balanced critique of the Bush administration (several of these have already been spun-out to book length by numerous authors). Rather, I think it was an expression, however rhetorical, of Dawkin's contempt for the President. This is why it was written. This is why it was commissioned by the Guardian. Dawkin's is a great scientist and a master of the well-reasoned argument, but I wouldn't treat his

letter as his foray into political debate, but rather as his opinion of

Bush expressed.

I think Dubya is a cunt. Dawkins, apparently, thinks likewise.

Kieren.

by Kieren on Wed, 03/16/2005 - 19:49 | [reply](#)

Gil's slippery sophistry is w

Gil's slippery sophistry is worthy of a theologian! And as for the project of trying to unravel Dawkins' tirade with percentages and logical minutiae, it's like saying 'Objection, your honour!' in the middle of a fist-fight. You can't blame the man for his emotionality over this subject, and in fact, rather than impugning his intellectual credentials, I think his vehemence evinces a sensitivity to the horrors for which Bush is responsible that is felt by all thoughtful people. He was speaking for the people of Britain, most of whom are by now aware that our very lives have been put at risk by this avaricious monkey. Under the circumstances, I think we're entitled to sound a little shrill.

by Jamie on Fri, 06/10/2005 - 16:21 | [reply](#)

Slippery Sophistry?

It seems that Jamie thinks my points may have been technically valid, but miss the larger point (or something).

I find it fascinating that wanting to have a "fistfight" rather than a calm, reasoned, carefully worded discussion of various policy options is now the defense of the anti-war crowd's behavior.

And, while I think Dawkins is spectacularly wrong about Bush and the war, I didn't mean to impugn his intellectual credentials. I think he's brilliant when he's writing about subjects he understands. I certainly didn't resort to calling him a monkey (avaricious or otherwise).

Gil

by **Gil** on Fri, 06/10/2005 - 17:28 | [reply](#)

Sophistry and violence

We are with Gil in this matter. You will not find us, here at **The World**, defending any factually false statement that we or anyone else may make on the grounds that we feel strongly about it. That is the way to replace debate by violence.

Incidentally, in our piece we repeatedly noted that Dawkins was making some of his points in the form of jokes, not intended to be taken literally. In those cases we tried carefully to address his underlying point as well as his literal one.

by **Editor** on Fri, 06/10/2005 - 18:03 | [reply](#)

In response to 'Gil' and the Editor.

I sincerely apologise if I came across as in being in favour of violence over reasoned debate. Nothing could be further from my intention. I think that what causes people to react with emotion over this issue, even to the detriment of rational argument, is the patent reality that the 'War on Terror' (Bush's war) is an action consisting entirely of violence, with the minimum possible debate. It was clear on the very day that the towers went down in New York that some kind of reprisal would be inevitable, and that blood would be paid for blood. What wasn't clear was the sheer swiftness and scale of the violence to come.

Dawkins' statement is indeed factually flawed, and hysterical, and trivially paranoid to boot. But the tone should be noted, because it arises from a justified and widely shared sense of horror. Yes, there is a place for reasoned debate; but all the reasoned debate in the world withers in the face of violence backed by might. We have all seen the carnage with our own eyes, and I challenge anyone to recall the bloody images spewed out by the media coverage of the 'War on Terror' and to remain unmoved.

This forum's editor may be with Gil in this matter, but I remain with Dawkins. To quote Churchill, with whom Dawkins draws an unfavourable comparison to Bush: "Better jaw jaw jaw, than war war war." If Bush admired the old war-horse as much as he claimed, then perhaps the violence to which Dawkins responds might have been replaced by debate. Given that it is now clear that America was never under threat from Iraq in the first place, maybe the ineffectual 'debating society' (as Bush regards it) called the UN might still be debating, and certain streets in certain countries might not be quite so littered with corpses.

by Jamie on Sat, 06/11/2005 - 13:13 | [reply](#)

Entirely Of Violence

Jamie,

The War on Terror has brought about **these changes** in Afghanistan, and **these** in Iraq. Of course, these are just a small subset of the many improvements in the lives of the people who have been liberated (not in your name).

The war is not about paying for blood with blood. It's about preventing future bloodshed, by giving potential future terrorists better options. Unfortunately, this often requires fighting those who are violently opposing this improvement in the lives of people who deserve it. I hope you don't count yourself among their supporters.

And, I really don't think you want to start comparing who does the most corpse littering. Certainly of innocents (which should be a consideration).

Gil

by **Gil** on Sat, 06/11/2005 - 22:31 | [reply](#)

Jamie, Are you aware there

Jamie,

Are you aware there are people who feel strongly that the war is right, and that you are rejecting discussion with these people on the grounds that *you feel strongly* that they are violent?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 07/05/2005 - 22:44 | [reply](#)

Response to Elliot

On the contrary, my grounds for rejecting discussion with the people you mention are that the war IS HAPPENING, regardless of public opinion within the countries whose troops are involved, and I am enough of a pragmatist to recognise the intractability, not to mention the futility, of the debate: wealth and power will do what they must to protect their own interests. On this very forum I have heard more noble and reasoned justifications for the war than were even thought of by those who perpetrate it. That is the point.

by Jamie on Sat, 07/30/2005 - 14:35 | [reply](#)

Oh, incidentally...

... I never suggested that those who support the war are themselves violent, merely that, as I would think was patently obvious even to an obfuscating sophist, the war itself is a monstrous violence, one which has snuffed more innocent lives than any 'campaign of terror'. Why must you people ignore this fact? This is THE fact that motivates highly reasonable people, such as Dawkins, to make the kind of rash comments supposedly beins 'fisked' on this forum.

by Jamie on Sat, 07/30/2005 - 14:52 | [reply](#)

Incidentally

the war itself [...] has snuffed more innocent lives than any 'campaign of terror'

So the victims of the Taliban and of Saddam's regime were not in terror?

When Molly Ivins made a similar remark, she eventually realised that she owed those victims an apology and [ate crow](#). Good for her.

by **Editor** on Sat, 07/30/2005 - 15:05 | [reply](#)

Yes, it seems Molly Ivins was

Yes, it seems Molly Ivins was very mistaken in her claim that the casualties of the current war out-weighed those of Saddam Hussein's regime. They don't even come close. However, such was not my claim: the comparison I drew was between the death toll inflicted on innocent Afghanis and Iraqis by 'the Allies' in the current war, and that inflicted on western nations by Al Quaida, with whom said innocents had no connection whatever.

The victims of Hussein's regime and of the Taliban were indeed 'in terror' before the despots were deposed, but I don't recall that being used as a justification for the war during the build-up to it. What I remember was talk of Terror, with a capital 'T'; that conflated monster of hocus and shadows conjured up by Bush and his crew to get as many nice, safe, good ol' white folks as scared as possible in an attempt to get them to back his war. Any and all considerations regarding Iraqis and Afghanis became apparent only AFTER the show was underway.

As I say, you lot are far more sophisticated apologists for the Monkey than any he has ever had in his own employ.

by jamie on Sat, 08/13/2005 - 16:08 | [reply](#)

we aren't monkeys. are you wheat?

Arguments such as "don't attack if you will lose more soldiers than the enemy would murder if you didn't attack" and similar have a critical flaw. they fail to take into account that the situation after each of the actions is different. you count the dead bodies. but I count the living, and what sort of life they want to have, and what situation they want to live in.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 08/13/2005 - 17:07 | [reply](#)

Re: I don't recall that being used

The victims of Hussein's regime and of the Taliban were indeed 'in terror' before the despots were deposed, but I don't recall that being used as a justification for the war during the build-up to it. [...] Any and all considerations regarding Iraqis and Afghanis became apparent only AFTER the show was underway

We are flattered to be compared favourably with President Bush and his 'apologists', but your recollections are mistaken.

President Bush on October 7 2002:

The Iraqi regime has violated all of those obligations. It possesses and produces chemical and biological weapons. It is seeking nuclear weapons. **It has given shelter and support to terrorism, and practices**

terror against its own people. The entire world has witnessed Iraq's eleven-year history of defiance, deception and bad faith. [Our emphasis.]

It would be easy to provide countless further counter-examples to your erroneous recollection. However, it might be more edifying for all concerned if we challenge *you* to find even a single example of a speech by President Bush, listing the justifications for the liberation of Iraq prior to the event, in which the harm inflicted by the Saddam regime on non-Americans, including Iraqis, did not appear among those justifications.

by [Editor](#) on Sat, 08/13/2005 - 18:12 | [reply](#)

justification and legality

As if I believed that the omission of humanitarian concerns as a justification for war in one of Bush's speeches would prove that it was not the overriding reason for starting the war! Of course it wouldn't, and neither does it's being mentioned prove that it WAS the overriding reason. I guess such lip-service didn't feature strongly in my recollections mainly because at the time I was paying greater attention to Bush's attempts at finding a legal basis for war, as were most of us in Europe.

Humanitarian intervention might have been given as a legal justification for war in 1988, when the Iraqi regime was carrying out its Anfal campaign against the Kurds; at that time, though, the Reagan administration— comprising many of the same officials who would later lead the invasion of Iraq—was supporting Saddam in his war against Iran and kept largely silent. The second major killing campaign of the Saddam regime came in 1991, when Iraqi troops attacked Shiites in the south who had rebelled against the regime in the wake of Saddam's defeat in the Gulf War; the first Bush administration, despite President George H.W. Bush's urging Iraqis to "rise up against the dictator, Saddam Hussein," and despite the presence of hundreds of thousands of American troops within miles of the killing, stood by and did nothing. See Ken Roth, "War in Iraq: Not a Humanitarian Intervention" (Human Rights Watch, January 2004).

by [Jamie Whyte](#) on Fri, 08/19/2005 - 13:59 | [reply](#)

Recollection

I guess such lip-service didn't feature strongly in my recollections

Previously you said it did not figure at all, and you categorically denied that such lip service had taken place.

Did this lip service feature in your recollection or not?

Also, recollections aside, it's not clear what you are now saying about whether the lip service actually took place or not. You previously said:

Any and all considerations regarding Iraqis and Afghanis became apparent only AFTER the show was underway

In your present opinion, is that statement true or false?

by **Editor** on Sat, 08/20/2005 - 11:19 | [reply](#)

Re: Recollection

Just out of interest, Jamie, prior to looking up the speeches in the context of this thread, had you heard or read any of them? Or were you relying on extracts presented by the media?

by **Editor** on Fri, 09/23/2005 - 00:58 | [reply](#)

re: blah blah blah

It's typical of a person who can justify in their own mind, to the extent that they can sleep easy, the boiling madness of war that they will focus on picking holes in an argument, rather than trying to come to terms with the gist it. This is why I call you 'sophists'. You deliberately miss the point, drawing a discussion away from said point until it is no longer visible. This is why I accuse you of 'obfuscation'.

I know you will take this as a cop-out, and really it is. I can no longer be bothered to argue with intelligent idiots about the justification for the ongoing war in Iraq when I know the argument is intractable. You can no more grow a conscience than I can ignore mine.

So I'll leave you with the last word...

by Jamie on Wed, 11/23/2005 - 16:57 | [reply](#)

Can I have the last word(s)?

Can I have the last word(s)?

Long story short: Everyone's Wrong. Or, for the glass-half-full amongst y'all, Everyone's Right.

I remember when the Lancet report came out with the 100,000 figure, and Pro War peeps started clutching desperately at(the previously rubbished) Iraq Body Count.

Given Hussein's Reign Of Terror was aided and abbetted by the US*, could we not divide the victims? How does that work out then?

*And a number of other countries, of course. We'd need a breakdown of Who supplied What, and then What was used to kill How Many.

Oh, and morality's an illusion, a bit like God. We've managed to off God, now it's just morality and free will. Though if we get rid of the latter, the former goes anyway.

by Tumbleweed Pete on Wed, 02/15/2006 - 03:14 | [reply](#)

Re: Can I have the last word(s)?

Although US policy towards dictators, including Saddam, was cynical and immoral for many years, the idea that the US 'aided and abetted' Saddam is hyperbolic to the point of fantasy.

we'd need a breakdown of Who supplied What

Here it is. What do you need it for?

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 02/15/2006 - 03:44 | [reply](#)

Well

I needed the breakdown in regards to earlier comments about weighing up numbers killed.

If x wants to kill y, and I gave x a gun, that would be aiding and abetting.

by Tumbleweed Pete on Wed, 02/15/2006 - 10:05 | [reply](#)

And another thing...

"cynical and immoral"

Enlightened self-interest, shurely?

by Tumbleweed Pete on Wed, 02/15/2006 - 13:05 | [reply](#)

Re: Well

Doesn't that depend on whether he already had a gun or access to a gun? Increasing his gun selection a little might not be important.

Doesn't whether it was bad to do depend on what we could reasonably have expected him to do with the gun, and whether we were negligent, or not, in deciding whether he was OK to sell to?

-- Elliot Temple

Now Blogging Again

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 02/16/2006 - 05:04 | [reply](#)

Re: Well, I needed the breakdown...

[For] *weighing up numbers killed.*

Exactly. And you said you needed to weigh those numbers up in order to "divide the victims" among Iraq's various arms suppliers. What were your results?

by [Editor](#) on Thu, 02/16/2006 - 23:23 | [reply](#)

"Doesn't that depend on wheth

"Doesn't that depend on whether he already had a gun or access to a gun?"

Not really, no.

"Doesn't whether it was bad to do depend on what we could reasonably have expected him to do with the gun, and whether we were negligent, or not, in deciding whether he was OK to sell to?"

Not where we know X wants to kill Y. What do you think a brutal dictator wants weapons for? Shooting supersized tin cans off of his palace?

"Exactly. And you said you needed to weigh those numbers up in order to "divide the victims" among Iraq's various arms suppliers. What were your results?"

The graph was next to useless. Not that I don't appreciate the effort. I'm still hunting around for the relevant information.

I'll be sure to let y'all know my results, though.

by Tumbleweed Pete on Fri, 02/17/2006 - 14:48 | [reply](#)

Dawkins and Pinter

D and P are both the worst kind of champagne Socialist: claiming to be 'Socialists', they are rich, living a life of luxury in some of the most expensive districts in their respective cities, patronising ('You aren't wanted here' - as though I have given this jerk permission to speak for me, any more than the real working classes have given that other unpleasant prat Pinter permission to speak for them), sneering and lying.

On this evidence, Dawkins is no more a scientist than Dewdney is (the idiot mathematician who goes around screeching that 9/11 was a project of the CIA, the Mossad and little green men from Pluto).

by [Yoni](#) on Sun, 09/10/2006 - 23:31 | [reply](#)

Faulty memory - can pills help this lad?

"The victims of Hussein's regime and of the Taliban were indeed 'in terror' before the despots were deposed, but I don't recall that being used as a justification for the war during the build-up to it"

Then you need to take memory pills. It was used, most emphatically and repeatedly.

Referring to Bush as a 'monkey' is a reflection on your infantile mentality, not on his.

by [Yoni](#) on Sun, 09/10/2006 - 23:36 | [reply](#)

This is a ridiculous statemen

This is a ridiculous statement. I might be able to spot the difference

if you could write it in legible English. Your point is therefore that humans have a greater capacity for reason and learning? Why should this be held as the marker for having rights? What about vegetated humans who will never have the capacity to gain greater intelligence than a pig or dog? should they have their rights limited also? I would guess your answer to "NO". and if it is your are simply exhauling speciesism.....and that is a poor argument!

by a reader on Wed, 03/07/2007 - 13:22 | [reply](#)

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Great Posts That Weren't In The Carnival

Bill Whittle is back – with a great new essay, **New Math**, that no one knows about yet. Quick, go and read it!

You must read **E. Nough's comments** on a harrowing 'honour killing'.

Oliver Kamm **skewers** a particularly nasty Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament. He also **has some fun** with a GLC City Hall official.

Elegance Against Ignorance **takes down George Soros**. (Spot on – but a shorter fisting would have been more elegant...)

Spoons rages, too concisely, about the US decision to cut loan guarantees to Israel by \$290 million.

Cox and Forkum's latest cartoon, and their accompanying article, rage against Communist China's recent appalling threats of war against Taiwan.

And **Allah picks his favourite headline of the year**. Peace be upon him. As for the newspaper concerned, we're with **Alan** on this one.

Fri, 11/28/2003 - 21:59 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

New Math

The Math in new math is unfortunately tragically wrong.

For starters the author includes the figures for the IranIraq war in his calculation of the number of people not killed this year, which is nonsense as that war finished years ago.

Figures for those killed as a result of this war would also have to include the higher murder rate among the civilian population caused by the break down of law and order.

Also the 300,000 of his own people Saddam killed through internal repression were not evenly distributed throughout the 30 years, they cluster around the beginning of that time and the early 90's. Also there is some evidence that the number killed through internal repression went up just before the war started and during the war it's self.

While I approve of the war and I believe it will save many lives in

the medium to long term, the calculation is not so simple, nor so positive, as Proteus makes out.

by a reader on Sun, 11/30/2003 - 12:30 | [reply](#)

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What Are They Trying To Do?

Here's a question, and a partial answer, inspired by several recent posts at [Solomonias](#). But first, the facts:

- Iran has been pursuing a **secret nuclear weapons programme** in violation of its international obligations for eighteen years. The UN, last to discover this as usual, has decided to "censure" Iran but to **take no action**.
- Israel has been **building a fence** to defend its citizens from murder. The United States, because it considers this **unnecessary**, has **punished Israel** by withdrawing an unspecified amount in loan guarantees.
- Jewish members of an organisation based in Israel have the blood of 300 Palestinian babies on their hands. Yes, **literally**. (Well, on their surgical gloves, anyway.) Plus some Jordanian babies and now one Iraqi baby as well.

Now the question: *What are they all trying to do?*

- The Iranians are **gearing up to instigate a Second Holocaust**.

The UN cannot bring itself to oppose this, even in the **mildest possible way**. Whether the Ayatollahs think they can literally achieve it or not, achieving the status of being able to threaten it realistically is extremely important to them. More important than trade. More important than good relations with the Europeans and Americans. Much more important than their actual national security or, of course, the **safety** or material well-being of their people.

- The Israelis are **trying to live rightly and to be happy**.
- The Americans? Trying half-heartedly to prevent both.

While saving the world.

Sat, 11/29/2003 - 21:10 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Room For Improvement

Mr Dean of the Democratic Party may sometimes be unable to compose coherent sentences but, as Andrew Sullivan points out, that is as nothing compared with his substantive unsuitability for Presidential office.

Frank of IMAO may have the worst spelling in the blogosphere. But that is utterly unimportant given his subtle grasp of his subject and, of course, his gift of expressing ideas humorously and concisely:

Think about it: how many good ideas are there about politics and social interaction? It's finite. But how many utterly idiotic ideas are there? Infinitely many. So if someone comes up with a new idea, i.e., draws from the infinity of ideas out there, what's the chance of its being one of the finite number of good ideas? Nearly zero. Thus, by being a conservative and just opposing any new idea out there, you'll be right 99% of the time or more. Just do the math.

Here's the rub, though: if a "liberal" idea actually survives the rigors of conservative scrutiny (the beatings, the shootings, etc.), it, being an accepted idea, is now a conservative one. Yes, the dark secret of conservatism is that once, long ago, all their ideas were liberal. But, by being a conservative, not only do you get to be right almost all the time by opposing new ideas, you also automatically gain ownership of all the liberal ideas that are worth keeping. As the scientific community would characterize that, it is totally sweet!

We are not Conservatives. But the above [here, and in the passage below, we could not resist correcting the spelling and other errors] is a very good summary of why we have **a lot in common** with them. Frank also goes on, in his jocular way, to endorse the fundamental error of Conservatism:

Inevitably, as time has passed, the finite number of good ideas out there have been discovered, and thus there is less and less chance that any liberal will have anything worth saying. Ergo, the ideas they do propose now are

increasingly idiotic. And, now facing only the weapons of derision, they survive by sealing themselves off from outside input, huddling together in small enclaves protected from the light of reason. They're like cockroaches, hiding in the walls, and occasionally emerging from the shadows to wreak havoc.

That there is, and always will be, infinite room for improvement, is one of the great liberal truths.

Tue, 12/02/2003 - 22:49 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

But surely if liberals genera...

But surely if liberals generate new ideas that conservatives adopt once they've been scrutinised, then liberals are creative new-ideas inventors that conservatives couldn't do without?

Seems a bit mean to steal ideas from the other side while constantly dissing them. Isn't that just the kind of badness liberals observe and despise in conservatives? "Keep homosexuality criminal! Down with liberals and their evil ideas!" (20 years of gay rights campaigning later) "Vote for us, gay people!" Ahem.

Alice Bachini <http://www.alicebachini.com/>

by a reader on Wed, 12/03/2003 - 23:13 | [reply](#)

"stealing" ideas

the idea of stealing ideas about how to live is, aside from exceptional circumstances (copying and selling someone's book on the subject,say) an absurd notion. we should be happy if people like our ideas enough to adopt them. we should not be resentful that they didn't always agree with us; rather we should be glad they've seen the light now.

all stealing really means in this context is being persuaded. which is good.

- Elliot

by a reader on Wed, 12/03/2003 - 23:20 | [reply](#)

Thomas Sowell...

...said (almost exactly) the same thing in his book "A Conflict of Visions". It's a gem that sheds much light on the never ending struggle between left and right.

by a reader on Thu, 12/04/2003 - 04:30 | [reply](#)

Appeasement Doublethink

A British prison officer **has been fired** for making a remark, in the aftermath of 9-11, which indirectly implied that he had something against Osama Bin Laden. Why is that grounds for dismissal? Because (the argument goes) if any Muslims had heard the remark, they might have been offended.

But why should they have been?

The officer is a former Coldstream Guardsman with a 21-year unblemished record in the Prison Service.

The Norwich hearing was told that on Nov 15, 2001, he threw some keys into a metal chute at the prison gatehouse. When someone said it sounded as if he had thrown them so hard that they were going through the tray at the bottom of the chute, Mr Rose said: "There's a photo of Osama bin Laden there."

Peter McKinnon, another prison officer, told him to be quiet because two Asian women wearing headscarves and an Asian man were at the window of the gatehouse.

The investigation never discovered whether the visitors heard the comment.

The very idea that hostility towards an enemy who has declared war on our civilization should be taboo, is the epitome of appeasement. It is the idea that threats can be avoided by systematically giving those who are making them the impression that we have no criticism of them, and that nothing that they might do would result in a violent response from us. This is not only false, it is the very thing that invites threats and, eventually, war.

The doublethink is located at the following question: *do Muslims, broadly speaking, sympathise with Osama Bin Laden or not?* And indeed, do they identify with him so profoundly that even overhearing a casual and indirect expression of opposition to him would cause them unacceptable offence? The authorities can answer neither yes nor no. If yes, they would be disparaging an 'ethnic' group – which is bigotry. If no, then their own assumption that the visitors, purely because they are Muslims, might be offended by an insult to a mass-murderer, would itself be a stunning piece of bigotry. And either way, their behaviour towards

officer Rose would be revealed as the outrageous injustice that it is.

This combination of doublethink and appeasement is shocking because it is not an aberration. It is a major factor in present-day Western political opinion. And it is dangerous. It concedes the enemy's fundamental ideological premise: that the war is caused by the West's lack of appeasement of anti-Western violence from the Arab world and other Islamic societies. So long as that remains so, we cannot win the war. The danger is not that we might lose it. It is that the longer the war takes, the greater is the chance that weapons of mass destruction will be successfully used against us. As soon as they are, the world will become a **nasty place** for a while.

The authorities should reinstate officer Rose. Sack those who sacked him. Locate the Muslims concerned and apologise to them, and to the Muslim community in Britain, for having tarred them with the Bin Laden brush.

Muslim organisations should demand that all of the above be done.

The government should make a declaration that expressions of opposition to the enemy in the current war will never again be grounds for disciplinary proceedings against civil servants.

The rest of us should be frightened and angry if any of that fails to happen.

Wed, 12/03/2003 - 20:27 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Not Appeasement, Just Insane "Political Correctness"

I have to disagree on this one. If this had happened at the UN or at a diplomatic meeting, then perhaps foreign policy would have been a consideration. I don't think it was here. I think this was just a case of insanely stupid political correctness.

I think you're right to suppose that they might have assumed "that the visitors, purely because they are Muslims, might be offended by an insult to a mass-murderer", but I don't think this is pure bigotry because the authorities are merely projecting their own ridiculous sorts of reactions.

In America, we have recently had **this incident**, in which someone got into big trouble for using the word "Niggers" in an *anti-racist* context. It's gotten to the point where some people are simply unable to hear certain words or expressions without taking offense, regardless of context.

Your points are good ones, but I think applying this incident as an example of the problems is a bit of a reach.

Gil

by **Gil** on Thu, 12/04/2003 - 17:39 | [reply](#)

Re: Not Appeasement, Just Insane "Political

Correctness"

Gil said

It's gotten to the point where some people are simply unable to hear certain words or expressions without taking offense, regardless of context

It got to that point quite some time ago: '[Stoning' sketch from *The Life of Brian*](#).

by [Editor](#) on Thu, 12/04/2003 - 22:25 | [reply](#)

Python Reference

Yes. I think [David Bernstein](#) beat you to that reference.

Who's Gill?

[Gil](#)

by [Gil](#) on Fri, 12/05/2003 - 00:13 | [reply](#)

Re: Gill

Whoops. Corrected noww.

by [Editor](#) on Fri, 12/05/2003 - 06:52 | [reply](#)

the above

Sheer insanity! These people really don't want discussion anymore do they. The prof and spokesperson should be sacked. Why the hell should a person making what in my young day would have been considered a very "right on!!!" anti-racist statement be sent for racial awareness therapy. Have these clowns ever heard of Stalinism? or maybe they still sneakingly believe it was a good idea.

Words have to be understood in context. It's no good getting a fit of the vapours just over the existence of them. Besides, why is it when I watch a Spike Lee film I hear the word nigger about every fifteen seconds, but being spoken by black people. This, apparently, is inoffensive because (let me do your homework for you you leftie clowns) it's post imperial slavery, neo-irony and a mark of black brotherhood and solidarity right? Well kiss my arse. I'm talking goose and ganders. What should be wrong for one should be wrong for all. What these PC assholes are saying is White always wrong, Black always right. It's way more complicated than that.

by a reader on Sun, 12/07/2003 - 17:04 | [reply](#)

Another Ungentlemanly Act

Decades pass and tempers cool. Argentina and Britain now have excellent relations. Argentina has long since apologised for starting the Falklands War in 1982 ... you'd think. But no, there has **never been an apology**. Nor will there be one in the foreseeable future. For the shameful reason that very few Argentinians think that any wrong was done to the Falkland Islanders or to the British people.

Culturally and politically British, the Falkland Islands in the South Atlantic Ocean had long been claimed by the Argentinians for reasons of third-world machismo and spite. On April 2, 1982, their bloody **dictator**, General Galtieri, needing a device to bolster his flagging popularity, did what dictators love to do: he ordered his people to commit the crimes that they yearned to commit, so that by abasing themselves, they would be at one with him. The Argentinian armed forces captured the Falkland Islands.

Initiating an aggressive war: that is a war crime. Attempting to enslave a free people: that is a crime against humanity. Causing the deaths of 255 British soldiers and three Islanders; maiming others; costing billions; wrecking a peaceful and unique way of life which has not recovered to this day: all those are foul crimes too.

But the Argentinian people **do not think so**. They do not get it. This moral failing in them caused the war in 1982, and it has not gone away. That they are not invading again at this moment is a matter of expediency to them, not morality.

On the contrary, President Kirchner of Argentina is now **demanding** that *Britain* apologise and seek the forgiveness of the Argentinian people. What for? For being invaded? Not quite, but almost. You see, it emerged on Friday that in the frantic rush to prepare the British fleet that would liberate the Islands, corners were cut. Some of the ships were pulled away from their Cold War duties of facing down the Soviet fleet, where they had been deployed with nuclear weapons. To un-install these weapons would take 36 hours, and so it was decided that this should be done while the ships were already under way. The weapons were duly transferred in mid-ocean to other British ships heading back to Britain.

In other words, on their way to a hellish battle in which hundreds of them would die, the British voluntarily disarmed themselves in order to spare enemy lives and safeguard the environment. But by

doing this in a way that did not also impair the Navy's remaining effectiveness, they were committing some vague violation of political correctness. *That* is the transgression which, by the standards of the Argentinian people, warrants apology and forgiveness. Tyranny, aggression and the taking of innocent lives do not. But nuclear equals bad, and therefore the Argentinians were in the right after all. On the basis of that pathetic excuse for a grievance and a justification, and twenty one years later, they are still managing to whine loudly enough to drown out any trace of moral thought.

P.S. Our title echoes that of the movie **An Ungentlemanly Act** which portrays the outrageousness of the invasion with superb understatement, humour and attention to detail.



Sun, 12/07/2003 - 19:15 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Malvinas, Victorious Falkland War & Hong Kong

Sir,

I somehow feel I should remind you of Hong Kong and the, ahem, thoughtful stance the United Kingdom took against Red China at roughly the same time, back in the late seventies and early eighties.

Of course machismo is an exclusively south american attitude, just as only ungentlemanly dictators would ever follow the notion to wage a splendid little war as a device to turn the public's attention away from, let's say, not so desirable developments.

Whether the sinking of the Belgrano was up to the very highest standard in sportsmanship would only be questioned by an Argentinian or a spoilsport – I'm not the one and do not wish to be the other.

Still, it's an ill wind that blows nobody good, and Argentine got rid of some unsavoury rulers as a result.

Respectfully

Tjalf Boris Pröβdorf

by Tjalf Boris Pröβdorf on Mon, 11/07/2005 - 21:24 | [reply](#)

Re: Malvinas, Victorious Falkland War & Hong Kong

Thank you for the comment. Consider us duly reminded of Hong

Kong, but we are not sure what your point is. If it is that the British should have held out for a better deal in the handover negotiations, that is certainly arguable. If it is that the British should fight a war to liberate Hong Kong, that is not. There are many positions in between, but whichever of them you were advocating, the relevance to our criticism of the Argentineans, which is the subject of this post, escapes us. Could you elaborate?

by **Editor** on Tue, 11/08/2005 - 01:14 | [reply](#)

Belgrano

1982: British sub sinks Argentine cruiser

Argentina's only cruiser, the General Belgrano, has been sunk by a British nuclear submarine in the South Atlantic.

It is the first serious attack on the Argentine navy by the British since the conflict over the disputed Falkland Islands began last month.

link

I don't understand. They sunk a ship after a war started. What's the criticism?

Not only that, they had a nuclear submarine in the area, but refrained from using nukes. Perhaps machismo isn't so strong in Britain?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 11/08/2005 - 18:41 | [reply](#)

British Amnesia

My friend you are right and wrong.

Yes, the Falklands War in 1982 was a sad thing but if you expect an apology you are wrong. Britain should be giving apologies first.

British opinion leaders have again begun to romanticize the "achievements" of their colonial empire and ignore the bloody crimes and violent history of the building and dismantling of the British Empire.

The British national school curriculum has more or less struck the empire and its crimes out of history. The standard modern world history textbook for 16-year-olds has chapter after chapter on the world wars, the cold war, British and US life, Stalin's terror and the monstrosities of Nazism - but scarcely a word on the British and other European empires which carved up most of the world, or the horrors they perpetrated.

You could perfectly write this:

An Ungentlemanly Act

Decades pass and tempers cool. Britain now have excellent relations with the world. Britain has long since apologised for the crimes committed under their empire... you'd think. But no, there has never been an apology. Nor will there be one in the foreseeable future. For the shameful reason that very few British think that any wrong was done to millions of people.

<http://www.globalpolicy.org/empire/history/2003/0816casual.htm>
<http://www.globalpolicy.org/empire/history/2004/07hyperpower.pdf>

by Alexander d'Agui  on Fri, 04/21/2006 - 07:57 | [reply](#)

Re: British Amnesia

The real state of public opinion in Britain is very different from that described in the above comment.

First of all, it is not the case that the British Empire has been "struck out" of history courses in British schools. **Here is a typical textbook** for 14-year-olds studying National Curriculum History (there is no "standard textbook" as such, because the British National Curriculum does not prescribe textbooks or force particular topics on schools). It is called *The Impact of Empire: Colonialism 1500-2000*. Nor does it omit the crimes and horrors perpetrated in the name of the Empire. On the contrary, it acknowledges them and emphasises them. Note the chapter headings: there is an entire chapter on slavery and the slave trade in the British Empire, and also an entire chapter on morally judging the Empire, entitled *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*.

Far from "romanticising" the British Empire, British opinion is overwhelmingly opposed to it, to such an extent that the very terms 'imperialism', 'empire' and 'colonialism' are now used exclusively as terms of abuse, by virtually all shades of British political opinion. The idea that "very few British think that any wrong was done to millions of people" is pure fantasy. The opposite is the case.

As for apologies from British governments, the main reason Tony Blair, for example, has not apologised much for actions of the British Empire is that he considers himself an implacable enemy of the entire moral and political rationale under which it was established and run – which is in any case no longer approved of by any mainstream political faction in Britain. Despite this, there *have* in fact been official apologies. For example, Blair apologised to the Irish people for Britain's role in the Potato Famine. The Amritsar Massacre of 1919 in Imperial India was strongly condemned even at the time by the House of Commons, in defiance of much public opinion which then, unlike now, contained a significant element of approval of the massacre.

The changes undergone by the British people both during and since the days of Empire stand, unfortunately, in marked contrast with the unchanged attitude of the Argentinean government and people that we criticised above. While there is no trace of imperial ambition

left in British politics, and while Britons show remarkably little inclination to justify even the favourable aspects of their former Empire, let alone its crimes, Argentinean attitudes towards the Falklands war consist of very little other than the same morally bankrupt irredentism that caused them to invade in 1982.

The unjustified Argentine demand for an apology – made by present-day politicians on behalf of a present-day population – is not excused by spuriously linking it to British crimes of earlier generations. To call the Falklands war a “sad thing” in this context while eschewing even a single word of disapproval of the Argentinean invasion is an evasion and a moral equivocation of the very type that our post was about. The war as a whole was indeed a sad thing, but the Argentinean invasion in particular was also an immoral thing, a vicious crime against a peaceful people who had done no wrong to Argentina or any other nation. This would merit an apology but cries out much more for the sincere change of heart that would make an apology unnecessary.

by [Editor](#) on Sat, 04/22/2006 - 11:33 | [reply](#)

It's always a dilemma

I read the whole thing and I found it quite interesting even though I do not agree with some of the things you say. In any case, I would like to remark the fact that you didn't use any low resorts like making fun of us Argentinians just to make your point. Personally, I appreciate that and it shows how mature you are.

Now, about the subject: All I can say is that sometimes, a war is started because someone who has a lot of power and feels like doing it just to feel even more powerful and show the world what they can do. Personally, I think it would be very unfair to be labeled as "machista" or something like that just because I'm Argentinian. The same way many Argentinian people don't deserve to be labeled like that. Truth is that Galtieri was a sick twisted man and we all despise him nowadays, the same way he was despised back in the 80s. However, there was nothing people could do about it. You said it yourself, he was a DICTATOR, just like Videla back in the 70s. A man who comitted a crime not only against Englad, but also against Argentina and humanity itself for that matter. The Argentinian soldiers were FORCED to do what they did. Nobody over here wanted to start a war against England, except maybe for those conservative old farts who thought it was a smart idea. Not only because a war can't solve anything, but also, because the Argentinian army is way weaker as well.

Nowadays, you see documentaries and movies based upon what happened back then, and many of the Argentinian former-combatants appear crying or giving testimonies about how painful it was to say good bye to their families just because an ignorant savage like Galtieri decided it was time to fight against England. Some of them even killed themselves after the war was over. The point is: I can see why English people would despise us after what happened, but this shouldn't be a massive hatred because we also feel the pain nowadays and we were also victims. This shouldn't be "Argentina against England", it should be "Argentina and England

against Galtieri and his dark warriors"

Regarding President Nestor "Penguin Face" Kirchner, you should know that even though he won fair and square, that doesn't mean he represents all of us. Personally, I think he's a lame excuse for a human being who pretends to be a lefty just to earn more votes from ignorant unwashed masses. It probably sounds cruel, but that's the truth.

Is England the one to blame? is Argentina?...I don't know that, I wasn't even in this world back then. I was born in 1985, but I DO know one thing. People always lie and it's imposible to believe something specific. You can always investigate and come up with your own conclusions. For example, I was raised to believe that English people are the ones to blame 100%, the ones with all the responsibility. Nowadays, being 20 years old, I realize that it is always better to read and investigate instead of giving a fictitious verdict.

by Francisco on Sun, 07/16/2006 - 02:34 | [reply](#)

take the piss

Mr Dilemma

The only dilemma I saw back in 1982, was when our Royal marines where made to put their face's in the floor so you lot could kick right off and invade our island. I, FOR ONE TOOK THAT VERY PERSONAL.

by a reader on Fri, 10/06/2006 - 21:07 | [reply](#)

Don't agree with neither of you

The Malvinas war was a stupid diversionary tactic used by a megalomaniac dictator in a desperate attempt to try to retain his power. People who worked in the government at that time knew it was doomed from the very begging, and I don't believe it was ever intended to succeed.

Moreover, I don't think you can find a single argentine nowadays who thinks it was a good idea, even though at that time, many idiotic people cheered the ruler's decision and waved flags from their cars when it was announced. They seemed to believe it was a 'patriotic' thing to do (which was a much more significant feeling at that time than nowadays). It had nothing to do with the Argentine people's machismo but with the realisation of an old nationalistic feeling that we all have, that those small ilands belong to us due to numerous reasons, amongst which I could highlight:

- the geological and geographical proximity
- the principle of international law of uti possidetis juris, which states that newly formed states should have the same borders that they had before their independence.
- the fact that YOU got them by INVADING them just 150 years before the war.

True, our soldiers -mostly unwillingly except, as Francisco well says,

some 'fachos'- fought yours and managed to get 300 brits and 700 argentines killed, plus one of our best ships sunk (which is not much to say, as we were anyway SO not prepared to put a real fight...!). But truth is the whole thing backfired on us, don't you see? There was no gain, no vindictive pleasure... We just screwed ourselves harder...as we always do!

You miss the point when you quote that joke of a president we have -because that's what he is, a bad joke, a populist clown. Its not to him that the UK should apologize. Maybe its not even the UK, but Galtieri's collaborators who should really be apologizing. In truth, I think that what we feel is that we were used to do a wacko's bidding. We need someone to apologize for all the suffering all those argentine soldiers endured FOR NOTHING but to worsen our relations with a country we formerly revered (and which is great, and I profoundly love!).

I guess our justification is that: partly, that we feel them as rightfully ours, but also, that your whole attitude towards the sovereignty of the islands has been very disrespectful all along.

That's my opinion.

by Belén on Sat, 02/17/2007 - 05:12 | [reply](#)

I just returned from an unwel

I just returned from an unwelcome business trip to Argentina, and was quite surprised to find that Argentines still seemed to be quite obsessed with a far away group of islands that seem to possess only sheep and English people.

I guess it all boils down to this, as the previous respindant stated: "I guess our justification is that: partly, that we feel them as rightfully ours, but also, that your whole attitude towards the sovereignty of the islands has been very disrespectful all along."

It seems that, due to the divine grace which falls upon Argentina and Argentines alone, that whatever they desire is theirs by right, and that disagreeing with them (on any subject, I suppose)is "disrespectful" enough to warrant them sailing over and putting a boot on your neck. Fortunately, the body politic to which that boot is attached is rather weak, so they have a tough time making it stick.

BTW, the principle of uti possidetis juris is not one the aforementioned Argentine should want to invoke, as it states that "territory and other property remains with its possessor at the end of a conflict, unless provided for by treaty" meaning that, according to the principle he invokes, Britain's claim to sovreignty over the islands is (if it wasn't sound before) now beyond doubt as it booted the Argentines off the islands rather unceremoniously.

I don't know where this Argentine attitude comes from. I have only been there once, but I did find the populace to be rude, arrogant, and rather mad at the rest of the world. Perhaps that is because of their great fall from the beginning of the 20th century. At one time

their standard of living surpassed Sweden. What Argentines ought to ask themselves is not why Britain won't give them a few rocks in the sea, but what fault lies within themselves that has brought them to their present miserable condition.

always easier to blame someone else though, isn't it? And it's always pleasant for a weak person to beat up on an even weaker one. It can be an unpleasant surprise, however, when the victim you think is weaker turns out to have claws.

by a reader on Tue, 07/03/2007 - 20:04 | [reply](#)

Persona Non Grata

Some people are not welcome at the Iraqi reconstruction table.

The US Department of Defense issued a list of 63 countries whose companies would be welcome to bid for reconstruction contracts. But everyone knows that this was just a diplomatic way of issuing a list of countries that would **not** be welcome.

Here is that list:

France
Germany
Russia
China
Israel

Is there a common thread running through this list? **Andrew Sullivan** and **Steven Den Beste** both give an excellent explanation, and justification, but it covers only about – hmm – we estimate 80% of those cases. **Scrappleface** humorously suggests that in the interests of friendship, some exceptions should be made to the ban, where a particular country is in a position to make a specialised contribution that cannot reasonably be obtained elsewhere:

"For example, we have a pressing need for more of those terrific human shields. There were a lot of them around before the war, but we can't find them now. While we're figuring out where Saddam hid them, we would welcome some French, German or Russian human shields."

So some are asked to provide human shields while others provide **human sacrifices**.

All to further the greater purpose of the War on Terrorism.

We do not oppose this policy, by the way. But the depth of the irony of it is just another sign of how bad we have let things get.

Thu, 12/11/2003 - 17:00 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

The price of sanity

I guess that's the price you have to pay if you are being

consistently rational and sane in this mad and moronic world. It arouses hate and hate is bad for safe business.

-AIS

by a reader on Fri, 12/12/2003 - 06:54 | [reply](#)

rescind

Canada has been removed from the Coalescence of the Unwilling in recognition of making an effort in the rebuilding. I won't hold my breath, but Israel may be as well for training troops for urban operations.

John Anderson

by a reader on Fri, 12/12/2003 - 23:24 | [reply](#)

Canada?

What, did something change overnight?

by [Kevin](#) on Sat, 12/13/2003 - 02:37 | [reply](#)

Oh, all right then...

For the non-Canadians out there, what did change overnight was our government; the pettily anti-American Jean Chretien has finally retired, and his replacement Paul Martin has promised to repair relations with the US.

by a reader on Sat, 12/13/2003 - 19:23 | [reply](#)

Silliness

This is silly. Right to bid on international contracts has nothing to do with what silly leader has spoken or what silly political slight has been committed. It has everything to do with rules of international trade and industrial competence to deliver high quality goods or services in a timely, capable manner for the best price.

Otherwise? Playground politics.

German companies for example, what if anything do they have to do with a payback for not sending troops. German companies just happen to have a corporate headquarters on German soil. This rampant display of silliness raises all the questions of trade and internationality. That BMW plant with all american workers in the southern U.S., for example, sounds awfully German to me. Better not let them drive those German looking cars off the lot on to roads paid for by U.S. tax dollars, might look like a political statement about Germans, uber-capitalism, and Iraq. Worse, now they even have infiltrated the U.S. capital, BMW's in Washington D.C.!

As for the Canadians, no more hockey on U.S. ice. And so on.

If you ask what this has to do with rebuilding Iraq, my answer is

absolutely nothing. That is, nothing that makes any more sense than the US Department of Defense having silly payback rules about playing in some foreign sandbox.

I won't play with Canadians, Germans, French, Israelis, Russians, or Chinese any more, until they make up with me and say they're sorry. So There.

by a reader on Sun, 12/14/2003 - 20:47 | [reply](#)

ageism

stop equating countries acting badly with children, you fucking ageist

- Elliot

by a reader on Sun, 12/14/2003 - 23:13 | [reply](#)

Playground politics and the middle east sandbox

Everything I learned for good and bad about politics and diplomacy is found on the local playground and in the nearby sandbox. You may be getting the point all wrong, so watch your mouth, its always connected directly to your brain. Since you bring up children, in my opinion a child would not still be playing such silly one-up games. Only bully politicians do and some seem to think their bully playground is the world. They seem to get stupider with age. I am talking about chronological adults here. Most children would surely do much better with diplomacy, and for that matter politics, and if that's my ageist attitude, so be it.

Unfortunately only adults well above the age of consent get to play global political sandbox payback. First of all it is not their sandbox. Furthermore, unlike these playground bullies who play at middle east sandbox games, most individuals, French, Germans, Canadians and Americans, do not equate a few stupid feuding politicians with their host countries, or see it as a right to slight capable companies and to ignore the rules of international trade.

by a reader on Mon, 12/15/2003 - 03:49 | [reply](#)

Rules of international trade – and other puzzles

Which rule of international trade is being violated by this policy?

Why is "slighting capable companies" not a human right?

And if a child would not be playing such silly one-up games, whom did you observe doing so in your local playground and the nearby sandbox? Was it Saddam?

by **David Deutsch** on Mon, 12/15/2003 - 07:43 | [reply](#)

David said: Which rule of ...

David said:

Which rule of international trade is being violated by this policy?

I'm far from being an expert on international trade in goods and services, but my understanding was that while it's acceptable under the WTO treaties to discriminate on the basis of quality it's not acceptable to discriminate on the basis of country of origin. This is certainly suggested by

The national-treatment provision contains the obligation to treat foreign service suppliers and domestic service suppliers in the same manner. However, it does provide the possibility of different treatment being accorded the service providers of other parties to that accorded to domestic service providers. However, in such cases the conditions of competition should not, as a result, be modified in favour of the domestic service providers.

from **A Summary of the Final Act of the Uruguay Round**

- **Rich**

by **Rich** on Mon, 12/15/2003 - 11:12 | [reply](#)

Re: Which rule of international trade...?

These contracts – or at least, the bulk of them – are not covered by those treaties, according to the **EU trade commissioner**.

by **David Deutsch** on Mon, 12/15/2003 - 16:19 | [reply](#)

Customers Have a Right to Choose

It seems to me that customers (in this case the U.S. taxpayers via their representatives) have every right to discriminate among service suppliers. Usually, this means that it costs them in terms of price and/or quality; but they might value other things more than these costs. In this case, the U.S. wants to make it clear that supporting its national security interests has benefits, and obstructing them has costs. Some of these costs will be in terms of pressure from companies losing out, lost tax revenues, and national pride.

Is it unfair to qualified companies that happen to be based in disfavored countries? No. It's unequal, but not unfair. They have no natural right to these contracts. It's up to the customer to choose both the recipients of the contracts, and the criteria.

Gil

by **Gil** on Mon, 12/15/2003 - 17:59 | [reply](#)

Well said Gil, disfavored countries

Fact is Canada and Germany and Israel, to name a few apparently

are disfavored countries. Makes one wonder if they are a threat to U.S. national security.

by a reader on Mon, 12/15/2003 - 20:03 | [reply](#)

israel not in us disfavour

Israel isn't disfavored, and would have helped us fight, but it was better for both of us that they didn't. we didn't need the Arab world bitching about how the j00000s invaded Iraq.

my best guess at why they don't get contracts is the US is too pansy (*ahem*) to explain that we do like Israel, and don't like France, and instead wants to say the contracts thing wasn't based on a moral judgment, but rather a mechanical criterion about sending troops to help.

it's also possible the US has good reasons politically not to explain that right now, and knows screwing Israel on contracts isn't the end of the world. but if it was something sufficiently important we would not screw israel.

- Elliot

by a reader on Mon, 12/15/2003 - 20:23 | [reply](#)

Israel

Obviously, I wasn't including Israel in my reference to disfavored countries.

I think the main reason for excluding Israel was to avoid offending regional arabs. I think it's a mistake; but nobody ever accused me of being diplomatic, either.

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 12/16/2003 - 00:38 | [reply](#)

Also,

The question was raised by a reader what penalizing companies with headquarters on German (etc) soil could properly have to do with payback for not sending troops. It doesn't make sense to him so he calls it silly and "playground politics".

I'll let Elliott deal with the age-ism, I'd like to point out why it makes perfect sense to penalize companies with headquarters in country X for actions of country X we dislike. The reason is that if that company feels sufficient economic harm from the decision, they may be inclined to place pressure on the government which shelters them to change their (the government's) behavior in the future. Or, failing that (and this can be the implicit threat), the company may move their headquarters, or jobs, or whatever, depriving the government of its tax revenues or of its political

capital (because people who have lost jobs may become irate at the

government).

If we make it less affordable for companies to set themselves up in countries which seriously piss us off, they will communicate this to the governments of those countries one way or another, and that *will* have an effect on the governments of those countries, one way or another.

The children on the playground have it essentially correct.

Blixa
blixa.blogspot.com

by a reader on Wed, 12/17/2003 - 16:23 | [reply](#)

Religion Re-Established

In the bad old days, we were oppressed by religion: if you said or did anything that was offensive to whatever religion was established in your country, you were in trouble. And of course *they* got to decide what was offensive.

But at least it was only one religion. Today it's all of them.

Mon, 12/15/2003 - 15:54 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Hmm

Well yes, but it's not exactly the same scale of trouble as having your head chopped off, or whatever. And it's not the same scale of having to agree- we don't have to spend one day a week each attending mosque, church, chapel, temple and synagogue and dancing round a totem pole in the nude, or get arrested.

And there are strategies for dealing with and avoiding the kind of situation where one might offend others, such as not working in the public sector (ahem) and learning target ideas-marketing. Also it's quite possible to find ways of strongly criticising religions without getting in trouble at all, just like it's possible to find ways to smoke marijuana without getting prosecuted.

(Or maybe I just missed the joke?)

Alice

by a reader on Mon, 12/15/2003 - 22:11 | [reply](#)

nah

That's not true. People offend Jews all the time without getting in trouble.

It's more like: the official religion is now The Religion Of Tolerance. unless you're a white male, or a jew.

- Elliot

by a reader on Mon, 12/15/2003 - 22:40 | [reply](#)

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Dishonest Reporting Awards

HonestReporting.com, which monitors anti-Israel bias in the media, has just made its **annual awards** in "recognition of the most skewed and biased coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict".

The winner was Reuters. Examples of its relentless bias included

- Omitting all mention of Palestinian attacks on Israeli civilians from its list of "Worst Guerilla Attacks since September 11";
- Describing suicide bombers as being among Palestinians "killed by Israeli forces";
- Repeatedly attributing to Hamas the motive of seeking "a state in Gaza and the West Bank" even though the **whole point of Hamas** is to reject that option and seek the destruction of Israel.

Last year's winner, the BBC, has to content itself with a mere Disonorable Mention, along with tragically many other news organisations. Read it all.

Keep up the good work, HonestReporting. Shame on you, Reuters and the others.

Tue, 12/16/2003 - 20:26 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

Thinking About Thinking About Thinking

Can animals think? Can they think about thinking? Yes, say scientists.

Here's what actually happened though. Someone had the brilliant idea of adding an additional button to those classic experiments where you train an animal to press buttons in response to stimuli.

In the classic experiment, you call the stimuli "questions", you call the button-pushing behaviour "answers", add a little **anthropomorphism**, and bingo, the Nobel Prize for Discovering that Animals Can Think is within your grasp. Or at least, a credulous newspaper article to that effect – and, perhaps, more funding for more of the same silliness.

In the new experiment, the extra button doesn't actually do anything. And so sometimes, when the animals' training has not been good enough to get them to pick the right button, they choose randomly and sometimes hit the new button. Even better, if you punish them for pressing the *wrong* button, but never punish them for picking the new button, then they will pick it whenever a conditioned reflex for one of the other buttons does not kick in first.

OK, so far, so obvious. But here's the master-stroke: as usual, it lies not in the substance of the experiment but in the *naming* of the outcomes. You call the new button the "Don't-Know" Button.

Actually, you could call it the "I'm sorry, ladies and gentlemen, but I'm afraid I can't work out the answer to your interesting question right now. Leave it with me and ask me again in a few days and perhaps by then I may have understood better what you are getting at" button. But, whatever. The point is, as always, once you have given your new button a human interpretation at the start of the experiment, your jackpot conclusion at the end – that the animal is essentially human – is pretty much guaranteed.

That is what a team from the aptly named 'University of Buffalo' did. And that's how the Science Editor of *The Guardian* breathlessly came to splash the headline: **Animals 'can think about thought'**:

It means that animals, like humans, may be capable not just of thinking, but of thinking about thinking, of knowing that they don't know. Psychologists call this

"metacognition", evidence of sophisticated cognitive self-

awareness.

No, it doesn't mean anything of the sort. It just means that humans displayed their usual ingenuity in naming the new button. But it does demonstrate yet again that when it comes to thinking about thinking, some humans chronically fail to use their inborn potential.

We think electric shocks might be the answer.

Update: We decided to do this experiment ourselves, and have discovered that our computer has evidence of sophisticated cognitive self-awareness too. We launched the program **Mathematica** and without further ado typed the following question:

Do you understand this?

The immediate reply was:

Syntax::"tsntxi": "this ?" is incomplete; more input is needed.

Do you understand this?

(Emphasis in original!) We are expecting our phone call from Stockholm any time now. Our only worry now is, is it morally justifiable to switch the thing off?

Wed, 12/17/2003 - 17:36 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

:-)

owned!

- Elliot

by a reader on Wed, 12/17/2003 - 23:34 | [reply](#)

spot on

Nice post, beautifully cutting. I almost reflexively dodged the flying spit several times.

One day, my friends, there will be a glorious revolution and all those stupid f-ing pigeons will finally get shot and we will be able to feed the (aesthetically more pleasing) ducks in peace.

Alice

by a reader on Thu, 12/18/2003 - 00:42 | [reply](#)

down with ducks

ewwww, no, i hate ducks. they are forever tainted by their

involvement with induction.

- Elliot

by a reader on Thu, 12/18/2003 - 04:01 | [reply](#)

Bold Conjectures

Some animals do think especially when they are doing something useful according to their own minds, and especially when that something is for their own animal benefit rather than for the benefit of humans. However animals lack the language skills to tell us so and write rather poorly too. But animal literacy is largely irrelevant to animals, ho hum. Why should they even care to tell us what they think? Their grammar is rudimentary but not so different from ours if only they could speak and also wanted to debate these bold conjectures. Trouble is a flaw in the design, the animals would scoff in barks and scratches and knowing sniffs and fur fluffing. If the human experiment only consists of three buttons, humans, like us animals, do look kinda stupid and reflexive. The three button scientists continue to scratch their heads and say, "Don't know. Looks like there is something going on in there. Let's do three hundred random trials and test the null hypothesis." Can you imagine an animal even thinking like that? And what would you do with grant money if you only had paws?

by a reader on Thu, 12/18/2003 - 04:24 | [reply](#)

"bold conjectures" -- huh?

A reader who says animals think but who's only argument is that animals are bad at communicating and unambitious, asked:

And what would you do with grant money if you only had paws?

i suppose i'd buy bark-recognition software and a computer and DSL and a (dog) house and maybe a maid (dogs aren't free to roam the streets alone, after all).

alternative answer: If you can't think of anything, I'm not surprised you "think" animals are as smart as you ;-p

by a reader on Thu, 12/18/2003 - 06:22 | [reply](#)

Seriously

I thought that was funny :) The research in question got \$8000 in grant money to say "Don't know, but maybe". Now that would buy alot of dog food with a three button dispenser to boot! Dog laughing all the way to the bank. Oops but the subjects were monkeys and dolphins, both of which are pretty useless to human beings.

by a reader on Thu, 12/18/2003 - 15:10 | [reply](#)

Anthromorphism

To set the record straight, anyone who thinks that animals think

like humans do and then think about their thinking about it is stretching the point to absurdity. Anthropomorphism is seeing animals from a human point of view and attributing human characteristics to them, mostly a pointless, wrongheaded, and almost frivolous pursuit. If animals could think about this thinking about thinking they would laugh heartily at the absurdity of us looking at them as being somewhat like humans in a don't know response. Well, duh!

However, it is also good to know that brain structures in some animals are not all that different from brain structures in ourselves. Only we as humans have advanced to the point of knowledge acquisition, knowledge growth and knowledge sharing to know that. What is really interesting is why humans have progressed so far, so quickly in consciousness, far beyond any other earthly known capacity to think about thinking among many other cognitive things, and much more than just in our own heads, unshared; and what's more, how human tools and devices (like symbolic thinking, progressive reason, language, writing, invention, productive debate, libraries as public resources open to all, scientific research, shared ideas, bold conjecture, creative wondering shared) and the like have made great leaps in our individual capabilities, each one, to advance not only human knowledge but the furthering of capacities of fruitful idea generation now available to billions of our kind; especially through access to our man made creative tools available to present and future generations to enhance our abilities to think about thinking. Why waste time on anthropomorphism, when we have all this, and us?

by a reader on Thu, 12/18/2003 - 17:53 | [reply](#)

Animal Rights

What has been claimed in this article about animals being able to think about thinking etc. is really absurd.

How ever, I do wonder if some highly evolved mamals do have a rudimentary consciousness or even self-consciousness? if so, if they are evolved enough to feel pain and suffering as some kind of conscious beings? And if so wouldn't it entitle them to some basic rights?

by a reader on Fri, 12/19/2003 - 01:57 | [reply](#)

got an argument?

conjecturing mebbe some animals are human or partly human, fun as it is, gets a tad dull when not backed up with powerful arguments.

- Elliot

by a reader on Fri, 12/19/2003 - 08:31 | [reply](#)

Elliot said: conjecturing ...

Elliot said:

conjecturing mebbe some animals are human or partly human, fun as it is, gets a tad dull when not backed up with powerful arguments.

Would you care to argue that there are no animals that are human? In which case, what are humans? Plants? Fungi? :)

- **Rich**, who thinks there are many powerful arguments from evolutionary biology that at least some animals are human.

by **Rich** on Fri, 12/19/2003 - 09:53 | [reply](#)

A chimp thinks what?

Rich, who thinks there are many powerful arguments from evolutionary biology that at least some animals are human.

What arguments?

by **Alan Forrester** on Fri, 12/19/2003 - 13:39 | [reply](#)

Probably more than I do without coffee

Alan said:

What arguments?

The evidence from shared morphology that humans and other animals can be fitted into nested sets of clades with common ancestors. The evidence from genes shared by humans and other animals that similarly strongly suggests the existence of common ancestors. The evidence from the fossil record that shows convergence between human and other lineages as we look further and further back in time.

If this doesn't convince you that humans are a subset of animals (and hence logically that some animals are humans) then I don't know what will.

- **Rich**

by **Rich** on Fri, 12/19/2003 - 14:56 | [reply](#)

This is Getting Silly

Rich,

Obviously, Elliot and Alan were using "human" to mean having human-like mental abilities; not the species. And they were using "animals" to mean non-human animals; which is not an uncommon usage.

And, although "some" can indeed mean one, I think it's misleading

to use "some animals" when you're talking about one (species of) animal.

So, are you supporting the position that there are non-human animals that can "think about thinking", or are you playing a semantics game?

Either is ok with me, but I'd like to know.

Gil

by **Gil** on Fri, 12/19/2003 - 18:22 | [reply](#)

Gil said: So, are you supp...

Gil said:

So, are you supporting the position that there are non-human animals that can "think about thinking", or are you playing a semantics game?

I thought that what I was saying was *entirely* clear from my very first comment in this thread when I said:

Would you care to argue that there are no animals that are human? In which case, what are humans? Plants? Fungi? :)

(Complete with emoticon!)

Although, having said that, I recall reading once about a chimpanzee getting upset with a human when said human was playing quite a subtle trick on another chimpanzee. I don't remember the details though nor do I have a reference so I'm not going to get involved in that argument.

- **Rich**

by **Rich** on Fri, 12/19/2003 - 20:23 | [reply](#)

i remember a study too

it was about silly people who mutter things under their breath while leaving that they don't want to subject to criticism. it said they are at highly increased risk of cancer or heart attack. i don't remember the source though, so don't criticise me.

by a reader on Sat, 12/20/2003 - 02:00 | [reply](#)

Chimps in mirrors

Just thought I'd mention: Scientists did an experiment with Chimps and mirrors and concluded that Chimps are "self-aware". They would experiment making facial gestures and moving their bodies and stuff to see if the "mirror self" would do it also. They're self aware! They're taking over!

Also, the scientific community has expressed interest in awarding

Chimps "homo" status, which would make them human.

by a reader on Sat, 12/20/2003 - 07:05 | [reply](#)

Somebody anonymous said: i...

Somebody anonymous said: it was about silly people who mutter things under their breath while leaving that they don't want to subject to criticism. Oh, give me a break. I never said that I didn't want people to subject it to criticism. To do so would be pathetically easy, seeing as it's a barely remembered anecdote. I said that I didn't want to take part in the argument (which would require doing quite a lot of research to present a proper case, and I'm afraid I just don't have the time right now). I only added the comment because I thought it was vaguely interesting, that there might be other people here who knew more about that sort of thing and who might make their own interesting comments, and because, if nothing else, it might get people thinking about possible experiments that could further investigate meta-cognition (or it's absence) in other animals.

If you'd like to criticise it, go right ahead.

- **Rich**, who must admit he strongly discounts the contents of anonymous postings.

by **Rich** on Sat, 12/20/2003 - 09:56 | [reply](#)

oops, didn't mean to be anonymous

that was me

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

by a reader on Sat, 12/20/2003 - 10:19 | [reply](#)

Anonymous conjecture

The world is spherical and contains matter.

by a reader on Sun, 12/21/2003 - 00:02 | [reply](#)

Is France In Serious Trouble?

Roger L Simon **thinks so**, for several interrelated reasons. There's also a picture of an "occupied MacDonaldis" (occupied by anti-globalisation loonies, that is),

and quite an interesting comment thread there as well.

Fri, 12/19/2003 - 08:53 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

There is still a little bit of hope for France

Well, after all this bad news about France, let's at least feel good about some **good French people out there**. I'm going skiing there next week (I've heard they still have some good food, even if there's no service), so I need to believe something good about France!

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Tue, 12/23/2003 - 23:58 | [reply](#)

Have you read the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire?

History repeating itself??

Of course France also has massive amounts of farmland which continues to somehow prop up the socialist French economy. So maybe it's not all doom and gloom.

by a reader on Wed, 12/24/2003 - 20:16 | [reply](#)

historicism

history doesn't repeat itself; people act on the same bad ideas.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 12/24/2003 - 23:45 | [reply](#)

Environmentalism – The Dismal Religion

Almost a year ago, the Danish Committees on Scientific Dishonesty delivered their infamous **ruling** that Bjørn Lomborg's book **The Skeptical Environmentalist** (which we highly recommend) is scientifically dishonest.

We now salute the Danish Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, which is responsible for those Committees, for robustly **overturning** that ruling:

The Ministry finds that the DCSD judgment was not backed up by documentation, and was “completely void of argumentation” for the claims of dishonesty and lack of good scientific practice. The Ministry characterises the DCSD's treatment of the case as “dissatisfactory”, “deserving criticism” and “emotional”

Is it really *emotion* that has dragged the highest arbiters of Danish scientific integrity down into the depths of unreason and pseudoscience? Whatever it is, they are not the only ones. *Scientific American*, for instance, treated Lomborg's work in an **appalling** **unscholarly** way. And as for the press – well, with a few honourable exceptions such as *The Economist*, which **backed Lomborg from the beginning**, they have largely abandoned any pretence at critical examination of conventional wisdom and have fallen comfortably into the role of buying for the punishment and destruction of a heretic. *The Guardian*, for instance, was unlucky enough to award Lomborg a derisive **eco-gong** award for disservice to the environment on the very day that the Danish ministry exonerated him.

If this is an emotion, it is a widespread, powerful, destructive and dangerous one. Where does it come from?

Michael Crichton, like many others, argues that **Environmentalism is a Religion**. Basically, we **agree**, but Crichton's take on this is inaccurate in some ways. He says:

I think that you cannot eliminate religion from the psyche of mankind. If you suppress it in one form, it merely re-emerges in another form. You can not believe in God, but you still have to believe in something that

gives meaning to your life, and shapes your sense of the

world. Such a belief is religious.

No, it's not some genetically imprinted Original Sin that makes people irrational. That's letting them off far too easily. And it's letting *himself* off too easily as well: despair is always available as a cop-out, but there's no justification for abandoning the obligation to set the world to rights. The existence of human error doesn't need any great scientific explanation, any more than it needs a religious one: what it needs is correction. Which comes from creative thought, argument, and persuasion.

Crichton also seems to make the common atheists' error that just because all religions are factually untrue, they are all worthless – and in particular, morally worthless. That is not so. They are neither worthless nor mutually equivalent. Many religions have **good moral content** as well as **bad**, while the morality of the environmental movement is **fundamentally bad**. Thomas Carlyle called economics "The Dismal Science"; that was **unfair**, but environmentalism is, precisely, the dismal religion.

Sun, 12/21/2003 - 00:38 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

v nice

v nice

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sun, 12/21/2003 - 03:55 | [reply](#)

Leap of faith

It would seem by that definition that all "Isms" are religions. I admit that I'm often confused by the way that dogmatic terms such as Environmentalism are thrown around. Blindly as any other "Ism". I'll tell you why.

Being "for" something like the environment is somewhat like motherhood and apple pie. Being an "anti" like an anti-environmentalist is not likely to be my cup of tea either.

I weigh in on the side of environmentalism, usually, but I am far from religious about it. Being an environmentalist in terms of choices can mean almost anything from not pouring used motor oil down the city sewer to driving spikes in old growth trees. It depends. I don't drive spikes in old growth trees. Neither do I empty used motor oil into the city sewer. Call it a leap of faith that one person's attitude and ideas can make a difference. Environmental choices, for example.

But don't label me.

Thinking rationally however it is not hard for most people to be "for" the environment in specific ways, at least "for" the air you

personally breath, "for" the water you drink, and "for" the land that

grows the particular food that you eat. It would be foolish to be otherwise.

You would be wrong to call me religious "for" believing that much, that environment matters, generally; but that is not the only question in the equation. I am in there too. For example, between two extremes of environmental choices I would definitely choose the ones that would benefit me. One of those benefits is to see the local rivers and tributaries cleaner and full of river life. Call me a river environmentalist. Given a choice of asphalt or trees in my back yard I would choose trees. Call me a tree hugger for liking leaves.

Greenpeace on the other hand is not on my list of favored charities. PETA certainly is not. Sierra Club has nice calendars. I am not a member, yet. But don't assume I'm a pushover. If you continue to dump your McDonald's garbage out your car window I will not consider that as your attempt at composting.

I guess I'm just not a fan of "Isms" of any kind, Environmentalism, Fundamentalism, Capitalism, Racism, Liberalism, Conservatism, Catholicism, Atheism. Together, Dogmatism. My views tend toward questioning all beliefs, a healthy skeptic-ism but not at all religious. Closer to anti-religious. Chuck the dogma. And my views tend to weigh in on the side of free markets, open societies, rational discussion, individual action, and a cleaner and saner environment to live in.

But I'm still open to being convinced otherwise.

by a reader on Mon, 12/22/2003 - 04:28 | [reply](#)

isn't opposing ***all*** isms extremism?

what about critical rationalism?

are you sure you oppose both atheism and theism? doesn't one have to be true?

what's wrong with capitalism? i suppose you also oppose socialism? do you favour not having an economic policy, or what?

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 12/22/2003 - 05:55 | [reply](#)

Good question

I do not oppose all isms. However, i am not an "Ism" fan. It is all too easy to fall into the mental trap of believing one's own fave ism is the answer for all things. Skeptic-ism and critical rational-ism fortunately are not such an easy pitfall mentally as many other isms because they contain within their own process the seeds of an open mind.

I tend to oppose Socialism. I am a little less negatively inclined

towards Capitalism. I favor having a range of economic policies suited to the ways of the real world that deal in real world economic practices that affect individuals and groups within real political contexts, certainly the ones that tend to grow wealth in more than purely monetary terms, especially those policy questions that are written down, thought carefully about, and are regularly debated and examined as to whether they actually work in the way their authors say.

Not all sizes fit all or are the answer for all times. Why use a wonderful hammer and a spike when you need a toolkit of specially crafted awls? Usually we need to think carefully, that is. Hence "Isms" with a capital I are crude, tho fancifully and sometimes beautifully inscribed tools, rather useless for other than straw man arguments in some hazy hallowed hall of theoretical debate. Not that I don't enjoy that too sometimes.

by a reader on Mon, 12/22/2003 - 18:45 | [reply](#)

Environmentalism should be true Religion!

I would have to disagree that Environmentalism is a Religion as of this time, however it should be the true Religion. The meaning of life is to live and sustain, and enjoy pleasure, that is it! We live in the "Kingdom of God" for we know nothing about what happens after death. The Sun is the all loving God, all- loving being the giver of life. To enjoy living, experiencing, and enjoying pleasure, we need to take environmentalism seriously. Become vegetarian is a good goal to. Living morally and ethically should be taught at a young age, and the only things we could know for sure is Mathematics, and Scientific laws. Everything is a matter of situation and scenario. Love and Peace should be waged as a war against ignorance and Hate, because the "Kingdom of Heaven" is upon us!!!

by SEEN on Tue, 11/16/2004 - 18:55 | [reply](#)

Industrial Society Destroys Mind and Environment

Industrial Society Destroys Mind and Environment

This is about the link between Mind and Social / Environmental-Issues. The fast-paced, consumerist lifestyle of Industrial Society is causing exponential rise in psychological problems besides destroying the environment. All issues are interlinked. Our Minds cannot be peaceful when attention-spans are down to nanoseconds, microseconds and milliseconds. Our Minds cannot be peaceful if we destroy Nature.

To read the complete article please follow either of these links :

[Article](#)

[Article](#)

sushil_yadav

by [sushil_yadav](#) on Sun, 08/20/2006 - 05:46 | [reply](#)

Crichton

Since Crichton's books are full of the most appalling misunderstandings about science - Jurassic Park and Sphere are especially dreadful - I would treat anything he says about environmentalism and 'religion' with great scepticism.

by **Yoni** on Sun, 09/10/2006 - 13:34 | [reply](#)

Atheism and theism

"are you sure you oppose both atheism and theism? doesn't one have to be true?"

No.

It depends on what you mean by 'true', and philosophers have disagreed on this since the dawn of history and still do.

I happen to be an atheist, for a variety of mostly rational and a few emotional reasons. That does not mean that I insist that atheism is 'true', because I can't disprove the existence of (a) god(s). But I do think that atheism is rational while theism is not (as well as being responsible for a great deal of human misery).

by **Yoni** on Sun, 09/10/2006 - 13:37 | [reply](#)

Bjorn Lomborg's opinions on the environment are ridiculous

Bjorn Lomborg's opinions on the environment are ridiculous. He's not a biologist, he's a statistician, and his book ignores serious, pressing environmental issues like invasive species, and habitat destruction.

He has a perspective that we shouldn't ignore but he has demonstrated zero knowledge about ecology and the environment.

I posted a critique [here](#).

I'm also guessing that this retraction is political. Lomborg has enjoyed some favor since the new right wing government came to the Danes... he even has a cushy government post.

by **Will** on Mon, 10/16/2006 - 12:25 | [reply](#)

link to Greenpeaces opposition to war

could someone explain how being against war is an example of fundamentally bad morals?

by **Jay Aziza** on Wed, 12/20/2006 - 20:07 | [reply](#)

Bad Morals

One is bad if one perpetually allows those who are innocent to be

attacked and killed.

Those who oppose war sometimes do that.

by a reader on Thu, 12/21/2006 - 00:19 | [reply](#)

Opposing war is an example of

Opposing war is an example of fundamentally bad morals because it disarms the moral in the face of the immoral.

Therefore to find a warmonger go to the nearest "peace" demonstration. To find a true peace activist go to the nearest Marine Recruiting Station and sign up. Peace through strength or suffer total war. There is no third choice, cultist.

by a reader on Sat, 01/27/2007 - 05:47 | [reply](#)

Our Conspiracy Theory

Why should only the bad, the silly and the misled have the fun of inventing stories of grand **conspiracies** to explain world events?

By the way, before we begin: you don't really think that **Gaddafi had weapons of mass destruction**, do you? Of course he didn't. The guy lives in a tent, for goodness' sake. So, what's going on? Well, just look at the timing: just before the invasion of Iraq, Gaddafi makes his first tremulous approaches to the West. Then he strings them along for a few months. And then suddenly, just after Saddam is finally given the **cow** treatment, he finally capitulates – or seems to. Why? Isn't it obvious? If a fellow-dictator *you* knew had secretly slipped you a large stash of WMD to hide from the Americans, what would you do? This was a dictator one **doesn't say no to**. Yet everyone knows that WMD can't be hidden without leaving smoking-gun evidence. Right? Gaddafi's in a dilemma. So he decides to make a virtue out of a necessity. He “admits” privately that he has a massive WMD programme but now wants to turn away from the Dark Side; then he waits until he's absolutely sure that Saddam isn't going to turn up one day to claim his weapons back; and then he brazenly goes public. So at a stroke, Gaddafi joins the select club of dictators who have achieved WMD status (thus making him a hero to the enemies of the West) *and* gets brownie points from the West itself. And all without ever having to find out what plutonium is made of, risk a single air attack, or spend a single petrodollar.

Damned clever. Maybe Gaddafi is secretly Jewish. After all, why else would he keep saying things like **this**, which so starkly confirm the fundamental justice of Israel's cause?

Anyway, here's our real conspiracy theory.

Did you really think that the unremitting torrent of defeatist, pro-Saddam propaganda that appeared in all the mainstream media before, during and after the liberation of Iraq was just a matter of reporters saying what they really thought? *In defiance of the Government?* Don't make us laugh! For those with eyes to see, the real purpose of what was thinly disguised as shallow, seditious stupidity is glaringly obvious.

First of all, consider this: Saddam was an avid consumer of TV news. And what were his favourite channels? **CNN, BBC and al-Jazeera**. The very channels that are controlled by the **US**

Government, the British Government, and the Qatari government (itself a puppet of the Americans) respectively. So, Saddam watches them, and what does he see? Endless variations on the theme that (1) the Coalition can't and won't fight because the UN and the French will stop them; (2) if it tries to fight, the US and British governments will be brought down by mass action by their own populations, already mobilised and on the streets to keep Saddam in power; (3) if it does manage to invade, it will blunder into a Stalingrad-Vietnam-quagmire, then withdraw after seeing a few casualties, resulting in another glorious victory for Saddam.

He believed it.

Who benefited from that?

Need we say more?

Let this be a lesson to you, folks: don't believe anything you see or hear in the media. Trust only what you have personally made up.

Tue, 12/23/2003 - 10:15 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

they're both funny

bravo

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 12/23/2003 - 20:47 | [reply](#)

brilliant

These are brilliant theories! The fact that they cannot be disproven only serves to convince me further of their eery correctness. Make up some more! ;-)

Blixa

blixa.blogspot.com

by a reader on Tue, 12/23/2003 - 22:44 | [reply](#)

news propaganda

You write:

Let this be a lesson to you, folks: don't believe anything you see or hear in the media. Trust only what you have personally made up.

Indeed. I'm doing a project and analysing the public TV (taxpayer paid) 8 o'clock news every day the coming weeks. My article about this is to be published in a Dutch weekly magazine. I've got a problem though. After analysing only one episode, I've already found enough anti-Israel, anti-America, anti-Western, pro-leftist, pro-cultural relativist (pardon, multi-cultural),

politically correct propaganda to fill a whole article. (I got only 3500

words.) :-(

By the way, I already know their defense to my coming article, cause I already read it in the papers as a response to other critics:

"Yes, it's good you bring that up. It's a very true point about journalism. Yes we are biased, of course we are. There's no way to report news without bias. There's no such thing as unbiased news. Everybody has his own truth. That's inherent in journalism. We can't do more than present our truth best we can, that's the nature of news and we think we do a pretty good job at it, though we always welcome suggestions and try to improve."

Ugh, get out off the TV you dangerous idiotarians, straight from the mysticism hell of Atlas Shrugged :-)

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Tue, 12/23/2003 - 23:50 | [reply](#)

"Trust only what you have personally made up."

I thought that was good advice, until I realized I did not personally make it up. No, I've seen enough *Star Trek* episodes to know where *that* leads.

by **Kevin** on Wed, 12/24/2003 - 00:06 | [reply](#)

tinfoil

It may be time to make tinfoil a controlled substance.

by a reader on Sat, 12/27/2003 - 06:35 | [reply](#)

Proportional Nonsense

The Liberal Democrats are pushing for **Proportional Representation** (PR) again.

One of the reasons given in support of this catastrophic move is that PR makes your vote "count" and that people might be staying away from elections because they think their vote does not count.

The irony is that the actual effect of PR is systematically to ensure that your vote, and the voting process as a whole, counts as little as possible. How so? Well, PR involves counting the votes for each *party* and then picking *candidates* from a party list in proportion to the votes that each party received. This means there isn't any such thing as a local MP who can be held responsible for his behaviour in Parliament. Furthermore, PR gives grossly disproportionate power to the third-largest party, for they are typically the kingmakers who, by choosing which of the two largest parties to ally with, get to choose the real outcome of a typical election under PR. The fourth-largest and even smaller parties often get lucky too. Thus the outcome is highly insensitive to votes, and highly sensitive to the whims of (literally) third-rate politicians. This, in turn, makes it easier for fringe parties – like Britain's third-largest party, the Liberal Democrats – to get a larger share of the votes, thus making it even more difficult to exclude them from the government. Karl Popper's overarching principle of politics is that the issue of who rules is less important than the issue of how bad rulers and bad policies can be eliminated. Well, PR makes it as hard as possible to choose good rulers in the first place, and well nigh impossible to vote, or campaign, or argue, to keep any party out of government.

This should hardly be surprising, for the notion that you can create good policy by taking the average of everyone's opinions is ridiculous. Should we allow decent people seeking asylum from persecution into the country? Well, the **neo-fascist right** wants to exclude all asylum seekers, so would it be right to exclude 5% of them? Should we have marched 62% of the way to Baghdad?

As for voter turnout, the difficulty in the last election in Britain was that there was no realistic prospect of removing Labour. Hence the drop from 71.5% turnout in 1997 to 59% in 2001. This can only be fixed by having a worthwhile opposition party – something that our present electoral system is giving the politicians powerful incentives

to create – not by sabotaging the electoral system to make sure

that no worthwhile party is ever in power again.

Fri, 12/26/2003 - 17:45 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

too bad more ppl don't understand this

v good post.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sat, 12/27/2003 - 10:42 | [reply](#)

Proportional Nonsense?

I've lived both in Holland (where they have a proportional system) and in America (with a district system). Therefore, I've been able to make some comparison. Though I am not for democracy, I think the proportional system is a bit better. Contrary to the above criticism, I think it is correct in an important sense that the proportional system makes your vote count more. That is, in a district system your vote doesn't "count" if you vote for a small party. Because of the typically homogeneous country wide distribution of political views, small parties tend not to get a single seat in district systems. Hence, your vote doesn't "count" if you vote for a small party in the UK/US, while it does in a proportional system (where small parties get a part of parliament proportional to their country wide vote proportion). This fact biases district systems to 2 party (US) and 3 party (UK) systems. This in turn means that in a country like Holland the political system is much more sensitive toward new ideas, new parties and has a larger margin of debate. In short, it makes the system more dynamic and self-correcting. Case in point: the Libertarian Party in the US typically get's 0.5% of the vote but no seats in congress. With PR they would get a few seats in Congress and have at least an influence on the debate. (Also, more people would vote for the LP in a system in which their vote would no longer be "wasted".)

Your theory that PR gives grossly disproportionate power to the third-largest party sounds logical at first, but turns out to be untrue in practice, for a variety of reasons. One of which is that there are often several "third parties" that can be used to help create a majority, which counteracts any monopoly power. And a second reason is that it is simply an empirical fact (explainable by both economic bargaining theory and gentlemen's agreement) that coalition agreements tend to favor each party's programme in proportion to their size.

You are right that the notion that you can create good policy by taking the average of everyone's opinions is ridiculous. But that's an argument against democracy in general, not against PR.

An important point to be made (but which is rarely made) is that countries that wish to keep their district system nonetheless **must**

change to the [Condorcet voting system](#), which is a potent cure

against the "wasted vote syndrome".

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Sun, 12/28/2003 - 12:49 | [reply](#)

Not Average

'That is, in a district system your vote doesn't "count" if you vote for a small party. Because of the typically homogeneous country wide distribution of political views, small parties tend not to get a single seat in district systems.'

This is as it should be. Or are you suggesting political cranks with unworkable policies, or people who are incapable of arguing convincingly for good policies should have an influence on policy? When socialists are in the minority, as they will be eventually (I hope) do you want their cranky minority opinions to blunt the force of reforms in the direction of capitalism, or do you want to be able to ignore their whining?

'Your theory that PR gives grossly disproportionate power to the third-largest party sounds logical at first, but turns out to be untrue in practice, for a variety of reasons.'

No, in practise it's true. Israel has a problem with religious parties putting in irrational legislation largely because of the disproportionate influence given to them by PR. If they didn't have PR they could ignore the religious parties.

'You are right that the notion that you can create good policy by taking the average of everyone's opinions is ridiculous. But that's an argument against democracy in general, not agains PR.'

Democracy does not take the average of everyone's opinion if you do it in a way that is even mildly sensible, i.e. - if you don't use PR. The policy of Parliament in Britain is not the average of everyone's opinion because the party in power can usually get legislation through on the strength of their own seats in Parliament. This is not the average in any sense of that word. Did the American and British governments half go to war against Saddam and half not? No. Did they compromise with their opponents? No. As such, political debates actually have a large effect on what happens, since they can ensure that one party rather than another gets its policies through. Under PR this is generally impossible to arrange, so every policy is a compromise and nobody has any responsibility for anything and cranks like Charles Kennedy can't be excluded from power.

There are good arguments that anarchocapitalism would be better than democracy, your averaging objection is not one of them.

Lastly, you say 'I am not for democracy'. Do you have any preference between dictatorship and democracy?

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Mon, 12/29/2003 - 01:38 | [reply](#)

PR Gives power to the third largest party

To those who doubt that PR gives grossly disproportionate power to the third largest party, I have only one word to say: Genscher.

by a reader on Mon, 12/29/2003 - 01:51 | [reply](#)

Just noticed this

Two accused war criminals could take Serbia parliament seats after weekend vote

Jailed former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic and another accused war criminal could become members of Serbia's parliament after their extreme nationalist allies swept weekend elections, according to results released Monday.

...

Although the Radicals did not garner a majority that would allow them to form a new Cabinet -- even in coalition with Milosevic's Socialist Party, which won 22 seats -- they will be a tough opposition for any new government.

David Schneider-Joseph

President, **Americans for a Society Free from Age Restrictions**
Chief, **Tewata**

by **DavidSJ** on Mon, 12/29/2003 - 15:26 | [reply](#)

Re: Not Average

Or are you suggesting political cranks with unworkable policies, or people who are incapable of arguing convincingly for good policies should have an influence on policy? When socialists are in the minority, as they will be eventually (I hope) do you want their cranky minority opinions to blunt the force of reforms in the direction of capitalism, or do you want to be able to ignore their whining?

I think you're missing the point. Of course it's better that cranks don't have political influence. But if by disposing of that we also dispose of the influence of good small groups it's not a good idea. We don't want to throw away the baby with the bath water. It's like saying let's abolish scientific freedom and keep only the good scientists who say good things. The cure would be worse than the disease, since by keeping bad scientists out you're also keeping new good scientists with good ideas out. In the end truth does better in a free and open debate, even if that means allowing the bad parts in as well. So too in politics. Of course, you're right that in a PR system you'll get idiot communist minorities influencing debate. But by abolishing that you also lose the libertarian minorities who can influence the debate. If I have a choice between only the status quo or status quo plus communist minority plus libertarian minority I think the latter is better.

No, in practise it's true. Israel has a problem with religious parties putting in irrational legislation largely because of the

disproportionate influence given to them by PR. If they didn't have

PR they could ignore the religious parties.

Of course you can always give examples where this does happen. I guess I should have been more precise and claim that in my experience in most systems (certainly in the Dutch system) this is relatively rare. But even if you are right about this being a problem sometimes or even more often, that doesn't mean we should immediately abolish PR. When choosing between two systems, both of which are less than perfect, we should balance both systems' pros and cons. A possible disproportionate representation by some small party in PR has a counterpart in the disproportionate **disrepresentation** of minorities in a district system.

Democracy does not take the average of everyone's opinion if you do it in a way that is even mildly sensible, i.e. - if you don't use PR.

Yes it does. And so there's much less difference between PR and district system than you might think. It is no coincidence that both parties in the US are almost equal and in the UK you're seeing more and more of that as well, with Labor adopting formerly Conservative policies. Big parties have an internal dynamic not unlike that of the PR system. In a district system the compromise comes not from the coalition agreements, but rather from the fact that parties have to market their policies toward a compromise gaining most votes. The results are really not very dissimilar. Therefore the main difference between both systems is really that the debate is larger, which I've argued is a good thing as it is in science.

PR and district do both have their advantages and disadvantages. On balance I prefer PR for the reason explained.

Lastly, you say 'I am not for democracy'. Do you have any preference between dictatorship and democracy?

Well democracy is just another form of dictatorship, but I think you mean whether I have a preference between democracy and other forms of dictatorship. My fundamental principle is freedom, so I would favor that system which gives more freedom. I'm an anarcho-capitalist, but given the choice I'd choose democracy over other dictatorships, because I think democracies tend to have more respect for freedom. Though it's interesting to note not everybody agrees. In particular Hans Hoppe argues that the wildly oppressive welfare state originates from democracy and would have been less extensive under absolute monarchism. We're obviously much better off in the West than say the Middle East. Interestingly even in a brutal dictatorship such as Iraq's Baath party, there was more freedom in some things than we have here. One didn't have any freedom of speech, but one did have the right to build say a shed in one's own garden, a freedom which is typically lacking in a Western country such as the Netherlands. They were so busy killing off their political enemies, that they really didn't have time to care about non-political life style choices that are overregulated in the West. (For the casual reader: I'm not defending Saddam's rule. I think the liberation by the Allies is a great improvement for Iraq and for the world.)

Alan, I think you might learn a bit more if you spend slightly more

time on looking at issues from your critic's points of view and slightly less time on contemplating how you can attack your critics views.

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Wed, 12/31/2003 - 00:01 | [reply](#)

alan rocks

"Alan, I think you might learn a bit more if you spend slightly more time on looking at issues from your critic's points of view and slightly less time on contemplating how you can attack your critics views."

funny, we could say the same to you. i think it's an unfair line of attack in either case, though.

i'd also like to personally vouch for Alan's integrity and openness to persuasion. you will find few people better.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 12/31/2003 - 01:41 | [reply](#)

Suppressing Debate?

I think you're missing the point. Of course it's better that cranks don't have political influence. But if by disposing of that we also dispose of the influence of good small groups it's not a good idea. We don't want to throw away the baby with the bath water. It's like saying let's abolish scientific freedom and keep only the good scientists who say good things. The cure would be worse than the disease, since by keeping bad scientists out you're also keeping new good scientists with good ideas out. In the end truth does better in a free and open debate, even if that means allowing the bad parts in as well. So too in politics. Of course, you're right that in a PR system you'll get idiot communist minorities influencing debate. But by abolishing that you also lose the libertarian minorities who can influence the debate. If I have a choice between only the status quo or status quo plus communist minority plus libertarian minority I think the latter is better.

First of all, it is perfectly within the power of those who do not get elected to publish their views, they just don't get to use other people's money to attempt to implement them.

A second point is that since at present the government monopolises certain services it is very, very important that the people in power be subject to the most severe criticism possible under such a restraint, i.e. - the district system. If this means chopping off parties with low, thinly spread amounts of votes, then so be it.

Well democracy is just another form of dictatorship, but I think you

mean whether I have a preference between democracy and other forms of dictatorship.

False, there is a fundamental difference, under democracy people have a chance at elections to get rid of bad or incompetent leaders, also votes of no confidence, impeachment, free press and so on play a similar role. Democracy is properly understood as a means of criticising governments, where in dictatorships criticism is deliberately suppressed. Democracy is very imperfect, but it is an improvement on dictatorship.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Wed, 12/31/2003 - 02:39 | [reply](#)

Democracy

I vote for Henry Sturman.

I think his points about the pros and cons of PR are well taken. While small parties may be free to publish their opinions, they are not free to vote on laws. There is no good reason for this. It means that people who support them are not represented in the legislature at all.

It seems to me that people who oppose PR really prefer elitist rule over honoring the people's choices (while paying lip service to democracy). If having members of more parties voting will make it harder to pass new laws, then I say "great". Most new laws suck. If there's an important new law that's worth passing, it should be possible to convince a majority to vote for it.

There's no reason we couldn't have PR in the legislature and a Condorcet-style election for a single chief executive who is not required to form a coalition. The idea of marching 62% of the way to Baghdad is really a silly argument. If the chief executive places his political ambition above principle, then he's unlikely to do the right thing no matter what system is in place.

And I don't think democracy is or isn't dictatorship. Democracy is about how to choose leaders, and dictatorship is about how much power leaders wield. You can have democratically elected dictators, and you can have leaders limited by a constitution chosen by other methods.

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Wed, 12/31/2003 - 08:04 | [reply](#)

Clarification

I didn't mean to imply that I am in favor of PR. I think I'm against it, but not for the criticisms given above.

My main objection is that I think people should vote for individuals rather than parties. I'm not sure that the law should do much to recognize the existence of parties at all. I'm not against potential

candidates organizing into parties, but that shouldn't be the concern

of election laws or constitutions (I think).

But, I do like the Condorcet-style voting method. It's very similar to one that I (and probably many others) have suggested in the past. It would allow people to vote for their actual first choice without worrying about wasting their vote. Their preferences would still be represented in the outcome. And, the election results would provide much more information about voter preferences.

Gil

by **Gil** on Fri, 01/02/2004 - 02:17 | [reply](#)

Re: Clarification

Gil wrote

> My main objection is that I think people should vote for individuals
> rather than parties.

I think first past the post systems are better than PR mainly because it is better that people vote for parties than individuals.

In an old culture like Britain or the US there exists certain political traditions each containing much evolved knowledge. Each tradition has had many writers and politicians contribute to it's history. Therefore with a little research a person can learn more about the beliefs of a party (embodying one of these traditions) than he could ever learn about an individual. Because of the history it is easier to predict what a party will do in government that what an individual will do.

For similar reasons first past the post is better because it is preferable to be ruled by any one of these evolved traditions than by some amalgamation of several of them.

A parallel is to say, if you are an organism in an environment, it is better to be an elephant or an eagle than some mixture of the two.

by a reader on Sat, 01/03/2004 - 12:17 | [reply](#)

A Better Analogy

In any particular, changing, environment: are we likely to see better adaptation from two species of organism, or twenty?

Gil

by **Gil** on Sun, 01/04/2004 - 21:09 | [reply](#)

Not such a good analogy

This analogy only works if each of these organisms is allowed to execute all it's genes independently, as would happen in 20 seperate countries each governed by one political tradition.

If the genes are combined into one organism as in PR it is much

worse.

If for example one party gets the Treasury while another gets the home office we are talking about something with the trunk of an elephant and the wings of an eagle. As I'm sure you know, such an organism will survive worse than either an elephant or an eagle.

by a reader on Mon, 01/05/2004 - 13:39 | [reply](#)

I have never seen an impeachment in reality.

I think almost all modern western democracies fail to pass the Popper's test. I am not very good at history, I must admit. But it seems to me that it is so-so-so difficult to remove a leader from power that only very few examples are out there.

Even notorious Nixon resigned himself before the impeachment has taken place and only under heavy pressure of an imminent trial court. There had still been no way of de-electing him without a trial court or judge's orders to give out tapes etc.. Even in this case people (americans en masse) didn't have any choice of removing him. USA got rid of him only with a great luck, to my view.

There was no impeachment for Clinton either. Not even a slightest chance of it. Recent re-elections in Israel - the same story. Barak resigned himself and put himself forward for the next election. He wasn't evicted from the government because of bad handling of the intifada problem. People voted for Sharon because they wanted protection - but only after Barak resigned voluntarily.

I don't argue that western democracies are better or worse than middle east life-long "presidentships". But to my point of view none of the modern democracies are closer to Popper's principle of ability to remove a bad leader than, let's say, 100 years ago.

And in his own words, this principle has to be a pre-condition for a proper democracy, not the other way around. I.e., if people have an ability to get rid of an evil president, then they could build up an open society.

by a reader on Mon, 06/28/2004 - 08:52 | [reply](#)

elections not impeachment

ummm d00d, the main mechanism for removal is elections. if you look at US history, you'll see lots of former presidents who lost elections, and were thus removed.

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 06/28/2004 - 15:58 | [reply](#)

PR vs first past the post

Isn't this a pro free-market website? If so, why do you favor

competition in the marketplace but seek to severely limit it in the political arena? Parties that have no chance of being elected to office quickly become laughingstocks and their ideas are ignored. This leads to complacency and lack of imagination in the dominant political culture. They start to see the present arrangements as immutable laws of the universe. There are many different ways to implement PR; the Israeli case with the whole country as one constituency and only a minimal number of votes needed to elect an MP is an extreme example. Some notion of a perfect democracy is not the issue, competition is.

by a reader on Fri, 12/03/2004 - 21:07 | [reply](#)

There are a infinite number o

There are a infinite number of ways to adapt the electoral system to a more complicated and diverse society. What would be the argument against say, electing half of parliament via the very simple "approval" system and half via party-list PR in five-member districts? A very simple system that would not give representation to marginal cranks. The only argument against such a change, or something like it, is blind adherence to tradition.

by seelow heights on Fri, 12/03/2004 - 21:31 | [reply](#)

an arg

The point of government policies is not to have compromises that partially enact the policy of every political group (or every person!). There must be one, unified policy (at a time). It cannot be a matter of averaging.

Democracy is not about giving everyone a fair share of control over policy, it's just a way to choose a policy, that allows for changes in policy.

Even if my argument is wrong, it is not "blind adherence to tradition".

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 12/03/2004 - 22:43 | [reply](#)

Somehow I thought democratic

Somehow I thought democratic politics was about compromise. The "approval" method is the most objectively pro-majoritarian voting system conceived by the mind of man. The type of PR I referred to would allow at least some degree of input by ideological minorities. In the end, unlike the basically judicial supremacist systems of the USA and EU, an authentic majority would rule.

by seelow heights on Sat, 12/04/2004 - 04:44 | [reply](#)

Re: PR vs First Past the Post

A reader wrote:

'Isn't this a pro free-market website? If so, why do you favor competition in the marketplace but seek to severely limit it in the political arena? Parties that have no chance of being elected to office quickly become laughingstocks and their ideas are ignored. This leads to complacency and lack of imagination in the dominant political culture. They start to see the present arrangements as immutable laws of the universe. There are many different ways to implement PR; the Israeli case with the whole country as one constituency and only a minimal number of votes needed to elect an MP is an extreme example. Some notion of a perfect democracy is not the issue, competition is.'

First Past the Post isn't about limiting competition, it is about allowing it. If you are going to have a state then, as a matter of fact, there is going to be one set of laws in place at a time, laws that the state gets to make. (I think we ought to move away from this monopolistic situation but that isn't likely to happen anytime soon.)

Let's contrast this with the case of, say, providing coffee. There are many different brands of coffee and many different coffee shops. Each coffee shop has distinctive policies and products, some only carry 'Fair Trade' coffee, some carry brands that are not so labelled. It's not the case that coffee shops get together and compromise on what they are going to do. they set a policy and if it makes a profit they keep going with it and try to improve it. They don't care if they offend the owners of other coffee shops with their policies, nor should they. They don't give some portion of their shops over to promoting the wares of other coffee shops, nor should they. As a result people can easily see what they're getting and don't have to calculate that maybe this product from Starbucks is actually something that got smuggled in from Pret a Manger.

In order to have competition in politics we must have distinctive parties and they must be able to have a clear legislative agenda. Now, unfortunately, if you're going to have a state you can't have the situation where you have lots of parties all passing laws at the same time in the way you can have lots of different coffee shops selling coffee at the same time. There is one set of policies at any one time and only one. So either one party is clearly in control at a time and clearly accountable for their mistakes, including those that make it impossible to pass particular legislation. Or you have a policy that's a compromise between many different parties so that all and none of them are responsible for the results. As a result the voters can't be sure from whom they are buying this policy, nor can they be sure who ought to get the chop if it turns out to be a failure. PR almost always leads to the coalition and compromise and First Past the Post does not inevitably lead to either. So First Past the Post allows competition and PR does not.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Mon, 12/06/2004 - 02:39 | [reply](#)

What's wrong with PR?

I live in Poland. Since 1989, when we are a free country again, we have PR voting system. During those 17 years we had 12 prime ministers. The link between MP's and voters is almost lost. Nobody understand how the votes are translated into seats in parliament and nobody knows who is representing who. We had MP's with less then 500 votes! There is always a need for a coalition to form a government and the resonsabilty is always fuzzy.

There is not ideal voting system but First Past the Post is MUCH better than PR. I know it from my life.

Bartek (37).

by Bartek Michalowski on Fri, 05/04/2007 - 19:35 | [reply](#)

Cuban Outrage

The fake “parliament” of the communist dictatorship of Cuba has been **criticising** conditions under which unlawful combatants are being held at Guantanamo Bay. We are not sure what President Castro hopes to achieve with this drivel. But if he has public-relations consultants, it must surely be against their advice that he has dared to invite comparison between Guantanamo Bay and the rest of Cuba.

A Cuban parliament statement called the leased US facility a “concentration camp”

That's a term usually reserved for places where innocent people or political prisoners are detained. Its misuse in this context is despicable.

It might be an appropriate term, however, for describing a country which is generally a hell hole and where attempted emigration is a **criminal offence**.

and said inmates were subjected to “indescribable humiliations”.

That's presumably why they didn't deign to describe them, then. Unlike **these** people.

The comments add to growing concern over the rights of those being held.

What, like **this**?

[...]

The prisoners are “totally isolated, without the possibility of communicating with their families or access to appropriate legal defence,” the Cuban statement said.

What, like **this**?

“They commit very serious attacks on human dignity, in an atmosphere of hysteria and fear

What, like **this**?

nurtured by North America's far-right,” it continued.

What, like **this**?

How long before the Cuban regime disintegrates under the torsional strain of its own twisted cynicism?

Sun, 12/28/2003 - 21:22 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

too linky

i would have liked this post better if it made more sense without reading the links (which i don't intend to). couldn't some short quotes from each have made things clearer?

btw i realise this would be difficult with only one type of block quote. but if you had 2 or more it'd work ok. i just recently made 4 for my blog just by using different colours. i think it works well. if you don't like that, i'm sure you could figure something else out too. (if you're against colour for aesthetic reasons, how about plain black dotted outline vs plain black dashed outline vs plain black solid outline vs no outline).

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 12/29/2003 - 05:03 | [reply](#)

Pot calling the kettle black

So your point is that Cuba treats his prisoners as badly as we do? Should we be proud of this as Americans?

I particularly like the implication that Castro is cruel for transferring his prisoners to locations far away from their families, as if this is something that has not been a common practice in the US since the prison system was privatized. There are thousands of people right here in Massachusetts who have been unable to visit their loved ones because they have been sold to the Texas prison industry.

Last One Speaks

by a reader on Mon, 12/29/2003 - 12:48 | [reply](#)

Re: Pot calling the kettle black

Last One Speaks asks:

So your point is that Cuba treats his prisoners as badly as we do?

No. That's your point, and it is false as well as irrelevant. We urge you to read the links. You too, Elliot.

by [Editor](#) on Mon, 12/29/2003 - 13:08 | [reply](#)

Castro is no President

I'm not criticizing your post but I do have to mention that Castro is not the President of Cuba. Presidents are elected democratically, and we all know how democratic the elections in Cuba are.

It's impossible to compare the Guantanamo prisoners to the thousands upon thousands of prisoners held in Castro's jails. For one, I don't think there are any prisoners in Guantanamo jailed for being simply independent journalists trying to enlighten the Cuban people about the world around them. I'm sure the conditions and treatment are completely night and day also.

If anyone, such as the commentor "a reader" above believes these comparisons to have some legitimacy, please visit Cubanet or my site (Babalu) for some schooling on the cruelty of Castro's regime.

by a reader on Mon, 12/29/2003 - 14:07 | [reply](#)

Good Post

Excellent. Castro is just hoping to distract from recent E.U. condemnation by trying to shift the focus to U.S. detainees.

And as to the Texas prison industry cited by Last One Speaks...write your congressman and have the law changed. Yes, we're allowed to work for reform here in the U.S. Just look at the recently passed prison rape legislation which was created out of grass-roots efforts. Those same grass-roots efforts would land YOU in jail in Cuba. There's no comparison.

--scott

by a reader on Mon, 12/29/2003 - 17:40 | [reply](#)

Read my Links

Editor note:

No. That's your point, and it is false as well as irrelevant. We urge you to read the links. You too, Elliot.

I did read the links, twice to make sure I didn't miss anything and the conditions in our own prisons is completely relevant on the point of human rights and inhumane treatment of prisoners. Read [this report](#) on Correctional Corp of America's failure to meet its obligations to US citizens.

Further [excerpts from the press release](#).

"Not only will CCA be unable to fill its beds, but the company has not improved operationally and is still mired by debt and controversy since going virtually bankrupt in the late 1990s."

..."States should think twice before signing any new contracts with CCA," said co-author Mafruza Khan, also from Good Jobs First. "This report shows that CCA has not undergone any significant

transformation since being racked by scandals at its prisons in the

late 1990s. It is still involved in numerous controversies and lawsuits involving conditions in its facilities."

and this on how they get away with it,

The study also notes hefty campaign contributions by CCA to legislators to drive policies to maintain and grow the prisoner population. The report reviews cases in which CCA appeared to use its contributions and ties with public officials and legislators to help it win new contracts and influence public policy. According to the Institute on Money in State Politics (www.followthemoney.org), 830 candidates in the 2000 election received contributions from the private prison industry for a total of \$1.12 million. CCA was the top giver with 600 contributions for a total of \$443,300..

Sorry, I'm no supporter of Castro but the Bush regime is no better.

Last One Speaks

by a reader on Mon, 12/29/2003 - 19:35 | [reply](#)

erm

when you say "no better" do you really mean they are exactly equally bad? is castro not even a tiny bit worse?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 12/29/2003 - 21:39 | [reply](#)

RE: ERM

Elliot was heard asking:

when you say "no better" do you really mean they are exactly equally bad? is castro not even a tiny bit worse?

-- Elliot Temple

Yes I mean any violation of human or civil rights, by anyone, is exactly equally inhumane. And on that criteria, I find the policies of my own country worse because the violations occur on a wider scale than one aging dictator can acheive within his limited sphere of influence.

The US prison gulag currently holds over 2 million Americans. We have more people in jail than China, and I just don't see that we have any moral ground to stand on in the face of Castro's criticism. Fidel may be hypocritical but he's right about Gitmo. We are denying those prisoners basic rights that they deserve under international conventions. We would expect no less if the situation were reversed.

just my opinion,

Last One Speaks

by a reader on Tue, 12/30/2003 - 01:14 | [reply](#)

i can see clearly now

so all abuses are equally inhumane, and the USA is the worst. got it.

PS the singular is criterion

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 12/30/2003 - 03:57 | [reply](#)

CASTRO AS PRESIDENT? BAH, HUMBUG!

You've hit it right on the button. He never was and never will be a President. For one thing, he doesn't have the stature to be anything more than a thug, and dictator, kept in office merely by force of arms.

Why is it that every criticism of La Maxima Cucaracha (LMC) in Havana brings these guys out of the woodwork who try to make the U.S. look like the *Evil Empire* and Castroconcentrationcamp land a *Paradise* where everyone enjoys free schooling and free medical care, which supposedly are far more valuable than **FREEDOM**. Cuba, before LMC, always had a top rating for education in the Americas, and the medical care in Cuba today is sub-par by any standard.

His supposed-caring nature in sending Cuban doctors abroad to help in the rural areas of South America is merely a cover-up for these subversive communist infiltrators, the same thing he did in S.A. in his youth.

Look how Capitalism produced the only success in all of Cuba over the past 45 years in the Tourist Zone, and compare that with the abject poverty in the rest of the Island! That thug is a moron who has mesmerized Hollywood. Why, I'll never know.

Keep the pressure on. You're doing a good job.

by **Howard e.** on Tue, 12/30/2003 - 06:52 | [reply](#)

THE BLACK KETTLE

Well, I don't see what the Massachusetts's prisoners situation has to do with Cuban prisoners, unless you have a loved one down there in Texas and must make the comparison. First, I assume that Massachusetts's prisoners are those convicted of felonies, even murder. In Cuba we are speaking about those who differ with The Great Cockroach politically, which can result in execution or a long prison sentence. That's a big difference, amigo. (There have been more than 10,000 executions of political dissidents in Cuba since 1959, not murderers, but those who disagreed with LMC.)

Secondly, we are talking about a legally constituted government in

Massachusetts and the U.S. vs a Dictatorship imposed upon Cubans and laws they did not initiate by majority vote.

Third, we are talking about **a free people with inalienable rights** versus a **slave state** where The Great Cockroach has ALL the authority, even though he never held an elective office in his life. How would you like to still have old mayor "Curley" still in power in Boston? As corrupt as they were, they don't even come close to what Cubans suffer today. Bah, humbug.

by [Howard e.](#) on Tue, 12/30/2003 - 07:09 | [reply](#)

Moral Equivalency

Cuba treats its average citizens much worse than the US treats its prisoners. US convicts have far more rights of appeal, just to name one difference. Cuba is one big slave plantation, Guantanamo is a prison camp for enemy combatants. There's a big difference, and if you can't see it then you're wearing moral blinders.

As for the poor "loved ones" who can't visit their beloved convicted felons, that wouldn't be the case if they hadn't committed the crimes they were convicted of in the first place. Being out of touch with their "loved ones" is a penalty they should have considered before committing those crimes.

Tim Starr

by a reader on Wed, 12/31/2003 - 22:46 | [reply](#)

What's Castro got to do with our sorry human rights record?

Last One Speak's point was correct, and the last few posters have proven it. WE'RE the nation that prattles on endlessly about civil rights and freedom, but hypocritically fall short of our own standards. I **expect** Fidel Castro to act like a tinhorn despot and to oppress his people in the name of building some socialist utopia.

What is your (our) excuse? Pointing to Castro or other despots and saying "we're not as bad as him" is pretty laughable as a reason to ignore our own manifest shortcomings.

To the last several posters who go on about U.S. prisoners deserving what they get because of their own supposed choices about disobeying the laws, etc., have you read the incarceration statistics Last One Speaks cited? Exactly what do you make of it that we have more prisoners and a higher incarceration rate (owing to the quite political, racist "War on Drugs") than the all-time badass totalitarian countries, you know, Commie China, Russia, Cuba and all of those "Axis of Evil" countries you all love to hate?

Cuba? Who cares? I'll grant you Castro is a badass if you'll extend to the rest of your fellow citizens that it's morally wrong and a bad thing to send one of Last One Speaks' black or brown

Massachusetts neighbors to prison in Texas for '20 to life' for

selling/using cocaine or marijuana.

And yes, I do assume from your hugely self-righteous bleatings that your response might be "Yada Yada, Drugs Bad, they 'chose' to break the law, etc.", but perhaps even someone as cloistered and self-righteous as the last few posters have probably tried dangerous "illegal drugs" like marijuana or cocaine, and unless you're totally partisan and a right-wing Moral Majority ideologue, you'll probably agree that the use or sale of those substances isn't much different than legal, politically-correct drugs like alcohol or tobacco and doesn't rate Draconian prison sentences and the break-up of the "offenders" family to a distant state.

But can we leave Castro out of it? Castro being a jerk doesn't at all condone or justify our own sorry human rights record in this regard.

by a reader on Sun, 01/04/2004 - 00:33 | [reply](#)

Is this a trick question?

A reader asked :

Exactly what do you make of it that we have more prisoners and a higher incarceration rate (owing to the quite political, racist "War on Drugs") than the all-time badass totalitarian countries, you know, Commie China, Russia, Cuba and all of those "Axis of Evil" countries you all love to hate?

Well, assuming this is true, I would guess that those countries killed/are killing more prisoners than the US.

How'd I do?

Rowina

by a reader on Mon, 01/05/2004 - 00:45 | [reply](#)

Brazilian Outrage

A Brazilian Federal Judge and nincompoop has **ordered a measure** which, in his own opinion, is "absolutely brutal, threatening human rights, violating human dignity, xenophobic and worthy of the worst horrors committed by the Nazis".

Why would he do such a thing? Well, the United States has announced that from 5 January, all visitors who require visas to enter the US will also have their fingerprints taken on entry.

This includes visitors from Brazil. Federal Judge and nincompoop da Silva objects to this measure.

"I consider the act absolutely brutal, threatening human rights, violating human dignity, xenophobic and worthy of the worst horrors committed by the Nazis,"

he ruled, in his court order.

So he has ordered all American visitors to Brazil to have their fingerprints taken too.

Just to anticipate the question that was asked about our previous item, on **Cuban Outrage**: No, we are not arguing that because Judge and nincompoop da Silva is hypocritical, the American measure is justified. We are arguing that because neither Judge and nincompoop da Silva nor anyone else has given any rational justification for his measure, it has not been justified. In addition, we consider his hypocrisy and blind anti-Americanism, like those of the Cuban regime, to be noteworthy features of the current world political scene, and that is why we are pointing them out.

Incidentally, we consider the American measures reasonable and unexceptionable under the circumstances. But that is not our point here. Even if they were misguided or excessive, their motivation is clearly not to humiliate Brazilians but to thwart terrorist attacks and save lives. Judge and nincompoop da Silva's order, by contrast, is designed solely to humiliate Americans, with shrill and ostentatious disregard for the moral context of the measure he is reacting to.

Wed, 12/31/2003 - 10:14 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

question

he's a judge. how come he can just randomly make a new law like

that?

and also won't it be overturned by some other judge?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 01/01/2004 - 06:56 | [reply](#)

A JUDGE WITHOUT GOOD JUDGMENT

Nor a fair knowledge of the Nazis, and history. There is nothing to guarantee that all judges come with common sense either. Then too, he might be a Castro worshipper and anti-US no matter what we do.

by **Howard e.** on Thu, 01/01/2004 - 09:11 | [reply](#)

Clear as Mud

I'm sure you'll be shocked to hear I disagree with your logic in excusing the US policy. Putting the judge's retaliatory act completely aside, with 27 countries exempt from the indignity of being treated like common criminals,(and one presumes these are the countries exporting light skinned tourists)this can hardly be called a content-neutral regulation.

Looks to me like a political handslapping by the Bush administration for the Latin American's failure to play along on the trade concessions at the WTO conference.

How can taking fingerprints and mugshots at the airport possibly prevent terrorism? Do you think we have some databank of every terrorist agent to compare it to? They recruit new agents every day and even your link suggests we don't have the capacity to use the information.

An official from the US Department of Homeland Security said at least two of the 19 hijackers in the 11 September 2001 attacks could have been stopped if this security system had been in place.

You don't think 17 could have carried out 9/11? I wish I didn't.

The reason there's a rise in anti-Americanism is precisely because of these kind of ineffective and insulting programs. You call it a safety measure. I call it a human rights violation.

Worrying about them getting into the country is pointless. They are here. They uncover sleeper cells within our borders all the time. The money would be better spent in fortifying the protections of the most vulnerable targets in our infrastructure, like say the nuclear power plants. Or did you forget about those reporters that wandered around one for fully fifteen minutes before they were arrested?

respectfully,

Last One Speaks

by a reader on Thu, 01/01/2004 - 22:00 | [reply](#)

Re: Clear As Mud

!

by [Editor](#) on Thu, 01/01/2004 - 22:13 | [reply](#)

Clear as Mud

Where exactly in my remarks did see a suggestion of a conspiracy theory? It seems obvious that since you don't have an answer to defend the effectiveness of this program, you resort to the usual tactic of simply dismissing my pragmatic concern about the allocation of my tax dollars to programs that are not contributing to the safety of the country by implying I'm some fringe lunatic.

It's not about 9/11, the point is this program would not have prevented it from happening, nor will it prevent a future attack.

You're insulted that Brazil would give you a taste of our own policy on the grounds it's unjustified. I'm saying you can't just say our policy is justified without offering some explanation as to how this outrageous invasion of the privacy of an innocent traveller without probable cause outweighs the results likely to be obtained by that infringement on personal sovereignty.

Last One Speaks

by a reader on Thu, 01/01/2004 - 23:00 | [reply](#)

Re: Clear as Mud

Last One Speaks asked:

Where exactly in my remarks did see a suggestion of a conspiracy theory?

That's an interesting question. According to [The World's discussion](#), the central feature of a conspiracy theory is that it alleges that the conspirators are lying about their motives for behaving in the ways that they do, and that their real motives are malevolent. In this case, you are claiming that the US Administration neither intends nor believes that the measures will help prevent terrorism as they publicly claim, but is intentionally diverting resources away from measures that would be effective, in order to further an utterly unrelated, secret intention of punishing Latin American countries for their trade policies, and additionally (if I understand you correctly) they are motivated by the pleasure they take in humiliating dark-skinned people.

Now, this in itself does not make something a conspiracy theory, for it is indeed common for people to lie about their motives. More is required. And in fact, a more conventional definition of 'conspiracy theory' would start from a different criterion: the irrefutability of

such theories. This criterion, too, is met by your remarks, for no conceivable observation would prove them wrong. Contrast that with the straightforward interpretation, namely that the Administration believes what it says about the fingerprinting measure. That interpretation would be utterly exploded by, for instance, a single accidentally recorded remark, when the President thought he was off-camera, of the form "well, that'll show those pesky Brazilians what happens when they cross us at the WTO talks! And can you believe how gullible people are? Security checks at airports deterring terrorists, the very idea, ha ha ha!"

But in my opinion, empirical irrefutability, in itself, is a little overrated as an indicator of irrationality. I would focus on a third feature, also stressed in **The World's** discussion, which is not so much about what a theory says as what it does not say. This is a matter of 'not taking one's own theory seriously'. Space does not permit a full statement here of what it would mean to take the 'terrorism-indifference-and-trade-policy-punishment' theory seriously as an explanation of the reality of the new fingerprint checks. But for instance, I would expect anyone who did take it seriously to be very preoccupied with questions such as: how is the Brazilian government to be made aware of the fact that they are being punished, given that the true motive has to be kept from the public?, by what mechanism does the Administration hope that the humiliation of Brazilian tourists will be translated into Brazilian government compliance at the next trade talks?, are black members of the Administration privy to the policy of exempting white tourists from humiliation? And so on. Your remarks showed no interest in a single such issue, and they therefore satisfy the third criterion too.

And then, fourthly, there is the matter of dupes. In this matter there certainly are dupes (I can testify that I am one of them) i.e. people who consider it highly plausible that these fingerprint measures *will* be helpful. Therefore someone who takes seriously the idea that the Administration does not believe this, would want to explain *how* they know that people with the foul, criminal, concealed motives that you allege, exist at all.

by **David Deutsch** on Fri, 01/02/2004 - 00:48 | [reply](#)

Clear as Mud

Please don't put words in my mouth. I did not address motive at all, perhaps these conspiracy implications you see in my words are your own unacknowledged anxieties speaking.

I'm questioning the fiscal responsibility of this program and the conceivable way to prove its value would be with some credible statistics. It would be a simple matter to produce some empirical evidence proving the humiliation of thousands of innocent tourists will succeed in interdiction of said terrorists, if any such evidence existed.

The only motive I attribute to this waste of my hard earned tax

dollars is political. It's a just another PR ploy in this election year to make you feel secure. It's all smoke and mirrors. It does not make you safer and further will only contribute to the anti-Americanism in the targeted countries. I attribute it to incompetence and indifference, not some evil intent.

still just my opinion,

Last One Speaks

by a reader on Fri, 01/02/2004 - 03:10 | [reply](#)

fun with invalid arguments

well, if "don't put words in my mouth" is a valid argument (you are omniscient WRT yourself, or something, i guess), then i'm pretty sure so is "2 people overrule 1". so i hereby join my voice with David's and assert he is right. he didn't put words in your mouth; his interpretation was entirely reasonable and i believe more accurate than your own knowledge of your views.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 01/02/2004 - 11:04 | [reply](#)

Clear as Mud

"Last One Speaks",

Your story keeps changing.

In your first comment, you seemed to be suggesting malevolent motives for the policy. You noted that 27 countries were exempt and suggested that it was related to skin-color rather than any kind of rational threat assessment.

Then you suggested that it was retaliation for WTO negotiation activity.

Now you say: "It's a just another PR ploy in this election year to make you feel secure."

I think you should forgive us if we're unclear on what your assertions are and why you're making them.

Also, I think you're wrong that "It would be a simple matter to produce some empirical evidence proving the humiliation of thousands of innocent tourists will succeed in interdiction of said terrorists, if any such evidence existed."

In fact, I think that such empirical evidence would be impossible to produce; even if the policy is worthwhile. And, it's not only about interdiction, but there are other security benefits such deterrence and aid in follow-up investigations.

If your concern is genuinely that the costs of this policy exceed its

benefits, then one would expect you to be happy that an analysis has determined that it's wise to exclude visitors from lower risk countries from these "humiliations". Instead, you react in the opposite direction, and perceive it as another problem (and imply irrational prejudice).

I, with you, am not certain that this policy is worthwhile. But, I acknowledge that it has *some* security benefits, and I deny that everyone has a "human right" to enter the United States without being fingerprinted.

Gil

by **Gil** on Fri, 01/02/2004 - 18:57 | [reply](#)

One More Point

I also think that "mak[ing] you feel secure" is a worthy goal.

It doesn't justify every conceivable policy, but it justifies some; and, perhaps, it helps to justify this one.

Gil

by **Gil** on Fri, 01/02/2004 - 19:09 | [reply](#)

Re: Clear as Mud

Gil said to "Last One Speaks":

Your story keeps changing.

In your first comment, you seemed to be suggesting malevolent motives for the policy. You noted that 27 countries were exempt and suggested that it was related to skin-color rather than any kind of rational threat assessment.

Then you suggested that it was retaliation for WTO negotiation activity.

Now you say: "It's a just another PR ploy in this election year to make you feel secure."

I think you should forgive us if we're unclear on what your assertions are and why you're making them.

Yes. Note also that the title of the thread, "Clear as Mud", chosen by "Last One Speaks", can only be referring to **The World's** claim that:

Even if they were misguided or excessive, their motivation is clearly not...

Why would someone forget, and indeed vehemently deny, that they had just made four separate references to motivation? Because, as

he rightly says, calling them that is putting words in his mouth. Or

in other words, it is taking his assertions seriously as statements about reality. It seems perplexing that someone would object to this, but maybe we can understand it like this: *in a conspiracy theorist's world view, theory is parable*. Thus it makes no more sense to "put words in his mouth" than it would have to demand that Jesus explain why the events in some of his more **implausible parables** had not been heard of before. The object of the formally factual assertions in a parable is not to achieve *correspondence* with reality, but to express a sort of transcendent understanding of it, or to feel a certain way about it. That is what the author of a parable is trying to achieve when he says "Then said the king to the servants", or "Bush lied".

by **David Deutsch** on Sat, 01/03/2004 - 06:05 | [reply](#)

A Thought

My little thought is not so much about Brazil or U.S. and motives. I don't think the idea of fingerprint checks and maybe mug shots at ports of entry is all so bad. However, are there not 23 countries for which the U.S. does not require this? List those countries. Can we trust that every citizen of those countries is not a terrorist or at least not hostile to the U.S. with intent to do harm? Are they safer than Brazilians and how does one know that? And why not returning U.S. citizens? Are we sure they are who they say they are, its possible to forge a passport. Maybe I read that wrong about exemptions, but it did sound like there is a gaping hole in the security measure.

Everything else I agree with. The Brazilian judge is a nincompoop. Last One Speaks is likely not a conspiracy theorist, arguments to the contrary.

by a reader on Sat, 01/03/2004 - 16:28 | [reply](#)

Gaping Holes

I'm really perplexed by this criticism of the policy.

We don't want security with no holes (in fact, it's impossible). We don't want to live in a prison. We want a balance between security and civil rights. We should want our limited security resources focused on the higher risk threats; and limit impositions on civil rights. This is **good** discrimination.

Why do the same people who complain that the policy puts a burden on visitors that is not justified by security benefits also complain that some of the visitors are not subjected this burden?

Why assume that both the policy is bad and the inequality is bad, rather than the more plausible theory that authorities are also interested in balancing security and dignity and have just drawn the line in a different place?

Gil

by **Gil** on Sat, 01/03/2004 - 22:10 | [reply](#)

Not a complaint

I would be for a policy of being electronically fingerprinted and digital mug shot, shoot, both upon entering and leaving the country. It would seem to make sense to me and would be less invasive than many other security measures to identify that I am who I say I am and am not a security threat. Please add to that, Have a nice day. Enjoy your travels. Seriously. Let me back in tho please.

by a reader on Sat, 01/03/2004 - 23:03 | [reply](#)

Still Clear as Mud

Hello. One of my readers just pointed out that this thread was still going. Forgive my inattention. I'm new to this form of discussion and I just assumed the thread would end more quickly.

In any event, it's an interesting form of communication. I have never had so many people tell me what I'm really thinking, instead of responding to what I actually said. Since you know my meaning so well, perhaps you'd be willing to call my mom. She loves hearing from me.

Otherwise I can't fail to notice that not one of you can offer a practical defense to a **fiscally irresponsible** and (yes) racist policy that accomplishes practically nothing in the way of homeland security. Excuse me for bitching but I work damn hard for the tax dollars they are squandering on this dunderheaded program and last I looked the Patriot II Act has not quite managed to take away my right to do so.

All I ask is that you think about it.

in peace,

Last One Speaks

by a reader on Sun, 01/04/2004 - 05:49 | [reply](#)

Ideas Have Consequences

A wonderful forum, and as Last One Speaks notes, "All I ask is that you think about it." Several interesting ideas here in these comments above. As close or as far from the truth each of them may be, they do present a spectrum of ideas, scattered somewhat, but a spectrum.

The byline is right tho, Ideas Have Consequences. Fingerprinting and mugshots for visa holding foreigners represents one of those ideas. An idea such as that can be enforced by fiat. It may need to be. Do it. Start now.

However, it would seem most of all from the discussion that not all

the consequences of such an idea have been explored. No one said that this forum is the place for it or must be, but I appreciate the opportunity to think about it as part of an overarching question. It affects me either way and along the whole spectrum once a decision has been made to put the idea into action. I know that the original post or must assume anyway that the intent was only to rightly call into question the Brazilian judge nincompoop. However the larger question of fingerprinting and mug shots at ports of entry has been raised by the implementation of a specific policy. It started as someone's idea. Ideas do have consequences. Sometimes ideas have consequences that may go far beyond the initial intent.

The judge is an inconsequential nincompoop and the world is little affected by his stupid ranting about Nazis and such.

The larger question is about security and freedom and the ideas as to how to balance the two in a free and democratic country where sometimes ideas are carried into action by fiat. The jury is still out on that one, what are our best ideas about security and freedom in a changing world? Of course its not a jury, just a right to think about it and discuss without throwing things. This is as good a place as any to do that, since after all **Setting the World to Rights** seems to understand more than than authors of most forums that Ideas do Have Consequences.

by a reader on Sun, 01/04/2004 - 16:16 | [reply](#)

Ideas have consequences?

The judge is an inconsequential nincompoop and the world is little affected by his stupid ranting about Nazis and such

How could his idea be dismissed so easily when the original theme is about idea carrying consequences? Is there any possibility that the idea of an important person, A JUDGE, could be used to flame an intensive anti-American of those "asking why they hate us" to say the least, not to mention of those even more fanatical. Perhaps you would say that his idea has less important consequences as compared to our consequences? If it's so, then you must be aware of the 2nd level of ideas having consequences, that is how well one's aware of one's own quality of reasoning, the pros & cons of such consequences, the premises and principles those such idea has built upon, the contradiction between principles that applied to such idea. And with that, I suggest that the quality of reasoning of Gil is superb as followed

...We don't want security with no holes (in fact, it's impossible). We don't want to live in a prison. We want a balance between security and civil rights. We should want our limited security resources focused on the higher risk threats; and limit impositions on civil rights. This is good discrimination...

Maybe, you can start from there to outline your lines of why the jury is still out there. It's your idea that we are listening to, if you think it's more probable than the "jury", since if it has the highest

truth, you should be willing to defend it with your life, right? That's one consequence one should think of too.

Words can fool men but nature doesn't give a damn!

by [Lan Nguyen](#) on Sun, 01/04/2004 - 19:03 | [reply](#)

The Judge

I'll let the words of the Brazilian Judge speak for themselves.

As to the second point, Gil does have a superb quality of reasoning. We both are concerned about the proper balance between security and freedom. The jury is still out because that is an everchanging scenario. I want my security measures adaptable to the times and in balance.

I have no need to defend my short post with my life. Some other time maybe.

I happen tho to think that it is not unreasonable to fingerprint electronically and take digital pictures at points of entry. Everyone. Security is security. Its not a half measure. I have no particular reason to question why our government has required this of citizens of other countries. I don't care what your nationality or race is. This is not Brazil and we have been burned badly.

So do it for everyone if it protects my freedom. If it doesn't, don't. Personally I have nothing to lose other then a minor inconvenience. We have the technology and it is pretty good and getting better, and it is alot less intrusive than luggage or body patdowns and x-rays. So include me electronically and digitally and make sure that I know it. They already have my fingerprints and my mug shot a thousand times over. I'm on every ATM film and a whole lot more.

After all I am a U.S. citizen and this time i'm on the passenger manifest. I like that they know that I am who I am when I return to this country. I just don't know that "they" are who "they" say they are, you know? Exempted country? What does that mean? Wave them on through like a flag is some kind of pass go badge? So do it. If its good enough for them its good enough for me too.

by a reader on Mon, 01/05/2004 - 04:19 | [reply](#)

I see your point now. It's no...

I see your point now. It's not against security measure based on "human right" principle as other does but you rather have everyone digitally captured and no exempt. I would yield to that small annoyance with a constant awareness that measure could be used for dark purpose too. For now, I give our government the benefit of the doubt.

Words can fool men but nature doesn't give a damn!

by [Lan Nguyen](#) on Mon, 01/05/2004 - 19:18 | [reply](#)

So, Brazil is - "Outraged"!!!!

Good for them - add it to "Irrelevant" and "Impotent"...

by a reader on Tue, 01/13/2004 - 04:00 | [reply](#)

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Glenn Tells It Like It Is

InstaPundit dares to state the (morally) obvious: that the United States should not be 'neutral' between right and wrong in the Middle East.

As he says himself:

Well, that's why I don't like writing about the Palestinian issue – if you tell the truth, which is that these guys are enemies of civilization, in the grip of a psychotic death cult that will probably lead to their destruction, then you sound shrill.

I also don't write about it much because the Palestinians, fundamentally, are the cannon fodder of other people who don't like the United States, and the real way to resolve this problem is to deal with those other people. And so it's those other people who get the bulk of my attention.

But the amount of pious crap spouted about the Palestinians is so vast that every once in a while I do feel the need to cut through it by pointing out the facts.

Indeed.

And he does so with concise precision. Glenn Reynolds' Instapundit is an effective force for good in the world.

Thu, 01/01/2004 - 19:45 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

Cannon Fodder...

Agreed. Cannon Fodder. Unfortunately as this so aptly points out, the cannon fodder are not the main problem, because it would be much easier to pinpoint solutions to the problem if they weren't.

Which brings up the point. If they (unnamed because of the obvious) are the cannon fodder, then who, what, where are the cannons? That too is obvious but what is behind it is usually ignored in the news.

1) Usually there is a rich man hidden well behind the cannon paying

the bill. Saudi wealth and other such sources ? 2) Usually there is an ideologue with an ax to grind who stands forward to light the taper, and then runs. Osama and the like? 3) Usually there are the bystanders (various ax grinders, or would that be organ grinders with pet monkeys) who root vociferously for the cannon shooters and the cannon fodder so long as the cannon does not appear to point at them. What they forget is that cannon(s) easily swivel to any point on the compass and are not beholden to kind words or the cheering section.

Watch out for the financiers, they are the lowest and sneakiest of the bunch and they like to hide their money trail. They look for leaders of lost causes and angry young men to finance and to do their evil dirty work. Who might they be?

by a reader on Fri, 01/02/2004 - 20:52 | [reply](#)

Slightly Martian

Some of the people working on the Mars lander project have **switched to Mars time**:

Golombek and others on the rover team have adopted a Mars schedule, coordinating their waking and sleeping patterns with Martian days, which are nearly 40 minutes longer than those on Earth. They have blacked out their windows to prevent sunlight from coming in. Some even sport watches that measure Mars time.

"My cats are staying with my husband, so they get to stay on Earth time," quipped mission scientist Wendy Calvin.

Isn't that cool?

Mon, 01/05/2004 - 10:09 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

cool!

How many people do we know who get up progressively later every day, assuming lack of diary constraints? (the correct answer is: 'lots')

This sounds to me like a fantastic correlation of desire-to-live-asynchronously with justifying-one's-desire-to-the-conventionally-timetabled. I just feel sorry for the cat.

Emma

www.rationalparents.blogspot.com/

by a reader on Mon, 01/05/2004 - 13:48 | [reply](#)

Slightly Martian Musings

Emma of rationalparents.blogspot.com remarked in a comment on our previous item **Slightly Martian** (about people working on the Mars lander project who have switched their personal sleep-wake cycles to Mars time):

This sounds to me like a fantastic correlation of desire-to-live-asynchronously with justifying-one's-desire-to-the-conventionally-timetabled.

That's an interesting observation: there are two cultures, the conventionally- and the unconventionally-timetabled.

Is this just a matter of taste, or is one of these two cultures objectively better than the other? Ask yourself this question: suppose *you* suddenly became very interested in the current Mars exploration, and wanted to follow it in real time – which would entail switching your sleep schedule to Mars time. Would you be able to?

Consider the class of people who would *not* be able to. We're not referring to people engaged in activities that they value even more: if someone loves their work so much that they would not interrupt it to follow the Mars mission even if all the relevant authorities and physical constraints permitted them to, then they would not count as 'wanting' to follow it in the sense that we mean here. We're asking: which people would not be able to follow the Mars mission even if they became passionately interested in it?

Probably most people who earn a living through one of the patterns called 'jobs' would not be able to, or more precisely, would think of themselves as being unable to. Most children would be literally unable to, because they would be forcibly prevented. Hospital patients scheduled for urgent surgery. Prisoners in jail. People who can't afford an internet connection...

It must be the case – mustn't it? – that such people tend to avoid lines of thought that might lead to an interest in following the Mars mission, or anything else, with anything like that degree of passion.

And then, on the other hand, there are the elect of the Earth: the people who are either currently pursuing an activity that they love, or are free to do so whenever they discover one.

This dichotomy cuts across the differences by which people are

usually categorised: nationality, wealth, race, class, status, and even the political regime under which they live. It is obviously correlated with some of those. But far from perfectly, and in itself, it is perhaps more important than any of them.

Wed, 01/07/2004 - 18:42 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

the future is flexible

Yes, it is absolutely amazing how many people consider it immoral to get up at 11am or later, say, even if you've been up till 7am doing perfectly reasonable things. I look forward to when all the world is on 24-hour flexi-time. The internet will move things along- as people make real-time connections with others in different time-zones, conventional timetables become less and less useful, and clever ways of solving apparent time-conflict problems can be evolved.

Alice

<http://www.alicebachini.com/>

by a reader on Wed, 01/07/2004 - 13:46 | [reply](#)

A speculation

A speculation: in the European Union, doing this would violate some directive or other about working conditions.

And, whether that is literally true or not, that, or something like it, is the reason the European Mars mission failed and the American one succeeded.

by a reader on Wed, 01/07/2004 - 14:50 | [reply](#)

In a Nearby Universe: BBC "Regrets" Anti-Kilroy Outburst

The BBC has backed down from its threat to **axe** Robert Kilroy-Silk's popular chat show after he wrote a **column** accurately criticising the Arab states as "barbarous and corrupt".

The BBC had described Mr Kilroy-Silk's column as "racist", but today a BBC spokesman said:

"Our hasty reaction has obviously caused great distress and offence and I can only reiterate that everyone here at the BBC deeply regrets that. It also contains clear factual errors which we also regret."

In response to similar accusations from the so-called Commission for Racial Equality, Mr Kilroy-Silk said:

"My lawyers have considered the Commissions's outburst and, in the light of widespread concern, I considered referring it to the police to consider whether it might constitute an offence under the Public Order Act. But then I decided that I wasn't interested in suppressing their right to free speech, regardless of the odious uses to which they put it, and decided to drop the matter."

The Muslim Council of Britain called upon the Sunday Express, which runs Mr Kilroy-Silk's column, to give him more space, saying that his frankness in describing the evils of Islamofascism was a "much-needed breath of fresh air in a world full of fatuous Islamofascist organisations peddling hatred of the West and promoting the oppression of Muslims under the guise of political correctness".

Update: Meanwhile, there is some good news in *this* universe. Ibrahim Nawar, of **Arab Press Freedom Watch**, writes in the **Daily Telegraph**:

"I fully support Robert Kilroy-Silk and salute him as an advocate of freedom of expression. I would like to voice my solidarity with him and with all those who face the censorship of such a basic human right.

I agree with much of what he says about Arab regimes.

There is a very long history of oppression in the Arab world, particularly in the states he mentions..."

Read the whole thing.

Sat, 01/10/2004 - 10:15 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

KILROY WAS HERE!

Back in 1943 and 1944 when I was taking some delightful cruises across the North Atlantic, and through the Mediterranean, Red Sea, Indian Ocean and into the Persian Gulf, every **Head** in every port seemed to have that funny little drawing, two eyes looking over a wall and two hands atop it, saying **Kilroy was here.**

So, the Arabs have known for years that Kilroy was watching them. Now they still can't get rid of the guy! I'm sure a hell of a lot of Arabs agree with his viewpoint, especially those Arab (Muslim) women who are still beaten with switches as they walk down the street because some religious zealot (nut) doesn't think they're dressed right. Every American who was overseas knew Kilroy then! **More should know the one today.**

by [Howard e.](#) on Sun, 01/11/2004 - 05:40 | [reply](#)

Re: Kilroy was here!

Howard e. wrote

Back in 1943 and 1944 when I was taking some delightful cruises across the North Atlantic, and through the Mediterranean

However delightful or educational those cruises must have been, that was a dark and dangerous time to be in those places.

We want to thank you from the bottom of our hearts for being there.

by [Editor](#) on Sun, 01/11/2004 - 15:03 | [reply](#)

Comprehensive Analysis of the Golan Heights Issue

The Golan Heights are a weapon.

They were used to commit mass murder.

They were confiscated and placed under civilised jurisdiction.

End of story.

Tue, 01/13/2004 - 08:42 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

nod

v nice. u put it better than **i did**

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 01/14/2004 - 14:30 | [reply](#)

On Fake Diseases

When children behave in ways that schools or parents dislike, this behaviour is often characterised as an illness. Depending on the nuances of the behaviour concerned, a child might be deemed to have Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) or any one of a growing range of other illnesses.

However, there is something unusual about these diseases. First of all, they are defined entirely in terms of their symptoms, not in terms of some malfunction of the body. Why is this unusual? After all, before the underlying cause was known, diseases like AIDS and SARS, too, were recognised in terms of their symptoms. But that is different. It is perfectly meaningful to say: "that looks like SARS, but it might just be a bad cold, or the person might be deliberately exaggerating his symptoms". Hence also, with real diseases, it is possible to have an asymptomatic disease, like **asymptomatic Hepatitis C**. But it is not possible, even in principle, to have asymptomatic ADHD.

There is another unusual feature of diseases like ODD that should give us pause: they are typically treated without the patient's consent; and indeed the "treatments" are often physically identical to what would in a non-medical context be called punishments. This breach of human rights is casually justified as being "for their own good".

ADHD and its ilk really aren't diseases in the same sense as, say, Hepatitis C. They are **metaphorical diseases**, the names of which denote behaviours that are deemed to be morally unacceptable. In other words, the child has a certain opinion about what he ought to be doing and this opinion is different from his parents' opinion about what he ought to be doing.

Take ODD as an example, the **diagnostic criteria** are:

A pattern of negativistic, hostile, and defiant behavior lasting at least 6 months, during which four (or more) of the following are present:

1. often loses temper
2. often argues with adults
3. often actively defies or refuses to comply with adults'

requests or rules

4. often deliberately annoys people
5. often blames others for his or her mistakes or misbehavior
6. is often touchy or easily annoyed by others
7. is often angry and resentful
8. is often spiteful or vindictive

Note the many moral judgements that are necessary to make any diagnosis according to this definition: "actively defies", "deliberately annoys" and so on. These are not deemed to be disease symptoms when a child does them to an intending kidnapper, or to the parents' political opponents at a demonstration, for example. These states of the child's brain become diseases only when a certain condition – disapproval – exists in the brain *of another person* – the parent or other authority. The treatment is also metaphorical and for **ODD** it consists of conversations and discipline. Again, this is very different from other diseases: bacteria are not great conversationalists, one cannot debate diabetes, but apparently ODD can be disposed of by talking to it.

The entire purpose of these diseases is, in fact, to give these vile "treatments" a gloss of medical and scientific respectability. Then no attention need be paid to whether the child is right to behave defiantly toward his parents in specific cases. No effort needs to be wasted on such fripperies as rational argument or considering that the child might have a point if they repeatedly refuse to obey their parents or say that they are bored in school. How very convenient for the force-users.

There is one last oddity to note. Professor Michael Fitzgerald of Dublin University has recently said that geniuses such as Socrates, Charles Darwin, and Andy Warhol **may have had** a mental disease called **Asperger's syndrome** characterised by not wanting to talk to people and having "restricted" interests with "abnormal" intensity. Now, suppose that having Asperger's syndrome for a while would help you to complete a great work on a "restricted" interest since you wouldn't have to spend time on conversations that would distract you from your work and you would be able to focus intensely on it. Might one not prefer to have Asperger's syndrome to being mentally healthy under such circumstances?

What does that make a person who "cures" it by force?

Wed, 01/14/2004 - 08:51 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

i know you weren't really asking for answers

but yes one might prefer to "have Asperger's" in those conditions. and it makes someone who "cures" it by force an immoral, controlling bastard.

bravo

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 01/14/2004 - 14:30 | [reply](#)

Spot On

It would seem that the self-appointed "curers" of "ODD" are the ones who have contracted the highly contagious delusional disorder, OTD, Oppositional Thinking Disease.

by a reader on Wed, 01/14/2004 - 16:38 | [reply](#)

I'm not a relativist, honest

So *this* is why schools employ the services of educational psychologists. Otherwise, it would be impossible for a teacher to suspect an unruly pupil of being ODD without simultaneously suspecting himself to be ODD. It takes two to argue, etc.

by **Tom Robinson** on Thu, 01/15/2004 - 21:09 | [reply](#)

So are the children here wrong to want something else?

Supposing a child is born to a father who displays characteristics which are typically described by Asperger Syndrome. In other words, the father is persistently unwilling to converse or interact with his children in any way that they would wish. Instead he is unusually occupied with an obscure and particular line of work, he seems unable to read the subtler nuances of conversation and body language, is unusually pedantic and verbose and doesn't realise when he is embarrassing or boring people. Given that the father seems unwilling/unable to turn this behaviour on and off, is the father morally wrong to have had children?

Also given that many people have tried strongly to help the father to learn ways of relating, eg: explaining explicitly what certain types of body language are likely to mean, and that children at times value being listened to and appreciated for their own talents, and all of these apparently humane strategies appear to have failed, what more can be done?

by a reader on Sat, 01/24/2004 - 15:57 | [reply](#)

VAPID father

a reader asked:

Supposing a child is born to a father who displays characteristics which are typically described by Asperger Syndrome...

Perhaps medicalising this style of fatherhood by calling it Verbose

Aloof Pedantic Inept Disorder would help. Perhaps it would do some good to subject the father to a regime of drugs, re-education camps or other pseudo-medical punishments. Perhaps the family will win a hundred million on the lottery if only they spend all their money on tickets this week.

Or they could try solving the problem by improving their ideas. For a start, we recommend total immersion in the **Taking Children Seriously** web site.

by **Editor** on Sat, 01/24/2004 - 17:17 | [reply](#)

mebbe not *total*

they let ppl besides David write stuff, so....

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 01/25/2004 - 03:35 | [reply](#)

Currently Insoluble Problem?

The editor suggested re family with problem father:

Or they could try solving the problem by improving their ideas. For a start, we recommend total immersion in the Taking Children Seriously web site

Which seems an excellent idea but is likely to be quite problematic on two grounds. First, father is only interested in collecting Cypriot stramps, c1964-66, and hasn't the least interest in improving his ideas about parenting. How could he be persuaded to take the TCS cure? Second, even if he did cast an eye over the TCS website, he may well be able to appreciate the epistemology, its rationale, its logical and explanatory force, etc but talking the talk is not walking the walk.

How could one solve these problems?

Is it inconceivable that part of the brain of this type of man really could be permanently unusable for some reason? Afterall, nurses are quite used to dodging the advances of people who, post frontal lobe stroke, lose all sexual inhibition. How could one be so sure that so-called aspergic people are necessarily exempt from a similar neurological deficit?

by a reader on Mon, 01/26/2004 - 19:38 | [reply](#)

all feasible

the first objection goes something like: how do you help someone voluntarily if he's intentionally wicked? the idea is he will reject all offers that would help. but people *aren't* intentionally wicked, and there is some way to reach him.

it's not about talking or walking, it's about what he *thinks*. that

talking and walking are different simply is no obstacle.

it's not a brain issue. if you doubt me, ask a brain doctor to take a look.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 01/26/2004 - 22:53 | [reply](#)

Which is the more coercive?

Is it not potentially more coercive to assume that everyone has the neurological ability to understand and enact TCS, than to hypothesise that for some neurological reason, certain people are, as the situation stands, incapable?

We happily accept, for example, that people are colour blind. Given a certain shade of grey, they will not be able to tell whether the colour is red or green. Someone else will forever have to tell them. We happily accept that this inability is a result of a genetic mutation that is highly heritable.

There are families out there who cannot experience pain. They have a genetic mutation. Would it be inconceivable to imagine that they risk hurting their adopted child when they pick it up, simply because they do not get the right feedback? OK, so one can attempt to prevent this by using other circuitry, but it is apparent that the deficit will always cause some accidents that would otherwise be avoided in a TCS family.

Given that Asperger Syndrome is much more frequent in monozygotic than fraternal twins, I think many brain doctors would say that it does have a genetic component. It seems perfectly conceivable that there is simply a part of the brain that is not functioning, and that this is likely to be due to genes interacting with environment in ways that render a person unable to will themselves out this situation.

The current lack of a precise neurological explanation for the deficits currently known as Asperger's, such as the inability to read body language, does not mean that there aren't any.

It would seem to me more humane to search for and deal with any genetic and non-familial sources, such as viruses, than to try to help someone understand TCS when they simply cannot do so.

by a reader on Sat, 01/31/2004 - 10:21 | [reply](#)

Fake diseases, empty explanations

a reader writes:

Given that Asperger Syndrome is much more frequent in monozygotic than fraternal twins, I think many brain

doctors would say that it does have a genetic

component.

It's true that they would. It's also true that they invariably become evasive when it is pointed out that by this definition of "have a genetic component", being the victim of racist attacks also "has a genetic component", as does being the beneficiary of favouritism due to one's looks.

It seems perfectly conceivable that there is simply a part of the brain that is not functioning, and that this is likely to be due to genes interacting with environment in ways that render a person unable to will themselves out this situation.

In view of the above, it is perfectly possible for a given behaviour to be 100% caused by "part of the brain not functioning ... due to genes ... [that] ... render a person unable to will themselves out", and yet also to be 100% due to the way other people have behaved towards that person, or 100% due to the person's own choices.

Therefore, even setting aside the philosophical complexities of the terms "conceivable" and "unable", the idea that a behaviour is "due to genes" has essentially no content in the absence of some theory about what *sort* of "interaction with the environment" is deemed to be the mechanism through which the behaviour in question is "due to genes".

by **David Deutsch** on Sat, 01/31/2004 - 12:22 | [reply](#)

David Deutsch wrote: In vi...

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In view of the above, it is perfectly possible for a given behaviour to be 100% caused by "part of the brain not functioning ... due to genes ... [that] ... render a person unable to will themselves out", and yet also to be 100% due to the way other people have behaved towards that person, or 100% due to the person's own choices.

Since we have no explanations either way and seeing as we still have the problem of a parent who is completely unable to read body language, despite being given numerous and repeated explanations and despite the fact that he explicitly declares that it would be right to try to solve these sorts of problems, what would one do?

Would one expect the child to change their preferences about being understood non-verbally, or would one just expect to explain oneself repeatedly again and again for all of the foreseeable future, or would one think...well maybe we should seek some other kind of solution. Perhaps the problem lies beyond the current scope of our ability to solve it and so we need new and other and better solutions. Until such time that these come about, we are stuck.

Isn't it more humane to imagine that the father is not intentionally

wicked or entrenched in these situations?

I agree wholeheartedly that the problems of the creation and treatment of fake diseases is rampant and awful but at the same time this does not mean that disabilities that relate to the capacity to think do not exist and would not benefit from consensual treatment.

by a reader on Sun, 02/01/2004 - 11:09 | [reply](#)

consensual treatment?

Fraud would take the ball and run with this, hopefully not as far as david. Perhaps the answer to any dis-ease IS love.

kindness and understanding are still a lost art, but they do exist, although david may want proof. I/m guessing he is far removed from the fact that ninety-five percent of the world DOES believe in GOD, even if david himself has not yet had an interaction which can be proved or is theory based.

I pray for all the sufferings of this world, and that goes double for ppl like you, david.

by a reader on Thu, 12/09/2004 - 05:51 | [reply](#)

ADHD, ODD

I have been immersed in the issues relating to such a child for seven years. He is my sweetheart's son, just 14. She is endlessly patient. I was raised on discipline, and our conflicts over the resulting disparity have been extremely painful. I have very gradually begun to really take responsibility for this, finally internalizing what was first an intellectual recognition that it is not so much the treatment rendered, but the content behind it -- love or anger. Mine has been anger. With determined determination, I am finally beginning to get past it.

by a reader on Mon, 04/04/2005 - 16:37 | [reply](#)

Neurological conditions

I find it interesting that you are focussing on mild and controversial diseases such as ADHD and aspergers. Would you say that diseases like depression, bipolar and schizophrenia were also 'fake' diseases? they too are neurological and thus are classified by symptoms, many of which require the diagnosing physician to make subjective judgements. I believe that all human behaviours lie on continuums and it takes a great deal of sensitivity and sensibility to decide where to draw the line between 'normal' and 'diseased' states.

You cannot make comparisons between completely different forms of diseases such as "diabetes" (a polygenetic and environmental disease); "Hepatitis" or "SARS" (both pathogens) and "ADHD" a behavioural dysfunction. MAY I just say that diabetes is also named by its symptoms and only now are the exact molecular mechanisms coming fully into light. Given the sheer lack of solid scientific

understanding about the brain, it is not surprising that we have not discovered the physiological underpinnings.

In any case, a diagnoses have many consequences, both positive and negative. 'Treatments', or at very least 'coping strategies', may help the sufferer to better handle day-to-day life. If we are to see all of these programs as a violation of rights, then we must resign to have paranoid schizophrenics wandering the streets, as it would be considered "wrong" to hospitalise them. I am not trying to make parallels between ADHD and schizophrenics, but where on the continuum do you draw the line?

Should badly behaved children be given labels? maybe not. but it is preposterous to assume that they have the right to defy parents and teachers. There is a very careful line to be trodden between love and discipline, and the two are by no means mutually exclusive. Only discipline that is administered with an obvious underlying motivation of love will be effective.

one last comment- about genetics...
the majority of behavioral traits are polygenetic, that is they are not simple inherited mutations like those that cause cystic fibrosis and the like. All of these genetic predispositions are greatly modified by environment and thus, in many cases should be all but ignored. An example- if a person happens to have a pattern of behavioural genes that make him susceptible to excessive anger- he should still try to find ways to minimise this anger, just as someone with a less "angry genome" who finds themselves prone to anger due to the way they were raised.

by a reader on Thu, 05/12/2005 - 13:07 | [reply](#)

Love, discipline, and science

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Is there scientific evidence for this theory?

by [Editor](#) on Thu, 05/12/2005 - 13:53 | [reply](#)

Asperger Syndrome is just a w

Asperger Syndrome is just a way for people to blame other people that differ from themselves. They say it is a disorder but it is simply wisdom beyond the comprehension of those who diagnose it. "Asperberger" people simply have more intelligence than "normal" people have but are outnumbered and are simply proclaimed as people with "messed-up" brains. Clearly, I do not believe Asperger Syndrome is real.

by Diagnosed Female on Thu, 05/19/2005 - 04:45 | [reply](#)

love

Ok, you are right, i do not know of any scientific evidence for "love" being the only useful motivator for training a child. Thats probably because no one can define love. Lets instead call it "unconditional positive regard" and then, yes, there is a bounty of scientific evidence. In fact, this is one of the paradigms of clinical psychology.

by a reader on Sun, 05/29/2005 - 01:21 | [reply](#)

diagnosis = excuse

This society has turned into a bunch of whiny babies looking for any excuse to blame someone or something else for their problems. How did children get through school 50 years ago? It's amazing that all these new psychological disorders just suddenly appeared and everyone's got one.

To me it appears a new way to create a defense before the crime. We've about worn out the excuse of "oh he killed that person because he had a tough childhood" so we need some new excuse.

I can smoke a cigarette and it has a calming effect, but you don't see doctors going around diagnosing some stress disorder and prescribing a pack of cigarettes. In 20 years when all these children taking these medications for ADHD and the related imaginary diseases this country will be in ruin, because we have fried the brains of an entire generation.

by take some responsibility on Fri, 06/24/2005 - 21:02 | [reply](#)

On Asperger's and AD(H)D.

First, some background on myself (If you don't care, feel free to skip down to "My Opinion"):

I was reared in the "If the child acts up, it must be ADD" era, otherwise known as the late 1980s. Being diagnosed as "intelligent", yet "socially awkward", as well as a slurry of other things, most of which were a result of my daydreaming, and temper - I was given various drugs for this "disease."

Basically, they put a kid on speed, and wondered why he was up all night, and managing to go from a lower-end (on the right) bell curve, down to "standard", finally ending up in the "why even bother" mindset which manages to affect many children in mid/late highschool.

It was later discussed that I might have Asperger's, but no further testing was done in this vein - being that I dropped out of school and moved to another state. When I moved back to complete my high school diploma, none of this was discussed, or even bothered with due to my current home status being below sub-par.

I'm now nearly 30, and still socially awkward; but mostly because I

choose to be - I don't enjoy being surrounded by more than a few people at a time, and due to an abusive childhood tend to steer away from work and social things which may be viewed as 'aggressive'.

My Opinion:

I believe the issue is a combination of changing social trends, the stronger emotional influence of the media, and the advancements in technology.

If you ever have the (dis)pleasure of sitting through an older television show, such as "I Love Lucy", or anything more than twenty years ago, you'll notice that despite working around the same simple plot line that is often used today, the guise of entertainment is less about the drama of the story, and the plot can last the whole (if not several) episodes.

The way things are often presented today are in a "quick-fire" method, where several things are forced upon the viewer at once. These shows often attempt to drastically "tug the heart strings" of the viewer, causing them to become engrossed with a character, and if that doesn't work, they often work in some other factor in an attempt to continue to gain an audience. This is done in several seconds, if not several minutes time. Children reared upon this (raised on television's social pulp) learn that emotions, as well as solutions can often be fast; and not to dwell upon an emotion, or a subject which does not amuse them - after all, it's fairly unimportant.

Rather than being raised with goals or purposes and having a lack of a parental figure during the child's youth, they're often turned to learn their earlier life's lessons this way. Sure, it's a long step from "Barney" to "E.R.", but cartoons often swiftly bridge this gap.

Not to blame this entirely on television, the world has changed within the last few decades than I could even imagine. In the 1980s, if you wanted to amuse yourself with music, you either turned on the radio, listened to a cassette, or (if you were lucky), MTV. Today, we have personal music playing devices which are capable of things which supercomputers were incapable of, then.

The internet slowly turned from an experimental educational system into a commercial product. In the 1980s, to be on the internet, you were (generally) either a scholar, an educator, or building ARPANET. In 1992, I was on the Internet through the local university - It was an amazing tool I could use to communicate with others (almost anywhere in the world), and obtain information on various subjects.

The internet is now a cesspool of commercial ventures, most notably pornography. Being that pornography is (sadly) quite a driving force between technology, it was required that things be faster, moving from a single dial-in BBS with one or two GIF files (which often took hours) to download to an instantaneous cornucopia of amusement.

This has perpetuated itself through (now) our children, as well as

ourselves. Think of the last time you were annoyed when stuck at a red light, and you were capable of purchasing an item without expecting to be able to track it's progress immediately.

Anyway, this is entirely speculation, but remember it is entirely my own personal view.

by Shawn on Tue, 08/23/2005 - 09:45 | [reply](#)

Asperger syndrome is neither

Asperger syndrome is neither "mild" nor imaginary, and as for the "how did these kids get through school 50 years ago?" the answer is, they didn't. They were carted off to or abandoned in asylums and long stay hospitals and left there to rot, or lobotomised and left there to rot.

by a reader on Tue, 12/06/2005 - 19:24 | [reply](#)

It's real - I should know

I'm talking about Aspergers.

DXed at 32 in 1997, it explained a great deal about my previous life. All the problems I had both at school and at work - especially the latter. Before that time, I wondered what the heck was going on. What was I doing to deserve all the abuse and ridicule I was being force fed - and worse still not being protected from? And I was expected to know, from just being told "You're upsetting people - stop it". I had no instinct to be able to respond appropriately to this otherwise reasonable instruction, and I ended up getting blamed for virtually everything that happened.

This is the reality of an Aspie's adult life without being diagnosed. A recent poster said that 50 years ago Aspies and other people with behavioural difficulties were treated as mad and lumped in asylums. Absolutely right. We didn't want to know about anything different in those days. You either fitted in, or you were mad and needed the full treatment to bring you around. Thankfully for the most part we have grown out of that sick attitude.

Then again - to have people speculate that these issues represent "fake" diseases just gets my blood boiling, because it harks back to those days again. Maybe not the act of sending us Aspies into asylums, but the attitude that got us there all those years ago. We are supposed to be progressing through the concept of tolerance for those who are different - the concept that everyone is different. Being an Aspie can, in fact, be a benefit if the positives of being an Aspie are properly utilised. If this is done, then the Aspie can in fact be just as useful as any other person - and in the normal way as well.

Another point - there is also another factor that has changed over the years. 50 years ago, sometimes Aspies could get by. If they had a special interest that fitted a particular work place, they could leave school early and work their way through a job from a young

age - with little need for qualifications. Now, you need degrees and diplomas for this that and the other, and to get into university you have to do things that previously you didn't have to. Also, the work place in general consisted of individuals with specific single skills. Now it's full of multiskilling and grey coloured flexibility. The work place for the Aspie of the past has gone so the disability had to be recognised, even though it always existed in the shadow of it's more pronounced brother - Autism.

I don't need to provide sources for my information. I'm talking through personal experience. What I have been through. It's all facts from my own life.

All us Aspies ask is to be understood for what we are. If we get abused, invariably we will respond in kind because that is the logical reaction. We will seek information, and when we are ignored we'll persist, and probably get abusive as well. It's frustration because we are not being understood (as opposed to not being agreed with - which is an all too common complaint) and we desire to be. Everyone wants to be understood and accepted for what they are. Achieving such a feat world wide is the secret to world peace IMHO. And that doesn't just go for disabilities either.

by a reader on Sun, 12/25/2005 - 10:08 | [reply](#)

Alright, I'll try not to make

Alright, I'll try not to make this too short for the benefit of being interesting.

Yes, you could say that Asperger's, ADD, and other illnesses are fake, based on the facts that their symptoms deal with relatively lucid things. However I, along with millions of other people, live in America, and there are other mitigating factors to be considered that you, my dear, may not have considered.

We live in a society where mental health is wrought with stigma and looked down upon. I know that for me it was bad enough when I got diagnosed with depression. However Asperger's and/or PDD took the cake for me. It doesn't just deal with the neurotransmitters, as you know, it goes into brain development. And kids like me, 16 year old me, don't want to be labeled that. AT ALL. In fact, I've avoided it like the plague for the past year. With that in mind, I don't think a high percentage of people would be simply fine and dandy with a diagnosis that likens one to being put in the same groups as those who are mentally retarded.

Another issue you brought up: that it could be just natural persuasion and that is wrong to change it. I have thought about this. However I have witnessed in myself (I'm not speaking for others) that it's not exactly the most beneficial to be socially isolated anyway. I'm sure many kids with Asperger's could be the new Einsteins or whatever, but many, many more are *alone and perhaps suffering like me*.

Keep that in mind.

Psychiatry is an enterprise as well as a field, and it depends on the

people. I suppose it'd be up to oneself to decide if you wanted to remain untreated. I've had psychiatrists listen to me as much as I've needed. But my personal suggestion is that, even though your ideas are worth consideration, don't get carried away with the idea that the *au natural* Upcoming Prodigy With Asperger's is better off as a person. Forgive me, but such a notion even seems a little selfish to me.

by Weirdinthecorn on Wed, 01/04/2006 - 06:07 | [reply](#)

emo powa

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by [a reader](#) on Mon, 02/27/2006 - 21:11 | [reply](#)

ADHD

It seems that the label ADHD sounds more 'serious' than hyperactivity. I hear so many bleeding heart stories from parents attempting to excuse the actions of their children, as some lunatic seven year old spits in the face of my newborn baby who is asleep in her pram in the park, and then calls her some nasty expletive. The parent gets all up herself when I say 'umm would you mind removing your child away from my baby' the response is almost automatic 'my son has ADHD he cant help it' ummm, well I cant help it either, so move your child away from my baby before I throttle it! It seems that people with well behaved kids, or mothers with the ability to do the responsible thing and stop their kids terrorising innocents, are the ones being victimised simply because their kids dont have ADHD. So I ask these defensive up themselves parents, Are your children born with a full vocabluary of expletives? Something tells they arent, so try some other excuse for your laziness, other than hiding behind an americanised over diagnosed

label which basically translates to ' your child is a little shit, and

your parenting skills are tantamount to child abuse'

by Emma Flavell on Mon, 03/20/2006 - 18:13 | [reply](#)

Jews Must Have Invented ADHD

Sincerely,

A Posh Jew

by a reader on Mon, 03/20/2006 - 20:05 | [reply](#)

Aren't they clever

Gosh! So they invented ADHD aswell as the right to use a 2000 year old book as deeds to their land! Very impressive.

by Emma Flavell on Tue, 03/21/2006 - 00:21 | [reply](#)

Jews Psychiatrists and the Mentally Ill

Jews, Psychiatrists, and the Mentally Ill, for interesting reasons, often excite the predatory fantasies of the masses. For interesting reasons, they just have to go away (or be defined as useless, evil, or non-existent).

All have historically challenged our deepest feelings about ourselves.

Bigotry has many interesting forms.

by a reader on Tue, 03/21/2006 - 15:42 | [reply](#)

Don't flatter yourself

You may Omit 'Jews' and 'Shrinks' from the 'found to be fascinating' category for a start. Mental illness however, is a worthy subject to be fascinated by, but let's not confuse fascination with bigotry, and let's not be prejudiced against a person simply because they don't fall into any of the three categories you mentioned.

by Emma Flavell on Tue, 03/21/2006 - 17:39 | [reply](#)

These mental disorders are so fake...

which proves me going from straight Fs to straight As in school after treatment is simply me changing my opinions to fit those of my parents, right? Um, no. It's my successful treatment.

You claim that these aren't connected to any dysfunction of the body, which is false. Issues with synapses in the brain cause chemical imbalances. You may be tempted to come out and say "there's no such thing as a chemical imbalance". However, if that were true, taking the drug ecstasy wouldn't be harmful because the

chemical flushing of serotonin wouldn't occur because that would

cause an imbalance.

Also, while your statement of "why wouldn't everyone want Asperger's then?" might seem insightful, all it really does is enshroud the fact that the negative symptoms stunt the positive effects of the extra intelligence.

by Asperger's Patient on Tue, 06/20/2006 - 03:18 | [reply](#)

Quite Right

If the attention deficit and obsessiveness associated with Asperger's illness are traits that are mostly learned over many years (like many personality traits are learned), then a chemical change could not rapidly change these characteristics. Chemicals do not encode logical thinking, approaches to problems, and behavior styles. Drugs therefore can not quickly remake deeply learned personality traits.

But chemical changes can in fact dramatically and rapidly decrease obsessiveness and improve attentional capacity. Therefore attention deficits and obsessiveness are not deeply learned personality traits.

They therefore must be, to some extent, chemically created characteristics.

by a reader on Tue, 06/20/2006 - 04:29 | [reply](#)

Re: Quite Right

To reach the conclusion in your last paragraph from the preceding one, you seem to be assuming that if a trait can be dramatically and rapidly decreased by chemical changes, it follows logically that it must have been chemically created (as opposed to learned). Are you?

by [Editor](#) on Tue, 06/20/2006 - 16:08 | [reply](#)

straight Fs to straight As

Thanks for your first-hand account.

As a matter of curiosity, what is your attitude towards other people's first-hand accounts such as the ones [here](#)?:

... while researching treatments for my own son's autistic symptoms ... I had been researching since we began our journey to cure our son for a little over a year ... we were willing to try anything to halt the headbanging, stimming, and unsettling behavior my then 18 month old son repeated day after day. We saw almost immediate improvement with the first dose of remedy. In the past year and a half my son has gone from a toddler who did not speak, play, or interact much to a happy, sweet, loving, typical 32 month old who by all means is normal - talks, laughs, plays, and tests out at or above his age on

all developmental tests. People meeting him for the first time can not believe he was ever on the spectrum.

by [Editor](#) on Tue, 06/20/2006 - 16:30 | [reply](#)

Re: Re: Quite Right

I'm an optimist. Learning and thinking will create the knowledge that enables us to change virtually any phenomenon whatsoever, for better or for worse. Knowledge created from learning and thinking may one day prevent stars from collapsing (as stated -- I think -- in David's the Fabric of Reality.)

Since the consequences of learning and thinking can cause virtually anything, learning and thinking can in principle be argued to cause and treat cancer, heart disease, strokes, and virtually any medical/psychiatric condition whatsoever, including attention deficit disorder and obsessiveness. But the causes of these conditions are ultimately so multifactorial, that it is not helpful to say that "learning" causes or treats them, unless one specifies the type of learning that causes or treats them, which can then be evaluated scientifically for accuracy.

Simple (known) chemical changes from medication can precipitate the immediate creation and destruction of attentional capacity and obsessiveness, but not core personality traits and mental retardation. Simple chemical changes can precipitate the immediate creation and destruction of cancer, heart disease, and strokes but not congenital deafness or homosexuality/heterosexuality.

Given our knowledge and the environment we live in, when it is plausibly thought or known that specific chemical changes, but not specific known types of changes in learning, can precipitate a condition and its reversal; the condition is said to be mostly "chemically based". Examples of chemically based conditions include heart disease, cancer, strokes, attention deficits, obsessiveness, and paranoia.

Given our knowledge and the environment we live in, when it is plausibly thought that or known that specific changes in learning, but not changes in chemistry, can precipitate a condition and possibly reverse it; the condition is said to be mostly "learning-based". Relative fear of spiders and certain types of personality characteristic are changed mostly by learning.

Given our knowledge and the environment we live in, if conditions are thought to be created by differences in the overall growth of the organism, which when completed is not changed by learning or changes in medication, the conditions are called "developmentally" based. For these conditions, the overall "structure" of the organism or its brain is thought to be responsible. Developmentally based conditions include many forms of mental retardation, Aspergers, homosexuality/heterosexuality, and congenital deafness.

Chemicals do not contain information about ethical principles,

logical thinking, approaches to problems, and empathy. These critically important human attributes are very much learned.

But in some ultimate model of reality, perhaps the behaviors associated with altruism and empathy, according to some reductionists, could be "explained" on a "low" level by chemical reactions. And in some future reality, perhaps the collapse of most stars will be best explained as a consequence of the choices of people.

But in this reality, empathy is a powerful explanatory factor in understanding human relations. And gravity is a powerful factor in explaining why stars collapse.

So the conditions of this environment -- this reality -- matter. The ease with which individuals are capable of thinking their way out of cancer, heart disease, or attention deficits is certainly relevant. For all practical purposes, people have grave difficulty using thought alone to improve these conditions. So we consider these conditions primarily chemically based, and treat them accordingly.

And when someone is afraid of spiders, we don't talk to them about "chemical imbalances" but instead about how he or she can learn to be more comfortable around these organisms.

Ultimately we can say that virtually anything can be caused by "learning" and by "chemicals". But we apportion causality as suits practicality, given the reality that we have. We just don't know what causes any of these conditions; whether heart disease, cancer, or attention deficits. So man is more spirit than substance when this helps him; but the opposite, when needed as well.

by a reader on Wed, 06/21/2006 - 02:51 | [reply](#)

Re: Re: Straight F's to Straight A's

Has the method utilized been studied using carefully controlled experiments?

by a reader on Wed, 06/21/2006 - 03:07 | [reply](#)

Learned condition

Editor,

Do you think cancer is caused less by learning than attention deficit disorder?

by a reader on Wed, 06/21/2006 - 21:16 | [reply](#)

I see different places

Highschool was only one year back for me; and despite being an aspie I highly enjoyed it. I can't say I fit in, but my exceptional abilities lead to respect and acceptance. I didn't focus on fitting in, it wasn't easy, but I just did my own thing and made a place for

myself.

From this string of comments I have the impression that aspies are viewed as different or separate from the mainstream. The catch is that there is no mainstream. I see many small streams; and some austrian decided to name one of them aspie.

My roommate has covered himself with body piercings and tatoos. He wants to separate himself from the norm; but in doing so has become part of the group of people covered in Tatoos and body piercings.

I go as far as to say that all people can be labeled and put into groups based on traits. In Highschool there were the socialite girls (and guys) gossiping in tight clothes; The kids who would sit on the sidewalk wearing hoods smoking dope; the athletes; the artists; the academics; the cheerleaders; the "Gangstas"; etc.

I see Asperger's as just another such group. The difference being that this group was cataloged in the 1940's by some Austrian doctor rather than MTV. An aspie is more than just an aspie. Knowing that an individual is homosexual or dresses like a rock star is entirely different from knowing the individual. Having or lacking Asperger's syndrome is one of only many traits that make an individual unique.

Aspie is just a name given to a group of people. No-one should define themselves or others as simply "an aspie" we're all so much more.

by a reader on Tue, 09/12/2006 - 07:24 | [reply](#)

Aspies

Hi, a reader,

You seem perfectly sane and lucid, not mentally ill. Perhaps you were misdiagnosed?

I don't really want to question your story. It's just that one of the tactics used by people who defend mental illness is to try to pretend that normal people are never misdiagnosed, or worse, properly diagnosed as ill.

If you could tell us a bit about the methods with which you were diagnosed, that might be informative. For example, were they very scientific?

If this is private, or you're at all uncomfortable, please don't answer. Also, if anyone else has experience with this, please do feel free to answer.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 09/12/2006 - 07:45 | [reply](#)

I see different places

Dear Elliot Temple.

My previous post was not intended to be about me personally; I was stating my opinions about Asperger's syndrome. I opened the topic with a brief and undetailed autobiography because I felt it necessary to put my message into context. You seem to share in my opinion that a piece of writing carries little meaning if the source is not identified (You don't trust the report of my Asperger's without knowing more about who was behind it). You have not provided any information about yourself; and as a result your message lacks depth.

I find your response offensive and close minded. My time in highschool was anything but normal, but it was truthfully enjoyable. You also appear to doubt that an aspie could be (in all humbleness) a skilled writer.

I have no wish to argue the merit of my diagnoses at this time. Tell me more about who you are and why you feel qualified to judge a man's mental state based on a single piece of writing. Please pay more attention to the point I was trying to make in the body of my message.

by a reader on Wed, 09/13/2006 - 03:18 | [reply](#)

Re: I see different places

Dear A Reader,

I don't believe personal evidence is required. However, proponents of mental illness make what I believe are false, factual claims. Facts, personal or not, could refute those.

I didn't mean to say that people with Asperger's Syndrome cannot be sane and lucid. I meant it the other way: it's silly to say that sane, lucid people are mentally ill. Any system of diagnosing people that reaches absurd conclusions, is broken.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 09/13/2006 - 05:50 | [reply](#)

I see different places

I was hoping to pass the time by engaging in some sort of debate, but it looks like we are more or less on the same page.

My Diagnosis was based on the results of several hours (spread out over weeks) of mental testing. In the end the doctor (an employee of the school district) showed me a chart indicating that I was above average in most areas but off the charts (literally) in some others. A "normal" human's mental abilities would all lie along the same line.

I don't consider myself mentally ill. I get by in society better than

some. There is no treatment for Asperger's syndrome so as I said it's a diagnosis and nothing more. I always get stuck when I try to explain exactly what I am. I'm me, no more and no less.

by a reader on Wed, 09/13/2006 - 07:12 | [reply](#)

Not Clear

"I don't really want to question your story. It's just that one of the tactics used by people who defend mental illness is to try to pretend that normal people are never misdiagnosed, or worse, properly diagnosed as ill."

Elliot,
Who is it that defends misdiagnosis?

by a reader on Tue, 09/19/2006 - 02:08 | [reply](#)

Confusing

"However, proponents of mental illness make what I believe are false, factual claims. Facts, personal or not, could refute those."

Which claims are factually false? You make many allegations, but provide few examples.

by a reader on Tue, 09/19/2006 - 02:14 | [reply](#)

Sane and Lucid

"It's silly to say that sane, lucid people are mentally ill."

Why? If your arthritis is treated and you no longer have pain, does that mean you don't have arthritis? Some insane people can be made sane with medications. Does that mean they no longer have a mental illness?

And why must untreated people with mental illness be insane or lacking in lucidity? Most untreated people with mental illness are quite sane and quite lucid.

by a reader on Tue, 09/19/2006 - 02:22 | [reply](#)

Allegations; etc

Re Allegations: An example of a false factual claim I've heard is that psychiatrists are almost always careful and thorough, like good scientists. There may exist some who are, but there certainly exist a lot who are not.

Re: Sane and Lucid: I meant that one can be diagnosed as mentally ill while acting sane and lucid. Let me pose a question: If psychiatry keeps very high standards about how to carefully and scientifically diagnose people, and makes it very clear that any other practices would be utterly irresponsible, then why is it a standard use of the English language to call people "mad", "crazy", "insane", "mental"

(ie, mentally retarded), and similar when we disagree with them strongly or we think they are ignorant? How did this blatant slur on psychiatry creep into our language? Where did it come from?

Re: Misdiagnosis: No one defends misdiagnosis, but some people claim they don't happen (much), or otherwise try to discount/ignore the issue. However a quick Google finds:

<http://mentalhealth.about.com/library/sci/0101/blbddd0101.htm>

[a study suggests] that between 15% and 40% of patients with bipolar disorder are misdiagnosed.

That's *a lot* of errors. If you can offer an epistemically sound procedure for correcting errors in diagnostic procedures, I'd be interested to hear it. It must pass the test that harshly-raised children often later thank their parents: you can't take someone's word for whether something helped him or not. He could be wrong. And whatever you may come up with, there will remain the issue of whether it is actually in widespread use or not.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 09/19/2006 - 03:06 | [reply](#)

More Allegations

"Re Allegations: An example of a false factual claim I've heard is that psychiatrists are almost always careful and thorough, like good scientists. There may exist some who are, but there certainly exist a lot who are not."

Is there any factual reason to believe that psychiatrists are less careful than other physicians? What factual reasons do you have to believe that psychiatrists are not careful? Why have you singled out psychiatrists, as opposed to cardiologists?

by a reader on Tue, 09/19/2006 - 15:09 | [reply](#)

Sane and Lucid

"Re: Sane and Lucid: I meant that one can be diagnosed as mentally ill while acting sane and lucid."

Why should someone not be diagnosed as mentally ill while being sane and lucid?

by a reader on Tue, 09/19/2006 - 15:12 | [reply](#)

Slurring Psychiatry

"then why is it a standard use of the English language to call people "mad", "crazy", "insane", "mental" (ie, mentally retarded), and similar when we disagree with them strongly or we think they are ignorant? How did this blatant slur on psychiatry creep into our

language? Where did it come from?"

I don't understand the question. Part of it seems to be -- "Why do we 'slur' psychiatry and the mentally ill?"

Because of the nature of their work, psychiatrists, like Jews, often point out to people what they don't want to hear. The mentally ill, in general, understand this. Others, faced with a challenge to the philosophies they hold dear, would rather bury people than ideas.

Why do we 'slur' psychiatry and the mentally ill?

Mostly because we are ignorant. But also because we are affraid, bigoted, and evil.

by a reader on Tue, 09/19/2006 - 16:27 | [reply](#)

Allegations; Sane+Lucid

Re: Allegatgions:

<http://www.settingtheworldtorights.com/node/498>

The linked thread is about how you can get psychiatrists to say things, and diagnose people, for political reasons. if this happens frequently with cardiologists diagnosing enemy politicians as "might die at any moment" so no one will vote for them, i'm unaware of it.

Another issue is that (within our culture) a cardiologist needs to know very little about a person's ideas. The patient describes some symptoms and some of their behaviors, answers some simple factual questions, little more.

But psychiatry is much harder. The person's knowledge plays a huge role. Every mental symptom could be explained by ideas, so that must be considered at every step. If the person has some kind of knowledge the psychiatrist doesn't know about, that could easily cause a misdiagnosis. And it must be the case that patients have relevant knowledge that their doctors don't understand very frequently. Psychiatrists can't and don't know everything.

"Why should someone not be diagnosed as mentally ill while being sane"

Because that would be a misdiagnosis. (I assume you mean the words in some special way, but I don't know what way, so you tell me.)

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 09/19/2006 - 16:50 | [reply](#)

Careful diagnosis

"Re Allegations: An example of a false factual claim I've heard is

that psychiatrists are almost always careful and thorough, like good scientists. There may exist some who are, but there certainly exist a lot who are not."

"The linked thread is about how you can get psychiatrists to say things, and diagnose people, for political reasons. if this happens frequently with cardiologists diagnosing enemy politicians as "might die at any moment" so no one will vote for them, i'm unaware of it."

Do you have any factual data supporting your allegation that psychiatrist are less careful diagnosticians or less thorough in ruling out diagnostic mimics (conditions that look alike) than caridologists?

by a reader on Thu, 09/21/2006 - 01:44 | [reply](#)

Sane and Lucid

"Why should someone not be diagnosed as mentally ill while being sane"...

Reader

'Because that would be a misdiagnosis. (I assume you mean the words in some special way, but I don't know what way, so you tell me.)'

Lucid -- easily understood; completely intelligible or comprehensible: a lucid explanation.

Sane has several meanings but usually implies "having or showing reason, sound judgment, or good sense: sane advice."

The overwhelming majority of those with mental illnesses are completely lucid and sane, if one utilizes the standard meaning of these words.

by a reader on Thu, 09/21/2006 - 01:53 | [reply](#)

Rationality: Independent of Time

"If you can offer an epistemically sound procedure for correcting errors in diagnostic procedures, I'd be interested to hear it. It must pass the test that harshly-raised children often later thank their parents: you can't take someone's word for whether something helped him or not. He could be wrong. And whatever you may come up with, there will remain the issue of whether it is actually in widespread use or not."

Psychiatrists change diagnoses utilizing the same procedures that others do. We create differential diagnoses (list of possible diagnoses given the symptoms) then rule out every possibility (as best as we can) until only one diagnosis is left. If all diagnoses are ruled out, we have to start over with a new list of possibilities.

I guess you are saying (?) that what one argues later in time is not necessarily more rational than what was argued earlier. That is obviously true.

It doesn't matter if people change their mind. The issue is what is

the best rational formulation possible. An original statement or a changed statement could be more plausible.

But what does that have to do with the validity of psychiatric diagnosis or treatment?

by a reader on Thu, 09/21/2006 - 02:12 | [reply](#)

Incorrect Diagnosis

"[a study suggests] that between 15% and 40% of patients with bipolar disorder are misdiagnosed."

To properly diagnose bipolar disorder (type 1) requires approximately 5 years. That compares favorably to, for example, multiple sclerosis diagnoses. And a high percentage of people are not diagnosed with heart disease prior to having a heart attack, either.

Although psychiatrists certainly do misdiagnose bipolar illness, the majority of incorrect diagnoses are made by family doctors, who think they are treating depression. Their use of antidepressants (particularly without utilizing anti-bipolar medications) decreases the subsequent effectiveness of treatments for bipolar illness, with subsequent brain damage and worsening course of illness.

So why were you claiming that psychiatrists are misdiagnosing bipolar illness, when the overwhelming majority of incorrect diagnoses are made by family physicians?

by a reader on Thu, 09/21/2006 - 02:28 | [reply](#)

Politics

Re: Allegations:

"<http://www.settingtheworldtorights.com/node/498>

The linked thread is about how you can get psychiatrists to say things, and diagnose people, for political reasons."

And you can get non-psychiatrists to say things, as well.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A48119-2005Mar18.html>

by a reader on Thu, 09/21/2006 - 02:35 | [reply](#)

Re: Politics

LOL. You have linked to a politician saying stuff, who used to be a heart surgeon, and now thinks doing this will further his political career. He's making a moral statement to get political support. And no one got him to say this. He's doing it himself.

Note that he's a former *heart* doctor talking about a *brain*

issue. No one considers this to be expert advice. He hasn't even visited the patient. Why? Because this isn't a serious medical opinion, and it's so obvious that it isn't worth bothering to make it less obvious.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 09/21/2006 - 13:10 | [reply](#)

Re: Careful diagnosis

I reckon the diagnostic criteria for 'Oppositional Defiant Disorder', as reproduced in the original posting, constitute ample factual evidence of a lack of care *in the psychiatric profession generally*.

A priest may sincerely believe that he believes the words he utters during his rituals, and pronounce them with great care. But that doesn't mean that religious services are a good source of information about how the universe works, or how to better live one's life.

So it doesn't really matter with how much care and sincerity one tries to apply them, if the diagnostic criteria are vague to begin with.

For example, every criterion begins with the word "often".

How often? Twice a day? Once per fortnight?

Why also "lasting for six months"? Is it just a coincidence that that period equals exactly half the time it takes the earth to orbit the sun?

By contrast, I imagine that diagnosing diseases of the heart involves, in addition to some judgement, the use of tests with simple numerical results.

For example, if the potassium concentration in the blood plasma exceeds [x] mmol/L,

or, if ultrasound scanning indicates that branch [y] of the cardiac artery is blocked,

or, if the cardiogram cycle contains abnormal component [z] with a weighting exceeding .18

(These are all made up. The intention is to give a flavour of what I think real medical science looks like.)

by **Tom Robinson** on Thu, 09/21/2006 - 23:18 | [reply](#)

5 Years

"To properly diagnose bipolar disorder (type 1) requires

approximately 5 years."

So are all patients told (repeatedly) that for the first five years they haven't been properly diagnosed, and may not have bipolar?

I have looked at these links

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bipolar_disorder

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Current_diagnostic_criteria_for_bipolar_disorder

They fail to mention how long it takes to diagnose, and all the criteria listed are vague. This is evidence of a lack of careful thinking, or a lack of careful explaining to the public.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 09/22/2006 - 00:34 | [reply](#)

Re: Politics

In malpractice cases in hundreds of courtrooms across the nation, one doctor says something for the defense, and another says something very different for the prosecution.

Disagreement, money, and politics are a daily part of medical practice, psychiatric and otherwise.

by a reader on Fri, 09/22/2006 - 01:56 | [reply](#)

Exact Diagnosis

Tom Robinson,

You seem to assume that precise differences in numbers (e.g. a cholesterol level of 176 vs. a cholesterol level of 178) means something independent of the predictive value of the number.

Pathological lesions and lab values are not (in general) causes of phenomena. Therefore their only value is to predict things.

Do you have evidence to suggest that psychiatric diagnoses do not predict things of relevance to people or that medical diagnoses predict things better?

by a reader on Fri, 09/22/2006 - 02:19 | [reply](#)

Re: 5 years

"They fail to mention how long it takes to diagnose, and all the criteria listed are vague. This is evidence of a lack of careful thinking, or a lack of careful explaining to the public."

David Deutsch says that 90% of physicists do not believe in the

multiverse, and the general public (in general) does not understand the concept, at all.

Is this evidence of a lack of careful thinking, or evidence of a lack of careful explaining to fellow physicists (let alone physicists apparent inability to explain this to the general public)?

You seem to be assuming that if the general public does not understand a concept, that means the science is wrong or the explanations are bad. Is this your assumption?

by a reader on Fri, 09/22/2006 - 02:29 | [reply](#)

Re: 5 Years

David Deutsch has publicly said things about this issue, including criticizing other physicists. You, on the other hand, haven't taken the stance that 90% of psychiatrists are stupid about important issues, rather you have been defending them. Further, having the wrong view of physics is much less dangerous than having the wrong view of bipolar.

The rate of believing in the multiverse is pretty good among physicists where it matters much to their work, btw.

"You seem to be assuming that if the general public does not understand a concept, that means the science is wrong or the explanations are bad."

Physicists aren't responsible for explaining physics to people (with the exception of physics teachers, authors, TV commentators, etc). And if it was ruining people's lives to not believe in some view of physics which is uncontroversial among experts, then physicists would need to do something about that, or they would be criticized for irresponsibility, by me and others.

Psychiatrists have patients, and they are responsible for talking to these people and correcting them. Given the proportion of people who have seen professional psychiatrists, how can the amount of knowledge of what you say is uncontroversial among psychiatrists, be so tiny? And isn't it irresponsible that they don't do something about this blight on our society? Won't somebody think of the children? :)

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 09/22/2006 - 02:34 | [reply](#)

Psychiatry

"A priest may sincerely believe that he believes the words he utters during his rituals, and pronounce them with great care. But that doesn't mean that religious services are a good source of

information about how the universe works, or how to better live

one's life."

You seem to be assuming that psychiatrists act as priests. If so, do you have any evidence to suggest that psychiatrists act in more priestly ways than other physicians?

You also seem to be assuming that psychiatrists are not helping people or perhaps that psychiatrists have not demonstrated that they help people, or perhaps that they do not help people as much as other physicians. Do you have any evidence to support this assertion?

by a reader on Fri, 09/22/2006 - 02:38 | [reply](#)

Re: Psychiatry

You seem to be assuming that psychiatrists act as priests

...

You also seem to be assuming that psychiatrists are not helping people

I attempted to argue that the ODD diagnostic criteria are careless and vague.

Since they have not apparently been condemned and rejected by the rest of the profession I take this as evidence of intellectual carelessness among psychiatrists generally.

The comparison with priests was meant to make the point that educated people can mean well and yet talk utter gibberish. This wouldn't matter so much if their loose talk didn't harm people and impede progress -- but it does.

I accept that priests and psychiatrists may help some people indirectly. (Their gibberish certainly does not.)

However, in the case of ODD they are not trying to help the children concerned. This means that the children cannot possibly be regarded as patients.

They are assisting teachers and parents in a rotten scheme by attempting to legitimise the harm done to children who wish to have more control over their own lives.

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Fri, 09/22/2006 - 12:35 | [reply](#)

Re: Exact Diagnosis

You seem to assume that precise differences in numbers (e.g. a cholesterol level of 176 vs. a cholesterol level of 178) means something independent of the predictive value of the number

Yes. It's a minor point, which is illustrated by the ODD diagnostic criteria. I regard the combination of the 6 month period referred to in the preamble (exactly half a year) and the stipulation that at least 4 out of the 8 criteria must be met (exactly half) as being

somewhat suspicious.

This is because there's no obvious causal connection between human personality differences and the movements of planets. (Psychiatry and astrology seem to be similar in this respect.)

Also, exact ratios aren't common when it comes to raw data in natural science. The numbers are usually 'messy'. (But not always. e.g. the ratio of toes to legs on a normal human body is exactly 5.)

In brief, the numbers are too parochial. One suspects that they probably haven't been discovered, but rather *chosen* for operational reasons.

The major advantage, of course, of diagnoses based on numerical data and true/false laboratory tests is that they are more objective and have more empirical content.

They more easily rule out healthy people and they do so with less room for error. They depend far less upon what the diagnostician ate for breakfast.

By contrast, with a little jiggery pokery, any normal person could be diagnosed with ODD.

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Fri, 09/22/2006 - 15:25 | [reply](#)

Diagnostic Criteria

The argument is not that psychiatric diagnostic criteria don't predict anything relevant to humans, it is that they don't predict what they are purported to.

But before we continue, let's agree on a set of diagnostic criteria to discuss. Are the ones in the original post the correct diagnostic criteria? If not, can you direct us to some that are correct?

One in the original post is "2. often argues with adults". Assuming we are both adults, I think we both have that :)

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us
[Dialogs](#)

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 09/22/2006 - 15:30 | [reply](#)

Speculation

How can the amount of knowledge of what you say is uncontroversial among psychiatrists, be so tiny?

I don't understand what you are saying, but it sounds speculative.

by a reader on Sun, 10/01/2006 - 03:31 | [reply](#)

Speculation again

"The argument is not that psychiatric diagnostic criteria don't

predict anything relevant to humans, it is that they don't predict what they are purported to."

What is it that is purported and what is it that is inaccurate?

by a reader on Sun, 10/01/2006 - 03:33 | [reply](#)

Inconsistency

"This is because there's no obvious causal connection between human personality differences and the movements of planets. (Psychiatry and astrology seem to be similar in this respect.)"

Numbers, for example the length of time that people have had symptoms and the amount of shift of an ST segment on an EKG, predict things. Do numbers have anything to do with the rotation of the planets around the sun? Yes.

So numbers are involved in one field and in another.

Why is that relevant?

by a reader on Sun, 10/01/2006 - 03:37 | [reply](#)

Vague = Not Reliably Diagnosed

"But before we continue, let's agree on a set of diagnostic criteria to discuss. Are the ones in the original post the correct diagnostic criteria? If not, can you direct us to some that are correct?"

The issue of what the diagnostic criteria are, is irrelevant to this discussion. Unless you have medical training, your ability to diagnose migraine headaches or bipolar disorder by examination; your ability to use an ophthalmoscope to diagnose Wilson's disease or decide whether a specimen could be a cancer illness, is problematic. A mathematical formula may seem to be uninterpretable by you, but that does not mean it can not be understood by a mathematician (or by you if you are trained)

It is not whether you think the criteria are vague, it is whether people who use them do. And "vagueness" of diagnostic criteria in the medical field is determined scientifically by whether diagnoses are reliably made. In fact, psychiatric diagnoses are reliably made by psychiatrists and others trained to do so (by ruling out mimics). And these diagnoses predict quite a lot about whether people will experience pain in the future, damage to organs, and other problems of relevance.

by a reader on Sun, 10/01/2006 - 04:41 | [reply](#)

Diagnostic Criteria

For the terms in the diagnostic criteria which have technical meanings, you could tell them to us, and explain roughly how they

are used. I think we'll understand each other better if you share

some of your knowledge about this.

Also why are criteria published which happen to have coherent non-technical meanings that could easily confuse and mislead people?

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 10/01/2006 - 08:12 | [reply](#)

Diseases

Given the proportion of people who have seen professional psychiatrists, how can the amount of knowledge of what you say is uncontroversial among psychiatrists, be so tiny? And isn't it irresponsible that they don't do something about this blight on our society? Won't somebody think of the children?

by **Scott Brison** on Tue, 11/28/2006 - 09:59 | [reply](#)

Conspiracy theory

There is a difference between believing that quantum mechanical ideas add to our knowledge and being able to utilize equations derived from quantum mechanics. People ask quantum physicists for help utilizing their knowledge and people ask psychiatrists for help in utilizing their knowledge, as well. So the fact that people ask others for help does not mean that there is no legitimate knowledge created by the person being asked.

People know about and utilize psychiatric/psychological knowledge. The National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation and virtually all reputable scientists throughout the world recognize the substantial contribution to global knowledge that neuropsychiatrists, psychiatrists, neurobiologists, and psychologists have made.

The minority is not always wrong. But please be aware that you (Scott Brison), if you are a scientist, are very much in the minority in apparently not understanding that neurobiological damage and dysfunction cause many well-recognized psychiatric conditions.

In fact I know of only one major scientist, in the entire world, who does not understand that major psychiatric illnesses like schizophrenia and bipolar illness are brain diseases.

There may be a few others whom I am not aware of...but please....when the editors posit that conditions like schizophrenia and bipolar illness are "fake" and "superstitions", they are suggesting that virtually every major scientist in the entire world has been the victim of a hoax.

Remarkable.

by a reader on Thu, 12/07/2006 - 00:51 | [reply](#)

Re: Conspiracy theory

Could there be no reason why the majority of scientists in a field might come to hold a false explanatory theory, other than that they have been victims of a hoax by conspirators?

And whether it is we who are in error or the majority of psychiatrists - isn't error the natural and unremarkable state of human beings? Isn't it *knowledge* that is remarkable?

by **Editor** on Fri, 12/08/2006 - 00:58 | [reply](#)

Training and ODD

"a reader" (the most recent one) is suggesting that because there are people who can use a set of rules (which otherwise seem vague) with some "training", their vagueness is irrelevant. This reasoning is flawed, because in the case of ODD it appears that the vagueness is inherent and not because of the lack of training of those who question the rules. The claim is that the trained are in a vague business while insisting they provide a precise service. The fact that they have received a "training" does not provide an answer. (The example of the priests is a good analogy for conveying the point.) If the "training" in question is to be part of the answer, it must be shown that it would technically alter the meaning of some of the rules for diagnosing ODD from their common-sense meaning.

The World's argument does not say that when a child shows the symptoms in the ODD definition, there is no problem. It says that the problem is not one localized in the child, but equally importantly, in its parents. It means that the word "illness" is carelessly used for ODD, with the harmful consequence that it is the child that must be treated. Instead, a rational solution to the problem must include the parents and their *relationship* with the child, complete with the usual standards we apply to human relationships, including human rights and freedoms, and their ethical implications.

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by **Liberal Iranian** on Fri, 12/08/2006 - 12:29 | [reply](#)

Other Than Conspiracy?

The previous claim seemed unclear, but perhaps was saying that because lot's of people ask psychiatrists questions or seek help or something, the fact that people are asking somehow means that there is no knowledge in the field. That claim obviously makes no sense.

It is not that the majority of psychiatrists are incorrect, but rather that virtually every major scientist in the entire world is incorrect. As I stated, I can think of only one who disagrees with the idea that schizophrenia and bipolar illness, for example, are brain diseases.

It certainly is possible that virtually every major scientist is

incorrect. In the abstract, all knowledge is provisional, and will ultimately be found to be untrue (or not completely true).

Why do you think that virtually every major scientist in the entire world disagrees with you? How are you able to see the truth so clearly?

by a reader on Fri, 12/08/2006 - 18:26 | [reply](#)

ODD

My points were specifically about ODD, not schizophrenia or bipolar personality. I am not sure if the same reasoning can be applied to these, but it is something that can be looked into. Is there a majority opinion about ODD being a brain disease among psychiatrists?

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by [Liberal Iranian](#) on Sat, 12/09/2006 - 02:35 | [reply](#)

ODD

Virtually all psychiatrists would say that ODD is not a brain disease.

But impulsiveness can be a consequence of a brain disease.

Schizophrenia and Bipolar illness are not "personalities".

by a reader on Sat, 12/09/2006 - 03:05 | [reply](#)

A disorder is not the same a

A disorder is not the same a disease.

by a reader on Sat, 12/09/2006 - 05:04 | [reply](#)

disease and freedom

For me, using a label such as "disease", "illness", "personality", etc. would not so much matter per se as the ethical implications of their use regarding freedom and personal choice. Let me use the word "condition" as one that includes all such labels. I think the most important aspect of our discussion is not so much the theory of which label is the best one to use, but the meta-theory of what should be done with them.

So far as a person diagnosed with a condition (be it one with physical symptoms such as a heart condition or one with mainly behavioral symptoms such as schizophrenia, bipolar or ODD conditions) can still make decisions regarding his life and convey them in an intelligible fashion to the people around him, he must have the freedom to do so. A failing heart is considered by almost everyone to be an "illness" perhaps because its sure outcome is death, but the person whose heart is failing is ultimately the one who must have the choice to decide what to do with it. The same

goes for the subject of this thread.

Physicians and psychiatrists are free to label and categorize these conditions, research the ways they can be treated to this or that end, but they cannot claim an authority over someone's life, be it a child or an adult, on the basis that the *psychiatrists* (or physicians) have labeled his or her condition as a disease. At the root of it, all conditions have a brain component, a genetic component and an environmental component to varying degrees. It is good to examine and determine these components so we know what to do with a particular condition *if* the person having the condition wishes so.

Those who have conditions that stop them from conveying their wishes to others fall in a different class, and accordingly different ethical principles must be used in such cases. However, a complete shutdown of communication is very rare.

There is another aspect of the labels that is of importance for our meta-theory, and that is the localization of symptoms. If as you say, schizophrenia is a brain disease (there seems to be no direct evidence for this yet), then a symptom such as "Social/occupational dysfunction" (according to [wikipedia](#)) is not acceptable, since this symptom is localized in many people at once, not just the person under diagnosis. If and when such symptoms are part or all of the diagnosis, which apparently is the case for ODD, the treatment must also include those others in whom the symptoms are localized.

Do you find this meta-theory opposite to yours? Why? Is there any evidence based on specific details of the labels used for schizophrenia or bipolar behavior (or any other condition for that matter) that would disfavor it?

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by [Liberal Iranian](#) on Sat, 12/09/2006 - 10:27 | [reply](#)

No Disease Without Damage to People

"Those who have conditions that stop them from conveying their wishes to others fall in a different class, and accordingly different ethical principles must be used in such cases. However, a complete shutdown of communication is very rare."

Agreed. And most psychiatric patients, with schizophrenia or otherwise, can, should, and do make their own decisions. Occassionally they and others are not in a position to make decisions consistent with their own rational beliefs, and so need our help.

"There is another aspect of the labels that is of importance for our meta-theory, and that is the localization of symptoms. If as you say, schizophrenia is a brain disease (there seems to be no direct evidence for this yet), then a symptom such as "Social/occupational dysfunction" (according to wikipedia) is not acceptable, since this symptom is localized in many people at once"
What constitutes "direct evidence" of a brain disease? (if your

instinct is to say "a pathological lesion", then ask yourself whether pathological lesions are causes or effects of illness? And then ask yourself whether a reliably observed behavior could not be, like a pathological lesion, an effect of an illness?)

Despite any pathological lesion (e.g. neurofibrillary tangles), a person does NOT have Alzheimers disease unless he or she has "clinical symptoms"....i.e. unless experts deem him to have symptoms of Alzheimer's disease like memory loss. So the symptoms of the illness must exist, to some extent, in the mind of someone else....an "expert" in the field.

A person does not have epilepsy (despite any positive EEG finding) if he does not have clinical symptoms of illness (like behavioral movement of limbs). So the symptoms of the illness must exist, to some extent, in the mind of someone else....an "expert" in the field. So are epilepsy and Alzheimer's disease "fake" and "superstitions"?

Indeed, the same is true, but in more subtle ways, of all illnesses and diseases. Their definition depends upon the way in which the manifestations of illness affect the living. For example, a pathological slide of a prostate gland, in a 50 year old, can lead to a diagnosis of a cancer disease, but will not do so in a 90 year old.

Why? Because the pathology will likely hurt the 50 year old, but not the 90 year old. If you will, the cancer pathology will hurt the "social and occupational functioning" of a 50 year old, but not a 90 year old. No objectively defined pathological lesion defines an illness or disease, unless it is correlated with a process that damages the psychology of people.

So "damage to people" is inherently a part of the conception of all diseases and illness, psychiatric and otherwise. So all definitions of disease include "damage to people" or "interference with social and/or occupational functioning." Statistical aberrations ("pathological lesions") are irrelevant unless they hurt people. Your body is covered with them, but you don't have millions of diseases!

Even the Szazian hero Virchow, the great pathologist, recognized that dead people have no disease (because nothing in their dead body will affect their "social and occupational functioning")!

A disease is simply not a disease unless it hurts people!

by a reader on Sat, 12/09/2006 - 19:56 | [reply](#)

Who? Whom?

So the symptoms of the illness must exist, to some extent, in the mind of someone else....an "expert" in the field.

This is not what I meant. The expert's mind is using a *theory* that identifies a certain symptom *in* the patient. What exists in the expert's mind is a theory, not a symptom. The symptom exists (or is supposed to exist) in the patient. This applies well to the loss of memory in Alzheimer's. But a "social/occupational" dysfunction

might or might not be localized in the patient under diagnosis. When someone is fired because he is introvert or less communicative (the case for bipolar people I guess) this "social/occupation" dysfunction is localized in the patient and his boss. It is a problem alright, but its solution must include the boss and the occupation itself. (Another example: think of the people who are fired because of their sexual orientation. Where is the symptom localized? What is the solution?)

The "damage to people" guideline constitutes the problem. But who is to be diagnosed? To whom do we apply our treatment? These solution strategies entirely depend on where the symptoms are localized.

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by **Liberal Iranian** on Sat, 12/09/2006 - 22:13 | [reply](#)

Damage to People

Cyrus Ferdowsi,

One can strike the "social and occupational" dysfunction piece from schizophrenia, but then one would have to strike this conception from all conceptions of illness.

But first, try to think of any way that you can understand illness or disease that does not involve psychological damage to people or its variants (pain and suffering). Can you come up with a definition of disease that does not involve psychological damage to people? I certainly haven't been able to. Let me know what you come up with.

By the way, it is almost always the individual who determines that a given condition is causing him "social and occupational dysfunction" or "pain" or "psychological damage".

Homosexuality and Congenital Deafness are developmental conditions, not diseases. There is no progressive damage to the brain. So though there may be social and occupational dysfunction with homosexuality, there is no progressive deterioration of the brain, unless others discriminate against homosexuals (hit them in the head, for example!) Indeed, there may be many cultures in which these conditions are advantageous.

Asperger's and many forms of attention deficit disorder are also not diseases, because they also do not involve progressive damage to the brain (unless people treat these individuals badly as well).

Like homosexuality and congenital deafness, Asperger's and many forms of attention deficit are developmental conditions, but whether, for example, attention deficit is a "developmental DISORDER" is tricky.

In certain cultures, there may be certain advantages to attention deficits (actually there is no deficit...just rapid shifting of attention).

In this culture, those with the condition usually want help. We can

help them with medications and other interventions, so we do. They say they want to function better in this culture.

If there were medicine that could convert someone from homosexuality to heterosexuality (or vice versa) and the individual wanted it, do you think it should be prescribed? Like plastic surgery, I think most doctors would do it. We treat attention deficits for the same reason. The person's performance increases, in this culture.

It is harder, but perhaps not impossible, to think of a culture in which those with Asperger's would do better than the rest of us. So Asperger's is pretty clearly a "disorder", albeit a developmental disorder.

In terms of Alzheimers, I'm glad that you see that a diagnosis can be made with a theory and ones eyes and ears. You apparently see that this method can be a better diagnostic tool than a lab specimen! You are one of the first who has responded (on this site) who recognizes that. And so we diagnose epilepsy, Alzheimer's, schizophrenia, bipolar illness, and migraine headaches, in the same way.

Yes, "damage to people" is subjective, but all definitions of illness depend upon this, unless you can come up with an alternative. But, your definition should allow you to figure out why the millions of pathological abnormalities in your body, are not illnesses.

by a reader on Sun, 12/10/2006 - 00:13 | [reply](#)

Living Beings

"When someone is fired because he is introvert or less communicative (the case for bipolar people I guess) this "social/occupation" dysfunction is localized in the patient and his boss. It is a problem alright, but its solution must include the boss and the occupation itself."

Note that the definition of the mental illness, Alzheimer's dementia, includes the definition,

[http://www.medterms.com/script/main/art.asp?\(articlekey=2940\)](http://www.medterms.com/script/main/art.asp?(articlekey=2940)).

"Significant loss of intellectual abilities such as memory capacity, severe enough to INTERFERE WITH SOCIAL AND OCCUPATIONAL FUNCTIONING."

All illnesses include this type of subjective component in their definition. Usually the sufferer himself says that he is experiencing pain, social problems, etc.

But your point is well taken. Social and occupational dysfunction is usually more of a consequence of an illness, not a symptom, per se. But if the illness were not in some way subjectively hurting the person, even if not socially and occupationally, then I don't think most doctors would consider it an illness.

Doctors in general include psychological consequences to people in

the definition of illnesses (e.g. pain and suffering) as a way of recognizing that illnesses happen to living people, but not to stones.

by a reader on Sun, 12/10/2006 - 01:31 | [reply](#)

Definition of Disease

Can you come up with a definition of disease that does not involve psychological damage to people?

I may or may not, depending on what I want to do with the proposed definition. I have no problem with including "pain and suffering" in a definition of "disease" and excluding that from "developmental condition" and/or "disorder." As I said, I am more concerned with the way these definitions are used for taking action with respect to the individuals, and the ethical consequences of those actions. If an individual is seeking help for a "disease" or a "disorder" it is of course no one's business to tell him he is not allowed to receive it if it is being offered based on mutual agreement. But you see, in this statement, I have not mentioned the disease's or disorder's definition. It is based on the meta-theory of what to do with any such definition. If some people try to use a particular definition to argue against this statement or for a different statement, their definition must have included a new meta-theory in it already.

I don't think identifying the source of the "damage to people" is necessarily subjective. I think **The World's** original post is actually arguing that in the case of ODD, the source is objectively localized in the parents as well as the child. As such, the diagnosis that excludes the parents is false.

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by **Liberal Iranian** on Sun, 12/10/2006 - 03:57 | [reply](#)

Your Point?

Cyrus Ferdowsi,

We have no disagreement that the overwhelming majority of exchanges between people should be voluntary.

Is there an additional point that you are making?

by a reader on Sun, 12/10/2006 - 04:10 | [reply](#)

More than that...

"I don't think identifying the source of the "damage to people" is necessarily subjective."

Agreed. But I did not claim it was "necessarily subjective." I said pain and suffering, a component of all illness, is to some extent subjective.

"I think **The World's** original post is actually arguing that in the

case of ODD, the source is objectively localized in the parents as well as the child. As such, the diagnosis that excludes the parents is false."

The editor's of "**The World**" claim that all mental illness is "false", "fake", and a "superstition". They do not just refer to oppositional defiant disorder. And they attack a charity that specifically helps the mentally ill.

Regardless of whether some people could misapply a diagnosis of "oppositional defiant disorder" to a child, when the parents are in fact behaving badly: The editor's have engaged in name-calling, attacks against charities that are helping people, and have refused to use a scientific approach to understanding brain diseases like schizophrenia that destroy people's lives.

Schizophrenia is no "superstition" and virtually every eminent scientist (except one that I know of) understands this.

I therefore think the editor's approach is morally and scientifically wrong.

by a reader on Sun, 12/10/2006 - 04:42 | [reply](#)

Asymptomatic Illnesses

The editor's suggest that latent Hep. C is an "asymptomatic disease". But they suggest that mental illnesses like Schizophrenia and presumably Alzheimers can't be "asymptomatic", so Hepatitis C is a real illness and mental illness is "metaphorical". Real illnesses can be asymptomatic, but not pretend illnesses.

But latent Hep. C, in a fully informed and rational person, is not asymptomatic, either.

People worry about latent Hep. C and treat it with interferon, because there is a distinct probability that it will injure the physical body and the psychology of the victim later in life (Hep C will cause pain and suffering and death). So informed and rational people worry (right now!) about damage to their body and mind that may yet occur, because of processes in their liver that may be beginning now.

Worry is a psychological symptom existing in the present. So Hep. C is not asymptomatic. A rational and informed person should be worried about it in most cases.

Alzheimer's, Schizophrenia, and latent Hep. C., can be "asymptomatic" if the person does not subjectively worry about the behaviors and states of mind he is exhibiting (memory loss, paranoia, etc.), and if he does not worry about the state of his liver. But in most cases, a rational and informed person should worry about these behaviors and the state of his liver.

If it is known that exposure to Hepatitis C is not going to injure someone, because the body responded adequately to it in the past, then the person is asymptomatic, but he also doesn't have a

disease!

So there is no philosophical distinction between Schizophrenia, Alzheimers and latent hepatitis C. None of these diseases are truly asymptomatic in fully informed, rational people.

Doctors do use the term "asymptomatic disease", but as a way of trying to convince people to worry more (be more symptomatic!) and therefore act aggressively to take care of their health, when they may not be aware that something is damaging them.

But strictly speaking, it is a contradiction in terms to speak of a disease that is truly asymptomatic over the long-term.

by a reader on Sun, 12/10/2006 - 15:32 | [reply](#)

Huh?

Worry is a psychological symptom existing in the present. So Hep. C is not asymptomatic. A rational and informed person should be worried about it in most cases.

Are you suggesting that a doctor should or does factor in the "worry" as a symptom of Hepatitis C? Can you explain how this should be or is done in a real-world scenario? For instance, should or could two patients, one with and the other without worry (for whatever reason), be diagnosed differently everything else being equal?

Doctors do use the term "asymptomatic disease", but as a way of trying to convince people to worry more (be more symptomatic!) ...

So, by your reasoning, are doctors making people ill?

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by [Liberal Iranian](#) on Mon, 12/11/2006 - 08:26 | [reply](#)

Asymptomatic Disease

Worry/Concern is a rational way of bringing the expectation of future pain and suffering into our current consciousness, so we can act appropriately.

If latent Hep. C did not cause the rational person to expect future pain and suffering, it would not be an illness.

So yes, physicians do need to take into account whether a rational person would expect a given condition to cause pain and suffering, in their consideration of whether that condition is an illness.

I'm afraid that one can not logically take subjective considerations out of conceptions of illness, otherwise rocks and dead people would be considered "ill".

Again. Try to come up with a conception of illness that does not

include subjective elements like "loss of needed functioning" or "pain and suffering."

If you try to argue that just the presence of a "lesion" defines an illness, your conception must take into account that you have millions of statistically aberrant structures (lesions) in your body, right now, yet you do not have millions of diseases.

by a reader on Mon, 12/11/2006 - 18:40 | [reply](#)

Objective Conception of Illness

I think it is possible to have an objective conception of illness. Before I lay that out, let me try to point out a few difficulties with your type of subjective conception of illness:

1. You say, "If latent Hep. C did not cause the rational person to expect future pain and suffering, it would not be an illness." But clearly, even in this statement, you are separating the "future pain and suffering" from "latent Hepatitis C" itself. Objectively the two are related as cause and effect. Including the effect in the cause is *logically* untenable.
2. But let's take this approach seriously for a moment. You say, "physicians do need to take into account whether a rational person would expect a given condition to cause pain and suffering, in their consideration of whether that condition is an illness." How does this apply to ODD? What *is* the condition there that is causing pain and suffering? It seems, even though you proclaim a subjective conception of illness, you still need to objectively identify the causing condition. How do you do that for ODD, where all we have are subjective symptoms?
3. Furthermore, if we are to include *consequent* "pain and suffering" which seems to be your defining element of an illness, what is to stop us just there? Why not include other consequences of the causing condition, say, consequent economical or political effects, etc.?

Now to my suggestion: I think that you are mistaking the "problem situation" for the "illness." As I wrote [earlier](#), the pain and suffering constitutes a problem. But when we use the word "illness" or "disease" in their common usage, we are referring to the causes of the problem. Our conception of these causes must be objective and especially if they are being attributed to a person (e.g., claimed to be the child in case of ODD), the attribution must be objective in the sense that the cause must be localized in that person. The solution is then in finding a way to resolve the problem at the level it can be acted on. This last step is also subject to ethical rules.

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by [Liberal Iranian](#) on Mon, 12/11/2006 - 23:05 | [reply](#)

A Further Element of Objective Conception of Illness?

I do not mean to deny that "pain and suffering" or other

consequences of a condition might be relevant to the notion of illness. But I do think that they must be taken into account with caution. On the other side of the discussion here, the approach defended by "a reader" can lead to ~~problems~~ difficulties s/he might not wish to cause.

Suppose person A comes down with cancer X, which would eventually kill him. I think we would agree that this would include "pain and suffering." However, if person A does not find it a problem (he might wish to die for personal reasons, etc.) "a reader" would seem to think that he does not have an illness. I regard this conclusion useless, and potentially problematic. Why? Suppose further that this is the first case of cancer X, a new type of cancer previously unknown. Should we not categorize it as an illness, make it part of the cancer research efforts, etc.? I prefer to answer, "we should" for reasons contained in our common-sense notion of illness: The reason is that we may conclude, *objectively*, that there are people who would find the "pain and suffering" or the ensuing death a problem, were *they* found to have cancer X.

So, if "pain and suffering" is to play a part in our conception of illness, it still needs to be in an objective way. There may be other constraints I have not thought of.

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by [Liberal Iranian](#) on Mon, 12/11/2006 - 23:52 | [reply](#)

ODD is Not an Illness

"But let's take this approach seriously for a moment. You say, "physicians do need to take into account whether a rational person would expect a given condition to cause pain and suffering, in their consideration of whether that condition is an illness." How does this apply to ODD? What is the condition there that is causing pain and suffering?"

I don't consider ODD an illness.

by a reader on Tue, 12/12/2006 - 01:39 | [reply](#)

Not Clear to Me

"You say, "If latent Hep. C did not cause the rational person to expect future pain and suffering, it would not be an illness." But clearly, even in this statement, you are separating the "future pain and suffering" from "latent Hepatitis C" itself. Objectively the two are related as cause and effect. Including the effect in the cause is logically untenable."

Latent Hep C is an infection, but not an illness unless it ultimately causes a rational and informed person to expect pain and suffering. For example, if someone had 3 months to live because of a cancer illness, if he then contracts a Hep C infection from a blood transfusion which becomes latent, he does not have a latent Hep C illness, though he has an infection, because the infection will not

cause him pain and suffering, early death, or any other problematic complication.

An infection may or may not cause an illness, depending upon whether it does or does not damage the person. You claim this statements is somehow logically untenable. In what sense?

by a reader on Tue, 12/12/2006 - 01:58 | [reply](#)

Doctors Focus on the Patient

"Furthermore, if we are to include consequent "pain and suffering" which seems to be your defining element of an illness"

No it is not the defining element of an illness. It is part of the definition of an illness.

"Why not include other consequences of the causing condition, say, consequent economical or political effects, etc.?"

That would go under social and occupational dysfunction!

Why not consider political effects of abnormal biological processes in the doctor's office?

Because in general people want their doctor to focus on the abnormal biological processes in their own body that are causing their own pain and suffering, not the suffering of other people.

by a reader on Tue, 12/12/2006 - 02:15 | [reply](#)

Not Going to Argue with Myself!

"Suppose person A comes down with cancer X, which would eventually kill him. I think we would agree that this would include "pain and suffering." However, if person A does not find it a problem (he might wish to die for personal reasons, etc.) "a reader" would seem to think that he does not have an illness."

Ahh. Forgive me, but I am just not following your argument. You are specifying that there is an abnormal biological process (the cancer cells). You are also telling me that a rational and informed person would likely think that this biological abnormality is going to cause pain and suffering. So by the criteria I have given, he has an illness.

Why would I disagree with that? Why is it relevant that he also wants to kill himself?

by a reader on Tue, 12/12/2006 - 02:39 | [reply](#)

Pain and Subjectivity

"The reason is that we may conclude, objectively, that there are people who would find the "pain and suffering" or the ensuing death a problem, were they found to have cancer X."

Notice something very interesting about what you said. I think you

have just determined that a person has an illness, not just by looking at an abnormal physical part in a person's body, but also by noting the effect of that abnormal part, on a person's mind!

You say (?for a biological abnormality to be an illness?)that there are "people" (not necessarily the person with the illness) "who would find the pain or suffering....a problem."

So you seem to be agreeing that the person is not ill unless other rational people believe that the person with the biological abnormality should or will perceive pain and suffering from the abnormality?

Hmm. If this is your belief, you sound suspiciously like a psychiatrist, actually like most MD's. (Sorry to insult you, if you think that I am).

But would not one person's conception of what should cause pain and suffering vary from culture to culture? Indeed, would it not vary from person to person?

Don't you think different, equally rational people, could think that the same biological abnormality causes different amounts of pain and suffering?

So is there not any subjectivity involved in determining what is painful?

I'm still waiting for your objective criteria that defines what an illness is.

by a reader on Tue, 12/12/2006 - 03:51 | [reply](#)

Clarification

Ok, so let me ask a clarifying question: when you say, a rational person would expect illness to cause pain and suffering, do you take this expectation to be subjective or objective? If it is objective, how can it be found out without reference to a particular person? If it is subjective, why do you not follow the step in my argument that person A could rationally but subjectively not worry about having cancer X?

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by [Liberal Iranian](#) on Tue, 12/12/2006 - 03:56 | [reply](#)

RE: Pain and Subjectivity

I said, "*objectively*, there are people who would find the 'pain and suffering' or the ensuing death a *problem*..." (added emphasis). The emphasis here was on there being a problem and the process is expressly objective. It does not refer to a particular person, especially the one under diagnosis.

It is also important to note that all our discussions have been with

the assumption that there exists some underlying cause, given different labels in different comments, e.g. a "lesion" or an "abnormal biological process", etc. I am arguing that the objective existence of such an underlying cause is the substantial part of the notion of illness and the problems it creates. Without them, there are only problems, no illness or disease. Especially, the sole existence of "pain and suffering" or other subjective symptoms, even in principle, does not constitute a disease, but only a problem situation.

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by **Liberal Iranian** on Tue, 12/12/2006 - 04:14 | [reply](#)

So Dead People Have Illnesses?

"But when we use the word "illness" or "disease" in their common usage, we are referring to the causes of the problem."

This is not correct. We do not know the cause of virtually any illness.

But I think it is illogical, as well.

So if a person has a staph. aureus infection, the illness is the staph aureus and the problem is the pain and suffering?

So if the person then dies of the infection, the staph is still on the person. If the staph. is the illness, then why isn't the dead person still ill?

If you say, "Because he doesn't have a problem", then you are agreeing that a person is only ill if he has a cause of a problem AND a problem.

So illness, by your own reasoning, must imply cause and problem, not just cause. Right?

And what one rational person determines is a "problem" is not necessarily what another rational person determines is a problem. Therefore illnesses have objective and subjective components.

by a reader on Tue, 12/12/2006 - 04:27 | [reply](#)

Dead People, Illnesses and Problems

So if the person then dies of the infection, the staph is still on the person. If the staph. is the illness, then why isn't the dead person still ill?

He is not ill for all practical purposes simply because he is dead. We could still consider him ill, but that usually wouldn't be useful or solve any relevant problem.

I think I should state again that I am not so much after fixing a definition for disease or illness. What I think is important is how we use the notion of illness to solve our problems and its ethical

consequences. Here is my description of the situation: People, symptoms (including pains) and illnesses are all parts of a problem situation. It seems to me that when we say a person has a certain disease, what we mean is that in order to solve the corresponding problem, the best solution would be to treat the disease, in great part because of the implied causal relationship. Since the disease is normally attributed to a single person, we are arguing that the best solution to the problem (having pain or any inconvenience, for instance) is for the said person to undergo treatment. This argument has ethical consequences. For it to be a good argument, the disease must be identified and attributed to the said person objectively. If instead there are only subjective symptoms spread over a number of people, I do not see why the best way to resolve the problem situation would be to pick and choose some of the symptoms in one person and treat them with no regard to others. In such cases, I prefer not to use the label "disease" and its implied treatment because I find it leads to inferior solutions, or even non-solutions, and also to ethically unacceptable actions.

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by **Liberal Iranian** on Tue, 12/12/2006 - 05:01 | [reply](#)

Dead People. No Illness

"He is not ill (a dead person with staph aureus in his body)for all practical purposes simply because he is dead. We could still consider him ill, but that usually wouldn't be useful or solve any relevant problem"

But you apparently say that the staph infection is the illness! If you don't say this, what is the illness? So if a live person then dies of a staph. infection, the staph is still on the person. If the staph. is the illness, then I ask again, why isn't the dead person still ill?

If you say "for all practical purposes" a dead person is not ill because "it's not useful" or because "it wouldn't solve any relevant problem", then you are agreeing that a person is only ill if he has the infection and a problem from the infection.

Also, if the staph. aureus infection is the illness, then why isn't every other infection in your and my body an illness? If we are healthy, we are currently infested with millions of infections, therefore millions of illnesses?

If you say that these infections are not illnesses because thinking of them as "illnesses" does not help us "to solve a relevant problem", then an infection is not an illness if it does not solve a problem. So an infection must solve a problem to be an illness. So an infection plus a problem creates an illness, by your own reasoning!

So again, your own reasoning would seem to indicate that an illness has at least two parts, a biological cause or abnormality, and a problem created by the cause.

Why is it relevant that illnesses have at least these two conceptual

parts?

You say,

"(S)hould we not categorize it (cancer) as an illness" because,

"The reason (that cancer is an illness in a person who wants to die) is that we may conclude, objectively, that there are people who would find the "pain and suffering" or the ensuing death a problem, were they found to have cancer X."

I think your argument is very insightful. Just like above, you seem to be saying that cancer is an illness because of two factors.

1. There is an abnormality

and

2. The abnormality causes an objective person to think that the cancer would cause a problem, for example "pain and suffering" and "an early death". (Psychiatrist's use "social and occupational dysfunction", rather than "pain and suffering", because they tend to think that social and occupational dysfunction can be more objectively defined than "pain and suffering".) But perhaps you are correct that "pain and suffering" is better.

But the second factor you mention in defining an illness, ("People...would find the "pain and suffering" or the ensuing death [to be] a problem, were they found to have cancer"), requires an observer to be very careful and insightful.

To imagine whether a given physical abnormality would cause pain and suffering in someone, or to "objectively" see in a patient that he is in pain and suffering, requires the observer to be able to accurately form a theory of mind of someone else, especially if the observer has never had the illness.

So to summarize what logically follows from your own arguments.

A person has an illness because doctors (or others) have a theory that a patient has a biological/physical abnormality.

In addition, the doctor has a theory that the mind of the victim, or a similarly situated person, should experience the abnormality as something that causes a problem, for example pain and suffering.

So if you follow your own logic, Mr. Ferdowski, you are saying (even if you don't wish to admit it), that someone has an illness, if and only if the illness, by objective standards, is an abnormality of the body that causes a problem for the mind.

I basically agree with that except that I think that rational people can reasonably disagree, to some extent, about whether a given biological abnormality causes a problem for a person. So the determination of what is a relevant problem for a given person is partly "objective" but also partly "subjective".

by a reader on Wed, 12/13/2006 - 00:31 | [reply](#)

Knowledge and Definitions

I hope you see that we are not just debating a definition of illness, but an entire approach to knowledge. I have repeated many times that I am not after fixing a definition for illness. Definitions must come after we have solved the problem, as a nice way of summing up the ideas used in our solution, but never we begin with them in order to gain knowledge. I think you are debating a definition of illness, as a word, and its meaning. This is the trap of essentialism, which is a false theory of knowledge.

To make my point clear, I may ask you this: Can dead people be *rich*?

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by **Liberal Iranian** on Thu, 12/14/2006 - 17:48 | [reply](#)

Can Dead People be Rich

No!

by a reader on Mon, 12/18/2006 - 22:10 | [reply](#)

The "Pots and Kettles" error in logic

What is it called:

When the editors of the World call the concept of mental illness "fictional", "fake", a "worthless" superstition, and an "abrogation of intellectual and moral standards?"

What is it called when someone then says:

"Well then, what do you mean by 'mental illness'?"

And what error in logic occurs when ones apparent inability to answer this obvious relevant question becomes justified by calling the answer "a false theory of knowledge" and "essentialist" thinking?

by a reader on Tue, 12/19/2006 - 02:26 | [reply](#)

More Pots and Kettles

"It is also important to note that all our discussions have been with the assumption that there exists some underlying cause, given different labels in different comments, e.g. a "lesion"...."

This comment is very much in error. Virtually no known lesion is a "cause" of an illness. In fact, virtually all lesions are effects of illnesses, not causes. We know the cause of very few illnesses.

If lesions are effects of illnesses, then why are they important? Because they are biological abnormalities that are reliably identified and predict future pain and suffering to the individual, in virtually any cultural context, in the absence of appropriate treatment. So the specific definition of "lesion" is irrelevant. What is important

is that there are reliably identified biological entities that are a consequence of a biological process. And these entities can be identified and predict future pain and suffering in virtually any cultural context.

That is why many mental illnesses are as real as any other illnesses. Alzheimers is a real (mental) illness, because memory loss of a certain variety is a reliably identified consequence of a biological process. The presence of the memory loss (and other findings) predicts future pain and suffering, to a large extent independent of cultural context.

Similarly, schizophrenia is a real illness, because a certain type of hallucination is a reliably identified consequence of a biological process. The presence of the hallucination (and other findings) predicts future pain and suffering, to a large extent independent of cultural context.

Diabetes is also a real illness because a certain type of lab finding (elevated fasting blood sugar) is reliably identified in the blood and is a consequence of a biological process. The presence of the elevated sugar (and other findings) predicts future pain and suffering, to a large extent independent of cultural context.

So the issue is not that there are entities defined as "lesions" present, so an illness is now present because of the lesions. The issue is what do the lesions mean?

Insisting on the presence of a "lesion" for something to be defined as an illness, is in fact the "essentialist" error that you suggest that I make. It fails to take into account the meaning of a "lesion".

Once one understands the meaning of the concept of a lesion, then entities other than lesions (e.g. EKG findings, X-ray findings, shaking behavior in seizures, memory loss in Alzheimers, hallucinations in schizophrenia), become equally diagnostic of abnormal biological processes. And therefore the presence of these findings (some lesions, some not) can be used to diagnose illness, mental or otherwise.

by a reader on Tue, 12/19/2006 - 03:48 | [reply](#)

What is important

... is that there are reliably identified biological entities that are a consequence of a biological process. And these entities can be identified and predict future pain and suffering in virtually any cultural context.

This is very much the right answer and what I have been trying to defend as an "objective theory of illness." If you subscribe to this objective methodology, we should not have much to disagree with. That we may not "know" in a positivist sense the cause of a certain illness, does not mean that when we call it an illness we are assuming such causes exist, objectively. What I said before about

objectivity and the localization of the symptoms as a measure of

the presence of the "biological processes" in the above quote, directly follow from such a view.

My understanding is that "mental illnesses" attacked by **The World** do not satisfy these criteria of objectivity and localizations. They are not illnesses in the sense that their treatment will solve the problems they are purported to have caused. This clearly applies to ODD and ADHD, the subjects of the original post in this thread, and the claimed "mental illness" of Mr. Jose Sequeira, the subject of **another thread**.

Do you disagree?

Also, your negative answer to the question "could dead people be rich?" would beg the question "why?" if you were to insist to *define* "rich" independently of the problems or the situations in which the notion arises. For instance, if "rich" refers to the material wealth, it would still be there after the death of the person, etc. The point is that, the concept of "rich" as part of a solution to any problem only arises in situations where the person is alive. From your answer, I expect that you agree with the same reasoning when we replace "rich" with "ill."

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by **Liberal Iranian** on Tue, 12/19/2006 - 07:52 | [reply](#)

Rich States, Value Laden Processes

Being rich is for the most part, a value-neutral state.

Being ill, on the other hand, is a value-laden process.

In my opinion, a person being ill is not analogous to a businessman being poor (or rich).

A better analogy to a person having an illness, is a homeowner witnessing the construction of his mostly uninhabitable house.

A homeowner, like a doctor with incomplete knowledge of material science, might measure (reliably) the rate at which the walls being constructed are cracking, and perhaps the rate at which the door is warping, and these measurements may indeed help to determine when the house will be fully uninhabitable. The growing cracks are analogous to the consequences of an abnormal biological process (for example, "lesions"), but the cracks are not the cause of the problem. Rather they are consequences.

The degree to which the house is "uninhabitable" is to some extent objective, but is to some extent subjective. The consequences of the faulty design and the materials used (for example, the rate of growth of the cracks and the warping of the door) are objective to the extent they can be accurately measured.

Note that the rate of growth of the cracks in the walls, the rate of warping of the door, the amount of heat loss from the house, etc.

could all be time-sensitive "signs" of impending inhospitability of the

house, though of course it would be better if the observer had a full knowledge of material science so would not have to make measurements at various points in time.

Unfortunately, doctors don't have a full knowledge of biological processes at this time, so we use time-sensitive measures and a number of different measures to determine the relative condition of the metaphorical "house".

Tom Robinson says:

"regard the combination of the 6 month period referred to in the preamble (exactly half a year) and the stipulation that at least 4 out of the 8 criteria must be met (exactly half) as being somewhat suspicious.

This is because there's no obvious causal connection between human personality differences and the movements of planets. (Psychiatry and astrology seem to be similar in this respect.)"

What Mr. Robinson fails to understand is that time-sensitive measurements and a number of different types of measurements, can help one to predict the evolution of conditions like the future uninhabitability of the house. Mr. Robinson apparently does not understand that "time" and "number" are used in many discussions, not just amongst those who believe in astrology.

Only when the physics of a given state is completely understood, will evolution from that state be completely understood. In the absence of this, we measure conditions over time to help us make predictions. This is a very imperfect process, but necessary at this point.

by a reader on Thu, 12/21/2006 - 02:41 | [reply](#)

Clarification

"My understanding is that "mental illnesses" attacked by **The World** do not satisfy these criteria of objectivity and localizations."

You slipped the word "localization" in your wording and that confuses me.

Seizures occur in brains, like the processes causing the mental illness Alzheimers, the mental illness schizophrenia, the mental illness bipolar disease, and the mental illness depression.

We do not diagnose seizures by an EEG, however, which seems to localize certain types of abnormal neural activity to various parts of the brain. The reason we don't do that, however, is that if someone has well-documented behavioral signs of seizures, even if there is no EEG abnormality, the behavioral signs are more predictive of future brain damage and pain and suffering, than the EEG is. Similarly, if a person has an EEG seeming to demonstrate "seizures", yet there is no behavioral abnormality, the patient does not have seizures, again because the seizure behavior is more predictive of future problems.

Similarly, I don't know whether you consider Alzheimer's patients to

have "localized lesions". Certainly there is a problem with the brain. We know that because we have ruled out other causes of memory loss and we see visible damage to the cortex in many patients.

But the damage to the cortex, however widespread, does not diagnose Alzheimers disease. The memory loss, in the absence of other better explanations for the memory loss, does diagnose the illness. So if a patient has all the signs and symptoms of Alzheimers disease and no better explanation for the memory loss, and at autopsy there is no brain pathology found, the person is still considered to have been correctly diagnosed with Alzheimers disease. The "localized" brain pathology does not diagnose the illness, the particular type of memory loss does.

The reason is simple. The memory loss is a better predictor of future pain and suffering (e.g. further decline in memory) than the brain pathology that "localizes" a lesion.

Similarly, when we look at the brains of those with schizophrenia, in those who have never been on medication, and also by serial sequential brain scanning at disease onset, we note a devastating apoptotic process. Indeed, the damage to the cortex occurs faster than in Alzheimers disease (but not for as many years). But we do not use exaggerated apoptotic processes as diagnostic tools.

The reason is simple. Noticing the hallucinations and noticing the particular production of certain speech patterns is more predictive of future brain damage and future pain and suffering.

The same is true for depression, in which the brain damage appears more localized than in Alzheimers (the first probable corrective surgeries on the subgenual cingulate are currently being performed). Surgery will probably be a reasonable procedure to treat depression, long before it is a reasonable procedure to treat Alzheimers, for example.

Bipolar illness and many other mental illnesses progressively damage the brain, as well, but are diagnosed, like seizures, Alzheimers and schizophrenia, by the behavioral effects of the malfunctioning brain.

ADHD is certainly a neurologically based condition. It can be induced (by damaging specific parts of the right frontal lobe of the brain). And the effects of that damage on the right frontal lobe of the brain can be corrected by using medication altering neural functioning in this part of the brain (the same medication used to treat the standard variety of attention deficit disorder.)

The reason standard ADHD is not an illness is that it is a state, like being "rich" or "poor". The condition does not seem to evolve from a neurological perspective. So in most people, ADHD is not a process, like an illness, because there is not progressive damage to the brain. This is unlike the mental illnesses I mentioned above (Alzheimers, schizophrenia, depression, etc. in which the untreated brain is progressively damaged. Actually, we have evidence that treating schizophrenia and depression with certain types of drugs protects the brain from the evolving neurological damage, but such

evidence is lacking in Alzheimer's disease.

Having ADHD is like having a long nose or being gay. But most consider ADHD a disorder, but not homosexuality or a long nose, because in most cultural contexts, having ADHD is disadvantageous.

But some of us can think of cultural contexts in which those with ADHD have certain advantages, so it is debatable whether it is a disorder. But please be aware, people can be made ADHD by manipulating the brain, and this condition can be mostly corrected by chemically manipulating the same part of the brain.

In terms of the editors of **Setting the World to Rights**, read their post "Science and Superstition", before saying they are not referring to illnesses like schizophrenia (if you are saying that). They have completely misrepresented the views of the charity "Rethink" which supports those with serious mental illness, including those with schizophrenia.

Any fair minded reader would find that post to either be immoral or to reflect very poorly on the knowledge of the editor's or the research they did prior to writing the post.

And they have never retracted anything of what they said. Indeed, they have defended it.

by a reader on Thu, 12/21/2006 - 04:53 | [reply](#)

I am infuriated.

As someone who DOES have ADHD and Asperger's, I must say that this article enrages me. They're not "fake"; they are very real problems, but it's obvious that you don't give a damn, instead focusing on those who pretend they have them but are just using it to get sympathy and/or get away with being assholes. While it is true that some fake it, many people truly do suffer from these disorders. As far as I can tell, you're just saying that we're ALL liars and jackasses, and I find that absolutely reprehensible.

by Shippinator Mandy on Sat, 01/27/2007 - 04:05 | [reply](#)

Fake

Hi Shippinator,

When the article says the diseases are fake, it does not mean to deny that people have real and problematic conditions. It only means to deny that the conditions are the diseases they are purported to be.

The debate is about whether the problem is bad ideas, or a physical or physiological malady. You aren't a liar.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sat, 01/27/2007 - 21:23 | [reply](#)

Please read an abnormal psych

Please read an abnormal psych textbook before arguing things like this. Your ignorance is astounding.

The DSM is not meant to be used by laymen. Used by laymen, anyone could have any disorder. There is more to a diagnosis than knowing the DSM criteria.

The DSM requires that these behavior occur more frequently in those diagnosed than the typical amount for children of a comprable age and level of development. ODD is also often a precursor to Conduct Disorder. And they do not deny that ODD is caused by bad parenting, but that does not make it any less of a disorder.

Furthermore, the editor fails to realize that many mental health professionals have issues with the DSM, which is why it is constantly being reworked.

by a reader on Mon, 02/26/2007 - 22:40 | [reply](#)

Astounding ignorance

Please read an abnormal psych textbook before arguing things like this. Your ignorance is astounding.

Quite possibly. But ignorance of what? Do you think it possible that we differ about a philosophical issue, not primarily about any matter of physiological fact?

Do you believe that there are any issues about how human behaviour may be explained in terms of physiology, that philosophers consider controversial?

One philosopher who thinks so is Sahotra Sarkar, whose book [Genetics and Reductionism](#) we recommend to you. (It is about the logic of explaining human behavioural traits as being partly genetically caused - an issue that overlaps with the one we are discussing here.)

Could you, in turn, recommend an 'abnormal psych' textbook that makes what you consider to be a good case in favour of the ways in which mental helath professionals currently attribute aberrant human behaviour to physiological causes?

by [Editor](#) on Tue, 02/27/2007 - 19:39 | [reply](#)

re: Please read an abnormal psych

The DSM is not meant to be used by laymen. Used by laymen, anyone could have any disorder. There is more to a diagnosis than knowing the DSM criteria.

OK.

The DSM requires that these behavior occur more frequently in those diagnosed than the typical amount for children of a comparable age and level of development.

I see. That makes sense. *Now* can I use the DSM myself, since I know the special extra information needed?

ODD is also often a precursor to Conduct Disorder. And they do not deny that ODD is caused by bad parenting, but that does not make it any less of a disorder.

Of course that does not make it any less of a disorder. Just like being caused by parenting doesn't make being anti-war any less of a disorder. But the cause is relevant to the treatment. The only reasonable treatment for being anti-war is persuasion. But persuasion is not a reasonable treatment for, say, AIDs.

Furthermore, the editor fails to realize that many mental health professionals have issues with the DSM, which is why it is constantly being reworked.

Hmm. It's not perfect, and it's being constantly changed and improved.

Doesn't that suggest you should *welcome* criticism and incorporate it into the next batch of changes?

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us
Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 02/28/2007 - 01:47 | [reply](#)

Use of DSM

"I see. That makes sense. *Now* can I use the DSM myself, since I know the special extra information needed?"

When you are able to distinguish hyperventillation in panic disorder, from the hyperventillation in a heart attack, and the hyperventillation in pneumonia, hypoglycemia, or with a pulmonary embolus; then you can use the DSM. If you can do that now, then you can use the DSM now.

Doesn't that suggest you should *welcome* criticism and incorporate it into the next batch of changes?

Of course. What makes you think the reader does not welcome intelligent criticism?

by a reader on Thu, 03/01/2007 - 22:53 | [reply](#)

Hyperventilation

So if you tell me about hyperventilation for ... 15-60min? ... then I

will be qualified to use the DSM regarding asperger's?

Why don't they just include a hyperventilation explanation at the start of the DSM so everyone could read that before using the DSM?

BTW I read about hyperventilation for some time but failed to find different types.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 03/01/2007 - 23:19 | [reply](#)

Yes

If someone is hyperventillating you need to be able to tell whether it is from hypoglycemia or a heart attack, rather than a panic attack, since all of them cause increases in the sympathetic nervous system.

But yes, if you were capable of distinguishing a clinical situation in which someone was having a panic attack from someone having a heart attack, then you could use the DSM, because your ability to do that would require enormous other knowledge...knowledge needed to understand psychiatric diagnoses.

by a reader on Sat, 03/03/2007 - 19:38 | [reply](#)

Doctors

Aren't you just appealing to authority? I'm not a doctor. OK. So what? Normal people are considered competent to decide when to call a doctor. If there's something like hyperventilation and I'm not sure about it, I'll know we need an expert.

But there are other symptoms I can make perfectly good judgments about, with no special expertise, aren't there? And some disorders in the DSM have **only** symptoms like that, don't they?

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 03/09/2007 - 00:43 | [reply](#)

DSM

No. The DSM explicitly states that all other medical conditions that mimic a symptom complex must be ruled out before a psychiatric condition is considered. Just makes sense. Physicians and many others can understand medical conditions.

by a reader on Fri, 03/16/2007 - 00:57 | [reply](#)

Damn Straight

That is the truth man. I was told I have "aspergers syndrome" when I was about 10, and it's a bunch of bullshit designed to sell pills. But fuck them, I claim it as a disability and get free public transport for whoever gets my card. Sweet ;)

by Boy on Mon, 03/26/2007 - 08:13 | [reply](#)

Being medically qualified can

Being medically qualified can hopefully enable someone to tell the difference between mental illnesses and physical illnesses like heart attacks. But what on earth has that got to do with the subject of this post, which is the difference between mental illness and no illness at all?

How could a knowledge of physical diseases like heart attacks EVER be helpful in deciding the difference between Oppositional Defiant Disorder and plain opposition and defiance?

And (another issue) how could ANY scientific qualification be helpful in deciding between morally justified defiance and morally unjustified defiance?

by a reader of this very long thread on Mon, 03/26/2007 - 08:43 | [reply](#)

Rule Out more than Rule In

"But what on earth has that (knowing the difference between mental and physical illness) got to do with the subject of this post, which is the difference between mental illness and no illness at all?"

To make a diagnosis, first we create a list of possible conditions that would seem to fit the symptoms that we see.

Diagnoses are made by ruling out other conditions with similar symptoms. We rarely say that a person definitively has a condition by virtue of the results of a particular test, but rather we figure out what conditions a person likely DOES NOT have. One of the diagnoses that we must exclude, in explaining a given symptom complex, is normalcy. So we do need to exclude the condition "normalcy" in arriving at a diagnosis of a mental or physical condition. So telling the difference between an illness of the brain that affects the mind vs an illness of the heart that affects exercise capacity, is not conceptually much different from telling the difference between normalcy and a specific type of illness.

This process (excluding incorrect potential diagnoses) allows us to arrive at a single remaining diagnosis or a range of possible diagnoses that have survived the inquiry. And sometimes, we end up treating all remaining possible diagnoses (for example when someone has an unidentified infection we use broad spectrum antibiotics.)

"And (another issue) how could ANY scientific qualification be

helpful in deciding between morally justified defiance and morally unjustified defiance?"

I agree with you that a particular qualification, as opposed to specific types of knowledge, does not enable someone to accurately make diagnoses. I also agree with you that "defiance", as a name of a diagnosis, should not be used.

But certainly the degree, frequency, and intensity of anger, potentially leading to inappropriate defiance, is appropriately studied and treated by physicians. For example, individuals with certain head injuries are more prone to having difficulties with controlling their anger.

by a reader on Mon, 03/26/2007 - 17:18 | [reply](#)

Normalcy

So, can you give examples of how you exclude normalcy as a diagnosis?

And do you think this part of a diagnosis (excluding normalcy, or not, nothing else) could be done by a non-doctor?

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 03/26/2007 - 20:01 | [reply](#)

Normal vs. Abnormal

Who can exclude a normal mental state, in order to diagnose an abnormal state?

I think the ability to rule-out any diagnosis or lack of diagnosis can be done by just about anybody. It is possessing the relevant knowledge, not whether someone is a doctor, that is obviously relevant.

If a person's blood urea nitrogen is 30 times normal and his creatinine 20 times normal, and he has edema in his feet, a few rales at the base of his lungs, a point of maximum intensity of his heart that is in the normal place, only slightly elevated liver function studies, a normal abdominal exam, and a slightly elevated white count with no left shift; and if this patient has poor focus and concentration, a negative toxicology screen, a reversed sleep cycle, a slowed EEG, non-focality on physical exam, a normal brain MRI and Lumbar puncture, and he reports seeing visual hallucinations of Mother Teresa dancing in front of his bed; and if he is screaming in a drunk sounding voice at the nurse while being OPPOSITIONAL; I think I would have a good idea what I would need to do to get rid of the hallucinations and the oppositional behavior. And no, he would not have "Oppositional Defiant Disorder", despite being

oppositional. But I would certainly say that he has an illness causing

oppositional behavior.

Elliot, or anyone with a bit of knowledge, might also be able to figure out how to get rid of the hallucinations and the oppositional behavior (and the edema) and begin figuring out the underlying cause of the problem.

But no rational doctor would say that he is "normal", mentally or physically. That simply would not likely be in the set of diagnoses considered given the description above. In more subtle cases, it would take training to determine whether he was psychiatrically or medically non-normal.

Yes, many people think that we are Turing machines. If that is true, then any given change of the mind (including converting a hallucinating, oppositional state into a calm and rational state) can be created by appropriate programming, for example by utilizing conversation. But no, it would not be appropriate to repeatedly try to talk this patient out of his hallucinations and his oppositional behavior after a few verbal efforts fail. We simply don't have the technology to efficiently reprogram a mind with this type of abnormality by utilizing conversation and reasoning. For all we know, conversation by itself might take one million years to change his brain/mind state into a non-hallucinating, calm state, and at that point we'd all be dead....And the patient would be dead sooner than all of us. Indeed most conversation, particularly reasoning with a patient like this, would make the hallucinations worse.

So just because a type of mental reprogramming can theoretically be said to change any mental state into a more rational one (if we really are just Turing machines), does not mean that conversation, argument, criticism, and discussion, are the appropriate means of changing someones mind, if he is in the state described above or similar states.

But a simple medical intervention would likely do the trick to get this unfortunate patient to be rational again. When reprogramming of the brain is best accomplished by organic interventions (drugs and procedures), we consider the state to be caused by the brain. This is so even if (unlike in this case) it was software (life experience and thinking) that damaged the brain (hardware) to begin with.

In the particular case described above, the hallucinating/oppositional patient has an abnormal physiological brain state causing these conditions. This abnormal brain state uncovered the inability of his current mental "programming" to compensate for the aberrant neuro-physiology. At some point, abnormal pathophysiology would prevent any of us from thinking correctly. So any of us can have our rational programming overridden by an appropriately severe neurological insult.

In the case of the patient described above, his neuro-pathophysiology is likely caused by failing kidneys.

Dialysis, but not conversation, would likely quickly eliminate the

oppositional behavior and the hallucinations. A psychiatrist would diagnose this man with delirium due to uremia, and recommend treatment of his delirium with dialysis and investigation into the cause of the failing kidneys.

But note that no lab test diagnoses delirium caused by uremia. The diagnosis is made by clinical observation in the context of abnormal labs. The abnormal labs by themselves in no way allow one to make this diagnosis. But the psychiatrist's clinical observations do allow the psychiatrist to say that conversation is likely not the most effective intervention to stop this man's oppositional behavior.

by a reader on Mon, 03/26/2007 - 23:03 | [reply](#)

Aspergers

Some of you have overlooked that Aspergers is not a diagnosis based on mental attributes, but rather a form of autism. It is also not diagnosed due to being "anti social and having obsessions." There are symptoms it causes that are not purely psychological. For instance:

- Nervous Tics and stemming
- Sensory Overload
- Has emotion only towards objects and animals, not people
- Uncontrollable urge to inspect food and utensils for blemishes before eating
- Poor motor skills

Eye contact, social anxiety, obsessions.. those are qualities anyone may possess, but the others generally are autism related. Aspergers is in no way fake, but there are millions of self diagnosed lunatics out there running about claiming they have it.. THEY are fake.

by Dave on Fri, 05/25/2007 - 07:28 | [reply](#)

Autism

I suspect (but am not sure) that the editor thinks that Autism is "fake", "false", and a "superstition", as well.

by a reader on Mon, 05/28/2007 - 22:36 | [reply](#)

If only it were that easy

It would be so much easier if Asperger's included only psychological symptoms. Unfortunately, it does not. It is not being able to stand anything touching your skin. It is walking later than everyone your age and never managing to do it gracefully. Asperger's is trying desperately not to rock back and forth in public.

It is tempting to dismiss it as a false disorder, since so many people try to use it as an excuse for their own awkwardness. Someday, a physical cause will be found, just as the physical component of other disorders are being found. The brain is complex, and research

is slow. Until then, accept that people with AS are wired a little

differently from everyone else. There's nothing wrong with that.

by an observer on Thu, 06/07/2007 - 01:12 | [reply](#)

It would be so much easier if

It would be so much easier if Asperger's included only psychological symptoms. Unfortunately, it does not. It is not being able to stand anything touching your skin.

That could very easily be a psychological symptom. You just mentally interpret the properly functioning nerve impulses from your skin as very unpleasant.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

[Dialogs](#)

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 06/07/2007 - 21:11 | [reply](#)

It would be so much easier

Why on earth would it be easier if it were a purely psychological disorder like, for example, socialism?

In fact, when are purely psychological disorders ever easy to cure?

by a reader on Thu, 06/07/2007 - 22:35 | [reply](#)

Pain is Only Psychological?

"That could very easily be a psychological symptom. You just mentally interpret the properly functioning nerve impulses from your skin as very unpleasant."

Is pain purely a "psychological symptom", since individuals with pain could be said to "interpret the properly functioning nerve impulses" in a way that is distressing to them? And since interpretation of neural impulses is, by this reasoning, a purely psychological phenomenon, should not someone simply be able to choose not to be bothered by pain?

by a reader on Mon, 06/11/2007 - 18:10 | [reply](#)

pain is not all in your head.

pain is not all in your head. but an irrational reaction to pain would be. or an irrational fear of pain. you mentioned what a person can stand, which is referring to their mental states and preferences.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

[Dialogs](#)

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 06/11/2007 - 21:12 | [reply](#)

Pain

So what makes you think that "pain is not all in your head"?

by a reader on Mon, 06/11/2007 - 21:35 | [reply](#)

the word pain is referring to

the word pain is referring to not just your mental state but also the external stimulus (which could be virtual reality or whatever). but if you prefer a different definition we can use that, it's no matter.

whereas earlier we were talking about what a person can stand, which could be just about their personality.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 06/12/2007 - 09:42 | [reply](#)

Pain

"Pain is referring to an external state."

I'm not sure what that means. Are you saying that something objective causes it?

by a reader on Tue, 06/12/2007 - 19:02 | [reply](#)

Pain and Depression: Philisophical Difference?

You say that "pain is not all in your head"

Is major depression also "not all in your head"?

by a reader on Mon, 06/18/2007 - 14:33 | [reply](#)

Pain v Depression

I think standard terminology is to say depression is all in your head. Sure your wife left you, and that's quite relevant, but plenty of people lose their wives without becoming depressed, so we generally don't count that: the part where you have an unusual, extreme reaction to relatively normal external factors is all in your head.

That's one theoretically possible sort of depression. Another is something goes physically wrong with your brain and its chemical environment and this throws you off in your life a lot. In this case, standard terminology is that it is NOT all in your head, b/c the major issue here is the physical problem not your own irrationality.

Note that, knowing little about neurochemisty, I would initially consider it quite possible that *both* types of depression could go away with drug treatment. But the first person would still have life/idea problems and only feel better (still probably a good thing),

while the second person would actually be fully recovered.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 06/18/2007 - 20:32 | [reply](#)

Best Theories

Concerning theories of causation of depression, Elliot said, "Another is something goes physically wrong with your brain and its chemical environment and this throws you off in your life a lot... the major issue here is the physical problem not your own irrationality."

Many scientists believe that our **best theories** tell us that some forms of depression are in fact caused by a situation in which "something goes physically wrong with your brain and its chemical environment."

Do you think that this current theory (that some forms of depression are caused by chemical abnormalities) is in fact the best theory currently available?

by a reader on Mon, 06/18/2007 - 23:49 | [reply](#)

Depression

I'm not up on the scientific research. My guess is that both types happen, and the more common type is personality-based depression.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 06/18/2007 - 23:57 | [reply](#)

Are Some Types of Depression Real?

In the case in which depression is caused by chemical abnormalities in the brain (and not irrationality), do you consider that a real illness?

by a reader on Tue, 06/19/2007 - 01:52 | [reply](#)

Yes

Yes.

But not a "mental" illness since it's physical. Like brain cancer.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 06/19/2007 - 04:12 | [reply](#)

Editor's Opinion

Does the editor agree with Elliot that the previously discussed theory (that some forms of depression are caused by chemical abnormalities) is in fact the best theory currently available?

If the editor does agree with the above then:

In the case in which depression is caused by chemical abnormalities in the brain (and not irrationality), do you also consider it a real illness?

by a reader on Tue, 06/19/2007 - 22:28 | [reply](#)

Lol wut

Why don't you get a fucking degree in psychology before you call this shit fake, dumbass.

by Dr. Spock on Sat, 06/23/2007 - 04:48 | [reply](#)

replies

A Reader:

since the editor doesn't seem to be responding, want to continue with your point anyway? (presumably these questions are leading somewhere)

Dr. Spock:

Are we meant to infer from your elegant rhetorical style that you possess the requisite degree?

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sat, 06/23/2007 - 06:08 | [reply](#)

Neurons Don't Read Their Opinions

The word "mental illness" is a category that includes major depression. When we are referring to an individual with major depression, we mean that there are chemical problems with the person's brain causing psychological problems. You might not like psychiatric nomenclature, but it is the meaning of the words (not your definition of the words) that is important. The key point is that most professionals understand what the words mean.

By the way, I agree with you that we should not use the words "mental illness" to describe brain diseases like Alzheimers, Bipolar Illness, Major Depression, and Schizophrenia, because though professionals understand what these words mean, others do not.

I am surprised (but happy) that you recognize that chemical

abnormalities in the brain can predispose someone to sad feelings, sleep problems, irritability, concentration problems, and a host of other major depressive symptoms. What caused you to change your mind, if indeed you have?

You asked for my line of reasoning (that I was going to go through had the editors wished to answer my question listed above)

1. Unlike you, the editors have expressed their profound disbelief in the idea that chemical abnormalities in the brain cause depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, etc. They have asked psychiatrist's to point to "lesions" that "cause" the illness and suggested that in the absence of these and/or other characteristics, an illness is "fake" and a "superstition".

2. The topic of pain was introduced in this discussion of mental illness. I asked the editors and others who dismiss mental illness whether they believe that pain is "fake" and a "superstition", just like depression. I asked this question because it seems to me that one cannot make a philisophical distinction between "pain" and "depression".

My point is that if the editor's believe in the existence of pain, then I would ask them what characteristics of pain make it "real"? Whatever relevant characteristics the editors come up with to claim that "pain" is real, will also be characteristics of clinical depression. The editors will not be able to make a philisophical distinction between mental pain (for example, depression) and physical pain (e.g. back pain) because both are simply types of pain.

3. For example, there is no way (at present) of making a diagnosis of "pain" by looking for a "lesion". One could look at firing frequency of certain nerves in the brain, but the same can be said for depression, and firing frequency of nerves is neither diagnostic of pain nor depression.

Depending on many circumstances, a given injury to the body may or may not be reported as pain by the injured person, so the visible injury cannot be said to be diagnostic of the

- a. pain reported
 - b. pain not reported
- or
- c. pain not felt.

So if a diagnostic lesion is needed for "pain" to count as something other than a superstition, then pain is a superstition, exactly in the same way that the editors say that mental illness is.

4. The editors say that mental illness is not real because there cannot be "asymptomatic" mental illness. I have previously demonstrated that this idea is illogical since an illness would not be an illness if it didn't hurt people! (Rocks are not ill). So no illness can be truly asymptomatic.

But I think the editors were trying to say that one might not feel that something is a problem in one's body, but it still might cause problems later (Latent Hepatitis C does not initially cause a patient

to report symptoms, until it has substantially damaged the liver). So Hep C is a "real" illness because there is something objective about it (the infection in the liver), even if the patient notices nothing wrong. Depression, on the other hand -- according to this spurious line of reasoning -- is a "fake" illness because it seems to depend exclusively upon the report of the person suffering from it, not on an objectively defined physical parameter.

5. But of course, the same argument makes "chronic pain" a "fake" illness, as well. Hepatitis C is a "real illness" because there is something objective about it (the infection), but pain is not real since it also seems to depend upon the report of the person suffering from it, not on an objectively defined physical parameter.

6. So pain and depression seem to share the characteristic that subjective reports define them both. So (according to this incorrect argument) both must be considered "fake".

7. But those who think pain is real but depression is not, often counter this argument (number 6) as follows though I believe this argument is mistaken, as well:

There are effective anesthetics that enable someone to feel the sensations that would have been "pain", but not be bothered by them. So pain has a real existence independent of the subjective discomfort reported by a patient. In the same way that a Hepatitis C infection can be asymptomatic but a person can still have a real infection of the liver; on certain anesthetics, a person can experience the "real" sensations of pain -- induced by objective neural firing -- but not be bothered by them.

On the other hand, the existence of the clinical entity "depression" supposedly depends on it being mentally uncomfortable (according to those who make this dubious argument), so depression is purely subjective. But pain is real.

But this distinction is spurious as well. It is true that depressed people often feel that they are experiencing abundant pressures (even when they are not) and feel unrealistically pessimistic. And it is true that this irrational thinking often is associated with sensations of mental anguish and reports of mental anguish.

But patients can experience the same symptoms, *but without feeling the mental anguish*

Indeed when a patient uses antidepressants, the psychiatrist does NOT have to teach someone to think more rationally for him to improve. And treated individuals *do not* have to --

a. perceive that they are experiencing fewer pressures in their life, or

b. perceive that bad things will not occur

-- in order to no longer feel mental anguish.

It is simply the case that when depression is treated by chemical

means (antidepressants), the patient is no longer bothered by his irrational thinking, does not become distressed when faced with identical pressures, and does not become upset because of pessimistic predictions.

Just as one can feel sensations that would otherwise have been thought to be painful -- but are not now bothersome when on certain anesthetics -- so too one can still have innumerable pressures, pessimistic thought, and irrational thinking, but also not be bothered by them because of antidepressant use.

But there is more to this story. Those who try to argue that depression is subjective but pain objective must surely see this irony. Many drug classes do cause an indifference to pain but a continued ability to perceive it. But those who argue that this observation makes pain a real entity but depression not real; must come to grips with the fact that many of the anesthetics that do precisely this are in fact **ANTIDEPRESSANTS**.

Not surprisingly, most antidepressants **are anesthetics**. Indeed, they are precisely the type of anesthetic that enable a person to feel sensations, just not be bothered by them. Emotionally, antidepressants do the same thing. They enable individuals to experience their (often negative) thoughts, just not be bothered by them.

Although philosophers and editors of blogs like this like to make artificial distinctions between pain and depression, we can all be grateful that neurons don't read their opinions. Otherwise we would not have discovered the wonderful way that antidepressants help those with pain and its sister entity, depression.

by a reader on Mon, 07/02/2007 - 22:20 | [reply](#)

I am surprised (but happy) th

I am surprised (but happy) that you recognize that chemical abnormalities in the brain can predispose someone to sad feelings, sleep problems, irritability, concentration problems, and a host of other major depressive symptoms. What caused you to change your mind, if indeed you have?

I haven't changed my mind. One's environment is relevant to one's mental state. If your dog dies that can be sad. If your food comes out burned, that can be frustrating. If terrorists blow up the WTC one might feel righteous anger. If you are injected with ecstasy you might feel ecstatic. One's environment includes the chemical environment of his brain. And even defects in the brain can be part of the environment of the mind.

(the "might be", "can be" is because people can interpret situations in strange ways. someone could be happy their food is burned for some reason. some people were happy about 9/11. etc)

PS other replies to come later

by Elliot on Wed, 07/04/2007 - 00:37 | [reply](#)

Diagnosis

When we are referring to an individual with major depression, we mean that there are chemical problems with the person's brain causing psychological problems.

How do you diagnose someone of having this?

The problem is if you notice he's sad or has other behavioral and emotional symptoms, for example, that is not any evidence at all that he has major depression (defined above) because it could be that he has psychological/personality problems only (not chemical).

And if you do lab tests, they can't tell you cause and effect. Did the chemical abnormalities cause psychological problems or vice versa?

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 07/11/2007 - 22:18 | [reply](#)

Depression and Biology

The problem is if you notice he's sad or has other behavioral and emotional symptoms, for example, that is not any evidence at all that he has major depression (defined above) because it could be that he has psychological/personality problems only (not chemical).

You are right that biological or behavioral markers of psychiatric problems could be effects of a problem not the cause. For example, a problem with personality may in some individuals be an ultimate cause of feeling sad.

But the same is true for virtually any illness whatsoever. Any biological, chemical, or behavioral marker of virtually any illness whatsoever is (just like depression) virtually always an effect of an illness, not its cause. For example, the biological marker called "elevated fasting blood sugar" is used to define the diagnosis "diabetes". But this marker is an effect of a complex metabolic problem, not the cause of diabetes. Again, biological markers are effects of illnesses, not causes.

If we had to know the ultimate cause of illnesses before we could treat them, there would be virtually nothing that we could do for anyone. For example, the stellate ganglia is a nerve-junction connector between the brain and the heart that activates the fight or flight response. If you cut the stellate ganglia in animals at birth, no matter what you feed them or how you treat them, they will not develop clogs in blood vessels supplying blood to the heart, so they will not develop coronary artery disease. The same is undoubtedly true in humans. Furthermore, when one feels relaxed because of one's peaceful thoughts, this ganglia is hardly activated, at all.

Therefore one's thoughts leading to anxiety activate the stellate

ganglia from birth, and are therefore ultimate causative agents in creating coronary artery disease; just as one's thoughts are ultimate causative agents in creating certain types of depression. But to treat a 60 year old with heart disease, we don't have to say that nothing can be done because we needed to first change his thinking when he was 5 years old.

The ultimate cause of illnesses, depression or heart disease, is not usually relevant. What is relevant is that there is a biological process that will progress and that its presence and progression will cause pain and suffering to people. In the case of major depression, it is not just that people feel sad. If they only felt sad, they would not have major depression. A diagnosis of major depression implies that there is a biological entity that will likely progress and damage organs. Many types of major depression, for example, decreases a person's sleep, his nutritional status, and increase his autonomic reactivity (blood pressure responses to stress, pain, and cold, for example).

These measurable and biologically real phenomena are known to cause brain damage and heart damage over time and permanent worsening of memory, for example, regardless of whether the ultimate cause of this depression was bad thinking, weird genetics, or something else. In major depression (as in other illnesses), whatever the initial cause, physical things have gone awry, and a chemical intervention such as a serotonin reuptake inhibitor can reverse the biological and psychological consequences of depression, prevent brain damage and (likely) heart damage, and prevent memory loss.

So the ultimate cause of something is interesting and will one day help us understand illness. But whether heart disease or depression were caused by bad thinking when one was 5 years old, or by something else, is irrelevant. They both end up with a set of biological abnormalities. Regardless of the ultimate cause of these abnormalities, they nonetheless progress and measurably damage organs. Chemical or surgical treatments decrease or reverse damage to these organs. In the case of both depression and coronary artery disease, brains can be damaged so there are psychological consequences of these illnesses as well.

by a reader on Mon, 07/16/2007 - 23:53 | [reply](#)

Get with the times

As I have Aspergers (diagnosed), many times I have come across people, either in day to day life or online who seem to think the growth of disorders are down to people wanting to have an 'excuse' as to why they can't cope. Isn't their an irony in telling people they are making an excuse for themselves when they are at the same time making an excuse for the growth?

We need to accept that people are different; people do have different tolerance levels. The world is not staying the same and so

we as humans will not stay the same. Technology changes; we

change or at least try to change.

That has had a knock on effect on loads of things, on medicine, food, entertainment, work and transportation, in fact I can't think of an area where it hasn't had a knock on effect, so why wouldn't it not have one when it comes to people? Let me give you an example.

Asperger Syndrome was universally recognised in around 1994, but years ago, some of the problems we have wouldn't have existed. Aspies dislike change, it makes us pretty depressed (in varying degrees - because no two people are the same {!}) if it's at short notice, why would it be easy to recognise now? Modern society has more change than it did years ago, people travel more frequently, whereas before if you went away you were seen as privileged. Technology and better communication systems means things don't need to be planned so far in advance and it is easier to just go out and do something, 5 minutes after you've thought about it. You can't say we're just eccentric people either, technology also means we know more about the brain than we did 30 years ago, even though its still only a tiny proportion of what is out there to learn.

Then there are tolerance levels, it's a very arrogant perception to think, I experienced loads of bad things, I'm fine, so everyone else should be (and so these disorders are excuses). People's immune systems are weaker than others, some collapse due to things, that other experience 0 problems with, so why shouldn't our brains and our tolerance to every day or bad problems be different? That's not humans being namby-pamby that is a fact of life. I know of two rodents that were neglected and given to someone who had a snake, which were put in a freezer (they were alive and fully grown) for over 12 hours, when they were taken out to be defrosted so they could feed them to their snakes, one eventually moved and survived, the other one died. One clearly was more adapted to cooler temperatures than the other; we clearly have people who are adapted to modern society better than others.

Then there is the increase in depression and similar problems, if someone is sad for no reason, then why is it assumed it is because they can't face their problems and get on with it? To me it contradicts the first part. People can be sad for no reason, just like you can be happy for no reason, or feel like something wrong is about to happen for no reason. Don't we even show signs of pregnancy for no reason? All mainly because of hormones. Then there is the other commonplace thought that depression is feeling "sorry for yourself" which is a massive incorrect generalisation. Self pity and depression are two very different things. For instance, when you are depressed you can feel a massive amount of self hatred, I know I did and I know I still get lows nowadays, sometimes people can help and sometimes they can't. Just like what you dream at night, you can't really control, you can't really control your mood. Some people have triggers that make them depressed, and that can be almost anything, could be people telling them to just get on with it too.

I do get on with my life to the best of my ability, I work with my

family and friends, those that care for me, to try and adapt the best way I can to the challenges I face, sometimes I fail, sometimes I succeed. I have a label, one that hasn't been around very long, but many fail to realise, some people go in search for many years like I did to find out what's wrong, just so they can try and work out where they can go from there, not to sit back and say, "I've got x, I can't do that, I won't do that, you have to accept that." But to say, "I know now I've got x, which means I have problems with y, and v can help me to try and improve in areas where I so far have failed, can you help me too?"

by a reader on Tue, 07/17/2007 - 11:50 | [reply](#)

> I don't need to provide sou

> I don't need to provide sources for my information.

Of course not. Fact would be tough to square with your statements.

by a reader on Tue, 07/17/2007 - 17:09 | [reply](#)

Re: Get with the times

- > Isn't their an irony in telling people they are making
- > an excuse for themselves when they are at the same
- > time making an excuse for the growth?

Since that's not what is being done, no. Not irony.

- > Asperger Syndrome was universally recognised in
- > around 1994

Isn't there irony in stating categorically something is "universally recognized" in the middle of a pitched discussion about the fact that said thing is not, in fact, universally recognized?

by a reader on Tue, 07/17/2007 - 17:19 | [reply](#)

Re: Get with the times

"diagnosis = excuse" I guess you missed that comment.

There is a difference between being finally added to the classification of disorders and your average Joe Bloggs having a full understanding of the disorder. A disorder can be recognised and diagnosed without being accepted by everyone.

by a reader on Wed, 07/18/2007 - 23:01 | [reply](#)

Ironic?

I think you are saying that those who do not believe in mental illness are making simplistic sociological "diagnos(es)" of the reasons for the increasing number of mental health diagnoses

currently in existence and the increasing numbers of individuals

who are thought to suffer from them.

One simplistic sociological theory might be the following,

"Those with so-called developmental disorders like Asperger's syndrome are just lazy and psychiatrists just want money. So both collude to create diagnoses in order to divert government funds. That's why there are more and more diagnoses like Asperger's."

But you are pointing out that those with Asperger's have a strongly genetically based condition that is very real. You are pointing out that those criticizing the diagnosis are simplistically ignoring what is now scientifically well-established.

So at the same time those denying the existence of developmental disorders like Asperger's are using bad thinking to rationalize false and simplistic sociological theories; these same critics are falsely criticizing those with Asperger's of using bad thinking and false diagnosis to rationalize their own bad behavior.

And you find that ironic. So do I.

by a reader on Thu, 07/19/2007 - 23:13 | [reply](#)

Ultimate Causes

The critical issue is not the ultimate causes of things, it is the reasonable explanations available.

With cancer no one is proposing that there is an explanation of how it is a personality problem and should be cured by conversation and learning. There is no rival theory of that sort. If you think there should be then feel free to argue along those lines. If you do so successfully you may create some dilemmas for medical science which require thinking, arguments, etc to surpass, and perhaps even changes in standard opinion and practice.

With Asperger's, there *is* a reasonable rival theory, and therefore it is very important to pay close attention to what is evidence of what. Anything compatible with the mainstream theory of Asperger's, and also compatible with the rival theory, is *not* evidence* in favor of the mainstream theory over the rival theory. It confirms the rival theory equally well. The rival theory can only be beaten with either a scientific test for some observable for which it makes a different prediction than the mainstream theory, or by philosophical argument.

Your implied stance seems to be that I have said: we don't know everything, theoretically the evidence is compatible with many things, therefore you must abandon your theory. And this is silly, and your comparison with other fields rightly illustrates that point. But my actual stance is not that, in theory, it could be multiple things. My stance is that today we have a serious rival theory which states that all the symptoms of Asperger's and various other "mental illnesses", can perfectly well be explained by the patient having bad ideas (and we can give specific details of the bad ideas that we propose may be involved for a given list of symptoms). This

rival theory *is* compatible with the existence of drug-aided recoveries.

Is this clear and do you now see where I am coming from?

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 07/20/2007 - 02:08 | [reply](#)

Pots and Kettles (part 3)

"With cancer no one is proposing that there is an explanation of how it is a personality problem and should be cured by conversation and learning.

If you think there should be then feel free to argue along those lines. If you do so successfully you may create some dilemmas for medical science which require thinking, arguments, etc to surpass, and perhaps even changes in standard opinion and practice."
Elliot

The causes of cancer require a different discussion than the causes of heart disease, the topic I brought up. As you recall, I said that depressive thinking is a cause of heart disease and its worsening. With heart disease, it is now well established that depression increases the risk of developing heart disease, enables coronary damage to progress more rapidly, and leads to increasing mortality from heart disease. (Frasure-Smith et al., 1995, JAMA 1993) There are literally hundreds of studies showing this and related phenomena. Psychiatric Times summarized the data as follows

"The risk (of death from coronary heart disease) is directly related to the severity of mood symptoms: a one-to twofold increase in coronary heart disease (CHD) for minor depression and a three- to fivefold increase for major depression (Bunker et al., 2003)".

By the way, the risk from major depression increases mortality by approximately the same amount as the risk from smoking or having diabetes! And there are excellent theoretical reasons to explain how depression damages the heart (increased cardiovascular reactivity in depression, endothelial [vessel lining] damage from vessel-reactivity, increased platelet aggregation in depression, etc.) Indeed the effect of depression on mortality from heart disease has become a well-accepted theory in the medical profession over the last 15 years. Forms of depression are major causes of physical deterioration in many organs, including the heart!

Now let's compare the support for your theory that Asperger's (a form of Autism) is created by "thinking" vs. support for the medical profession's theory that depression causes heart disease.

First of all, the idea that thought causes Autism is theoretically true, but not a useful idea. If we are fully functional conscious Turing machines, then given enough time, we should be able to create virtually any neural configuration in our brains. Therefore, given 1

million years of thinking, for example, we should be able to configure our brain exactly as we want it to be, in order to use the nerves leaving the brain as tools to fix, repair, and prevent, any disease or disorder of the body, including autism, cancer, heart disease, and everything else.

So saying that thought causes a medical disorder is like saying that all relevant problems are soluble by thought. Although in my opinion these statements are true, they are also vacuous because they explain too much without telling you how to proceed to solve a given problem. If autism is caused by thought, then so is everything else! In order to usefully proceed with this line of thought, one needs to specify what type of thought is said to cause a given medical condition.

So what does the evidence say about actual causes of autism and Asperger's, given that your theory is that a particular type of thinking causes the illness.

Ronald, Happe, and Bolton (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2006) found in their study:

High heritability was found for extreme autistic-like traits (.64-.92 for various cutoffs) and autistic-like traits as measured on a continuum (.78-.81) *with no significant shared environmental effect*.

Many studies have found very high heritability for autism and related traits, with no shared environmental effect.

What does "no shared environmental effect" mean for autistic traits? The easiest way to explain the concept is to imagine that a mother and father adopt two children. Imagine that Mom, Dad, and the two adopted children share no genetic relatedness at all. If the "shared environmental effect" is found to be zero in a well-done study of families like this, this means that two unrelated adopted children in the same family are as likely to share autistic traits in common as two complete strangers randomly chosen from the street. In other words different family cultures are irrelevant in causing differences in whether someone develops autistic traits or not.

When hereditary effects are high (monozygotic twins share the trait and dizygotic twins virtually do not) and the shared environmental effect is zero, as is the case with most studies of those with autism, the studied condition occurs in genetically related individuals. With zero shared environmental effect, the family culture does not influence rates of autism, so genes must be causally responsible. Since the family culture is irrelevant, the willful thinking of the individual --surely influenced by family culture -- does not cause the disorder, either. So the evidence strongly argues against the proposition that a particular type of thinking causes autism.

But how do those critical of genetic studies answer this seemingly airtight case? They use an argument that some have pejoratively called "X-factor" theory. They say there may be some cultural factor (the "X" factor), invariably not studied, that is ubiquitous and

homogenous across cultures. This factor interacts with genes that make one vulnerable to a condition, for example autism, but this "X-factor" is the *real cause* of the problem. Since all families are exposed to this ubiquitous "X-factor", then regardless of which family a child is raised in, he is exposed to this factor. And if he has the predisposing genes, this factor interacts with the genes to cause the condition. So the family that raises a child is irrelevant, which explains why the "shared environmental effect" is found to be zero in studies. All families are equally exposed to this common cultural factor which is the ultimate cause of the problem, not the genes.

What is the mysterious "factor X"? Here you may fill in the blank, usually depending upon one's political perspective. Those writing for this blog usually argue that factor X is the "coercion" of children. Coercion happens worldwide in every culture and in virtually every family and to every child (but is dramatically minimized in families supporting the "Taking Children Seriously" [TCS] movement.)

So the coercion of children interacts with the products of certain genes which make children vulnerable to the deleterious effects of coercion, and this interaction then causes all mental illness, and presumably also autism. So the absence of TCS parenting is the cause of mental illness and autism.

Now, if you ask proponents of this viewpoint if there has been even a single (even) descriptive study of a group of families following TCS principles, to see if anybody has mental illness, the answer is a resounding "NO".

Indeed if you ask whether there has been any data, any evidence, any descriptions of families cured of mental illness, or even any theoretical work done explaining why TCS should prevent autism or other mental illnesses, the answer is another resounding "NO".

So there is a tremendous irony in Elliot's post. Those advocating TCS as a cure for mental illness have done no investigations to support their speculations. Yet when I claim that much work has been done showing that depressive thinking dramatically affects whether someone develops worsening coronary artery disease, this is considered speculative, though hundreds of empirical studies support the theoretical ideas. Indeed I am asked to create a whole new field (that already exists across the world!) to lend credence to these ideas.

Yet the idea that coercion of children causes autism and other psychiatric problems is not supported by any studies at all (none). If Elliot even could show that rates of mental illness were lower in families practicing TCS, that at least would be a good start. But there is no evidence, naturally, only the speculation that the mysterious "X-factor" called coercion is somehow to blame for all chemical, genetic, and psychobiological disorders. And TCS-parenting would prevent them all.

Now, who is speculating about a brand new field in medicine?

by a reader on Mon, 07/23/2007 - 23:47 | [reply](#)

X Factor

Parents speak of their babies having "personalities" at the age of a few weeks. Some cry more. Some smile more. Some they interpret as a happy baby, others angry, others cute, other sad, others fun-loving, others curious, etc... Although there are no meaningful traits being observed, the parents think they are meaningful. This way of looking at infants is, I believe, dominant in our culture (including also people who hardly pay attention to infants consciously, but still do notice some things and have inexplicit reactions). Parents would take it as a point of pride that they treat their children appropriately: they react to their children's personality and characteristics and treat them in the way they imagine someone with that personality would prefer. So, there are complex differences in the treatment of infants, based on parental reactions to trivial traits which could easily be genetic and heritable. If one of these traits corresponds to an imagined "infant personality" that receives autism-causing treatment then autism is (at least sometimes) due to bad ideas and traditions in our culture, and is triggered by certain genes that have no functional role in autism.

It doesn't have to be quite that direct either: an infant personality could receive parental treatment that causes certain personality traits at a later age, which then receive more treatment to cause others at a later age, and so on, until finally the autism is caused. Autism also might require a few such traits combine in one person.

That's the X-factor: bad ideas and traditions, especially about how to treat children. Coercion does play a major role: it is part of the process by which parents entrench irrational ideas in their children.

While I can't fill in the exact details of which infant personality traits are treated in exactly which way, it is well known that this X-factor exists: some attitudes to parenting, including memes, are ubiquitous. And it is well known that parenting can cause complex and unwanted consequences and parents often don't even know why they do things (even complex things), and sometimes don't even notice they have done them. I think you already agree this happens in general, but if not I can give examples.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 07/24/2007 - 06:23 | [reply](#)

bullshit

Continental drift was laughed at by all good scientists. Hand washing was ridiculed by all serious physicians in the mid nineteenth century.

Yes, all scientists have all believed wrong theories, countless times.

So you're talking right out of your smug ass, really.

by a reader on Sat, 07/28/2007 - 11:28 | [reply](#)

They're not fake...

...so much as they are created by the parents to excuse bad parenting.

by Crudblud on Sun, 08/05/2007 - 16:08 | [reply](#)

Child's Genes Determine Parents!

Elliot,

You are assuming that some parents are not less likely to have behaviors that cause autism in their children than others. If some parents were less likely, there would be a positive shared environmental effect found in the data, but studies find none.

So your first assumption is that within statistical limits, there have been no parents with good parenting strategies (that prevent autism) who have been studied.

Wouldn't you think that even a few parents would raise children somewhat the way you want (and I'll heroically assume that your parenting strategies are good), so that children with the predisposing genes would not develop autism?

If there were strategies already practiced by parents that did not cause autism, these would show up as a "positive shared environmental effect" in the data and they do not. So you must be claiming that you know of a parenting strategy that no one else does and that naturally has never been studied. And you must be claiming that your miracle strategy (but not the strategies used by everyone else), prevents genes that predispose to autism from causing autism.

But there is even more irony. Instead of saying that genes in the child determine that there will be autistic traits in a child, and the child can't help it; you are claiming that genes in the child cause autism-predisposing-traits in the parent, and the parent can't help it! And the child's choices still are irrelevant. Because the autism-predisposing-traits of the parent determine the child's autism!

So you are still a genetic determinist. It's just that children's genes don't determine children's behavior. They determine parent's behavior and this determines children's behavior!

by a reader on Mon, 08/06/2007 - 19:06 | [reply](#)

Environmental Factors

If there were strategies already practiced by parents that did not cause autism, these would show up as a "positive shared environmental effect" in the data and they do not.

If you record the amount of (say) lead paint in the house of subjects in a study, I see you could rule out that out as a relevant environmental factor. And if you record which parents are

democrats or republicans, you could rule that out too. But what do you do in order to rule out the infant personality theory? It's hard to record how much people have that, even if you try, because people don't know how much they have it.

I also see that you could do a twins-raised-apart study, or something like that, as another way of attacking, for example, the lead paint issue: if only one person in the house gets autism (the foreign twin) then how could it be the lead paint causing it? If this happens reliably then the only way lead paint would be relevant is if they have a gene causing lead paint susceptibility. But again this doesn't work with the infant personality theory which states that part of the causal mechanism of autism is that the parents treat different children differently, so it predicts that the control child won't be affected.

So I'm not sure in what way you can guarantee that there is no environmental effect and thus rule out the infant personality theory.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 08/11/2007 - 20:48 | [reply](#)

Please Clarify

Let's examine the model that the editors use to question genetic studies.

Their argument was that lynching of black people could be wrongly interpreted as being caused by genes (by ignorant population geneticists) because genes cause black skin. And black skin incites murderous anger in bigots, so genes coding for black skin could be (falsely) interpreted as being the relevant cause of lynching.

Is the same logic behind your "infant personality" theory of autism?

by a reader on Mon, 08/13/2007 - 14:24 | [reply](#)

clarification

it's kind of like that in general logic terms, but more realistic: you'd have to imagine that 99.9999% of the population is a racist and that no one has ever heard of racism. so in that situation you can see how people might miss it as a factor.

I also have anecdotal evidence that people have the infant personality theory, reason to expect others do, comparisons to known and similar effects (like gender discrimination towards infants), and evidence that interpretations of children can have large, measurable effects (not that one really needs evidence on this last point. of course they can).

-- Elliot Temple

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 08/13/2007 - 17:48 | [reply](#)

OK

"it's kind of like that in general logic terms..."

Ok. So you must be assuming that parents are reacting (consciously or unconsciously) to a unique trait of a child that is caused by genes, and the reaction of parents to this trait causes the autism.

Which parental factors are causing autism and which ones are preventing it?

by a reader on Mon, 08/13/2007 - 18:51 | [reply](#)

Implausible?

The "shared environmental effect" is found to be zero (as stated previously) when for example two genetically unrelated adopted children growing up with the same two parents share a trait (say having autism) as frequently as two random strangers who have random parents. With autism, the shared environmental effect has been found to be zero.

So in studies, a child with autism was as likely to have developed autism no matter what family he was raised in, no matter what parenting style he was exposed to. And rates of autism were found to skyrocket when children were more closely genetically related to others with autism, no matter who raises any of them.

Given your theory that autism is nonetheless caused by parenting (not genes) and knowing that most children do not develop autism, does this not imply that parents, on some level, know very well how not to cause autism?

If your theory is correct, you should be able:

A. To specify a particular visible characteristic of children that is directly controlled by genes -- a characteristic to which parents react. You need to specify this characteristic in order to explain why identical twins share autism far more than fraternal twins who share the disorder far more than those less related, etc. The genetic theory, by contrast, explains this perfectly well.

And you should be able

B. To specify why this genetic characteristic of children causes (not some) but all parents, within statistical limitations, to be immediately unable to utilize **any** of the non-autism-causing parenting skills they utilize every day to raise all their other children.

Don't your assumptions seem just a little bit implausible to you?

by a reader on Mon, 08/13/2007 - 23:14 | [reply](#)

Illnesses; Science; Behavior vs Genetics

Hi :)

Let's try to step back and see the conversation as a whole before I answer your questions about local details. It has gotten quite long, and that leaves a lot of room for us to diverge in what we think has been said.

I believe that you said that bipolar, depression and other conditions are illnesses and that this is backed by scientific evidence, especially studies which purport to show these conditions are caused by genes. They do this by showing "heritability" of conditions. But this does not actually imply they are caused by genes; the studies are consistent with the conditions being caused by behaviors. I gave an example of how this might work based on parental interpretations of infant personalities.

You now challenge the infant personality theory and ask for a defense of its plausibility, and also for details of its mechanisms. When addressing this issue we should remember my point about behavior-based theories of bipolar/etc causation has been that they are consistent with the studies; therefore, the studies can't inform us about whether the cause is genes or behavior. So in this particular part of the debate, that evidence is not relevant.

That said, we can address plausibility as a philosophical issue, and it can have some bearing on the science: if we can rule out behavioral theories philosophically, and other rivals using the scientific studies, we'll have a good case for genetic theories. The likely method of attack I see for delving into the issue is epistemological because we're interested in different ways of constructing a person with given knowledge (bipolar, depression, etc) in their mind. So let me know if we're on the same page, and then we can each give arguments about the plausibility of the behavior and genetic theories.

BTW, what should be called an illness or not is itself an interesting question. One reason to call something an illness is to imply people with it are broken and should be fixed: to dehumanize them. This seems especially relevant when some people with an "illness" prefer to be that way, and compulsory treatment is on the table. Another reason is because something has gone wrong with normal functioning that the patient prefers to be fixed, like cancer. Or if a gene injects harmful knowledge into a brain without (unconscious) choice by bypassing normal methods of thinking, and that person wants it gone, then that'd be reasonable to call that an illness. On the other hand, if an "illness" consists of knowledge created in the usual way -- conjecture and criticism -- then it isn't philosophically different than idiotarianism, or pacifism, or mysticism.

- Elliot

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sat, 08/25/2007 - 01:19 | [reply](#)

Disorders are real, but not clearly enough defined

I wouldn't say the disorders themselves are created by the parents. I think it's more that once a disorder gains some media attention, while a few people genuinely have the disorder, a lot of hypochondriacs and bad parents will recognize a few features of it in themselves or their children and jump to conclusions about it (particularly if they do it themselves without any psychiatric training).

Not only that, a lot of them are "spectrum" disorders; it's like the difference between Boolean and fuzzy logic. For example, there's a very long list of features of Asperger's Syndrome, and not every Aspie has all the features. I have AS myself (formally diagnosed by a consultant psychiatrist and a psychiatric nurse) and have met a few other Aspies, some of whom are more neurotypical (normal) than I am and others who have it more severely than I do. I've also met a lot of neurotypicals who have had a few mild features of AS, but not enough for them to be officially diagnosed as Aspies. The same is true of learning disorders such as dyslexia - a lot of people have trouble with literacy or are plain stupid/lazy, but far fewer people are officially dyslexic.

The obvious problem that this creates is: where do you draw the line between neurotypicality and dyslexia/AS/ADHD/ODD/etc.? At the moment, it isn't exactly clear, and because of this, a lot of people with only a few features of a certain disorder are misdiagnosed.

Unfortunately this does also mean that, sometimes, the disorder itself is dismissed as nonsense.

by EJWeir on Sun, 09/09/2007 - 17:12 | [reply](#)

Tautology

As I have said before, the idea that thought (or parenting or culture) causes autism is theoretically true, but given the evidence, it is not a useful idea. If we are fully functional conscious Turing machines, then given enough time, we should be able to create virtually any neural configuration in our brains. Therefore, given 1 million years of thinking and parenting, for example, we should be able to configure our brain exactly as we want it to be, in order to use the nerves leaving the brain as tools to fix, repair, and prevent any disease or disorder of the body, including autism, cancer, heart disease, and everything else.

So saying that thought causes a medical disorder (like autism) is like saying that all relevant problems are soluble by thought. Although in my opinion these statements are true, they are also vacuous because they explain too much without telling you how to proceed to solve the problem of autism or any other problem. Yes, autism is caused by thought, because thought can theoretically cause anything to happen that is consistent with the laws of physics.

In order to usefully proceed with your line of reasoning, you should

specify what type of thought causes a given medical condition (like autism). Then you should make some testable predictions based on your theory.

Even if direct chemical pathways are shown between genes, chemicals produced from genes, neural arrangements, and patterns of behavior (or between genes, chemicals, abnormal myocyte arrangements, and cardiac behavior), one could still claim that appropriate parenting could reverse these abnormal configurations, by having our own nerves reprogram our bodies and brains so that our brains and hearts are healthy.

Given the way you have stated your theory, I am not sure it can be shown to be false (even in principle), unless I am missing something. Can you specify for the readers an experiment, the results of which could conceivably show that autism is not caused by the absence of appropriate parenting, but is in fact caused by genetic derangements?

An inability to do this would show that your ideas are tautological and possibly solipsistic.

by a reader on Mon, 09/24/2007 - 02:09 | [reply](#)

Useful

If mental illnesses are based on thought this is useful to know. It would mean, for example, that people attempting to change their ways of thinking about the world should be optimistic that this can have far-reaching effects including, for example, curing their depression. It would mean they don't need drugs or surgery if they don't want those, and they can still get better.

It means that prevention strategies should focus on parenting instead of testing for high risk genes in babies. it would mean that genetic screenings are a total waste, for this particular issue.

you keep asking for a detailed rival theory from me. there are two problems with this. the first is that i don't need one to offer criticism of the mainstream theory. the mainstream theory claims certain things as evidence that are equally well evidence of alternatives. therefore they aren't evidence. one doesn't have to prove the alternatives are true to make the logical point that the evidence was no good. and second, the mainstream theory itself doesn't pass the simple test of offering an explanation of what's going on. it says there is some gene/chemical/physical-thing that uses some mechanism to cause depression. saying, for example, that there is some behavior that transfers memes into children which somehow cause depression isn't any more vague.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 10/03/2007 - 06:24 | [reply](#)

Can it Be Shown to be False?

Economists claim that everyone acts in their "self-interest" This is very much the same kind of argument that says, "Thought Causes Autism (and everything else!)"

But I can prove that everyone is an altruist.

Altruist: Everyone, including John, is an altruist

Dubious: Then why did John kill Harry?

Altruist: Obviously Harry was very unhappy.

Dubious: But Harry screamed and begged John not to kill him

Altruist: Obviously Harry was trying to save John the effort.

Philosopher: I can prove that thought causes Autism (or cancer or anything else consistent with the laws of physics)

Scientist: ` But stars collapse and humans are no where near the collapse. Surely gravity is the explanation.

Philosopher: If parents had used my parenting strategy (FPS) children would have the knowledge to stop the collapse of stars and children could control whether stars collapse or not. So bad parenting causes stars to collapse!

Scientist: Yes but some children are mentally retarded. They have known chromosomal abnormalities, known brain structural abnormalities. In autism, Identical twins, reared together or apart have the same problem. With "no shared environmental effect", children who are genetically unrelated, but are raised together, do not share the characteristic more than random strangers on the street. Yet if they are genetically related, whether raised together or apart, they share the characteristic. And known changes in chemicals can experimentally induce given psychiatric states (like depression) and reverse it (make the person happy.) Doesn't that show that chemicals from genes and chemicals from brains are relevant causes of a psychiatric condition. Maybe some profoundly retarded autistic children are not smart enough to learn how to stop stars from collapsing.

Philosopher: Yes but some type of correct parenting would correct everything.

Scientist: So is there any experiment that could show that thought is not the best explanation of autism?

Philosopher: I don't need to come up with one. Human thought explains all the evidence. It can do nothing else.

by a reader on Thu, 10/04/2007 - 00:51 | [reply](#)

The Obvious Difference

The obvious difference between my theories and yours is that my theories can easily be proven false. So our arguments are not symmetrical.

Is there any experiment, even in principle, that could show that

your theory is false?

by a reader on Thu, 10/04/2007 - 00:56 | [reply](#)

Is it Falsifiable?

"In so far as a scientific statement speaks about reality, it must be falsifiable; and in so far as it is not falsifiable, it does not speak about reality."

Karl Popper

Concerning your theory that thought causes autism.

Which is it?

1. Is your theory not scientific?
2. Is your theory not about reality?
3. Perhaps you have not had time to formulate an experiment that could show that thought does not cause autism or perhaps you would prefer not to?

by a reader on Fri, 10/05/2007 - 00:04 | [reply](#)

testable

the theory that some type of thought causes some mental illnesses by some chain of effects is not testable. it's a possible structure a scientific theory might have.

the more specific story about parents who interpret trivial actions in terms of infant personalities is still too vague to be tested -- which actions are interpreted in precisely what way, which causes parent to do precisely what, which causes...? but it is much closer than the generic outline. and it could be developed further into a testable theory.

but so what? you haven't offered a testable explanation either. if you claim X drug will cure Y disease, that's testable, sure, but it isn't explaining what's going on or why. to illustrate another testable claim w/ no explanation: if i said sacrificing a goat will cure depression, that is testable (try it, and see if it works or not), but more importantly i don't give any reason why it would work; there's no explanation.

i haven't claimed to know exactly what happens, i've simply criticized some flaws in the mainstream view, as a matter of logic. and also pointed out that in the absence of a compelling reason to take one view over the other, its irrational to choose one now.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 10/05/2007 - 02:01 | [reply](#)

Can it Be Shown to be False?

There are many theories in which psychological processes can be reasonably thought to be caused by a variety of specific brain chemicals and bodily structures producing chemicals. And all of these theories, though currently thought to be true by most neurobiologists/psychiatrists/geneticists, can certainly be shown to be false.

For example,

1. We can study a large group of identical twins raised separately. We can rule out differences in genetic factors as a relevant cause of differences in a particular psychological characteristic, if this psychological characteristic is not shared (in a statistical sense) by twin pairs.

2. If identical twins do share the characteristic, but unrelated adopted children raised together also share the characteristic (more than unrelated children raised separately), we can rule out differences in genes as the sole relevant factor explaining differences in the characteristic.

3. If we deplete a neurotransmitter like serotonin in humans and animals and we get behavioral signs of depression in humans and animals, and depressive statements from a person so depleted; and if serotonin repletion reverses the condition, we have evidence that serotonin depletion is a cause of depression. In other words, we have a chemical theory of depression. But this theory could certainly be shown to be false if for example differences in behavior and symptom reports are better explained by efficiency (not quantity) of serotonin neurotransmission.

4. If a particular parenting strategy consistently prevents the appearance of autism, autism is not best explained by genetics.

In fact there are no legitimate psychiatric theories that could not be shown to be false by the hypothetical results of future experiments. Yet you criticize specific psychiatric theories with what you call your "structure of a scientific theory"?

No, a "structure of a scientific theory" does not criticize ideas. Ideas are criticized with other ideas. It is a category error to compare a "structure of a scientific theory" with a psychiatric theory. Your explicitly stated idea is that parenting equally well accounts for all the evidence that is also consistent with psychiatric ideas about causation. So you are comparing your theories about causation with psychiatric theories about causation. But there is a difference between the two. Your theory, unlike psychiatric theories, cannot be shown to be false by any evidence whatsoever and you now admit that.

Yes, ideas and parenting can cause and cure schizophrenia and autism, because as previously argued, they can cause and prevent everything consistent with the laws of physics! You are essentially saying,

1. I think I am correct that parenting causes schizophrenia and autism.

2. My theory is as good an alternative as psychiatric theories

because both theories equally well account for all the evidence.

3. There is no evidence that could be presented under any circumstances that could show that I am wrong.

4. Therefore the idea that parenting causes schizophrenia/autism is as good a theory as psychiatric theories.

So if someone presents to you a gravitational theory of star collapse, you certainly can "criticize" the theory by saying that all the evidence of differences in how stars collapse could equally well be accounted for by differences in parenting, because if parents transmit the correct ideas and knowledge to children, they (and not gravity) will determine differences in how stars collapse. And you can say that if you are correct, we don't have to waste resources studying physics (gravity and all that stuff). Instead, we should study parenting.

But you are not likely to be taken too seriously unless you are a bit more specific. In particular, your ideas should lead to demarkable (specifically defined) theories that can (at least theoretically) be shown to be incorrect. This is the case in all legitimate scientific fields including physics, genetics, psychiatry, psychology, neurobiology, etc.

By the way, the study of the way in which particular ideas affect minds and brains has a name. No new research program needs to be invented. This field is called.....PSYCHOLOGY. And yes, the study of infant characteristics and their relationship to parenting styles is a burgeoning field in psychology. It is fascinating!

But please do model how memes (possibly defined as ideas that reproduce between people and are disseminated by brains) influence people. It is an interesting subject. But your ideas about memes will need to be more specific than what you have stated to have meaning to scientists.

by a reader on Mon, 10/08/2007 - 14:26 | [reply](#)

I love how you refer to Aspergers as a "mental Disease" moron

I love how you refer to Aspergers as a mental disease! what about your mental disease (Nuerotypical Mental Disease) or NMD. just because you suffer from your devastating condition which doesn't allow you to feel real emotions and truly live your life to the fullest, doesn't mean you can hate on people who can.

by a reader on Tue, 11/20/2007 - 21:58 | [reply](#)

ass burgers is bullshit!

Asperger's Syndrome is bullshit. I was diagnosed with it. I am miserable, everone hates me, but that is because i'm just a retarded freak!!!! I'm not giving a mental desease as an esxuse for that!!!!

by fuck off crap assess! on Sun, 01/13/2008 - 19:03 | [reply](#)

So wrong

To view any mental illness as fake is the most narrow minded view you could have. ADD, Bipolar and the like are over-diagnosed but there are many out there with these real diseases. Bipolar for instance is recognised as a physical disorder not a mental disease. They have real implications much like more recognised diseases.

It strikes me that all of your researched is terribly skewed and more to the point what qualifies you to make these judgements? I would question anything you ever wrote since none of what you have posted is based on fact.

Why do people insist on sharing their narrow views with the rest of the world.

Perhaps you should be happy that you are not afflicted by one of these so called "fake illnesses". Either do decent research and present an unbiased, factual viewpoint or keep it to yourself.

by Reaper on Mon, 01/14/2008 - 11:05 | [reply](#)

Re: Can it Be Shown to be False?

So, I had a similar argument with someone else. And towards the end he said two strange things, which revealed most of the previous discussion missed the real point of disagreement.

First, he isn't sure if apes are intelligent.

Second, he said that, like genes, mountains control human personalities and cultures.

To elaborate on the mountain claim, he meant that human cultures turn out differently in the presence of mountains. Mountains **cause** different culture than flatlands.

The importance of this claim was that our disagreement was all about the word **cause**, and not about genes vs memes. He thought that mountains and genes both did the same kind of thing. That'd have been much easier to discuss if we'd stuck to mountains, which are simpler.

So, in case it will help: do you think either of his statements is correct?

If we deplete a neurotransmitter like serotonin in humans and animals and we get behavioral signs of depression in humans and animals, and depressive statements from a person so depleted; and if serotonin repletion reverses the condition, we have evidence that serotonin depletion is a cause of depression. In other words, we have a chemical theory of depression.

How is this more than finding a **correlation**?

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us
Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 01/29/2008 - 06:37 | [reply](#)

The Opposite Theory

How is this more than finding a *correlation*?

Yes and it may even be less than that!

The observations are consistent with serotonin depletion being a cause of *happiness*.

In this theory the brain enters a state of depression in an attempt to restore equilibrium levels of serotonin following the intervention.

(Rather like a car driver applying the brakes to try to prevent an accident. The accident is not caused by braking.)

by **Tom Robinson** on Wed, 01/30/2008 - 13:20 | [reply](#)

Science vs. Superstition

Let's be clear. I have stated psychiatric theories (which may be correct or not) that can theoretically be shown to be false. Your theory (that parenting causes schizophrenia) by your own admission can not be shown to be false.

The way you've stated your theory (which states that schizophrenia is caused by parenting) is therefore not a scientific theory. Your theory is like the "theory" that creation "science" is real. It could be the case that G-d created the world in 7 days and faked all evidence to test our faith, but it is not something that scientists address. Like your theory, these theories "explain all the evidence" but can not be shown to be false.

Psychiatric theories are in their infancy, and could use a lot of work. But they are scientific theories, and can be refuted. Therefore, progress can be made.

Psychiatric theories try to identify many causes of psychological phenomena, including chemical causes, parental causes, and cultural causes.

The theory that deficits in serotonin transmission are a cause of depression are interesting but surely very incomplete. The fact that those with low levels of serotonin (actually its 5-HIAA metabolite) in the cerebrospinal fluid tend to commit suicide is interesting. The fact that depletion of serotonin in the brain causes normal people (with no history of depression) to become depressed is interesting. Repletion of that same chemical in those previously depleted then causes a return to happiness. This suggests that deficiencies in

serotonergic transmission are a cause of depression/suicide. I don't

understand the argument that it is a correlation, not a cause.

Tom Robinson's argument is no doubt interesting. I just don't understand it. If serotonin depletion caused happiness, then when we experimentally deplete it in those with no depression, the depleted patients should tend to become happier. But they don't, so I'm not exactly sure how his theory works.

by a reader on Mon, 02/04/2008 - 22:09 | [reply](#)

Serotonin Depletion

Correction: Depletion of serotonin in those with no history of depression and who are currently not depressed does not lead to depression.

But depletion of serotonin in those with a history of depression but no current depression does lead to depression.

Thanks.

by a reader on Tue, 02/05/2008 - 18:32 | [reply](#)

Mountains

If a particular theory about the effect of mountains on a culture is testable and refutable, I would consider that the perception of mountains, like the perception of our parents, can cause us and our culture to change.

Saying that the presence or absence of certain memes in people causes all mental illness, however, is like saying that the presence or absence of certain memes in people causes stars to collapse. Both are true statements. Both are meaningless. Neither advances our knowledge.

by a reader on Tue, 02/05/2008 - 23:00 | [reply](#)

correlation does not imply causation

This suggests that deficiencies in serotonergic transmission are a cause of depression/suicide. I don't understand the argument that it is a correlation, not a cause.

In Tom's example, breaking is correlated with dangerous driving, but breaking does not cause dangerous driving. This is one way a correlation may not indicate a cause.

Besides mistakes regarding which causes which, in general correlation does not imply causation because something else might cause both.

For example imagine a correlation between wearing coats and car accidents. One might say that it looks like coats are causing accidents. It even makes sense: coats could hinder movement, thus

slowing reaction times, or making people less inclined to turn to see

things.

Now imagine someone figures out that *rain* was causing both coats and accidents. The correlation between coats and accidents did not indicate a cause, after all.

With the serotonin issue, you have not ruled out rain. There may be a non-obvious cause.

I will continue, but I want to check if you understand and agree, first. If you do not, let's discuss that before going on.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Blog

by a reader on Sat, 02/09/2008 - 21:25 | [reply](#)

Correlation Does Not Imply Causation (Right)

You are right. Correlation does not imply causation. But I think you may be confusing the two.

Let us define a few terms. When it comes to the social sciences and medicine, when we say that event (A) *causes* event (B), we do NOT mean that (A) is a necessary precondition for B to occur. And when we say that event A causes event (B), we also do NOT mean that (A) is a necessary and sufficient precondition for event (B) to occur. We do not use this language because virtually no event in medicine or the social sciences is an absolutely necessary precondition or an absolutely necessary and sufficient precondition for some other event to occur.

Instead when we say that event A causes event B, we mean that event A increases the likelihood that event B will occur.

If a third hypothetical factor (say cancer) caused the body to lower brain serotonin and if the cancer also made people depressed, then cancer would be causing depression and lowering serotonin. Low serotonin levels would *CORRELATE* with depression, not cause it.

But placebo controlled experiments show that in subpopulations of subjects, lowering serotonin is in fact followed subsequently by depression, relative to subjects taking an active placebo. The only statistical difference between the group that gets the placebo and the group that experiences the active intervention is that the active intervention group has serotonin lowered. Therefore a third factor (like cancer) should not be relevant because large enough groups have been chosen to make sure that both groups do not statistically vary, except that one group has serotonin depleted and the other takes an active placebo.

In these conditions, serotonin depletion has been found to make depression statistically more likely (in non-depressed patients with a history of depression) and serotonin repletion has been found to make happiness more likely. That is, serotonin depletion is a cause

of depression and serotonin repletion is a cause of happiness, given

the way I have defined the word "cause".

I don't understand what Tom Robinson is saying. But those who talk about drivers of cars using their brakes in order to prevent automobile accidents, while discussing mental illness, are usually using the arguments of a famous antipsychiatrist.

His claim was that serotonin deficiency has not been found to cause depression just because low levels of cerebrospinal fluid serotonin (actually metabolites) have been found to correlated with reports of depression. He argued, for example, that depression could cause low levels of serotonin, not that low serotonin necessarily causes depression.

He apparently was not yet aware that creative, blinded, and placebo-controlled experiments were being performed in which serotonin was effectively removed from the brains of individuals with a history of depression, but with no current depression. These individuals rapidly became depressed. When serotonin was replenished, the previously depleted individuals were restored to happiness. Therefore serotonin depletion increased the probability of a subgroup of individuals becoming depressed. That is, serotonin depletion caused depression and serotonin repletion caused happiness. The arrow of causation was demonstrated.

A second argument that the famous antipsychiatrist used against the serotonin-depletion argument went like this (although we now know that it was mostly wrong):

1. Serotonin may have nothing to do with regulating mood. Perhaps it actually regulates heart rate, for example.
2. If something occurs that causes serotonin levels to fall, the body has compensatory mechanisms to raise serotonin levels, in order to protect the body from the effects of low serotonin. The body "wants" to protect itself against the low levels of serotonin because in the hypothetical example, normal serotonin levels are needed to have a normal heart beat.
3. According to this (incorrect) theory, depression is a compensatory mechanism to raise serotonin levels.
4. This theory does correctly predict that experimentors will find low levels of serotonin in people who are depressed. According to the discredited theory, low levels of serotonin cause the body to respond with a clinical depression in order to raise serotonin levels.

So when scientists take needed serotonin away from the brains of people using experimental interventions, this theory by the antipsychiatrist says that the experimentors are causing something bad to happen to the person, analogous to someone creating a situation in which a car accident is about to happen. The body's creation of depression in response to the serotonin deprivation is like a person using the brakes of a car to prevent a accident. So depression (like braking in an automobile) is a good thing because depression raises serotonin levels (just as hitting the breaks prevents the car accident). Depression in brains/minds (like brakes in a car) can be seen as something that protects people. Neuroscientists have taken the above argument seriously and most

aspects of it have been shown to be wrong (and one aspect might be sort-of true). At some point, I will explain the evidence showing you why it is wrong. But even if the theory were TRUE, how Tom Robinson manages to get from the above stated theory to the idea that serotonin depletion causes happiness is beyond me. His arguments don't make sense (to me) and seem illogical. Serotonin depletion is not causing happiness, any more than car accidents in his analogy are helping to protect people.

But for the sake of argument, let's assume the theory by the antipsychiatrist is TRUE. That is, let's assume that the body creates depression in order to raise serotonin levels depleted by experimentors or depleted by other causes of serotonin deficiency. This would explain why low levels of metabolites of serotonin are found in the cerebrospinal fluid of subjects who say they are depressed.

Do you think serotonin depletion by experimentors then **causes** or is **correlated with** depression (if we assume that my recounting of the serotonin depletion experiments is accurate). Do you think that serotonin repletion then causes or is correlated with restoration to happiness?

by a reader on Mon, 02/11/2008 - 20:14 | [reply](#)

Mean Relatives

There are those with Asperger's who are nice, there are those with Asperger's who are mean, and there are those who do not have Asperger's who are mean.

I don't know which your relative is.

But please don't give up on the mentally ill and those with developmental disabilities because you know someone who has been diagnosed with Asperger's and is unpleasant.

The reality of Asperger's disorder as a legitimate condition does not hinge on the behavior of your relative. Right?

I know of no psychiatrist who thinks that people are just chemical reactions. The issue is that the structure of the brain and its chemistry is a relevant consideration when discussing behavior.

by a reader on Mon, 02/18/2008 - 20:57 | [reply](#)

re: Correlation Does Not Imply Causation (Right)

when we say that event A causes event B, we mean that event A increases the likelihood that event B will occur.

That is a bad definition, because it's too vague. It's sort of like saying playing good moves increases the likelihood of winning chess games, and that this is the same thing as causing chess victories.

OK, it superficially sounds true, but you can easily play good moves

and lose, and various strategies for playing good moves will in fact

cause chronic losing (like spending too much time on them too early in the game, then running out of time).

It also reminds me of the approaches to epistemology which try to support or justify theories and then say they are "more likely" to be true. All (existing) approaches to epistemology which speak in terms of theories being likely to be true, are bad. And imprecise. When they say something is likely, they don't bother to work out when it will happen, and when it won't.

And that's what matters. Not what is "likely". How likely? What are the exceptions? Why? Will this apply in a different situation? All other instances of it are different situations in some sense. Different time, usually different place, usually different people, lots of subtle differences. Which ones matter? If you have an explanation of what's going on, then you can evaluate which types of differences should matter, and which similarities will allow the explanation to still apply. If all you have is "more likely", then you have no clue.

Therefore a third factor (like cancer) should not be relevant because large enough groups have been chosen to make sure that both groups do not statistically vary

That's not entirely accurate because you can't check whether there is statistical variance between two groups, or not, for a factor you haven't thought of. However, I am not claiming that the active and control groups in any studies were chosen badly and have a bias of any kind, so it's ok.

In these conditions, serotonin depletion has been found to make depression statistically more likely

What I am suggesting is possible is that many people (but not all, which is why the depletion makes depression more likely but not guaranteed) have a certain "vulnerability". It consists of bad ideas about how to react to certain environments. And keep in mind I'm not saying we know this is the case, but rather that the evidence for the mainstream position is consistent with this alternative possibility. And if we are to consider which theory is true between two rivals, we cannot use any evidence that is consistent with both of them.

So for example, imagine people who yell and scream wildly, when put on a roller coaster. The analogy of your position is to say that roller coasters increase the likelihood of yelling and screaming, and thus (statistically) cause yelling and screaming.

And the analogy of my position is to say that, perhaps, roller coasters don't cause yelling and screaming in all people. Perhaps, they don't cause it at all, in any people. Perhaps what's going on is that some people, with certain ideas, choose to yell and scream when put in certain situations. The situation is not the cause, their ideas are. This is fairly clear in the roller coaster case, because any "screamer" could easily resist and remain quiet throughout the ride, if they wanted to -- if it was important for some reason.

Back to mental illnesses, could we agree that *if* it's the case that

some people decide to get depressed in low serotonin situations, based on their ideas, and they could do otherwise if they A) wanted to and B) knew how *then* it's inaccurate to say serotonin causes depression?

*Do you think serotonin depletion by experimentors then *causes* or is *correlated with* depression*

I think the experiment only shows a correlation, which is perfectly consistent with scenarios in which it does not really cause depression. The experiments are thus inconclusive.

- Elliot Temple
www.curi.us

by a reader on Tue, 02/19/2008 - 04:41 | [reply](#)

Cause Again

"when we say that event A causes event B, we mean that event A increases the likelihood that event B will occur."

A Reader

That is a bad definition, because it's too vague. It's sort of like saying playing good moves increases the likelihood of winning chess games, and that this is the same thing as causing chess victories. OK, it superficially sounds true, but you can easily play good moves and lose, and various strategies for playing good moves will in fact cause chronic losing (like spending too much time on them too early in the game, then running out of time).

Elliot Temple

If a patient has high blood pressure and I recommend that he take a beta-blocker because "placebo controlled studies show that beta-blockers cause individuals with similar conditions to live longer", do you think I have misled the patient because I have used the word "cause"?

If the beta-blocker is not causing the average patient in a given situation to live longer, based on the results of placebo controlled studies, why should he take the medicine?

by a reader on Tue, 02/19/2008 - 19:36 | [reply](#)

Lynching

During slave times in America, some of those with black skin were lynched. Do you think black skin is *correlated with* or *causes* lynching?

by a reader on Tue, 02/19/2008 - 20:55 | [reply](#)

If a patient has high blood p

If a patient has high blood pressure and I recommend that he take

a beta-blocker because "placebo controlled studies show that beta-blockers cause individuals with similar conditions to live longer", do you think I have misled the patient because I have used the word "cause"?

Yes, you are misleading him a bit. (Disregarding the issue of how precise doctors should be in explaining stuff to their patients.)

The studies didn't show that beta blockers cause increased longevity for those groups. The studies are consistent with that being false.

Check out wikipedia on beta blockers. It has paragraphs of explanation about how they work. This explanation was not created by the studies it was created by the creative thought of scientists. This kind of explanation is the actual basis for suggesting the medicine to the patient. Explanation can reference studies and they can be helpful to it, but the studies **alone** don't get us anywhere.

Of course being black doesn't cause rope to constrict around your neck. Those lynchings were caused by irrational (and immoral) culture. If you want to know who will get lynched, what you need to investigate is not the innate consequences of being black, but rather the set of people the culture hates. Being black has only a very superficial role in the proceedings.

- Elliot
www.curi.us

by a reader on Wed, 02/20/2008 - 05:22 | [reply](#)

"Yes, you are misleading him

"Yes, you are misleading him a bit. (Disregarding the issue of how precise doctors should be in explaining stuff to their patients.)

The studies didn't show that beta blockers cause increased longevity for those groups. The studies are consistent with that being false."

Elliot Temple

You're mistaken. According to well designed studies, in many subgroups of patients who have had a heart attack, beta blockers do decrease average mortality rates.

"This explanation (for how beta blockers work) was not created by the studies it was created by the creative thought of scientists. This kind of explanation is the actual basis for suggesting the medicine to the patient."

You're correct that people who are able to think create theories. The results of studies do not create theories. But the results of studies often do help people to create theories.

For example, it used to be thought that any medicines which

lowered blood pressure approximately the same amount had approximately equivalent efficacy. Distinctions were made about which medicine to prescribe based upon side-effect profiles.

Obviously, one can't observe something without the brain/mind having at least some theory about what to look for. But that doesn't mean that we have good explanations for that which we see!

Doctors observed that blood pressure medications that acted primarily within the brain did not seem to work as well as blood pressure medications that worked primarily on the heart and blood vessels, though both could lower blood pressure the same amount. Studies were conducted showing that medicines that worked in the brain (centrally acting) were in fact not as effective in preventing bad outcomes as other medicines that acted in the periphery of the body.

When these studies came out, we changed our behavior *before* we really could explain why the medications primarily acting in the brain did not do as well as medications primarily acting in the body. We prescribed according to what the study indicated was better, before we knew why it was better.

We do now have reasonable explanations, but it was the study results that changed our prescribing practices, not the explanation. And our patients were happy about being healthier without knowing why. And it was the study results which prompted us to start looking for reasons why the two types of medicines led to different outcomes.

Nowadays we use duloxetine, for example, to treat certain types of pain, yet we really don't know most of the details about how it works. But doctors are willing to prescribe it and patients are more than willing to take it, because the studies say it decreases certain types of pain with relatively minimal side-effects. And patients feel the difference!

In a world of imperfect knowledge, medical practitioners often have made many improvements, not by being able to explain everything, but rather by being able to observe differences between things (using studies). Observed differences can often mean the difference between life and death or just being in pain or not being in pain, long before explanations are provided.

Yes we would like the explanations for medical phenomena. But often the observed differences precede our ability to explain the differences.

Contrary to what you have said, I think most patients would be willing to take a beta-blocker if they knew it increased their chances of living longer, without bad side-effects, even if they did not know exactly why it did so. Perhaps you would, too.

by a reader on Mon, 02/25/2008 - 18:39 | [reply](#)

Confusion of Cause and Correlation

Unfortunately Elliot, I think you are still confusing the concepts of

"non-explanatory cause" and "correlation". The two are not the same.

Black skin tones (and the genes that created them) were a cause of lynching, but these factors are not accurate explanations of why lynching occurred. Racism, not genes, is an accurate **explanation** of lynching. Historians and scientists are interested in explanation much more than cause, but confusing cause and correlation makes your arguments unclear.

Let me quote a conversation that occurred on the World concerning the subject of whether genes for black skin cause lynching.

Gil tried to argue that genes for black skin are not a cause of racism, but rather are correlated with it, using an argument similar to yours.

"I think we are comfortable about denying the role of the victims' genes in lynchings or the Holocaust as causes because we have better explanations that account for the observed genetic correlations as being non-causal factors in the explanations."

Gil

I wish to point out that an editor of the World did not agree with Gil's argument that genes for black skin were merely correlated with lynching behavior. I quote him exactly, except for the capitalization which I add for emphasis.

"But in the examples I gave, the genes are NOT JUST NON-CAUSAL factors and the observed effects are NOT MERELY CORRELATIONS. The genes in question are perfectly genuine, OVERWHELMINGLY SIGNIFICANT, CAUSES of the given effects. But ONLY IN ONE SENSE, not in another."

An Editor

I think the editor is saying that genes are causes of lynching, but they do not explain why lynching occurred. Genes are causes, but they are not accurately thought of as **explanatory causes** of lynching.

When you say that serotonin depletion in vulnerable populations, relative to placebo interventions, is correlated with depression, but does not cause it, you are making the same logical error that Gil made, which prompted obvious disagreement from the editor.

I think what you mean to say is that you think that serotonin depletion is not an explanatory cause of depression. Ultimately the important question is whether serotonin depletion, in addition to being a cause of depression in certain populations, is also a relevant **explanation** of depression. I will address that point in my next post.

by a reader on Mon, 02/25/2008 - 23:32 | [reply](#)

i have AS and i don't appreci

i have AS and i don't appreciate it being called a mental illness.

Development vs. Illness

J

What is the difference between a developmental disability and a mental illness, in your view?

by a reader on Tue, 02/26/2008 - 21:35 | [reply](#)

Your 'explanatory cause' term

Your 'explanatory cause' terminology is fine with me. That is, roughly, what I mean by "cause". Using the more literal sense of cause does not accord with common sense usage which uses 'cause' to mean something like "important or relevant cause".

I did not object at all to patients taking beta blockers, I only thought your endorsement of them was somewhat misleading. The studies don't show the conclusion that you said. Our best guess of how to explain the studies is that conclusion (medical benefit). And I think we also have pretty good explanations. But if it was only the studies, then you should tell the patient we don't know, but our best guess is he should take it. (And if there was a major rival theory, which I think there isn't, then you should say that also.)

*When these studies came out, we changed our behavior *before* we really could explain why the medications primarily acting in the brain did not do as well as medications primarily acting in the body. We prescribed according to what the study indicated was better, before we knew why it was better.*

That's fine if no one has a better idea. Essentially there is an explanatory theory which states, "This medicine somehow reduces blood pressure which somehow has the following medical benefits..." That's not a very good explanation due to the omitted details, but it does accord with the facts of the studies, and if there is no rival theory, then it's the best explanation available. If there is a rival theory with equal or better quality of explanation, then it's insufficient.

- Elliot
www.curi.us

by a reader on Wed, 02/27/2008 - 05:03 | [reply](#)

OK

"I did not object at all to patients taking beta blockers, I only thought your endorsement of them was somewhat misleading. The studies don't show the conclusion that you said."

They don't? How so? Which studies are you referring to?

"Your 'explanatory cause' terminology is fine with me. That is,

roughly, what I mean by "cause". Using the more literal sense of cause does not accord with common sense usage which uses 'cause' to mean something like 'important or relevant cause' "

When you confuse placebo controlled studies (which can show causation) with correlational studies (which don't), it is difficult to know what to say. But I am glad we can agree on terminology, for now.

I will respond later to the question of whether serotonin depletion is an explanatory cause of depression. Or rather, whether the structure of your argument enables any reasoning or data (whatsoever) to demonstrate that it is.

by a reader on Thu, 02/28/2008 - 00:50 | [reply](#)

I haven't confused studies (i

I haven't confused studies (in my opinion) and don't believe correlation studies show causation (in any sense) because there could be a non-obvious factor which is causing both things. Those studies don't rule out that possibility, therefore they don't prove a causation.

That applies to placebo controlled studies about beta blockers, depression, or anything else.

- Elliot

by a reader on Thu, 02/28/2008 - 01:29 | [reply](#)

sorry that was worded a bit c

sorry that was worded a bit confusingly and i can't edit it...

the reason i haven't clearly differentiated placebo controlled studies and correlation studies is that they are the same thing. using no placebo gets you *nothing*. using a control group gets you a correlation.

- Elliot

by a reader on Thu, 02/28/2008 - 01:39 | [reply](#)

Clarification

Assume a theory exists explaining (to some extent) why taking a particular pill ought to help people with a particular condition (on average) to live longer than any other intervention. If a well done placebo-controlled study evaluating the theory finds to a highly statistically significant degree that those taking the active intervention live longer without side-effects, and if a doctor and patient cannot see any reason to believe that the given patient is different from average, should the study make the rational patient more likely to take the medicine?

Should rational people be more willing to take the pill, everything

else equal, before any study was done, or after? Why?

by a reader on Thu, 02/28/2008 - 14:13 | [reply](#)

Correlation Again

"using a control group gets you a correlation."

Why do carefully designed, placebo controlled studies evaluating well-defined a-priori hypotheses allow us to make statements about correlation, but not causation.

I am using causation in the non-explanatory sense.

by a reader on Thu, 02/28/2008 - 15:26 | [reply](#)

Why do carefully designed, pl

Why do carefully designed, placebo controlled studies evaluating well-defined a-priori hypotheses allow us to make statements about correlation, but not causation.

I am using causation in the non-explanatory sense.

They don't rule out the possibility that something else you hadn't thought of is the cause.

re pill - yes, take it, if no one has thought of a rival theory suggesting you shouldn't. and the study in this case definitely provides useful information to rational people. for example, the people in the study didn't get any nasty, obvious side effects.

- Elliot

by a reader on Thu, 02/28/2008 - 19:34 | [reply](#)

They don't rule out the possi

They don't rule out the possibility that something else you hadn't thought of is the cause.

Elliot

I don't understand. Are you commenting on randomization procedures? The groups differ (on average) in that one group is prospectively randomized to placebo and one group to the active intervention. This also can be checked (not perfectly, but checked) after the study. Since the groups differ (on average) by one getting placebo and the other getting the active intervention, it would seem that if the placebo group ends up differing to a statistically different degree from the group that gets the intervention, the intervention caused the difference.

And if the intervention did not cause the difference, then why do you think we can conclude that a correlation was established between the intervention and an effect?

by a reader on Fri, 02/29/2008 - 01:36 | [reply](#)

if there is a hidden cause, c

if there is a hidden cause, causing both things, then it's still a correlation because both things are being caused together in this way.

so for example, if aliens used mind-rays to cause depression, only in patients given serotonin-depleting drugs, the study would conclude that serotonin-depleting drugs cause depression, but this would be false, because actually mind-rays do. however, the drugs would still be correlated with depression, and that link would hold up as long as the aliens kept up the same policy.

the way to rule out alien mind rays is not placebos, and it's not randomization. it's only philosophical argument.

once that's established, you have to consider what you can rule out by argument, and what you can't. we can reasonably rule out the mind rays as a bad explanation. but in some cases there is a theory, consistent with the study data, but different than the conclusion presented by the researchers, that we can't reasonably rule out by argument (or that maybe we can, but it's controversial and non-obvious). in that case, the study can't tell us the answer, and hasn't proven anything.

by a reader on Fri, 02/29/2008 - 02:20 | [reply](#)

You're correct that it is dif

You're correct that it is difficult to measure what an intervention (material object) in an experiment is. But this argument can be applied to all material objects utilized in *explanations* as well. A material object whose function you think you are explaining may in fact not be that object, but instead could be another object, that merely looks like it and is correlated with it.

For example, alien mind rays can make atoms appear in experiments every time you look for them and every time you try to explain why they exist, and search for them. So then atoms don't really cause or explain anything, either. Their "pretend appearance" in physics merely correlates with an attempt to explain atoms. We can hypothesize that the aliens only fabricate their existence when you try to explain atoms. The appearance of atoms, as an explanatory factor, is merely an illusion created by mind rays.

So not only do experiments not show cause, explanations do not provide real explanations, either.

We do need to be careful to identify that we analyze carefully our interventions in experiments (is serotonin depletion really serotonin depletion, or is it instead alien mind rays?) and explanations (is evolution caused by selection or by alien mind rays when we look at anthropological evidence.)

But saying that we cannot establish causality using carefully constructed a-priori hypotheses (with experimental tests of the hypothesis) is equivalent to saying that we cannot come up with reasonable explanations, either, because what we think we are

explaining is actually just correlated with something else that is the real cause.

By the way, your argument also makes correlation impossible. Why? The aliens mind rays do not have to be turned on only when serotonin is depleted. So serotonin depletion is not actually *correlated* with depression, either.

If careful theorizing, with subsequent comparisons of placebo and active intervention, does not establish our best understanding of cause in medicine, then comparisons of explanations do not establish our best understanding of explanations, either. Your argument, taken to its logical conclusion, is that explanation, cause, and correlation are all impossible because whatever material object we are describing (for example serotonin depletion) is actually something else (alien mind rays), merely correlated with the apparent object.

But if nothing that we theorize has any reality, because it could be correlated with something else, then we live in a world where our minds can discern nothing real. That is, we live in a solipsistic world.

by a reader on Sat, 03/01/2008 - 21:05 | [reply](#)

Cause and Correlation

Elliot,
"for example, if aliens used mind-rays to cause depression, only in patients given serotonin-depleting drugs, the study would conclude that serotonin-depleting drugs cause depression, but this would be false, because actually mind-rays do."

So would you say that serotonin depletion, in this study with the aliens, causes or is correlated with depression? (I am using cause in the non-explanatory sense).

by a reader on Sat, 03/01/2008 - 22:54 | [reply](#)

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“Human Beings Are Headed Into The Cosmos”

Hurray! Human explorers are going to Mars! Humans are going to live on the moon! **Human beings are headed into the cosmos!**

Yes, yes, in a better world, government would have no role in these developments. The private sector would be doing it, and doing it better and more efficiently, and of course without coercing the taxpayer or anyone else. But the idea that, in this imperfect world in which we live, it would be preferable for the human race not to embark on this adventure, or to delay it for decades, just because of an aversion to government projects, is breathtakingly narrow. Glenn Reynolds, advocate of space exploration though he is, **can't work up any enthusiasm**: he says a lot of money will be wasted. Of course it will! This is a government agency we're talking about here. But it's the only game in town, Glenn. **Andrew Sullivan** calls it “fiscal recklessness” and speaks on behalf of the future generations who will have to pay for it. He too is absolutely right – and heartbreakingly wrong.

Future generations will not look back on this moment with condemnation. They will not say “there was the beginning of our poverty and our bankruptcy”, for, in fact, they will be rich and solvent despite this. *And they will be colonising the cosmos.* That such a wonderful thing was initially achieved through such inefficient and morally questionable means will be a mere footnote in their history, as ironic, and also as irrelevant, from their point of view, as the fact that it was achieved by people who still spanked their children.

Update: **Lileks** gets it right.

Thu, 01/15/2004 - 12:51 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Proponents of private sector ...

Proponents of private sector development should welcome this as an opportunity to have NASA relieved of the 'distraction' of commercial satellite launches.

by **Kevin** on Thu, 01/15/2004 - 19:45 | [reply](#)

Public monopoly

But it's the only game in town, Glenn

Well, yes, but won't Nasa's going to Mars help to *keep* Nasa the only game in town? Private initiatives like the Xprize will lose out on publicity because of Nasa. Without publicity and sponsorship they will find it harder (literally) to get off the ground. When space tourism or whatever gets going it will do so profitably and therefore there'll be far more launches per year. There will be no hiatus, like after Apollo. That will mean less hard-won knowledge will be lost. Plus there'll be many different companies involved which means more creativity and fewer blind alleys. Progress from tourism to interplanetary mining could actually turn out to be quite rapid.

So let's hope we're not inadvertently *delaying* the colonisation of the cosmos. Of course, if we do get to Mars, whoever pays the bill, I'll be glued to the telly just like everybody else!

by **Tom Robinson** on Thu, 01/15/2004 - 20:51 | [reply](#)

Make money on Mars!

Bookies are giving out **very good odds** for those of you who are only slightly optimistic about our chances of reaching the moon or mars. Great way to save for your pension!

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Fri, 01/16/2004 - 19:03 | [reply](#)

Re: Make Money on Mars!

Here's an even better way:

Space Bonds!

by **David Deutsch** on Fri, 01/16/2004 - 21:49 | [reply](#)

Wrong

It's not "morally questionable". It's morally wrong. That's something that **The World** is usually unafraid to recognize and take seriously.

I'm enthusiastic about human beings exploring and colonizing the cosmos, but not so much as to violate important principles.

Our commitment to free speech isn't tested by having to defend speech that we agree with, but speech that we find horribly wrong. Likewise, our commitment to limited government is tested by having to oppose government projects whose consequences we expect to like. **The World** has failed this test.

It's ironic that this post comes immediately after one in which **The World** correctly denounces enforced treatment of spurious diseases by saying: 'This breach of human rights is casually justified as being "for their own good".' It seems to me that **The World** is guilty of

the same thing here against those who would prefer to pursue their

own goals rather than ours.

Also, I think Tom Robinson is right that a government space program could inhibit progress rather than accelerate it, and that there are already good private alternatives to government-run space programs.

The government has a role. It can clarify property-rights and liability issues. It can remove obstructive regulations that make it difficult for willing people to pursue dangerous projects. It should pursue space-based projects with justified security-related benefits. Otherwise, it should stay out of the way.

Gil

by **Gil** on Sun, 01/18/2004 - 22:27 | [reply](#)

i declare gil an anti-gubmit fanatic

version 1: the war on terror is an increase in gubmint. QED

version 2:

but we aren't committed to smaller government in the sense of opposing all expansions of government of any sort for any reason. for example we liked the war in Iraq. we like this too.

on the road to smaller government, we know sometimes it will wind, not slowly decline with no increases ever. that's how it should be (sometimes it **needs** to wind, and this should be supported, b/c certain things need to get done, and the government is sometimes in best position to do them). blindly opposing everything good or bad is not our policy, just yours.

PS i don't get how gubmint program is supposed to stop private one. is it that ppl will say "nah, we don't need you fools, we got NASA"? if so, won't that only happen if NASA is doing a r0xx0r job ... ie if the private guys are being out-competed? (by a government agency no less! oh the same and humiliation!) if not that, is it that NASA spends part of budget on assassins? or what?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 01/19/2004 - 09:20 | [reply](#)

why not NASA?

Because something funded by taxation requires 257 layers of bureacracy; \$100 of investment in a project gives a return of \$2.50, whereas in a privately-funded initiative, \$100 of investment gives a return of \$30 (hey, I checked these figures, they're absolutely accurate ;))

Because people spending their own money on what they want are more likely to demand and receive good service than people

spending other people's money on something that yet another set

of people want.

Because government-funded projects get all muddled up with appearances and the necessity of being re-elected rather than with solving the actual problems.

Emma

<http://rationalparents.blogspot.com/>

by a reader on Mon, 01/19/2004 - 12:13 | [reply](#)

Re: Wrong

Gil says:

It's ironic that this post comes immediately after one in which **The World** correctly denounces enforced treatment of spurious diseases by saying: 'This breach of human rights is casually justified as being "for their own good".' It seems to me that **The World** is guilty of the same thing here against those who would prefer to pursue their own goals rather than ours.

It seems to me that that analogy only holds on the basis of some assumptions which I, for one, doubt are true.

One is that the overall burden of taxation (including inflation and other economic effects of government) on the American people will be higher as a result of this project than it would have been otherwise. But I would expect that the total level of taxation is, and will be for the foreseeable future, determined almost independently of the final destination of the diverted resources. In short, the government takes whatever it can get away with, and it spends it on whatever it judges best. Though the totals are linked by the inexorable laws of arithmetic, and though popular forms of expenditure do have a slight tendency to make taxation in general more politically acceptable than unpopular ones, there is no mechanism within government that links particular spending with particular taxation. Indeed, there can't be: money is fungible. Comparing, as you do, the Mars project with the invention of a new metaphorical disease and the consequent violations of children's rights, it might likewise be argued that children who behave defiantly were going to be punished anyway, so the invention of the new disease and new forms of punishment has caused no net harm. Well, I doubt that that is factually true, but if it were true then surely it would indeed diminish the force of **The World's** objection to such practices. But either way, my point here is that your "guilty" verdict against **The World** depends on your making a certain (counter)factual assumption about what would otherwise have happened to the resources now destined for the Mars project. If you accept that that assumption is in any way questionable, you must accept that it is at least as questionable that the Mars project is immoral.

A second assumption is, in effect, that the Mars project is not

economically viable: that it will not in the long run make a sufficient return on the investment. I am sure it will, and I think you are too, Gil. But implicitly you are assuming it will not, by characterising the government's action as being "against those who would prefer to pursue their own goals rather than ours". For though, admittedly, any scheme funded by taxation will in some vague (because of fungibility) sense force opponents of the project to contribute to it, one could equally well say that a refusal to go to Mars would be forcing Mars-oriented taxpayers to divert their precious Mars funds to the purchase of canes for schools, or whatever other function of government strikes you as the most foul. And if the Mars project is, in fact, profitable while the canes project is, in fact, destructive of resources, then the latter interpretation is more accurate.

I also don't accept that the Mars project will tend to divert private funds away from space by being more exciting. There are plenty of exciting things to do in space, and if anything, each of them draws more attention to the others by making us into a more spaceward-looking culture.

So in summary, I think that "morally questionable" was a fair way of characterising the means by which the human race will now begin its historic move outwards into the cosmos. The move itself, and President Bush's decision to initiate it under government auspices, is not wrong, but right.

This is not a case of 'the end justifying the means'. Government is not the means by which we are going to Mars. The means is human creativity. Government is the obstacle. But under existing political circumstances, the choice facing the President was whether it was to become a relatively minor obstacle, causing inefficiency (and being morally questionable), or an obstacle that would remain insuperable for decades or perhaps centuries. Which would be very wrong.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Mon, 01/19/2004 - 12:15 | [reply](#)

It seems to me that we have g...

It seems to me that we have governments to do those things that markets don't do well but which some large subset of us can agree are good and which we'd like to see happen. I think that opening up space is one of those things, for reasons that I've outlined in my article "[The Economics of Interface Transportation](#)". For those who don't want to follow the link, my argument is essentially that because the launch vehicle market is highly inelastic, evolutionary developments of current vehicles won't take us into an elastic region, and getting to such a region will require more investment that private companies can raise, we're dependent on governments if we want to develop space using our current technological approaches.

(Actually, the purpose of that article wasn't to support government space programmes but rather to set up an argument for alternative

private approaches to space development in a third article in the

series which I haven't yet found time to write.)

- **Rich**

by **Rich** on Mon, 01/19/2004 - 19:49 | [reply](#)

Belated hurrah

This argument of David's

In short, the government takes whatever it can get away with, and it spends it on whatever it judges best.

together with this one

There are plenty of exciting things to do in space, and if anything, each of them draws more attention to the others

..have persuaded me to join in the 'hurrahs' for Mars.

So, hurrah!

Setting NASA the Mars goal will probably (and crucially) help to dissolve the regulatory opposition (that Gil rightly mentions) to private individuals wanting to do space stuff. I still think that, initially, private sponsorship will be reduced as the general public's gaze is fixed on NASA. But the eventual net effect of the first will be to encourage a space-faring culture. It will establish a moral *imprimatur* in the eyes of some politicians and offer a proof of principle to everybody else.

Perhaps Congress might consider funding some prizes to encourage the private individuals to join the race. How about \$1 billion to the first private team to live on the moon for a month, and \$3 billion for the team that makes it to Mars and back? These are tiny sums next to NASA's budget. We might even end up with a repeat of the Human Genome Project, where Craig Venter pipped at the post the government-funded academic teams. (Congress should place the funds in independent trusts. This would avoid a repeat of some shameful history when the (English) Board of Longitude quibbled for a decade over rewarding John Harrison for his marine clock.)

Encouraging a space-faring culture might be an antidote to socialism, for two reasons. Firstly, if NASA succeeds, it will raise the psychological stakes for anti-Americanists around the world. Secondly, inhabiting distant reaches of the solar system is a great way to evade taxes. Perhaps it is a universal law that the only way to avert cultural stagnation is to start new colonies in distant places. We did this in New England and Hong Kong, and may perhaps do so in cyberspace. Such considerations should be set against the the morally-questionable funding of NASA.

Of course, as **The World** conceded straight away, the morally-questionable funding is going to be dreadfully inefficient. (By curious coincidence, the colonists of New England and Botany Bay were themselves morally-questionable in the eyes of those who

stayed behind. Need only risk-takers and **eccentrics** apply?)

For the colonization of the cosmos to gather real momentum, apart from **eccentric** heroic participants, we'll need some superb innovations. History has shown that these *always come* from individual inventors and entrepreneurs. First off, we'll need launch systems that keep most of the power generation on the earth's surface. Then there's the hazard of sudden blasts of ionising radiation from sun activity. Then there's an awful lot of biotech to be done to (a) combat space fatigue, and (b) recycle food and atmosphere. The list goes on. We'll need to do a lot of GM (especially if we want to create some of Freeman Dyson's **warm-blooded plants** or similar such exotic delights). And we may even find that Mars isn't the best place to start and that the Kuiper Belt would be preferable...

by **Tom Robinson** on Mon, 01/19/2004 - 20:26 | [reply](#)

Still Wrong

David,

I don't think your arguments salvage the moral ambiguity you seek. The fact is that the missions will be financed by money taken from people who have earned it, often without consent. That this theft is a small part of a larger regime of theft making it difficult to trace a particular project to particular victimizations does not change its character. It's still wrong to steal the funding for these projects. Yes, canceling one mission will probably not force a tax reduction; but it's a start. And cancelling many such projects will result in less of a tax burden (as you seem to recognize with "almost independently", and "the inexorable laws of arithmetic"). Moral people should be calling for such cancellations.

And it's not true that my point *depends* on what would otherwise be done with the resources. I'm not responsible for what other harms the government does with the loot, and the threat of such harms does not justify this harm. If the question is "Would you prefer that the money be spent on space missions to being spent on school canes?" then my answer is "Yes, I do." But if the question is: "Should the government use taxes to fund non-security-related space missions?" then my answer is "No, it shouldn't." These are different questions, with different answers.

It's also wrong to propose that my point depends on the second assumption that the Mars mission is not economically viable. It would be wrong for me to invest your money (even with a greater monetary return than you would have) against your will, wouldn't it? The person who should control your resources and your life is you. Not me. And not your neighbors.

And while it's impossible to be sure how this will affect private contributions and investments in private space development, it seems very plausible to me that many will conclude that they're already paying for such development with their taxes and be less inclined to contribute any more to similar and, perhaps, redundant

projects.

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 01/20/2004 - 03:22 | [reply](#)

thanks for listening

gil continues on with his unstated, unargued premise that lowering taxes is always good. ho hum.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 01/20/2004 - 03:41 | [reply](#)

Listening To What?

Elliot,

I'm reluctant to claim that anything is "always" good, but it seems to me that lowering taxes is as likely to be good as Taking Children Seriously, and for similar reasons. It's respecting the autonomy of other people that their status as human beings demands. Even if we're confident that we know better than they do what's good for them. If we cannot convince other people that our project is worthy and that it is a common preference for them to go along with us, then it's probably wrong for us to override their preferences and coerce them into complying.

I think the burden should be on those who think that a government program (whether it's space development, art promotion, schooling, health care, etc.) justifies the taking of people's property to, well, justify it.

Can you?

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 01/20/2004 - 05:01 | [reply](#)

listening to *me*! duh

ok lets say u had the option for this to happen:

1,000 best things US govt does disbanded.

half of freed money returned as tax cuts

other half wasted

would that be good or bad, do you think?

if your only compunction is losing security related programs, you can try the same question except 1,000 best programs not related to security.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 01/20/2004 - 15:48 | [reply](#)

Returning Taxes

Elliot,

If "security" is understood to cover all of the law creation and enforcement functions that I think are proper for the government to do, then yes, your second scenario would be good.

I think that every single one of the 1,000 "best" things that the government does that are abuses of force is bad. I think that every dollar returned to those who earned it is good. Dollars mean choices. I prefer the sphere of choices of individuals be large and that of leaders speaking for the collective be constrained to those areas where force is appropriate.

I don't understand the point of your stipulation that half of the funding for those programs be wasted, but it might be less than the current proportion of waste.

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 01/20/2004 - 16:55 | [reply](#)

Clarification

After all of these comments I just wanted to put my position in perspective.

I don't think the space program is anywhere close to the worst thing the government does and I'm not going to lose sleep over these new missions. I think of it as being in a similar category as first-class mail delivery. I think it's a good and useful thing, but I think it would be better handled by the private sector.

I agree with the sentiments of this post and am also very enthusiastic about the continued exploration and development of space. My only reason for commenting was that I think that the funding is not merely "morally questionable" but is actually morally wrong. It's far from the worst thing that could happen, but that doesn't make its moral status ambiguous. I think it's important to be clear about this if we want things to evolve in a direction of improvement (as I am optimistic they will).

I strongly disagree with Rich's opinion that "we have governments to do those things that markets don't do well but which some large subset of us can agree are good and which we'd like to see happen." I think this is the point of view that I'd like to see challenged whenever it's brought up as an uncontroversial truth. If a large enough subset of us think something is worthy, then we should have no problem doing it voluntarily. The only advantage of using the government is to coerce those who disagree with the majority to pay for things anyway. This is almost always wrong, and I'm confident it's wrong with respect to the space program.

Gil

Security

So, then, why don't people voluntarily organise national security?

Actually, I think that true space development is one of the few things that a government might be better at than the market, at least until we have launch vehicles that are several orders of magnitude cheaper than **Ariane**. Furthermore, I see no evidence whatsoever that corporations would invest the tens of billions required in such a high-risk and long-term project when there are much less risky ways to make money in the space industry (such as, for example, winning a larger share of a static or slowly expanding market by having a better success rate as measured using various metrics).

(For those who will doubtless cite the various contenders for the **X Prize**, I can only say that even winning the prize is incredibly far short of producing a cheap method of accessing space. Instead, it's rather like producing a privately developed version of the **X-15**.)

- **Rich**, who wonders if he now has to hand in his Anarchocapitalism membership card...

by **Rich** on Tue, 01/20/2004 - 18:04 | [reply](#)

RE: Security

Rich,

I'm fairly confident that enough people recognize the value of national security that they would adequately fund it voluntarily even understanding the free-rider problem. However, the risks of my being wrong about this are so great, that I support a gradual, rather than immediate, movement in this direction to avoid any gap in security.

The space program is just not that kind of thing.

You are clearly passionate about space development. I am too. Some people are passionate about opera, others about renewable energy research, etc. Being a goal worthy of passion, even by a sizable majority, is just not sufficient IMNSHO to justify stealing the funds. If it takes longer than we'd like to see the progress we hope for, that's too bad.

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 01/20/2004 - 19:06 | [reply](#)

Mars tax

Gil,

A person's salary is mostly the creation of his productive labour. But

the government also had a hand in its creation, since without a government there'd be no peace and people wouldn't be able to do their jobs. This means that tax isn't exactly like theft. If enough people could be persuaded that taxes should be cut drastically then politicians would probably do so. But, however desirable, cutting taxes might be like cutting the noise level in a restaurant. You need 95% co-operation, otherwise people will soon resume shouting in order to be heard. Logically then, over time, as David said, governments will grab all the taxes they can.

If that's true then the President is very limited in what cuts he could make. If, having read Elliot's comment, he decided to cancel 1000 projects and perhaps merge a few departments then very likely the total budget of other departments would quickly rise to restore the burden.

His primary budgetary choices, then, concern which departments should get more money. He thinks NASA should get more money so we can go to Mars.

The World also thinks it's a good thing to go to Mars. We all agree. Probably, the technical developments needed to start actually colonizing the cosmos will come from private individuals. However the precedents and the general interest in space which NASA's missions will bring about are likely to inspire more individuals to join that creative effort. (BTW, Rich, I think the Xprize will act in this direction too, regardless of the vital need for cheaper launch technology you rightly mention). Also, the missions may help prevent powerful bureaucrats from hampering progress in space with environmental regulation or whatever. Hey, the new politics would be a refreshing change from inward-looking ritual discussions about healthcare and unemployment.

I think we've exonerated Bush. Should government employees, tax collectors, or NASA workers choose differently, like quitting their jobs? I don't think morality over the source of funding comes into this issue directly.

But what about *indirectly*? There are the two consequentialist arguments I gave above. Encouraging a move out into the solar system might well have tax implications that favour liberty within the not-so-distant future. (One minor point I omitted is that we may see spin-offs for the missile defense shield.)

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Tue, 01/20/2004 - 22:12 | [reply](#)

Human Beings Are Headed Into The Cosmos

Hurray! Human explorers are going to Mars! Humans are going to live on the moon! Human beings are headed into the cosmos!

I doodled around reading posts and responses on this blog (*not gonna respond as "a reader," not gonna happen*), and immediately signed up!

Timothy Lang

by [Timothy Lang](#) on Sun, 02/01/2004 - 00:32 | [reply](#)

immediately signed up!

Welcome!

by **Editor** on Sun, 02/01/2004 - 01:22 | [reply](#)

Commercial Satellites

Proponents of private sector development should welcome this as an opportunity to have NASA relieved of the 'distraction' of commercial satellite launches.

I think you are behind the times. Commercial enterprises have taken this on long ago. Lots of folks are lighting the fuses under rockets these days.

Timothy Lang

by **Timothy Lang** on Sun, 02/01/2004 - 01:50 | [reply](#)

Socialism Without The Middle Man

Socialism has traditionally been justified as a process of taking from the undeserving rich to give to the deserving poor. But the process (known as "planning") of deciding how deserving or undeserving each citizen or project is, required a large, powerful and unproductive bureaucracy which was one of several reasons why socialist societies have a strong tendency to slide into economic ruin as well as political tyranny.

Now the socialist masters of Venezuela have come up with a brilliant idea: cut out the middle man – **legalise theft**:

Supreme Court Judge Alejandro Angulo Fontiveros told Reuters on Wednesday that the so-called "famine theft" clause should be part of a broad penal code reform measure for humanitarian reasons.

"This is a guide for judges to avoid injustice," said Fontiveros, who is in charge of drafting the reforms. "They lock up for years a poor person who lives in atrocious misery and what they need is medicine."

And why not? Who has not at some time been standing in a long queue at the checkout with only a loaf of bread and a rumbling stomach behind somebody buying enough food to supply Michael Moore for an entire day? Wouldn't it be much more convenient to be allowed just to take the bread and leave?

How much more impatient must the people of Venezuela feel? They have been saddled with a bloated, corrupt, shakily democratic welfare state that has been flushing their country down the economic drain for the **past 40 years**. Their current President, Hugo Chavez, has done everything he could to worsen their economic situation and is **refusing** to hold an election despite his obligation to do so.

Just to spell it out: The problem is that if Venezuela legalises theft then it will become much harder for anyone to do business since they won't know whether somebody's going to bother to pay or not. As a result, shops will have less incentive to stock goods, there'll be even less of anything for people to steal and sooner or later the entire economy will crash and burn with terrible consequences. The only way to deal with Venezuela's current problems is not to release citizens from the rule of law, but to subject the government to it by

holding an election and reforming toward a free market.

Sat, 01/17/2004 - 18:13 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

that's silly

what they really need are theft monitors. they will go around and watch all the stealing, to make sure only the needy steal. if a rich man steals they'll confiscate all his stuff and ~~keep it~~ spread it around. "rich" will be defined as having enough stuff for it to be worth the bother to take it.

monitors won't need to be paid; they will volunteer. ~~to get free stuff~~ out of the goodness of their hearts.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sun, 01/18/2004 - 16:29 | [reply](#)

When they start building a wa...

When they start building a wall around the country is when I'll be concerned. As long as the borders remain open Venezuelans can always escape.

Alan

It's usually the obvious that gets you by surprise

by [mythusmage](#) on Tue, 01/20/2004 - 11:14 | [reply](#)

Mocking Rachel Corrie

Rachel Corrie was the **International Solidarity Movement** member who was accidentally killed by an Israeli bulldozer as it was attempting to seal tunnels used to smuggle weapons for use in terrorist murders. **E.Nough** provides a superb **analysis** of the morality of various reactions to her death – reactions ranging from crude mockery to indifference to near-worship as a saint.

But for the sake of clarity of exposition, E. Nough has analysed a situation that differs in small but significant respects from the real one, and in doing so, he has let Corrie off too lightly. He says:

Corrie wasn't out to fill mass graves; she was ultimately just a severely misguided fool who let the heat of the moment get the best of her, and paid for it with her life.

[...]

she really was: a dumb, pitiful klutz without enough sense to not stand between a bulldozer and a terrorist tunnel

But in fact, she did not blunder into that situation: it was a calculated risk. That it ended up killing her is no evidence that she was either stupid or incompetent. Warfare involves risk, and even intelligent, competent soldiers sometimes get killed. Moreover, every volunteer in even the most unjust and atrocious of wars is in some sense driven by misguided benevolence, and a vision of a world in which such atrocities will no longer be 'necessary'. So that is not an exculpatory circumstance either. That Corrie was also filled with boiling and sharply focused **rage** against innocent people is an inculpatory one though.

Those tunnels were (like the **Golan Heights**) weapons, just as a gun is a weapon even though it never touches the victim and only the bullets that pass through it ever hurt anyone. And a person who knowingly or recklessly sets out to protect weapons, currently in use, is a combatant. And if they are currently in use for murder, she is an unlawful combatant and an accessory to murder.

We should not, in general, make a mockery of the deaths even of unlawful combatants in an unjust and murderous war. For why we should in this case, see E. Nough's article.

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Conspiracy Theories In The Mainstream

Conspiracy theories are an almost ubiquitous feature of irrational political beliefs. (If you haven't been reading our **analysis** of conspiracy theories we urge you to do so now.) The degree of detachment from reality of some individuals and some entire cultures can be very scary. But what's even more scary is when such theories begin to seep into mainstream political thinking in our own culture. Some recent examples are:

- The theory that Princess Diana was murdered by the British Secret Service – **believed by 27% of British people**;
- The theory that Dr David Kelly was murdered – **taken shamefully seriously by the BBC** (see the last paragraph of that article);
- The “**It's all about oil**” explanation of the liberation of Iraq, including...
- “**the dumbest bit of oil-based conspiracy-theory yet**”: explaining the recent Mars policy announcement in terms of President Bush's being under the control of mineral-exploration companies (see also **this** follow-up); and...
- The **theory** (with heavy antisemitic overtones) of a conspiracy of “neocons” having “taken control” of the President: check out its various versions on Google if you have the stomach for it.

Are you afraid yet?

Wed, 01/21/2004 - 17:43 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

Nothing new

This is nothing new in American culture. From the myriad JFK theories, to the FDR-Pearl Harbor stuff, to stories going back all the way to the Founding Fathers about their involvement in a secret world-dominating society of Freemasons, conspiracy theories are a part and parcel of American political culture. The real danger here is not the apparent sudden rise, but allowing ourselves to be so deluded as to think this is something new. Its obvious to me that these theories aren't accepted because they're so compelling, but because the mind of the American electorate is such fertile soil for these kinds of theories to grow. And **that** is the real problem.

-GJM

by a reader on Wed, 01/21/2004 - 18:39 | [reply](#)

neocons control bush

i blogged that one. [see here](#)

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 01/21/2004 - 18:43 | [reply](#)

Link to Curiosity

Elliot Temple wrote

I blogged that one

Linked now.

by **Editor** on Wed, 01/21/2004 - 21:08 | [reply](#)

a reader@18:39 makes a very g...

a reader@18:39 makes a very good point about conspiracy theories not being new in our society. It's probably a little much to imply that they are uniquely or primarily the province of, or spring from the nature of, "American culture"/"American electorate". If you ask me, there are certain other cultures one could name which are more plagued by conspiracy theories, more by at least an order of magnitude. (For starters you might want to look at any society in which "the Protocols" are taken seriously by anything close to a majority....)

-Blix
blix.blogspot.com

by a reader on Thu, 01/22/2004 - 01:47 | [reply](#)

Evil In The Mainstream

Dr Jenny Tonge, a Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament and former spokesperson for international development, has caused widespread consternation (though, shockingly, not within her party) by saying that she would **consider becoming a suicide bomber if she were a Palestinian.**

Please read **Oliver Kamm's characteristically trenchant analysis** of why

Dr Tonge's remarks are incompatible with any reasonable conception of public service in a constitutional democracy [and] why the empirical claims and the political principles underlying her views are inflammatory nonsense.

We'll wait here while you do that.

We want to make a different point, though: Suppose, for the sake of argument, that *you* were a Palestinian. (Or, if you are a Palestinian, please read on.) Suppose also, for the sake of argument, that the conditions under which you live have made you so desperately unhappy that you are contemplating suicide, and also so angry that you wish to take some of your oppressors to oblivion with you.

And suppose, finally, that you do not also happen to be a degenerate, evil, sub-human monster.

Then you might indeed attack your oppressors, the authors of your misfortune, such as Yasser Arafat and the other leaders of the Palestinian Authority. You would not attack children whose only connection with your situation is that their parents are trying to prevent them from being murdered by others among your people.

When Dr Tonge and other exponents of the "understandable reaction to oppression" argument take for granted that the understandable *target* for such a reaction is the nearest Jew and not the actual perpetrator, they are doing more than spouting inflammatory nonsense. They are more than apologists for evil. They are participants.

cause it's so important, and cause it makes u feel kinda dirty to miss it. thanks for posting.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 01/23/2004 - 17:58 | [reply](#)

Conditions

It would be a fallacious argument that conditions you have been living under have made you so desperately unhappy that you are considering committing suicide. Unhappiness makes you unhappy, not conditions. But nonetheless, for the sake of argument, suicide is a personal act of misguided despair about an internal fugue. Murder is blaming someone else for your own anger. Neither suicide or murder is a viable response to changing conditions in a meaningful way. No one person no matter how vile their opinions are is the essence of the problem. Murder the idea with critical reason. P.S. Dr. Tonge certainly misunderstands human nature and the real reasons why people do or don't do things. Send her to Israel and see what she does, probably nothing better than spout some relativist rhetoric for the drivel media to ham hash.

by a reader on Fri, 01/23/2004 - 18:00 | [reply](#)

If they are to attack their oppressors...

why not the religion or say, if a woman, to attack any (most likely) males who have the most effect upon her life? Isn't religion and culture what is keeping people down?

by a reader on Mon, 01/26/2004 - 02:09 | [reply](#)

Murder/Suicide as Reaction to Treatment

Thing is, suicide is not a rational action. The suicidal are not reasoning beings. It is an emotional act, and while it makes sense to the suicidal, it cannot be considered rational by any rational definition of the term.

Killing yourself and others with you is an act of desperation. An act of vengeance on a world that has treated you so badly. It's a way of striking out against those you have convinced yourself must die. Reason has nothing to do with it.

Suicide in any form remains unfathomable only so long as we assume the suicidal are rational, reasoning beings. When we accept that suicide bombers etc. are acting emotionally and using irrational reasoning is when we'll start making real progress against the practice.

Alan Kellogg

It's usually the obvious that gets you by surprise

by **mythusmage** on Tue, 01/27/2004 - 00:00 | [reply](#)

erm

Do you have an argument that suicide is not right in any situation?

Do you even have an argument that suicide is not right in any situation where life and death aren't already at stake for other reasons?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 01/27/2004 - 01:38 | [reply](#)

The BBC Is Tacky

The BBC takes seriously the tale of a **telepathic parrot which also understands English, tenses and all, and has a sense of humour.**

And the tale of an Indian holy man who has not eaten or drunk anything for several decades. (He *definitely* has a sense of humour.)

And some policemen who are earnestly chasing a lead **given to them by a psychic.**

And no, they are not merely reporting how irrational some people are: they do not say "psychic", or purported psychic, they say psychic. They do not speak of the *alleged* finding of a parrot with an almost unparalleled power to communicate, they report the finding as fact. Their tone is indistinguishable from that which they adopt when reporting a Mars landing or a new vaccine. They are taking this nonsense seriously. They are affording it more legitimacy than they do, say, **President Bush**, to say nothing of the State of Israel. This is not **villeepinism**. This is not idiotarianism. This is just tacky.

Mon, 01/26/2004 - 20:41 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

Tacky?

I'm not sure tacky covers it.

It's not exactly villeepinism or idiotarianism; but I think it *is* related to the desire to appear open-minded and uncritical of anything that goes against traditional, western, philosophy.

It's deference to whatever doesn't make sense to people who are committed to objective reality and reason.

It's not the exact same impulse as the one that makes them side with terrorists against victims, but I think it's related.

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 01/28/2004 - 05:49 | [reply](#)

Or, perhaps

I think that a reasonable term (or at least one I've grown fond of) is

Generalized Tardedness.

by **Anticipatory Retaliation** on Fri, 01/30/2004 - 16:51 | [reply](#)

I think you're onto something

Gil writes:

I'm not sure tacky covers it.

It's not exactly villepinism or idiotarianism; but I think it is related to the desire to appear open-minded and uncritical of anything that goes against traditional, western, philosophy.

It's deference to whatever doesn't make sense to people who are committed to objective reality and reason.

It's called *Political Correctness*.

It's not the exact same impulse as the one that makes them side with terrorists against victims, but I think it's related.

The proverbial "silver lining" of the September 11 atrocity is the anti-PC backlash that it has quietly engendered.

by **Alan Furman** on Sat, 01/31/2004 - 07:31 | [reply](#)

Not Tacky

The BBC isn't "tacky" (unless I mis-understand the use here) so much as "wacky."

Think one shot Ananova's *Quirkies* 3 quick dashes of Weekly World News plus a big shake of New York Times arrogance. Make that two shakes. Okay, three. Add toff accent and serve.

Timothy Lang

by **Timothy Lang** on Sun, 02/01/2004 - 01:11 | [reply](#)

Not Fit To Govern

We **criticised** the former Leader of the Conservative Party for engaging in

pointless, opportunistic sniping [...] without bringing to bear any coherent criticism...

Since then, the Conservative Party has elected a new leader, Michael Howard, but the pointless, opportunistic sniping has continued. If anything, it has become worse, with Howard returning to the issue of whether the Prime Minister or the government "sexed up" the dossier on Iraqi weapons, or behaved dishonourably in their treatment of Dr David Kelly.

Now Lord Hutton, after conducting an enquiry of exemplary thoroughness and fairness into these allegations, has delivered a **report** that **absolutely exonerates** Mr Blair, and contains devastating criticisms of the BBC for initiating the whole affair by making "unfounded" allegations against him.

Mr Blair, in accepting the report in Parliament, gave possibly the finest speech of his career.

Mr Howard then had the opportunity to demonstrate leadership, political judgement, and common decency. He failed on all counts. He had previously made numerous allegations of dishonesty against Mr Blair which have now been categorically refuted. A measured apology would not have been out of place, yet far from making one, he actually persevered with similar innuendo. Furthermore, though claiming to accept the conclusions of the Hutton Report, Howard cherry-picked a few incidental remarks in it, and ludicrously took them out of context in order to misinterpret them as supporting this innuendo. To give just one example (¶1396 of the report): Lord Hutton said that if various policy decisions by the Ministry of Defence

are looked at in isolation from the surrounding circumstances it would be possible to infer, as some commentators have done, that there was an underhand strategy by the Government to leak Dr Kelly's name to the press in a covert way. For a time at the start of the Inquiry it appeared to me that a case of some strength could be made that there was such a strategy [...]

However as the Inquiry proceeded and I heard more evidence about the surrounding circumstances and the considerations which influenced those in Government I came to the conclusion that the reality was that there was no such underhand strategy.

Howard quoted from the first part of that passage with considerable relish, made no reference to the second, and behaved as though the whole thing constituted a devastating criticism of Mr Blair's integrity.

Michael Howard is not fit to lead a major party; his party is not fit to govern.

Wed, 01/28/2004 - 16:06 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

What He Said

Go and read what **Oliver Kamm** says about the aftermath of the Hutton Report.

Sample:

The resignations of the two most senior figures in the BBC's management are welcome and honourable. The accompanying verbiage is not. Greg Dyke's pre-recorded assertion yesterday that the BBC acknowledged errors and had taken remedial action bore the hallmarks of one who had no conception of the venality of the BBC's conduct. These were not faults of administrative torpor or inefficiency: they were instances of professional misconduct compounded by an institutional abdication of responsibility to investigate grave and unfounded allegations. The moral evasion of the BBC management in insinuating that, while they resign, they do so having been more sinned against than sinning is an indication in itself of the unfitness of the BBC to be self-regulating or even to be taken seriously as a public-service broadcaster.

Kamm, the Thunderer.

Thu, 01/29/2004 - 22:47 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Three Lettered Air

What is it about three letters of air-time? BBC, CBS, FOX, ABC, CCN, CNN, ETC.

How can they in all seriousness, be taken seriously? Yet some do. BBC, CNN, etc.. Are we so bold to believe that there is such a noble thing as the manufactured news? And, executives(?) who are capable of managing such?

Once I might have been naive to trust all things British. Even Air Time. But I think not.

Now I trust that which is not broadcast, or is broadcast, but only what is clearly thought, and better yet reasonably, rationally

spoken, with no authority other than one's own, and other's own,

incisive questioning at the end of each sentence. Air time, or not.

by a reader on Fri, 01/30/2004 - 20:04 | [reply](#)

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Thuggery Defeats Science

Cambridge University has **cancelled** the construction of a research laboratory that would have used monkeys for neurological testing because they couldn't afford the security cost of keeping out anti-vivisectionist groups.

One of the animal rights protesters offered the following excuse for thuggery:

"We are absolutely delighted," said a spokeswoman for Animal Aid. In a joint statement with the National Anti-Vivisection Society, the group said the decision signalled that the university *failed to show the proposed experiments would be of any use to people*. [Our italics]

That is false. Here is what the lab was going to be used for:

The university and the publicly funded Medical Research Council (MRC), said the decision was a great disappointment as the laboratory would have attracted scientists from around the world to work on diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.

These terrible diseases are blighting and destroying hundreds of millions of lives at this moment. Making progress in understanding them is the very epitome of what is "of use to people", and Animal Aid's excuse that animal testing **doesn't help** with curing human diseases is just a sham. They oppose it on principle and most of their factual arguments are pseudo-scientific claptrap. Yes, animals are not perfect models of human biology, but they are better than anything else short of experimenting on living human beings.

It is a shameful indication of the state of our society that this bunch of thugs is empowered to stamp on scientific innovation to the detriment of the entire human race.

Fri, 01/30/2004 - 23:37 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

Isn't Animal Aid's position a conspiracy theory?

At the risk of seeming to see **conspiracy theories** everywhere...

When Animal Aid says that the normal processes of scientific peer

review and financial oversight are systematically delivering the wrong answer to a factual question ("are animal experiments useful to medical science?") – isn't that a conspiracy theory?

I mean, what are they alleging? That all the scientists in the Establishment get such a huge kick out of cutting up animals that they have agreed to falsify their research reports and reviews, impede their own research, and defraud the public just so they can carry on doing it? Could anything less explain the difference between the MRC's stated opinion and Animal Aid's FAQ?

by **David Deutsch** on Sat, 01/31/2004 - 00:46 | [reply](#)

A Modest Proposal

If the protesters really want to save the monkeys, as well as to address the issue of the animals not modelling human biology perfectly, then I think they should each volunteer to replace a monkey in the experiments.

Their brains are like new (rarely used).

Gil

by **Gil** on Sat, 01/31/2004 - 00:52 | [reply](#)

i bet they're commie vegan ludites too

gil: rofl

dd: i didn't think so from what's quoted here. but i went to their site and OMG. not only do i agree but i have to point out they say:

Animals as 'models' to predict human reactions to drugs or chemicals are worse than useless, with a prediction rate (for harmful side-effects) of only 5-25% - and this is according to a former Director of Huntingdon Life Sciences, the notorious animal testing company! We would actually be better off tossing a coin than relying on animals in risk assessments

which is just interminably stupid

and

Animal experiments are in the industry's interests because they can be used to market their products more quickly

one wonders how useless animals tests *speed up* development times as opposed to skipping them.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 01/31/2004 - 01:12 | [reply](#)

re A Modest proposal

I think they should each volunteer to replace a monkey in the experiments. Their brains are like new (rarely used).

Is there any reason to believe that animal-rights protestors' brains would provide a good analog for human biology?

by a reader on Sat, 01/31/2004 - 01:19 | [reply](#)

Who says monkeys are like humans?

Surely the animal rights protestors are dealing in flawed arguments and hollow victories. However, the essence of the question is an entirely different one. What is good science?

Part of the answer is found in robust replicability, the speed at which experiments can yield results. This points to why white rats are ubiquitous in human/science studies. Their brains are similar to human brains and their life cycles are short; and they breed really easily; and they live well in crowded conditions of laboratories with few side effects.

Whereas, on the other hand, monkeys appear to be a lot like humans in more ways than brain tissue studies might at first confer. They freak in lab conditions. Catatonia, dystonia, melancholia, feces throwing, screeching, bar chewing. Perfect for studying prison conditions perhaps, but Alzheimers?

There is the essence of the lab study question, what are the best laboratory mediums for particular studies? And, are they crude or finely crafted? Humans are in many cases the best subjects to study humans. It all depends. Ask the right questions, first.

by a reader on Sat, 01/31/2004 - 21:38 | [reply](#)

Straws In The Wind

The great structural changes that are currently under way in the world are beginning to have a beneficial effect on the Middle East problem.

This latest **analysis** by Steven Den Beste is laboured in parts but basically accurate. He examines the subtle yet momentous ways in which side effects of the Iraq campaign are shifting the Arab/Israel dynamic.

The EU is **opposing** the intervention of the World Court in the issue of Israel's security fence. The EU nucs are even beginning tentatively to **audit** their large aid grants to Saddam's number one fan Yasser Arafat.

And with Saddam being **out of goodies** to dispense, presumably many destructive favours that used to be done are no longer going to be. Perhaps the slogan will finally come true: henceforth "No (Israeli) blood for oil."

Sun, 02/01/2004 - 13:55 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Gas Chambers in North Korean Camps?

The Observer reports eyewitness testimony alleging that terrible atrocities are taking place in North Korean prison camps:

Over the past year harrowing first-hand testimonies from North Korean defectors have detailed execution and torture, and now chilling evidence has emerged that the walls of Camp 22 hide an even more evil secret: gas chambers where horrific chemical experiments are conducted on human beings.

Witnesses have described watching entire families being put in glass chambers and gassed. They are left to an agonising death while scientists take notes.

If this is true, why is the world permitting it to happen?

Mon, 02/02/2004 - 02:36 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

China. As long as Beijing sta...

China. As long as Beijing stands ready to intervene on Pyongyang's behalf should Seoul and Washington act, North Korea remains inviolate.

To save North Korea we must be ready for a war with the People's Republic of China. As long as our leadership thinks of the American people as something to be protected from the big, bad world we will not be getting ready.

I'll write more on the subject at my own place

Alan

It's usually the obvious that gets you by surprise

by [mythusmage](#) on Mon, 02/02/2004 - 04:49 | [reply](#)

Update

Here's the essay I mentioned above. Archiving isn't working for me, so the link will send you to the blog's mainpage.

Alan

It's usually the obvious that gets you by surprise

by [mythusmage](#) on Mon, 02/02/2004 - 05:54 | [reply](#)

picky point

actually, it's variants on obvious things that might get you by surprise, not actually obvious things.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 02/02/2004 - 10:45 | [reply](#)

re: China

China. As long as Beijing stands ready to intervene on Pyongyang's behalf should Seoul and Washington act, North Korea remains inviolate.

To save North Korea we must be ready for a war with the People's Republic of China.

But that doesn't really answer the question because the world is not taking the stance you indicate. If it were, Mr Bush would be announcing in his next address to the American people, and Mr Blair would be declaring in Parliament: "The Government of China is, to its eternal shame, continuing to subject the North Korean people to these appalling atrocities by threatening us with nuclear attack if we should dare to save them, which, otherwise, we would be doing right now."

by a reader on Mon, 02/02/2004 - 13:13 | [reply](#)

Re: Atrocities

Some acts are blatantly atrocious. Why "the world isn't taking action" might boil down to essentially two reasons:

1) The "world" is world government authorities, who either a) know this, and aren't willing to act in any form, or b) don't know this, the latter, less likely; or c) some degree of a) or b) above.

And/Or:

2) The "world" is ultimately people like you and me who up to now, did not know this, and a) now speak out about it until something is done to put pressure to bear on our own government authorities to act to change it, b) live under various degrees of citizen restriction where we have a blunted and ineffectual voice, or c) simply do not care.

The "world" I would hope is ultimately us, who know and take action within our means to do so. Information is a start.

by a reader on Mon, 02/02/2004 - 19:40 | [reply](#)

The Reason...

America is occupied with Iraq and the rest of the world neither care or are capable of doing anything but talk about how humanitarian they are and how evil America is.

by a reader on Tue, 02/17/2004 - 00:50 | [reply](#)

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Still Too Lenient With The BBC

On further reflection, we no longer entirely **agree** with **Oliver Kamm's take** on the BBC in the light of the Hutton Report.

Kamm himself noted that his previous broadsides against the BBC had "*still* erred on the side of the BBC". We think it's still so.

Kamm wrote:

These were not faults of administrative torpor or inefficiency: they were instances of professional misconduct compounded by an institutional abdication of responsibility to investigate grave and unfounded allegations.

Yes, but those are themselves only symptoms, and minor symptoms at that, of what has fundamentally gone wrong with the BBC: *they have become a political faction* – and not a nice one. At the heart of their politics is a certain world view, far left of the political centre and dominated by 'political correctness', but there is more to it than that. It is a **fantasy-ideology**, a way of thinking and being in which certain ritual behaviours, certain formal utterances, become the entire purpose of existence, replacing what an unaffected person would think of as ordinary morality and displacing all connection with facts. That is why Andrew Gilligan still thinks of himself as having suffered a punishment out of all proportion to his offence: in terms of *ritual behaviours and utterances*, he did indeed make only a minor slip-up when he said, for instance, that the government knew that the 45-minute claim was false before they inserted it into the dossier. To Gilligan, who was painting with a very broad brush, that utterance meant no more than "Saddam's government is legitimate, the war is unjustified, America is the source of all evil and the Blair government is illegitimate for siding with America", which was also the implicit content of practically every other report that he or any of his BBC colleagues had made on the issue. It is only if the truth – in the sense of correspondence the facts – plays some significant role in your psychology that you would see this particular statement as differing greatly from those others. Considered as a ritual utterance whose purpose was to express Gilligan's virtue and help

draw the audience into his state of mind in regard to the Iraq crisis,

it did not differ from them at all.

To interpret all this as a failure by Gilligan and by his editors and their bosses *to check their facts* is to miss most of what has been happening. This was not merely an error of incompetence, or an institutional failure to achieve a standard of excellence to which they aspired. It was case of aspiring to something else entirely: to express, to promote, to *embody*, a certain moral take on the world. Fundamentally, it is because reporting facts or even opinions was subordinated to that aspiration that Gilligan thought nothing of casually making up stories as he went along, and his colleagues and bosses thought – and continue to think – nothing of his doing so.

By the way, Kamm also wrote:

The resignations of the two most senior figures in the BBC's management are welcome and honourable.

But since then it has emerged that Greg Dyke did not resign, but had to be **pushed out kicking and screaming**. And the BBC staff, backed by the National Union of Journalists, **continue to kick and scream for his reinstatement**. And so does much of the rest of their profession. Kamm admits to "revering" Martin Bell and expresses admiration for other veteran journalists. But those very journalists are blind to the nature of Gilligan's wrongdoing: not just Martin Bell but for instance **John Tusa, Max Hastings** ("Hutton's assault upon the whole culture of the BBC and journalism is out of all proportion to their offences"), and **many others**:

The growing mood of discontent within the BBC was highlighted at the weekend with some of the most distinguished of its staff signing a newspaper advertisement protesting at the departure of Mr Dyke. Among those who signed the advertisement were John Simpson, the world affairs editor, Gavin Esler, the News 24 presenter, Joan Bakewell, the broadcaster, Jeremy Vine, the Radio 2 presenter, and Ben Brown, the BBC's special correspondent

That blindness is closer to the heart of the disaster than any specific reporting failures.

To a frightening extent, this pathological, manipulative, dishonest approach to news reporting has taken over **the whole profession of journalism** in Britain. But the BBC has the worst and most dangerous manifestation because of its unique status which shields it from criticism, not only in the narrow sense that its massive unconditional subsidy tends to immunise it from market forces, but also because its official role, like that of the monarchy, gives it a sort of automatic, unearned moral authority – even (dare we say it) with the likes of ourselves and Oliver Kamm – which, in a better world, no rational consumer would grant any news provider.

Tue, 02/03/2004 - 15:19 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Beware

The Free and Independent Media. Nothing in the public sector is more vital than a free and independent media. The case of the BBC makes this more obvious. No free nation or body of citizens can or should depend on one outlet for news and journalism. It is all too easy to be led down the path to falsity. Humans have bias, and flagrant biases, and even blindnesses to truth. It is not inherent to being human, but is an all too easy perceptual flaw.

Free your mind. Free the BBC. Free the sources of public opinion and discourse. Free the media. Hand in hand, free your mind.

Open the media to many rational and considered views. Free one's own mind to be rational and critical of not only others' opinions and biases but especially one's own. Seek truth. Do not expect to easily find it. Write, speak, discuss, critique. Be not only a rational consumer. Be also a rational provider of content.

If this bothers you to read this, you are definitely on the right track, which is only the first step to thinking. Which of course, you already know.

This has been an unpaid political advertisement for a free and independent and critically rational media, often found lacking in a free world, and nonexistent in an oppressed one. Beware its loss.

by a reader on Tue, 02/03/2004 - 16:20 | [reply](#)

v nice

good work

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 02/04/2004 - 00:11 | [reply](#)

In A Nearby Universe: Saddam Turns Other Cheek To Iranian Nukes

Saddam Hussein and his sons were so humbled by the example of the United States in abandoning its invasion at the last moment out of respect for the UN, that they ordered the termination of all Iraq's illegal weapons research programmes.

Then they converted to Christianity and used the power of the Holy Spirit to bring all the people they had killed back to life.

Most remarkably of all, a few months later, when **Iran's** secret nuclear programme was revealed, Saddam announced a new policy of "turning the other cheek" and ordered all former Iraqi nuclear scientists to be assigned to hydro-electric projects in the desert in order to "keep their minds away from their former wicked ways".

Thu, 02/05/2004 - 23:23 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

What Has The Grand Mufti Denounced?

Saudi Arabia's top Muslim cleric, Grand Mufti Sheik Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah al-Sheik, has **denounced terrorism**, declare the media triumphantly. But has he?

“Is it holy war to shed Muslim blood? Is it holy war to shed the blood of non-Muslims given sanctuary in Muslim lands? Is it holy war to destroy the possession of Muslims,” he said, adding that their actions gave enemies an excuse to criticise Muslim nations...

“Islam forbids all forms of injustice, killing without just cause, treachery ... hijacking of planes, boats and means of transportation. After all this, our religion is still described as terrorism?” he said.

What about shedding the blood of non-Muslims in non-Muslim lands? Is “sanctuary” the only status of non-Muslims in Muslim lands that protects them from having their blood legitimately spilled?

Do you need three guesses about whether he considers Tel Aviv to be “Muslim Land”?

The Grand Mufti's past rulings are hardly promising either. He has **denounced women** who go out in public and do business with men without **dressing** like a **pillar box**. He has participated in the suppression of those in the Saudi media who **oppose** Islamist incitement in Saudi schools and anyone else who **calls for reform**.

Just about the one group he has yet to denounce is the one that really is running his country at top speed towards the gates of hell.

Fri, 02/06/2004 - 23:04 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Who Is The Liar?

Hans Blix has said that Tony Blair was like an **insincere salesman** when he based his case for war on Weapons of Mass Destruction.

Mr Blix is getting very close to calling Tony Blair a liar. Like Mr Gilligan did – an allegation that was thoroughly refuted by the Hutton Inquiry. Unfortunately, Mr Blix's remarks are beyond Lord Hutton's remit, so let us review who has actually told the truth and who has not.

Tony Blair said that Iraq had **programmes** for making WMD:

In recent months, I have become increasingly alarmed by the evidence from inside Iraq that despite sanctions, despite the damage done to his capability in the past, despite the UN Security Council Resolutions expressly outlawing it, and despite his denials, Saddam Hussein is continuing to develop WMD and with them the ability to inflict real damage upon the region and the stability of the world.

David Kay and his team have discovered that Iraq **had programmes for making WMD**. So Mr Blair was telling the truth.

Hans Blix was instructed by the UN Security Council to investigate Iraq's WMD programmes and report his findings to them. He found, but **did not report**, that Saddam had a variety of rocket warheads apparently configured to scatter "bomblets" filled with biological or chemical agents. This was a blatant lie of omission.

Mr Blair, by contrast, told no lies.

Sun, 02/08/2004 - 22:31 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Truth and Lies

"This was a blatant lie of omission"

Intriguing thought, this. I must question it in search of truth. Does that say that if everyone says nothing, that everyone is committing a blatant lie of omission? Or if everyone qualifies everything they say, then is everyone telling the truth? No matter how confabulated?

Not taking sides here, for the rational reasons noted below. Not

sure what to say about this, so i won't say Blair or Blix. I'll listen to both, taking each statement and weighing it on its merits, but not dwelling on it fixedly.

I tend to think rather than "told no lies" or "this was a blatant lie of omission", the key question is the search for larger truth. Trying ot look for that, rather than the search for who might be lying, comissionally or omissionally.

The search for truth also I would think involves intent to find it. I am less concerned with wording of a sentence, or lack of wording, then i am with the reality of what is.

The reason that I mention this is that it is all to easy to get caught up in sides, "who" said what, and "who" didn't say what, and "who" is telling the truth, and "who" is lying. Take every statement with a grain of salt, and assemble the best findings that we have to work with. Humans are fallible especially with words, and especially when the conclusion is drawn about the meaning of words after the fact of speaking them. If we pick apart sentence structure or pregnant pauses, we're dealing only in minutiae of two sides with allegiances or camps, justifying their own precise wordings, arguing a non-essential point or points in phrasing a sentence or two, well after the fact. Sometimes that entirely confabulates the essential issue.

Seeking truth. What is the reality of what is?

by a reader on Tue, 02/10/2004 - 16:34 | [reply](#)

Blix v. "everyone"

reader^a16:34,

You lost me somewhere in all that, but as regards your opening sentences, the difference between Blix not reporting banned items and "everyone" saying "nothing" in a general abstract situation, is that Blix was charged with a positive, specific task, while (lacking other information) "everyone" is not.

Blix's task involved at its very core verifying Iraq's compliance (or non-compliance) with UN Resolution 1441; this was the *raison d'etre* of Blix's responsibility, it's the only reason we even know his name in the first place. Given this responsibility, for him to "bury", even subtly, items which are wholly germane to the issue of Iraq's compliance or lack thereof (I would have mentioned the banned UAV Blix found rather than the "bomblets" thing, but very well), is indeed a "lie of omission". Unlike "everyone", Hans Blix had a *positive responsibility* to report such things.

The real problem of course is that Blix approached his job as if his responsibility was not to very Iraq's compliance or lack thereof with Resolution 1441 at all, but rather, to prevent a war between the US and Iraq. This was dishonesty of a rather different sort.

Blixa
blixa.blogspot.com

by a reader on Tue, 02/10/2004 - 20:18 | [reply](#)

Blurred Responsibility

It would help a lot if a person charged with a specific responsibility would stick to talking about what they are responsible for; too often, a limited authority and specific knowledge of one area is used to cast wide aspersions. This is where Blix goes wrong I think. If he has something specific to say about the inspection process in Iraq, that which he knows, fine. If he is using his stage as a bully pulpit to speak about foreign and domestic policy, that is neither his field of knowledge, nor can it even be a credible role for him.

Blix is no more credible to me than the average person on the street when it comes to spouting off about world politics. Tony Blair, on the other hand, is sticking to his area of responsibility, the office he was elected to, the office he holds, and the carefully considered weighty decisions of that office.

by a reader on Wed, 02/11/2004 - 00:12 | [reply](#)

Lies were necessary

Er - I don't see how your quote illustrates your point. In your quote, TB states:

"Saddam Hussein is continuing to develop WMD"

This is ambiguous. It could mean that he has WMD and is continuing to develop them or that he is just developing them. Reading the rest of the document we find statements like the following:

"As a result of the intelligence we judge that Iraq has:

1. Iraq has continued to produce chemical and biological agents;
2. Military plans for the use of chemical and biological weapons, including against its own Shia population. Some of these weapons are deployable within 45 minutes of an order to use them...."

It is clear, then, that Tony Blair is not referring to programmes in the sense of having plans to develop WMD, but not actually having WMD. Rather he thinks that Iraq has WMD and is continuing to develop them.

The US and British government *had to* lie about WMD in order to drum up enough support for the war among people that mattered (e.g., congress). The real reasons for the war were as follows:

1. To send a message to a post-911 world that belligerent dictatorships will no longer be tolerated.
2. To bring freedom and democracy to the people of Iraq.
3. To realise Iraq's full potential as an oil producer (this very important reason is not defended nearly enough by supporters of the war).

4. To secure military bases in the Middle East

5. To better ensure the flow of intelligence from the Middle East.

It would have been just too hard to sell all these (good) reasons for war. So, they were made secondary.

by a reader on Wed, 02/11/2004 - 04:12 | [reply](#)

had to lie

reader[@]4:12 writes,

*The US and British government *had to* lie about WMD in order to drum up enough support for the war among people that mattered (e.g., congress).*

The U.S. Congressional vote authorizing war against Iraq occurred in October 2002. Kindly point out which lies about WMD you think the U.S. government (British government is irrelevant here) to its Congress prior to that vote. Thanks,

Blixa
blixa.blogspot.com

by a reader on Wed, 02/11/2004 - 06:00 | [reply](#)

had to lie

Difficult to know where to begin.

Read this speech by George Bush given in early Oct 2002, prior to the Congressional vote:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/10/20021007-8.html>

Here are some extracts:

"We've also discovered through intelligence that Iraq has a growing fleet of manned and unmanned aerial vehicles that could be used to disperse chemical or biological weapons across broad areas. We're concerned that Iraq is exploring ways of using these UAVS for missions targeting the United States."

The Director, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance, US Air Force, did not agree with this view.

"We know that Iraq and al Qaeda have had high-level contacts that go back a decade. Some al Qaeda leaders who fled Afghanistan went to Iraq. These include one very senior al Qaeda leader who received medical treatment in Baghdad this year, and who has been associated with planning for chemical and biological attacks. We've learned that Iraq has trained al Qaeda members in bomb-making and poisons and deadly gases."

Intelligence agencies knew of tentative contacts between Saddam and al-Qaeda in the early 1990s, but found no proof of a continuing relationship.

"Saddam Hussein is harboring terrorists and the instruments of terror, the instruments of mass death and destruction."

"The evidence indicates that Iraq is reconstituting its nuclear weapons program. Saddam Hussein has held numerous meetings with Iraqi nuclear scientists, a group he calls his "nuclear mujahideen" -- his nuclear holy warriors. Satellite photographs reveal that Iraq is rebuilding facilities at sites that have been part of its nuclear program in the past. Iraq has attempted to purchase high-strength aluminum tubes and other equipment needed for gas centrifuges, which are used to enrich uranium for nuclear weapons."

CIA and UN reports up through 2002 showed no evidence of an Iraqi nuclear weapons program. And it was established at the time that the aluminium tubes could not be used to enrich uranium. Yet the lie that they could be was recirculated for months. There was no faulty intelligence here.

"If the Iraqi regime is able to produce, buy, or steal an amount of highly enriched uranium a little larger than a single softball, it could have a nuclear weapon in less than a year."

This is just scare-mongering.

"Knowing these realities, America must not ignore the threat gathering against us. Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof -- the smoking gun -- that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud."

Again, scaremongering that had no basis in fact.

"Before being barred from Iraq in 1998, the International Atomic Energy Agency dismantled extensive nuclear weapons-related facilities, including three uranium enrichment sites"

The inspectors were withdrawn - not barred - in 1998 when it became clear the Clinton administration was going to bomb Iraq.

BTW, don't throw the Oct NIE back at me in response. Or, if you do, please use the declassified version, and also read:

<http://www.ceip.org/files/pdf/Iraq3FullText.pdf>

by a reader on Thu, 02/12/2004 - 01:39 | [reply](#)

It's simple really...

From http://www.meib.org/articles/0311_iraq1.htm:

"The eradication of WMD was always an important part of the Administration's strategy, but it was (and is) far from being the whole. And this fact was never hidden, although the WMD piece was publicly much more prominent than were the larger, strategic elements. This was hardly surprising, since the Administration was trying to give potential allies (e.g., Germany, France) something they could endorse, and the destruction of Iraqi WMD was a far easier goal for the Europeans to support than a proposal for sheer

US power projection would have been.

Still, the decision to be relatively coy about the strategic goals of Operation Iraqi Freedom carried a risk: If WMD were not found, there would be some explaining to do. When the decision to emphasize WMD was made, this risk seemed relatively low. In retrospect, it was not."

by a reader on Thu, 02/12/2004 - 21:43 | [reply](#)

the lie of omission was from ...

the lie of omission was from Blair or certainly from his ministers who knew the 45 minute claim did not threaten the UK as claimed in the media but only related to battlefield weapons.

Although since the 45 minute claim was itself found to be bogus then its moot.

In contrast Blix DID mention the so-called "bomblets" which may or may not have been intended to scatter weapons, many items are dual-use in that way and of course we have never found the chem/bio weapons we speculate that could deliver.

by a reader on Fri, 02/27/2004 - 13:14 | [reply](#)

“I Have tears In My Eyes”

This famous Vietnam war picture of a South Vietnamese officer summarily executing a Viet Cong prisoner – has a surprising **story** (via **Solomon**).

What moral follows from this? Context is everything? War is hell? Cameras *do* lie? The Americans were the good guys in Vietnam after all? The media, and their agenda, haven't changed much in 30 years? Not really. Nothing much follows from the fact that some human being has made a mistake. It's what human beings do. But all those morals are true nonetheless.

Wed, 02/11/2004 - 03:48 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Immoral Outrage

The pop singer Justin Timberlake tore off part of the black leather shirt of another pop singer, Janet Jackson, while they were performing together live on television (during the interval of a sporting event known as the 'Superbowl'), briefly exposing Jackson's curiously decorated right nipple. Some people seem to doubt the entertainers' explanation that this was a "wardrobe malfunction" and suspect that it was a carefully choreographed stunt...

"Immoral outrage" is what New Jersey's **Star-Ledger** rightly calls the widespread reaction to this event. But the *Star-Ledger* does not go far enough: it only condemns some aspects, such as the selectiveness of some people's outrage, the insincerity of others', and the increase in media censorship that has followed.

The truth that the *Star-Ledger* coyly skirts around is that everyone who was offended by witnessing this event *is an immoral person*. In fact, some of those who are perfectly sincere and consistent in their outrage are more immoral than some of the hypocrites who pander to them. Sincerity (as Robert Heinlein used to point out) is overrated as a virtue, and likewise hypocrisy is overrated as a vice. But in any case, all the complainers of every kind, jointly and severally, are a disgrace to our society, and to American society in particular.

Fri, 02/13/2004 - 09:25 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Holier

Than Thou News Flash.

For anyone who actually saw the "halftime show", it would more informative to call the interim performances between football ballet and commercials "a mediocre mish-mosh of flash and glam and rockets" than an "immoral outrage". Perhaps the flash that some people focused on, if they even saw an image, was a ripped bodice, all of two seconds at a great smoky glittering distance. Was that the only thing in 15 minutes of halftime performance fame that could attract an oft distracted human's attention?

Whether the entire show or two seconds of it was tasteless pandemonium or accidental theater is not the point. The point is audience reaction. The from-camera-1-to-the-tv-share-household,

to the mental process going on behind the eye of the beholder exhibited itself as a knee-jerk reaction, "well I never....!"

Seeing an opportunity to exploit the numbers, shock and awe at a public sighting of a bared breast (partially), cheesy media responds in a blizzard of coverage. Pandering coverage. Is a ripped bodice and a nipple ring front page news? Apparently so. Which says something about what some people consider as important news.

Wasting (mostly feigned) outrage on the little things is occupying the distant recesses of more than several lower brains. We have a (moral) problem, Houston. Think.

by a reader on Fri, 02/13/2004 - 17:53 | [reply](#)

Further Explanation

I wish **The World** would elaborate about *why* those who were offended are immoral.

Gil

by **Gil** on Fri, 02/13/2004 - 18:17 | [reply](#)

being offended

... distinguishing carefully between being offended/outraged and feeling mildly nauseous (which is a natural enough reaction from the squeamish to seeing metal threaded through holes in other people's tender bits)

by a reader on Sat, 02/14/2004 - 10:45 | [reply](#)

Re: Further Explanation

Why are those people immoral? Well, they subscribe to a moral code which attributes rightness to a covered breast and wrongness to an uncovered one, a distinction which is in reality one of convention only. Admittedly conventions, once they exist, give rise to genuine moral issues: is not automatically OK to violate them under all circumstances. However, the same is true of taking offence at such violations. People to whom this particular violation constitutes a personal disaster are, even in cases where they never complain of it to anyone else, conducting their lives very wrongly. Of course it is in the nature of this sort of vice that such people do not in fact keep their outrage to themselves. They try their best to punish the perpetrators both through verbal abuse (which is immoral because the perpetrators do not deserve it) and, in practice, by helping to make or enforce unjust laws. But these outward signs of immorality are, as always, the consequences of previous morally wrong choices within the minds of individuals, choices which, even if they somehow failed to harm anyone else

directly, would be bad for those individuals and would make them

worse people.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Sat, 02/14/2004 - 13:47 | [reply](#)

Convention

Why is the difference between a covered and an uncovered breast merely convention and not a direct moral distinction?

Clearly, *The World* is leaving this as an exercise for the interested reader, so I'll have a go:

It's because, traditionally, adult-pairing relationships, to the extent that they are not concerned with shared creative interests, are coercive. Maintaining such a relationship is possible because the coercion is offset by bribery. The bribery is along the lines of "if you do all these unpleasant tasks then you get to have exclusive private access to my body". Such bribery is only effective because there exists a false meme (with moral implications) in the mind of the sugar-receiver. The coercion-bribery component in relationships has been tolerated because stable, permanent male-female pairings were considered absolutely necessary for the welfare of children. These days, given the existence of contraception and other stuff, the meme makes its holder a bad person. For example, the meme prevents one from forming close friendships with potential alternative sexual partners. This sacrifices valuable opportunities for knowledge growth. For example, two musicians may stop playing duets if they fear their intimate professional relationship is putting a marriage in danger.

Most people unconsciously recognise the meme to be false which is why divorce is now widely tolerated (badness is always inconsistent).

One of the ways that the meme is implanted in children is via the public nudity taboo. The degree of nudity, as we all know, shifts with time, and the boundary is exploited by celebs and film stars who wish to draw our attention. It also depends on context, for example, nudity in school biology textbooks is acceptable.

I'm pretty new to ARR theory so please criticise the above where wrong.

In the meantime, Happy Valentine's day, everyone!

[Arrghh! Forget I wrote that last bit please]

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Sat, 02/14/2004 - 20:42 | [reply](#)

i don't even know which day valentines day was

tom,

you didn't answer your own question! you described why people are pissy about nudity. but your question was why is the difference

btwn a covered and unconvered breast just convention (ie

arbitrary) not fundamental or important.

the reason is clear if we try the question with some new subject material: Why is the difference between toys in a toy chest and toys in a bag a matter of convention and not a fundamental moral issue? sounds stupid now, huh?

ok you may counter covered breasts make sense to stay warm. this is true, and a real difference. however no one was worried that Janet was cold. so the outrage obviously wasn't about that. nothing else comes to mind, just like nothing comes to mind with bag vs chest.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 02/15/2004 - 13:50 | [reply](#)

Where the boundary lies

You're right, I ought to have gone on to explain why the boundary of the convention, or part of it, currently happens to lie around the female nipple (in the West, at least)

I've posted my slightly lengthy answer over at TCSsociety, which will hopefully pass the moderators shortly.

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/TCSsociety/>

by **Tom Robinson** on Tue, 02/17/2004 - 01:17 | [reply](#)

So, is Bush Immoral?

Is somebody who is outraged by gay marriage similarly immoral?

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 02/25/2004 - 06:47 | [reply](#)

Re: So, is Bush Immoral?

that facet of Bush is immoral. but the statement "Bush is immoral" would be inaccurate and misleading.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 02/25/2004 - 16:10 | [reply](#)

Bush is Immoral

The World wrote "That everyone who was offended by witnessing this event is an *immoral person*." Not "That everyone who was offended by witnessing this event has an *immoral facet*." I think it

was a reasonable usage. I don't think it means they are entirely

immoral. I asked if he was *similarly* immoral.

I think he is.

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 02/25/2004 - 17:19 | [reply](#)

Re: Bush is immoral

Looking back at my previous comment in this thread, I see that President Bush's opposition to gay marriage is indeed in broadly the same category as some people's opposition to breast-baring. So he is immoral in the same *sense* as they are, but, I'd say, less so in degree.

In fact I would say *much* less so in degree if it weren't for one thing: there's a war on, and he's leading it. At a time like this, he should not be diverting his creativity and attention into a highly controversial social engineering project (his proposed constitutional amendment) that is not only wrong and ultimately doomed, but even aside from that, cannot be reasonably regarded as urgent.

by **David Deutsch** on Wed, 02/25/2004 - 18:48 | [reply](#)

la de da

the world was calling them immoral **in context** (the context being a discussion about a specific issue). saying someone is immoral in a discussion in a certain context is a much weaker statement than just calling someone immoral with no context. calling people who are offended by breasts immoral sans context would be a mistake, but i'm sure that's not what **The World** meant to do.

if being immoral in one facet made someone immoral generally then all we'd have to do is consider how good the angry people are **as parents** to condemn them, nevermind the whole incident about the breast.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 02/25/2004 - 21:42 | [reply](#)

Gulf War II Syndrome?

The Ministry of Defence is quite rightly planning to run physical and psychological tests on British soldiers who have served in recent wars, to try to ascertain whether they have suffered illness as a result. As the leader of the study **commented**:

“The immediate concerns are first, whether or not there will be a repeat of the kind of physical health problems experienced by Gulf One (1991 Gulf War) soldiers and, second, the increasing concerns about psychological issues,” study leader Simon Wessely told the paper on Sunday.

He is, of course, referring to **Gulf War Syndrome**, a distressing condition whose only scientifically established symptom is that the sufferer tends to attribute subsequent ailments to it. Fortunately, most Gulf War veterans did not catch Gulf War Syndrome. We hope that Gulf War II syndrome does not claim as many victims as its predecessor.

Mon, 02/16/2004 - 19:27 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Apparently, common symptoms o...

Apparently, common **symptoms** of GWS include fatigue, musculoskeletal pain, cognitive problems, skin rashes, and diarrhea. So at first it sounds like a run-of-the-mill vague pseudomedical condition, and a fine opportunity for litigation (as **The World** hints).

I wonder if anybody has considered that GWS may be due to a chronic activation of the so-called 'acute phase' of the body's immune response. In general, people who are depressed or anxious can become ill in this way. The most likely cause is a moral one. One has failed to perform a duty or has done something unforgettably shameful. I expect that war, which is obviously a dramatic event, provides plenty of scope for such failure. Dylan Evans thinks that the **placebo effect** operates by damping down the acute phase mentioned above. I recommend his book BTW, it's an exceptionally clear and interesting discussion. In it he breaks the taboo of linking physiological malfunction to beliefs. I wish he had made the final step of providing an evolutionary rationale for the fact that coercion stress impedes physical health. Humans are the only animals which think in order to thrive. They

are vulnerable to bad memes, especially from members of the tribe who are closely related to them biologically. Therefore genes might viably exist which help to kill off those who cannot understand the world or who have acted badly by their own lights.

This might explain why Ayn Rand's character, John Galt, always enjoyed perfect health.

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Tue, 02/17/2004 - 02:22 | [reply](#)

John Galt

Since John Galt was a fictional superhero, he could not be otherwise. Ayn Rand made up for her alter-ego John by suffering some very strange and debilitating maladies and delusions. She never admitted any of these. It was the other guy who had problems.

by a reader on Tue, 02/17/2004 - 18:59 | [reply](#)

Who is John Galt?

Just kidding. :-)

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Thu, 02/19/2004 - 20:40 | [reply](#)

Immune system and GWS

Perhaps I should flesh out my earlier comment. Of the many soldiers who went out to the Gulf, a tiny minority did some things that made them ashamed. Perhaps someone became paralysed with fear just before action. Perhaps somebody else drove a jeep carelessly whilst tired and killed a friend. When they get back home they experience nightmares and regret. This triggers phase 1 of their immune systems (lethargy, fever, inflammation), whilst suppressing phase 2 (tailored antibody production). As a result they get ill more easily, catch viruses, lose motivation and generally feel physically bad. Then they hear about Gulf War Syndrome. They remember all the special injections they received in case of chemical attack. B follows A therefore A caused B and presto, their maladies are explained and the guilt is obscured and abated. Then a slightly larger minority, encouraged perhaps by counselors, accident lawyers, and the anti-war media, decide to try to cash in on GWS through litigation. After all, it's surely no worse than making a false insurance claim...

I could be quite wrong about this guess. I should also add that the majority of our armed forces are good, decent and honorable people that carry forward a great tradition. They have an awesome supply of common sense including a judgement of right and wrong that leaves most of our politicians, academics and journalists far behind.

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Thu, 02/19/2004 - 21:13 | [reply](#)

gulf war syndrome

you know fuck all about gulf war syndrome you stupid arse

by a reader on Thu, 09/30/2004 - 16:03 | [reply](#)

Such Brilliance (was gulf war syndrome)

'you know fuck all about gulf war syndrome you stupid arse'

Such wit! Such rhetorical flair! Sir, I take my hat off to you and concede that I have been totally wrong about Gulf War Syndrome. I prostrate myself before your supreme wisdom.

Alan

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sun, 10/03/2004 - 02:01 | [reply](#)

re: brilliance

why feed the trolls?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sun, 10/03/2004 - 03:29 | [reply](#)

Rumour Of A Momentous Development In Iran

Mohammed Reza Khatami calls for abolishing Islamic republic in Iran, reports the Israeli newspaper Maariv.

Mohammed Reza Khatami, leader of the Islamic Iran Participation Front, Iran's largest pro-reform party, said today (Wednesday) in Teheran that the time was ripe for establishing a secular republic. This was reported by a western diplomatic source, and confirmed by Stratfor. Khatami is President Mohammed Khatami's younger brother. He is among the 80 incumbent members barred from running for re-election in Feb. 20 parliamentary elections by the Guardians Council.

Well, Maariv has not yet reported this as a fact, and nor has anyone else. It's only a rumour. **Stratfor** isn't always accurate, and nor are "western diplomatic sources". So maybe the story will dissipate. But if it pans out, it's a momentous development and, **unlike previous important news from Iran**, it will receive front-page treatment and intense analysis *and be welcomed* all over the media, right?

Thu, 02/19/2004 - 04:27 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Tonge Descends Further

The author H. G. Wells was a passionate socialist – a failing that caused some amusing inaccuracies in his science-fiction visions of the future, and more seriously, caused him forever to besmirch his reputation as a decent human being when he sided wholeheartedly with one of the greatest and cruellest evils of all time: He visited Stalin in 1934 and delivered **this verdict**:

“I have never met a man more candid, fair and honest, and to these qualities it is, and nothing occult and sinister, that he owes his tremendous undisputed ascendancy in Russia. I had thought before I saw him that he might be where he was because men were afraid of him but I realize that he owes his position to the fact that no one is afraid of him and everybody trusts him.”

The fact that this sort of betrayal of civilised values was common among Wells’ fellow intellectuals was one of the great catastrophes of the twentieth century. But few of them descended as deeply into the moral gutter as today’s Jenny Tonge, the Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament for Richmond Park.

We commented on Tonge recently, after she said that she might become **a suicide bomber** if she were Palestinian. Now she has gone further, displaying such fatuous trust in vicious killers that Wells would seem perceptive and honourable by comparison. On a recent **visit** to the West Bank, she met some terrorists who were proud of her. She claims to be ashamed of this (why? are they not doing what she said she would do in their position?) but then reports:

More re-assuring was the statement that they now accepted that Israel had a right to exist and their campaign would stop when Israel withdrew to its 1967 borders, removed settlements and returned Jerusalem to the Palestinians.

Should one weep in sorrow or laughter at the sheer naivety of this statement? The mass-murdering terrorists tell her they don't want to wipe Israel from the map and kill all its inhabitants, so obviously it must be true! But it is **not true**. She continues:

We visited the family of a suicide bomber. The stories of

indoctrination of little children right through their schooldays didn't seem to apply here.

Perhaps she never bothered to visit a school or pick up a **textbook** or **watch television** during her visit. Her willingness to take a cynically sanitised propaganda tour at face value is disgusting abrogation of the values of openness and criticism. Shame on her.

So desperate is she to to rescue the sacred premises of the leftist drivel that consitutes her world-view that she will swallow any argument, no matter how ridiculous or counter-factual. Thus she argues that suicide bombing is a result of poverty:

I would challenge anyone to spend a few days here and see the contrasts between modern Israel and its affluent citizens and the third world of Palestine.

She will not let the fact that most Islamists are **well off** and educated and come from wealthy countries get in the way of her "righteous indignation".

She churns out every myth exculpating Palestinian terrorists as if it were Gospel, including the wicked remark that got her fired from her shadow-ministerial position in her party:

It is certainly true that suicide bombers are regarded as national heroes here, but what else do they have - born out of despair and the desire to resist occupation, laced with religious belief.

What else do they have? The Palestinians could choose as their heroes those trying to resist the terrorists. They could fight against terrorists rather than praise them. That is what every civilised person is urging them to do.

Footnote: Jerusalem cannot be "returned" to the Palestinians because they have never held sovereignty over the city. Arabs have not held it since 1250, and Jews have been the majority there since about 1850 – Editor.

Sat, 02/21/2004 - 19:25 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Israel and terrorists

"They could fight against terrorists rather than praise them. That is what every civilised person is urging them to do."
or they could elect terrorists as PM, Israel having been ruled by terrorists Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir only 20 and 10 years ago

Begin bus bombing innocent civilians - 1 of many incidents

http://www.cdiss.org/terror_1940s.htm

Twenty Arabs, five Jews and two British soldiers killed and thirty wounded in Jewish terrorist bomb attacks on buses in Haifa and

Ramleh, Palestine. British mandate to rule Palestine ends on 15 May

1948; state of Israel established.

December 29

Jewish Irgun terrorists throw grenades from passing taxi into cafe near the Damascus gate, Jerusalem, Palestine, killing eleven Arabs and two British policemen.

Shamir murdered the UN peace negotiator

<http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/History/folke.html>

The terrorists, wearing khaki shorts and peaked caps, left their jeep, found Bernadotte in the second car of the convoy and one man, later discovered to be Yehoshua Cohen, fired a Schmeisser automatic pistol into the car, spraying the interior with bullets and killing Seraut and then Bernadotte. The other LEHI members shot the tires of the rest of the convoy and all the terrorists escaped to the religious community of Sha'arei Pina where they hid with haredi (ultra-religious) LEHI sympathizers for a few days ... Yitzhak Shamir reputedly played a role in planning the assassination; however, he was never tried and went on to become Prime Minister of Israel.

by a reader on Thu, 02/26/2004 - 16:13 | [reply](#)

Israeli Terrorism

Jewish terrorism had an objective that was not lunatic, genocidal, racist nonsense, unlike the atrocities committed by Palestinian terrorists

<http://www.settingtheworldtorights.com/node.php?id=84>

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Fri, 02/27/2004 - 02:23 | [reply](#)

terror is terror

that is rubbish, terrorism is terrorism and you seem to be close to condoning it there.

what was the purpose of Begin's killers bombing a cafe full of civilians if not to murder innocents ? too much mayo in the bagels ?

the ultimate purpose was an Israeli annexation of land whose inhabitants were still 2/3 Pal arab even in 1947, if anything the Pal rationale for terror: to end illegal (under international law an dUN res 446) Israeli annexation of the remaining 22% of their homeland is MORE justifiable.

by a reader on Fri, 02/27/2004 - 09:14 | [reply](#)

Jewish Terrorism

Couple of points:

(1) Terrorism was only ever a minority thing among the Jews.

(2) The Irgun and the Stern Gang were deliberately dissolved and

suppressed by the IDF very shortly after the War of Independence.

<http://www.settingtheworldtorights.com/node.php?id=86>

'When the United Nations envoy Count Folke Bernadotte proposed a new partition plan which, among other things, again did not assign Jerusalem to Israel, he was assassinated by Lehi. Ben-Gurion ordered: "Arrest all Stern Gang [Lehi] leaders. Surround all Stern bases. Confiscate all arms. Kill any who resist." Virtually all Lehi members were indeed arrested and Lehi ceased to exist.

'Ben-Gurion then demanded that the Irgun be dissolved. Any members of the Irgun who unconditionally handed over their weapons and joined the IDF, would receive amnesty for their previous crimes. Otherwise they would be treated as criminals. The Irgun, in a bitter statement in which they said that they evidently valued the lives of IDF soldiers more than the Israeli government did, complied, and its members joined the IDF.'

For more details see Martin Gilbert's book Israel.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sun, 02/29/2004 - 02:30 | [reply](#)

Alan, terrorism was such a "...

Alan,
terrorism was such a "minority thing" about Israelis that they elected 2 of the terror chiefs as Prime Minister.
exactly - Israelis only ceased terrorism once they got a state - maybe there's a clue to "solving" Palestinian terrorism. Or maybe it would have been better if the world hadn't given in to Israeli terror in the first place.

"virtually all Lehi members were arrested" - and none served any extensive time in jail - the terror chief Yitzhak Shamir never faced justice for his crimes. the killer who pulled the trigger on Bernadotte, Yehoshua Cohen, later became Ben-Gurion's personal bodyguard.

<http://www.adelaideinstitute.org/Beauty/bernadotte.htm>

by a reader on Mon, 03/01/2004 - 14:00 | [reply](#)

what should we do about it?

wow, now i see how awful the jews are. but as a new member of the anti-semite clique, i don't yet know all the pieces. specifically, you've convinced me how horrible the jews are, but have yet to tell me what we should do with them. could you please fill me in?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 03/01/2004 - 20:56 | [reply](#)

Elliot, don't be so juvenil

Elliot,

don't be so juvenile !
did I say I thought Jews were horrible ?
I condemn terrorism, Palestinian and Israeli.
strange how condemning Israeli terrorism and the election of Israeli
terrorists gets you all excited yet you seemed perfectly happy at the
claim that Palestinians "praise" terrorists.
that speaks volumes about you.

by a reader on Thu, 03/04/2004 - 12:27 | [reply](#)

Palestinians, Jews, and a recent poster

The Palestinians have two major national aims. They want to establish a state, and they want their state to replace Israel. Israel's national objective is to continue to exist as a free and democratic Jewish State. The first Palestinian national objective is in no conflict with the Zionist mission, but the second one is, as it calls for the destruction of the Jewish state. Israel is, understandably, only willing to cooperate with the creation of a Palestinian state if the state is not a step in a Palestinian attempt to destroy Israel.

Unfortunately, the Palestinians are only willing to cooperate with a two-state plan if it seems to allow them to continue moving towards their goal of Palestinian sovereignty in all of Israel's territory, including the section inside the green line. They are currently seeking, not peace, but favorable diplomatic agreements that facilitate both their legitimate and illegitimate national agenda. As Israel and her allies are now unwilling to cooperate with this, there have been no new agreements lately. The Palestinians have been fighting the war with their suicide bombers rather than trying to negotiate their way to victory.

It's certainly the case that a just peace will involve a two state solution -- but that is not possible until both sides genuinely want it. As such, Palestinian terrorists are undermining the legitimate effort to get the Palestinians a viable state, and should properly be regarded as traitors to the legitimate Palestinian cause. And yet, they are widely supported by the Palestinian people. This fact is worth mentioning, and it ought to tell us something about which national objective the Palestinians value more.

The pre-state Zionists were dealing with a completely different situation than the modern day Palestinian Arabs. They were dealing with Arabs who wanted them dead and gone, and a British authority that wanted to appease the Arabs more than it wanted to save the Jews from genocide. This was not a situation they could improve by agreeing to be peaceful and negotiate sovereignty. It was necessary to raise an army that could fight a war and win, in the face of an occupier that tried to prevent this. In these circumstances, everyone faced impossible choices, and some of the Zionists formed terrorist organizations and used unjust tactics for just causes. The mainstream Zionists did not approve of terror and tried to suppress it to some extent, but they were really not in a position to put down the terrorist organizations and win the war at the same time. They

rightfully considered preserving their existence to be more

important, and they later suppressed the terrorist organizations. Former members of these organizations joined the legitimate army and renounced terror at that point. They had the right aims all along, and they have now renounced the unjust means they once used. As such, there is no dishonor in electing them.

It is now no longer reasonable to describe surviving pre-state Zionist members of terrorist organizations as terrorists at all, as they now neither advocate nor practice terrorism. It is also quite unreasonable to draw parallels between modern Palestinian Arab terrorists and pre-state Zionist terrorists, as the former are acting to promote manifestly unjust aims and the latter were using unjust means in the cause of morally vital aims.

A recent poster has been arguing that Zionism and Palestinian nationalism are essentially morally equivalent, while suggesting that Zionism is perhaps a bit worse. This poster has argued on this thread that Israel's election of some former members of defunct pre-state Zionist terrorist organizations to political office is somehow morally equivalent to the Palestinians' current pursuit of terrorism as a means of destroying Israel. This person has made similarly ill-reasoned anti-Zionist claims on other threads, and has yet to offer any substantive reasonable criticisms of Israel. It seems reasonable to conclude that this poster believes that there is something inherently unjust about Zionism that makes it immoral regardless of the means it adopts. As the poster seems somewhat supportive of Palestinian nationalism, objecting only to some of their means, I am assuming the objection is not to national movements in general. So, given that the poster claims not to find Jews horrible, I'm left wondering what non-antisemitic objection this person has to the Zionist movement.

~Woty
<http://woty.davidsj.com>

by **Woty** on Thu, 03/04/2004 - 19:42 | [reply](#)

thanks for your post, woty.

thanks for your post, woty.

I'll believe that in fact many Palestinians do genuinely support a 2 state solution - whereas a large number of Israelis trot out their refusal to countenance a Pal state at, denying Palestine's right to exist with lines such as "there's never been a Pal state before", "Gaza and the WB are disputed not occupied", "Jordan is really the Pal state" etc etc.

Meanwhile the Israelis continue to seize more and more of the remaining 22% of Palestine in defiance of international law, UN res 446 and the road map - Israel rejected the road maps settlement freeze and when the Pals accepted it and went as far as getting a ceasefire which Sharon sabotaged by assassinating a string of Hamas/IJ leaders (on Aug 8 and 14th prior to the bus bomb on Aug 19th).

SO yes I think the Pals do have a just cause - their survival in any sort of Pal homeland.

meanwhile you argue that the Arabs in the 1940s wanted the Jews dead - there had been attacks of Pals on Jews of course though historical Arabs and Jews have got on better than say Jews and Europeans. Atrocities like the Hebron massacre against indigenous Jews were certainly not justified but they were provoked not by gut hate but by anger at the prospect of their land - in which Pals were still a 2/3 majority in 1948 - being annexed for an Israeli state against their wishes - the "just" cause you refer to. Israel is far the regional superpower, there is no threat to their existence from the Pals - while the US continues to unconditionally support an Israeli state bent on hoovering up the remains of the Pal land there will be no peace.

by a reader on Thu, 03/04/2004 - 21:05 | [reply](#)

just read some of your post i

just read some of your post in a bit more detail
"that Israel's election of some former members of defunct pre-state Zionist terrorist organizations to political office "
ahh - I like that ! you mean : Israel's election as *prime minister* of former terror *chiefs* - not just any old "members" or any old "political office"
I see from your website that you're not too bothered about Sharon sabotaging the ceasefire as Israel wasn't on ceasefire - no "supportive action" or withdrawal then as the road map calls it, no settlement freeze. no wonder I wonder if SHaron wants peace.

by a reader on Thu, 03/04/2004 - 21:16 | [reply](#)

Rethink your picture

If I am understanding "a reader" correctly, events in the Middle East need to be understood in the context of an expansionist state that is permeated with aggressive ideology. This state marches forth with its superior weaponry to crush its hapless neighbors. These neighbors, who lack any good options, find themselves in a war of survival and resistance against the iron grip of the martial state.

But this picture is problematic.

There does not exist any philosophical or ideological tradition among Jews and Zionists that would make these actions on this scale palatable to a majority of Israeli Jews. On the contrary, many Israeli Jews left such states in order to seek a socialistic utopia in peaceful co-existence with arab neighbors. Even rudimentary knowledge of Jewish and Zionist traditions renders it hugely implausible that the idea of territorial gain, at the expense of innocent civilians both Israeli and Palestinian, was ever on the ethnic or national agenda.

Israel is a Capitalist Democracy. Therefore, it would take a conspiracy theory of incredible intricacy in order to explain how

Israel continuously elected "terrorists" who ripped apart the

economy with their expansionist wars, killed scores of young Israelis, and caused constant disruptions in the daily life of a largely professional populace. On the other hand, if only a fringe group supports the government, how are they gaining such amazingly disproportionate power?

by [Paco](#) on Fri, 03/05/2004 - 07:08 | [reply](#)

well that Israel is progressi

well that Israel is progressively annexing the remaining Palestinian land in the West Bank and Gaza is a matter of fact not a matter of speculation given the philosophical nature of the Jewish people. As it happens I'm a big admirer of Jews: particularly their steadfast loyalty to their cultural roots over millenia and their academic and entrepreneurial achievements in the face of oppression. I welcome your remarks as more evidence that the Israeli state and its actions are not supported by large numbers of Jewish people.

by a reader on Fri, 03/05/2004 - 08:49 | [reply](#)

The occupation

Countries that fight defensive wars are generally considered justified in annexing or occupying some enemy territory for the sake of avoiding having to fight the same war again.

The West Bank and Gaza were both captured in a defensive war. The West Bank is territory captured from Jordan. The Gaza Strip is territory captured from Egypt. Neither these nor any other territories have ever been part of a Palestinian state.

The closest thing to a State of Palestine that's existed in modern times is the British Mandate of Palestine. The largest portion of this territory is now Jordan.

Does the recent poster object to the existence and policies of the states of Jordan and Egypt, or just Israel? And does the recent poster want Israel to return the occupied West Bank to Jordan?

~Woty
<http://woty.davidsj.com>

by [Woty](#) on Fri, 03/05/2004 - 14:39 | [reply](#)

Explanation and fact

Although "a reader" believes his claims are born out by facts alone, I put it to him that his entire understanding of the Middle East situation is governed by *explanations* of those facts, involving theories of culpability, rather than the facts themselves. Therefore "a reader" ought to be compelled by an argument which makes the underpinnings of his/her explanatory structure highly implausible.

by a reader on Fri, 03/05/2004 - 17:56 | [reply](#)

The above post was by me, sor

The above post was by me, sorry.

by [Paco](#) on Fri, 03/05/2004 - 17:58 | [reply](#)

Terrorism is a relatively new concept

I don't think that terrorism by some Jews in 1947 should be excused just because their strategic intentions were good. I think it can be excused because

-6 million Jews had just been murdered, the horror and pain being sharp and raw

-The prospect existed of keeping a grip on a homeland which could offer sanctuary against possible future genocides. However, there was no guarantee, therefore the mood must have been truly desperate. Desperate people don't always think straight.

-The intentional mass killing of ordinary, innocent civilians for political or religious reasons wasn't widely understood to be an absolute and atrocious crime like it is now. (Many of today's crimes weren't crimes if you look far enough back in history. Even murder wasn't murder once if the guy killed was from another tribe.)

Whether this is correct or not, I don't see how hotel bombings in the late-1940s have much bearing on Israel 2004.

These days, there's no way on earth the Israelis would elect a terrorist as their leader. On the other hand, it seems unlikely that the Palestinians could avoid doing so, given the death cult.

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Sun, 03/07/2004 - 03:41 | [reply](#)

woty, "The West Bank and Gaz

woty,

"The West Bank and Gaza were both captured in a defensive war. " no they weren't - they were captured in 1967 as part of the war that started in 1947 when the Israelis seized 78% of Palestine (and Jordan is not part of Palestine, by the way) against the wishes of its 2/3 Pal Arab inhabitants: at the time Ben Gurion made it very clear that Israel wanted ALL of Palestine, hence the annexation of the WB/Gaza.

Tom,

" bombings in the late-1940s have much bearing on Israel 2004" because the terror chiefs became PM of Israel only 10 and 20 years ago - Shamir is still at large having never faced justice for his crimes.

and no, terror against anyone is not justified: maybe the Pals are desperate as the remains of their homeland are hoovered up. you discount the 1940 terror attacks and maybe in 50 years time you'll discount the current suicide bombings as inevitable acts of a people fighting for their homeland against the odds.

by a reader on Mon, 03/08/2004 - 11:26 | [reply](#)

tom,

i don't think jewish terrorism in 1947 should be excused. but it doesn't need to be. it was just a small minority. it didn't have the support of the jewish people in general. and in fact the jewish people put a stop to it.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 03/08/2004 - 21:11 | [reply](#)

Who's a what now?

'no they weren't - they were captured in 1967 as part of the war that started in 1947 when the Israelis seized 78% of Palestine (and Jordan is not part of Palestine, by the way) against the wishes of its 2/3 Pal Arab inhabitants: at the time Ben Gurion made it very clear that Israel wanted ALL of Palestine, hence the annexation of the WB/Gaza.'

If the Israelis wanted to keep the West Bank and Gaza why did they offer to give it back immediately after the 1967 war in return for peace and recognition from the Arab states?

Also, in 1947, the Palestinian Arabs made no attempt to declare a state in the portion of the former UN mandate that was allotted to them. If they wanted a state back in 1947 why didn't they declare it?

Next, I am unaware of any quote by David Ben-Gurion to the effect that he wanted to annex the whole of the West Bank and Gaza. In fact, I am fairly sure there is no such quote. Could you provide such a quote, preferably with a reference?

Finally, why didn't the Arabs of whom you speak wish to participate in a democratic state with equal rights for all of its citizens like Israel? What kind of state did these Arabs want?

by **Alan Forrester** on Tue, 03/09/2004 - 03:17 | [reply](#)

Fighting for a homeland?

Elliot,

You're quite right. Rather than excusing the terrorist acts I really wanted to excuse those among the minority who committed them at that early time, and who were later elected to office (having renounced terrorism).

-- Tom

reader on 03/08/2004 - 11:26 GMT,

in 50 years time you'll discount the current suicide bombings as inevitable acts of a people fighting for their homeland against the odds

I doubt that very much. I believe in moral progress. Terrorism can

no longer be confused with freedom fighting under any circumstances. Also, there never has been and never likely will be any kind of Palestinian holocaust. So you can't draw a parallel with my argument above, whether or not you agree with it.

I don't accept that the Palestinians are fighting for a homeland, or any land at all. They're blowing themselves up out of a kind of twisted religious hatred. If they had any sense, they would have seized the opportunity to become Israeli citizens while this was still possible. As Israeli citizens, they would have been more secure and more wealthy. They would have been free to buy and sell land. Furthermore, land would itself have been a relatively trivial issue, as it is within the West today. (If you add up the value of all assets in an advanced economy, land makes only a small percentage of the total).

If you listen to the Jenny Tong interview, you'll discover that Palestinians regularly go to Israeli hospitals for treatment. But if an ordinary Israeli took a walk in the West Bank, he could expect to be killed by a mob within an hour. There is no symmetry here.

The Israeli government is now building a wall. The Pals don't like it. However, they, and in particular, the suicide bombers and the death cult, are responsible for that wall. They could scarcely be more responsible if they mixed the concrete themselves.

Even if I adopted your premise that the Israelis have stolen land from the Palestinians (which I don't), it doesn't justify murder. You don't murder a thief, or murder your children by brainwashing them into suicide-bombing him. OTOH, seizing a murderer's assets, including some of his land, might well be a reasonable way of extracting reparation. It might also shock him and his brethren into turning away from crime and having a change of heart.

by **Tom Robinson** on Tue, 03/09/2004 - 06:59 | [reply](#)

Alan, why didn't the Pals de

Alan,
why didn't the Pals declare a state in 1947 ? because they had a bigger priority - opposing the occupation and ongoing expansion of invading Israelis whose sworn aim was to seize and expel the Palestinians from ALL of Palestine (Ben Gurion: in June 1938: "I support compulsory [Palestinian Arab population] transfer. I do not see in it anything immoral."
in 1947 "We feel we are entitled to Palestine as a whole," replied Ben-Gurion, "but we will be ready to consider the question of a Jewish state in an adequate area of Palestine."
<http://www.jpost.com/com/Archive/04.Dec.1997/Features/Article-2.html>
previously in 1936 BG made it clear he wanted some of Palestine as a first step to getting the lot - in a letter to his son Amos at the time of the Peel plan).
given that I think liberating their homeland was more important than declaring a state.
Now of course : 50 + years later the Palestinians realise there is no

possibility of liberating the 78% of Palestine that is now Israel. they accept a 2 state solution. so do I though I still think the 1947/8 ethnic cleansing was wrong.

do you ever disagree with those Israeli propagandists who deny Palestine's right to exist : who claim there is no such thing as Palestine and claim the WB/Gaza is "disputed" ?

"why didn't the Arabs of whom you speak wish to participate in a democratic state with equal rights for all of its citizens like Israel?" a bi-national state consisting of the current Israel and West Bank/ Gaza is one solution. Or if you mean why didn't the Pals in 1947 "participate" its because they were ethnically cleansed. For exactly the same reason that Israelis today oppose right of return the Israeli in 1947/8 drove out the Pals in a series of bloody massacres to ensure an adequate Jewish majority.

no Tom, "Terrorism can no longer be confused with freedom fighting under any circumstances"

its not good enough to claim that terrorism was OK in the 1940s but its not now. Nor is it OK to claim that terrorism against Pals was justified by the holocaust given that the Palestinians did not participate in the Holocaust - if it had been Americans bombed by Israelis in reaction to the Holocaust I think you'd appreciate the faulty logic.

no, I didn't say that land theft justified murder - or that you could murder a thief (although the right to bear arms/ gun lobby might disagree with us there) - however thats easy for me to say since its not my land being stolen.

anyway isn't it Ariel Sharon who says land is worth innocent lives. He rejected the road map insisting on continuing the land grab and then sabotaged the Pal ceasefire assassinating a string of Hamas/IJ leaders on Aug 9/14th knowing this was bound to get a response and result on the deaths of innocent Israelis: hope that Pal land is worth it.

by a reader on Tue, 03/09/2004 - 08:52 | [reply](#)

Fabricating History

A reader wrote:

'why didn't the Pals declare a state in 1947 ? because they had a bigger priority - opposing the occupation and ongoing expansion of invading Israelis whose sworn aim was to seize and expel the Palestinians from ALL of Palestine (Ben Gurion: in June 1938:

"I support compulsory [Palestinian Arab population] transfer. I do not see in it anything immoral."

This quote is incomplete, the full quote reads:

'I saw in the Peel Plan two positive things: the idea of a state and the idea of compulsory transfer...I support compulsory transfer. I don't see in it anything immoral, but compulsory transfer can only be affected by England and not by the Jews...Not only is it

incoercible for us to carry it out, but it is also inconceivable for us

to propose it.'

So, to summarise, the British government proposed the Peel Plan in 1937 which included the idea of compulsory transfer and also cut down the Jewish state to an even smaller sliver of land than the UN awarded them. It was in the context of this reduction of Israel to a tiny fraction of the Palestine Mandate that the Zionists were reluctantly prepared to agree to such measures being undertaken by the British. Hence Woodhead Commission that consulted the Zionists said of the transfer idea: 'on behalf of the Jews it was made clear to us that Jewish opinion was opposed to the exercise of any degree of compulsion.'

Also, the surrounding Arab states invaded Israel in 1948 with the intention of killing or expelling all of the Jews and even before then sent in irregulars and terrorists to wage a campaign of mass murder against the Jews. Yet, somehow, the Jews managed to find the time to declare a state. So, again, why did the Palestinians not declare a state?

Overall, the content of your comment bears no relation to what actually happened. As Efraim Karsh has shown, many historians such as Benny Morris, Tom Segev and Avi Shlaim have deliberately and systematically distorted the historical record by selectively quoting from the contents of meetings in such a way as to completely change the meaning of the what was actually said. When they have not been able to find a way to distort a quote to say something bad, they have simply made it up.

<http://www.meforum.org/article/302>

'do you ever disagree with those Israeli propagandists who deny Palestine's right to exist : who claim ther is no such thing as Palestine and claim the WB/Gaza is "disputed" ?'

I would support the formation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza with a democratic government determined to suppress terrorism. I would not support a Palestinian state run by terrorists and tyrants, I think both the Israelis and the Palestinians deserve better.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Tue, 03/09/2004 - 19:11 | [reply](#)

Alan, your BG quote apart fr

Alan,
your BG quote apart from stating he regarded ethnic cleansing as positive merely seems to confirm he thought the 1/4 Jewish population at that time unable to drive out the Pals.
in fact BG supported the Peel plan seeing the allocated Jewish state as a bridgehead for taking ALL Of palestine by force
Ben-Gurion was quite explicit, as illustrated in a 1937 letter to his son:
"A partial Jewish State is not the end, but only the beginning. The establishment of such a Jewish state will serve as a means in our historical efforts to redeem the country in its entirety. ...We shall

organize a modern defense force ..and then I am certain that we will not be prevented from settling in other parts of the country, either by mutual agreement with our Arab neighbors or by some other means... We will expel the Arabs and take their places with the force at our disposal."

your claim that the arabs wanted to "kill or expel" all the Jews in 1948 is a common unsubstantiated claim despite the fact that as shown above the Israelis were the aggressors. the pals rejected partition allowing the Israelis a state from which to carry out their sworn intention of overrunning Palestine and expelling the indigenous Pals. the pals then lost the initial war and were in no position therefore to declare a state with 78% of their homeland occupied.

your Karsh link at a glance rejects Morris et al as you'd expect. It seems to mainly cite an old 1990 link by Teveth (BGs biographer) , "The Palestine Arab Refugee Problem and its Origins," Middle Eastern Studies, Vol. 26, No. 2Apr. 1990, pp. 214-49.

(actually its Palestinian not Palestine).

he quotes Morris as saying

"what happened in Palestine/Israel over 1947-9 was so complex and varied" as though that debunks the occurrence of ethnic cleansing.

I agree at least with your last para. given Sharons refusal to even freeze the expansion, never mind remove, of illegal settlements at the heart of the proposed Pal state how do you suggest this will happen ?

by a reader on Wed, 03/10/2004 - 09:18 | [reply](#)

Bored now

Sharon has said many times that he will make concessions in return for peace. The Israelis did in fact disassemble their settlements in Egyptian territory after their 1979 peace treaty, the same would happen in the West Bank and Gaza if the Islamonazis would stop killing Israelis. Your distortions and falsifications are tiresome, read:

<http://www.settingtheworldtorights.com/node.php?id=74>

<http://www.settingtheworldtorights.com/node.php?id=105>

<http://www.meforum.org/article/466>

<http://www.meforum.org/article/207>

Ben-Gurion not only never advocated ethnic cleansing, he explicitly stated he would never do such a thing:

'We do not wish, we do not need to expel Arabs and take their place...All our aspiration is built on the assumption... that there is enough room in the country for ourselves and the Arabs.'

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Fri, 03/12/2004 - 02:50 | [reply](#)

", the same would happen in t

", the same would happen in the West Bank and Gaza if the Islamonazis would stop killing Israelis." well that flies completely in the face of the facts and Sharon's own statements when he rejected the settlement freeze (a freeze mind you, not even dismantlement) proposed in both the Mitchell agreement and the Road Map claiming this would require "a pregnant woman to have an abortion just because she is a settler?" - its not known whether Sharon thought the continuing land grab of Palestinian land was forcing Palestinian women to have abortions or whether he was the slightest bit worried if they were.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3020335.stm

Despite your claim that Sharon would support a Pal state and dismantle the settlements but for pal terrorism it is uncontested fact that Israel rejected the road map peace treaty whereas the Pals accepted it without reservation and obtained a ceasefire (despite the fact the RM was slanted towards Israel) Straight away Israel announced 14 reservations <http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/Peace/road1.html> basically refusing to meet any of its commitments. Sharon then rejected the road map on the 31st July announcing he'd continue his land grab of Pal land in defiance of the road map. <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/08/01/world/main566251.shtml> and http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3115325.stm

if Bush has clamped down on Israeli violations like he said he would (he earlier said he'd "ride herd" to ensure Israel and the Pals met their commitments <http://www.jerusalemmites.org/news/english/jun2003/5a.htm>) then many Israelis and Pals would be alive today.

The IDF then assassinated a string of Hamas/IJ leaders on Aug 8 and 14 which provoked, as Sharon must have realised, the August 19 suicide bombing (which I regard as not justifiable but certainly inevitable given Sharon's actions) <http://in.news.yahoo.com/030808/137/26rqn.html> and [http://www.unhchr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/\(Symbol\)/E.CN.4.2004.G.7.En?Opendocument](http://www.unhchr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/(Symbol)/E.CN.4.2004.G.7.En?Opendocument) and <http://www.guardian.co.uk/israel/Story/0,2763,1018928,00.html>

And its ludicrous that you deny BGs support for ethnic cleansing when we have it from his own lips. Its also strange to me that the same people who refuse the Pals right of return on the grounds that it would endanger the demographic majority of Jews in Israel fail to see that the Israelis carried out, indeed needed to carry out in their view, ethnic cleansing in the 1940s on precisely the same grounds.

by a reader on Fri, 03/12/2004 - 10:43 | [reply](#)

Islamism, Lunatic Conspiracy Theories, And Death

Of course those evils go together like the heads of Cerberus. But here's a manifestation that we had not heard of before.

Polio is a terrible disease. It can kill; more often it cripples. Throughout history, the terror of recurrent polio epidemics used to be an abiding fact of life, and especially of parenthood – until it was all but eradicated by mass vaccination.

Occasionally, there are still outbreaks. These things happen. They are dealt with.

But sometimes they don't "just" happen. Sometimes they are not dealt with, and start to spread, and there's a reason for that. **At present,**

Nigeria accounts for almost half of all new polio cases and [the northern, Islamic province of] Kano is at the centre of the disease's resurgence.

Why? Because Kano hasn't allowed any polio vaccinations for months. Why? Because they defer to their holy men who, unfortunately, are barking mad:

Kano suspended immunisations last year, following reports by Muslim clerics that the vaccine was contaminated with an anti-fertility agent as part of a US plot to render Muslim women infertile.

[...]

A United Nations Children's Fund spokesman said any delay would result in the spread of the virus crippling more innocent children, both in Nigeria and neighbouring countries.

Polio has already radiated out from Kano to infect at least six west and central African states.

Conspiracy theories kill. And cripple.

Eco-Loony Feeding Frenzy In The Press

It's what they have been dreaming about for years now: the most extreme fears about environmental catastrophe being endorsed by an authority so close to the heart of the Establishment that even ~~sane people~~ supporters of the present Administration can't dismiss it as cranky. And so, for instance, **The Guardian** (whose sister publication *The Observer* apparently broke the story) thrashes about in ecstasy, hardly knowing which tasty morsel of doom and Bush-hatred to snap at first:

A secret report, suppressed by US defence chiefs and obtained by The Observer, warns that major European cities will be sunk beneath rising seas as Britain is plunged into a 'Siberian' climate by 2020. Nuclear conflict, mega-droughts, famine and widespread rioting will erupt across the world.

[...]

The findings will prove humiliating to the Bush administration, which has repeatedly denied that climate change even exists. Experts said that they will also make unsettling reading for a President who has insisted national defence is a priority.

Yes, savour that humiliation! Perhaps he'll even have to withdraw from Iraq and reinstate Saddam and apologise to the peace-loving peoples of the world and confiscate Halliburton's assets and [pant, pant...] And **so on**:

By 2007 violent storms smash coastal barriers rendering large parts of the Netherlands inhabitable. [*Er... we think they mean **uninhabitable**. But then, since when has accuracy been an issue when writing loony scare stories? – Editor.*] Cities like The Hague are abandoned. In California the delta island levees in the Sacramento river area are breached, disrupting the aqueduct system transporting water from north to south.

Well, let's get one thing out of the way first: these conclusions are junk. They are false. They are unsupported by science. They are made up. None of them is going to be borne out. You heard it here first, folks. Now, the more interesting question is, precisely what sort of howler has been made here, and by whom? It is perhaps

remotely possible that 'The Pentagon' (whatever that means) really has taken this seriously. After all, part of their job is to investigate ridiculous possibilities *before* they suddenly turn real and bite us. It can happen. More likely, though, is a much simpler explanation: that the scenario described above is the *premise*, not the conclusion, of a report not intended to evaluate the science of climate change but something else, perhaps simply the Pentagon's own preparedness for an unexpected catastrophe. So they could just as well have used the "Martians attack" scenario. Just imagine what sort of reaction *that* would have produced in the gullible if it had been leaked. No, wait – we already know the answer to that one: the media would panic; **ordinary people would not.**

Update: [Elegance Against Ignorance](#) has an **alternative explanation** that seems quite plausible too.

Tue, 02/24/2004 - 14:19 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

Heads I win -- tails you lose

So now both high and low temperatures are signs of impending catastrophe inflicted upon us by the wicked George W. Bush, spoiler of the Kyoto protocol.

The "precautionary principle," which counsels panic over claims of danger which are *unproven*, will seem nostalgic in a time of panic over claims of danger which are *unfalsifiable*.

by [Alan Furman](#) on Wed, 02/25/2004 - 10:19 | [reply](#)

Falsifiability and the Precautionary Principle

So now both high and low temperatures are signs of impending catastrophe inflicted upon us by the wicked George W. Bush, spoiler of the Kyoto protocol.

The "precautionary principle," which counsels panic over claims of danger which are unproven, will seem nostalgic in a time of panic over claims of danger which are unfalsifiable.

Claims made under the Precautionary Principle are also unfalsifiable. The PP claims that we should try to refute statements of the form 'X exists' where X is an adverse ecological effect and all such claims are unfalsifiable. If DDT has no bad effects on birds or humans, then it might have a bad effect on shellfish or whatever. As far as I know environmentalists have yet to condemn DDT for its bad effect on malarial mosquitoes, but it's bound to happen eventually.

Environmental organisations deliberately couch their claims in such a way that they can always manufacture new claims that disaster is imminent. I think there are two reasons. The first is that they desperately want to believe that disaster is imminent and thus that they are right to be anticapitalist. The second is that as long as they keep manufacturing new scares there are people who will take

those claims at face value and give them money.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Wed, 02/25/2004 - 13:57 | [reply](#)

Eye witness report from the Hague

I happen to live in the Hague and I can tell you it really is getting wet here, so this is not something to joke about. I'm glad at least I'm living on the third floor. Must not forget to buy a rubber boat tomorrow.

Also, I want to report one mistake here. In fact all the terrible floods all over the world the last few hundred years have been caused by the Netherlands. So the ~~environmental-apocalypse wishers/economic-apocalypse-makers~~ nice environmentalist have their facts backwards, I'm afraid. The Netherlands is not disappearing because the sea level is rising, but the sea level is rising because the Netherlands is still here.

Without those wicked dikes and dunes 25% of the Netherlands would be permanently below the water and 68% of the Netherlands would have regular floods. And we all know that when you go into a bath tub the water level rises cause your body pushes the water away. Well, that's just what happened here. Cause greedy Dutch capitalists pumped the water out of Holland so as to get more and more land, the water level of all the seas in the world have risen 12 meters, causing millions of deaths and poverty and malaria due to wetlands in the third world.

This is a terrible racist injustice which must be stopped immediately, but the problem is that the world court in the Hague is trying to implement world piece in Israel right now and they're afraid they might get wet if they do the right thing and remove those man made, and hence evil, water blocking objects. Don't they understand that a wall in the water is an even greater obstacle to justice than a wall on the land?

I do hope nobody finds out that the biggest multinational polluter and global warmer is mother nature herself in the form of vulcanos, spontaneous oil releases under the ocean, bush fires, bacteria, radioactivity and clouds - because I'm not sure about the consequences if Kyoto forbids all these things as well.

Oh, by the way, maybe the streets are wet right now because it rained. But the rain may well have been caused by Golf war environmental syndrome or something - the Pentagon should look into this.

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Thu, 02/26/2004 - 10:44 | [reply](#)

Even more worrying

Look at [this](#) Guardian report on Mars:

Or did a magnetic field that must once have protected

the planet fade, leaving it at the mercy of pitiless solar and stellar radiation that gradually dismantled molecules and stripped the atmosphere and seas a little at a time?

Imagine the consequences if this were to happen here! And yet the Bush Administration neglects to even consider this possibility, while Americans the world over are misusing precious magnetism to build hard disk drives and to stick notes to fridges. And what do these things have in common? Simple: holding information.

Save the Earth's magnetic field - down with information!

by **Kevin** on Thu, 02/26/2004 - 16:47 | [reply](#)

[Er... we think they mean uninhab...]

[Er... we think they mean uninhabitable.

no they meant inhabitable

<http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=inhabitable>

inhabitable

*In*hab"it*a*ble, a. [L. inhabibilis: cf. F. inhabitable. See In- not, and Habitable.] Not habitable; not suitable to be inhabited. [Obs.] The frozen ridges of the Alps Or other ground inhabitable. --Shak.*

More likely, though, is a much simpler explanation: that the scenario described above is the premise, not the conclusion, of a report not intended to evaluate the science of climate change but something else, perhaps simply the Pentagon's own preparedness for an unexpected catastrophe.

why don't you demand that this document is made public then we'd know wouldn't we and wouldn't have to sepculate

by a reader on Fri, 02/27/2004 - 14:53 | [reply](#)

It is news like this that keeps us from news.

The impending disaster meme combined with conspiracy theory meme combined with the news meme:

Do the power of memes multiply?

Is there a part of the human brain that craves regular doses of Fear and Suspicion?

Likely.

Pentagon Reveals Global Warming Investors Scheme;
Beach Property For Sale at Bargain Prices as Millions Panic over
Rising Tides.
Real News at 11!

by a reader on Fri, 02/27/2004 - 17:59 | [reply](#)

Re: [Er... we think they mean uninhab...]

No, the folks at *The Guardian* do not use Shakespearian English. They have trouble enough with present-day English.

As for the document, it has already been published.

by **Editor** on Fri, 02/27/2004 - 19:34 | [reply](#)

Scientific Integrity in Policymaking

Does anybody here have an opinion on [this report from the Union of Concerned Scientists? Surely it merits discussion at least as much as the Guardian article?](#)

by a reader on Tue, 03/02/2004 - 03:59 | [reply](#)

Re: Scientific Integrity in Policymaking

What is interesting is that now Bush appears to be saying he wants to [improve the scientific objectivity of government.](#)

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Tue, 03/02/2004 - 13:46 | [reply](#)

Yeah, Right

Maybe Bush says he wants to improve the scientific objectivity of government, but what he **does** is something else.

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 03/02/2004 - 16:44 | [reply](#)

Union of Concerned Scientists

There's a critique of them here:

http://www.activistcash.com/org_detail.cfm?ORG_ID=145

by **Editor** on Thu, 03/04/2004 - 00:03 | [reply](#)

Kevin wrote: 'Look at this

Kevin wrote:

'Look at this Guardian report on Mars:

'Or did a magnetic field that must once have protected the planet fade, leaving it at the mercy of pitiless solar and stellar radiation that gradually dismantled molecules and stripped the atmosphere and seas a little at a time?

'Imagine the consequences if this were to happen here! And yet the Bush Administration neglects to even consider this possibility, while Americans the world over are misusing precious magnetism to build hard disk drives and to stick notes to fridges. And what do these things have in common? Simple: holding information.

'*Save the Earth's magnetic field - down with information!*'

Ah, Kevin, you thought you were joking, but you were **wrong**.

However, this does highlight a serious and potentially devastating shortage, we are running short of ways to mock environmentalists because their views are already so ridiculous that satire is redundant.

by **Alan Forrester** on Tue, 03/09/2004 - 17:41 | [reply](#)

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Tonge Tongue-Lashed

Jenny Tonge, the Liberal Democrat MP and sympathiser with mass murderers (whom we have discussed before, [here](#) and [here](#)), was for some reason granted an [interview](#) by Dr. David Sangan of the Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem. Tonge remained as clueless and spiteful as ever but Sangan is so good he could be an Israeli ambassador. It's worth listening to in full, but since the BBC may not archive its audio, we have transcribed a particularly good section of his comments:

I come from a family of Holocaust survivors. I have never known my grandmother, my grandfather – never: they were gassed in Auschwitz. My father brought me up. With forty years of being alone in the world, he has nobody from his family. Never ever had he persuaded me or said to me 'listen, go and suicide in a supermarket in Frankfurt with the Germans'. His parents were gassed! We didn't gas the Palestinians. We didn't – we don't kill them deliberately. We don't kill citizens. Yes, there's some problems with the roadblocks and yes there's problems with getting their salaries, their income, but nobody really has hunger there. I treat the Palestinians here. I treat all the Palestinians from the West Bank, from Jenin, from Ramallah, from Hebron. They come to me. You see nobody has hunger. You are talking about people that six million of them have been gassed and nobody from all their descendants went into suicide in the German supermarkets!

Not only have Germans not lived in fear of Jewish suicide bombers following the Holocaust, but today, Palestinians fear the Israelis so little that they are eager to go and get medical treatment from them. So much for the evil Zionists.

Sat, 02/28/2004 - 16:21 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

What's New?

What I find amazing is that the facts here are all well known.

And yet, so many people have so much trouble processing them morally.

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Sat, 02/28/2004 - 23:38 | [reply](#)

Morality and Facts

'What I find amazing is that the facts here are all well known.

'And yet, so many people have so much trouble processing them morally.'

Well, their view of the facts is more strongly influenced by their view of the moral of the situation than vice versa. Specifically, their moral ideas are usually so tangled up in the notion that particular groups are good or bad, and that in turn is usually tied up with what they think of as fundamental moral principles, that they can't divorce themselves from that idea without doing severe violence to their worldview. As such, many of them will not change unless offered a better alternative worldview. some of them won't even change then.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sun, 02/29/2004 - 03:05 | [reply](#)

well Sangan is just factually

well Sangan is just factually wrong: the allies DID bomb civilians in WW2, you may say that it was necessary to win the war and end Nazi atrocities (and maybe Pals say the same about their search for state and though I would disagree I can't see anything other than force ending the Israeli land grab)

obviously the bombing of German civilians wasn't by Jews in particular and weren't "suicide" attacks but I can't see that that is important.

by a reader on Thu, 03/04/2004 - 12:48 | [reply](#)

Factually Wrong?

Which facts were wrong?

He wasn't talking about the Allies; he was talking about the Jews, and Israelis. He was pointing out that they don't target civilians as a matter of policy, in contrast to the Palistinians. This is true and important. It's sad that you can't see that that is important.

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Fri, 03/05/2004 - 02:45 | [reply](#)

well he was very selective in

well he was very selective in his facts then wasn't he ?

Jews may not have have authorised the attacks on German civilians in WW2 but do they support or condemn them as a valid means of fighting that war ?

and to claim that Israelis don't target civilians is also wrong : from the terror attacks of the 1940's to the more recent attack on the UN

base at Qana and the demolition of a Gazan tenement block Israelis have deliberately attacked civilians.

by a reader on Fri, 03/05/2004 - 08:44 | [reply](#)

Targeting civilians

Consider the following situation:

You are in a crowded area, with your children, and for some reason a terrorist is trying to shoot you. You are armed, and you can shoot the terrorist, but the crowd density is such that you will almost certainly harm bystanders.

If you shoot in this situation, is it your or the terrorist who is intentionally targeting civilians?

~Woty
<http://woty.davidsj.com>

by **Woty** on Fri, 03/05/2004 - 14:29 | [reply](#)

red herring

irrelevant, that wasn't the case when the IDF flattened a Gazan tenement block , or at Qana, or when Menachem Begin's terrorists bombed buses and cafes in the 1940's - its a complete red herring.

by a reader on Mon, 03/08/2004 - 09:48 | [reply](#)

Evil at heart of Palestinian society

Leave the red herrings alone. We can only hope that one day the hatred and calls to murder ,made by Immams in mosques in The west bank and Gazza during friday night prayers will end when the free and life loving Palestinians fight to reverse the immense moral depravity which is rife and ravages Palestinian society today. Palestinian society has busily indoctrinated their own children by glorifying child suicide bombers in their high school text books. Footage of children aged 5-7 years old interviewed on palestinian TV aspiring to be suicide bombers is well documented. Suicide bombers are heroes on the Palestinian streets in Gazza and the west bank as their posters can be seen on every street corner.

When it comes to evaluating moral standards, the Palestinians haven't got a leg to stand on. And neither do scores of suicide bombing victims who've had their limbs blown off in these attacks, which Palestinian society is so proud of.

by a reader on Sun, 08/21/2005 - 10:07 | [reply](#)

Jeanie Kennedy's Description of Daniel Pipes's Talk

Daniel Pipes is one of the world's leading experts on the Islamic world, a member of the President's new US Institute for Peace, and Director of the Middle East Forum. He recently gave a talk at UC Berkeley. Here's how the event was reported by the *Daily Californian*, the student newspaper there. Notice how Pipes is described in the title as simply pro-Israel, as if he is only a member of a self-interested faction, and there is no such thing as objectivity.

My comments, as one who attended, are below this article.

Staunch Israel Backer Attacks 'Militant' Islam

By GEORGE DERK, MEGAN REITER AND EMMA SCHWARTZ
Wednesday, February 11, 2004

The controversial head of a Middle East watchdog organization delivered a searing attack on militant Islam at a campus talk last night to an impassioned but divided audience.

Like many campus events on the Middle East, Daniel Pipes' speech ignited antagonism between fierce ideological opponents. Supporters welcomed him with a standing ovation, but his opposition frequently interrupted the presentation, booing Pipes and calling him a racist.

Nonetheless, Pipes, who runs the Web site Campus Watch that tracks Middle Eastern studies in North America, sought to spread his own philosophy of action for the Middle East.

Pipes said the region has been overpowered by militant Islam, a force hostile to free speech that needs to be destroyed.

But he said achieving democracy in the Middle East would be slow and pointed to Iraq as a key example.

"I supported war against Iraq as any civilized person must," Pipes said.

For the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Pipes had a simple

cure: no diplomacy until all Palestinians recognize the state of Israel.

"Palestinians need to give up their foul ambition of destroying their neighbor," Pipes said to a burst of dissent from many audience members.

Pipes also took aim domestically, chastising his colleagues in Middle Eastern studies for "incompetence" and called campus Muslim students' associations bastions of militant Islam.

Aside from a lecture on the war in Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian crisis, the audience's internal crossfire seemed to tell a story of its own.

Throughout the speech, a handful of loud commentators were escorted outside by police, and a large faction of Pro-Palestinian students made a dramatic exit toward the end of Pipes' speech.

Pipes' supporters often shouted back for those students to listen.

And those somewhere in between, the moderate Jews, Muslims and community members said they found little resonance in Pipes' words and even less of an opportunity for real discussion.

Throughout the crossfire, the event was overshadowed by the question of what constituted appropriate free speech on campus.

To Pipes' denouncers, the protest represented the precise expression of free speech.

"This is a man who has made his career by vilifying Arabs and Muslims and spreading conspiracy theories on Middle Eastern studies," said English graduate student Snehal Shingavi, the first person thrown out of speech.

But for Pipes, the audience members' outbursts only reaffirmed what he had come to preach: that universities – UC Berkeley in particular – were the most intolerant institutions in the country.

"I thought this was an institution of higher education," Pipes said.

This article of course was *entirely* too even-handed in its assessment of the whole event. The disrupters were even warned by many signs on the front doors not to engage in disruptive behavior. The whole experience was extremely uncivil, and ruined Pipes' talk for those who actually wanted to hear what he was saying. There were constant interruptions, not only involving name-calling, but shouting back and forth within the audience. Moreover, the 6-8 police in the room (which was filled to its capacity of several hundred, with many more outside, unable to get in) had to wend

their way through the long rows of chairs to evict the worst of the disrupters. They and their placards not only called Pipes a racist, but also a Fascist and a McCarthyite. At one point, they all shouted together as a mob so that no one could be singled out to be evicted.

The evening wore me out. First, the location was changed to way up the hill and across campus. Then there was the suspense of possibly not being let in to this free event without possessing some blue ticket that had been sent out in advance, even though many of those ticket holders weren't going to show up. This during all the shouting outside. THEN, we had to line up in 3 groups, according to a number we chose in our heads, and then at first only one line got in. After that, the rest of us squeezed our way to the front door, then they frisked us and went through our bags. Last, there was the palpable tension in the air during the presentation. I didn't know if the loudmouth guys behind me, who were razzing me when we supporters of Pipes were giving him standing ovations for certain statements, were going to hit me or what!

We were supposed to start at 7:30, but the introductions didn't even take place until 8:20. Pipes only spoke until about 9:10, but with the interruptions, so I doubt he was given more than 20 minutes actual speech time. The Q&A went just past 9:30.

Whew! This was my first experience setting foot on the Berkeley Campus, even though I have lived really close for 2-1/2 years, and it may be my last. On the way out, I heard from some fellow supporters that the next pro-war type to speak there will charge \$20, which may keep this sort of thing from happening again, at least in the same way.

Anyway, it was heartening to hear about his Campus-Watch project. I think Pipes does a lot of good with that all over the nation, making Middle East Expert professors accountable for what they are teaching. He's an impressive guy, with very impressive credentials. Please go see him if he shows up in your area.

Jeanie Kennedy

Sun, 02/29/2004 - 22:49 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Behaviour of idiotarians

Unfortunately, the extremist viewpoints of radical islamists will never allow opposing dialog of their self proclaimed cause.

So much for the quote.... is a peaceful religion..."

Was never able to fathom what it means, but then it's probably my fault not 'catching on' to what's really meant, but left unsaid.

Anyhoo, it's still all free entertainment. :o)

by a reader on Wed, 03/03/2004 - 17:06 | [reply](#)

Pipes

I have heard Pipes talk. At no time did he denounce Islam, only

violent Islamists who are muffling moderate Muslims. I imagine that in the audience were also leftist, self-hating Jews who are so gullible that they believe the constant shrill of Muslim denouncement against any voice of reason and moderation.

by a reader on Fri, 05/21/2004 - 14:09 | [reply](#)

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Wed, 03/03/2004 - 23:33 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Saddam's Weapons Of Mass Destruction – The Issue Won't Go Away

In the acrimonious controversy between supporters of the liberation of Iraq (currently somewhat on the defensive because no WMD stockpiles have been found there) and the 'Bush Lied' faction (currently engaged mainly in mindless crowing), the central issue of understanding what happened is being largely overlooked. For if there really were no stocks of WMD, as David Kay now considers most likely, there is no getting away from the question: did Saddam know this, or was he being deceived? *Both possibilities are, on the face of it, extraordinarily implausible.*

In **Case Not Closed: Iraq's WMD Stockpiles** (via **Solomon**), Douglas Hanson, WMD expert and recently Chief of Staff of the post-liberation Iraqi Ministry of Science and Technology, puts it like this:

[Was Saddam] really fooled by scientists scared to death of him and the Baath Party, or [did he run] one of military history's most successful deception operations. If he did the latter, we must also ask why he would risk the toppling of his regime, and his death or capture, over non-existent WMDs. The only alternative explanation to these two questionable scenarios is that WMD stockpiles did in fact exist, but that they have been hidden, and/or spirited out of the country.

The anti-liberation faction are trying their best not to let this issue go away. They needn't worry. There is no prospect of its going away until the truth – and that now means, principally, the true explanation of Saddam's and Iraq's pre-war behaviour – is discovered.

Thu, 03/04/2004 - 00:34 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Your argument is incomplete

For if there really were no stocks of WMD, as David Kay now considers most likely, there is no getting away from the question: did Saddam know this, or was he being deceived? Both possibilities are, on the face of it, extraordinarily implausible.

You have not argued why both these possibilities are implausible.

You are right it is very unlikely Iraqi scientists deceived Saddam into believing in non-existent weapons. But you also disregard the other option that Saddam did know there were no WMDs, on these grounds: *Why he would risk the toppling of his regime, and his death or capture, over non-existent WMDs?*

There is something missing in your argument, because you are implicitly assuming something without giving reasons for those assumptions. Namely: you are assuming (1) that Saddam put himself at risk of war on purpose, plus (2) that if he did provoke the war on purpose he would only have done that if he believed he had WMDs. You have failed to give reasons for both of these two conclusions. Without that the obvious possibility remains that Saddam was simply telling the truth when he said Iraq had no WMDs.

Another note: The case for war was NOT that there were WMDs. The case for war was that Iraq was not complying with the inspections, and hence Saddam MIGHT have had WMDs. The fact that the allies also had a positive belief that Saddam DID have WMDs is besides the point. The fact that Saddam MIGHT have had them and was not complying with inspections is good enough reason for the war. (And even if we knew Saddam had no WMDs, anybody still would have been justified in liberating Iraq for humanitarian reasons.)

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Fri, 03/05/2004 - 19:40 | [reply](#)

Dying For A Fad

One of the most under-publicised scandals of recent decades is the stance of environmental pressure groups – and the governments that pander to them – on the issue of the insecticide DDT. It all started with a book called *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson, which alleged that DDT causes a thinning of birds' egg shells (thus endangering many bird species) and cancer in humans. Since then it has emerged that these claims were based on **misinterpreted evidence**. Nevertheless, *Silent Spring* remains the Bible of the environmental religion – and we do not mean that figuratively: its apocalyptic, moralising tone, its many factual inaccuracies, and the uncritical praise lavished upon it by its fatuous disciples make it typical of the holy books of religions throughout the ages.

Some Africans are now beginning to **question the wisdom** of the environmentalist crusade (or jihad) against DDT. Malaria kills about a million people every year – most of them children in Africa – and is spread by mosquitos. DDT kills mosquitos and is the **best pesticide** for this purpose by a large margin. Indeed DDT is the best means of any kind available to prevent malaria.

Environmentalists overwhelmingly agree that killing animals in the name of *clothing* fashions and fads is wrong. It has been clear for many years that there is no scientific case for banning DDT on either health or environmental grounds, and yet this remains the policy of most governments, aid agencies, and the environmental organisations that shape their policies. The fact that they are prepared to allow millions of people to die just to preserve the anti-DDT fad at the centre of their religion is a tragic and disgusting irony.

Mon, 03/08/2004 - 21:11 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Anti-DDT Fad

It is all too convenient to claim the virtues of DDT in an age where DDT does not exist in daily use. DDT is an extremely dangerous and crude pesticide that persists and moves up the food chain from insects to birds to man as well as being directly harmful to man. Few of us lived in those times, but the dangers of its continued widespread use as a broad-spectrum pesticide and poison became very clear. No one book had much to do with it worldwide. I would not claim that there is never a reason to use DDT, only that its

persistence in the food chain needs to be heavily weighed against any potential benefit of use. There are other non-persisting pesticides and methods that destroy mosquitos in the larval stage and eradicate the danger of malaria. The problem is not the absence of DDT. The problem is only in the willingness to address and apply the many solutions. Death to the mosquitos!

by a reader on Mon, 03/08/2004 - 22:59 | [reply](#)

The previous message...

... is an apt example of what **The World** is talking about. Look at the amazing indifference to tens of millions of deaths just because they happened as a result of following the environmentalist religion. Look at the way a belief is clung to, and the only response to scientific evidence is to re-state the belief more passionately. And look at the ending, a chanted prayer, no less: "death to the mosquitos!" But prayer is not effective at preventing disease. DDT is.

by a reader on Tue, 03/09/2004 - 00:36 | [reply](#)

Evidence?

A reader wrote:

'DDT is an extremely dangerous and crude pesticide that persists and moves up the food chain from insects to birds to man as well as being directly harmful to man.'

Really? If what you say is true, then presumably there is a study somewhere documenting the harm done by DDT. Could you provide an example of such a study?

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Tue, 03/09/2004 - 02:56 | [reply](#)

Really

"American scientists found that the insecticide increases the risk of pregnant women having their babies before 37 weeks of gestation." That is a direct quote, I must presume, as a result of a study example.

Really. No one says though, including me, that you have to believe it.

I am neither an "environmentalist" or a "prayer chanter". Having worked with DDT many years ago, and not as a scientist, I can say first hand that it is a crude and dangerous chemical. Used with careful forethought it is extremely effective. Before jumping on the crazy-looney bandwagon, please note again, "I would not claim there is never a reason to use DDT". I used it, it is effective. It is something you handle very carefully.

Read the studies yourself. Or don't. Draw your own conclusions.

by a reader on Wed, 03/10/2004 - 23:02 | [reply](#)

Straight Talk

A reference page:<http://extoxnet.orst.edu/pips/ddt.htm>

by a reader on Thu, 03/11/2004 - 05:31 | [reply](#)

Re: Straight Talk

It's hardly surprising that DDT is somewhat toxic. Let's play with some figures and see what might be extrapolated from animal studies.

The reader provided a source which gives 50% lethal oral dose for rats: LD50 = 112mg/kg

The long-term regular **dosage** leading [?] to tumours for mice: TD50 = 12.5(mg/kg)/day

Breastmilk DDT of affected mothers is up to 20mg/kg of milk fat

Assuming:

3% milk fat

baby drinks 1.5L per day

baby weighs 5kg

This gives a baby's DDT dose to be $0.03 \times 1.5 \times 20 / 5 = 0.18$ (mg/kg)/day

...which is about 1.5% of TD50 for mice

Assuming linearity that's a 0.75% chance of cancer due to DDT over lifetime.

Assume 1 billion Africans live in malarial areas

Assume life expectancy = 35 years

$0.75\% \times 1 \text{ billion} / 35$ gives 220,000 annual cancer cases due to DDT. Note that this is completely hypothetical. I don't think epidemiologists have ever recorded significant rises in cancer due to DDT spraying.

In reality, approx 900,000 Africans *die every year* of malaria.

So even if all the hypothetical cancer cases proved fatal, this rough & ready calculation shows that, deathwise, Africa would be 4 times better off with DDT.

A shortfall is that DDT might cause other problems. e.g. liver disease, hormonal disruption or poor quality of life. Just don't know. However, non-fatal cases of malaria are known to be pretty **unpleasant**.

The calc was conservative, cos, amongst other stuff:

-poisons are often non-toxic at low doses

-we don't drink breast milk all our lives
-neither do many of us weigh only 5kg
-we aren't rodents, and the other mammals tested were better off than mice
-it's probable that other preventative measures/cures will be found before current babies reach middle age, whereas it's certain that people are dying of malaria *right now*

by **Tom Robinson** on Thu, 03/11/2004 - 18:23 | [reply](#)

Tom Robinson

I can follow that extrapolation as stated. DDT has little to do with cancer. Little or no evidence of that. Malaria is a horrible disease. DDT is effective when used properly. Africa does have DDT and it has an appropriate use. We agree on all that.

DDT should never be used indiscriminately. Insect populations develop resistance over time. Watch runoff into streams and lakes since DDT breakdown is slow and has particular documented toxicities as widely noted. Mix and apply carefully. Use proper precautions. We agree on all that.

You've weighed the knowledge about this pesticide and you in particular have a healthy respect for it. So have I, and so do I. That is why we each posted. Fine.

by a reader on Fri, 03/12/2004 - 02:44 | [reply](#)

Malaria Action

The Gates article is worth reading too:
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/3127040.stm>

by a reader on Fri, 03/12/2004 - 16:02 | [reply](#)

Tom Robinson

I don't get it. Is DDT in widespread use in tropical Africa or isn't it? If it isn't it should be: 1 million annual known *human* deaths trump other unknowable environmental consequences. Resistance argues for heavy DDT use for a decade or so in my (underinformed) mind. Piecemeal use would tend to encourage more resistance by differentially killing off weaker strains of midges.

All animal and plant bodies are made of chemicals. What does it matter if a particular chemical accumulates, what matters is whether it causes harm. The human misery and poverty caused by religious-style conceptions of purity and contamination seem more likely to have a nasty impact on wildlife conservation.

by **Tom Robinson** on Sat, 03/13/2004 - 09:08 | [reply](#)

Africa

That is my understanding of it too. The general problem with Africa

is that is thought of as a vast third world country that needs to be treated like poor neighbor or ignored. Not many people are thinking about the problems of African countries and peoples. Who is interested in Africa ? Malaria is only one of the problems and it affects millions but it is not an impossible task to wipe it out. It could be done in less than 5 years with a concerted effort. Polluted wells and parasites are not an impossible problem to address, likewise. Hunger and starvation are not insurmountable. Aids and other diseases can be addressed. These are not unfathomable problems beyond the scope of money, science and intelligence.

It is the thinking of people inside and outside of the continent that is the problem, and it is religious style conceptions of purity and contamination, a conception of human worth that is the problem, regarding DDT, malaria, and also unclean water, hunger and all of the above.

by a reader on Sat, 03/13/2004 - 15:25 | [reply](#)

Africa and Malaria

I have been more than 7 times in Niger, Benin and Central-African republic.

I observed that people don't care about protecting themselves against the risk of acquiring malaria.

For me they prepared a bed with a mosquitonet, but due to the heat, whole families, including small children were sleeping outside.

In the evening, at the moment of highest mosquito activity, small children run around without any clothes.

What I want to say: Protecting has to start with education of the people and learn them to minimize risks.

At the same time governments must treat watersurfaces with chemicals.

I was once in the north of Benin living close to a small river. I did not encounter one single mosquito!

people told me that sometimes an helicopter flies along that river and sprays insecticides.

This underlines the need of chemicals as part of the solution.

by Jerome van Dijk on Fri, 03/18/2005 - 18:33 | [reply](#)

DDT is not banned

The resurgent claims about millions and millions of lives lost due to a nonexistent ban on DDT is one of the oldest antienvironmental claims. It has developed a life of its own.

I doubt that the editors of this page has actually read "The silent spring", and it is obvious that they have not checked any of the claims about harmful effects of DDT with scientific literature.

First of all: Rachel Carson's "The silent spring" did NOT advocate a universal ban on DDT use - the book explicitly distinguished between

agricultural use (which Carson did want banned) and in disease

control (which she argued should continue).

The book made claims about DDT causing thinning of bird's eggshells as well as being carcinogenic in humans. The second claim has never been convincingly validated, at least not in realistic doses. But the link between DDT and declines in raptor populations all over the industrialised world in the years 1950-1950 has overwhelming support! Apparently, DDT does little harm to smaller birds low in the food chain (like in the quails and songbirds studies), but since it accumulates upwards it does affect birds like raptors, owls or herons severely. This is confirmed by almost all major studies in the last 40 years.

Read the book!

And DDT is still not banned, neither formally nor de facto. It is still used in many countries in the world where it is still effective - but only against disease-carrying insects. The US ban of 1972 only covered the agricultural use, and it had absolutely no force of law outside the US.

And DDT could by no means eradicate malaria - there is a very big problem: the rapidly evolving resistance by the mosquitos. This is the main reason for the cease in the use of DDT in many poor countries. You could start spraying with DDT all over the tropics, but you would most likely only achieve making DDT useless in the antimalarial fight for a long time into the future. You can argue this as much as you want, but there is absolutely no factual support whatsoever to these claims.

The main advantage of DDT is that it is cheap - therefore, every environmental organisation that I have ever heard arguing for a phaseout in the use of DDT has also argued that another antimalarial drug should be provided without costs to the poor africans or latin americans.

You should check some sources to these often heard allegations. I guess that www.junkscience.com is a major source - try <http://johnquiggin.com/index.php?p=1902> - or - <http://timlambert.org/2005/06/ddt10/> - or - <http://info-pollution.com/ddtban.htm>

Please check these sources and point out to me exactly where they are wrong.

Christoffer Harder

by Christoffer Bugge Harder on Sun, 05/28/2006 - 10:45 | [reply](#)

Curious

Are there studies of DDT used solely as an insecticide in endemic malarial regions that document its harm to non-pregnant, non-breastfeeding humans?

Has Tom Robinson accurately summarized the extent of hypothesized damage to humans by DDT?

by A Reader on Sun, 05/28/2006 - 23:38 | [reply](#)

Hysterics

"Some Africans are now beginning to question the wisdom of the environmentalist crusade (or jihad) against DDT"

This idiotic statement, including in particular the hysterical term 'jihad', is exactly the same sort of thing you are accusing other people of (you know: calling something 'terrorism' when it is not; indulging in dumb conspiracy theories - that sort of thing). Hypocrisy par excellence.

by **Yoni** on Mon, 09/11/2006 - 19:29 | [reply](#)

Sources

"Please check these sources and point out to me exactly where they are wrong"

Christoffer,
Hysterical people do not want to be bothered with facts.

by **Yoni** on Mon, 09/11/2006 - 19:30 | [reply](#)

An Egyptian Undertaking

The Egyptian government has **agreed** to secure its side of the Egypt-Gaza border after the Israelis leave under Prime Minister Sharon's unilateral disengagement plan.

"We agreed on several steps to ensure the border from our side and to make sure that there is no weapon smuggling. I hope there will be no violation," Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak told Israeli reporters

He *hopes*? What seems to have escaped the attention of the entire fawning press corps is that this constitutes a public admission, at long last, that Egypt has been flagrantly violating the terms of its peace treaty with Israel in 1979:

[Article 2]: Each Party undertakes to ensure that acts or threats of belligerency, hostility, or violence do not originate from and are not committed from within its territory [...] against the population, citizens or property of the other Party [...] and undertakes to ensure that perpetrators of such acts are brought to justice.

By permitting terrorists to smuggle weapons at will across its border for a quarter of a century, in violation of the promises for which it has been lavishly rewarded, the Egyptian government has been complicit in the hundreds of murders committed with those weapons.

Fri, 03/12/2004 - 03:42 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Two Kinds Of Spaniard

Today, when they cast their votes at the Spanish General Election, the voters are reportedly split on what lesson to draw from the fact that Al Qaeda has now committed mass murder on Spanish soil. Will their reaction be:

- 'He was right: global terrorism *is* a serious danger that we must fight'; or
- 'If we hadn't fought them, they would not have attacked us.'

Which is true? Well, both of them have been stated in a way that disguises a moral judgement as a pragmatic one. For in fact, to those who are in moral agreement with the terrorists' objective, global terrorism is *not* a serious danger but only a tiny additional risk in their lives, a price well worth paying to create a world worth living in. And to those who value a way of life that is incompatible with the world that the terrorists are trying to create, it is simply false that 'they would not have attacked us', for they already have attacked us, many times.

So the Spanish voters *do* have to choose which way to jump on this issue. But it's not a question of whether the recent attack tends to vindicate or refute Prime Minister Aznar's pro-Coalition stance in the war. It is whether they believe that our society is better than the one the terrorists are fighting for, or not.

Update: "...we seem to be very near the bleak choice between War and Shame. My feeling is that we shall choose Shame, and then have War thrown in a little later, on even more adverse terms than at present" – Winston Churchill in 1938. He was right on all counts, and that was Britain's moment of greatest shame. Today the Spanish people were given the choice between war and shame. They too chose shame. They too will get war. This is the most disgraceful moment for the Spanish nation since **1936** – or perhaps **1492**.

Sun, 03/14/2004 - 13:15 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Or their reaction may be:

Ansar has been wasting Spain's resources chasing a mirage in Iraq while leaving our home vulnerable.

by a reader on Sun, 03/14/2004 - 16:39 | [reply](#)

Or:

"If we had continued to attack al-Qaeda with our full military might, and not got side-tracked by paper tigers like Iraq, they would not have attacked us".

by a reader on Mon, 03/15/2004 - 03:32 | [reply](#)

interesting

Hypothesis: most supporters of tackling terrorism rather than appeasement would generally vote for whatever the smaller-taxation, less-interventionist party on offer is.

In Spain, and in the US, this means that the anti-war people probably wouldn't have been natural supporters of the party in government anyway. I wonder how much the "ETA is prime suspect" bit damaged the Spanish government, rather than their pro-coalition stance?

The really interesting thing is going to be watching what happens in the next UK general election, where a high-intervention, high-tax party went to war... maybe the (non)-liberal democrats will pick up all the anti-war votes? (polls aren't suggesting it at the moment)

Emma

by a reader on Mon, 03/15/2004 - 11:28 | [reply](#)

Will Tony Blair be a casualty of Spanish silliness?

Emma - Yes, you are right: It will be interesting watching what happens during the UK election. IMHO, the Spain election result will have panicked the British Labour party, most of whom did not support the war, and they will see Tony Blair as a liability to be got rid off before the election.

by a reader on Mon, 03/15/2004 - 23:39 | [reply](#)

Terror works

I'm going to say something about the Spanish situation, but before I do let me first tell you about another story which I believe has relevance for what's going on here. Today I was dismayed at reading in a Dutch newspaper the comment of a politician on the recent murder of an Islamic woman in Holland by her husband. Apparently in many Muslim countries it is seen as the perfect right of husband to kill his wife if she doesn't obey him, and he'll even get support from the woman's own family. Death threats are seen more and more in Holland within Muslim families. Anyway, this was the suggestion of the politician: "Government should help women receiving death threats from their husband get a new identity or move to a foreign country." This, it seems to me, is the epitome of the culture of appeasement. Surely, if women are being threatened

or killed, then the appropriate action is to go after the perpetrator and punish him so severely so as to discourage any would-be criminals to commit such crimes in future. But in the upside down world we apparently live in it's not the criminal who is to be dealt with in the case of crime, but it's the victim who should yield. This politician is proposing that we punish victimized women by banning them from their community, thus achieving the criminal's objective that there be a strong disincentive for women disobeying their men.

And so there we have it. As this example shows, terror works in our weasel society. And creating a system in which terror works creates more terror. For you get whatever you reward. And so it is for Spain. Those who would have us believe that going to fight off the oppressors in Iraq promotes terrorism got it backwards. It may be the case that Muslims would wish to seek revenge for Spain's participation in the fighting, though it's ironic that the Muslims will in fact do **better** with Saddam gone rather than worse, so you'd have to question the logic of the revenge theory. But that aside, being involved in a situation where the other party may commit revenge is not the same as **promoting** terrorism. Promoting terrorism would have to mean **rewarding** terrorism. And who is it who is rewarding terrorism? Aznar's party who sent troops to Iraq? No, that would count more as the opposite of a reward for terrorism. The ones who are rewarding terrorism are the voters who changed their vote from the ruling party to the socialists in response to the terrorist attack in Madrid. Those voters are the ones who are making it so that terrorism works. Terrorists commit a terrible terrorist act, and within a week they are rewarded by voters putting a party in charge that will obey the directives of the terrorists 100% by getting the troops out of Iraq.

These voters have done the whole of Europe a tremendous disservice. With this level of success for the terrorists, surely they will be inspired to act again. Who will be next? Holland? England? Well, I hope not, but it is a real possibility. Certainly they will be better targets than the US. Because if the US is attacked again, they are likely to get angry again. But if European countries are attacked they are likely to submit to the terrorist demands. And so it's the weasel mentality which promotes terrorism and not the hawk mentality.

Having said all this, I do also think that the voting result is partly Aznar's own fault. People rightly were angry that he continued to shift blame of the attacks on the ETA, even while evidence for an Arab attack was piling in. In fact, many of us correctly put the blame on Muslims as soon as the attack happened. But still I don't think this was the overriding reason for the voters to vote the way they voted. And I think without Aznar's foul play the same would have happened. They voted the way they did because they suffer from a dangerous case of blame-the-victim mentality. Shame on them.

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Tue, 03/16/2004 - 11:18 | [reply](#)

People with no emotions don't

People with no emotions don't get it.

by a reader on Wed, 03/17/2004 - 02:06 | [reply](#)

Not a terrorist victory!

Henry Sturman - Good posting, but I can see some holes in your argument. Let's look at this:

"The ones who are rewarding terrorism are the voters who changed their vote from the ruling party to the socialists in response to the terrorist attack in Madrid. Those voters are the ones who are making it so that terrorism works."

Undoubtedly, some voters did change their vote from the ruling party to the Socialists in response to the attack. But the attack also provoked a substantially larger turnout than the previous election. So it is quite possible that the election was determined by Socialists who would not otherwise have placed a vote. So I ask you: Is it a victory for the terrorists to get more voters into the booths? I think not.

"Terrorists commit a terrible terrorist act, and within a week they are rewarded by voters putting a party in charge that will obey the directives of the terrorists 100% by getting the troops out of Iraq."

But they won't be withdrawn until the handover in June and maybe not even then. So what's the problem - we should hope that Iraq can stand on its own feet by then. Could you point out some other examples of how the new government is engaging in appeasement? I think there is a danger in writing off the election result as a victory for the terrorists. For that truly is to encourage them.

by a reader on Wed, 03/17/2004 - 21:01 | [reply](#)

Terrorist victory

So it is quite possible that the election was determined by Socialists who would not otherwise have placed a vote. So I ask you: Is it a victory for the terrorists to get more voters into the booths?

Yes.

But they won't be withdrawn until the handover in June and maybe not even then. So what's the problem - we should hope that Iraq can stand on its own feet by then.

No it can't. But that's not the point. The point is that Spanish voters have given in to terrorist demands.

Could you point out some other examples of how the new government is engaging in appeasement?

Isn't this enough? Come to think of it, I think the new socialist

government should retract its campaign promise to withdraw the troops, on the argument that things have changed because of the bombing, and so they are no longer bound by that promise, and they refuse to be part of a terrorist plot to control Spanish policy. In other words, the honorable thing for the socialists to do is to keep the policy in place that would have occurred had the bombing not taken place, even if they don't in fact agree with that policy.

I think there is a danger in writing off the election result as a victory for the terrorists. For that truly is to encourage them.

The damage has already been done. Denying what happened won't change that. The terrorists know they were successful, even if we were to deny it. We must explain to the voters who changed their mind in the election (either by voting for someone else or by voting while they had planned not to vote) how bad that is, in order to help prevent such things from happening again.

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Thu, 03/18/2004 - 10:21 | [reply](#)

Not a terrorist victory!

Henry -

You are making certain assumptions about the motivations of the bombers. The election took place three days after the bombing. It was not clear at this stage who carried out the bombing let alone what their motivations were. We now know that al Qaeda were involved but there is still no clear evidence that they intended for a Socialist government to come to power. An argument can be made that in fact they wanted to cement in a victory for the ruling party. For example, see [this](#). Given the uncertainty, the rational thing for the Spanish people to do was to vote for the party they intended to vote for anyway (as you acknowledge). I suspect that most in fact did, given the opposition to the Iraq war that was already prevalent in Spain and given that larger turnouts have tended to favour the socialists. That more people turned out to vote is not a victory for the terrorists but a victory for democracy (and it is so, even if we hate socialism). Until we know more about what the bombers intended we cannot say that they won. I am not denying what happened. Sure the terrorists may think they were successful. But it doesn't help when we agree with them, especially when the evidence is not in and most especially when it may be the case that they didn't win. I agree that we need to make clear to people the dangers in changing your vote in response to terrorism but we cannot tell those who would not otherwise have voted to stay away from the polls. That is silliness.

Danny

by a reader on Thu, 03/18/2004 - 22:33 | [reply](#)

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1976 – The Best Year Ever?

It takes a special kind of blindness to believe that science can define the 'happiness level' of even a single person as a single, objectively measurable number. An even more dangerous delusion is that this can be done for society as a whole. This level of delusion typically results from years of specialist training in how to pretend that a bureaucrat with no knowledge or skills (that anyone would actually pay for if they had the choice) is nevertheless capable of running the world and making people happy by fiddling with numbers.

Capitalists look on the market as being a set of conditions under which which people can try ideas to see whether they sink or swim. Leftists, when they notice the market at all, judge it according to whether the values they happen to like are doing well.

So if you see a **story** about an economic think tank called the **New Economics Foundation** saying that 1976 was the **best year ever**, you know what to expect.

What did they actually do to reach this startling conclusion? They added up a bunch of arbitrary numbers, called it the Measure of Domestic Progress (MDP) and declared that it measures well-being. Since the MDP peaks in 1976, they say that it was the best year ever.

Of course, no piece of leftist nonsense is complete without some pat, fatuous pseudomoralising:

Too much food makes the nation obese.

No, it doesn't. Food consists of physical objects and objects that do not control people cannot explain behaviour. People who are obese have made choices that lead to them becoming fat, such as eating a lot or not exercising much.

More guns make our streets unsafe.

Again, the physical object fallacy. Also, this is **wrong** both morally and factually.

Endless choice leaves us hurried and harried.

All this choice may fluster some easily-confused leftist bureaucrats

who are only accustomed to choices involving paper and staples, but the rest of us are just fine.

Burning too much carbon threatens our climate.

No. And finally, the words we've been waiting to read:

Excessive commercialism erodes social value and strips our lives of meaning.

Leftists insulting people for wanting to have nice things to buy – they're so predictable.

However, in that very predictability lie the seeds of hope. Leftists do not understand why they are comically mistaken, about the greatness of 1976, the meaning of life, and everything else. But many people today, such as **The World**, understand what is wrong with that kind of nonsense and can argue against it.

When they've stopped laughing.

Wed, 03/17/2004 - 20:57 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Overindulgence Starts at Home

1976 was a very good calendar year. It has been all downhill from there. Don't blame the world. In the words of Pogo, we met the enemy and it was us.

How to improve the comedy? Rethink the excuses above.
Possible rewordings and slogans to go along with the reality:

Too much food - eaten by one person - makes the person overly full.
(Stop personal overindulgence !)

More guns - shot at people on the street - make a street unsafer.
(Don't be crazy with a gun !)

Endless choice - unmade - leaves one hurried and harried.
(Make choices, please !)

Burning too much carbon - without oxygen - threatens one's breathing.
(Stop smoking cigarettes, you idiot!)

Excessive commercialism erodes social value and strips our lives of meaning.
(Stop complaining, don't buy the useless stuff !)

by a reader on Thu, 03/18/2004 - 19:54 | [reply](#)

ho ho

It's already been garbled.

A complete stranger told me yesterday, absolutely seriously, that

1966 had been identified as the best year ever.

"Ah" I said, nodding sagely. "Of course, that was in the days before normal people could afford dishwashers"

Emma

<http://rationalparents.blogspot.com/>

by a reader on Fri, 03/19/2004 - 09:58 | [reply](#)

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Conspiracy Theories – 4: Collectivism

[For the first three instalments of this series, see [here](#).]

Have you heard the one about light bulbs? The secret of everlasting light bulbs has been known for decades but is being **suppressed** by the manufacturers of electrical goods because they would be ruined if people did not continually have to buy new bulbs. But how do they enforce this policy among themselves, and how do they prevent researchers (including their own, who are presumably dupes wasting their lives tinkering with an obsolete technology) from rediscovering the principle?

Now give the story a more sinister turn. The myth relies on conspiracy. Even if an individual firm would seize avidly the opportunity created by the everlasting light bulb, the manufacturers would establish a cartel to see that our inventor was assassinated or otherwise removed from the scene.

This urban myth is one of a **class** of conspiracy theories about evil capitalists. They are widely believed. And yet the people who believe them – and make real-life decisions on the assumption that they are true – nevertheless fail to wonder about even the most elementary implications of their own theory. For instance, how does the conspiracy get transmitted to the next generation? There must come a point at which a conspirator's child, or a talented young executive about to be promoted from Dupe to Conspirator, is taken aside and told the dirty secret: "until now you have believed that we make our living by making a positive contribution to society, but in fact we are secretly parasites and murderers". What happens to those who are appalled by the revelation and want nothing to do with the conspiracy? Can all light bulb manufacturers be relied upon to murder their own children if they suspect they may be about to flirt with environmentalism, or with integrity? What happens to manufacturers who are going bankrupt anyway and so have nothing more to gain from the conspiracy, but could be saved by capitalising on the secret? If the conspiracy theory is true, we cannot directly observe how the conspirators deal with such dramatic problems, but we do know that they must be doing so: the logic of the situation dictates that a long-lasting conspiracy must include some method of converting dupes to conspirators. And this method must be extremely reliable despite the fact that it involves people suddenly and radically altering the moral values on which they base their

lives.

But the believers in such theories just don't care. **We have remarked** that one characteristic of conspiracy theories is that their holders apply them very selectively to explain away some aspects of the world that they do not like. They are uninterested in any wider consequences that their theory would have if it were true. In other words, they fail to take their own theory seriously as an account of what is happening in the world.

It is therefore no accident that conspiracy-theoretic ways of thinking are always associated with collectivist fantasies of one sort or another. For Marxists, the 'ruling class' has many of the attributes of a *person* – a devious, dangerous person capable of having inherent 'interests' and secret motives and taking coherent actions to further them. Likewise, Nazis and other antisemites conceive of The Jews (or often, tellingly, 'The Jew') as being such an entity, while for many Libertarians The State plays this role. If the conspiracy theorists can manage to think entirely in terms of this monstrous Person and its evil agenda, then they never have to think about the issues which make all conspiracy theories ludicrously flawed when taken seriously – issues such as how the conspirators are supposed to communicate, agree upon their evil plans, deal with dissenters, launder the funds needed to pay the assassins, groom a new generation to take over in due course, fool and control the dupes, distribute the spoils and so on, all while plausibly pretending that all their overt actions have some entirely different purpose.

Some ideologies have become notorious for the conspiracy theories that they contain. So when we find people who earnestly believe the light bulb myth, we may well enquire whether they are (say) socialists, and if so, we may guess that this explains their gullibility in regard to the economics of electrical technology. Given our analysis here, though, it is possible that the true explanation goes in the other direction. It may be that people are attracted to collectivist ideologies (including **Libertarian versions of statism**) because they want to believe a conspiracy theory and because the collectivist ideology allows them to disregard its flaws, rather than vice versa.

Part 5

Sat, 03/20/2004 - 18:32 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Why do they bother?

issues such as how the conspirators are supposed to communicate, agree upon their evil plans, deal with dissenters, launder the funds needed to pay the assassins, groom a new generation to take over in due course, fool and control the dupes, distribute the spoils and so on, all while plausibly pretending that all their overt actions have some entirely different purpose

And they have to work full time on their ostensible jobs too. And

those researchers: they have to pay them anyway, so they could be paying them to do real profitable research instead! Why don't they? The whole thing's crazy.

by a reader on Mon, 03/22/2004 - 04:50 | [reply](#)

Conspirators

I have come to the conclusion, um theory, that most and maybe all conspiracy theories depend on the 'juicy gossip' syndrome, just bigger and more full of lies. Conspiracy theories are patently nonsense and otherwise they would have no life. Most of the people, conspirators, that pass them on are not convinced of their truth themselves, but pass them on because they would like to believe them, or some choice portion of them. Or, they would just like to stir up some trouble and controversy. Or, they have nothing better to do and no one would talk to them without their conspiracy gossip.

Conspiracy theories are tall tales that are told on the basis that you can trust no one, which itself is untrue. Make up a wild alternate scenario to what actually happened. Talk trash and nonsense in a conspiratorial tone. Psst, pass it on, because the conspirator has nothing better to do. Be untrustworthy or gullible or both, but blame it on the wild conspiracy rumor. Otherwise the person and their willing confidants might have to stick with truth.

Conspiracy theories would quickly fade away if it were not for the conspirators who perpetuate them.

by a reader on Tue, 03/23/2004 - 23:32 | [reply](#)

Conspiracy Theories Are Elementary School BS - Tabloids Paradise

It is elementary... Conspiracy Theories are just a quick way to make people question a particular person or party. If someone wants to find fault with a particular person or party to turn others against them, they think of ways they are trying to harm everyone... That is how most gossip starts in high school, elementary school, work places etc.... Democrats want to find fault with the Republicans... It is that simple.. But think about it, if Clinton had been elected, I am sure we, Republicans could somehow blame Clinton for the 911 attacks... perhaps linked to Monica Lewinsky too! Perhaps Hilary and Monica were having an affair and had to cover it up... Believe me.. If we tried hard enough.. we COULD link them somehow.. It is all Tabloid BS to me..

by gadarInbabe on Sat, 08/20/2005 - 22:53 | [reply](#)

every corporation is a conspi

every corporation is a conspiracy.

every rock band is a conspiracy.

every plot to bomb a building is a conspiracy.

people working together - that's all a conspiracy is. nobody knows anything about anything anyone is doing; therefore every group's operations are to a large degree secret. most public operations of groups are uninteresting to others anyway. therefore either every group is a conspiracy or conspiracy is a meaningless term.

the author of this site is tilting at windmills. there is no such thing as a "conspiracy theorist". people are exposed to different information and draw different conclusions based on that information and their own biases. the only thing protecting us is our ability to assess the quality of the information we take in and our ability to suppress or eliminate our biases. better information inevitably precedes better conclusions about the true nature of things. there is better information to be had about 9-11 than what most have read. those who have read it and have incorporated it into their knowledge framework will see that all roads of inquiry lead to a small nest of neocons who obviously engineered 9-11 and the iraq/afghanistan mess. we who know this are not "conspiracy theorists"!

i am sussing that the implicit message of this website is: "if you think Bush was behind 9-11, you're a CONSPIRACY THEORIST and here's what's wrong with you." If the author were describing inane arguments against evolution, perhaps I would have understood. but I myself have done research on 9-11 and know what I know to be corroborated by FACTS, some of which I have observed firsthand ^(a) ground zero or through logical fallacies i discovered in the media myself.

Let me break it down for you:

BUSH AND HIS TEAM WERE BEHIND 9-11.
BELIEVING THAT DOES NOT MAKE ME CRAZY.

have you considered that by your definition of "conspiracy theorists" it's the mainstream media that are the REAL conspiracy theorists by pointing the finger at bin Laden and his supposed "gang of 19" without a shred of evidence?

-j

by the definition on Sat, 12/03/2005 - 17:58 | [reply](#)

a hoax?

Why did bin Laden admit it?

by a reader on Sat, 01/21/2006 - 00:54 | [reply](#)

You don't have to be crazy but it helps

"BUSH AND HIS TEAM WERE BEHIND 9-11.
BELIEVING THAT DOES NOT MAKE ME CRAZY"
erm, Yes it does. OK maybe not crazy but certainly deluded or

stupid.

The insanity of people who believe in 9/11 conspiracy theory is incredible to behold. The way they can hold mutually incompatible theories in their heads at the same time is truly impressive. I visited a couple of sites and in less than ten minutes of looking managed to find these two examples of "evidence" on the same sight.

1 The planes that crashed into the twin towers were "remote controlled" from a secret command centre operated by Dick Cheney.

OK you may say that in itself is nuts. Put aside the calls from those onboard or indeed what truly happened to all the passengers because this same site goes on to claim

2 The FBI failed to investigate Mohammed Atta because they were instructed not to by lawyers acting for the administration.

To all 9/11 conspiracy theorists out there, please think this through and please be consistent. Either there were hijackers out there being protected by the evil lawyers and they crashed the plane OR the planes were remote controlled by Cheney and the passengers killed off separately after making their last calls. You cannot have both!

by RK on Thu, 06/29/2006 - 13:20 | [reply](#)

9/11 denial

9-11 Conspiracy Websites are apt to point out that never in world history has a plane brought down a building by airplanes but go on to state that the World Trade center buildings were brought down by a controlled demolition using thermite. So when in world history has thermite ever been used in a controlled demolition? It could probably be done, but the fact that it hasn't happened before is completely irrelevant to a reasonable discussion. The tin foil hat brigade themselves don't take their theories seriously. So no plane hit the Pentagon you say? How did the 5 light posts and generator get moved? Oh they were planted. What about the DNA tests, oh, I see, the FBI, CIA, FAA, NTSB, Military, pentagon employees, fire department, coroner, FEMA, police, NSA, they are all in on it too? What happened to the original plane? Were the passengers killed or are they coconspirators? Wouldn't the coconspirators be worried about eye witnesses to the missile attack and workers at the pentagon, or FAA inspectors that weren't in on the plot leaking what they actually saw? Wouldn't it have been easier just to use a remote controlled plane like they did with the World Trade center towers? Popular Science magazine disagrees with the theories, that's because they are yellow journalists as a front for the CIA. The Structural Engineering Institute of the American Society of Civil Engineers disputes your claims? That's because they are in on it too! So is the Society of Fire Protection Engineers, the National Fire Protection Association, The American Institute of Steel Construction, the Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat, the Structural Engineers Association of New York. Not a single structural engineer

in the United States believe the world trade centers believe the world trade center was brought down by controlled demolition but you know the truth, you've done your research on the web. Boy ain't you smart! How far down the rabbit hole do you want to go, if you believe your own theory, consider the implications. Are the passengers still alive as well as the so called hijackers? How do "they" keep them quiet? It's absurd.

by random on Sat, 09/23/2006 - 04:03 | [reply](#)

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Wed, 03/24/2004 - 19:36 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

Trading While Rich - arguments?

While admitting that imposing a half-billion fine for integrating a media player into Windows does sound a little overkill (provided I know neither the details of this trial case nor the actual multimedia companies profits involved) I nonetheless don't understand your arguments. In particular, "Trading While Rich" sounds cynical to me. There is no need to remind me that *stronger people are always righter*. In return, I ought to tell you n-th time that freedom of establishing a monopoly has nothing to do with the economical freedom and economical prosperity. If americans are so strong (and, therefore, morally right) what happened to them when it was brought to their attention that that are not free to buy a PC without Windows on it anymore? Sorry for the such a violent argument.

The bottom line is that Microsoft uses creativity to produce products which people freely buy...

by a reader on Fri, 03/26/2004 - 09:52 | [reply](#)

Trade and freedom

Indeed, we most go after wicked companies that force us to buy things we don't want by integrating different parts into one product. Just as it is wrong to sell a PC with Windows, or Windows with a media player, it is wrong to sell cars with wheels and tires and an engine and houses with windows and doors and floors. All integrated products should be forbidden and it should only be allowed to sell the smallest parts, like screws, tires, bricks and buttons. And we should put anyone into jail who would offer the service of putting those parts together. That's what freedom is about.

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Fri, 03/26/2004 - 10:01 | [reply](#)

owned!

applause for henry

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 03/26/2004 - 10:48 | [reply](#)

A better alternative to government imposed sanctions

Microsoft strategies for lovers of freedom and justice

by a reader on Fri, 03/26/2004 - 17:30 | [reply](#)

Freedom and Justice?

That all of those non-MS alternatives exist is proof that Microsoft is not inhibiting freedom. And, I haven't heard a persuasive argument that Microsoft has done anything unjust.

Anyone, who wants to, can try to compete with Microsoft. But, people who want governments to intervene with voluntary trade to help assure the success of Microsoft's competitors are supporting something very different from freedom and justice.

Gil

by **Gil** on Fri, 03/26/2004 - 18:59 | [reply](#)

Freedom

That all of those non-MS alternatives exist is proof that Microsoft is not inhibiting freedom.

No it doesn't. I can create a much longer list of non-MS alternatives that no longer exist at all. Does just the mere existence of this other list provide proof that Microsoft is inhibiting freedom? Neither list provides "proof" either way.

And, I haven't heard a persuasive argument that Microsoft has done

anything unjust.

Read Judge Jackson's **Findings of Fact**. The interesting part starts at the bottom of page 40 in the section "Microsoft's response to the browser threat".

This is not a company competing in the market by providing it's customer with better choices (i.e. more freedom). This is a company that competes by inhibiting its customers choices to its products. Microsoft is the master at inhibiting our freedom to ensure that their products remain the only choice.

But even if you remove Microsoft's business practices, their products still inhibit your freedom. You do not have the freedom to make a copy of their software and give it to someone else. Nor do you have the freedom to modify, enhance, or just fix out right bugs in their programs. This is not a moral criticism of Microsoft, they are entirely within their rights to put whatever restrictions they want on the terms of the purchase of their products. It is merely a statement of fact of the way that proprietary software in general inhibits your freedom.

Note that none of those non-MS alternatives inhibit your freedom in this way.

by a reader on Fri, 03/26/2004 - 20:15 | [reply](#)

Freedom and Justice

Competing vigorously (but not fraudulently) and exploiting competitive advantages and enforcing property rights is not inhibiting freedom or violating justice. Freedom and justice don't entail having your dreams come true regardless of the facts of reality.

It sounds like your problems are with property rights, not Microsoft.

I started to look at the findings of fact (from the man thrown off the case for unethical behavior and clear anti-MS prejudice), but I didn't see anything new or unjust. Can you tell me what specific action that Microsoft did what was unjust? I don't mean something that was tough or an aggressive business practice, but a violation of other people's rights.

Gil

by **Gil** on Fri, 03/26/2004 - 21:56 | [reply](#)

Back to freedom.

I am willing to accept that whether or not Microsoft's business practices can be interpreted as unjust versus very aggressive is very debatable. I do see both sides of the issues. IMO, the behavior in this recent The New York Times article is unethical, unjust, and immoral (sorry, free subscription required):

Newly Released Documents Shed Light on Microsoft Tactics

I do not have any problems with property rights. I already stated, "This is not a moral criticism of Microsoft, they are entirely within their rights to put whatever restrictions they want on the terms of the purchase of their products." I agree that they have such rights.

What I said is that the rights Microsoft asserts with regards to its products (which in this case is actually deals with copyrights, not property rights), does place a limit on our freedom of what we can do with that product. This is completely independent of Microsoft's business practices, they could be the perfect corporate example of proper behavior, yet such actions still result in the same restriction of our freedoms.

Let me repeat. Microsoft is entirely within their rights for imposing such restrictions, just as I am from restricting complete strangers from trespassing on my property. But let's be clear, both scenarios are in fact inhibiting the freedom of others, both scenarios are less than a completely non-coercive situation.

The freedom being referred to in the title of the original article I linked to is *this* freedom. Our freedom to do what we want with the software on our computers. The products referenced in that article give you this freedom, whereas Microsoft's products restrict this freedom.

by a reader on Fri, 03/26/2004 - 23:23 | [reply](#)

subject lines now have a max length that's pretty short

a reader is right that just as a list of failed companies wouldn't prove microsoft evil, a list of active ones does not prove it innocent.

on the other hand, i read the entire section about microsoft and the browser threat. the gist of it is microsoft didn't give certain technical specs to netscape, and offered some deals that would suck for netscape. as to the deals, so what? now, in a better society, any company trying to sell an OS but hiding tech specs from developers they don't like, wouldn't sell many copies once that got announced on the news. but microsoft is not to blame that our society is sufficiently bad to buy windows anyway. they figured out how much shit most people wouldn't mind. somewhat immoral, but *shrug* perfectly legal, perfectly just, as it should be.

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 03/26/2004 - 23:49 | [reply](#)

Definitions

If Microsoft did violate confidentiality agreements then I agree that's immoral. I know that this has been alleged many times, and perhaps it has happened, but I know that Microsoft officially

strongly discourages such activity and will fire employees who are

found guilty of such actions.

Aside from that, you (Reader) seem to be using the expression "inhibiting freedom and justice" to mean that they do things that you don't think are in your (or others') best interest, or that don't allow you (or others) to do whatever you want with Microsoft's products. This usage is very different from mine.

Physics and morality place limits on your actions. Calling this inhibiting your freedom seems strange to me, and calling it unjust seems even worse.

Why not just say you don't like some of the things that Microsoft does?

Microsoft's behavior is not up to you, and I suspect that this is a very good thing for the world. Microsoft has a tremendous record of success and productivity that greatly surpasses that of its competitors and critics who offer it unsolicited advice.

Microsoft's aggressive practices may not make us happy, but I think we agree that they tend to be within their rights. What's clear to me is that the EU's actions (and the US DOJ's before it) are unjust and immoral. I think **The World** is right to recognize and condemn these actions.

Likewise, I think it's perfectly within your rights to avoid Microsoft's products; but wrong to imply that they are acting immorally by invoking "freedom and justice". I also happen to think that you're making a mistake to encourage others to follow your lead, if you think that the tech industry (and everyone it affects) would be better off if Microsoft were made to fail. I think it would be much worse off.

Gil

by **Gil** on Sat, 03/27/2004 - 09:55 | [reply](#)

EU's Microsoft Inquisition

The EU's Inquisition of Microsoft is so ridiculous that it baffles the mind. The EU's ruling, once you take away the legal jargon, basically says that Microsoft is responsible for producing too good of a product, and that other companies that don't produce products that are as good as Microsoft's are being unfairly discriminated against because these other company's products aren't good enough to be sought after by users/consumers.

Ask yourself this question. Why do the computer companies include Microsoft with the purchase of their PCs? I'll tell you why, because their PCs wouldn't sell if they didn't include Microsoft's Windows. It's a very simple fact of supply and demand, and no sane PC manufacturer is going to SUPPLY PC's that only offer Linux as the OS because there is no DEMAND for PC's that only offer Linux as their OS. Granted, there are quite a few Linux users, but they comprise less than 1% of new PC buyers (probably because these users are usually computer geeks who prefer to make their own PCs

from parts they buy at discount suppliers such as Price Watch...like me!).

Once again, the EU's whining about something because their countries' companies can't come up with anything to rival Microsoft. So instead of trying harder to make a better product (thus, "raising the bar" so to speak) they prefer to drag down the competition so that their sub-par products can get a "fair share" of the market. If an End User can't figure out how to send email attachments, much less load the appropriate drivers for a software application to run on a Windows platform, then they probably shouldn't be using that application in the first place and should stick with the Windows application that came with their PC (that's why Windows is so successful...because even a complete idiot can point and click on the GUI button prompts that have made Windows so popular). Yet, somehow the EU thinks that this ease of use is a bad thing and that because Microsoft has made PC usage so easy for PC users that they have broken some law of conduct that makes it unfair for other software vendors who's products aren't as easy to use on a Microsoft Windows OS. That's the kind of logic that led the French Vici Government to adopt the "Victory through Surrender" approach to German aggression (and the Spanish government's current terrorist's puppet regime).

Hey Europe, get off the government dole and produce something! If you have to fine someone/something, fine yourselves for not having an original thought in the last fifty years! If I were Bill Gates, and who knows maybe I am, I'd pull any distribution of new Microsoft Products from Europe and make them come up with something on their own (and I wouldn't give them access to the billions of lines of code developed by Microsoft software engineers). I'd make them start from scratch, and if they stole any of Microsoft's code then I'd sue them!

by a reader on Sat, 03/27/2004 - 19:02 | [reply](#)

The difference is that PC is not produced by MS

Adn if I wat intel PC with Linux on it I shouldn't have been forced to pay for Windows

by a reader on Sun, 03/28/2004 - 20:56 | [reply](#)

Missing the point

Microsoft - and I must say I abhor EU and EUNUCHJS and EUROCRAPPERS and all they stand for - engaged in PREDATORY MONOPOLISTIC practices! Not only in EU, but in the US and, indeed worldwide. All what was said above it's very nice, but nobody noted the MEGA COSTS for millions of users and companies because of this predatory behaviour. Just think back 10 years, and tabulate losses through viri, worms. Hell - just think about the man-years lost through rebooting every day, at least once, to keep the beast alive! Ask the South Koreans if they are happy with Microsoft, after loosing like 3bln last year through use of Windoze. MS uses a big

part of its profits, just like the tobacco companies, to hire the best lawyers to avoid law-suits. I predict, just like the tobacco companies, this is FUTILE. Once there is a breach Bill will be much poorer and MS price on NYSE 5 % of what it's now. In the previous comments I discern lack of knowledge about

1, what LINUX is, can do, how MARVELOUSLY stable it is (I write this cmnt. of course on LINUX MANDRAKE!)

2, history of MS - the years of "WAPORWARE" (eg. a small co., like CARLSBAD with their compression SW is WIPED OUT by MS promising MONTH-AFTER-MONTH "better solutions", after few months the targeted co. folds - NO SALES - everybody waits for "superior" product from MS)

I've been with the PC's since 1976, and IMHO we would've been much better off if MS was cut down to size in the US years ago.

MS is bad news for freedom and capitalism!

Oldo, Bhaktapur, Nepal

by a reader on Mon, 03/29/2004 - 06:40 | [reply](#)

bzzzzt. try again.

ummm, just calling someone "predatory" is not case closed. you have to say exactly what they did and why it's wrong.

u gave an example about MS promising upgrades then taking 4ever. well, so what? if everyone wants MS products so much they will wait 4ever instead of buying from someone else ... well how do u get from there to something illegal?

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 03/29/2004 - 11:35 | [reply](#)

It's a bit strange

It's a bit strange. Someone in this thread says they use Linux but the evil Microsoft monopoly forced them to buy Windows. Another person says they build their own PC but the evil Microsoft monopoly stops them *buying* one unless they buy Windows too. Well, those two people should get together and prove each other wrong.

Meanwhile, I use a Mac on which I run the Mac OS. I could run Linux if I wanted, or even Microsoft Virtual PC with Windows. Somehow the evil Microsoft monopoly failed to stop me doing all that. What's the definition of monopoly again?

Now here I am depriving everyone in the entire world of their freedom to be 15th on this comment thread. I have established a monopoly on it! Will the EU come and fine me too?

by a reader on Tue, 03/30/2004 - 06:07 | [reply](#)

Will the EU fine you?

Whether or not the EU will fine you depends on a very important matter of principle to them.

How much have you got?

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 03/30/2004 - 17:09 | [reply](#)

Sorry, Microsoft is corrupt...

Yet another example of business as usual within Microsoft:

Microsoft behind \$12 million payment to Opera

Microsoft purposely made it so Opera, a competing browser, would display messed up pages when viewing MSN. This is not a case of Opera not working correctly. If Opera identified itself to MSN as IE, then Opera could display the generated pages just fine. But if Opera identified itself as itself, then MSN generated a *different* set of pages which made Opera display the site with errors.

The only explanation that I can conclude for MSN generating different pages for Opera than IE was to make it appear that the Opera browser was faulty. Note that this occurred at the same time both Opera and IE were competing for contracts in the embedded browser market (such as PDAs and cell phones).

by a reader on Tue, 05/25/2004 - 18:37 | [reply](#)

corrupt?

It says: "Opera has accused Microsoft of deliberately breaking interoperability between its MSN Web portal and various versions of the Opera browser--charges that the software giant has repeatedly denied."

Well, suppose Microsoft did do this. What exactly is corrupt about "breaking interoperability" between one's own web site and someone else's browser?

Un-public-spirited, definitely. Ungenerous, probably. Mean, maybe. But corrupt? How? And why on earth should doing a thing like that be against the law?

I don't use MSN or IE. Do you? If so, why don't you stop? If not, what are you complaining about?

by a reader on Tue, 05/25/2004 - 19:51 | [reply](#)

Yes, corrupt.

They did not just "break interoperability". If the entire web site was

designed such that IE worked fine but Opera had problems, I would call that "breaking interoperability". However, what MSN was doing was detecting when the Opera browser was accessing it and then feeding only it a set of pages designed specifically to break it. If Opera fooled MSN into thinking it was IE, then Opera displayed the IE generated pages without a hitch. Here is a technical explanation of what MSN was doing:

Why doesn't MSN work with Opera

It was if and only if the browser was Opera that MSN would feed it the faulty web page. If Opera identified itself as an unknown browser such as Oprah, then MSN did not send it the faulty page. At the time, Microsoft denied any problem on their end and claimed Opera was not standards compliant, and Microsoft continues to deny any fault.

To purposely cause a competitors product to fail and then to deny that you were the cause of the failure is well beyond un-public-spirited, ungenerous, or mean. It is dishonest and deceitful. It is yet another example of the core corruption of Microsofts business practices.

I do not use either MSN or IE and I am not complaining. I am stating that I think Microsoft is corrupt and needs to be identified as such.

by a reader on Tue, 05/25/2004 - 20:37 | [reply](#)

Libel

To accuse Microsoft of corruption, and of purposely doing things one has insufficient evidence of (that has been denied), seems at best irresponsible and at worst libelous.

I'm not sure what's happening in this case, but I know that ASP.NET can generate different HTML based on the detected browser type. This is a feature intended to ease development. It's an attempt to make things work well in all browsers; not to fail. The problem *is* that many browsers are not standards compliant and adapting code to handle each one's incompatibilities can be a lot of work.

Now, it might be that Microsoft made mistakes when generating Opera code (perhaps they misinterpreted a bug, or the bug was fixed, or they just did it wrong...). But it takes a fanatical conspiracy theorist to conclude that they must have intended for visitors, to a site that they hope to reap large ad revenues from, to have a bad experience in the hopes that they'll want to switch to Microsoft's free browser.

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Thu, 06/03/2004 - 16:31 | [reply](#)

Corrupt I say!

I'm not sure what's happening in this case, but I know that ASP.NET can generate different HTML based on the detected browser type. This is a feature intended to ease development. It's an attempt to make things work well in all browsers; not to fail. The problem is that many browsers are not standards compliant and adapting code to handle each one's incompatibilities can be a lot of work.

These days, all browsers with the exception of IE attempt to be standards compliant. I realize that way back when Netscape ruled before IE that it did add many non standards compliant features, but that was a long time ago. Currently, I am not aware of a single browser (again except IE) that does anything beyond what the W3C standards dictate.

These days web sites have to worry about two classes of browsers, IE which makes no attempt to keep with the latest W3C standards and the rest which do.

Can you provide any references to these non-IE browsers that are not standards compliant?

Now, it might be that Microsoft made mistakes when generating Opera code (perhaps they misinterpreted a bug, or the bug was fixed, or they just did it wrong...).

As the above linked article explains, the problem was MSN sent the Opera browser a style sheet with the following code:

```
ul {  
margin: -2px 0px 0px -30px;  
}
```

The problem is the "-30px" value which explicitly instructs Opera to move list elements 30 pixels to the left of its parent. This was the only thing wrong and caused all lists to look like they are misaligned. Opera has never had any bugs or problems with aligning list elements in the wrong place. This is not a complicated piece of html or code to have accidentally made a mistake with.

If Opera identified itself as IE, then this "-30px" value did not occur and Opera displayed the IE compatible pages just fine. If Opera identified itself as some random, unknown browser, then this "-30px" did not occur and Opera displayed what must be the default pages just fine. It was if and only if the browser said it was Opera that this extra "-30px" showed up and Opera dutifully complied with exactly what it was told to do.

But it takes a fanatical conspiracy theorist to conclude that they must have intended for visitors, to a site that they hope to reap large ad revenues from, to have a bad experience in the hopes that they'll want to switch to Microsoft's free browser.

I agree if the point was to try and get personal computer users to

switch back to IE then this would be a fanatical conspiracy theory. But this was not the reason.

The reason is because at the time the two companies were (and still are) competing in the embedded browser market. Microsoft was trying to scare companies considering contracting with Opera Software instead of Microsoft for the use of their browser in cell phones and PDAs. It did this by making it appear that Opera was flaky at times and could not render sites properly that other browsers could.

Microsoft was just doing business as usual when trying to take over a new market.

by a reader on Fri, 06/04/2004 - 01:15 | [reply](#)

The Many Other Wheelchairs, And Related Matters

Allah Is In The House is in a rare serious mood today, and is at least as well worth reading as when he is being hilarious. Read it, and follow his links too.

Fri, 03/26/2004 - 03:40 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Terrorism

Though global terrorism is on the rise, there is some good news, and that is that terrorism by Europeans has been in sharp decline since the 70s. European terrorists have always had at least some rationality, and they have tended not to maximize the number of deaths in their acts, because they knew that would not be good for their popularity. IRA bombings have ceased and ETA bombings have become smaller. And the Rote Armee Faction and the Italian Death brigades have pretty much disappeared. Arab terrorists are less susceptible to rational reasoning, because they have no political cause and have only an ideology that promotes killing as many Jews, Christians, and nonbelievers, as their holy book clearly advocates. Well, at some point they will change as well, because there is a tendency of humans in the end to want Western values of freedom and prosperity because they are universal values, and so the Arabs will eventually understand that. I just hope it doesn't take 100 years. But events in countries like Iran are promising nonetheless.

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Fri, 03/26/2004 - 23:26 | [reply](#)

A Meaningless Death In An Evil Cause

Oliver Kamm rightly speaks ill of the dead – Tom Hurndall of the International Solidarity Movement (ISM), in whose service Hurndall died. The ISM, under the thin disguise of 'peace activism', does nothing for peace but is active in support of the mass murder of Jews in Israel. Although the details of the two cases differ slightly, most of our comments on that other dead ISM activist, **Rachel Corrie**, apply here too.

Mon, 03/29/2004 - 16:19 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Iran: Get It, Before It Gets You

Here are two articles for people who, like ourselves, need to learn more about Iran. The first, **Who Rules Iran?**, is about how Iran is governed:

Westerners often meet with assorted officials who, they are led to believe, run Islamist Iran. They don't.

The second article, **The Next Threat**, is about the historic catastrophe that Iran is about to bring about, if we – and particularly the US government – can't find a way to stop them:

The Shahab-4 missile, developed with the kind assistance of North Korea, could carry a plutonium-core nuclear bomb from Iran to Central Europe. Even the mullahs aren't crazy enough to do that, but just the existence of that capability may well affect European decision makers when they next discuss immigration, or headscarves, or the middle east conflict, or cooperation with the United States. But the critical issues are not those. They are: the survival of Israel, and the threat of an untraceable nuclear attack on America.

Taken together, the implication of these two articles is this: the present evil oligarchy that rules Iran is speeding down the road to hell – for them, their people, and for the rest of the world. Yet they will not voluntarily change course. The only way of avoiding this hell is for the people of Iran to change their government.

Tue, 03/30/2004 - 17:08 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Pakistan could also be "The next threat"

In my eyes, Pakistan represents just as great a threat as Iran. General Musharraf's grip on power is weak and the country is swarming with Islamofacists who would grasp any chance to topple him. And the recent battle with al-Qaeda members in the border region of Waziristan will only have underscored Musharraf's weakness and emboldened the Islamofacists.

by a reader on Wed, 03/31/2004 - 02:20 | [reply](#)

only way? what about the people of somewhere else changing it for them?

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 03/31/2004 - 05:20 | [reply](#)

The proposed solution is horrific

The proposed solution in the second article mentioned seems at least strange.

First of all, I don't get this: "destroying the Zionist entity is worth the retaliation". It assumes that Iran could potentially bear the consequences of a "one or few nuclear detonations" caused by Israel. Well, everyone is ignorant in some ways. So, we can assume they are nuts, i.e. Israel nuclear program wouldn't stop them. Then American one wouldn't do either.

Second, the author then suggests to threaten them. American society is very good at threatening their criminals with a capital punishment and prisons - do they have less criminals or prisoners per 1000 of population? Another question is - are you really going to wipe out the whole state if a new terrorist attacks happens brought by unidentified terrorist group or it is just a threat that suppose to restrain them well?

Reminding you again Osirak campaign in 1981 I could suggest a better way of dealing with them. If Israel cannot accomplish a similar task with now several Iranian targets, then US probably can (without starting a full-fledged war). International community will swear hard on US, but, as the author asserted on account of this, who cares?

Not far apart from this topic, an interesting fundamental question arises - shell a nuclear submarin soldier launch an attack knowing that his own state has been already wiped out? If he does so - there will be no chances of hosting a human life on Earth for another 4 billion years, if not - there is still a certain possibility that at least one continent will survive (of course, with evil regime). What's your answer?

by a reader on Wed, 03/31/2004 - 10:25 | [reply](#)

Joint effort

Elliot,
...or a combination of the two?

-An Iranian Student (AIS)

by a reader on Sat, 04/03/2004 - 01:50 | [reply](#)

The Iran hype-machine has beg

The Iran hype-machine has begun. Are we looking for the action to begin in June? Remember, Americans have a very short attention span.

The fear and panic this propaganda is supposed to initiate cannot be sustained for a lengthy period and must be used within several months or it will be squandered.

by a reader on Tue, 04/26/2005 - 03:23 | [reply](#)

Re: The Iran hype-machine has beg

It's *almost* funny that the anonymous reader from Towson, Maryland posted such a comment on an article over a year old.

Only *almost*, because the anonymous reader arrived here via a Google search: [iran wipe out the zionist entity israel](#).

by [Editor](#) on Tue, 04/26/2005 - 04:47 | [reply](#)

A Reporter Fails To Apologise

"Reporter Apologizes for Iraq Coverage", says the headline in "America's Oldest Journal Covering the Newspaper Industry":

In the wake of Richard Clarke's dramatic personal apology to the families of 9/11 victims last week -- on behalf of himself and his government -- for failing to prevent the terrorist attacks, one might expect at least a few mea culpas related to the release of false information on the Iraq threat before and after the war. While the major media, from The New York Times on down, has largely remained silent about their own failings in this area, a young columnist for a small paper in Fredericksburg, Va., has stepped forward.

The "young columnist" in question, Rick Mercier, had stepped forward to say:

The media are finished with their big blowouts on the anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, and there's one thing they forgot to say: We're sorry. Sorry we let unsubstantiated claims drive our coverage. Sorry we were dismissive of experts who disputed White House charges against Iraq. Sorry we let a band of self-serving Iraqi defectors make fools of us. Sorry we fell for Colin Powell's performance at the United Nations. Sorry we couldn't bring ourselves to hold the administration's feet to the fire before the war, when it really mattered. Maybe we'll do a better job next war. Of course it's absurd to receive this apology from a person so low in the media hierarchy. You really ought to be getting it from the editors and reporters at the agenda-setting publications, such as The New York Times and The Washington Post.

Quite a climb down, you might think. A dramatic reappraisal of his former views. Others who supported the liberation of Iraq might therefore do well to reappraise theirs? That's certainly how the Communist *China Daily*, and apparently all others who picked up the story, saw it (**Admission of US media's fault concerning pre-Iraq war coverage**). "Rick Mercier is a brave young man" wrote one reader of the report in **InfoShop News**. "It's been a long time since a journalist has taken this level of responsibility"

wrote another, as they unanimously welcomed the convert.

But the whole thing is bunk. In reality, this "person so low in the hierarchy" was no convert to the anti-liberation camp. He had been a virulent opponent of the liberation before, during and after the event, and he was not apologising at all. He was fantasising about other reporters apologising *to him* and other like him. For what? Well, in his fantasy, the media had spent the pre-war months in a frenzy of blind *support* for the liberation of Iraq.

Ironically, but not surprisingly, he does have something to apologise for. A quick visit to Google shows that he did let unsubstantiated claims and blind partisanship drive his coverage. Propagating the '**imminent danger**' canard, and touting an arms embargo against Israel as an alternative formula for regional stability, and speaking wildly of chicken hawks, he was insufficiently critical of 'experts' who claimed that "the Kurds of Northern Iraq aren't too keen on [an invasion]", and that an invasion would be followed by "tens, perhaps hundreds, of thousands of more civilian deaths, particularly among children, the aged, and others of the most vulnerable sectors".

And not one word about the continuing murder and terror that following their advice, and his, would have visited upon the people of Iraq.

Fri, 04/02/2004 - 02:35 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

So, where is WMD? Where is Al-Qaeda link?

I agree on Israel issue. I agree that that was an evil regime in Iraq indeed. Millions of people in North Korea are dying from hunger because of even worse regime - so what? I seem to be like a child saying: THE KING IS NAKED. Produce your proof at last!!!

by a reader on Fri, 04/02/2004 - 11:13 | [reply](#)

Media

Who is the "media"? The "media" is not any one source or even a hundred sources. The "media" is the mediums of transmission of words and pictures, synopsisized and soliliquy-ized by thousands of mostly invisible journalists, reporters, media-heads, headline writers, editors and the like across all the media mediums. To say that the "media" should apologise completely misunderstands and misstates the nature of the assemblage, massaging, sorting, defining of information which is transmitted across and to the vast audience of people who then receive and digest transmitted information in their own individual minds.

What is more truthful to say is that the "media" is a vast marketplace of words and pictures and sounds across many languages and mediums that is only accountable to its readers, viewers, and listeners. Any opinion and its opposites can easily be found, useful and useless. There is choice, and there is rebuttal. The old adage about marketplaces says, "Let the buyer beware".

Since the "media" is a distributed marketplace of marketplaces and venues, and there is no such thing as one arbiter of the vast media bazaar, might we say, "Let the recipient reason". Choose wisely. Choose critically. Utilize your perceptive capacities and your mind.

Ultimately, there is no one to apologise for "the media". Or, there is everyone to apologise, and to apologise for, but why? There is always specifically bad reporting along with the good, along with the insightful. There is always the competitive scramble to "sell" the particular idea product in any way and by any means that it can be sold. There is always somewhere, the voice of reason, or rather, voices of reason. Some of the products are useful, some of them are useless or worse. Some of this is not "fit to print" or to disseminate. What is so new about that? It has always been so from the times of the first scribes and orators and gossip in the street.

As always, then as now, there is only personal responsibility. We live within a river of the words and pictures and sounds, growing wider, flowing faster, among which we must personally discriminate the flotsam from the jetsam and the eddies from the streams. Although specific distortions are always culpable, responsible or not to someone and somewhere, there is no river god of "media", or even a river god of "big media" to blame.

It is the consumer of information who blindly believes in distorted ideas who should apologize. Yet, apologize to whom, oneself, and for what, ignorance or gullibility? Rather than mea culpa, get on with it, consider the source and the content. Above all, take personal responsibility. Agree, rebut, discuss.

"Let the recipient reason". Set it right within.

by a reader on Fri, 04/02/2004 - 17:36 | [reply](#)

sigh

how about "a large majority of major media outlets that deal with politics acted very badly. each and every one that acted badly ought to apologise for it."

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 04/02/2004 - 17:56 | [reply](#)

Spain Gets War?

No, not yet. The Spanish people were indeed given the choice between war and shame, they did indeed choose shame, they will indeed **get war**. But the **bomb** found on a Spanish high-speed railway track today is not that war. That's not how it works. In the short run, appeasement usually pays off.

Nevertheless, this incident does illustrate two points that appeasers everywhere desperately need to consider. The first is that the terrorists of the world are already working as hard as they can to kill good people and bring down the only society in which people can become better. Partial submission will seem as meaningless a gesture to them as it does to you. It will not placate them, any more than an offer to exempt Methodists from terrorism would placate President Bush. And by the same token, refusing to submit will not make them any angrier. They are already mass-murdering innocent people! They could not be more angry.

The second point is that the enemies of civilisation, though they have become remarkably similar in their strategies and tactics, are diverse in their other aims and ideologies. So people who initially hoped that the attacks of March 11 were perpetrated by Basque separatist terrorists rather than by Al Qaeda, and those who now hope that today's bomb wasn't placed by Muslims, are missing this bigger picture: in regard to the appeasement issue, it really doesn't matter whose bomb this is. If it is Al Qaeda's, then Spain has been unlucky and appeasement has failed in record time. But suppose for the sake of argument that Al Qaeda has decided not to attack Spain for the moment. Then nevertheless, Spain has been unlucky and appeasement is failing. For whoever planted this bomb wants something, and they expect their demands to be met just as they saw Al Qaeda's being met. And they won't stop until they either get what they want or the survivors among them despair of ever getting it.

What if this bomb was set by some ultra-nationalist terrorist group opposed to the appeasement of Muslims? Take this to its logical conclusion: if rival terrorist groups make opposite demands, which one does the appeaser choose to appease? And in either case, what good does it do? What effect can it have, other than to attract even more terrorists to the decaying corpse of the appeasers' society?

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Hans Blix's Allegiance

Hans Blix, the former UN weapons inspector, has at last openly **declared his allegiance to Saddam Hussein**.

No doubt he does not think of himself as having done that, but then, what Hans Blix thinks has never been a good guide to what is so. He thinks he has been fairly explicit in siding *against* Saddam:

“What's positive is that Saddam and his bloody regime is gone,”

But there's a 'but':

“but when figuring out the score, the negatives weigh more,” the former chief U.N. weapons inspector was quoted as saying in the daily newspaper Jyllands Posten. “That accounts for the many casualties during the war and the many people who still die because of the terrorism the war has nourished,” he said. “The war has liberated the Iraqis from Saddam, but the costs have been too great.”

But this is identical to Saddam's own position on this matter. Saddam probably did not, even in the privacy of his own mind or within the inner circle of the Ba'ath Party, hold up his killings and tortures and repression as being *benefits* of his rule. He would have called them necessary evils, worth it on balance because the alternative of stepping down would, in his view, have precipitated an even worse outcome.

Blix, in endorsing Saddam's view of why it would have been better if Saddam had stayed in power and continued his aggressive, **mass-murdering** tyranny, has sided with Saddam.

Tue, 04/06/2004 - 17:59 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Popper thought

Popper thought an idea should be criticised on it's content not on who held it.

So, does **The World** have an argument for why Blix's position is wrong?

And if Irag becomes an Islamic Republic rules over by a Grand

Ayatollah, will **The World** admin that Blix was right, and that it was wrong?

by a reader on Wed, 04/07/2004 - 08:59 | [reply](#)

sheesh

oh come on. **The World** was not disputing Popper, they were just assuming their readers were opposed to Saddam and his murderous regime.

you want an argument for why that's a good idea? because he was murderous. the side-effects of fighting evil are the fault of the evil people who had to be fought, not something to blame on the good guys.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 04/07/2004 - 11:34 | [reply](#)

Kebab

Sadam was murderous, but he has been murderous for a long time. The West chose to side with him against Iran because a murderous fascist regime is less dangerous than an Islamic Fundamentalist one. Sadam, if left in power, would have killed many of his own people, but he would have been unlikely to want to nuke Manhattan or set bombs on the London Underground.

During the cold war all sensible people knew it was necessary sometimes to side with evil people, and ignore their deeds, strategically, while fighting a bigger evil.

If Iraq falls to the Islamists then this invasion will have been a huge strategic blunder, and your desire to kill bad people, even when un-strategic, will be revealed as naïve in the extreme.

Thatcher would have known that, as would Churchill.

by a reader on Wed, 04/07/2004 - 14:44 | [reply](#)

A Simple Point

This piece was making a simple point: that Blix's position on the issue of whether Saddam should have been allowed to carry on doing what he was doing, and why, is the same as that of Saddam himself. It argued for this point simply by stating both positions without the logically irrelevant details (such as Saddam's Ba'athist ideology, or the disclaimer preceding Blix's 'but') and noting that they are identical. This argument did not address, and does not depend on, whether this common position of theirs is right or wrong.

by **Editor** on Wed, 04/07/2004 - 15:11 | [reply](#)

Iraq and terrorists

'Sadam, if left in power, would have killed many of his own people, but he would have been unlikely to want to nuke Manhattan or set bombs on the London Underground.'

Saddam funded terrorism, which made him a legitimate target of the War on Terror. He might not have set a bomb on the Underground, but some of the terrorists he funded might have.

'During the cold war all sensible people knew it was necessary sometimes to side with evil people, and ignore their deeds, strategically, while fighting a bigger evil.'

That is true and that is why we are allied with Pakistan at present.

'If Iraq falls to the Islamists then this invasion will have been a huge strategic blunder, and your desire to kill bad people, even when un-strategic, will be revealed as naive in the extreme.'

No. If Iraq falls to the Islamists then somebody somewhere along the line has made a mistake about the country's security arrangements. However, that has not happened and probably will not happen at all.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Wed, 04/07/2004 - 15:18 | [reply](#)

Re:A Simple Point

And there was not the slightest hint that having the same opinion as Saddam implied some guilt by association, or was prima-facie evidence of badness. This was a simple piece with no sub text whatsoever. Any subtler meaning was entirely in my own mind I am sure.

by a reader on Wed, 04/07/2004 - 15:49 | [reply](#)

A Simple Point

I have to agree with "a reader" that this post seems designed to argue against Blix's position by associating it with Saddam, and that this is an appeal to emotion rather than reason.

I think Blix is wrong, but the fact that Saddam would have made a similar argument is irrelevant to that. And, while Saddam might have expressed a similar argument, I'm sure his considerations weren't *identical* to Blix's. I suspect that the fact that it was *he* who was in power would have entered into his thinking on the matter.

Saddam is a murderous bastard. And I think that if someone agreed with him about everything, then that would be good circumstantial evidence that he was similarly immoral. But a single identical conclusion is evidence of precisely nothing.

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Thu, 04/08/2004 - 18:19 | [reply](#)

Re: A Simple Point

It's not the conclusion, it's the argument, based on the judgement that Iraq under Saddam was 'on balance' better off than it is after liberation. Not everyone who opposed Saddam's removal made that argument, because not all of them share that judgement, and the underlying moral values on which it is based. That Saddam and Blix both do share that judgement and those values even though they differ in other judgements and values is, I think, undeniable and also significant. It reflects badly on both of them as people. (BTW I agreed with Oliver Kamm's take on the broader issue at the end of [this](#) piece.)

That Saddam would have made other arguments as well is undoubtedly true. And he would have been superhuman if his own future had not figured somewhere in his private deliberations. But it seems highly implausible that his personal benefit was the decisive argument in his mind: first, because millions of other people who are not Saddam approved of his rule too; and second, because if he had not approved, on balance, of the way he ruled, he would have ruled differently.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Thu, 04/08/2004 - 20:00 | [reply](#)

Not The Same Argument

I'm sorry, but I don't think it's credible that Blix and Saddam believe anything like the same argument.

I don't think Saddam weighs the harm caused by either his own murders and tortures or the harm to casualties of the invasion as heavily as Blix does.

And, I can't know for sure, but I suspect, that Saddam would disagree with Blix both about whether the invasion and transformation of Iraq, if successful, would help or hurt terrorism; as well as about whether international terrorism is a bad thing.

And, I don't understand the "second" point above. How does Saddam's approval of the way he ruled argue against his personal benefit being a decisive argument in his mind? Isn't his personal benefit likely to be part of *why* he approved of his rule? I suspect that if he had been a victim of another tyrant ruling identically, he wouldn't have approved as much.

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Thu, 04/08/2004 - 21:00 | [reply](#)

Not 'Allegiance'

I agree that 'allegiance' is not a fair description of what Blix has shown Saddam. But I think 'siding with' **is** a fair description. They share the relevant values of undervaluing the freedom of Iraqis and being blind to Saddam's instability and menace. Because of those

shared values, they agree about who should currently be ruling

Iraq, despite their differences in other respects.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Fri, 04/09/2004 - 13:53 | [reply](#)

Siding with one Evil

Good point. **The World** would then - in making any statement on which evil was greatest - necessarily (by its own words) "side" with one of the two evils.

Indeed, by the logic of **The World's** own argument: Whenever there are two opposed evils, and you make any judgement about their badness, you always side with one of the evils - which is still an evil - and are therefore always to be identified with that evil as if you had perpetrated it yourself.

by a reader on Fri, 04/16/2004 - 11:48 | [reply](#)

Re: Siding With Evil

If you judge that one of two evils is greater than the other, and it is, then surely you have done nothing wrong. If the difference between the two evils is slight or subtle, then you may not have done anything wrong either. If, in judging between two evils, you favour the one which is in fact an enormously greater evil, then your judgement is morally wrong. If, in making the judgement, you assist the cause of the much greater evil, then you have done wrong. If you did this because you share some of the evil values, then you are to that extent 'identified' with the evil.

Is any of that controversial?

by [David Deutsch](#) on Fri, 04/16/2004 - 14:19 | [reply](#)

The controversy

Then I think it would be better to question Blix' judgement, rather than to tag it with "Saddam" and guilt-by-association. So your case is a good one, Mr Deutsch, though the original case was poorly stated.

by a reader on Mon, 04/19/2004 - 07:06 | [reply](#)

In A Nearby Universe: Japan May Withdraw From Iraq

Following the kidnapping of three Japanese civilians today by terrorists who threaten to **burn them alive** unless Japan withdraws its forces from Iraq, Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi demanded that Japan be allowed to reinforce its existing force of 550 with a specialised search-and-rescue team of 550,000, comprising five armoured divisions with corresponding air and logistical support.

'This is a Constitutional issue', said Koizumi. 'Our military is not called the *Self-Defense Force* for nothing. We are Constitutionally required to use it to defend our citizens from aggression, which this crime clearly is. Ever since World War II, Japan has considered itself to have a sacred commitment to the cause of peace. That is why we are proud members of the Coalition, and that is also why we are determined to rescue our kidnapped citizens with all possible dispatch, to bring their kidnappers to justice, and to burn every evil war criminal who dares to stand in our way while we are doing so.'

Japanese officials who have been asked to prepare contingency plans in case the hostages are found dead are said to be scouring certain 60-year-old documents 'for ideas'. Koizumi is said to have threatened to leave the Coalition if its response to today's outrage is insufficiently vigorous.

Fri, 04/09/2004 - 01:40 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Japanese Reactions in Iraq

Others have made a variety of comments in other places, but I'd just like to say that, based on my experiences in Japan that I would not want to be an arab/Islamic terrorist when the SDF is told to "get Imperial" on their butts.

"Insufficiently Vigourous response"!!!! Try cutting off limbs!

They have some VERY SERIOUS people in their post-WWII forces (in spite of a deliberate effort to look otherwise), and while I'd be pleased to have them in my foxhole or watching my 6, I would never want them mad enough to get serious on me.

This will be fun to watch.

Charlie 32

by a reader on Tue, 04/13/2004 - 03:07 | [reply](#)

Link, please

Do you have a link to Koizumi's response? There was nothing about the 550,000 in the article you had already linked to.

by a reader on Fri, 04/16/2004 - 10:50 | [reply](#)

Re: Link, please

Links to that parallel universe don't seem to be working at the moment. When they are, we'll post one right away.

by [Editor](#) on Fri, 04/16/2004 - 14:22 | [reply](#)

sheesh

oh c'mon. obviously the reader doesn't understand the MWI stuff. u ought to explain it, or at least point him in the right direction, not make an odd joke he won't follow. more like this:

dear confused reader person:

the universe thing is from quantum physics. you can just think of "in a nearby universe" like "imagine a duplicate of our universe, expect slightly different". so in this duplicate, we can imagine it'd be about the same, except b/c of a few differences (japanese more moral, in this case) there is a different result (japanese defense forces defend japanese citizens)

~curi

by a reader on Mon, 04/19/2004 - 01:34 | [reply](#)

Joke OK

The joke was right on. It was my own fault for not reading the damn headline. But then again, who does?

by a reader on Mon, 04/19/2004 - 07:03 | [reply](#)

i read headlines

i read headlines (repeating in case you don't read subject lines either)

also it wasn't really a joke. i believe [The World](#) is rightly entirely serious that A) that did happen in a similar universe and B) the implication that they'd like it to, and it'd be better

by a reader on Mon, 04/19/2004 - 23:09 | [reply](#)

Nuclear Dis-Argument

During the 1930s, the era of the Great Dictators, a faction in the West argued that the only way to achieve peace was to disarm, hoping that the Dictators would keep their promises to do likewise, and meanwhile to concede their demands and tolerate their crimes in order to persuade them that we were not belligerent (the Dictators' supposed belief that we were belligerent being the supposed cause of their demands and crimes). Unfortunately, this policy was adopted, and very soon caused the most destructive war in history with some fifty million dead.

In the minds of many people, this sequence of events had tested that policy to destruction. The very word 'appeasement', which had been proudly coined by the policy's own supporters, became a term of abuse. It remains so to this day, with the amusing consequence that ever since then, appeasers have been obliged to deny they are appeasers in order to get a hearing.

During the Cold War, the appeasers argued that the only way to achieve peace was to disarm unilaterally and hope that the Soviet Union and Communist China would follow suit, and meanwhile to concede their demands and tolerate their crimes in order to persuade them that we were not belligerent (the Communist dictators' supposed belief that we were belligerent being the supposed cause of their demands and crimes). Fortunately, fewer people than before now accepted this argument, and the policy was never enacted, thus preventing the most destructive war in history with some hundreds of millions dead.

Though the appeasers' position was not tested to destruction this time, the outcome of the Cold War nevertheless refuted it: the Soviet Empire did not launch a nuclear attack. Instead, it fell – though not before it had tried every possible strategy to conquer, enslave and intimidate other nations *without* provoking a nuclear response.

Which brings us to the present day, and another chapter in the shameful history of the appeasement faction. Only this time, it is not a matter of a flawed argument or a refuted argument, but of no argument.

The British Ministry of Defence is planning to redevelop its nuclear weapons facility at Aldermaston to replace Britain's Trident nuclear deterrent in 2010 if the need should arise. Anti-nuclear activists

marched on the facility this Easter weekend in an attempt to stop this. The BBC comments:

The MoD insists whatever is decided will be within Britain's legal obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

But that treaty requires the signatories to work "in good faith" for total nuclear disarmament and forbids the acquisition of new nuclear weapons.

Actually the **Treaty** permits the modification of current nuclear weapons, which is what is being planned. Article X even allows signatories to withdraw under "extraordinary circumstances" – like, say, an Islamofascist country like Iran **getting nukes**?

But what is the supposed point of unilateral disarmament this time? The position of today's appeasers, who call themselves "peace protesters", is cruder and more reprehensible than that of their forebears. They are not fearful of invasion or destruction. They are fearful of the United States. They believe – viscerally – that the United States and its allies, especially Israel and Britain, *are* the essential evil in the world. They want this evil to be disarmed and if necessary eradicated **by force**, and for the future of the world to depend instead on the goodwill of the world's most irrational and tyrannical rulers, granted a monopoly of the world's most destructive weapons.

But the facts remain as they always were. The peace of the world is in no danger from British nuclear weapons, nor American nor Israeli ones. The exact opposite is the case. And in the current security situation, to reduce our capacity to retaliate against a nuclear strike is to invite such a strike from the enemies of civilisation.

Tue, 04/13/2004 - 23:01 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Tolerating The Intolerable

In a free society, thoughts go unpunished. There are exceptions: if you kill someone accidentally, you will be treated very differently from someone who did the same thing while *intending* to kill. The guilty thought makes all the difference.

In a free society, words go unpunished. There are exceptions: if you hire someone to commit a murder you are guilty of murder even if all you ever did was talk.

In a free society, the practice of religion goes unpunished. The only exceptions are acts which would be illegal whether they were religious practices or not.

Does **Salman Rushdie** live in a free society? Did his Japanese translator, his Italian translator, or his Norwegian publisher? And if they don't, do we?

Do mainstream Muslims living in Western countries identify with the evil doctrine of **death to the apostate**, or do they live in fear of it? Either way, do they live in a free society? And if they don't, do we?

Update (via **LGF**): an important paper, **Islam, Apostasy, and Human Rights**, presented to the UN Commission on Human Rights by Islamic apostate Ibn Warraq.

Sat, 04/17/2004 - 15:53 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

Signed posts

I guess you've probably thought this over, but maybe you should post as individuals so we can see the differences among the contributors. Perhaps you all talk about the posts and contribute to the weblog as a collective. To some people it would be interesting to see the differences of opinion among the contributors, if there are any. I've noticed that the responses to comments are signed by individuals. Sometimes that provides an insight into what people think or what they will say in defence of their opinions. Some other blogs do the individualist method, though I have no idea whether that results in better entries. Perhaps you could sign as yourselves when you are the sole author, and not when it was a collective effort.

by a reader on Sun, 04/18/2004 - 01:44 | [reply](#)

1000 year Reich

If you ever wondered what the world would have been like if the Third Reich really remained in power for 1000 years and became the source of a 'civilization', you don't need to wonder anymore. Just look at islam and the Islamic world today. Well, it is 1400 year Reich by now, but you get the point.

An Iranian Student (AIS)

by a reader on Mon, 04/19/2004 - 00:31 | [reply](#)

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Captain Euro

Warliberal has a wonderful series of funny-because-they're true stories about a European superhero, Captain Euro:

Captain Euro in Afghanistan

Captain Euro meets Buffy the Vampire Slayer

By the way, if you don't know who Buffy the Vampire Slayer is, then you should *immediately*:

- Purchase a television set;
- Purchase a DVD player;
- Watch **these**.

Do this at once. We'll still be here when you get back.

The complete Captain Euro collection (in reverse chronological order)

Thanks to **Meryl Yourish** for the reference. Her blog is well worth reading too.

Tue, 04/20/2004 - 17:57 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

i don't see what's so great about buffy

i've watched a dozen or so eps from i think mostly around season 3, and the first about 4. i have up thru season 2 to watch whenever i want. but, shrug, there's so many other things, i don't watch buffy. i don't see what's so impressive.

also since u like buffy so much, you really ought to watch firefly.

by a reader on Tue, 04/20/2004 - 20:29 | [reply](#)

Not A “Whistleblower”

Reuters, the masters of anti-Israeli and anti-American **bias**, report:

Israeli nuclear whistleblower Mordechai Vanunu emerged defiant after 18 years in prison Wednesday, saying he was proud of revealing secrets that exposed the Jewish state as an atomic power.

Whistleblowers are insiders who report wrongdoing in the organisations for which they work. But many highly reputable people (including **ourselves**, of course) believe that there was no wrongdoing in Israel possessing nuclear weapons, or in keeping the details secret. The correct term for people who reveal military secrets is *spies*. If they do this with the intention of **destroying the state of which they are citizens**, then they are also *traitors*.

By using the unambiguously positive term whistleblower rather than spy or traitor, or even renegade or defector, Reuters is endorsing Vanunu's call for the destruction of Israel.

Update: In regard to a tangentially related issue, **Steven Den Beste** corresponds with a reporter from *Paris Match* and criticises their biased conception of impartiality.

Wed, 04/21/2004 - 18:16 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

A reader

Does the state have the right to develop nuclear weapons without seeking the consent of the citizenry? If so, why?

by a reader on Thu, 04/22/2004 - 10:00 | [reply](#)

Secret weapons

a reader asked:

Does the state have the right to develop nuclear weapons without seeking the consent of the citizenry? If so, why?

Most states do not have the right to develop nuclear weapons at all. Those that do, derive that right from their duty to defend their citizens. In some situations, the effectiveness of a weapon depends

on secrecy. In such situations, if the the state in question has a right to develop that weapon at all, it has an obligation to develop it with the appropriate level of secrecy.

Thus, for instance, the Soviet Union and China had no right to develop nuclear weapons because they were rogue states. The United States had both a right and a duty to develop them because they were fighting a just war and such weapons would help to end it sooner, more certainly, and with less loss of life. Because of the circumstances, they also had a duty to do this in the utmost secrecy, which they did. Britain and France had a right to develop them under the conditions of the Cold War, but with a much lower level of secrecy: the existence and some of the capabilities of the weapons were rightly determined by public debate, while other details rightly remained secret. Israel had a right to develop them because of the existential threat it faced. Under the circumstances, the deterrence value of the weapons depended on only their bare existence being publicly known, but none of the other details. So the fact that they existed was deliberately leaked, and the other details kept secret – a policy of intentional ambiguity whose existence was itself deliberately leaked. These policies were publicly discussed and overwhelmingly approved. In particular, all the major political parties were in favour of them, and their leaders continued them through successive changes of government.

by [Editor](#) on Thu, 04/22/2004 - 12:52 | [reply](#)

A reader

Nice answer. Thanks.

by a reader on Fri, 04/23/2004 - 09:29 | [reply](#)

Isn't the problem (with news reporting)

the idea that impartiality is possible?

by a reader on Fri, 04/23/2004 - 23:16 | [reply](#)

bias unavoidable?

no. the world is non-biased. thus proving it's possible.

(ok not *perfectly*, but far more than the media we complain about. so the media could be much less biased, if it was better.)

~curi

by a reader on Fri, 04/23/2004 - 23:22 | [reply](#)

Don't understand

When you say "the world" is not biased, do you mean "[Setting The World to Rights](#)" is not biased?

by a reader on Fri, 04/23/2004 - 23:29 | [reply](#)

you got it

yes. sry if my lack of caps confused u.

~ curi

by a reader on Sat, 04/24/2004 - 05:00 | [reply](#)

rogue states ? just war ?

who decides which the rogue states and just wars are ?
presumably Israel is not a rogue state despite constructing illegal settlements on someone else's land, despite electing as PM bus bombing terrorists like Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir (who also ordered the murder of UN peace negotiator Bernadotte)

by a reader on Wed, 04/28/2004 - 10:02 | [reply](#)

Re: rogue states ? just war ?

who decides which the rogue states and just wars are ?

We do, of course. Since you evidently did not see our our [post yesterday](#), giving a working definition of 'rogue states' for the benefit of readers without a moral compass, you must be a newcomer to our blog. Welcome!

You will see that Israel does not meet the criteria. You should also read our [Short History of Israel](#).

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 04/28/2004 - 13:34 | [reply](#)

The 'Oil For Food' Scandal

The United-Nations-run 'oil-for-food' program was intended to shield the Iraqi people from the effects of UN-mandated sanctions. Despite consuming staggering amounts of money, it largely failed to do so. It was profoundly corrupt, not only in the sense that all sorts of people unjustly enriched themselves through it, but in the sense that it undermined every institution and sabotaged every political process that could genuinely have improved the lives of Iraqis. All this has been well known for years, but to the great shame of the international community, was regarded as an inevitable part of the scenery of world politics.

Now that hard evidence and the sordid details are beginning to come out, there is a chance that the world may learn a lesson. Everyone should at least read these articles:

The Oil-for-Food Scam: What Did Kofi Annan Know, and When Did He Know It?

The next month, "humanitarian" became a broad category indeed. On June 2, Annan approved a newly expanded shopping list by Saddam that the Secretariat dubbed "Oil-for-Food Plus." This added ten new sectors to be funded by the program, including "labor and social affairs," "information," "justice," and "sports." Either the Secretary-General had failed to notice or he did not care that none of these had anything to do with the equitable distribution of relief. By contrast, they had everything to do with the running of Saddam's totalitarian state. "Labor," "information," and "justice" were the realms of Baathist party patronage, propaganda, censorship, secret police, rape rooms, and mass graves.

And:

World leaders on list of oil recipients

Fri, 04/23/2004 - 14:47 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Greg Dyke Is Unrepentant

Greg Dyke is the former Director General of the BBC who was forced out after the **Hutton Report**.

Anyone who thinks that he left in disgrace, or that he is in any way repentant, or that either he or the BBC have the slightest idea what they have done, should think again.

Last night Dyke had the honour of being guest presenter of the BBC's flagship comedy-news-quiz programme *Have I Got News For You*. In the programme, an executive of the Shell oil company had just been quoted as reacting as follows to an internal company **report** about oil reserves:

"This is absolute dynamite, not at all what I expected and needs to be destroyed."

Dyke seized the opportunity to proclaim his position on an entirely different Report. He remarked:

"Funny, that's exactly what I said when I saw the Hutton Report. Of course, the difference between the two was that the Shell report was true."

Unrepentant. Unenlightened. Insufferable.

Sat, 04/24/2004 - 01:41 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

and supported by most of the UK

a majority of the British people would agree with Dyke that the Hutton report was a whitewash.

All the info relating to the inquiry was published at its web site and it beggars belief that Hutton could reach the conclusions he did.

by a reader on Wed, 04/28/2004 - 08:19 | [reply](#)

Your Hutting Us On

'a majority of the British people would agree with Dyke that the Hutton report was a whitewash.'

If they would I should think that says rather more about them than

it does about Hutton.

'All the info relating to the inquiry was published at its web site and it beggars belief that Hutton could reach the conclusions he did.'

What conclusions should he have reached and why?

by **Alan Forrester** on Thu, 05/13/2004 - 01:40 | [reply](#)

Photoblogging



In our first tentative excursion into photoblogging, we provide evidence that in Oxford, 2004, idiotarianism is alive and graffiti-ing.

This picture of a newly politicised pillar box was taken today by our colleague **Lulie**.

Sat, 04/24/2004 - 19:15 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

But it's true.

But it's true.

by a reader on Fri, 04/30/2004 - 12:52 | [reply](#)

Re But it's true

Don't you mean "but it'\$ true"?

by **Editor** on Fri, 04/30/2004 - 14:03 | [reply](#)

European Union – The Mask Slips

The prospect of the proposed European Constitution being put before (ugh!) *the people* for ratification in the forthcoming British **referendum** has shaken the European ruling class so much that some of them have accidentally **said what they really mean**. So now, briefly (for soon the oversight will be weaselled out of view with a torrent of non-denying denials), we can plainly see that all that talk of the benefits of Unity and the sacredness of Treaty Obligations is just code for them ruling the rest of us without restraint or accountability. In reality they have as much respect for either concept as a pigeon has for the statue it perches on.

The EU's External Relations Commissioner Chris Patten said that

A British 'No' vote in a planned referendum on the European Union constitution would be tantamount to a vote to leave the bloc

because, after all,

"What's the point of being inside and endlessly, truculently making trouble," he said.

"Making trouble" is, as President Chirac **made clear** recently, EU-code for not silently doing whatever France and Germany say.

Chancellor Schroeder was even more explicit:

Aware of the paralysis a British rejection could cause the bloc, German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder told Focus magazine he wanted the new constitution to permit implementation of new voting rules even if not all countries had ratified the deal.

In other words, Schroeder is proposing to abrogate the existing EU constitution, as defined by the most solemn and binding treaties to which any of its members have ever committed themselves, and which require unanimity for any changes, and to replace it by a constitution that allows France and Germany to change the constitution as they please.

Well, so be it. The only question in our minds is whether the resulting entity should be called the Fourth Reich or the Sixth

Republic. Presumably the European

thing would be to adopt a statesmanlike compromise and call it the Fifth Eurenial.

By the way, Bernard Connolly, whose book we illustrate above (click the picture to buy it), really is a whistleblower, unlike **some** who are so designated. The vicious way he was **treated** by the leviathan for exposing its true nature has never received anything like the opprobrium that it deserves.

Sun, 04/25/2004 - 14:10 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)



Bernard Connolly

It is not clear to me what the ruling was against Bernard Connolly and why it was bad. On the linked article I read:

The EU's top court found that the European Commission was entitled to sack Bernard Connolly [...]

What is wrong with that? Isn't any employer fully entitled to fire employees which are critical of them, or for any other matter of their choosing? Unless I misunderstand this article, this is simply an issue of free association and freedom of contract, and not about freedom of speech.

Could someone please clarify what would be the problem with this ruling?

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Sun, 04/25/2004 - 19:48 | [reply](#)

When is it desirable to make a decision by referendum?

When is it better for politicians to make the decision?

by a reader on Sun, 04/25/2004 - 22:00 | [reply](#)

Why Was Firing Connolly Wrong?

The head of a company has been skimming money and defrauding his shareholders ever since the company was first launched. Some of the shareholders think something funny is going on and pressure the boss man to get an auditor in. The boss man does so and gives the auditor a carefully doctored set of records. The auditor finds out that they are doctored and begins telling people. The boss man demands that the auditor give the cooked books back, demands that he shut up and fires him. Now imagine we are not dealing with

a businessman, but with an organisation with taxpayer's money and arbitrary powers.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Mon, 04/26/2004 - 00:24 | [reply](#)

Then the contract entitles boos to do so. Or what?

When an auditor company is being hired both sides are supposed to sign a contract that should allow/disallow the auditor to disclose any findings. Or some state law can allow the auditor to do so. We are not in a court room to figure it out. So, why would I comment on other party's commercial contracts? Do we have a moral right to do so?

by a reader on Mon, 04/26/2004 - 08:38 | [reply](#)

Re: Bernard Connolly

A person should have the right to spend his own money for whatever lawful purpose he wishes, and in particular, to hire and fire whomever he likes and not give any reasons except as required by the relevant contracts. The reasons may be arbitrarily whimsical or hypocritical or base or evil, so long as they are not unlawful. He also has the right to require, as a condition of employment, that his employees not reveal the extent of his wickedness or hypocrisy.

The European Commission does not have any of those excuses or rights. It is not a person or company but an arm of government whose legitimacy depends in part on its being impartial between legitimate political opinions. In particular, it is not permitted to use its spending power, including the power to hire and fire employees, to encourage or discourage the expression of any legitimate political opinion. It is not using its own money, but exclusively other people's, which it obtains by force with the legitimacy of government action. This legitimacy depends in part on its not being whimsical, hypocritical, base or evil: obeying the letter of legal constraints is not enough. It also has to have 'transparency' – i.e., unlike a private citizen or company, it has an obligation to keep everything it does open to public scrutiny except where there is a publicly-justifiable reason to keep it secret.

These are some of the reasons why I think firing Connolly was wrong.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Mon, 04/26/2004 - 16:31 | [reply](#)

Governments Have Different Obligations

I think that David is exactly right here.

This is why I think that governments should be bound by, for example, anti-discrimination rules that would be wrong to impose on private businesses.

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Mon, 04/26/2004 - 18:59 | [reply](#)

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Who Knows What They Believe?

A train in North Korea exploded killing 160 people and injuring 1,300. South Korea offered train loads of aid but the North Korean thugocracy **refused** to let it across the demilitarised zone. Why?

Does the North Korean government believe its own **propaganda** that the South is an American colony? Do they think that the South might use this as an opportunity to attack?

Or is it even worse than that? Are they turning the aid down despite knowing that South Korea only wants peace and is willing to help the North to cope with this disaster?

The North Korean regime is so closed and irrational that we can't tell what they're really thinking, and this is a problem. They might already **have** nuclear weapons and they have certainly been trying to **acquire** them. Crazy communists and nuclear weapons don't mix well. The West needs to come up with a policy to make sure that we don't find out the hard way that the rulers of North Korea have both nuclear weapons and irrational beliefs.

Mon, 04/26/2004 - 18:14 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

You Can't Make A Silk Purse Out Of...

Remember the Koran that was being written in Saddam's blood? And his handwriting on the Iraqi flag? Well, now it's been **revealed** what that flag was actually made of:

BBC NEWS WORLD EDITION

Last Updated: Monday, 26 April, 2004, 15:52 GMT 16:52 UK

[E-mail this to a friend](#)

[Printable version](#)

Iraq unveils new 'inclusive' flag

Iraq's US-appointed Governing Council has approved a new national flag for the embattled country, officials said.

The design consists of a pale blue crescent on a white background, with a yellow strip between two blue lines at the bottom.



What the new Iraqi flag might look like

IGC spokesman Hameed al-Kafei said the flag heralded "a new era" as Iraq could not continue using its flag from the Saddam Hussein era.

Mon, 04/26/2004 - 18:41 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Some Working Definitions For The Twenty-First Century

We have devised some working definitions that can be used to spot the bad guys without needing to resort to airy fairy concepts like whether or not their cause is just. Simply check your suspected evildoer against this handy checklist:

You are a terrorist leader if:

- 1) You are prepared to kill more civilians in the cause of your righteous battle than the evil regime you are trying to overthrow is willing to kill to stop you.
- 2) You live a life of luxury in the centre of your enemies' homeland, preaching your values in the certain knowledge that the evil, corrupt government there will do its best to protect your right to do so.
- 3) You regularly use the word 'infidel'.

Yours is a rogue state if:

- 1) Whilst fighting a desperate defensive war against another nation that threatens your very sovereignty, you can still manage to spare enough resources to massacre large numbers of your own civilians.
- 2) Your ruling party won the last election by a majority of 100% or more.
- 3) The leader of your main Opposition party is in prison, in hiding, or dead.
- 4) Your chief torturer appears on the western media and criticises your enemies for human rights violations.
- 5) Your ambassador to America refused to come back after his last diplomatic mission.
- 6) Your military is funded largely through food aid from the European Union.

The Truth Is...

Steven Den Beste of **USS Clueless** has been blogging a lot less lately due to some sort of blogger burnout. But today something seems to have boiled over inside him and he has burst back into the blogosphere with a massive essay on the theme '**The Truth Is...**'. Firing wildly in all directions, he nevertheless hits the bull's eye with every shot.

Does he look like a carrot, though? We don't dare venture an opinion.

Thu, 04/29/2004 - 00:11 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

A Veiled Threat

Her Majesty's Government is intending to **exempt anyone willing to dress up as a Muslim woman** from the proposed new universal requirement to carry a photo ID. This is in any case a wicked and stupid law, but the exemption is insane beyond belief.

Isn't it interesting that just as the British have invented this grotesque new form of appeasement of militant Islam, the Saudis, in a vanishingly rare display of sense, are **going in the opposite direction?**:

Saudi scholars, Imams and women say that unveiling in critical situations is appropriate, and called for establishing policewomen sections within existing male departments to help foil terrorists who disguise themselves in Abayas. Tareq Al-Hawass, a professor at Shariah College in Dammam, believes that Islam does not prohibit a woman from unveiling her face if the necessity arises and for the sake of proving her identity to a policeman at a checkpoint. ...there is no Islamic script or verse that shows veiling as obligatory in Islam...

What a pity the religious authorities never explained that to their **mass-murdering lackeys** who forced Saudi schoolgirls back to their deaths in a burning school because they were not fleeing modestly enough.

Thu, 04/29/2004 - 16:28 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Why is a universal requirement to carry a photo ID

"A wicked and stupid law" but the U.S. fingerprinting Brazilian visitors a good idea?

by a reader on Thu, 04/29/2004 - 23:33 | [reply](#)

I'm interested to know

why it's a good idea for Blair to have a referendum over Europe - despite his personal strong opinion - if it wasn't a good idea for him to have a referendum over the war.

by a reader on Fri, 04/30/2004 - 05:14 | [reply](#)

Excuse off-topic nature of the last question

but it sank without trace when I asked it five blog entries earlier.

by a reader on Fri, 04/30/2004 - 05:17 | [reply](#)

The murdering lackeys ...

... is actually the bigger of the two stories, if you ask me.

by a reader on Mon, 05/03/2004 - 07:40 | [reply](#)

why 1 of these things is not like the other

a reader @ 5:14,

You really see no difference between joining Europe and participating in some war?

Hint: one's a finite-time policy choice which even if you think it's a mistake, (evidently) fell entirely within the PM's purview. (And if you disagreed with him, you can vote him out next opportunity.) The other alters the constitution of the country for all time. (And voting Blair out would not change that.)

if you're an American, it's like the difference between amending the Constitution, and passing some law. The former has a higher threshold for success, and rightfully so.

-Blix

by a reader on Mon, 05/03/2004 - 19:50 | [reply](#)

Oliver Kamm And The Missing Argument

Oliver Kamm recently wrote that **he would not have reconsidered** his position that the war to depose Saddam was right, however things had turned out afterwards. He wrote:

Deliberately allowing such a regime to remain in place when we had the power to remove it would have been to violate values that are axiomatic. Again, I can't easily argue for them, they merely seem to me obvious and irreducible. That's not to say it would be right to overthrow a bestial regime regardless of any other considerations, ever; there would, however, be an overwhelming presumption in favour of such action where it was possible to take it.

It was indeed a matter of moral values and we agree with Kamm's conclusion. However, we do not think that the relevant values are axiomatic and we shall now supply an argument for them.

We human beings do not understand the world all that well. That is not to say that there aren't some things that we understand very well indeed. The current state of human knowledge is an astonishing achievement for which we should feel pride and awe. However, the fact remains that our ignorance dwarfs our understanding – and (as Donald Rumsfeld recently **remarked**) when we are ignorant of something, we do not always know what. Therefore, when we think we are following a good policy based on a good underlying theory, we will sometimes be wrong. So we need to have a way of coping with such errors.

The way that we in the West do this is through institutions that allow people to withdraw their support from policies, ideas or leaders that they think are in error. Liberal democracy is one such institution: if we think that a political party that we once supported was so badly in error that we no longer wish to support it, we may vote for another party and try to persuade other people to do the same. Because of such institutions, the West is not necessarily doomed to be limited by the mistakes of any of its subcultures. This has made it the first and only society in history that is stable under rapid changes, and therefore also the first ever to be capable of sustained rapid improvement.

In some countries – of which pre-liberation Iraq was certainly one –

the rulers go out of their way to destroy such institutions or to prevent their formation. They do this to maintain themselves in power, to murder and extort with impunity. Such societies never thrive, and are doomed to suffer the errors of their rulers indefinitely.

From the point of view of these evil dictators, the open and self-improving nature of the West is an ever-present threat to their legitimacy and their lives. If they realise this, as they often do, they will be willing to go to considerable lengths, and take considerable risks, to hurt, cripple or destroy the West if they possibly can. If we let an evil dictator such as Saddam persist in acquiring weapons of mass destruction we run the risk of facing a mortal threat to our open society: there is the direct threat of mass casualties and the fear thereof; and there is the fact that in a society that cannot effectively suppress the intimidation of good people by evil factions, political progress is, at best, on hold. We also sacrifice the possibility that the dictator's victims would one day have contributed something distinctive to our understanding of the world.

A possible reason why Oliver Kamm missed this argument is that he is of the left. The left generally wants the state to interfere in economic transactions. Now, in short, you can switch your electricity company in a rather short time without going to jail, but you can't stop paying tax to the current government anywhere near as quickly or as certainly. In this and many other respects the market is an even better institution of criticism than liberal democracy. This argument is closely related to the one given above. Leftists, by definition, either do not know this argument or do not understand its generality. Hence being a leftist puts one at a disadvantage when it comes to understanding the reasons why the war to depose Saddam was right.

Fri, 04/30/2004 - 20:48 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Leftists by Definition

I am a Leftist, by definition, hypothetically. Please state further why I do not know this argument or do not understand its generality. This is not to debate the point of Leftism or Rightism so much as to better understand the argument. Can one be a Leftist not by definition?

by a reader on Fri, 04/30/2004 - 23:40 | [reply](#)

Leftist by Definition

'I am a Leftist, by definition, hypothetically.'

A person is not a leftist by definition, they are a leftist by choice. It's just that believing leftism entails thinking certain things that contradict this particular argument.

'Please state further why I do not know this argument or do not understand its generality.'

If you're a leftist you want to let the state rather than the market

control certain parts of the economy. However, a state institution providing a good is not as easily criticisable as a free market institution providing that good. If a person thought that criticisability was an important criterion for all institutions they would favour free markets over states. So leftists evidently don't see that this argument applies to the state/market issue in the areas where they think the state ought to interfere. Thus they either don't know the argument at all, or they are unaware that it applies to this case.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sat, 05/01/2004 - 00:44 | [reply](#)

not quite right

Hence being a leftist puts one at a disadvantage when it comes to understanding ***a reason*** why the war to depose Saddam was right.

to explain their misunderstanding of the other reasons, we must point out some of their other flaws.

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sat, 05/01/2004 - 02:08 | [reply](#)

Good job!

This was a great post.

AIS

by a reader on Sat, 05/01/2004 - 02:16 | [reply](#)

Could it be argued...?

Could it be argued that if one understands that argument and its generality even better than the average non-leftist, one will conclude that the deposing of Saddam is a job best done by private enterprise, and so government should keep out of it?

If not, why not?

by a reader on Sat, 05/01/2004 - 03:17 | [reply](#)

private armies? and more not right

private armies are a nice idea, and I hope to see them someday, but we do not have them yet, and we can't just wait around and refuse to have any wars until they are created -- defense is necessary *now*.

also i wanted to add another objection to the post. most right wing people do not *explicitly* understand the argument about markets being better institutions for criticism (how many get it inexplicitly is hard to say). but anyway, also, most right-wing people supported,

for true, *explicit* reasons. (how many people said they supported the war but didn't know why..?) therefore, i just don't see how you can claim this leftist failing was a significant handicap to having the right view on the war.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 05/01/2004 - 07:35 | [reply](#)

A reader

Good post. But I think you need to add some explanation of the following:

1. Why was the West willing to tolerate - and indeed support - Saddam throughout the 80s?
2. Why did the West not take the first Gulf War into Baghdad?
3. Why did the West not give support to the Shites during the 1991 uprising?

Did the best suffer from a moral failure? Or was it the case that Saddam served a useful purpose: namely keeping militant Islamism in check? And isn't the fact that we are still in Iraq a reflection of the truth of that?

by a reader on Sun, 05/02/2004 - 22:56 | [reply](#)

Good post. Re: comments, I

Good post.

Re: comments, I'm still trying to figure out what "I am a Leftist, by definition" is supposed to mean.

-Blixa

by a reader on Mon, 05/03/2004 - 19:52 | [reply](#)

"By definition"

I think you're somehow mis-parsing the sentence. The phrase "by definition" is enclosed in parenthetical commas. So to understand the sentence, read it omitting that phrase, and then add: "(This follows from the very definition of Leftists, given above.)"

by **David Deutsch** on Mon, 05/03/2004 - 20:11 | [reply](#)

Not a Leftist Then

"The left generally wants the state to interfere in economic transactions."

I do not generally want the state to interfere in economic

transactions. Therefore, by definition, I am not a Leftist. That was helpful to get that straight. Neither am I completely trusting of "the market" in all respects, unless the market is governed by natural market factors which are untethered from manipulation intended to distort markets or to imbalance them for solely personal gain.

Note the qualifier, "untethered from manipulation intended to distort".

by a reader on Mon, 05/03/2004 - 22:24 | [reply](#)

market distortion

can you give an example of a market distortion you're worried about? one that doesn't involve initiating force (which would make it illegal. no one says the market can withstand unlimited illegal acts...)

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 05/04/2004 - 00:31 | [reply](#)

market distortion

Agreed, no one says the market can withstand unlimited illegal acts.

There are also acts which are not illegal but legal within the bounds of the international marketplace. Walmart is a legal act, but that is far too easy. Eliminate the competition by volume. Corner the world market on cheaply made goods. Buy low high volume, sell low high volume, but sell relatively real price high and high volume. Exploit world market inequities in labor prices caused by world market forces of overpopulation and poverty.

Another would be to exploit market inequities caused not by market forces per se but by circumstance of source and resource and personal holdings. Is OPEC a market, a state, a private enterprise collaborative, or a princely fiefdom?

Another example, more troubling even, would be ships which fly the Liberian flag unregulated for safety or seaworthiness, and while still afloat on the high seas, ship hazardous chemicals worldwide with impunity.

Another example, this time to argue for natural market forces with limited oversight, would be the world diamond market. The market is normally driven by efficient market forces. In 2000 and 2001, Al Queda operatives sold extensive reserves of diamonds bought in Liberia and other gems, tanzanite from Tanzania legally, to finance illegal terrorism. The sales were legal. The sudden glut of gems on the market drove prices substantially higher. No one knew who was selling or why the market was distorted. There was no oversight In this case it was not distortion for personal gain but rather to finance worldwide destruction under the cloak of a free market. Perhaps

this is an anomaly.

You are right. The market does work without initiating force. Some limited oversight may always be needed to see that it continues to be free.

by a reader on Tue, 05/04/2004 - 14:15 | [reply](#)

Market Distortion

I don't understand the criticism of Walmart. Isn't what they do helping to alleviate the "World market inequities in labor prices caused by world market forces of overpopulation and poverty"?

I also don't see why a sudden glut of gems on the market would drive prices substantially higher. Seems to me it would do the opposite.

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 05/04/2004 - 15:39 | [reply](#)

i don't get it

you're mad at walmart for cheaply providing products people want to buy, and hiring people who wanted to be hired?

you're mad at al quaeda for selling us gems?

you're mad at people willing to use unsafe ships *at their own risk* to bring you cheaper stuff?

as to oil, i'm not sure what you're mad at.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 05/04/2004 - 19:44 | [reply](#)

Gems Correction

Prices were driven lower ultimately, buy high sell low, because the Al Queda operatives were trading heavily at non-market driven prices. They wanted liquidity and cash fast. The market was distorted.

I am not mad at any of the above. These are examples of market distortion. Granted they are not good things. They are reasons for considering limited oversight. If Walmart begins to rape and pillage, I might get mad. If a rusty oil tanker breaks apart and sinks next to my favorite beach, I might get mad. I am already mad at Al Quaeda for attempting to blow us all up. As to OPEC, I have a question.

by a reader on Mon, 05/10/2004 - 14:12 | [reply](#)

A Fork In The Road

Which is true,

Iraqis Hail Falluja 'Victory' as U.S. Changes Tack

or

an astonishing success by the USMC

or could it conceivably be both?

If the US has really 'changed tack' to allow the fighters in Falluja (including the perpetrators of the **atrocities** against the four Americans which sparked the present confrontation) either to escape or to retain control of their stronghold, it constitutes a major defeat for the Coalition and a catastrophe for Iraq and the world. For it means the end of hope for a functioning civil society in Iraq. No one will participate in civil institutions if their armed and murderous enemies are still permitted to operate with impunity.

On the other hand, if what we are seeing is merely part of a complex manoeuvre which is about to break the power of the faction currently controlling part of Falluja, then it is one of the most important victories so far in the liberation of Iraq and in the broader War Against Terror.

We are approaching a fork in the road.

Update: Wretchard at **Belmont Club** is sticking to his interpretation: **Retreat, Hell!**

We hope he's right.

Another update: And again.

Sat, 05/01/2004 - 15:12 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

The Elephant In The Room

The BBC World Affairs correspondent Paul Reynolds has posted an **analysis** of why the

letter to President Bush by former American diplomats complaining about US policy towards Israel and the Palestinians is unlikely to have much of an effect on the White House.

In summary, the reasons he gives are:

- The State Department doesn't have much influence on the present Administration.
- Some of the diplomats are involved in pro-Palestinian lobby groups and may not be seen as impartial.
- Few of them are well known.
- The letter barely mentions Iraq, which is of more interest to the US Government and would also be more effective because of 'we told you so' arguments.

Not one word about the fact that the Administration considers the current policy towards Israel to be right. Nor about whether there was anything in the letter that could make them think that the current policy is wrong.

Isn't it astonishing that someone whose job is to keep abreast of world affairs is completely unaware of one of the major determinants of international events today? Or perhaps 'unaware' isn't the right term. He is aware of it. It's just that he is *pathologically committed to denying its existence.*

Tue, 05/04/2004 - 19:59 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Can I Quote Me On That?

David Schneider-Joseph looked up a New York Times story cited by Michael Moore in support of one of his conspiracy theories.

Guess whom the New York Times was quoting, in that story?

Thu, 05/06/2004 - 16:26 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

My guess is ...

... David Schneider-Joseph. But what good is a mere guess. You could tell us and give us a link, couldn't you?

by a reader on Mon, 05/10/2004 - 07:38 | [reply](#)

Link to Curiosity

a reader wrote

You could tell us and give us a link, couldn't you?

Perhaps the link we gave is not working for you. If it were, you would have seen that the person they were quoting was Michael Moore's own spokesman – in effect, Michael Moore himself.

by [Editor](#) on Mon, 05/10/2004 - 16:30 | [reply](#)

Works now ...

Well, Michael Moore isn't amusing anyway. Just very bullishly opinionated in a way which some people for some reason like. I'd hate to have such a guy on my side, so it's just as well he's a spokesperson for the other side of things most of the time.

by a reader on Tue, 05/11/2004 - 11:08 | [reply](#)

Another Elephant In The Room

Some snapshots of the interaction between Islam and other religions today:

In **Cordoba, Spain**, Muslims have petitioned the Vatican for permission to pray in Cordoba Cathedral, because it was once a mosque. Muslims are of course already allowed to enter the Cathedral as visitors, as they are allowed into all churches and synagogues. Incidentally, the mosque that became Cordoba Cathedral was built on the site of a demolished Christian church. Of course, in those days, the prevailing values were – well – medieval.

Last week, in **Zamfara, Nigeria**:

Governor Ahmed Sani of Zamfara State, has ordered the demolition of all churches in the state, as he launched the second phase of his Sharia project yesterday. Speaking at the launch in Gusau, the state capital, Governor Sani disclosed that time was ripe for full implementation of the programme as enshrined in the Holy Quran. He added that his government would soon embark on demolition of all places of worship of unbelievers in the state, in line with Islamic injunction to fight them wherever they are found.

What, like **this**?:

In Jeruslaem, Israel, four years ago, the Palestinians rejected a peace treaty that would have given them an independent state. They embarked instead on a murderous war to destroy the Jewish state. They claimed that the war was a spontaneous uprising sparked by Mr Sharon desecrating a mosque by entering it while being Jewish. They were **lying**: they had been planning the war for some time, and Sharon had never entered the mosque. However, the very idea that he had, caused an upsurge of anti-Israel feeling and violence among Muslims worldwide. Why? The doctrine that by entering a mosque, a Jew justifies the mass killing of Jews in retaliation, is never criticised in the press. On the contrary, Western coverage of these events usually condones it by blaming Sharon for his 'provocative' action of walking near the mosque. Incidentally, the mosque that he did not enter was built on the ruins of the ancient Jewish Temple.

Meanwhile, in **Sudan**:

Over the last 15 years, the Sudanese government has ... imposed a reactionary version of Islamic law that includes crucifixion, stoning to death of mothers who are out of wedlock, and "cross amputation" (removing the hand and foot from opposite sides of the body); waged what the U.S. House of Representatives has called a "genocidal" war on its southern, largely Christian and animist population; promoted forced conversion to its brand of Islam; strafed refugees with helicopter gunships; and manipulated food relief as a weapon, resulting in the death of over two million people — more than in Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo, Cote D'Ivoire, and Liberia combined. It has also produced four million displaced people, the largest such population on the face of the earth.

Sudan has just been **re-elected** to the UN Human Rights Commission.

Why is there so little public criticism of the values that inform the behaviour of Muslim governments towards non-Muslims?

Intimidation is one reason, but it is presumably not the main one. What is?

Sat, 05/08/2004 - 17:29 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Two Possible Reasons

Public criticism is extremely limited when,

- 1) There is not a free press in the countries where the behavior takes place.
- 2) There is not separation of church (or synagogue or mosque) and state. Borders are respected not only as physical boundaries but as religio-political boundaries.

Information starts at home.

Further, public criticism of values is limited when underground protest and press results in imprisonment and death.

by a reader on Sat, 05/08/2004 - 23:24 | [reply](#)

multiculturalism?

most people, I think, aren't that interested in doing, say, what LGF does. too much work and such. too complicated..

most self-styled intellectuals, the type who would be interested in doing that kind of commentary, sad to say, seem to be politically correct cultural relativists (why? we can blame colleges, the media, and umm, i dunno). and they are very nasty to people who try to be reasonable. LGF is deemed a hate site, or at the least biased and just one point of view.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 05/09/2004 - 06:20 | [reply](#)

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Come-As-You-Are Wars

When the United States joined the Second World War in December 1941, it did so with racially segregated armed forces. Ubiquitous, cruelly irrational discrimination against non-white soldiers was legal and largely taken for granted. Little of this had changed by the time the United States led the Allies to victory in 1945. It began to change only in 1948, when President Truman ordered the desegregation of the US Navy.

Therefore, if Hitler had only postponed his attack on Poland, and if the Japanese had only postponed theirs on Pearl Harbor, for a decade or so, the Allies would have been able to field armies incomparably more worthy to take up a fight against racist tyranny.

Of course, by then they would have been facing nuclear weapons and intercontinental missiles.

In the event, the enemy was not so prudent, and in 1941, Americans did not have the option to wait until they themselves were without sin before going to war. Though there were appeasers and pacifists and outright enemies among them who urged further phoney peace initiatives and concessions, the Second World War was not an elective war any more than the present war is. The West had already waited far too long. Fifty million lives too long, as it turned out. A blighted generation too long. A Holocaust too long.

The summons could not be refused and it could not be procrastinated. It said: come as you are, ready or not. For it is usually the aggressor, not the victim, who gets to choose when and where a war will break out. And so sixteen million young Americans, who had not been ready, rushed into the war with all their hangups and their shameful flaws and their parochialism and rough edges on display for all to see and sneer at. They had not asked for this to happen, and some of them made terrible mistakes. And some committed crimes – for among any sixteen million human beings chosen at random there will be thousands of murderers and tens of thousands of rapists and criminals of every kind. And that is how America saved the world.

They had the moral high ground. Yes, thousands of American criminals in uniform committed crimes in the liberated countries (and for that matter in allied countries). American bigots in uniform daily committed what would today be called hate crimes. American antisemites in power sent Jewish refugees back to their deaths and

refused to attack the Auschwitz death camp from the air. Yes, they all shamed themselves and their country. But for all that, America did not lose an inch of the moral high ground that it had claimed when going to war. The idea that it could is insane.

Imagine that someone at the time had written about any of those shameful acts in the way that **Andrew Sullivan** has about the Abu Ghraib scandal:

But I cannot disguise that the moral core of the case for war has been badly damaged. It would be insane to abort our struggle there now because of these obscenities. But ... what this ... nightmare has done is rob us of much of this moral high ground – and not just symbolically or in the eyes of others. But *actually* and in the eyes of ourselves.

Of course it hasn't. Crimes have been committed: those responsible will be punished. Apart from that, what has happened here is that a sophisticated weapons system of which we were rightly proud, turned out to have a flaw and has harmed people against whom it was not aimed. Regrettably, this happens sometimes in war. Remember, this was a come-as-you-are war. Of course it must be investigated urgently, and the level of the system at which the flaw occurred must be identified, and improvements must be made so that it does not happen again. But there is no more significance to the affair than that. Most people understand this. Those who were morally opposed to the war of course still oppose it. Some (not all) of them are engaging in the same orgy of *Schadenfreude* and self-vindication as they do every time anything bad happens to America – including the occasions when American bombs, despite all the care that is taken, go astray and kill innocents. But very few who have believed until now that the liberation of Iraq and the broader war on terror are morally right, will be convinced by the Abu Ghraib affair that America is now a bad guy.

Fortunately, not everyone has a weakness for wallowing in completely imaginary guilt. Go flagellate yourself if you must, Andrew, but leave America out of it.

Sun, 05/09/2004 - 23:56 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

"Flaw" or bad policy?

Crimes have been committed: those responsible will be punished.

Let me ask you this: do you think what happened at Abu Ghraib is the logical outcome of a US policy decision to use abuse - and in some cases torture - as a tool in the fight against terrorism? And if this is the case, can we bring those responsible (eg. Donald Rumsfeld, assuming he is responsible) to justice without compromising the war in Iraq?

Apart from that, what has happened here is that a

sophisticated weapons system of which we were rightly proud, turned out to have a flaw and has harmed people against whom it was not aimed.

This so-called sophisticated weapons system imprisoned thousands of innocent Iraqis at Abu Ghraib, many for months on end, and inflicted abuse on many. It has done the same - and maybe worse - at other prison complexes in Iraq and Afghanistan (see eg. [this](#)). How can you say it was not aimed this way? It seems to me that the flaw of which you write is really bad policy and it won't be corrected until this policy is put under scrutiny.

BTW I accept your general argument that the scandal does not affect the moral case for invading Iraq. I just don't share your faith that all those responsible will be brought to justice.

by a reader on Mon, 05/10/2004 - 05:15 | [reply](#)

Moral, but impelling?

The coalition forces may have the moral high ground. But did they really have a impelling reason to be in Iraq? What has been gained for people in the US, British and other coalition countries? Aside from the moral joy of helping liberate some Iraqies from the misrule of other some Iraqis?

by a reader on Mon, 05/10/2004 - 09:35 | [reply](#)

How can educated people say such ridiculous things?!

Like "United States led the Allies to victory in 1945", "And that is how America saved the world". Everyone around the world loughs at it. It is very similar to French way of educating people. They, in France, say in schools: There were three fronts in WW2 - French resistance, some British help and a number of other countries. In a very similar way Egyptian thinks that they continuously won several wars against Israel (1967, 1973 etc.). Looking at how people re-tell historical events I sometimes think that there is no such science as history - it is only education that matters.

by a reader on Mon, 05/10/2004 - 09:51 | [reply](#)

The Difference

Mr A. Nonymous wrote that the World was talking rubbish when we said:

'Like "United States led the Allies to victory in 1945", "And that is how America saved the world". Everyone around the world loughs at it. It is very similar to French way of educating people. They, in France, say in schools: There were three fronts in WW2 - French resistance, some British help and a number of other countries. In a very similar way Egyptian thinks that they continuously won several wars against Israel (1967, 1973 etc.). Looking at how people re-tell

historical events I sometimes think that there is no such science as

history - it is only education that matters.'

The French surrendered in World War Two and only a few thousand of them mounted a resistance. The French government willingly shipped Jews out to the East to die. The Americans, on the other hand, produced most of the weapons used by the British and the Russians to defeat the Nazis. They played a very large part in planning the Allied invasion of Europe and they provided millions of troops. The British after becoming the first country in Europe to refuse to surrender to the Nazis helped the Americans to liberate Europe. The Russians fought and died in their millions against the Nazis; despite the fact that Stalin was also an evil man they deserve a large helping of credit for helping to beat the Nazis. So to wrap up - the French sat back and ate croissants; America saved the world.

The Egyptians in fact didn't win wars against Israel. Their aim, as clearly stated before every such war, was to kill all of the Israelis. They never succeeded in this war aim and they usually lost territory, which Israel later gave back as part of a peace deal.

History is not a science. However, there are good historical arguments like 'America saved the world during World War Two' and bad historical arguments like 'France saved the world during World War Two'. The only way we can get closer to such truths is by arguments like the one above rather than blank assertions.

Oh, by the way, we're British, not American.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Mon, 05/10/2004 - 23:32 | [reply](#)

Re: The Difference

ouch!

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Tue, 05/11/2004 - 04:53 | [reply](#)

It is not French, who saved the world at all

I was just giving examples, how education perverts the truth in different countries in different ways. Saying that French saved the world is at the same level of truth as saying it about Americans, who got themselves involved only after Pearl Harbour (half-way through). In fact, several countries together delivered the victory - Russia (who defeated majority of all German troops even if losing badly millions of people due to mistakes etc.), UK and America. But US takes the top-from-behind of this list. If they only arrived earlier than the war wouldn't be such a disaster for everyone, but they didn't. What we all agree now is that blind pacifism (which prevented many nations from fighting Nazis from the beginning) very often leads to BIG problems.

by a reader on Tue, 05/11/2004 - 08:20 | [reply](#)

Separating issues

It's sad to see people so unable to separate issues. I am against the

invasion of Iraq; it is a pointless battle. But none the less, condemning the war on the grounds of what **some soldiers** have done in Iraqi prisons is an argument I will not side with. IF the war had been a good idea, THEN what happened in Iraqi prisons serve only to stain those with responsibility and knowledge. They should of course be court-martialled and publicly executed (which for my own sake means I hope this goes all the way up to Rumsfeld). But I am ashamed to see those who - on the surface - agree with me resort to any cheap argument.

by a reader on Wed, 05/12/2004 - 07:02 | [reply](#)

Re Separating issues

"what happened in Iraqi prisons serve only to stain those with responsibility and knowledge. They should of course be court-martialled and publicly executed"

I wonder. Do you think that all Iraqis who were responsible for this level of human rights violations should be publicly executed too, or is it just Americans you fantasize about killing?

by a reader on Wed, 05/12/2004 - 12:10 | [reply](#)

Both

I see no reason to spare those who committed atrocities under Saddam. It puzzles me a bit that Saddam himself has not been executed yet, too. For though invading Iraq was a bad idea, the US has been very ambivalent about whether they really have taken over or not, when it comes to truly bringing responsible individuals to justice. IF you fight a war, do it whole-heartedly. That also forces the question upon you: "Is this war worth fighting whole-heartedly?"

Best: No war.

Second: A whole-hearted war.

Worst: This war.

by a reader on Thu, 05/13/2004 - 11:17 | [reply](#)

Lying Press

Here's **Daniel Pipes** on a type of systematic disinformation that we've **noted** several times before:

This euphemism "militant" is becoming a true obstacle to understanding the Palestinian war on Israel; things have reached the point where politically-correct news organizations are even surreptitiously changing the words of Israeli spokesmen.

Thu, 05/13/2004 - 02:15 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Too much fuss from one word distract people from the problem

It is true that making little changes in news announcements does a good job of perverting the truth or the image of Israel. But pointing out at "militant" each time doesn't do a good job of restoring the truth or the image. Just stop following the opponent in this stupid game and do something different instead.

by a reader on Thu, 05/13/2004 - 08:42 | [reply](#)

Something different

Should be done of course, but that doesn't mean stop insisting that the media et al state the truth. Words do matter; how we describe something has an affect on how we think about that something. The war being waged against Israel and her people is being waged on many fronts, and it is far easier to kill us if the world can be persuaded to look away, or see it as a warped sort of justice.

And while this is a "little change" in the wording, the affect could be quite large in the understanding.

be well,
Rachel Ann

by [RachelAnn](#) on Thu, 05/13/2004 - 09:40 | [reply](#)

The video

This place seems a reliable link source:

<http://ilovejennabush.blogspot.com/>

And you know which video I am talking about. The one that makes you grab for your guns.

by a reader on Thu, 05/13/2004 - 14:30 | [reply](#)

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Let's Face it

Solomon is trying to get the world to face up to a very ugly and frightening truth.

The frustrating thing is, if the world did face up to it, it would become far less frightening and would soon cease to be true.

Update: And here's a thoughtful piece by Evan Coyne Maloney on a related issue: **Abu Ghraib & Nick Berg**. (Via **InstaPundit**.)

Fri, 05/14/2004 - 03:31 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

Dangerous turn

So, what is the point of this article in Solomon? What does the author ask the "Zionists" to do? Seems unclear to me. People all around the world seemed to miss the rise of Hitler - true. People seem to miss the rise of new Islamofashist ideology - true. But not only Islam - in fact, any religion as a social institute (not as someones personal beliefs) is evil. So what shall we do? Strike first, I guess. In what way?

Any extremist ideology usually starts from showing the truth about future decay unless we do something now. And of course, the people on this site are intelligent enough not to allow primitive instincts to burst out, but...ideas have consequences.

The article makes an important step - it doesn't only tell about specific moral failuers in Islam, it suggests starting a war against it. Or am I wrong about the main idea of it?

A war in Iraq has been a big failure for US not because some idiots tortured Iraqis in a jail, but because it was unjustified (there is no WMD, no Osama in there) and ineffective (more radical islamists are on their way). But the goal was right - remove the dictatorship of Saddam. The previous shameful US campaign in Jugoslavia - destroyed economy, islamists on the rise. How does it happen - whenever America goes to fight Islam radicalism - it always helps them. And 50 former american diplomats are wrong about loosing an image of "good guys" because of US Meadle East policy. The outside world sees Americans as similar extremist with a different name - may be it is not completely untrue..

by a reader on Fri, 05/14/2004 - 08:52 | [reply](#)

A couple of notes

First, thank you for the link. It's gratifying to spend time writing something and have it actually be read and appreciated.

Second, a bit of clarification for those who may need it. The theme of the article is basically me walking my thoughts through - thoughts brought on by hearing people carp about the major conflict of our world today - the fight against Middle Eastern Islamofascism and Totalitarian demagoguery - being just a product of us needing to understand each other better which I believe is likely nonsense and more a product of wishful projection. While I go a bit afield from that, that's just a product of writing without an outline I guess.

I wander into two territories to make my point. The first being Nazi Germany, which is an overused metaphor, but that's because it's such a good one for two reasons: Not as a prescription that we should march across Europe and seize Berlin (although as I write that it does contain some appeal), but One, because anyone worth talking to immediately grasps WW2 as about as close to a big war of good v. evil as you're ever likely to get, and two, because even those uninitiated in history have at least a basic outline of the facts involved. You don't have to do any extra explaining to make a point. There are plenty of other examples where physical confrontation was extremely likely regardless of how much talking either side did (King Philip's War here in New England coming to mind), but many of them would require a history lesson in and of themselves and would likely sidetrack the point. WW2 is very convenient for these reasons.

The second place I wander to is Israel and antisemitism, of course. If "the enemy" can so twist history, logic, morality, and the reporting of fact to demonise and ultimately destroy that country, and create hatred of Jews as they have, then it will only be a matter of time before those same forces are turned on us next. There's nothing to stop it, and, as readers of this web site know, those forces are ultimately irrational, based as they are on the twisting of all of the above. How can one reason with the irrational? Further, it is internally corrupting. That could be another whole post, but there's something in that letter from the 50+ "ex-diplomats" and their Arabist, antisemitic boobery that encapsulates the concept.

I don't generally do prescriptions. There's something ultimately frivolous and silly in a blogger making war plans that makes me want to avoid such posting. I'll only go so far as to say that I support opinion leaders who understand the gravity and reality of the situation we face and leave it there. Others will have to pick up from where my essay leaves off.

I am also cognizant of my own fallibility. It is possible I am wrong, and I understand that the concepts I address may lead toward some overreaching extremism - hence my holding out of some hope and ending the essay as I do. But at the same time I want to avoid being an "extremist," I'm not going to shy away from the truth as I

see it in order to avoid a label.

by [Solomon](#) on Fri, 05/14/2004 - 15:10 | [reply](#)

Talking about the truth - but not only

Apart from informing everyone and sharing your thoughts, your comparison with late ignition in WW2 does a good job of provoking action. And, as I said, US already tried to start first with regrettable results. I am only afraid of worse consequences of such pro-active "highly moral" future American/British actions. I hope we all agree that it wouldn't be possible to start anti-German campaign before 1939, although there shouldn't be any appeasements and delays after the war has started with occupying Czechoslovakia.

by a reader on Fri, 05/14/2004 - 15:54 | [reply](#)

I can't say

History is as it was, no changing it. I've no encyclopedic memory, but someone who can rattle off the facts better than I can probably show that Hitler had been violating his treaty obligations since long before 1939. Yet the calculus at every point was to let it go rather than risk bloodshed. No one event was anything anyone wanted to risk war over, although they could have. (Reminds me of, "One more inspection...OK, but if Saddam doesn't cooperate THIS time, oh boy, we're really gonna talk tough then...") Chamberlain, a hawk rendered a dove by the horrors of WW1 ran more by the philosophy of, "As long as we keep talking, at least we're not fighting..." In the mean-time, Hitler built and re-armed... (I don't mean to only pick on Chamberlain here, the US didn't enter until we were bombed and declared war on, but again, Chamberlain is a convenient device to make the point.)

by [Solomon](#) on Fri, 05/14/2004 - 18:57 | [reply](#)

Re: I can't say

Solomon wrote:

History is as it was, no changing it

Indeed. Nevertheless (as Solomon implies), 'counterfactual' statements about it can be meaningful (see my book, [The Fabric of Reality](#) for an explanation). In fact, history, and the world in general, are incomprehensible without them.

For instance, it takes an unusually extreme commitment to political determinism (or to a variety of other life-denying falsehoods) to deny, as 'a reader' does, that if the West had adopted different policies, such as those advocated by Churchill and others, Hitler would have been stopped before 1939, and at the cost of fewer than fifty million deaths. This is not only a meaningful statement,

despite the impossibility of changing history, it is an extremely

important truth.

Likewise it is true that had the policy of appeasement been pursued for only a few years longer, then the consequences (either a nuclear slugging match or a Nazi victory) would have made the actual World War look like a brief inconvenience.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Fri, 05/14/2004 - 20:07 | [reply](#)

Treaty Obligations

OK I realise this is an old string but I've only just read it!

I thought I'd respond to the comment on German treaty obligations and how they were breaking them long before 1939. The treaty of Versailles limited Germany to an army of 100,000 with no tanks or heavy artillery. It also restricted their Navy to 15,000 men and no submarines while the fleet was limited to six battleships (of less than 10,000 tons), six cruisers and 12 destroyers. Germany was not permitted an air force.

OK here are a few facts to show how Germany was breaking these obligations long before 1939.

The Army

Panzer IV design work had begun in 1935 and trials of prototypes were undertaken in 1937. The Panzer I marked the first production tank design in Germany since the conclusion of World War I. In 1932, specifications for a light (5-ton) tank were made and issued to the German industrial manufacturers. Production began in 1934. Recognising that this programme was banned under Versailles the Panzer I was referred to as "Landwirtschaftlicher Schlepper" (an agricultural tractor).

The Navy

The treaty limited Battleships to 10,000 tons but the Pocket Battleships all had displacements over this limit. The first of which, Deutschland, was launched in 1933. The famous Battleship Bismarck was laid down in July 1936. It's displacement was almost five times the limit in Versailles.

The Air force

Heinkel, Messerschmitt, Dornier and others were developing planes for the Luftwaffe from the early 1930's. In 1934 the Luftwaffe held a competition to choose the design for its principal fighter. The winner was the famous Messerschmitt BF109. The Heinkel He111, one of the bombers responsible for most of the damage during the Blitz in 1940 first flew in 1935.

by RK on Wed, 06/28/2006 - 14:20 | [reply](#)

But The Damage Is Done

The Daily Mirror has **apologised** – sort of – for publishing a pack of lies about British soldiers abusing Iraqi prisoners. Responding to pressure from their shareholders and others, they have sacked their editor Piers Morgan.

However, Morgan himself **refuses to apologise**. Like **Greg Dyke** before him, he has no idea what he has done.

Sat, 05/15/2004 - 15:43 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Bush and Blair never apologised for cheating two countries!

The simple truth remains unnoticed by the authors on this web-site - there is no WMD in Iraq. Publishing fake photos is a child play comparing to what Bush and Blair have done to the image of two countries - they run a fake war - where is their apology after all???

by a reader on Mon, 05/17/2004 - 10:11 | [reply](#)

No, it was a real war

a reader remarks:

The simple truth remains unnoticed by the authors on this web-site ... Bush and Blair ... [ran] a fake war...

In fact we have already covered this in considerable depth [here](#), and particularly [here](#).

by [Editor](#) on Mon, 05/17/2004 - 10:39 | [reply](#)

Either the links are wrong or you avoiding answering

The links refer to conspiracy theories topic. I hope, the editor simply mad a mistake. The question remains: where is Iraqi WMD?

by a reader on Mon, 05/17/2004 - 12:57 | [reply](#)

Re: Either the links are wrong or you avoiding answering

a reader asked:

the links refer to conspiracy theories topic. I hope, the editor simply mad[e] a mistake. The question remains: where is Iraqi WMD?

No, the links are correct and we commend them to you. If you believe that we know where the Iraqi WMD are, then that is one kind of conspiracy theory. If, as seems more likely, it was a rhetorical question and you believe that the WMD never existed and Mr Blair and Mr Bush (or whoever is 'behind' them) have known that all along, then that is another kind of conspiracy theory. This is why we referred you to our series on conspiracy theories.

In particular, if you want to know why the belief in question is a conspiracy theory, consult that series. If you want to know our explanation of why conspiracy theories of this type tend to be false, consult that series. If you want further analysis of the role of conspiracy theories in the world today, and the harm that they do to their holders, we ask you to be patient. The series will continue.

Hope that helps.

by [Editor](#) on Mon, 05/17/2004 - 13:30 | [reply](#)

So, what was the reason to invade Iraq then?

I might have forgotten how frantically inspectors were searching for WMD in Iraq and believe that "illegal weapon possession" was the reason to go. Now, after you have noticed that it would be wrong to assume that Bush/Blair knew that there is no WMD all the way, then the only option remains as a reason - Saddam's refusal to admit inspectors or his wicked intentions to acquire WMD - is it what you trying to say? I thought we would never see the rise of "pre-crime units" in a civilised country, but reality proved me wrong...

If Bush and Blair didn't know that WMD existed for sure and discovered the truth together with the rest of the world - then they led two countries on war without a serious reason (nevertheless, the consequences are goddamn serious). You shouldn't be too keen on conspiracy theories in order to realise that. A number of other countries either do not admit inspectors or admit possessing WMD. A number of other countries exhibit dictatorship state model and incite/sponsor terrorism openly. And these are the cases when we know for SURE.

The damage Daily Mirror made is much much less important now. The damage done by Bush/Blair to Iraq, US, UK and the rest of the world by their unilateral action is incomparable - and there is neither apology nor a resolution from them both. There is a great opportunity for radical muslims in Iraq now to come into power sooner or later (as it already happened - thanks to Americans - in Afganistan not long ago). Of course, it would be rather silly conspiracy theory to assume that Bush/Blair never leave the opportunity to help brothers-muslims in a dodgy way.

by a reader on Mon, 05/17/2004 - 17:08 | [reply](#)

Why?

'I might have forgotten how frantically inspectors were searching for WMD in Iraq and believe that "illegal weapon possession" was the reason to go. Now, after you have noticed that it would be wrong to assume that Bush/Blair knew that there is no WMD all the way, then the only option remains as a reason - Saddam's refusal to admit inspectors or his wicked intentions to acquire WMD - is it what you trying to say? I thought we would never see the rise of "pre-crime units" in a civilised country, but reality proved me wrong...'

Saddam and his goons had already committed mass murder, tortured people by the bushel, started a war and was running a vicious Stalinist police state in his country. He was also running WMD programmes, presumably to start another war. Part of the reason was to prevent whatever evil he had planned and part of it was his past history. Also

<http://www.settingtheworldtorights.com/node/view/326.html>

by **Alan Forrester** on Mon, 05/17/2004 - 18:19 | [reply](#)

Also: Bush and his goons

have already committed mass murder, tortured people by the bushel, started a war and is running a vicious Stalinist police state in his country(well still working on the last one!).

by a reader on Tue, 05/18/2004 - 02:24 | [reply](#)

The killing of innocents

"For nearly 12 years, Staff Sgt. Jimmy Massey was a hard-core, some say gung-ho, Marine. For three years he trained fellow Marines in one of the most grueling indoctrination rituals in military life - Marine boot camp.

The Iraq war changed Massey. The brutality, the sheer carnage of the U.S. invasion, touched his conscience and transformed him forever. He was honorably discharged with full severance last Dec. 31 and is now back in his hometown, Waynsville, N.C.

When I talked with Massey last week, he expressed his remorse at the civilian loss of life in incidents in which he himself was involved.

Q: You spent 12 years in the Marines. When were you sent to Iraq?

A: I went to Kuwait around Jan. 17. I was in Iraq from the get-go. And I was involved in the initial invasion.

Q: What does the public need to know about your experiences as a Marine?

A: The cause of the Iraqi revolt against the American occupation.

What they need to know is we killed a lot of innocent people. I think at first the Iraqis had the understanding that casualties are a part of war. But over the course of time, the occupation hurt the Iraqis. And I didn't see any humanitarian support."

Full article [here](#).

The crimes of Piers Morgan and the BBC pale into insignificance compared to the above.

by a reader on Tue, 05/18/2004 - 05:05 | [reply](#)

Having your cake and eating it

If...you believe that the WMD never existed and Mr Blair and Mr Bush (or whoever is 'behind' them) have known that all along, then that is another kind of conspiracy theory

If you believe that WMD existed, that Bush and Blair knew this, and that the WMD have now vanished then, among other things, you have to account for why they were never used (and are not now being used by insurgents, terrorists, and such-like), why no-one has come forward to say where they are (esp. now that Saddam is gone), why satellite observations etc have not picked up the tell-tale signs of burial, and why the inspection programs carried out by the UN and by the US missed them. Seems like you need one whooper of a conspiracy theory.

On the other hand, if you do not now believe that WMD existed then you should be demanding an apology from Bush and from Blair for all the evidently fallacious claims that were made. Just like you rightfully demand an apology from Morgan and from Dyke. It matters not whether Bush and Blair did or did not know whether the claims they made were false (and it is not a conspiracy theory to believe that WMD never existed and that Bush and Blair *did not know*). It was their business to find out and they screwed up.

Judging from Alan Forrester's comment, you believe that Iraq had WMD programs "presumably to start another war". Now I might ask why he couldn't have been running them for deterrence (or, indeed, need them to start a war when he could just as well have started one with conventional weapons), but have you actually paid close attention to **what David Kay said? He talked about WMD-related program activities. For example, they found:**

1. clandestine network of laboratories and safehouses within the Iraqi Intelligence Service that contained equipment subject to UN monitoring and suitable for continuing CBW research.

2. A prison laboratory complex, possibly used in human testing of BW agents, that Iraqi officials working to prepare for UN inspections were explicitly ordered not to declare to the UN.

3. Reference strains of biological organisms concealed in a

scientist's home, one of which can be used to produce biological weapons.

4. New research on BW-applicable agents, Brucella and Congo Crimean Hemorrhagic Fever (CCHF), and continuing work on ricin and aflatoxin were not declared to the UN.

5. Documents and equipment, hidden in scientists' homes, that would have been useful in resuming uranium enrichment by centrifuge and electromagnetic isotope separation (EMIS).

6. A line of UAVs not fully declared at an undeclared production facility and an admission that they had tested one of their declared UAVs out to a range of 500 km, 350 km beyond the permissible limit.

....

Note the equivocations, the use of phrases such as "that would have been useful", "suitable for continuing", "possibly used". If you read the speech with a critical eye, it is difficult to conclude that Saddam had any weapons programs of any significance. In any case, what David Kay concluded is a long way from the claims about actual WMD that were made prior to the war. You might argue that one of the reasons we went to war was to remove the uncertainty but what if the uncertainty arose because of failures in intelligence gathering and interpretation? Are we running the risk of making similar mistakes in the future by not demanding - as it seems you are not - full accountability (with attendant apologies)?

by a reader on Tue, 05/18/2004 - 05:57 | [reply](#)

Everyone was told that WMD was THE REASON

But not the past history. Full stop.

by a reader on Tue, 05/18/2004 - 07:59 | [reply](#)

What next?

I can't recall Bush or Blair coming on television to tell us that "We must wage war on Saddam's Iraq because it is a Stalinist regime that commits atrocities and violates human rights". What they told us was that Saddam had WMDs, and that was the reason, period. So you are left with two uncomfortable realities:

1. Bush and Blair's intelligence workers had their facts seriously wrong.
2. Bush and Blair knew there were no WMD, and had ulterior motives.

Since you reject (2) on the grounds that it is a conspiracy theory,

you are left with (1). What consequences do you think such a serious and costly error should have for future international action by Britain and by the US?

by a reader on Tue, 05/18/2004 - 11:25 | [reply](#)

And Back In Reality...

Somebody wrote:

'Everyone was told that WMD was THE REASON

'But not the past history. Full stop.'

And Some other person wrote:

'I can't recall Bush or Blair coming on television to tell us that "We must wage war on Saddam's Iraq because it is a Stalinist regime that commits atrocities and violates human rights". What they told us was that Saddam had WMDs, and that was the reason, period.'

George Bush **said**:

'The threat comes from Iraq. It arises directly from the Iraqi regime's own actions -- its history of aggression, and its drive toward an arsenal of terror. Eleven years ago, as a condition for ending the Persian Gulf War, the Iraqi regime was required to destroy its weapons of mass destruction, to cease all development of such weapons, and to stop all support for terrorist groups. The Iraqi regime has violated all of those obligations. It possesses and produces chemical and biological weapons. It is seeking nuclear weapons. It has given shelter and support to terrorism, and practices terror against its own people. The entire world has witnessed Iraq's eleven-year history of defiance, deception and bad faith.'

So obviously people people were not told that WMD was the reason. Some people like to imagine that Bush and Blair said WMD were the reason but they are wrong.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Tue, 05/18/2004 - 13:17 | [reply](#)

Re: And Back in Reality...

Also, here are the conditions that President Bush said, in his [address to the United Nations](#), Iraq would have to meet if it wanted peace:

If the Iraqi regime wishes peace, it will immediately and unconditionally forswear, disclose, and remove or destroy all weapons of mass destruction, long-range missiles, and all related material. If the Iraqi regime wishes peace, it will immediately end all support for terrorism and act to suppress it, as all states are required to do by U.N. Security Council resolutions. If the Iraqi regime wishes peace, it will cease persecution of its civilian population, including Shi'a, Sunnis, Kurds,

Turkomans, and others, again as required by Security Council resolutions. If the Iraqi regime wishes peace, it will release or account for all Gulf War personnel whose fate is still unknown. It will return the remains of any who are deceased, return stolen property, accept liability for losses resulting from the invasion of Kuwait, and fully cooperate with international efforts to resolve these issues, as required by Security Council resolutions. If the Iraqi regime wishes peace, it will immediately end all illicit trade outside the oil-for-food program. It will accept U.N. administration of funds from that program, to ensure that the money is used fairly and promptly for the benefit of the Iraqi people.

Human memory does not work in the way that it subjectively seems to. We do not store the equivalent of movie footage of our experiences and later play it back. We actually store only a tiny fraction of that amount of information, and not in the form of images but only *clues* for our later use. When we remember something, it is through a creative process of interpreting those clues in the light of our broader interpretation and explanations. This is why we are capable of understanding events, including their causes and the universal laws and principles that underlie them. But it is also why it is so easy to forget things that we did experience but which contradicted our interpretation of what must be happening, as here:

I can't recall Bush or Blair coming on television to tell us that "We must wage war on Saddam's Iraq because it is a Stalinist regime that commits atrocities and violates human rights".

and also to remember states of affairs that never happened, because we assume that they must have, as here:

What they told us was that Saddam had WMDs, and that was the reason, period.

The internet has exactly the opposite virtue: it remembers facts superbly well but cannot tell you how to interpret them.

by a reader on Tue, 05/18/2004 - 15:41 | [reply](#)

Re: And Back in Reality...

George Bush did indeed say:

It [Iraq] possesses and produces chemical and biological weapons. It is seeking nuclear weapons.

In the same speech he also says:

If we know Saddam Hussein has dangerous weapons today -- and we do -- does it make any sense for the

world to wait to confront him as he grows even stronger

and develops even more dangerous weapons?

We've also discovered through intelligence that Iraq has a growing fleet of manned and unmanned aerial vehicles that could be used to disperse chemical or biological weapons across broad areas. We're concerned that Iraq is exploring ways of using these UAVS for missions targeting the United States.

The evidence indicates that Iraq is reconstituting its nuclear weapons program.

Satellite photographs reveal that Iraq is rebuilding facilities at sites that have been part of its nuclear program in the past. Iraq has attempted to purchase high-strength aluminum tubes and other equipment needed for gas centrifuges, which are used to enrich uranium for nuclear weapons.

If the Iraqi regime is able to produce, buy, or steal an amount of highly enriched uranium a little larger than a single softball, it could have a nuclear weapon in less than a year.

Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof -- the smoking gun -- that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud.

Nothing in these statements has proved true - and every one of these statements was questionable at the time the speech was given. Alan, are you not the least bit curious why? Or angry. Do you not think George Bush is as accountable for these mistakes as Piers Morgans or Greg Dyke were for theirs?

by a reader on Tue, 05/18/2004 - 22:02 | [reply](#)

They led two nations on war not having enough information

All the evidences Bush/Blair have given were either very modest or incomplete or wrong. They always left a room for speculations that they personally know something quite convincing but cannot disclose because it would harm their intelligence sources. So, they made faces trying to passuade and then started the war.

At the end of the day it turned out that they didn't know anything special at all. They deliberately started the war knowing that there is still not enough evidence - is it a "conspiracy theory" way of thinking?

All the other reasons are not strong enough for public and for me personally. All the other evils can constitute many other countries behaviour. So, Bush/Blair knew that without WMD there wouldn't be enough reasons to go. And again they deliberately stressed WMD issue in order to achive the goal. They knew that there is not

enough reasons but they did it anyway - is it still a conspiracy

theory?

Amongst other countries that 1) supported terrorism (Syria, Iran, Saudi Arabia do much more on this account) 2) have or develop WMD (Northern Korea does more on this account) 3) have evil regimes (all the above plus many more countries). All this had been known to public before Iraq war. But Bush has insisted on Iraq. So, once again, Bush deliberately led countries to strike on Iraq instead. Why such persistence?

In my PERSONAL VIEW - the reason is fairly simple - PERSONAL VENDETTA of BUSH FAMILY (and a good opportunity to do it in the light of 9/11). Now you can call me any names: conspiracy theorist or whatever. Just tell me if making logical analysis should always be called "conspiracy theory" or only sometimes?

by a reader on Wed, 05/19/2004 - 09:45 | [reply](#)

Personal vendetta of the Bush family

a reader wrote:

In my PERSONAL VIEW - the reason is fairly simple - PERSONAL VENDETTA of BUSH FAMILY (and a good opportunity to do it in the light of 9/11).

If so, then one of the following statements must be true:

1. Mr Blair is a member of the Bush family
2. Mr Blair is a dupe, in the sense defined [here](#)

Which is it?

by [David Deutsch](#) on Wed, 05/19/2004 - 15:23 | [reply](#)

The misleading statements of GW

The series on conspiracy theories is entertaining and mostly spot-on. But on the issue of whether GW lied or not, has the World seen [this](#) and [this](#)?

At the very least, there seems to be a lot of evidence that the Bush administration made many misleading statements on Iraq. And some that were just outright wrong.

by a reader on Thu, 05/20/2004 - 00:13 | [reply](#)

Re: The misleading statements of GW

a reader wrote

At the very least, there seems to be a lot of evidence that the Bush administration made many misleading statements on Iraq. And some that were just outright wrong.

Why describe events in terms that equivocate over precisely the

issue that is in dispute? In this case, the word 'mislead' has two different meanings: one is to make a statement intended to cause the listener to believe something that one does not believe oneself, and the other is to make a statement which one believes to be true but is in fact false.

The document cited by a reader is rather long so I admit I did not study it carefully. However, dipping into it at random, I found very little even purporting to show that Administration officials misled anyone in the first (guilty) sense. If I am right that it is mostly about the second (innocent) sense, and presumably relies on the equivocation to make readers conclude that the Administration misled the public in the guilty sense, then ironically, the document itself is misleading in the guilty sense.

So ask yourself this: if Saddam's WMD stockpiles are found tomorrow, how much of the 'evidence' in the document will still seem to show Administration statements to have been 'misleading'? Whatever in the document does not pass that test is not evidence.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Thu, 05/20/2004 - 01:21 | [reply](#)

The definition of "misleading"

Why describe events in terms that equivocate over precisely the issue that is in dispute? In this case, the word 'mislead' has two different meanings: one is to make a statement intended to cause the listener to believe something that one does not believe oneself, and the other is to make a statement which one believes to be true but is in fact false.

Fair point. The [second link](#) I provided above is a searchable database of statements that is complementary to the document I cited. The methodology section on this second link provides an in-depth explanation of what is meant by misleading:

"... For purposes of the database, a statement is considered "misleading" if it conflicted with what intelligence officials knew at the time or involved the selective use of intelligence or the failure to include essential qualifiers or caveats.

The database does not include statements that appear mistaken only in hindsight. If a statement was an accurate reflection of U.S. intelligence at the time it was made, the statement is excluded from the database even if it now appears erroneous.

To determine whether a statement was misleading, the Special Investigations Division examined the statement in light of intelligence known to the Administration at the time of the statement. The primary sources for determining the intelligence available to the Administration were (1) the portions of the October 2002 National Intelligence Estimate ..."

So the authors are clearly saying that the statements were selective

and contained information known by the Administration to be wrong. Does this make GW guilty in the first sense of misleading above? No, of course, we can't conclude that. But it does makes the *Bush administration* guilty in that sense (assuming, of course, that the statements are as the authors claim).

by a reader on Thu, 05/20/2004 - 03:06 | [reply](#)

In Which Sense Did Piers Morgan Mislead?

Did he publish pictures intended to cause the reader to believe something that he did not believe himself, or did he publish pictures which he believed to be true but were in fact false? If he misled in the latter sense, then - taking your view above - isn't he thereby innocent? Just curious.

by a reader on Thu, 05/20/2004 - 05:07 | [reply](#)

Re: In Which Sense Did Piers Morgan Mislead?

a reader asked:

If he misled in the latter sense, then - taking your view above - isn't he thereby innocent?

Yes. If he thought that the pictures were genuine, and if he was telling the truth when he said that he had "**extensively checked**" their veracity and the identities of the providers, then, obviously, he would have misled his readers only in the innocent sense of the word.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Thu, 05/20/2004 - 13:08 | [reply](#)

Partisan?

Given that you admit that it is possible that Piers Morgan thought the pictures were genuine, perhaps it is not surprising that he refuses to apologise and that "he has no idea what he has done". It seems that the World is willing to extend the benefit of the doubt to George Bush, but not to Piers Morgan. Did the Bush administration "extensively check" the evidence they had before making the statements they did?

by a reader on Fri, 05/21/2004 - 01:19 | [reply](#)

A Simile

Many supporters of the liberation of Iraq are perplexed that large stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons have not been found there, despite a careful search by the **Iraq Survey Group**, and there is no consensus among them as to the explanation.

Many scientists are perplexed that no extraterrestrial life has yet been detected despite the careful search by **SETI**, and there is no consensus among them as to the explanation.

Opponents of the liberation of Iraq who regard the former mystery as a vindication of their position are like creationists who view the latter as a vindication of theirs.

Tue, 05/18/2004 - 16:13 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Digging a grave

The simplest and most likely explanation is that neither exists, at least not in this universe.

Opponents of the liberation of Iraq who regard the former mystery as a vindication of their position are like creationists who view the latter as a vindication of theirs.

But this comment indicates a blindness on your part. You are taking a side-swipe at the anti-war crowd while refusing to face up to the real issues. One can still be in favour of the war on moral and strategic grounds but angry at the Bush administration for the many mistakes it made re. WMD. The anger is justified because, as a reader in the thread entitled "But The Damage Is Done" noted, the mistakes have consequences for future international action by Britain and by the US. And if corrective action is not taken, we will continue to make similar mistakes. If you do not demand accountability from the Bush and Blair governments, you are digging a grave for yourself.

by a reader on Tue, 05/18/2004 - 22:30 | [reply](#)

Timing is off

One can still be in favour of the war on moral and

strategic grounds but angry at the Bush administration for the many mistakes it made re. WMD. The anger is justified because, as a reader in the thread entitled "But The Damage Is Done" noted, the mistakes have consequences for future international action by Britain and by the US

I think your intent is true; but timing is off. Now is not the time to act on any anger one might have regarding the lack of WMD. 1st the area needs to be secured. Second, it needs to be proven that

- 1)There were never WMD
- 2)That we were lied to.
- 3)Who lied and why.
- 4)That we were lied to altered how we would have conducted this, imho, moral war, in such a way as to cause more damage. Not every lie is evil.

It seems to me the presence of Sarin could indicate we were not lied to, though that remains to be determined.

After that one can act on any anger that might result from "being lied to".

be well,
Rachel Ann

by [RachelAnn](#) on Wed, 05/19/2004 - 01:57 | [reply](#)

But an election is looming

I think your intent is true; but timing is off. Now is not the time to act on any anger one might have regarding the lack of WMD. 1st the area needs to be secured. Second, it needs to be proven that

- 1)There were never WMD

It can, of course, never be proven that there weren't any. But I think that the lack of evidence, despite repeated searches, is very telling. And we can be quite sure about some things. For example, we know that Iraq was not reconstituting its nuclear weapons program (and the author of the original post at top implicitly acknowledges this by mentioning only biological and chemical weapons). The aluminium tubes could not be used in centrifuges to enrich uranium. etc.

- 2)That we were lied to.
- 3)Who lied and why.
- 4)That we were lied to altered how we would have conducted this, imho, moral war, in such a way as to cause more damage. Not every lie is evil.

I make no claims about whether we were lied to or not. It is quite possible that evidence was inadvertently cherry-picked to support the thesis that WMD existed and that the clamour to go to war meant that contrary opinions were overlooked. Bush and Blair

would be accountable for this just as much as they are accountable if they lied. Yes, some lies are justifiable, but I don't think they were in this case (assuming we were lied to).

It seems to me the presence of Sarin could indicate we were not lied to, though that remains to be determined.

One shell, a WMD arsenal does not make.

After that one can act on any anger that might result from "being lied to".

My anger would only be intensified if we were in fact lied to. It is enough that they got it wrong. You say now is not the time for anger.

But given that we are almost sure that Iraq possessed no stockpiles of WMD and given that the US election is approaching, I think now is the time. I do not want Bush or Kerry making the same mistakes again. They have cost America dearly.

by a reader on Wed, 05/19/2004 - 02:43 | [reply](#)

Re: One shell

It's far too early to say what the significance of the two recent chemical weapons finds is. While it's certainly true that one shell does not an arsenal make, one counter-example definitely does make a refutation.

If the sarin shell is just an accidental leftover from previously-known arsenals, then it is not evidence of anything interesting. At the other extreme, if it is of a type that it has hitherto been believed Iraq did not have, as **has been suggested**, then it is significant because it proves the existence of a secret chemical weapons programme after the time when Iraq persuaded the UN that it had ended all such programmes. And the only possible reason for a new chemical weapons programme under those circumstances would have been an intention to produce chemical weapons.

As Rachel Ann says, all this remains to be determined.

If it turns out that there was indeed a class of chemical weapons being produced in Iraq of which the US had no inkling, then the CIA, FBI and US government have made a terrible mistake and should all resign. (Just kidding.)

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 05/19/2004 - 03:54 | [reply](#)

We don't know yet if it's Iraqi

...if it [the shell] is of a type that it has hitherto been believed Iraq did not have, as has been suggested, then it is significant because it proves the existence of a secret chemical weapons programme after the time when

Iraq persuaded the UN that it had ended all such

programmes.

How does this follow? The shell could have been manufactured elsewhere and recently imported (smuggled) into Iraq.

by a reader on Wed, 05/19/2004 - 04:23 | [reply](#)

Re: We don't know yet if it's Iraqi

a reader wrote:

The shell could have been manufactured elsewhere and recently imported (smuggled) into Iraq.

Indeed. OK you're right. The US Government need not resign after all.

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 05/19/2004 - 04:28 | [reply](#)

Grounds for war

So war was waged on Iraq based on evidence just as good as those gatered by SETI for intelligent life elsewhere in the universe? That doesn't bode well for intelligence nearby, either. Neither of the military kind nor of the cerebral kind.

by a reader on Mon, 05/24/2004 - 06:14 | [reply](#)

Grounds for terrorism

It seems to me that if the US can go to war on Iraq because "the existence of WMD have not been disproved", then Al Qaeda can terrorize the West because "the existence of Allah has not been dsproved".

by a reader on Mon, 05/24/2004 - 06:16 | [reply](#)

WMD as a Side Issue

'It seems to me that if the US can go to war on Iraq because "the existence of WMD have not been disproved", then Al Qaeda can terrorize the West because "the existence of Allah has not been dsproved".'

At best, the WMD are a side issue in the justification for war. The real issue was Saddam's dreadful behaviour toward his own people, his foreign aggression and his sponsorship of terrorism. He also certainly had illegal programmes for making WMD regardless of whether they had actually produced any or not.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sun, 05/30/2004 - 01:48 | [reply](#)

Mainstream Antisemitism

Antisemitism in recent decades has been the hatred that dare not speak its name. Recently, it has become increasingly open. This worrying [article in National Review](#) surveys the extent to which antisemitic conspiracy theories have now become a widely accepted feature of mainstream political debate in the US:

Discussing Iraq last month on Washington Journal, C-SPAN's live call-in program, two callers — one American and one British — telephoned to ask whether I was Jewish. I am and said so. Both suggested that Jews were responsible for sending American soldiers into harms way. This was ironic since I volunteered for duty in Iraq, and then lived outside the security parameters enjoyed by other Coalition employees. One questioned whether I was part of a secret cabal operating for other than American interests. At the suggestion that his question might be anti-Semitic, the caller insisted my religion was a valid subject for a segment dedicated to a discussion of the situation in Iraq. Discourse has changed.

Indeed. To an extent not seen since the Second World War. However, serious awareness of antisemitism and its significance, and serious support for Israel, both seem to be at an all time high as well. May the best world view win.

Wed, 05/19/2004 - 17:18 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

It Has Spread to the US Senate

It seems that Senator Ernest Hollings (D-SC) wrote an opinion column for a newspaper that claimed that Bush went to war with Iraq to protect Israel and appease American Jews.

Here's an article:

<http://www.thestate.com/mld/thestate/8699607.htm>

He didn't blame it on a jewish plot, but claimed that Bush wanted to "Take the Jewish vote from the Democrats."

So, it's still caused by Jewish influence, apparently.

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Thu, 05/20/2004 - 00:09 | [reply](#)

Jewish influence

Everything is caused by everything. Not quite. I guess then that we could narrow it down a little and say that everything is caused by Jewish influence. How convenient.

Or we could narrow it down much further and say everything is caused by me, personally. Mea Culpa. But I refuse to take the blame for such narrow minds. Anybody else want to volunteer? No?

Maybe I should change my religion, and crank it up a notch. Since Jews have taken enough heat for the sins of the world, its about time someone else steps up to the plate.

(Psst, its the Episcopalians! Holy Moly, hold on to your crucifix, the truth about Episcopalian influence is finally revealed! First they took over Great Britain, and now they want to take over the world. Pass it on.)

by a reader on Thu, 05/20/2004 - 11:05 | [reply](#)

Max Boot on 'Neocons' Conspiracies

[Here](#)

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Thu, 05/20/2004 - 15:35 | [reply](#)

Re:Max Boot on 'Neocons' Conspiracies

I am surprised that "[The World](#)" would not cringe at being associated with someone like Irving Kristol, clearly anti-Popperian. Maybe "[The World](#)" is ready to repudiate Popper?

by a reader on Fri, 05/21/2004 - 01:03 | [reply](#)

Interesting

I live in an extremely anti-war, leftist area. (Berkeley, California)

I have never encountered a single anti-war leftist around here who who would make a comment like that. In fact, they would be abhorred.

Why is it that the one of the most conspiracy-theory laden, leftist entrenchments in America fails to represent this "widely accepted feature of mainstream political debate"? It seems rather... odd.

by a reader on Fri, 05/21/2004 - 12:45 | [reply](#)

Re: Interesting

a reader wrote:

I have never encountered a single anti-war leftist around

here who who would make a comment like that. In fact, they would be abhorred.

Perhaps you are making an unwarranted assumption about what they "would" or would not say, or how they would behave towards those who do. Evan Coyne Maloney has spent a great deal of time talking to anti-war leftists and he has come away with an impression opposite to yours. Check out the video [here](#), for instance.

by [Editor](#) on Fri, 05/21/2004 - 14:16 | [reply](#)

Check out this one ...

<http://www.isratv.com/video/filmpmwadsl.aspx>

by a reader on Fri, 05/21/2004 - 14:47 | [reply](#)

And this

The video in the last comment is amazingly important but not very relevant to this thread. This is though: [Berkeley Intifada](#).

by a reader on Sat, 05/22/2004 - 02:59 | [reply](#)

I'll be damned

Seeing as how I discuss issues regarding Israel with them on a regular basis, I doubt I'm misunderstanding how they 'would' react.

On the other hand, that last link is horrifying. I suppose I just know the wrong people.

by a reader on Fri, 05/28/2004 - 20:56 | [reply](#)

anti posh word for oppsing people who might happen to be jewish

Isn't it marvellous? You can openly claim to 'hate arabs' you can openly claim to 'hate hispanics' , no one will say much, and there is no fancy name for 'that ' sort of hate, and yet, you happen to dislike someone who is jewish, and you become antisemitic!! I am rather bored of the 'precious jew' syndrome, and have yet to discover why they feel they are so precious, and i lack the inclination to find out.

by Emma Flavell on Mon, 03/20/2006 - 18:17 | [reply](#)

if it's so boring why take th

if it's so boring why take the time to write anti-semitic comments?

-- Elliot Temple

Now Blogging Again

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sun, 03/26/2006 - 09:45 | [reply](#)

Dear Miss, Ms. or Mrs. Flavel

Dear Miss, Ms. or Mrs. Flavell.

The inclination to find out, as you, less than eloquently, put it, is apparently not the only thing you lack. But worry not, the world is full of people such as yourself, and you can take pride in belonging to a group of people with very prominent members. Hitler, Himmler, Stalin, Arafat, Goering, the current pope, most of the previous popes, Mel Gibson, Osama bin Laden. In short, you are in good company.

by William Smythe-Livingston on Fri, 08/11/2006 - 00:53 | [reply](#)

Jews

Jews are not a religion. They are a nation. Historically, they've had a unique religion associated with them. That's a different issue.

by [Yoni](#) on Sat, 09/09/2006 - 22:57 | [reply](#)

Antisemites

"I am rather bored of the 'precious jew' syndrome"

This concept was invented by antisemites, and immediately flags you as one.

by [Yoni](#) on Sat, 09/09/2006 - 22:59 | [reply](#)

Where The Freedom Is

"Where is the freedom?" **asks the demonstrator.**

Well, um... if he didn't have a bag over his head, he might be able to see the incongruity of his question.

Explanation: The point of our comment above seems to be unclear to some readers. It is simply that a released ex-prisoner staging an angry protest outside the building where the prison guards who mistreated him are on trial, while soldiers stand unconcerned in the background protecting his right to do so, is about as close as one could get to encapsulating the concept of political freedom in a single picture. That he himself cannot see this, and that his placard asks where the freedom is, is an intense irony, to which the bag over his head gives additional symbolic emphasis.

Fri, 05/21/2004 - 02:22 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Idiotarian troll

Yeah, but where are the WMDs?

by a reader on Fri, 05/21/2004 - 02:28 | [reply](#)

Maybe he's afraid he'll be identified

As someone from oh, lets say Pennsylvania?

Hey Marge come look! Eds on the t.v.

be well,
Rachel Ann

by [RachelAnn](#) on Fri, 05/21/2004 - 06:18 | [reply](#)

Adding insult to injury

I must have misunderstood the posting, but it seems to me that you are making fun of the former prisoner on the basis that he is not fluent in English and in politics and in etc. etc.. Torture in Iraq prisons is a shame for coalition forces - do you have an urge to bring it up and elaborate on it. Most readers will use this as a

perfect opportunity to make fun of you because of another shameful fact - absence of alleged WMD in Iraq.

by a reader on Fri, 05/21/2004 - 08:45 | [reply](#)

Indeed

The last commentator is correct. Who's to say what that man went through? If he was falsely imprisoned (or worse), then he has a right to be angry and a right to ask for justice. Which, presumably, is what he is really doing.

by a reader on Fri, 05/21/2004 - 10:14 | [reply](#)

Right to be angry

If he indeed is who he says he is...

There just seems to be something fishy with that photo...that is what i meant.

by a reader on Fri, 05/21/2004 - 10:28 | [reply](#)

WMD

Yes, the "absence of alleged WMD" is precisely correct. Now that the required tests conclusively prove their presence.

by a reader on Fri, 05/21/2004 - 17:56 | [reply](#)

No oppression by definition

If I read you correctly, there can be no oppression because if there is, and people protest against it, it means that there isn't. Your theory of freedom and oppression is a nice unfalsifiable theory.

by a reader on Fri, 05/21/2004 - 19:34 | [reply](#)

Re: No oppression by definition

No, you don't read us correctly. That the intervention of Coalition forces has enhanced political freedom in Iraq is a premise, not the conclusion, of our piece.

by [Editor](#) on Fri, 05/21/2004 - 21:43 | [reply](#)

Well I did miss your point

Admittedly, and you are correct.

I guess I just kept focusing on that hood and thinking, something isn't right here. As in, why would he be announcing he wants to go into court and tell what happened if he is hiding his face? Shame, no, because he reveals his face on other interviews. This is just a visceral reactions, which I admit are faulty, but I can't image

someone who faced that kind of abuse would willingly put a bag over their face. Carry it, maybe. Hide their face in another manner, yes. But put the bag over their head? That's hard for me to imagine.

Maybe I'm barking up the wrong tree.

And your assessment is good.

take care,

be well,
Rachel Ann

by [RachelAnn](#) on Sun, 05/23/2004 - 08:08 | [reply](#)

Where is the freedom?

Something we should be asking ourselves every day. It is a good question. Incongruous or not, I like the question. Premises, conjecture, and discussion.

Freedom is an every day thing until it is not. Freedom is often invisible. Oppression is often invisible too. The ideas of freedom. We have to look closely to see.

by a reader on Mon, 05/24/2004 - 15:25 | [reply](#)

oh no!

What's really scary is the tiny little helicopter the Pentagon sent to pee on his head. I didn't know they had that capability.

by a reader on Sun, 06/20/2004 - 11:18 | [reply](#)

Re: oh no!

No, what's *really* scary is that the helicopter's rotor isn't moving. I suspect it was actually launched at the ex-[presiner](#) from a catapult, like some kind of giant metal cow.

by [Kevin](#) on Sun, 06/20/2004 - 17:50 | [reply](#)

Moore, Again

With all due apologies to the gentleman, who no doubt enjoys well-deserved worldwide fame and respect as editor of the *Weekly Standard*, we had not heard of Fred Barnes before today. But he has a **complaint about Michael Moore**:

It was in his first bestselling book, *Stupid White Men*. Moore wrote he'd once been "forced" to listen to my comments on a TV chat show, *The McLaughlin Group*. I had whined "on and on about the sorry state of American education," Moore said, and wound up by bellowing: "These kids don't even know what *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are!" Moore's interest was piqued, so the next day he said he called me. "Fred," he quoted himself as saying, "tell me what *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are." I started "hemming and hawing," Moore wrote. And then I said, according to Moore: "Well, they're . . . uh . . . you know . . . uh . . . okay, fine, you got me--I don't know what they're about. Happy now?" He'd smoked me out as a fraud, or maybe worse. The only problem is none of this is true. It never happened. Moore is a liar. He made it up. It's a fabrication on two levels. One, I've never met Moore or even talked to him on the phone. And, two, I read both *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* in my first year at the University of Virginia. Just for the record, I'd learned what they were about even before college.

So it's one man's word against another's. Now, faced with a choice between believing a guy we never heard of before, and believing **Michael Moore** – we are inclined to place our confidence in Mr Barnes.

Tue, 05/25/2004 - 01:50 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Huh?

Huh? Humor? *Iliad* and *Odyessey*? Confidence in whom?

by a reader on Tue, 05/25/2004 - 03:34 | [reply](#)

I'm no Michael Moore fan but

I'm no Michael Moore fan but sometimes when I hear something

like this I can't quite bring myself to believe it; even with guys like him, you gotta think, Why lie about something so (a) dumb and (b) verifiable? I mean what the heck would possess him?

But it's not like I'm going to believe his version over Fred Barnes's. So I'm thinking perhaps there's some semi-innocent explanation, like that in recalling the incident from memory, Moore mistook Fred Barnes for one of the other McLaughlin Group panelists. Or McLaughlin Group for some other show. Or something along those lines - in other words, the exchange happened, but *not with Fred Barnes*, with Morton Kondracke or someone else.

I mean, to make this up out of thin air, just to take a swat at the low-lying pinata that is *Fred Barnes*, just makes absolutely no sense. Then again I'm not a lefty propagandist like, undoubtedly, Moore is, and I guess you just never know what makes sense to such people.

--Blix

by a reader on Tue, 05/25/2004 - 23:01 | [reply](#)

I'm no M. Moore fan either

Yes, Moore probably didn't deliberately lie on this occasion. But neither did he check the story. Did he care whether it was true or false? Unlikely. It fit his agenda perfectly, so he printed it. That's what he does.

by a reader on Thu, 05/27/2004 - 03:34 | [reply](#)

No Big Thinker

Parveen Sharif, sister of the suicide bomber Omar Sharif, said that he was a **big thinker**. This is an instance of a common fantasy about terrorists, that they have somehow seen something deeper than our petty, everyday concerns and gone off to explore it.

What, by redecorating the walls of some formerly joyful place with their own internal organs and those of as many innocent people as they can target? No, we rather doubt that Omar Sharif was a big thinker. Before he went to blow himself up in a bar in Tel Aviv, did he ever think carefully about the nature of morality? Did he ever bother to investigate Israel's history? Had he done so, he would have known that the war to destroy Israel is evil and he ought not to participate in it. Or about his own nature as a human being? Did he ever think for even two minutes about the strategic and tactical effects of such actions and whether they are likely to achieve the goals that he thought he died for?

The choice to become a suicide bomber is in fact a sign of mind-boggling shallowness.

One further comment: Parveen Sharif's evidence that Omar was a big thinker was that:

“He would contemplate a lot. He was mysterious. You did not see him smile much.”

We don't think that somebody who thought deeply about the world would never smile. The world as it is now is better than it has been at any previous moment in human history. Technology is increasing human lifespan, ease of communication and every material indicator of quality of life. Tyranny and slavery are on the defensive throughout the world and free societies are prospering. Of course, the world still has problems, but they are mostly better problems than we had before. There does not seem to be any compelling reason why this progress cannot continue indefinitely. So someone who is a deep thinker ought also to be an **optimist**.

Fri, 05/28/2004 - 01:59 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Truly Remarkable

There does not seem to be any compelling reason why

this progress cannot continue indefinitely

Indeed, and when you think about it this is truly remarkable. And it is not just that the world has been getting better, it is that by many measures the world has been getting *exponentially* better. I truly cannot conceive what the world will be like in 20 years. It boggles my mind.

by a reader on Fri, 05/28/2004 - 05:08 | [reply](#)

Some problems are worse than we experienced before

"Of course, the world still has problems, but they are mostly better problems than we had before."

Not quite true when we speak about terrorism. There is no simple solution. Millions of people have to be somehow re-educated - but how? It is not that I am pessimistic about the future, but the terrorism wouldn't have a rise if people were not so scared and not so susceptible to it in general. Many developed western countries would rather give up some "ambitions" in return for a quiet life as before. Sadly, it is true.

by a reader on Fri, 05/28/2004 - 08:30 | [reply](#)

Optimist

Optimist, imho, are those who stare at a glass that is half full and assume it will not go down. In fact, it is likely to fill! Rain will pour down, fill the cup till it runneth over!

A pessimist looks at the same glass, sees it half full, assumes it will not go up. In fact, it is likely to empty completely! The sun will come out, and dry up all the water.

A thinker looks at the glass and thinks; this is good. Do I need all this water right now? Should I put some aside, share it? Do I need more? Where can I get more? How should I get more?

The realist then acts. If he or she is moral, acts in a way that benefits the world and the self.

The terrorist looks at the glass as half empty, and figures no one should have any more water than s/he does, goes around emptying and threatening to empty all the water in all the glasses reachable, including the water s/he owns.

Thats the difference, imho.

be well,
Rachel Ann

by [RachelAnn](#) on Fri, 05/28/2004 - 10:28 | [reply](#)

What about Bin Laden?

What about Bin Laden? Is he a big thinker?

by a reader on Sat, 05/29/2004 - 10:51 | [reply](#)

Re: What about Bin Laden?

Osama Bin Laden is not the same sort of person as a suicide bomber. As a thinker he would be best classified as a crank rather than an empty-headed gull. Cranks do think a lot, but not to any productive effect.

by [Editor](#) on Sat, 05/29/2004 - 15:40 | [reply](#)

Gore Is No Good

We supported Al Gore for the Presidency in 2000.

The events of September 11, 2001 caused us to reconsider, and improve, the criteria by which we make such judgements. We now realise that Gore is **fundamentally flawed**, in his relevant political values and personal qualities.

We would not support him again. Nor Kerry. We support George W Bush for the Presidency in 2004.

Here's **David Schneider-Joseph** musing on similar changes that he himself has undergone.

Fri, 05/28/2004 - 22:59 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

Bothered

I would say that Gore's address was fundamentally flawed. As to his personal qualities that's a stretch. He might be plain angry something that even seems out of political character for him.

Much of what he spouted in the address is angry rhetoric and not particularly useful to him or anyone else. I take it at face value as not of much use. However, good people as well as not so good people do get angry and say so publicly.

Something else bothers me, the "Gore No Good" blanket heading. There seems to be much of an amplified knee jerk reaction here, no better than the Gore comments. Is this a political endorsement or a political disendorsement? What bothers me most is that it sounds like it should have a campaign ad trailer saying, "I am George W. Bush and I approve this message."

Politics is surely a dirty business aimed at the gut and often quite void of reason. Adding to the dirty business with a Gore No Good punch heading specifically bothers me.

by a reader on Sat, 05/29/2004 - 16:41 | [reply](#)

Bad Character

The fundamental flaws in Gore's address and in his behaviour since

9/11 are evidence of flaws in his character. The issue is not that he is angry per se, although the fact that he 'did a Dean' does weigh somewhat against him. He and many of his fellow Democrats have attacked Bush's character and policies in the War on Terror in a remarkably unprincipled and vicious manner. Discussing policies and trying to come up with better ways to implement them in cooperation with the Administration would be one thing, foaming at the mouth conspiracy theoretic ranting and unjustified character assassination is quite another. Gore is no good.

I do not say this because Bush has asked me to but because it is true. Nor do I say 'elect Bush' because he has asked me to, but because his policies on the most important political issue of our time (the War on Terror) are basically sound. Bush has flaws, his policies on gay marriage, abortion, embryonic stem cells and probably many other issues are a fatuous waste of air, but these are minor in comparison with his opponents' flaws. It's a recommendation but I doubt Bush would put it on a campaign poster.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sun, 05/30/2004 - 01:33 | [reply](#)

Bush Is No Good

I forecast that, in one or two years, you will have a title running, "Bush Is No Good," because you will have realised that he messed up the punishment for 9/11 (where is Bin Laden?), and he messed up our liberties. Puritanism is the only thing he is good for.

by a reader on Sun, 05/30/2004 - 01:40 | [reply](#)

Bush is Plenty Good

'I forecast that, in one or two years, you will have a title running, "Bush Is No Good," because you will have realised that he messed up the punishment for 9/11 (where is Bin Laden?), and he messed up our liberties. Puritanism is the only thing he is good for.'

How exactly did he mess up our liberties?

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sun, 05/30/2004 - 01:50 | [reply](#)

Liberties

Evidence is everywhere. In all Western countries. Any newspaper. To start, you might want to go to <http://www.free-market.net/search/index.cgi>, and search in "news reports", "civil liberties" and, say, "war terror" as keywords.

by a reader on Sun, 05/30/2004 - 02:52 | [reply](#)

Learning from errors

See <http://www.antiwar.com/mercero/?articleid=2691>

by a reader on Sun, 05/30/2004 - 03:12 | [reply](#)

Northern Irelandization of England

For example (not to talk about abolition of traditional habeas corpus): Terrorism Act 2000 2000 Chapter 11 - continued PART I INTRODUCTORY Terrorism: interpretation. 1. - (1) In this Act "terrorism" means the use or threat of action where- (a) the action falls within subsection (2), (b) the use or threat is designed to influence the government or to intimidate the public or a section of the public, and (c) the use or threat is made for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause.

Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 2001 Chapter 24 - continued PART 5 RACE AND RELIGION 38 Meaning of fear and hatred In Article 8 of the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 (S.I. 1987/463 (N.I. 7)) in the definition of fear and the definition of hatred (fear and hatred defined by reference to a group of persons in Northern Ireland) omit the words "in Northern Ireland".

by a reader on Sun, 05/30/2004 - 17:12 | [reply](#)

Re: Learning from errors

Are you saying Mercer has learned from her errors? I see no indication of that.

by a reader on Sun, 05/30/2004 - 18:58 | [reply](#)

Re: Northern Irelandization of England

Are you saying that making threats intended to intimidate the public for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause is a precious liberty? Are you also saying it was previously legal in England?

by a reader on Sun, 05/30/2004 - 19:03 | [reply](#)

Re:Re: Northern Irelandization of England

Are you saying it is important to have redundant sets of laws?

If making such threats were illegal before why pass a law to make it illegal twice over? Are terrorist willing to break one law but not two?

by a reader on Sun, 05/30/2004 - 22:44 | [reply](#)

Civil Liberties

I'm not particularly convinced that the Patriot Act to which the readers above are presumably referring is anywhere near as bad as it is often portrayed. See

<http://www.lifeandliberty.gov/>

If you can fault the Patriot Act after reading it and thinking about it

rather than doing the knee jerk, security provided by government is automatically bad schtick, then I will be interested.

It is certainly an exaggeration to say that the civil liberties situation is worse than it has ever been before. It is interesting to note that there have been much worse violations of civil liberties in all previous wars. During WW2 both Britain and America took to interning lots of people whom they deemed might be a threat on the basis of ethnicity or nationality, no sign of that this time. It is also interesting to note that the Framers of the US Constitution saw fit to guarantee that:

'No Soldier shall, in time of peace be quartered in any house, without the consent of the Owner, nor in time of war, but in a manner to be prescribed by law.'

Evidently this was something that they foresaw might happen sufficiently often that they actually needed to cover themselves in case it did happen. The civil liberties during war situation has got better not worse.

In any case, I'm not entirely sure what abuses of civil liberties in the name of the War on Terror would actually demonstrate about the morality of the war itself, if anything. Islamist terrorists have said often enough that they want to destroy our civilisation and that they despise its values, as have the dictators who support them. They are at war with us whether we like it or not. As such we must wage war against these terrorists and the dictatorships that lend aid to them.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Tue, 06/01/2004 - 01:39 | [reply](#)

This blog didn't exist in 200

This blog didn't exist in 2000!

by a reader on Thu, 06/03/2004 - 13:21 | [reply](#)

But..

But its editors did.

~Woty
<http://woty.davidsj.com>

by [Woty](#) on Sun, 06/06/2004 - 03:58 | [reply](#)

don't be so mean

surely A Reader meant something other than that the editors of the world didn't have political opinions before they had a blog. i don't know what, but it's gotta be something else. assuming it's something so utterly idiotic is insulting.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 06/06/2004 - 06:15 | [reply](#)

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Euro-Evil

A few months before 9/11 a Eurocrat by the name of Paul-Marie Couteaux made a rather interesting little speech in the European Parliament. Interesting because of the depth of evil to which it sinks. Mr Couteaux, who is **on** rather a lot of committees and is evidently rather distinguished in Eurocratic terms, **said**:

Madam President, the most surprising thing about our debate is our surprise, for Israel's expansionist policy is the inevitable and predictable result of the growing imbalance in the region, the stability for which we bear much of the responsibility. Firstly that is because since 1967 most of our states, with the notable exception of France, have continued to give the State of Israel – a state that is growing increasingly self-assured and domineering – the impression that it can violate international law and UN resolutions with impunity.

In reality, here as elsewhere we have followed Washington and persist in closing our eyes to the theocratic excesses of this religious state whose governments are under the thumb of fanatical parties and minorities that are just as bad as the other groups of religious fanatics in the region. That is why we should envisage imposing sanctions on Israel.

There is, however, another serious imbalance for which we are in part responsible, namely the imbalance of forces. I have no hesitation in saying that we must consider giving the Arab side a large enough force, including a large enough nuclear force, to persuade Israel that it cannot simply do whatever it wants. That is the policy my country pursued in the 1970s when it gave Iraq a nuclear force. We have now destroyed it. So we will carry on with our policy of imbalance and what is happening today is merely the annoying but inevitable result of our collective blindness and cowardice.

Try to look past the nauseating calumnies against Israel, and at what he is really saying. What is striking about the argument is how much it refers to power and how little to morality. We read of a “growing imbalance” and of Israel being “self-assured and domineering”. Look past the froth about theocracy in the second

paragraph, which we are astonished that even Couteaux was braindead enough to believe. It analyses the political situation in the Middle East in terms of *who holds the power*. This obsession with power finds its fullest expression in the last paragraph. To solve the problems of the Middle East, he advocates giving the Arab thugocracies the power to destroy Israel through genocide. He doesn't bother to explain how this will improve matters, he just states that it will. It is self-evident to him.

One of the reasons why the Euroweenies and the vile dictators of the Middle East get along like a house on fire is that they share this obsession with power. They see political situations not in terms of right and wrong but of who has power and who does not. This common mistake binds them together more strongly than considerations of rationality or ideology or even genuine self-interest. And that is why they will lose their war.

Sun, 05/30/2004 - 19:06 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Which War?

The post ends with:

And that is why they will lose their war.

Which war are you talking about exactly, and who is on each side of it?

Gil

by **Gil** on Mon, 05/31/2004 - 04:13 | [reply](#)

Shocking

That the Eurocrat and "**The World**"s views are so fundamentally similar.

The Eurocrat believes: The EU should participate in social engineering in the middle east.

"**The World**" believes: The US should participate in social engineering in the middle east.(e.g. Iraq)

The Eurocrat believes: The EU will not suffer any "blowback" from such social engineering.

"**The World**" believes: The US will not suffer any "blowback" from such social engineering.

by a reader on Mon, 05/31/2004 - 06:20 | [reply](#)

Re: Shocking...

...that the Eurocrat and "a reader"'s views are so fundamentally similar. Both of them analyse political conflicts by compulsively ignoring the moral aspects of what is in dispute. Thus, by ignoring the difference between a policy of entrenching the tyrant in power

and a policy of deposing the tyrant and liberating his victims, one can call both policies "social engineering" and argue that they are alike.

by **Editor** on Mon, 05/31/2004 - 13:20 | [reply](#)

Re: Which War?

Gil asked:

Which war are you talking about exactly, and who is on each side of it?

Neither the war nor the participants have generally-accepted names yet. It is between the good guys and the bad guys. The good guys often call it, misleadingly 'the War on Terror'. The bad guys use terminology like 'the war against Jews and Crusaders'. The Eurocrats think of it as the war to humble America, and therefore tend to condone, sponsor or side with the bad guys.

by **Editor** on Mon, 05/31/2004 - 14:03 | [reply](#)

Does the editor believe...

that any action someone takes is OK as long as they have "virtuous" ideals?

by a reader on Mon, 05/31/2004 - 14:29 | [reply](#)

Re: Does the editor believe...

No.

by **Editor** on Mon, 05/31/2004 - 14:56 | [reply](#)

The bad guys

Since it is the white hats against the black hats, apparently, it could be useful to know who the black hats are and how they thrive. Terrorism is the struggle of the seemingly weak by tactic against the seemingly strong. The bad guys see themselves as the good guys tiny army of reformers and this is how they see their cause:

http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/congress/9-11_commission/030709-sageman.htm

by a reader on Mon, 05/31/2004 - 18:10 | [reply](#)

So not only must someone's ideals be virtuous

but their means must be virtuous as well. In addition, what the person(s) actually accomplish is as important as what their stated ideals were. Am I missing anything or does that fairly well sum it up?

by a reader on Mon, 05/31/2004 - 20:41 | [reply](#)

Re:Re: Shocking...

Might not a principle against social engineering be a more compelling "moral principle" to the reader? and not "compulsively ignoring the moral aspects of what is in dispute"?

by a reader on Mon, 05/31/2004 - 23:16 | [reply](#)

Against Social Engineering?

A reader wrote:

'Might not a principle against social engineering be a more compelling "moral principle" to the reader? and not "compulsively ignoring the moral aspects of what is in dispute"?'

Having a blanket principle against social engineering would be deeply silly and wrong and would inevitably involve ignoring important moral differences.

For example, it would involve ignoring the important moral difference between piecemeal social engineering (in which the US is engaged) and utopian social engineering (in which the US is not engaged).

Utopian social engineering involves setting up institutions that will attempt to direct a whole society toward some particular end. This invariably ends in disaster for various reasons that the reader can find in books by Karl Popper and F. A. Hayek.

Piecemeal social engineering is what the US is engaged in. It involves changing specific institutions in a way that is responsive to criticism. They toppled a dictatorship that needed to be toppled. They are trying to help the Iraqis to train themselves to defend their country, in other words to help them to build one particular set of institutions they urgently need given the problem-situation facing Iraq. At the same time they are attempting to help Iraqis to set up institutions that will help develop a democratic government in Iraq. They are undoubtedly helping to solve lots of other problems that they have discovered since the end of the invasion. The one thing they are not trying to do is to impose a plan on the (non-terrorist) Iraqis without their consent.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Tue, 06/01/2004 - 00:51 | [reply](#)

Re:Against Social Engineering?

Would you consider prohibition, the war on poverty, and the war on drugs examples of utopian or piecemeal social engineering? I think you could easily call the above examples utopian social engineering. What is the precise demarkation between piecemeal and utopian?

by a reader on Tue, 06/01/2004 - 01:56 | [reply](#)

Hypocritical American policy

Talking about morality in the war between good and bad guys and about justifying means one must always remember that US is no exception to the common dirty way of doing all things. What I mean is that US sided with many bad guys not sharing their moral values but for the sake of enterprise against someone "trully bad". What do you, libertarians, call this method? Idiotarianism? Moral relativism? Whatever the name. US shouldn't have backed Osama Bin Laden in order to be anti-Soviet in Afganistan. Of course, USSR was such a terrible tyranny that even notorious Osama is better... Just imagine the world without this "freedom fighter" and remember that he is a USA creature, the creature that has undergone- unforeseen-transformations. This example may seem worn out, I agree. I will give you another one. Not long ago, before 9/11 Americans provided some sort of support to Chechen leaders just in order to be anti-something or pro-something again (pro-humanrights, I guess). The same J.W.Bush didn't give a damn about links between Al-Qaeda and Chechen terrorists before Al-Qaeda stroke him. Chechen leaders were accepted in White house, they had their representative offices in USA, they were live legends, symbols of whatsoever... And those "freedom fighters" became terrorists for him too. Although not quite "overnight" - the idea of a "political solution" was still reiterated for some time. As the time goes by they are becoming more terrorists than liberals, then a little bit more and more again. Just look at this link, for instance: http://www.larouchepub.com/other/2001/2838whtehse_on_putin.html - this dialog had me in stitches:

Helen Thomas: Haven't we made many statements denouncing Russia for its attacks in Chechnya? And isn't there some image of freedom fighters there? And all of a sudden you're calling them terrorists?

Fleischer: As I just indicated, the concern for human rights remains a vital part of American policy, and the only solution to the problem in Chechnya is a political one.

Q: Yeah, but why is it just today that you're calling them terrorists? What has changed?

Fleischer: Well, as I indicated, that's not the case. That's been the long-standing position.

Q: I think this is the first time—is this not the first time you've used this word at that podium? It's the first time we've heard it.

Fleischer: I'm not sure that I have discussed the situation in Chechnya with the White House press corps prior to this. We haven't had much reason to do so.

But that's why I indicated, going back to the previous administration, in testimony before the Senate, they said what they said because it's true. And the State Department publishes a report every year that included similar information.

Q: Is it fair to assume that these words from you are in exchange

for Putin's cooperation on the U.S. effort?

Fleischer: No, it's an accurate statement about the situation on the ground and the importance of the speech that President Putin made. But keep in mind, President Putin called for political discussions. Leaders of Chechnya have now indicated they are willing to engage in such discussions. That's a positive development.

Q: It sounds like a deal, though. It sounds like, in exchange for Putin's support, we, rhetorically, from this podium, are lending him support in characterizing the opposition as international terrorists.

Fleischer: No, there's no—no such conclusion should be reached. This is consistent with actions taken by the previous administration, because it's an accurate statement about developments in Chechnya

A widely accepted principle "enemies of my enemies are my friends" is obviously immoral and eventually not effective in cases like Osama Bin Laden. But USA, UK and almost every country in the world has it as their main weapon of foreign diplomacy. European parliament is no exception either. Telling that USA are better than Euro because of moral grounds they are insisting on is very proposterous and cynical.

And that is exactly why everyone in the world hates America - not because they are doing worse things than others. Because of this outrageous cry that they are the most moral country and what they do is utterly right. European parliament is still not an accomplished master of this art - that why you have so many opportunities for critique.

by a reader on Tue, 06/01/2004 - 09:28 | [reply](#)

Re: Hypocritical American policy

So, how about this?

"We must shake off decades of failed policy.... [We] have been willing to make a bargain, to tolerate oppression for the sake of stability. Longstanding ties often led us to overlook the faults of local elites.... No longer should we think tyranny is benign because it is temporarily convenient."

by [Kevin](#) on Tue, 06/01/2004 - 16:11 | [reply](#)

Re: Hypocritical American policy

From your citation of Bush speach I can conclude:

1) Americans are not responsible for dodgy foreign politics anymore - some stupid presidents did this in past - not contemporary accomplished highly-moral Americans.

2) There will be compromises no more

I personally would be happy to see this dream coming true after all.

by a reader on Tue, 06/01/2004 - 16:32 | [reply](#)

Demarcation

'Would you consider prohibition, the war on poverty, and the war on drugs examples of utopian or piecemeal social engineering? I think you could easily call the above examples utopian social engineering.'

Utopian. They are aimed at imposing a single policy of preventing peaceful behaviour that the government dislikes on people across an entire country without paying the slightest attention to their wishes.

By contrast, trying to help build free institutions in Iraq is aimed at setting up a means for the Iraqis to solve their own problems. The only behaviour they are trying to prevent in doing so is evil, violent behaviour.

'What is the precise demarkation between piecemeal and utopian?'

Utopian policies invariably involve trying to force everyone to do something that the authorities say will make people happy, while they are in fact foisting their irrationalities on people.

Piecemeal policies involve giving people access to things and letting them choose for themselves whether to support it, as well as blocking attempts to curb free choice.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Wed, 06/02/2004 - 00:09 | [reply](#)

Re: Demarcation

Would imposing (or attempting to impose) free institutions on a group of people who have no interest in such freedom be utopian or piecemeal engineering? Locke considered all government to be by the consent of the ruled. If this is true then the majority of Iraqis at least tacitly agreed to Saddam's rule. These people would not seem to be very good candidates for leaving each other alone.

by a reader on Wed, 06/02/2004 - 02:25 | [reply](#)

Re: Hypocritical American policy

"We must shake off decades of failed policy.... [We] have been willing to make a bargain, to tolerate oppression for the sake of stability. Longstanding ties often led us to overlook the faults of local elites.... No longer should we think tyranny is benign because it is temporarily convenient."

Are our new "allies" (Afghan warlords, Pervez Musharraf, Islam Karimov etc.) examples of our "new" policy?

by a reader on Wed, 06/02/2004 - 02:39 | [reply](#)

Re: Hypocritical American policy

I think your examples predate the speech I quoted — but more importantly, the USA is *not actually* a dictatorship whose policies turn on a dime at the whim of the President.

by [Kevin](#) on Wed, 06/02/2004 - 17:46 | [reply](#)

Yeah, methinks not

'Would imposing (or attempting to impose) free institutions on a group of people who have no interest in such freedom be utopian or piecemeal engineering? Locke considered all government to be by the consent of the ruled. If this is true then the majority of Iraqis at least tacitly agreed to Saddam's rule.'

Locke was wrong so your argument doesn't work.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Fri, 06/04/2004 - 02:34 | [reply](#)

Re: Locke

Please explain why Locke is wrong and your view of how governments come to power and stay in power.

by a reader on Fri, 06/04/2004 - 12:13 | [reply](#)

Governments and Consent

'Please explain why Locke is wrong and your view of how governments come to power and stay in power.'

People frequently do not consent to the government they happen to live under. A government can come to power in one of two ways. It can win an open, honest and free election, which is repeated at regular intervals. Or it can seize power by violence. Governments that do the former have people's consent to be in power. Those that do not have not got people's consent to be in power since they have not offered people the opportunity to get rid of them, i.e. - to withdraw their consent. Saddam's government was obviously in the latter category.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sun, 06/06/2004 - 02:32 | [reply](#)

Re:Governments and Consent

Several comments:

1. An insolvable problem with democracy is that the rules of democracy cannot be established democratically. They can only be established by decree. An example of this is voter eligibility. One could argue that monarchy is a form of democracy where one voter is eligible.... the monarch.

Furthermore, there have been historically wide variations in the

eligibility of voters:

- a. only the noblemen can vote (England around the time of the Magna Carta)
- b. only property owning white males can vote (post revolutionary war America)
- c. only males can vote (post civil war America)
- d. only people over the age of 18 can vote (present day America)

Would George Washington be considered a dictator since he (most likely) did not have the electoral consent of the majority of the total population of the 13 states?

2. How does like Saddam someone "seize" power. You could say: "I, Alan Forrester, declare myself supreme ruler of Great Britain.", but no one would think that you actually seized power. You need to have someone (a lot of someones) to carry out your orders to actually seize power. How does someone like Saddam get others to carry out his orders? And what percentage of the population must follow those orders for him to stay in power?

by a reader on Mon, 06/07/2004 - 23:18 | [reply](#)

Re:Governments and Consent

'1. An insolvable problem with democracy is that the rules of democracy cannot be established democratically. They can only be established by decree. An example of this is voter eligibility. One could argue that monarchy is a form of democracy where one voter is eligible.... the monarch. [followed by snipped examples]'

A democracy can't be established democratically where there was none before. However, your example don't really bear much weight. In some of the societies below, criticism of the powers that be was allowed and even encouraged. Voting was one of the means of doing that and the most effective one employed to date. Those would count as democracies IMO. So I would count (b) - (d) as democratic, although rather flawed. I should say (a) probably was not.

'2. How does like Saddam someone "seize" power. You could say: "I, Alan Forrester, declare myself supreme ruler of Great Britain.", but no one would think that you actually seized power. You need to have someone (a lot of someones) to carry out your orders to actually seize power. How does someone like Saddam get others to carry out his orders? And what percentage of the population must follow those orders for him to stay in power?'

From whence do tyrants originate? Well, it's not all that big a mystery really. Democracy, human rights and freedom are all abstract and difficult to discover ideas. Iraq had never been democratic even before Saddam came along and people had no knowledge of these ideas. The rewards of smashing in a person's skull and taking their stuff, or bumping off your enemies, or committing rape are immediate and obvious. The consequence of having a society where that sort of thing are routine and accepted are not immediately obvious. Furthermore, by the time such a system is established lots of people are all engaging in this

behaviour and to dissent from it is to invite death unless you have a lot of people on your side and any time you invite somebody into a circle of dissidents you risk death.

Of course, that is not enough in and of itself to guarantee that a tyranny will stay alive. For that to happen, all outside ideas must be excluded. Rewards for using creativity to come up with new ways of smashing anything that vaguely resembles thought or dissent are necessary. An ideology that provides a specious pseudojustification form murder, torture and extortion also helps. Saddam's policemen had the habit of breaking into a person's home late at night while they were asleep, putting a gun to their head, telling them that Saddam had been toppled and that they must join the revolution against the Baathist state or die, of course the person would be shot if he agreed.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Thu, 06/10/2004 - 00:25 | [reply](#)

Re:Re:Governments and Consent

If indeed: "Democracy, human rights and freedom are all abstract and difficult to discover ideas." how are the benefits of these ideas going to conveyed by an occupying force that, by in large, does not even speak the same language as Iraqis? Western civilization has evolved over a period of at least 400 years. and Iraqis are going to learn all of explicit and implicit principles in how many years? Maybe utopian isn't the right word, but....

"The rewards of smashing in a person's skull and taking their stuff, or bumping off your enemies, or committing rape are immediate and obvious." What are the immediate and obvious rewards of being a suicide bomber? or do you consider suicide bombing and tyrannical regimes completely unrelated to each other?

"An ideology that provides a specious pseudojustification form murder, torture and extortion also helps." Helps? I think ideology is essential. To get people to follow the orders of a tyrant, become suicide bombers, or torture and murder requires ideology (however specious we may think it is). What would the Iranian or Taliban regimes have been without Islamic ideology?

But the bottom line is that Iraqi's beliefs about the world have not fundamentally changed, and the continued presence of U.S. troops will not change that.

by a reader on Fri, 06/11/2004 - 12:14 | [reply](#)

Governments and Consent

'If indeed: "Democracy, human rights and freedom are all abstract and difficult to discover ideas." how are the benefits of these ideas going to conveyed by an occupying force that, by in large, does not even speak the same language as Iraqis? Western civilization has evolved over a period of at least 400 years. and Iraqis are going to

learn all of explicit and implicit principles in how many years?

Maybe utopian isn't the right word, but....'

Oddly enough they have people there who speak Arabic. The soldiers aren't there to persuade them, they're there to provide security. also, it's harder to invent an idea from scratch than to learn it from somebody who already knows it.

"The rewards of smashing in a person's skull and taking their stuff, or bumping off your enemies, or committing rape are immediate and obvious." What are the immediate and obvious rewards of being a suicide bomber? or do you consider suicide bombing and tyrannical regimes completely unrelated to each other?'

The suicide bombing is a result of Islamist ideology, not every tyranny features suicide bombing.

'But the bottom line is that Iraqis beliefs about the world have not fundamentally changed...'

I tend to find arguments more useful than blank assertions. The evidence indicates that more Iraqis want democracy now than when the US arrived:

<http://www.thedesertsun.com/news/stories2004/national/20040515020610.shtml>

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sun, 06/13/2004 - 15:31 | [reply](#)

Re:Governments and Consent

I asked: "How does someone like Saddam get others to carry out his orders? And what percentage of the population must follow those orders for him to stay in power?"

You replied: "Well, it's not all that big a mystery really Democracy, human rights and freedom are all abstract and difficult to discover ideas.....The rewards of smashing in a person's skull and taking their stuff, or bumping off your enemies, or committing rape are immediate and obvious."

I asked: "What are the immediate and obvious rewards of being a suicide bomber? or do you consider suicide bombing and tyrannical regimes completely unrelated to each other? "

My point was to question your theory of how tyrannies are formed (not specifically Saddam's) . That it could not simply be because the rewards of certain behaviors are "immediate and obvious". That in general humans are motivated by theories. And as long as the majority of people believe in those theories, they will tolerate a tyrant who espouses those theories.

by a reader on Mon, 06/14/2004 - 03:23 | [reply](#)

LE

Or, as a more reasonable middle ground, a nation can passively agree to accept rigged elections; so that the illusory facade of "consent" can be used to rationalize away the harsh reality, that

we are nothing but a banana republic anyway.

Just a big, rich one.

This has certainly been clear since shortly after November of 1963, when an inconvenient US elected official was hastily replaced through public execution on the streets of Dallas.

From that point on, most Americans accepted the painful realization that their "consent" would be manufactured by elites, one way or another, with or without their active participation.

And most, predictably, stopped voting at all in national elections.

Uniquely American cultural norms in broad acceptance now, like the "couch potato", passively watching television for hours at a time, remaining thoroughly detached from real political decision-making; emerge from a mature and realistic acceptance of political power the way it actually functions and not as we fancifully imagine it to work.

In a gangster republic, the preponderance of force is the ultimate arbiter of political power. Even children intuitively understand that harsh reality of the schoolyard and the street.

In the end, people realize that the power is in the hands of those who command the loyalty of the armed forces (regular military, Reserves, National Guard, and elite special ops units) which will finally determine the outcome of the current evolving situation.

Just like any other ordinary Third World banana republic.

Referencing Tommy Franks remarks in a recent interview with Cigar Afficionado magazine, I would say that martial law here in the America is no longer inevitable - since it has already arrived in incremental fashion. Martial law is already here.

Most Americans just don't know it yet.

by a reader on Sun, 06/20/2004 - 20:23 | [reply](#)

Most Americans just don't know it yet

Right. Just a certain **relatively small category** of them.

by **Editor** on Sun, 06/20/2004 - 22:04 | [reply](#)

"Just like any other ordinary

"Just like any other ordinary Third World banana republic."

Only you are able to say all of this publicly without the slightest fear of any retribution. I wonder what this tells us?

An Iranian Student (AIS)

by a reader on Thu, 07/08/2004 - 01:41 | [reply](#)

What a farce!

How remarkable! A "libertarian" web-site that, because it is not "idiotarian" (which allows them to comfortably despise the rest of "idiot" humanity) decides that when it comes to the crunch, when push comes to shove, and given the available data at the present time, then actually..... it supports the world's most gigantic military installation ever, currently rampaging around Afghanistan and Iraq (I'm sorry, "building democracy" in Afghanistan and Iraq). "Rebuilding" means the wholesale demolition of towns like Falludja, of which we hear little these days....

It also means supporting Israel. Not that I have the slightest axe to grind for the "Arab thugocracies", but if it were any other country in the world, then Israel (which explicitly bases its flag, its citizenship, and its immigration policy on RACE and RELIGION) would rightly be called a racist state. And Ariel Sharon would be denounced for what he is: a fascist killer (anyone remember Sabra and Chatila? or indeed Sharon's services to the Israeli cause when he was leading punitive expeditions against the Palestinians?).

Oh yes, and while you're slamming the "Euroweenies" (whatever that might mean) for supporting "Arab thugocracies", might you perhaps tell us which ones you are thinking of? Could it be Egypt, one of the world's biggest recipients of US aid, including military aid? Could it be Saudi Arabia, which for decades has been the lynch-pin of US power in the region? Might it be possibly be Saddam's Iraq, which the US supported (via Saudi Arabia) during a particularly ghastly and bloody war against Iran (8 years of fighting, 1 million dead, massacres of Kurds using poison gas supplied by Germany)? Could it be Osama Bin Laden and his bunch of killers, hired, armed, and trained to fight the Afghan government supported by the USSR? And if we're talking about thugocracies, then let's go outside the Arab world and talk about Pakistan, Chile (Pinochet) not to mention Guatemala, Salvador, Panama (America's man the drug-dealer Noriega...), oh yes and the racist South Africa, and and and... the list just goes on and on.

Scratch a "libertarian" it seems, and you get a defender of US imperialism!

Not that the European states are any better of course, each defends its own interests with whatever means it has available and will cosy up to the most vile dictators (Saddam, Putin the butcher of Chechnya, China as long as they can sell them an airbus or two).

by a reader on Mon, 09/12/2005 - 13:21 | [reply](#)

The History of Israel

Surprisingly enough, you are factually mistaken about both the history of Israel and the nature of Zionism. We recommend our short [account](#) of that.

As for the moral/political issues you raise about Israel: That the Law of Return could possibly make Israel a 'racist state' even if it were an utterly iniquitous measure, and the idea that because of

special privileges granted only to Jews it escapes being called a racist state, are examples of the grotesque sophistry under which Israel and Jews are singled out for condemnation according to the prevailing political correctness. Moreover, the claim that the Law of Return *is* iniquitous in the first place makes no more sense than a claim that the **NAACP** is 'racist' because it does not turn itself into an 'International Association for the Advancement of All People'. Indeed, it makes considerably less sense because if the NAACP did do that absurd thing, the people currently receiving its assistance would not be immediately subjected to genocide.

by **Editor** on Mon, 09/12/2005 - 14:26 | [reply](#)

Den Beste For President?

Here's the speech that Steven Den Beste might give at the D-Day commemoration ceremony, if he were President of the United States.

Tue, 06/01/2004 - 22:29 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

The Attributes Of A Saint

There may well have been a Jewish preacher in the first century CE called something like Yeshu, later known as Jesus Christ, whose life formed the basis of the myths related in the Christian Gospels. If there was, then it is unlikely that he was antisemitic.

There may well have been a person called Matthew who wrote the Gospel of that name a few decades later and who has since become known as Saint Matthew. Whoever wrote that Gospel probably intended to appeal to antisemitism in his readers when he wrote of the Jews cursing their own descendants with the guilt of deicide:

His blood be upon us, and upon our children.

But whether Matthew intended it or not, the overwhelming majority of Christians throughout the ages never doubted that the Gospel story, especially the story of the death of Jesus, is virulently antisemitic and that this was right and proper.

In the early nineteenth century, a German nun called Anne Catherine Emmerich claimed to have witnessed the death of Jesus and the preceding events via a series of miraculous visions, which were written down in a book called **The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ**. This absurd claim was believed by most Catholics and remains recognised by the Catholic Church to this day.

Emmerich was of course obsessed by The Jews and their guilt. Among the things she saw in her visions was the eternal torture of all Jews, for which she blamed only – The Jews:

Whenever, during my meditations on the Passion of our Lord, I imagine I hear that frightful cry of the Jews, '*His blood be upon us, and upon our children,*' visions of a wonderful and terrible description display before my eyes at the same moment the effect of that solemn curse. I fancy I see a gloomy sky covered with clouds, of the colour of blood, from which issue fiery swords and darts, lowering over the vociferating multitude; and this curse, which they have entailed upon themselves, appears to me to penetrate even to the very marrow of their bones, – even to the unborn infants. They appear to me encompassed on all sides by darkness; the words they utter take, in my eyes, the form of black flames, which

recoil upon them, penetrating the bodies of some, and only playing around others.

In the early twenty-first century, an actor called Mel Gibson read Emmerich's book and was inspired to produce a Passion Play (if you're not aware of the history of Passion Plays, please read [this](#)), in the form of a **movie**, based on Emmerich's visions.

Pope John-Paul II saw the movie and allegedly authenticated it, saying 'it is as it was'. Since John-Paul no more has the supernatural ability to witness historical events than Emmerich or anyone else, this was taken as a *moral* endorsement of the content of the movie. Later, the Vatican denied the endorsement and the quotation.

Now John-Paul has **beatified** Anne Catherine Emmerich. Beatification is the step just short of sainthood, and is often followed by it.

What are the attributes of a saint?

Fri, 06/04/2004 - 01:52 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

saint = exceptionally good/mo

saint = exceptionally good/moral person

or am i missing something?

by this criterion, Anne isn't one.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 06/04/2004 - 06:56 | [reply](#)

It is just an interpretation

It looks like the main point you were trying to bring is that Christianity is, deeply in its heart, antisemitic because of these words that Matthew added. Christianity is antisemitic in the same way and to the same extent as any religion or ideology is responsible for any hatred against other religions/ideologies. Up to a certain extent! It just happens every so often that whenever you stand for any moral value you would necessarily denounce any "immorality" and people who stand for different values. Judaists would say that being christian is bad - will we call them anti-european after that?

Whether certain people choose some words as the target or as an argument has nothing to do with the real meaning of the words (whatever it is). In the same way as you cannot blame a person who is falling on you from the stairs just because you never know who pushed that person first and why. If a woman pronounced these or similar words once and Matthew put them down or heard these words from someone else it still doesn't prove that he was anti-semitic. And if it does, it doesn't prove that passion plays are

all anti-semitic. And, in turn, it doesn't signify that mentioning a crucifixion is anything to do with anti-semitism. Even if one says that judaism is evil religion (and this IS the main point of Gospels) it is still not "jews are all evil". You cannot say that all Saudi Arabians are bad people just because Islam is their main religion.

As you said earlier, everyone is entitled to a freedom of speech unless one gives orders to kill. I wouldn't be sure about Matthew being inciting violence against jews and neither I would say about Mel Gibson. And even a weaker link leads to the Pope.

Hitler himself was only responsible for Holocaust, not Matthew.

As for possible interpretations, one might say that the words meant "I know what I am doing and it is right and my children should be proud of it because we fought devil in this case" - isn't it what Bush and Blair say about themselves all the time?

by a reader on Fri, 06/04/2004 - 08:49 | [reply](#)

Pogo

I read the same Gospel and saw the same movie you write of, and came away feeling compassion for, not hatred against, the Jews.

I can understand how you might interpret otherwise, given the vile anti-Semitism of the Church's past. But I don't think this is the operative mode today. The idea that Jews put Jesus to death is as interesting as saying Americans killed Lincoln and Kennedy. Jesus was Jewish, lived among a Jewish population, and died at the hands of his people. This same sad story can be told in every part of the world.

I agree however, that attention to language and actions are essential. Just be careful of alienating all who support Israel by painting with too broad of a brush.

It's motive, not religion, that mattered.

by a reader on Fri, 06/04/2004 - 12:35 | [reply](#)

But...

Who cares? Who should?

by a reader on Fri, 06/04/2004 - 20:33 | [reply](#)

Call me simple but seems to m

Call me simple but seems to me that the attributes of a saint are no more or less than: having been declared a "saint" by whatever church you're talking about. Historically it would seem that good or bad people can be and have been declared "saints" by this or that church for good or bad reasons. Sounds like this Emmerich lady had

her problems and should she be made a Catholic saint it would

probably be safe to call it a shame.

Meanwhile, while it's appropriate enough to complain about historical anti-Semitic passion plays, and to place Emmerich's sentiments, vision and writing in that dishonorable tradition, the modern (and, American) understanding of "his blood be upon us" as exemplified in the recent movie by Mel Gibson (in fact the line was excised from the film IIRC) need not necessarily have much of anything to do with all that. Of course I remain open to evidence to the contrary, in the form of e.g. pogroms committed by recent *The Passion of the Christ* moviegoers. However, the actual historical record of that movie's release and its showings, in the US at least (I make no claims as to how it is being received in Arabia.. or France..), would seem to suggest that you can relax to some extent.

--Blix

by a reader on Fri, 06/04/2004 - 22:31 | [reply](#)

The Pope's mistake

The Pope, in deciding to beatify Emmerich, must regard her as an exemplary person.

Everyone in this thread so far seems to agree that the Pope is mistaken in this judgement.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Sat, 06/05/2004 - 00:38 | [reply](#)

Sometimes people get beatified

Sometimes people get beatified for being mystics rather than being martyrs or people whose actions were particularly meritorious.

The beatification implies papal endorsement of the visions experienced (Hildegard of Bingen, with her notoriously wacky visions got papal endorsement while still alive, which meant that she was safe to go on recording what she saw without being accused of heresy, which had been a real possibility).

I also consider the Pope to be mistaken in his judgement of the orthodoxy of Emmerich's visions.

Emma

by a reader on Sat, 06/05/2004 - 09:04 | [reply](#)

Exclusivity

The facts of the matter are:

None of us are very likely to ever be declared either beatified or a saint. Nor are any of us very likely to become Pope. One of the attributes of a saint is usually that they are no longer living so we

can make up stories about who they were and they have little

possibility of objecting. All in all a saint is just an example of the more visible traits of humanity, with a little sanctification and mystery thrown in. Most saints don't bother me. I imagine that they put on their coulottes one leg at a time like anybody else. Maybe they just gave more thought to it.

by a reader on Sat, 06/05/2004 - 14:41 | [reply](#)

The Pope's mistake

This 'mistake' has a name, doesn't it?

by a reader on Sun, 06/06/2004 - 14:49 | [reply](#)

Ronald Reagan RIP

We salute Ronald Reagan, fortieth President of the United States and victor of the Cold War, who died today.

Some will say that this is not a moment to engage in political controversy, but this is a special case: May the current President listen to reason, as articulated by President Reagan's widow **Nancy** among many others, and reconsider his irrational opposition to the scientific research that would cure terrible diseases such as the Alzheimer's from which Ronald suffered.

Sun, 06/06/2004 - 00:30 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Religious Morality

I salute Reagan as well.

I'd also like to note that the World often seems to praise Bush's religiousness as a guide to his moral choices. It's important to remember that this is also a source of significant moral errors, too. His position on stem-cell research is a good example of this. It isn't merely Bush's position on this research that's irrational. It's the basis of his entire worldview.

Perhaps it isn't so praiseworthy after all.

Gil

by **Gil** on Sun, 06/06/2004 - 04:49 | [reply](#)

foundationalism

worldviews do not have basis-es.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 06/06/2004 - 06:14 | [reply](#)

Re Religious morality and foundationalism

I agree that world-views do not have bases. Nevertheless I agree with the substance of Gil's comment. I would merely replace 'It's the basis of his entire worldview' by 'Religious thinking pervades his

entire worldview'.

As I wrote [here](#), even the best religions tend to 'entrench a slew of wrong ideas' in the minds of believers, some of which are evil ideas.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Sun, 06/06/2004 - 14:38 | [reply](#)

it makes a huge difference

it makes a huge difference. if something bad was the *basis* of a worldview, it would seem to make sense to conclude the worldview was bad, not praiseworthy, or something like that. this is what Gil did.

but for a mistake to simply pervade a worldview (come up a lot, be common) simply means the worldview has a bunch of errors with a common theme. and it would not automatically follow from this that the worldview shouldn't be praised. further argument and judgment would be required. and in some cases this would conclude that we should praise religious people.

you'll notice [The World's](#) post criticises a religious flaw in bush. so gil wasn't saying to simply be willing to criticise religious flaws when we see them. we do that. he wants more. it seems to me he clearly was asking the world to stop endorsing and praising bush generally, and to instead only do it in a very limited way like "Bush is good on the war".

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sun, 06/06/2004 - 18:09 | [reply](#)

David, say more

You refer to the article on the Edge. Specifically I am intrigued by this statement: "Why would somebody hate so badly"? And he /George W. Bush/ replied: "my answer is, there's evil in the world. But we can overcome evil. We're good." This is the simple truth — a truth on which all our futures depend —

In almost all senses I agree. We can overcome evil. This is the simple truth - a truth on which all our futures depend -

However, the "We're good." of the address seems a broad brush way of saying the inclusive We, not as a critical rationalist statement, but as a foregone conclusion; right against wrong side. "We", the good guys.

The potential trap here is that in saying We're good, as in "We are the good guys", could become a conclusion, before critical thought. The president may not mean it this way but it is very easy to fall into this trap. Once you have concluded that you are on the "right side" it is easy to continue to conclude rightness before thinking about what constitutes goodness and how to act rightly from it.

It is significant and meaningful here that he is talking to children.

Children especially continue to ask why. Why are we good?

The truth does not take sides. It simply is. The "good guys" are good because they continue to think rationally, critically and act according to to this credo. In that sense, "We" are good too.

by a reader on Sun, 06/06/2004 - 20:22 | [reply](#)

It Makes Little Difference

Religion doesn't "simply pervade" Bush's worldview.

Religion **PERVADES** Bush's worldview.

And, these things don't simply have a common theme. They have a common source: his commitment to mysticism, faith, and allegedly divinely-inspired doctrine, rather than to reason. This is not a reliable path to moral truth. It's more likely to lead to moral errors. It, in fact, leads many others to be wrong on the war, so I think his rightness on this subject comes from knowledge that he has that is independent of his religious faith. I'm happy that he applies this non-religious knowledge to this issue. I wish he would do it to more issues. The fact that he doesn't do it often enough is a flaw.

Yes, I'm very happy that Bush knows that there is good and evil in the world. But, this knowledge is available without all of the irrational baggage of religion. Even a stopped clock is right twice a day.

Elliot is wrong again when he asserts that I object to praising Bush generally. I think it's quite appropriate to praise many religious people generally (Ronald Reagan is a great example). What I object to is praising his religiousness specifically as if it should be considered a badge of honor, and the mark of an enlightened and trustworthy leader.

And, what I noticed was that **The World** did NOT characterize Bush's error as a "religious flaw" but, rather, as an "irrational opposition".

Also, I'd appreciate it if either **The World** would endorse Elliot Temple as one of its official spokesmen, or he would stop giving the impression that it has (e.g. using "we" when referring to **The World's** posts and opinions).

Gil

by **Gil** on Sun, 06/06/2004 - 22:19 | [reply](#)

bush is critical

Bush has certain ideas about what good is. he talks about them all the time. he thinks everyone should be free, woman shouldn't be oppressed, people should not live in fear of their governments, and the list goes on. if our society wasn't like that, he would notice, and stop calling it good.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 06/06/2004 - 22:20 | [reply](#)

we

"we" gives the impression the world endorses me just as much as if i said "i am morally aligned with **The World**". in both cases clearly this is my view.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 06/06/2004 - 22:38 | [reply](#)

religion and the war

According to a survey conducted March 13-16 by the Pew Research Center and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 62 percent of American Catholics support the war, the same percentage as white, mainline Protestants. Religious support was strongest among evangelicals, 77 percent of whom support the war.

Only 36 percent of African-American Protestants favored military action in Iraq. "Seculars" -- respondents who said they were atheists or had no religious affiliation -- divided evenly, with 44 percent in favor and 44 percent opposed. --[source](#)

Gil, you seem to say Bush understands why the war is right *despite* his religion. in light of this view, could you explain the above stats which feature Christians being better on the war than non-religious people?

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 06/06/2004 - 23:17 | [reply](#)

Religion and the War

Those statistics don't require an explanation. They are just correlations.

But, religious communities often share many values that go beyond the contents of the religion. So non-religious correlations are to be expected.

What are the statistics among european christians? If their support for the war is lower, does that mean they're not following christianity as accurately as americans do? Or would it support the notion that the support of the war comes largely from values outside of the religious tradition?

Gil

by **Gil** on Mon, 06/07/2004 - 00:18 | [reply](#)

explanation

your explanation seems to be that more religious communities with

shared values happened to share good values than similar atheist communities. isn't that explaining who is moral by luck or happenstance?

you say an explanation isn't required of you. well, not *by the statistics*. sure. however, i asked for one. if you want to be persuasive that your views are good at explaining reality (*the* criterion for good views, basically), then you should be able to explain things with them when asked. and also, the better your views are, the easier this should be, and the more sense your explanation should make, etc

so if you find it difficult to explain facts in terms of your view, then this suggests your view isn't very good.

"If [European Christian] support for the war is lower, does that mean they're not following christianity as accurately as americans do?"

i would explain it by saying that is a different religious tradition, despite the shared heritage and shared name.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 06/07/2004 - 01:30 | [reply](#)

Explanation

Elliot,

If we were to find that, as I conjecture, american evangelical christians are more likely than athiests to be NASCAR enthusiasts, would that require an explanation based on religious traditions?

If not, then it seems to me that everything you've written above is nonsense.

Gil

by **Gil** on Mon, 06/07/2004 - 04:48 | [reply](#)

explanation

no one criticises christians for liking NASCAR. it's viewed as a matter of taste, and preferences on the matter aren't taken very seriously. thus they haven't really evolved a lot (though how to make the sport better may have).

the war isn't like that. this is something everyone's thought about, and involves moral issues accessible to everyone. so, say, "my mom took me to a race when i was little and i liked it" won't work for liking the war. it takes more detailed explanation involving people's moral theories.

have i *proven* the explanation for christians favoring the war is a

religious one? no. but that's a possibility, and if you can't think of another one, then my version of events seems the most compelling explanation.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 06/07/2004 - 05:06 | [reply](#)

Explanation

Ok, here's another possible explanation...

People in communities with lots of christians also tend to be more patriotic and nationalistic than average. They tend to support whatever their national leaders have chosen to do, and to resent those who oppose them. They were, I'd guess, more likely to support the Vietnam war, the draft, and Japanese internment during WWII, too.

Again, this is not caused by their religious faith and tradition, but merely correlates somewhat within the same communities; and has nothing to do with deep moral consciousness or superiority. Like NASCAR.

Gil

by **Gil** on Mon, 06/07/2004 - 05:27 | [reply](#)

"would"?

The above exchange aside, I'm still hung up on (what seems to be) **The World's** assertion that for the U.S. government to fund research which uses fetal stem-cells-from-other-than-existing-lines (as opposed to just adult stem-cells and/or fetal stem-cells-from-those-existing-lines) - which is what Bush actually forbid, you see - "would" cure diseases such as Alzheimer's. (And BTW, although he may "oppose" it on a personal level, AFAIK there is no stem-cell research which Bush has actually forbid.)

If **The World** really knows that such research "would" cure Alzheimer's, or even a disease-such-as-Alzheimer's whatever that might mean, it would be extremely newsworthy and scientifically relevant, and ought to be published in journals and publicized in the media. Such an earth-shaking scientific finding might even perhaps convince Bush to change his mind on this issue, who knows? Please, please don't sit on this finding.

Along these lines, another highly advisable course of action would be to pressure **other** agents than the U.S. federal government (such as European governments, George Soros, Bill Gates etc) to fund fetal-stem-cell-research-which-would-cure-Alzheimer's-or-a-disease-such-as. After all, if the only thing now preventing an Alzheimer's cure is the U.S. federal government not funding research involving fetal-stem-cells-other-than-from-existing-lines, that could be easily remedied. The U.S. government is not the only

potential source of research money in the world; money from other sources is just as good. Certainly it can't be the case that Alzheimer's-or-a-disease-such-as "would" be cured if research is funded using U.S. government money but not other kinds of money, can it?

So again, I reiterate, please publicize your scientific findings regarding this disease that "would" be cured, both in the interest of science and to get other-than-US-funding to do the actual research. What's stopping you?

by a reader on Mon, 06/07/2004 - 23:11 | [reply](#)

Could

The above is amusing. But, I think it's a valid point that Bush has urged discrimination against a particular promising line of research because of the religious symbolism involved. That's a bad thing.

It's hard to tell, but this could have a chilling effect on privately-funded research because there would be fewer researchers who could follow-up on interesting results, and some might fear an eventual legal ban (as with cloning), etc.

Gil

by **Gil** on Mon, 06/07/2004 - 23:36 | [reply](#)

The Prisoners' Conscience

Getting back to Reagan...

I think **The World** readers will probably be interested in **this** short tribute to Reagan from Natan Sharansky.

Gil

by **Gil** on Mon, 06/07/2004 - 23:45 | [reply](#)

lots of things could...

Gil,

But, I think it's a valid point that Bush has urged discrimination against a particular promising line of research because of the religious symbolism involved. That's a bad thing.

1. Governments have, do, and will continue in the future to discriminate against the FUNDING of lines of research. (In fact, they **have** to. Capital is finite. To fund project X necessarily discriminates against the funding of project Y.) I don't know how they "discriminate against research" per se outside of the context of funding, unless you're talking about banning, which is not actually what Bush did and which your alarmism notwithstanding I don't think anyone seriously believes to be in the cards.

2. "Promising" is your, highly informed I assume, opinion. May be

correct. However,

3. whether something is "promising" in and of itself is not very interesting. Even modulo subjectivity, lots of things are promising. It would only be informative as a **relative** statement (see 1, we **must** discriminate), as in, It's **relatively** promising compared to other things. That may be how you meant it, and indeed, that it may be, but,

4. Make sure you understand what you are calling "promising". Again, what Bush has **actually** declined to fund is research-using-fetal-stem-cells-from-other-than-lines-XYZW..., not "Stem Cell Research" in general. Are you **really** saying that fetal-stem-cell-research-from-other-than-those-existing-lines, is promising, and **relatively** so? Why are fetal cells in particular so necessary? Why are other lines so necessary? What's so bad about the existing lines? Have you done the leg work here?

5. Although Bush's religion was undoubtedly involved in his decision (as it is in virtually **all** his decisions I presume), unclear why you use the phrase "religious symbolism" to denote this decision. Religious **principles** perhaps, and understandably if one doesn't believe in any religion than all such principles may seem like mere "symbolism" or incomprehensible as anything other than that, but... Why don't I just go ahead and accuse you of engaging in Scientific Symbolism? Basis for the charge would be the same.

It's hard to tell, but this could have a chilling effect on privately-funded research because there would be fewer researchers who could follow-up on interesting results, and some might fear an eventual legal ban (as with cloning), etc.

But on the other side of the ledger we have **The World's** implicit declaration that this particular research (=research using fetal-stem-cells-from-other-than-existing-lines), if only funded at a higher level, would definitely cure Alzheimer's or some disease like that, and all that is really lacking is money. Your more sober hedging here is duly noted; however, assuming **The World** is correct, why wouldn't some enterprising funding agent/European government/researcher jump at the chance to grab that sure thing? ;-)

Again, apparently an Alzheimer's (or disease like it) cure is out there right now just for the taking, all that is needed is for enough money to be paid to a scientist to manipulate fetal stem-cells from lines other than the crappy useless pathetic ones that are US government approved. If it's such a sure thing then who cares if the US government, being overrun by religious fanatics, puts a (temporary, as it would surely be, since a cure is almost here!) "chilling effect" on future research or even bans it. All the more reason for Euro-gov'ts or George Soros (or hey what about the Chinese?) to fund this research aggressively, quickly pluck that low-hanging disease-cure off the tree, get famous/win Nobel Prizes/distribute the cure around the world, make big profits, and say a big "In Your Face!" to the stupid Americans who would be shown the error of their ways in the most dramatic way possible

since Sputnik.

P.S. I know this is all mostly just an irritating tangent and perhaps I should have just let stand the sloppy use of "would" because the important thing is to allow all stem cell research unfettered in the interest of progressiveness and all that is good and nice. However, IMHO equally irritating was the fact that **The World's** first post about the death of Ronald Reagan was to use it as a flimsy springboard into a virtual non sequitur about Bush's mid 2001 stem cell research decision.

Does the life and death of Ronald Reagan have nothing more pressing to teach us than the need for the U.S. federal government to issue research grants to scientists who want to work with fetal stem cells other than the existing lines already in use?

--Blixia (last one too)

by a reader on Tue, 06/08/2004 - 00:42 | [reply](#)

Should

Blixia,

I'm responding in a somewhat random order...

I called it "religious symbolism", because it's my understanding that there's an adequate supply of embryos that would otherwise be destroyed; primarily from excess in vitro fertilization processes. These embryos would not otherwise have resulted in a baby, and using them would not motivate abortions. These embryos will die anyway. I think that this decision *was* purely symbolic, because it could not save any children, but it's a topic that just makes people *think about* abortions.

I'm certainly not an expert, but I understand that many researchers have claimed that fetal stem cells might have a wider variety of cells that they can become than non-fetal ones, or they can be made to do this more easily, or have some other such advantages. I think that there has been a great deal of recent progress with non-fetal stem cells, so this might not be as important as it was once thought. I don't know. What I do know is that many of these researchers claim that the preliminary results have been promising enough to warrant funding by the existing standards and it is just the religious aspect associated with using human embryos that have blocked it.

I don't claim to speak for **The World**, but I suspect that they meant to say something closer to what I have, rather than to imply that cures are imminent.

Like it or not, politics often works in such a way as to have certain legislative and regulatory changes triggered by peripherally related news events. Take the Brady Bill as an example.

And, it's true that the government should have no obligation to fund

this particular research (as it should have no obligation to fund abortions). I actually would like to see the abolition of all non-defense-related publicly funded research.

But, when the government *does* fund things, I'd like it to base its decisions on the best available knowledge and criteria to get the most value for the money, rather than to sacrifice this quality to appeal to certain constituencies' prejudices. I think that private people should be able to discriminate about how to allocate their own resources using whatever foolish criteria they like; but the government, as trustee for the public, should be held to a higher standard.

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 06/08/2004 - 02:04 | [reply](#)

stem cell research

Blixa,

Nice post!

Do you think Bush analysed the issue as you did, and then came to your conclusions rationally, or do you think an irrationality stopped him from giving the idea of funding stem cell research fair consideration (fair judged by comparing it to how much consideration other similar research options get that he has no irrationality about)?

Also, do you think when **The World** said "would" this was meant to communicate an infallible guarantee, or simply that research will cure the disease, and this particular research is part of the correct path to finding the cure?

PS the 'would' thing may have been a picky point, but it was kinda interesting anyway. and i liked your response to gil.

PPS wanna join my email list, chat on AIM (curi42), meet, or email me from an addy you ever check? i don't bite. curi[at]curi[dot]us

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 06/08/2004 - 02:51 | [reply](#)

Comment Editing

The "edit your comment" feature is great, but it seems to revert back to the original comment if you go back to edit a comment again. This might be useful, but it should be optional since one is more likely to merely want to make a small refinement to the current state of the comment.

Sorry to complain about it here, but another feature that it's missing is the ability to delete extraneous comments entirely; so I had to write *something*.

Gil

Gil, I'll try to be as bri

Gil,

I'll try to be as brief as possible.

The "symbolism" charge still seems unjustified. 1. How do you know Bush (right or wrong) wasn't sincere? Sure seemed so to me. 2. What's the point of "appealing to" a constituency (pro-lifers) he already had in his back pocket? *puzzled* 3. In fact pro-lifers were *not* uniformly happy with the decision, the "using existing lines is ok" part being viewed as a terrible cop-out. The decision was a compromise that irked practically everyone, another reason I believe it to have not been a political ploy. It was not, as you seem to imply, prompted by "news events"; it was only in the news because he made it so in the first place. If it had been about votes or politics it would have been more astute to have made the opposite decision, or at least to have done it quietly on a Friday night, under the radar. Instead, he gave a (highly unusual for him!) prime time, prominent speech explaining his rationale. YMMV but to me these all point to him (however wrong his decision was) having given weighty and sincere consideration to the matter, and taken it quite seriously indeed, rather than some kind of political motives or trying to "appeal to" the "prejudices" of some constituency.

Re: what researchers think, It should be pointed out that *all* researchers think *everything* they're doing deserves funding, the more the better ;), however, obviously I do not doubt the substance of the claim that stem-cell research in general is especially promising, or that embryonic stem-cells in particular can have some advantage or another. But you still haven't said why the advantage is so overwhelming or why adult stem-cells - or embryonic stem-cells from the "lines" which *are* approved - are insufficient to whatever research task you have in mind, if any.

More importantly, it benefits precisely no one - not even the people who want the research approved! - to (as **The World** did) oversell the situation by crying Wolf and implying that there was an automatic-disease-cure in the works if not for Bush's decision. (And to have fed a grieving, agonized Nancy Reagan some fairy tale about how "this would have definitely cured Ronnie's disease, too late for him, but hey" so as to use her as a talking-prop, if that's what people did, is downright distasteful if you ask me.)

Re: it won't be saving lives, because of certain embryos which won't be growing up, and could be used in research, but now won't... Isn't it possible that Bush knows all that, and nevertheless is worried about a slippery-slope? And wouldn't he be correct - i.e. if he *did* allow the use of those particular embryos you're talking about, but not future embryos, or all embryos, or whatever, wouldn't you now be saying, He should be allowing everything!

But if all that's the test of "symbolism" then my earlier "scientific

symbolism" jest may not be so far off the mark after all.. It's not at all clear that you have any concrete idea what's so necessary about the particular research that Bush has decided not to fund (=research using embryonic-stem-cells-from-other-than-some-particular-lines), *but you really really want it to be funded regardless*. I suspect you are far from alone in that regard. The way some people talk, it's hard to escape the conclusion that they want desperately this stuff to be funded *because Bush doesn't want to* (+ *Bush is religious*).

And by "best available knowledge" informing such decisions, you mean to axiomatically exclude all explicitly "Religious" knowledge, correct? Just checking :) Because all sorts of "knowledge" other than (what you would call, I imagine) Purely Scientific informs public-policy. Christians worried about stem-cells is hardly the first or last item; the relative funding of breast cancer and even AIDS research would probably be difficult to justify on objective, quantitative grounds for example. On some such not-purely-scientifically-informed issues, **The World** would probably even share my concerns - why is nuclear power so held back? genetically modified food? (On other matters I may be more alone: why the f**k do carpool lanes exist?)

Can you see any possible bias here in singling out the known-Religious guy and saying he, in particular (because he's Religious) shouldn't be allowed to make decisions informed by his morality, which, in fact, is something that *everyone* does, and in a sense he's just one of the few who admits it? I know this is not what you think, but assuming Bush was sincere, should he have made a decision he believed to be wrong? Or should acknowledged-Religious people just not hold public office? Best,

by a reader on Tue, 06/08/2004 - 19:32 | [reply](#)

oops that was

--Blix again

by a reader on Tue, 06/08/2004 - 19:32 | [reply](#)

Re: Comment Editing

The "edit your comment" feature is great, but it seems to revert back to the original comment if you go back to edit a comment again.

The blog software doesn't actually keep any earlier version of an edited comment, and the timestamps in the headers look fine, so I think you might merely need to configure your browser to be slightly less enthusiastic in its caching.

Sorry to complain about it here, but another feature that it's missing is the ability to delete extraneous comments entirely

The software doesn't do that yet, so for now, we have implemented

a feature that permits users not to write extraneous comments in the first place.

by **Kevin** on Tue, 06/08/2004 - 19:56 | [reply](#)

not extraneous

lol@kevin

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 06/08/2004 - 20:11 | [reply](#)

to Elliott

Thanks..

Do you think Bush analysed the issue as you did, and then came to your conclusions rationally, or do you think an irrationality stopped him from giving the idea of funding stem cell research fair consideration (fair judged by comparing it to how much consideration other similar research options get that he has no irrationality about)?

First of all I **haven't** analyzed the stem-cell issue, rationally or irrationally, all I know is what I read in the papers, and heard some other researcher allude to his use of stem-cells (or more precisely, his use of some drug/chemical/Thing which apparently was created using stem-cells) in a science talk or two. Bush has almost certainly given it more thought than I have, I'd bet on it.

Nor do I have any "conclusions". Although I'm (a bit flakily) pro-life, I'm not dogmatically opposed to embryonic stem-cell research on anything like pro-life grounds, but that doesn't mean I don't see any potential moral problems at all, and I'm mostly just kind of agnostic on the urgent need to do the kind of stem-cell research that Bush has declined to fund. (Remember: Bush has **not** declined to fund "Stem Cell Research" en masse!!) I don't actually understand why Bush's (I won't exactly call it "Solomon-like", but still seemingly reasonable to me..) compromise of "as for embryonic stem-cells, ok, but just use the dozen existing lines" [or however many it was] solution was not sufficient to researchers' needs; I'm open to being convinced, of course. Just need more info perhaps; it'd probably take one Google search, but like I said, I **haven't** researched the issue.

or do you think an irrationality stopped him from giving the idea of funding stem cell research fair consideration

I think it's certainly probably that the religious framework through which, we are so often told, Bush views the world, amounted to a bias or template that effectively prevented him from being convinced of the need/benefit of funding this research, by an amount/type of evidence that would have convinced other not-so-Religious (or other-Religious) people, or which would have

convinced him on other matters not so connected to the morality of things his religion tends to focus on. Is that "irrationality"? If so, ok, but I'd just like to also be able to say that anyone who thinks painting a white diamond on the left lane of a freeway, and forbidding solo drivers from driving in that lane, absent any tangible evidence whatsoever that doing this has any salutary effects at all of any kind for society, is also clouded by irrationality. ;-) More generally I'd like to also say that precisely *no one* is free from a bias/template. Some people hide it. Not to say that all biases/templates are created equal but still.

So at the same time, what I have a problem with is *assuming* that Bush came to his decision "irrationally", or at least more than the next guy, because the only real basis for saying so seems to be either *disagreement* with the decision, or our knowledge that he's Religious and didn't somehow excise this portion of himself when making the decision. As far as I know (indeed I remember reading and anyway, came away convinced that) Bush gave it great thought and consulted with many people, not all of whom agreed with him or wore white collars. Now maybe that great thought Bush put into it was worthless, because of Bush being so stupid and all; or maybe the bioethicists etc he talked to couldn't convince him because they used big words or didn't point at a Bible.. but I don't actually know any of that.

And again, the decision - the *actual* decision he made, not the "he banned Stem-Cell Research!!" caricature being bandied around in some quarters - seemed ok to me; I saw no reason to think it unduly messed-up. I don't know all the answers and so I don't know that moral concerns about embryonic stem cells are wrongheaded. But it should be emphasized that pro-lifers *weren't* overjoyed at the decision, far from it. If you ask them, from their point of view what Bush actually did was that he *allowed* stem-cell research, and a debate about it on a more pro-life website would probably look like bizarro-world to people here.

I think part of where I'm coming from here is that I actually respected how he managed to make a decision that ticked off both sides :-) It either took lots of guts, or political stupidity... but it's almost *impossible* for me to interpret it, as Gil seems to, as some kind of political ploy to get votes... *whose votes*??

fair judged by comparing it to how much consideration other similar research options get that he has no irrationality about

The thing is, why would we take that as a control group? There are lots of research areas which Bush not only has no irrationality about, but hasn't considered at all, their funding running on autopilot or at least not touched by his admin. one way or the other, and which I would probably like to call "unfair". "Not having been considered by Bush in his religious mind-set" is not the test of "fairness" to me. Or to put it another way, practically *everything* which gets funded/decided in public policy, probably has been done so with some amount of "unfairness". Part of what I'm saying is,

Why single out Bush and *his* decision, and not all those others?

cuz he's Religious, right?

*Also, do you think when **The World** said "would" this was meant to communicate an infallible guarantee, or simply that research will cure the disease, and this particular research is part of the correct path to finding the cure?*

The thing is, even if it's the latter, I'd still disagree. Who knows that research will cure the disease? We may never find a cure. Who know that this particular research is part of the correct path? We may find a cure but by some other means entirely. (By the same token stem-cell research may cure something *else* or lead to other, unimagined benefits...)

That having been said, you asked me what **The World** "meant". And that's the problem, because honestly it looks like **The World** "meant" to paint embryonic-stem-cell-research-finding-a-cure-for-Alzheimer's-or-something-like-it as if not a sure thing, as close to a sure thing as they could get away with saying. I agree of course that if pressed **The World** would retreat to a more carefully hedged formulation, but IMHO what **The World** "meant" to do in the original post was to state their case as strongly as they thought they could get away with doing... and I didn't want to let them :)

Like I told Gil, it benefits no one to oversell stem-cell or any other kind of research as some kind of panacea. There is a definite "crying wolf" danger here; it is just not good to overstate and sensationalize your case in science, *even* if it leads to short-term gains. Look at the global-warming people as an analogy. Although politically I am squarely on the "anti-Global-Warming-people" side, at the same time I don't dispute that a (lowercase g, w)global warming has occurred in the recent 100-150 years or so, and of course I acknowledge the greenhouse effect is real, and thus that the future climate *may* be worth worrying about, etc., but the danger here is that they've spent so much effort turning it all into a cartoonish armageddon story + political/ideological dogmatism that even if they're *right*, eventually only the True Believers will have believed them.

Suppose that George W. Bush is as we speak perusing the blogs and comes across STWTR, sees this post, and gets convinced that stem-cell research should be funded unfettered because it "would" cure Alzheimer's. And then it *doesn't*. All that happens is that the next funding priority which is potentially impeded by someone's wrongheaded moral concerns, becomes a much harder sell....

P.S. I'll catch up on the private correspondence when I get a chance, i promise :)

by a reader on Tue, 06/08/2004 - 20:33 | [reply](#)

I Agree

Blix,

I agree with you. HOV lane restrictions are worse-than-useless and

should be abolished.

As for the other stuff...

I don't think Bush is insincere such that he doesn't personally agree with limiting this research but is doing it *only* to win votes. I think he does believe in it. I just think he's wrong. If he didn't believe in evolution and was sincere in trying to abolish teaching it in federally-funded schools, I think he'd be sincere and wrong to do that as well.

You're right that all funding decisions are affected by politics, but most at least claim to be based on the objectively determined expected benefits of the research.

And, I don't think Bush is a monster. I think he's a fundamentally decent man who wants to do the right thing. I just think he has a major area of irrationality which leads him to do the wrong things sometimes.

My point was simply that people who are quick to praise him specifically for his religion-guided moral sense should be a little more restrained in their praise, because that knife cuts both ways.

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 06/08/2004 - 21:49 | [reply](#)

Gil, I don't think Bush i

Gil,

I don't think Bush is insincere such that he doesn't personally agree with limiting this research but is doing it only to win votes.

I'm glad you don't find him insincere but your political diagnosis still seems on the fritz: How will the decision "win" him any votes at all, in the first place? from whom? The pro-life people (who were already going to vote for him), the people who don't care much about this issue and wouldn't let his stance affect their vote (like me), or the folks who hate him with a vengeance and this is just fuel for the fire to them?

Objectively the actual decision he made was a political loser all around. He **ticked off** (a little bit) the true blue pro-life people with this decision you seem to think was made for them, are you denying this or simply unaware of it? I think many people, for whatever reason, are really underestimating just how much of a political loser this was, not only to make the decision he made, but to give a prime-time speech explaining it.

I think he does believe in it. I just think he's wrong.

As was clear. And perhaps you are right. But I hope you now understand that "he's wrong (in my opinion)" and "it was just religious symbolism" are not the same thing...

You're right that all funding decisions are affected by politics, but

most at least claim to be based on the objectively determined expected benefits of the research.

And all too often that claim is disingenuous... frankly I find honesty more refreshing than pretense myself... YMMV

And BTW it's not that Bush didn't take into account the "expected benefits" AT ALL... remember, he *allowed* the funding of "some" stem-cell research if headlines such as **Bush Allows Some Stem Cell Funding** are any indication. Quote: "...if they're going to be destroyed anyway, shouldn't they be used for a greater good, for research that has the potential to save and improve other lives?" You boil that down to giving no consideration to expected benefits of research? Sounds more like he weighed benefits against the moral considerations he had and sought some compromise. (Which, again, did *not* make pro-life people especially happy!) Ok to disagree with his conclusion if you want, but at least characterize it accurately.

And, I don't think Bush is a monster.

Heh. That's good!

I just think he has a major area of irrationality which leads him to do the wrong things sometimes.

As do we all, my friend. As do we all.

My point was simply that people who are quick to praise him specifically for his religion-guided moral sense should be a little more restrained in their praise, because that knife cuts both ways.

That's a perfectly valid point that, I now see, you'd made earlier in the thread, and I basically agree. You will note that I've not praised Bush "specifically for his religion-guided moral sense" per se, here. (Well, or anywhere. :-) Doesn't make too much sense to me to praise someone "for being religious" qua religious. (I suppose I could sign on to a weaker formulation such as, 'On balance I'd rather have a leader who seems to have some good moral center rather than being adrift, even if at times I disagree with him...' + 'American-flavor Christianity for example provides a good moral center') But really, in practice this just means I'll praise him for his moral sense when I think it's right, and not when I don't. This here happens to be a case where I don't have a firmly held opinion one way or the other, and don't have a big problem with the decision that he made. Obviously YMMV, but of course one would hope a critic'd know what Bush's actual decision *was*, before deciding to lambaste it. ;-) Best,

by a reader on Wed, 06/09/2004 - 00:00 | [reply](#)

stem cell reserach, take 2

Blix,

We call wrong views irrationalities when they are held immune to

criticism (actually this goes for true views too). Is Bush personally irrationally resistant to criticism on this point? Beats me; I haven't ever argued with him. But the tradition he identifies with, and many people who seem to be like him, are entrenched on this issue, and Bush hasn't done anything to show he isn't, so it seems a pretty safe bet he's at least somewhat irrational on the matter. (If he has done something to show he isn't, let me know. I haven't really been paying attention to that.)

Anyhow, most research he doesn't consider a moral issue, so it gets due consideration (usually by aids, or whatever you call the people who do that). But this particular research got special evaluation. And it was evaluated in terms of Bush's wrong, irrational view. This greatly increases the chance for a policy error compared with letting the normal processes handle the matter (but only because he is wrong, simply intervening isn't an error).

Given Bush's views on the matter as premises, he did do the right thing (ie, assuming he doesn't improve his views, what's the next best thing? This is it.)

Moving on, when you persistently defend Bush, with great energy, even when he does have a flaw -- well assuming when Kerry has a flaw that's overplayed, you don't come to his defense with the same energy ... then this shows a partisan bias in who you argue for. Is that bad? Well, some is OK. And I don't see a reason it would be necessarily bad. I wouldn't want to spend my time arguing for Kerry unless he was treated quite unfairly. But if your partisan approach to who you defend is too strong, people are more inclined to stop listening to you and write you off as biased. And the more you do it, the harder you may find it to keep perspective on matters yourself.

I'll be happy to call the people who made carpool lanes irrational. I do frequently call the whole damn environmental movement nuts. They are an amazingly easy target.

I understand your view that many people are far too aggressive in attacking Bush's religiousness; I think this most reveals a flaw in the attackers. And I do think Gil is one of those people. I hope to blog more pro-US-Christian, anti-atheism stuff soon.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 06/09/2004 - 00:54 | [reply](#)

We call wrong views irrational

We call wrong views irrationalities when they are held immune to criticism

But who's to decide whether someone's "immune" to criticism or they just find that criticism wanting for other, perhaps quite good, reasons of their own... to diagnose "immune", at some point you still have to bring "I disagree with him and he won't change his mind and well, I think he should" into play
But the tradition he identifies with, and many people who seem to

be like him, are entrenched on this issue, and Bush hasn't done anything to show he isn't, so it seems a pretty safe bet he's at least somewhat irrational on the matter.

I would only wish to say it weaker: It's not unreasonable to *suspect* he's irrational on the matter. I don't know how safe a bet it is, actually. (Well, "somewhat" irrational is a pretty safe bet - most people are at least *somewhat* irrational about most things - but "irrational" is less safe...)

If he has done something to show he isn't, let me know.

Well, start by asking yourself, Why did Bush allow any stem-cell research at all, in the first place? Remember, ask a pro-lifer to summarize Bush's decision and they might well say "he allowed stem-cell research, the sellout". Doesn't this compromise suggest he's at least *listening to* - heck, *agrees with* - at least *partially* the arguments of non-pro-life-addled people? did you look at the link I showed Gil, where he talks about the lives that can be improved etc? You're still talking as if this decision boiled down to Banning Stem-Cell Research Because I'm Pro-Life. That's, um, totally wrong.

Anyhow, most research he doesn't consider a moral issue, so it gets due consideration (usually by aids ...

You speak of this "due consideration" as if it's necessarily a totally bias-free process because Dubya isn't participating in it. Heh... I disagree, let's leave it at that. Can't the aides have their biases too? Or is it only a Religious person like Bush who infects the sterile, impartial process of public funding?

But this particular research got special evaluation. And it was evaluated in terms of Bush's wrong, irrational view.

I'm surprised you're saying this actually. You're really trying to say that because a decision Bush made was evaluated "in terms of" Bush's wrong, irrational view, that decision is flawed? Couldn't Bush be right, accidentally?

This greatly increases the chance for a policy error compared with letting the normal processes handle the matter (but only because he is wrong, simply intervening isn't an error).

I'm not sure. I'd concede this much, *If* you think that the view Bush evaluates things "in terms of" is Wrong, then when Bush intervenes and evaluates something, it's certainly fair to strongly suspect his evaluation contains errors. However, who's to say that the process of Bush-intervening has *increased* the errors? Maybe when Bush intervenes he just replaces other, different kinds of errors (of the aides, etc., who normally evaluate things) with his own. What's the net, positive or negative? I don't know. But I'm certainly not willing to concede that the normal processes of government-funding-decisions constitute a control group.. LOL

when you persistently defend Bush, with great energy, even when

he does have a flaw

You must have misunderstood because I'm not at all sure I think that his stance on stem-cells constitutes a flaw. Obviously Bush like all people has flaws but in my view, the greater ones lie elsewhere. As things stand, although I could still be convinced otherwise, I kinda *liked* his stem-cell compromise that ticked everyone off ;-)

well assuming when Kerry has a flaw that's overplayed, you don't come to his defense with the same energy

There's no John Kerry-related issue on the table to talk about. If/when I see Kerry being unduly criticized IMO, I say something. (the "medals" thing comes to mind..) Kerry hasn't been President (yet) so I have no real policies to criticize or defend. And in this context there would be no way for me to bring John Kerry into this conversation (I can guess, but I don't actually know what his stem-cell stance is frankly) so I'm a bit puzzled why you take my lack of John Kerry-mention as indicative of something... I also haven't talked about Vladimir Putin or Britney Spears very much here, what does that mean??

this shows a partisan bias in who you argue for. Is that bad? Well, some is OK. And I don't see a reason it would be necessarily bad.

I'll go ahead and concede I probably have a partisan bias (I'd rather see Bush win than Kerry, I'll be voting for Bush, etc., so surely this influences how I talk about them). Still don't understand why you perceived it in this thread but that's ok, you're not wrong or anything :-)

But if your partisan approach to who you defend is too strong, people are more inclined to stop listening to you and write you off as biased.

That's true of course and to some extent that this would happen to me is inevitable. I honestly don't know how someone could start reading my posts here and come away thinking "but why isn't he defending John Kerry with the same energy????" however. I'd like to be able to but please explain to me how the heck I am supposed to defend John Kerry in the context of this conversation.. I could interject "by the way, John Kerry's a nice-looking man" or something, but that's about it...

I understand your view that many people are far too aggressive in attacking Bush's religiousness; I think this most reveals a flaw in the attackers. And I do think Gil is one of those people.

You have understood me more or less correctly on that note. As for Gil, I do understand him to have been making a fair point earlier, about people who "praise Bush's religiousness" en masse, and I agreed with him that that is a bit silly. (I don't know who was actually doing that in the first place, but whatever.. :) My basic point would be to say that much of the criticism against Bush is built, to an uncomfortable extent, on the pillar "..and we know him to be Religious". If Bush weren't known to be Religious some of the criticism would have to vanish. As you say, this leads to errors. A

big one on evidence here is, "since Bush is Religious, if Bush decided X, and his Religion informed that decision, then X must be wrong". Boil it down and you get: I want X to be funded because Bush doesn't. And even worse, at least some of the people saying that here **don't actually seem to know** (1) what Bush's decision actually was, (2) what it is that he declined to fund, (3) why that thing he declined to fund is so important.

Can it **really** be true that research-involving-fetal-stem-cells-from-other-than-existing-lines is desperately worth funding *because Bush decided - "in terms of" his Religion - that it shouldn't be funded???* I could be convinced this stuff needs funding but I'm gonna need a better reason than that.
best,

by a reader on Wed, 06/09/2004 - 16:02 | [reply](#)

News Events

Blixa,

One thing I forgot to mention...

My comment about changes being triggered by "news events" was about re-addressing the decision now that Reagan has died, not about the original decision, as you seem to have inferred.

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 06/09/2004 - 16:03 | [reply](#)

I concede

Blixa,

I concede your points about Bush and about partisan bias.

I don't agree with the epistemology of saying Bush might be right accidentally. It's possible, but everything else balanced, **if** he was wrong, and acted on this wrong view, it makes sense to expect mistakes.

Also you say irrationalities come down to "I think X person is irrational". Well, you could add "the speaker thinks" to **all** claims. Therefore, the fact that you can doesn't seem to me an argument against any claim.

I believe the people Gil considers to praise Bush's religiousness objectionably include **The World** and myself. Dunno who else though.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 06/09/2004 - 17:39 | [reply](#)

****if** he was wrong, and acted**

**if* he was wrong, and acted on this wrong view, it makes sense to expect mistakes.*

Fair enough, as I've acknowledged. However, for the most part people in public office are wrong and act on wrong views, like, a lot. Why are some people so mad about this **particular** kind of mistake (if that's what it is)? Cuz he's/it's Religious. no? They can tolerate all other kinds of mistakes not known to come from a Religion (that's just "normal") but the obviously or admittedly Religious kind, must be immediately weeded out with high priority.

I believe this is an error.

Also, if it's not ok to say Bush could be right accidentally, then I'm gonna hafta say that neither are **The World** or Gil right accidentally. That is, they've been trying to make a point about X needing to be funded, but they don't know all that much about X (at least it's not evident that they know much more than I do.), they distorted Bush's actual decision, they (well **The World** did) deliberately overstate the benefits (painting potentialities as sure things), and their reasons for thinking it should be funded (for objecting to Bush's decision not to fund it) contain a heavy dose of anti-Religion stuff (it's **almost** as if they want it to be funded **because Bush doesn't wanna due to his Religion** isn't it?). So why can't I say, When approaching the issue "should stem-cell research be federally funded with no restrictions?", **The World**/Gil used a wrong view. So even if it's **true** that "stem-cell research should be federally funded with no restrictions", an epistemology granting **The World**/Gil credit for being "right" about that is flawed, and thus the claim is open to question.

*Also you say irrationalities come down to "I think X person is irrational". Well, you could add "the speaker thinks" to **all** claims. Therefore, the fact that you can doesn't seem to me an argument against any claim.*

Remember though that the claim was "Bush is irrational". I wasn't trying to argue against that claim in the first place let alone use this as a reason to argue against it. Bush may be irrational, in fact I'm sure he is on many many things if not most things.

But on stem-cell in particular? You'd explained "irrational" to me in terms of, being "immune" to counterarguments (basically). As we both agree apparently, that requires a judgment call. By identifying that judgment call I do not mean to say that this constitutes a proof that Bush is **not** irrational on this. All I mean to say is that it remains a judgment call, and I'm still left with no (for lack of better term) "objective" means of declaring (or anyway being forced to concede) Bush is "immune" to counterargument.

And while apparently you believe Bush is immune to counterargument (and thus irrational) on this subject, on reflection, I do not. (He is certainly **resistant**, presumably, to counterevidence but I don't believe he is "immune" especially given that his decision was **not** in line totally with the pro-life dogma.)

So he's not irrational here, I say. Your move...? "is too"?

by a reader on Wed, 06/09/2004 - 18:35 | [reply](#)

Gil, That clears it up, ye

Gil,

That clears it up, yes. Thanks. Best,

by a reader on Wed, 06/09/2004 - 18:49 | [reply](#)

Bush's Irrationality

Blixa,

The reason that *I* think Bush is irrational on this subject is that I think his position is strongly influenced by the idea that killing a human embryo is very similar, ethically, to killing a born human.

It's not merely that I think he's wrong about this. I think that idea is one that is the accepted doctrine of his religion and is not subject to criticism in his mind. I don't think that there are any new facts or arguments that could convince him that he's wrong about this. So, if this idea is false, he has no way of being right about a policy that depends upon his knowing that it is false.

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 06/09/2004 - 19:49 | [reply](#)

*light bulb goes on in Blixa'

light bulb goes on in Blixa's head

I now see your point, Gil. The claim being that Bush is irrational *about embryos being morally very similar to born human life*, *not* that he's irrational *about whether stem-cell research involving new embryos ought to be funded*. Got it. Thanks for the clarification and the light-bulb, and sorry for being dense there (to you too, Elliot).

Yes, I agree completely that Bush is irrational on *that* - about his notion of the moral status of embryos.

However, I don't agree that that makes his stem-cell decision wrong ("he has no way of being right"). Being right on whether new-embryo stem-cell research ought to be funded does *not* depend on knowing that "the moral status of embryos is very similar to that of born humans" is false. One can know it's false but at the same time think that the moral status of embryos is *not* completely vacuous or irrelevant*, or that other derivative ethical or unintended-consequence issues may arise, and thus still end up agreeing with Bush's decision, because it was a compromise and did allow the funding of some research, but on a limited, controlled basis. (And there's still that whole issue of, Research *can* actually

happen without the US taxpayers funding it, so one could even

agree with Bush's decision on a grumpy libertarian "the gov't doesn't have to fund a damn thing so who cares, if he's withholding funds, I'm fer it" rationale which makes no reference to morality or Frankenstein horror stories whatsoever...)

In short there are people (I am one) who agree with Bush's decision without totally sharing his views on the moral status of an embryo. How can that be? Well, one resolution is to say that although we didn't start from wrong premises as Bush did, we simply must be wrong in our conclusion, because in agreeing with the conclusion of a Religious person who (therefore) "has no way of being right", we're just automatically wrong anyway, whatever that conclusion was.

In other words, if a Religious person comes to conclusion X and Religion played a known role in that conclusion, X is wrong.

That is precisely the reasoning I've been objecting to.

by a reader on Wed, 06/09/2004 - 20:33 | [reply](#)

Meeting of Minds

Great.

I think we're on the same page now.

I have NOT been making the argument that you've been objecting to.

I'm actually one of those grumpy libertarians who is against this funding anyway.

But, what I'm leery of is a president who may make numerous policy mistakes (e.g. gay marriage amendment, Supreme Court nominations with an eye toward overturning legal abortions, FCC censorship, etc.) because the policy involves areas of irrationality that he has due to his religion.

It's true that everybody has areas of irrationality, and I'm leery of those other areas too! Religious irrationality is just one that's easy to identify, and one that I consider to be under-estimated by some.

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 06/09/2004 - 22:39 | [reply](#)

If Religious-guy's irrational

If Religious-guy's irrationalities lead him to make X policy good-thingies (what's opposite of "mistake"? ;) and Y policy mistakes, and X is greater (and Y smaller) than for typical non-Religious guy (with *his* associated irrationalities, whatever they are), couldn't we come out ahead w/the Religious guy? Perhaps (I dunno) that's what people (which people BTW?) mean by the "praising religion" stuff you've perceived and are arguing against. I'm not saying that this applies to Bush, but hey. The point is that "it's good his religion

guides him morally" (who said this BTW?) isn't refuted by observing one or seven errors that result. If Bush's religion based worldview still guides him correctly *more than average*, or *more than the next guy*, or *on certain important things*, or whatever (relative!) metric you want to use, the claim can still have merit.

I'm glad you're not making the argument I object to, but then you're still left needing to explain why Bush's was a "policy mistake" in the first place. And hint: you can't use "because it was based on his flawed thinking about morality of using embryos". Remember, you're not making the argument I object to.

I agree that Religion is one of the most visible/easy to spot sources of irrationality but it seems whack to claim that it's underestimated as such. If anything it's easy-to-spot'ness would lead to it being *overestimated* as a source of irrationality, it seems to me. Which was kinda my point actually.

Best,

by a reader on Wed, 06/09/2004 - 23:47 | [reply](#)

To anyone still here.

Interesting article

"PEOPLE NEED A FAIRY TALE," Ronald D.G. McKay, a stem cell researcher at the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, told Washington Post reporter Rick Weiss, explaining why scientists have allowed society to believe **wrongly** that stem cells are likely to effectively treat Alzheimer's disease. "Maybe that's unfair, but they need a story line that's relatively simple to understand."

[...]

Researchers have apparently known for some time that embryonic stem cells will not be an effective treatment for Alzheimer's, because as two researchers told a Senate subcommittee in May, it is a "whole brain disease," rather than a cellular disorder (such as Parkinson's).

Nancy Reagan has cruelly been told a fairy tale, and is being used. The death of her husband is being used, including here on STWTR, and it is cruel.

by a reader on Thu, 06/10/2004 - 19:58 | [reply](#)

Stem Cell Research

President Bush is irrationally hostile, not to stem cell research but to experimentation on human embryos, just as his coreligionists in the 19th century were irrationally hostile to experimentation on human corpses. Although there are no doubt alternatives to both types of experiment, it is wrong to be hostile to them and harmful to use the force of law to discriminate against them compared with

any other scientific research. Science makes better progress, including progress on curing Alzheimer's, if it uses scientific criteria and genuine morality, not ancient taboos, to choose what lines of research to pursue.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Fri, 06/11/2004 - 13:24 | [reply](#)

It's the hyperbole

President Bush is irrationally hostile, not to stem cell research but to experimentation on human embryos, just as...

Another "just as" you could've written is, "just as many people nowadays are irrationally hostile to experimenting on live human beings". But you didn't. I don't think it makes sense to paint all irrational opposition to all things as equally harmful or draw analogies which obscure important differences.

it is wrong to be hostile to them and harmful to use the force of law to discriminate against them compared with any other scientific research.

He is not using the "force of law" to discriminate against embryonic stem-cell research. There is no law in the US against conducting embryonic stem-cell research of which I am aware.

He is declining to fund stem-cell research with public monies. Not the same thing. Alternatively, yes you could say (if a bit awkwardly) he is "using the force of law to discriminate against" the FUNDING of such research, but again, discrimination is inevitable (in fact necessary) when deciding what to fund with public monies, and the "force of law" part of that equation is redundant, he wouldn't *have* this money to dish out if not for the "force of law" in the first place. To dish out public monies to a research scientist is, inherently, to use the "force of law" so if you accept publicly-funded research you can't take the "force of law" part out of it.

Another thing left out of this discussion was that the decision not to fund embryo research was originally made by Congress, it springs out of a law passed back in the '80s IIRC. (Aren't any of you the least bit curious why a U.S. President can unilaterally make such a decision? Because he is issuing a judgment about how he will enforce an **act of Congress**.) To wish/wait for a US President who will just, golly, interpret that law to bring about the result you want, may be a Pyrrhic victory if you get it. (Could lead to a counter-reaction - as perhaps Bush has done in his Presidency after Clinton had been "interpreting" the law more loosely...). A much, much better way would be to seek to change the **public's** minds so that they, through their Congress, would authorize this funding less restrictedly, as you think (or assume anyway) makes more scientific and moral sense. This would legitimize the decision in the public's mind - we do have a democracy, after all. So the people you ought to be making your pitch to are the voters, not Bush.

However, in making your case, if you engage in hyperbole and tell

fairy tales to grieving widows to use as spokesmen-props, this (rightfully!) lessens the force of your argument and you just might find yourself back where you started - or worse - if/when people find out about the dishonesty.

Science makes better progress, including progress on curing Alzheimer's, if it uses scientific criteria and genuine morality, not ancient taboos, to choose what lines of research to pursue.

Do you have any good reason to use the word "Alzheimer's" in this discussion?

Does science make good "progress" if its advocates lie and exaggerate and trick the public in order to get their hands on the public's money?

I would be much more interested in a discussion of why Bush's embryo stance (which, again, I don't really agree with) is not "genuine morality" and, what is. Presumably such a discussion would not employ hyperbole about Alzheimer's in an effort to score points off of Ronald Reagan's death.

by a reader on Fri, 06/11/2004 - 16:25 | [reply](#)

Presumably

Presumably presidential hyperbole, if it is in fact a presidential stand on stem cell research, would not make a specific issue about stem cell research unless there is some specific scientific objection to stem cell research, or rather, question public funding of scientific research in general. But that's politics for 'ya.

As to religion:

How many angels can dance on the head of a stem cell?

41?

by a reader on Fri, 06/11/2004 - 18:15 | [reply](#)

Hyperbole

It must be because it is human embryo stem cells that the president is involved. Not human hair follicles or human dna. Hence the hyperbole:

Save The Human Stem Cells! Or was that, Discard The Human Stem Cells!?

Next those nasty scientists will be digging up graves in the night, or even experimenting on microscopic embryos trying to figure out stuff.

Correction, human stem cells, not human embryos, please disregard the hyperbole.

by a reader on Fri, 06/11/2004 - 18:37 | [reply](#)

A good thing

This is a good thing: **UK to clone human cells.**

Opposition to it is bad. Opposition to it by politicians, such as Anne Widdecombe and George Bush, is especially bad. All opposition to it is irrational.

The UK team seeking the go-ahead for the controversial experiment is led by Dr Miodrag Stojkovic, of Newcastle University. He plans to create dozens of cloned embryos using the same nuclear transfer technique that was employed by the scientists who created Dolly the sheep.

The cloned embryos will initially be exploited as sources of stem cells for treating diabetes patients.

'This is a great opportunity,' Stojkovic told The Observer last night. 'We are focusing on diabetes, but believe our work could lead to cures for other diseases like Parkinson's and Alzheimer's. Our intention is not to create cloned humans, but to save lives.'

I don't think he's lying or exaggerating.

by **David Deutsch** on Sun, 06/13/2004 - 02:28 | [reply](#)

Force of Law

'President Bush is irrationally hostile, not to stem cell research but to experimentation on human embryos, just as his coreligionists in the 19th century were irrationally hostile to experimentation on human corpses.'

'Another "just as" you could've written is, "just as many people nowadays are irrationally hostile to experimenting on live human beings". But you didn't. I don't think it makes sense to paint all irrational opposition to all things as equally harmful or draw analogies which obscure important differences.'

It is irrational to be hostile to experimentation on live human beings who give their consent. However, the reason why that particular just as was appropriate is that both corpses and embryonic stem cells are not thinking human beings, they are lumps of organic material that happen to be useful. Experimentation on live human beings brings up different issues.

'it is wrong to be hostile to them and harmful to use the force of law to discriminate against them compared with any other scientific research.'

'He is not using the "force of law" to discriminate against embryonic stem-cell research. There is no law in the US against conducting embryonic stem-cell research of which I am aware.'

He is, by legally banning the use of public money for stem cell research. If the government is going to extort money from people in the form of taxes, by making people pay it using the law (hence

force of law) the only way this can be even slightly legitimate is if they don't block lines of research because of an irrational 'feeling in their water' or whatever Bush's current excuse of the week happens to be.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sun, 06/13/2004 - 15:09 | [reply](#)

A Flaw Is A Flaw

Alan,

I haven't checked (but it seems you haven't either). But if I had to guess at Bush's "excuse of the week" (which hasn't I bet hasn't changed for decades), it is: he thinks the embryos are partially human. Much like many people think animals are partially human. Would you say PETA's rationale is a "feeling in the water"? I wouldn't.

PS Wanna source that legal ban you mention? I tried Google and didn't spot any obvious headlines of that nature.

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sun, 06/13/2004 - 20:14 | [reply](#)

source plz, dd

David,

got a source on bush's opposition to that cloning thing?

also, even taking some proposition as true as a premise, it's possible to oppose it rationally, by simply being mistaken.

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sun, 06/13/2004 - 23:17 | [reply](#)

Re: source plz, dd

Remarks by the President on Stem Cell Research.

Read it and weep.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Mon, 06/14/2004 - 00:08 | [reply](#)

Alan Forrester, If the go

Alan Forrester,

If the government is going to extort money from people in the form of taxes, by making people pay it using the law (hence force of law) the only way this can be even slightly legitimate is if they don't block lines of research because of an irrational 'feeling in their water' or whatever Bush's current excuse of the week happens to

be.

Policy makers are going to block lines of research for irrational reasons no matter what. Every single funding decision they make contains a healthy dose of irrationality as (at least) a part of its justification, and blocks the funding of some other line of research. (Even in cases where you think funding X is perfectly rational and can make a good rational argument for funding X with precisely the priority that they do, chances are the key vote for making that funding decision was swung by promising to build a highway in some Congressman's state or whatever.)

I suppose all this icky irrationality being part of the process could be part of an argument for why using public monies to fund scientific research at all is unjustifiable. (That is not my view BTW.) To single out for criticism the irrationality influencing one funding decision and not all the others, however, is odd to me.

Is the obsession with this decision anything other than "Because Bush Used Religion"? If not - if there were some objective reason to focus on this irrational funding decision to the exclusion of all others - one would think you, or someone anyway, would have ready answers to questions such as:

- why are embryonic stem cells in particular so necessary?
- what is wrong with the existing lines of embryonic stem cells, i.e. what research needs cannot be met by them?

Since this research is so urgently pressing and all to people here, said people presumably have these answers at the ready in their minds. Yet no one has shared those answers. I cannot easily explain why. Best,

by a reader on Mon, 06/14/2004 - 18:47 | [reply](#)

some answers to the questions in the above comment

are here [Dean Fischbach's Testimony Before Congress](#)

by a reader on Mon, 06/14/2004 - 19:15 | [reply](#)

Why We Care

We are not upset because the irrationality is religious.

We're upset because Bush is our leader, and we do not have a better leader, and we wish Bush was better.

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 06/14/2004 - 19:26 | [reply](#)

Of Mice And Men

Apparently some Australians think it's fun to **chew live mice**, while a certain Mr Palaszczuk of the Royal Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals thinks it's fun to measure the civilisation of society according to a mouse-chewing-related criterion:

...both men put mice in their mouths and bit off their tails. One of the men went on to further chew his mouse then spat it out. They were taking part in a "Jackass promotion" – named after a US TV stunt show – which took place on Wednesdays at the Exchange Hotel in Brisbane and involved undertaking dares, one of the hotel's managers told BBC News Online. It was not clear who organised the promotions, but Marie Middleton said they had now been stopped. "The whole incident was horrific," said Ms Middleton. "It was all supposed to be harmless fun," she said. [...] "Chewing a mouse and spitting it out is not entertainment, it is barbaric," said Mr Palaszczuk. "All animals deserve respect. How we treat animals is a measure of how civilized our society is," he said.

The owners of the hotel have been severely ~~chewed out~~ criticised and the miscreants are being prosecuted. Trashing Australian culture may not violate the tenets of political correctness, but what about this: 'The United States is, in significant respects, a more civilised country than Mexico'? Because the United States does not tolerate **bullfighting** while in Mexico it is a national sport.

We propose a different measure of civilisation: the more civilised a society is, the more it prides itself on how well it treats people, not on how harshly.

Fri, 06/11/2004 - 12:23 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

The Pro-Death Lobby

In his **address to the nation on stem-cell research**, President Bush acknowledged that research in such fields as human cloning and embryonic stem cells has the potential to save lives, but, as he explained:

I strongly oppose human cloning, as do most Americans. We recoil at the idea of growing human beings for spare body parts, or creating life for our convenience. And while we must devote enormous energy to conquering disease, it is equally important that we pay attention to the moral concerns raised by the new frontier of human embryo stem cell research. Even the most noble ends do not justify any means.

My position on these issues is shaped by deeply held beliefs. I'm a strong supporter of science and technology, and believe they have the potential for incredible good -- to improve lives, to save life, to conquer disease. Research offers hope that millions of our loved ones may be cured of a disease and rid of their suffering. I have friends whose children suffer from juvenile diabetes. Nancy Reagan has written me about President Reagan's struggle with Alzheimer's. My own family has confronted the tragedy of childhood leukemia. And, like all Americans, I have great hope for cures.

I also believe human life is a sacred gift from our Creator. I worry about a culture that devalues life, and believe as your President I have an important obligation to foster and encourage respect for life in America and throughout the world.

This implication that supporters of this sort of research – **such as ourselves** – are part of a “culture that devalues [human] life”, is unfair as well as false. In reality, our (Western) culture values human life more than any other that has ever existed. The controversy here is not between those who value life and those who do not, but between rival conceptions of what ought to be thought of as a human being. And while there is room for considerable philosophical disagreement about this issue, no rational person can take the view that a collection of cells without a functioning brain is

human in any moral sense whatsoever.

There *are*, unfortunately, cultures that really do devalue human life. Islamofascism is currently the most important of these. But it is a frightening fact that there is also an authentically Western cult of death that currently enjoys enormous support (including, ironically, from the very tradition to which President Bush belongs, and from which he bases his opposition to certain types of scientific research). Check [this](#) out (via [InstaPundit](#)):

it's a great shame that the field once known as medical ethics has degenerated into a coven of high profile bioethicists set on finding the best way to prevent new medicines from saving lives

Hyperbole, perhaps. But the underlying point is true: there is widespread, principled opposition to scientific research intended to defeat, or even significantly to postpone, ageing and death.

Mon, 06/14/2004 - 15:20 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Again with this..?

This implication that supporters of this sort of research – such as ourselves – are part of a "culture that devalues [human] life", is unfair as well as false.

Don't think he implied that. He said he "worries" about such a culture. Should he not?

The controversy here is not between those who value life and those who do not, but between rival conceptions of what ought to be thought of as a human being.

I thought the controversy here was whether research involving the use of certain types of cells ought to be funded by public monies. You seem more concerned with this "ought to be thought of as a human being" thing; embryonic stem cell research (from other than existing lines) per se is almost an afterthought here. Is the reason that the funding decision bothers you so much, simply because you don't want Bush's underlying idea that the embryo ought to be thought of as a human being to stand?

If so, why not make that argument by itself?

What if embryonic stem-cell research proves to be a big flop? Would you be forced to admit that Bush was "right"? Of course you would not do so. So why not decouple the two issues "embryo=human" and "stem-cell research should be funded" to make it more clear that it's the former that really concerns you? Is it because you think that dangling "Alzheimer's cure" in front of peoples' faces will more easily sway them to your side?

And while there is room for considerable philosophical disagreement about this issue, no rational person can take the view that a

collection of cells without a functioning brain is human in any moral

sense whatsoever.

Not in *any* moral sense whatsoever? Can't a rational person (not Bush) think it's (in whatever sense) .0001% human or whatever? Why such binary thinking here? Doesn't make rational sense to me. But perhaps I'm not rational, you'll have to tell me. By the way when does the binary switch occur?

But it is a frightening fact that there is also an authentically Western cult of death that currently enjoys enormous support (including, ironically, from the very tradition to which President Bush belongs, and from which he bases his opposition to certain types of scientific research).

Good thing you phrased that so carefully.

Bush says he "worries" about a culture of death and that's unfair and false. Yet here you (in a slippery, weasel-worded way...) place Bush *in* (oh yes I see merely "supported" by) a "cult" of death...

Ohhh-kay.

I'm still astonished how many people can become utterly convinced almost to the point of obsession of the urgent necessity of the US government (whether or not that's even *their* government...) to federally-fund some research they evidently know very little about... apparently all that's required is for a "Religious" person to oppose it.

On a positive note this does call to mind some potential reverse-psychology strategies for Bush, if only he were clever enough to employ them.... ;-)

by a reader on Mon, 06/14/2004 - 19:14 | [reply](#)

Public funding

Democracy is publically funded - should it be immoral to demand democracy? Certain areas of science are global and generic - they cannot be funded privately at all. Even big companies (biotechnological companies in this case) invest money only in specific research - a concrete drug or a concrete disease treatment. They do invest something in general research but to a very limited extend. Millions (if not billions) of public dollars had been invested in quantum physics research before a few private companies have attracted a couple of millions into the creation of first quantum computer. But it wouldn't be possible without public money at all. And it holds for almost all general research areas whether it is in biology or in physics or anywhere else. And deciding whether to give public money for a certain area or not is a way of allowing/disallowing a whole are of research. Bush's way of disallowing or discouraging stem cell research will cost lives in any way you look at it. If it provides a direct method of treating cancer, Alzheimer's disease etc. - that is one. If it doesn't - an enourmous amount of scientific data will be passes to researchers anyway.

And it might be not an "urgent necessity of the US government to

federally-fund some research we know very little about". But it is important to show scientists that governor who know very little about their science wouldn't interfere on the basis of their irrational political ideology but rather choose another target. For example, falling educational standards all over the country.

But yeh, I hear the libertarian outcry - if you don't like state school then go private. However, the less people are educated en mass the more support Bush's opinion has.

by a reader on Tue, 06/15/2004 - 08:52 | [reply](#)

Science funding

Even big companies (biotechnological companies in this case) invest money only in specific research - a concrete drug or a concrete disease treatment

This isn't true. Research and development companies import most of their know-how from other RND companies with similar interests. In order to do this they have to attract scientists. This is because expired patents are hard to exploit, technical papers are difficult to read, conference gossip is valuable and elusive, and so on. The way you attract high-calibre scientists is by giving them considerable freedom to pursue whatever takes their fancy, including pure research. Otherwise they'll either be poor scientists or not interested in working for you.

Terence Kealey of Buckingham University, England, has analysed the history and economics of science funding. He has shown that every dollar of public funding displaces more than a dollar of private funding.

Government funding of science did not get going until the world wars. I hope we can agree that plenty of scientific progress had been made up till that point in history.

It's consistent to understand all this and to condemn President Bush's opposition to research which makes use of human embryos. Embryos aren't human beings. Life is valuable. It's perforce impossible to know which areas of research will yield the most fruit. These facts stand regardless of who pays your salary.

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Tue, 06/15/2004 - 10:54 | [reply](#)

It's Not Just About Funding

The President of the United States is using his bully pulpit to characterize certain lines of research as immoral because of their use of human embryos. This is not a fiscal point; it's a moral and cultural point.

This president has created a Council on Bioethics **led by** and **stacked with** people with well-known positions against many forms

of artificially influencing biological processes, for reasons that

appear to many of us to be mystical nonsense.

Ideas have consequences, and these are bad ideas that have the president's support.

I applaud **The World** for pointing this out.

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 06/15/2004 - 15:50 | [reply](#)

careful w/ the quotes

gil,

did Bush actually say doing it is immoral somewhere? I missed that bit.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 06/15/2004 - 16:06 | [reply](#)

Quotes

Elliot,

I don't know if he uses that exact phrase anywhere (and I didn't indicate that it was a quote), but the implication seems pretty clear and I thought it was fair to call it "characterizing...as immoral".

Here are some direct quotes:

Research on embryonic stem cells raises profound ethical questions, because extracting the stem cell destroys the embryo, and thus destroys its potential for life. Like a snowflake, each of these embryos is unique, with the unique genetic potential of an individual human being.

As I thought through this issue, I kept returning to two fundamental questions: First, are these frozen embryos human life, and therefore, something precious to be protected?

...

And while we must devote enormous energy to conquering disease, it is equally important that we pay attention to the moral concerns raised by the new frontier of human embryo stem cell research. Even the most noble ends do not justify any means.

Since he decided against continuing to use these means, it seems clear that he considers them to not be morally justified: immoral.

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 06/15/2004 - 16:35 | [reply](#)

what's the real issue then?

Two responses here get to the heart of what bothers me about this criticism.

1. *"And it might be not an "urgent necessity of the US government to federally-fund some research we know very little about". But it is important to show scientists that governor who know very little about their science wouldn't interfere on the basis of their irrational political ideology"*

2. *"It's Not Just About Funding: The President of the United States is using his bully pulpit to characterize certain lines of research as immoral because of their use of human embryos. This is not a fiscal point; it's a moral and cultural point."*

For both people who wrote these statements, the **actual** bee in their bonnet is that President Bush evidently believes embryos have at least some moral status, and they think that belief is wrong, and they don't want that opinion to stand or carry any force. "Stem cell research" as such is neither here nor there for both people who wrote these statements. They could be defending "kwyjibo flibbertigibbit research" for all they care, or know. All they know (were told, read somewhere..) is Scientists Want It and Bush used a Religious reason to oppose it, *and that's enough* to cause a hue and cry.

If it's wrong for President Bush to oppose the US government funding stem cell research for reasons which include irrationalities, is it also wrong for people to be in favor of the US government funding "stem cell research (whatever that is! but scientists want it!)" for reasons which include the aforementioned rationale - and are thus **also** irrational? Let me know, I'm still learning,

--Blix

by a reader on Tue, 06/15/2004 - 18:26 | [reply](#)

Huh?

Blix,

I'm not sure what you're asking. Are you saying "Is it wrong to support US Government funding for stem cell research merely because Scientists Want It and Bush opposed it on religious grounds?"

I think that depends. I don't think it's wrong to insist on scientific criteria to guide these funding decisions rather than mistaken religious criteria.

If by "Scientist Want It" you mean that there is a consensus that the research shows sufficient scientific merit to warrant funding based on historically applied criteria in the absence of an erroneous religion-based intervention, then it isn't wrong.

If by "Scientists Want It" you mean just that some scientists think

its merit is greater than zero but it wouldn't meet the historically applied criteria for funding, think it is wrong.

Of course, the above assumes that US Government funding of this sort of research isn't wrong in general. I think it is wrong.

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 06/15/2004 - 19:27 | [reply](#)

Gil, There could (for all

Gil,

There could (for all I know) be a "consensus that the research shows sufficient scientific merit to warrant funding based on historically applied criteria in the absence of an erroneous religion-based intervention" (although I don't know how one ever sets up these controlled conditions, there still seems to be this weird assumption that non-erroneous non-religion-based (or at least, non-irrational) criteria are somehow the norm. I don't buy that).

But a large number of the people currently saying "We [or, 'you Americans', as the case may be, depending on the speaker..] must fund stem-cell research (from embryos (not from existing lines)) NOW!" *don't actually know that*, as far as I can tell. What they "know" is far closer to "some scientists think its merit is greater than zero". More like, "they read in a magazine (or saw on Oprah..) that some scientists think its merit is greater than zero".

This knowledge alone (and not any particular knowledge of this kwyjibo-flibbertigibit research or whatever the heck it is, who cares anyway), combined with the knowledge that George Bush opposes it and is Religious, is quite evidently sufficient grounds to bring the issue to the forefront in some peoples' minds and make it a huge urgent important issue. (Now, this all may not actually apply to **The World's** advocacy in particular, but thus far if Their knowledge of stem-cell research goes much beyond that, it's difficult to tell.)

by a reader on Tue, 06/15/2004 - 19:56 | [reply](#)

ok it wasnt a direct quote but you implied you were paraphrasing

Gil,

the stuff you quote shows that Bush considers it a moral issue. but his decision against funding does not mean he thinks the research is definitely immoral. it could be that he simply is not totally sure, and wants to play it morally safe. if he was sure, wouldn't he try for something stronger like a ban?

(it's not actually playing it morally safe, because his decision hurts real humans, but he doesn't seem to realise that. but that's another issue.)

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 06/15/2004 - 20:32 | [reply](#)

Immoral?

Elliot,

You're right. I implied that I was paraphrasing, because I thought (and still think) that Bush indicated that he thinks it's immoral. I don't think my interpretation is outrageous; and if Bush doesn't think it is immoral, and wants others to know that, he should have communicated better.

Also, I don't think the lack of a ban is a good test for his opinion, because I think he lacks the authority to ban it. I believe that would require an act of congress, and he knows that he wouldn't be able to get it without a politically costly fight (probably not at all).

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 06/15/2004 - 21:17 | [reply](#)

Irrational Support

Blix,

Yes, I agree that those who might strongly support this research funding only because they heard some scientists want to do it and that Bush blocked it for religious reasons are wrong and irrational.

I suspect that **The World** bases their judgment on the accounts of scientists that they have reason to trust that the research is otherwise deserving of funding in the sense that I indicated. So, I don't think that **The World** is wrong or irrational about this. Ultimately all of us, including Bush, must make our decisions based partially on the trusted advice of scientists; we can't be experts in all fields, and many decisions should not be left to those "experts".

Also, something that I think is *not* wrong or irrational is to take no position on whether the funding is warranted, but to criticize Bush's reasoning.

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 06/15/2004 - 21:31 | [reply](#)

Therapeutic Cloning

From the **Advanced Cell Technology FAQ**:

Cloning is a process in which a body (somatic) cell is placed into an egg cell from which the DNA has been removed, by a process called nuclear transfer. The egg cell is then activated and starts to develop. The resulting offspring has DNA identical to the animal donating the somatic cell. Cloning is an asexual form of reproduction.

In contrast, sexual reproduction uses a sperm and an egg cell and the resultant offspring has a genetic mix from two animals.

2. How does Reproductive Cloning differ from Therapeutic Cloning?

In Reproductive Cloning, following the nuclear transfer process the egg cell is grown into an embryo and is placed in the uterus of a surrogate mother who will carry the pregnancy to completion as a normal pregnancy. In Therapeutic Cloning, the egg cell is grown only to the blastocyst stage and the inner cell mass is removed from the blastocyst. The stem cells in the inner cell mass are then differentiated into cells that can be used to treat life-threatening diseases. It is important to note that no embryo is either created or destroyed in the Therapeutic Cloning process.

Someone **asked**:

what is wrong with the existing lines of embryonic stem cells, i.e. what research needs cannot be met by them?

For one thing, existing embryonic stem cells aren't genetically identical with the patient and thus there is the problem of rejection. It is not that there will be this research using embryonic cells and then we'll have treatments that don't involve using embryonic cells: therapeutic cloning involves the creation of embryonic cells – though note that we are not talking about a foetus about to be born, just a collection of 100 cells that have been dividing for only about 8 days.

Note also that these cells could become more than one embryo, and two such collections of cells (blastocysts) could become one embryo. These are potential human life, but then, a sperm or an ovum or a skin cell or just about any part of a person has the potential to become a human being.

For more information on this, read some of **these fascinating scientific papers**, **this interview** with therapeutic cloning pioneer, Michael West, and the explanatory articles linked **here**. There is also a very clear explanation of somatic cell nuclear transfer **here**.

Michael West's book about his brave and pioneering work in this field, **The Immortal Cell**, is an absolute classic. Well worth reading.

A question for those who disapprove of therapeutic cloning: Do you disapprove of using bovine egg cells too, or just human ones? Apparently it works using bovine ones, though obviously they would be using the patient's own DNA to create the so-called 'embryo' (all 100 cells of it) so perhaps this idea will have people protesting even more loudly. (And given that a bovine ovum has the potential to become human life – not a hybrid, but 100% human life – I'd be interested to know if all those against harnessing the power of

embryonic stem cells are vegarians.

Here are some advocacy group pages giving useful information:

- **Therapeutic cloning**
- **Why is George W. Bush Trying to Send America's Best Medical Researchers to Jail? What can you do about it?**
- **Stem Cell Action**
- **Texans for Advancement of Medical Research**

I must admit that I am a bit hazy about what the current legal situation is in the USA, but according to **the National Human Genome Research Institute**:

In July 2001, the House of Representatives voted 265 to 162 to make any human cloning a criminal offense, including cloning to create an embryo for derivation of stem cells rather than to produce a child. In August 2002, President Bush, contending with a DHHS decision made during the Clinton administration, stated in a prime-time television address that federal support would be provided for research using a limited number of stem cell colonies already in existence (derived from leftover IVF embryos). Current bills before Congress would ban all forms of cloning outright, prohibit cloning for reproductive purposes, and impose a moratorium on cloning to derive stem cells for research, or prohibit cloning for reproductive purposes while allowing cloning for therapeutic purposes to go forward. As of late June, the Senate has taken no action. President Bush's Bioethics Council is expected to recommend the prohibition of reproductive cloning and a moratorium on therapeutic cloning later this summer.

Prepared by Kathi E. Hanna, M.S., Ph.D., Science and Health Policy Consultant

(March 2004)

In **an editorial** in The New England Journal of Medicine Volume 349:300, July 17, 2003, Number 3, Jeffrey M. Drazen wrote:

The U.S. House of Representatives has voted to ban research on, and the use of, medical treatments derived from embryonic stem cells. This bill is shortsighted and has the potential to put many critical future advances in medicine beyond the reach of patients in the United States.

There are two distinct uses of embryonic stem cells. The first, for which there is no support among members of the scientific and medical communities, is the use of stem cells to create a genetically identical person. There is a de facto worldwide ban on such activities, and this ban is appropriate. The second use is to develop

genetically compatible biomaterials for the replacement of diseased tissues in patients with devastating medical conditions, such as diabetes or Parkinson's disease. This is important work that must and will move forward. [...]

As a physician who has cared for patients who suffered and died from conditions that we are currently unable to treat, I hope that this research can progress rapidly.

--

Sarah Fitz-Claridge

<http://www.fitz-claridge.com/>

by **Sarah Fitz-Claridge** on Wed, 06/16/2004 - 17:58 | [reply](#)

Gay Marriage

Good news, everyone! We here at **The World** fully recognise same-sex marriages. We oppose any discrimination in law between same-sex and different-sex marriages .

Indeed, unlike many who take those views, we go further. We also oppose any discrimination in law between married people and single people.

In other words, we think that the state should gradually phase out its relationship-validating and -invalidating business. If two (or more) people want solemnly to declare that they will never leave each other no matter how much they may later want to, that should be their right. If holy men and women set up in business to endorse or deprecate such declarations, that too is their right. But the state should not enforce such declarations (beyond what would be required by ordinary contract law) nor set up legal penalties or rewards for those who make them.

That President Bush should be expending time, energy and political capital on this issue in wartime would be reprehensible even if he were on the right side of it. It can wait. And we therefore say also to campaigners who are on the right side of the issue – such as **Andrew Sullivan** – remain calm; it can wait.

One more thing. Since we have recently made several criticisms of President Bush, perhaps it's worth stressing that we unequivocally endorse him in the forthcoming Presidential election, and not just because the other candidates are hopelessly bad. We agree with **Condoleeza Rice** that posterity will regard Bush as one of the great Presidents. We are just sad that he isn't greater.

Tue, 06/15/2004 - 13:48 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Rights??? Slightly off-topic

If two (or more) people want solemnly to declare that they will never leave each other no matter how much they may later want to, that should be their right

This idea is not quite clear to me. If I marry someone and, in addition, declare that I will never ever leave my spouse that I should be obliged to keep such promise? I thought that certain types of contract conditions should be void under modern

legislation. If I want to sell myself into slavery and noone forces me to do so but nevertheless I wish to sign for it - this condition should also be void by any means. Even if I signed it, even if I got money in return for that - still noone should be able to enforce it. Catholic marriage, slavery, peonage etc. are inhumane things and shouldn't be considered as valid conditions under any circumstances. If two same sex people sign for an eternal marriage - it doesn't change a thing.

Is there anyone to disagree on this issue?

by a reader on Wed, 06/16/2004 - 08:34 | [reply](#)

I have been struggling with t

I have been struggling with this issue for a few months now and i cant seem to find a defensible position on either side of it.

One the one hand, a couple who are in love and wish to share their lives together really should have at least some legal rights as married people do now. On the other hand, if simple desire to be together is sufficient for two people to gain legal status and protection then why should not a brother and sister (both of legal age) be forbidden to marry for instance, or even parent and child? This may sound like its getting a bit off topic but how do you say that two peoples respective desire to live together is more or less important than any two other people. I'm sure there is a good argument to settle this, i just haven't heard it yet.

At the moment a marriage, in theory, is the union of a man and woman to create children. ignoring that this is not always the case, it is none the less the ideal case and the reason for the institution to exist. If that reason no longer applies as the guiding principle then it would seem to be morally impossible to refuse the union of any two people, regardless of their status or reasons.

by a reader on Wed, 06/16/2004 - 13:07 | [reply](#)

certain types of contract conditions should be void

Indeed they should.

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 06/16/2004 - 13:27 | [reply](#)

Re: I have been struggling with - why marry?

You don't even need to marry if you are going to have children.

At the moment a marriage, in theory, is the union of a man and woman to create children.

No, it is not for quite a while already. Marriage is a union of two people. Full stop. Official marriage gives you legal rights and practical conveniences in a number of situation. The examples are numerous: inheritance of property and share of property when divorcing, immigration and travel, adoption, mutual health care -

when you are allowed to visit your spouse in hospital, make decisions on possible treatment etc., taxation as long as it depends on marital status and number of children. In all these areas same sex couples would be deprived of something quite important for them. Most people just ignore these issues and say something very simplistic like "if you want to live together just do it".

by a reader on Wed, 06/16/2004 - 17:04 | [reply](#)

damn subject line

the world said people should have the right to make marriage vows, not that they should literally be a legally enforceable contract.

brother and sister or parent and child **should** be able to marry legally for tax etc purposes. i don't see that happening though. more realistic is just not having marriage effect taxes etc anymore.

also, i don't see why living together should have anything to do with it. who to live with is a lifestyle choice and shouldn't have anything to do with taxes.

and yes if you enact my changes, we will have two straight brothers who are businessmen who live on opposite sides of the country "marry" to abuse the tax system. this reveals not a problem with my changes, but a problem with the whole idea of changing tax law for "married" people.

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 06/16/2004 - 17:56 | [reply](#)

Maybe it oughta be a law

Everyone should marry and adopt x number of dependents and open Roth IRAs to pay for their future educations. The current personal income tax system would then collapse under the weight of bliss or become ever more burdensome upon those unable or unwilling to wed a spouse.

by a reader on Wed, 06/16/2004 - 22:18 | [reply](#)

Taxation can be quite a diverse thing

The point was not about having less burden of taxes for officially married couples. Taxation is a huge area nowadays. If I want to make a present to a friend then in some countries you pay tax from the gift you receive. However relatives pay less. It happens because in some countries they consider gifts as income. Tax systems can be very complicated and tricky. Also, taxes from inherited property can be different depending on whether you are in relation or not. Childless people pay tax for not having children in some countries too. Of course, if you stand for abolishing all taxes then it is pointless to even argue about it. But this is what I meant by taxation in my previous post - as long as some tax makes any

difference to married/unmarried status same sex couples are deprived (or favoured) of something. And after all, you have overlooked other important differences and other kinds of deprivation which may be much more important.

I find ridiculous not to be able to join my spouse in other country for several years - that is what majority of western "highly-civilised" countries force people to do. But it is even worse not to be able to join your spouse at all.

by a reader on Thu, 06/17/2004 - 08:45 | [reply](#)

Same sex marriage

According to editors of this site, the above issue 'can wait'. The reason cited? We are in wartime. Gee, can't we do more than one thing at a time? Let's hold off everything!! No no, let's get to increasing cancer research funding later, it can wait, we are in wartime. Let's put off fixing main-street - we are in wartime, it can wait. Hell, let's throw every resource we have into this 'war on terror' - because it's the only thing worth worrying about right now. Everything else can wait.

How long do we wait for? How long will we wait for the war to be over? How long until our friends in Fallugia are 'free'? We just wait. They'll just wait.

I think there is an argument for the view that trying to solve things quickly, with a shite-load of 'collateral damage' as is being done in Iraq, is, perhaps not the best way for ensuring freedom. This 'imposed revolution' might seem in retrospect to be the way we have made terrorists more dangerous - because they hate the west more. Perhaps better is what is happening in China - it's not a revolution of freedom - but an evolution of western values. The youth there and the freedom-lovers no longer stand before tanks, rising up against powers they are too weak to withstand. Instead western values just 'slowly' seep into the nation. In this sense, waiting is worthy. It's worthy because the light at the end of the tunnel might be a little further off, but at least we don't have to crawl over quite so many bodies and shattered lives as we do right now in Iraq, claiming the light is just around the corner.

Personally, I reckon the length the tunnel in Iraq is a hell of a lot longer than the one in China. Moreover it's going to be clogged with a lot more blood.

Whatever the case, we're going to be waiting along time. And with all that time let's do somethign productive rather than destructive...like, I don't know...give rights to people in democratic nations who are at the moment being discriminated against, like singles and gays.

by Brett on Sun, 11/28/2004 - 02:13 | [reply](#)

Re: Same sex marriage

According to editors of this site, the above issue 'can wait'. The

reason cited? We are in wartime.

You're right. We should have stressed that it is the fact that this issue is *divisive*, as well as non-urgent, that makes it wrong to force controversial changes of policy through during wartime.

We did so in a later post, [here](#).

by **Editor** on Sun, 11/28/2004 - 02:29 | [reply](#)

There Is No Honour In Victimhood

Former President Bill Clinton has been **talking** about his impeachment and the sexual peccadilloes that led up to it:

Clinton tells Rather he is proud that he fought the impeachment battle that failed to drive him from office. "I didn't quit, I never thought of resigning and I stood up to it and beat it back," he tells Rather. "The whole battle was a badge of honor. I don't see it as a stain, because it was illegitimate," says Clinton of the impeachment process that he calls "an abuse of power."

[...]

The failure high on his list of regrets is the affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky that he terms "a terrible moral error."

He's likely to come in for a lot of criticism for calling his impeachment battle a badge of honour. The fact is this: he made a moral error. But it was not that terrible an error. He tried to cover it up, by lying. That was much worse (mainly because of the harm it did to Monica Lewinsky), but neither the original error nor the lies were even remotely serious enough to warrant impeachment. Clinton was indeed the victim of an abuse of power. The perpetrators ought to be ashamed.

None of that confers any honour on Clinton.

Thu, 06/17/2004 - 14:24 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

huh

I thought he meant *beating them* was a badge of honor. Beating people who attack you, even if they shouldn't be attacking you, can have honor in it. I don't see any victimhood in the quote.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 06/17/2004 - 16:22 | [reply](#)

battle

The need for impeachment is not so easily deflected as you

describe. It was the cumulative effect of Clinton's multiple lies that pushed his detractors to propose a futile attempt at his removal when the electorate refused to do so.

He was and is slimey. He defamed the office of the president. He did not however deserve to be impeached, especially as he now views his sheer survival as honorable. But there is no honor to be found on either side in the whole mess.

KC Fleming

by a reader on Fri, 06/18/2004 - 15:18 | [reply](#)

Yes there is no honor in vict

Yes there is no honor in victimhood but there is honor in Clinton's support for Bush's Iraq policy today, especially compared with most other Democrats. The difference is, he had everything to gain and nothing to lose by "fighting" the impeachment, so it's no great credit to him that he did it. Supporting Bush today is case of doing the right thing whether it helps him personally or not.

by a reader on Fri, 06/18/2004 - 15:47 | [reply](#)

Impeachment should be easier, not harder

This Crackerjack-box history of the impeachment situation is somewhat unsatisfying in comparison with one's memory of the actual events (if one has any).

He didn't merely "lie". He lied under oath (perjury), and pressured others to do the same (subornation of perjury). In common parlance these are what is known as "crimes". He used the power of his political office to grant favors to a witness in exchange for her not giving damaging testimony against him, which was corrupt to at least some extent. You acknowledge damage done to Monica Lewinsky (for some reason; in fact, she committed perjury and deserves little sympathy) yet ignore damage done to Paula Jones, who was the actual complainant against Clinton in a civil case under a duly written law, and who was denied justice under that law because of Clinton's shenanigans.

Reasonable folks can differ about how serious these acts were or whether they justified removing him from office, but they cannot be simply papered over with the word "lie". "Lying" is something politicians regularly do and to some extent is unavoidable. Perjuring and suborning perjury are inexcusable for the chief of the executive branch.

One can also, by the way, use the discussion to seriously call into question the underlying *laws* which brought his acts into the legal spotlight (sexual harrassment laws). Yes, perhaps indeed he should never have been placed in a position where he was forced to tell the truth about adultery, or be committing perjury, in the absence of a criminal charge of harm against some person etc. I'll go with that.

I'm suspicious however of people who had that revelation suddenly

dawn on them only when the perjury-trapped person in question happened to be Bill Clinton. It can happen to a thousand and one Joe Schmoes and go un lamented. You will notice, in addition, that sexual harrassment laws have not in any way been pulled back or repealed as a result of the horrendous unspeakable absurdities perpretrated against poor Bill Clinton in their name. Why should that be? Didn't we all agree that it was horrible that Clinton was forced to testify about his personal life? Where are the impassioned pleas to repeal sexual harrassment laws then, in order to prevent such atrocities from taking place ever again? Or are sexual harrassment laws only absurd when applied against people we like? This is the true damage Clinton did - to the notion of rule of law, to justice applying equally, and blindly. The tacit message is that sexual harassment laws were *intended* only for use against (R)s but not (D)s; or for use against the plebes, but not the powerful.

Another thing I'd like to see put to rest is the idea that nobility or honor can, even in theory, somehow accrue to Clinton fighting *his own damn impeachment* (uh, excuse me, what did we expect?) merely by ex cathedra asserting that to impeach him was (somehow) "illegitimate". Sorry but there was nothing "illegitimate" about it and **The World's** assertion that it was not "warranted" is little more supportable. Impeachment is a perfectly legitimate procedure written into the US Constitution. The standards for who can be impeached and why are amazingly open-ended and, in the end - as was pointed out during Watergate, I believe - boil down to, An "impeachable" offense is whatever the House says it is. One of the things which bothered me *most* about Clinton surviving impeachment is that it seems to have raised the bar to the point where frankly, I'm pretty sure that no President will ever be impeached again. I'd almost rather see Presidents impeached left and right. But perhaps that's just me. ;-)

--Blix

by a reader on Tue, 06/22/2004 - 00:01 | [reply](#)

Not morally legitimate

Blix wrote:

Impeachment is a perfectly legitimate procedure written into the US Constitution. The standards for who can be impeached and why are amazingly open-ended and, in the end - as was pointed out during Watergate, I believe - boil down to, An "impeachable" offense is whatever the House says it is.

By writing this, are you not conceding that impeachment is a political and not a legitimately legal process? (This is reminiscent of **The World's** discussion [here](#), BTW.) Yes, it's constitutional, like a wide variety of other political processes. But not all political action is morally defensible. At his impeachment, Clinton was not facing the rule of law. He was facing a concerted misuse of Constitutional mechanisms with the intention of overriding the electorate's choice of President. His perjury, too, must be understood in that context.

It was perjury before a Star Chamber, not a rule-of-law court.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Tue, 06/22/2004 - 00:42 | [reply](#)

Not a criminal trial, Prez not a king

Again it's all well and good to assert out of clear blue sky that to impeach that particular President for those things was "not morally defensible", but that assertion is based on almost nothing of substance. Why don't you just come out and call it "EEEE-VIL"? That might **really** convince people! I don't see how Whether To Impeach maps so easily onto the "moral" spectrum as you seem to think. If at all. Perhaps one needs to have liked Bill Clinton to have seen this (not saying you did, but obviously I didn't, and perhaps it would've helped if I had ;).

But part of the problem is that the template through which you view these events is inapt. No, impeachment is not a legal process, "rule of law" or otherwise. But there is no reason to expect it to have been or criticize it for not having been. Impeachment is never a legal process, never obeys the "rule of law", and your criticism could be leveled against any impeachment, of anyone, past present or future. (But you choose to level it against that **particular** one for some reason, of course.)

Bill Clinton was not being criminally charged with anything in the first place. Had the Senate voted the other way, he would not have gone to jail or received any other form of punishment, or had his rights abrogated in any way whatsoever (absent a future, actual criminal trial for something). Impeachment was not a criminal trial. It was not even a civil trial (monetary damages were not on the table).

He would simply have been removed from the office of the Presidency, the occupation of which was not, as you seem to think, his inherent or civil right, but rather was a temporary privilege of authority he had been granted at the pleasure of the people of the US, and which - theoretically - could have been revoked at any time by their representatives in Congress, by impeaching and then voting to remove him. Or so it says in the Constitution. Impeachment is a (the only!) means for the people (through their representatives) to remove their chief executive from office.

Yes, the impeachment procedure, as set up, is **reminiscent** of a trial court - with the House, roughly, acting as a "grand jury" (deciding whether to "indict"), and the Senate acting as a "jury" (in what is actually called an impeachment trial). You seem to have read too much into that analogy though. So the fact that impeachment doesn't obey the "rule of law" (which it NEVER CAN) doesn't make it "morally indefensible".

To speak of the Congress removing the President by perfectly constitutional means, or just **attempting** to do so, as being "immoral" - **whatever** the circumstances - is quite odd. "Bad idea", "wrong", "not serious enough misdeeds to justify", sure... but "immoral"?? This seems prejudicial towards the interests of the guy

who has the privilege of being President over the rights of the people who allowed him to do so. And why on earth would one have such a prejudice? Bill Clinton still being President was a "moral" issue? Was he a king ruling by "divine right"?

"Moral indefensibility" as such simply is neither here nor there, and lack of "rule of law" doesn't matter; it can't make impeachment "morally indefensible". Unless of course it makes **all** impeachments "morally indefensible". Is that what you're saying? If so, I again lament the sad fact that Clinton has apparently ruined impeachment for us **forever**, depriving the people of the lone Constitutional procedure they had once enjoyed for removal of a President (prior to the conclusion of his 4-year term) they through their representatives desired to remove. Apparently he's convinced a lot of really, really smart people that to remove a President prior to the conclusion of 4 years can somehow be "immoral"! Presidents have a "moral" right to serve (reign?) for at least 4 years now! Again, this is the true damage his "noble" efforts did.

On a similar note, trying to use "with the intention of overriding the electorate's choice of President" as part of your case for "morally indefensible" is equally inapt. By definition, any impeachment trial of **any** President would have to be with the intention of "overriding the electorate's choice of President" (i.e. removing him in favor of his Vice President - I hasten to add that Gore, and not some Republican, would have ascended to the Presidency had Clinton been removed). Unless of course the particular President being impeached had reached that office by some other means than election, which happens relatively seldom. You make it sound oh so horrible to have this horrible "intention" but if so, one must wonder why the author of the Constitution explicitly provided for precisely that procedure, and why its signatories didn't correct the error. Guess they were just too dumb to think through the obvious straightforward "immoral" ramifications, that if they allowed something called "impeachment" this might (gasp!) "override the electorate's choice of President" and a President would be leaving office prior to the end of his 4-year-term, which apparently is "immoral" (?).

A lot of people seemed to have this impression, that what was being done was not merely an attempt to remove him from office but an abrogation of Clinton's rights, that in attempting to remove him from office this was somehow metaphysically tantamount to throwing him in jail or some other punishment. I can only marvel at the strong identification some people seem to have with a head of state and his fates and fortunes, in an almost vicarious way. "Poor Bill Clinton! He wouldn't get to be President anymore! Not fair! He has a right to still be President!" Huh????

I can only reiterate that ideally, impeachment should be easier and not harder. And in passing, people need to stop identifying so much with (fantasizing about being?) the President over and above the Congress; it's not healthy for constitutional republicanism.

P.S. As for what to say about your characterization of (former Bill

Clinton student, who eventually threw out the case) Judge Susan Webber Wright's court (the one in which the sexual-harrassment suit, under a duly-written law, was being heard against Bill Clinton) as a "Star Chamber, not a rule-of-law court", I'm somewhat at a loss. I suppose I could just give you the benefit of the doubt and assume that you speak from a basis of legal expertise + firsthand knowledge of the proceedings that went on in her court, to characterize it as such. Surely it is not just a vile, unsupported slander of Judge Wright and her court based on nothing?

The World's and/or your post, even if correct in the main (impeachment not a good idea, etc), have the flavor of someone speaking about impeachment from a distance, without knowing much about what actually happened. It's a phenomenon I encounter quite often when speaking with non-Americans who viewed all of the events through the prism of stories in their press or perhaps CNN. "they impeached him for having an affair", "all that he did was lie about sex", etc. This is really a cartoon version of the actual events. And often there is no clear separation in such peoples' minds between the *sexual-harrassment lawsuit* (if they even know there *was* one - nevermind if they know who "Paula Jones" was), and the *impeachment trial*. I'm guessing (to be courteous) that your "Star Chamber" bombthrow was merely an instance of the same phenomenon. Unless of course you really do have good reason to (whether or not you know this is what you were doing) question Judge Wright's abilities, legal expertise, decisions, and application of the sexual-harrassment law(s) in question? Best,

--Blix

by a reader on Tue, 06/22/2004 - 14:50 | [reply](#)

p.p.s.

Two more points.

1. I see that like many, you imply that the "electorate's choice" was for Bill Clinton to serve as President for the 4 years 1997-2001 regardless of what were to happen during those 4 years. Not so. They did not and CANNOT make such a "choice", they have no right to do so.

It was their choice for him to serve as President *under the Constitution*, which is what defines and restricts that office. Implicit in that "choice", even if not all (or no!) Clinton voters were conscious of it as they cast their votes, is the possibility that he could be impeached by the House, since impeachment is explicitly provided for in that Constitution. The electorate (=51% of voters, or however many it takes to make up an electoral college majority) has no authority whatsoever to make, and have respected, a "choice" for someone to serve as chief executive/head of state/commander in chief for 4 years *independently of the constitutional provisions which define and restrict that office,*

any more than 51% of the electorate has the right to impose a

dictator on the other 49%.

Notice that Bill Clinton had to step down after 8 years because the Constitution says so - and this didn't violate the electorate's choice for him to be President because they were perfectly aware of this constitutional provision, or should have been, when they cast their votes. *Similarly*, Bill Clinton could be impeached if the House decided to because the Constitution says so - and this didn't violate the electorate's choice for him to be President because they were perfectly aware of this constitutional provision, *or should have been*, when they cast their votes.

The possibility of being "impeached" is part and parcel of being President. There is *no such thing* as "being President" apart from the Constitution which defines "President", and part of that definition is "can be impeached". Ignorance ("nobody told me he could be impeached! not fair! I wanted him for 4 years no matter what! respect that desire of mine!") is no excuse and I have no sympathy for it. 51% of the electorate has absolutely no right whatsoever to impose a "President" on the other 49% and insist that he remain so, without respecting the Constitutional restrictions on that office, and impeachment is one such restriction. Or **was**, anyway.

2. However true it may be that Republicans' support of impeachment/conviction was political and did not respect a "rule of law", the same criticism (for what it's worth - not much) applies equally to Democrats and others who opposed conviction. Notice that all (D) Senators voted Bill Clinton-(D) "not guilty" of the acts for which he was impeached, acts which (regardless of whether the impeachment should have been handed to the Senate for those acts) no reasonable person can possibly argue Bill Clinton did not actually commit. In other words their "not guilty" vote was not based on a sincere deliberation that Clinton did not commit those acts for which he was impeached, but rather, entirely on their desire that - regardless of whether he committed the acts - Clinton remain in office. In short, justice was NOT blind, the Senate vote NOT TO REMOVE was ALSO "political" and did not obey the "rule of law".

But hey that's ok I guess. For some reason.

by a reader on Tue, 06/22/2004 - 17:58 | [reply](#)

Did they vote him not guilty of the acts?

Notice that all (D) Senators voted Bill Clinton-(D) "not guilty" of the acts for which he was impeached

I can't remember the details, but did they ever vote on whether he was guilty of the acts for which he was impeached? Weren't they just voting on a motion which both said that he committed the acts *and* that they amounted to high crimes and misdemeanors for which he deserved to be removed from office?

by a reader on Tue, 06/22/2004 - 18:23 | [reply](#)

yes

Click: "**The perjury charge was defeated with 55 "not guilty" votes and 45 "guilty" votes. On the obstruction-of-justice article, the chamber was evenly split, 50-50.**" Vote breakdown (GUILTY or NOT GUILTY next to each name and under each article) can be found at that link.

by a reader on Tue, 06/22/2004 - 19:19 | [reply](#)

yes?

That CNN story quotes "guilty" and "not guilty" but did the senate really vote guilty or not guilty instead of aye and nay as usual or is that just CNN dumbing down the story? Anyway, that doesn't answer my question which was did they ever vote on whether he committed certain acts, or did they only vote on whether he committed certain acts *and* they amounted to high crimes and misdemeanors for which he deserved to be removed from office?

by a reader on Wed, 06/23/2004 - 14:20 | [reply](#)

Star Chamber

To Blixa: Yes, sorry about that: I confused the two proceedings! I forgot that (some of?) the perjury in question was in a real court and therefore much more serious morally than perjury in a political court.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Wed, 06/23/2004 - 18:43 | [reply](#)

to reader: you have a point

Everything I have seen suggests that the impeachment trial is a trial (political trial is a good way to put it) and that nominally the votes are called either "guilty" or "not guilty".

That doesn't mean I don't think you have a point. The most neutral way for me to answer is to point you to the text of the articles (**1**, **2**) of impeachment which they were voting on. I think we can agree that, plainly, and in effect, a vote of "not guilty" (despite being denoted by the phrase "not guilty") was a vote to reject some aspect or another of the texts, both of which contain "he did X" stuff and "he should be removed for doing X" stuff.

By voting "not guilty" are they rejecting the "he did X?" part or the "he should be removed for doing X part?" Well, I can't say. Maybe in some cases they really **didn't** think he did X (although I doubt it). Maybe in other cases they thought, or didn't doubt, that he did X, but didn't think X was serious enough to warrant removal (which is why you have a point). In at least Arlen Specter's case he seems to have decided that Clinton having done X was "not proven, under Scottish law" or Scottish rite or something.

But for at least some of them - I suspect most, your estimate may

differ - they thought he did X, but didn't really care, and although they might think doing X pretty serious in other circumstances, they weren't going to let a (D) President (or a President they liked..) be removed from office no matter what, at least not unless the polls indicated that they'd be punished on election day for not doing so (which they didn't), and so, because (obviously) they had full knowledge that the *effect* of casting a "guilty" vote was that it was a vote that said "yes remove him from office", they voted "not guilty" for this consequentialist reason, with virtually no reference whatsoever to the act X influencing that vote in their mind.

And that's basically what I'm saying: that (at least for some of the voters, at least to some extent..) the vote was *political* in nature, rather than a sober and objective deliberation as to Clinton's "guilt" of the acts or (although many affected this pretense of course) an objective, scientific weighing of those acts against some supposed objective, measurable standard of what is "impeachable" and what isn't. What I'm saying is that you simply can't squeeze the Politics out of that vote.

For what it's worth. (Again, not much.)

For the record, (and to avoid confusion) the reason I say it damaged the rule of law is not because the impeachment vote was politicized and didn't obey the rule of law (impeachment votes never really can..), but just because the chief executive pretty obviously broke the laws and was allowed to remain in office. That's just kinda bad, sets a bad example, etc. Maybe that Bad was outweighed by the other Good accruing from the fact that impeachment shouldn't have happened, I don't know.

Anyway, this point I've been hashing out with you is much smaller: "the (R)s' vote was politicized? yes but so was the (D)s". I don't think we're that far apart as long as I don't overreach to make this point ;-) Best,

by a reader on Wed, 06/23/2004 - 20:59 | [reply](#)

to DD

ok :)

I could also probably provisionally be convinced that the impeachment trial if not Webber's court was a "Star Chamber" then. The problem is, that criticism would apply to all impeachment trials, in the sense that: an opponent of any impeachment conviction can level the criticism, claim that it alone justifies a "not guilty" verdict, and there's really no rational way to rebut. Impeachment trials simply are never set up as rule-of-law courts and as I told "reader" you can't squeeze the politics out of them.

Which (if the logic that this makes them invalid "Star Chambers" carries the day) means, the American people have effectively lost a perfectly Constitutional means they (through their representatives) had once enjoyed for removing a President prior to the end of his 4 year term. This is what bothers me, the raising of the

"impeachable" bar to unattainable levels and the overblown rhetoric about "Star Chambers" makes impeachment highly unlikely ever to happen again. Which is, well, bad (even if it was indeed incorrect to impeach, and would have been incorrect to remove, Clinton).

On the other hand I suppose I could console myself with the thought that many of the impeachment-opposers were simply being disingenuous about all their "that's not impeachable" and "this is a Star Chamber/witch hunt" stuff, and would be completely inconsistent and withdraw 99% of those rhetorical objections to it if/when it comes to be used against a President of the opposite party ;-)

Best,

by a reader on Sat, 06/26/2004 - 00:18 | [reply](#)

webber

=wright

by a reader on Sat, 06/26/2004 - 00:19 | [reply](#)

Impeachment and Star Chambers

I think there should be such a thing as impeachment and I think it can only be a political process and not a judicial one. I think that the US Constitution gets it about right.

By 'political and not judicial' I mean that the criteria for impeachability cannot be specified in advance in a Constitution or in legislation. I do not mean that it is morally OK (even though it is Constitutional) for legislators to use the process to remove a President because his political policies are harmful or because they hate him, or that impeachment should ever be used to resolve a current political controversy. Equally, it is not morally right for legislators to shield a President from impeachment just because his political views are right. Therefore honourable legislators should formulate, in their own minds, a criterion of impeachability which gives the same answer if they imagine a President of the opposite party being accused of the same misdeeds. The criterion should be non-judicial in another sense too: the purpose of impeachment in the US system should not be to punish wrongdoers who happen to be President: that should be the job of normal courts. It should be to prevent the nation from being harmed by a bad President, acting as President. Of course the party opposing the President's will always consider that he is in some sense harming the nation and indifferent to its welfare. Impeachable crimes or wrongdoings should therefore be actions, such as accepting bribes or committing treason, in which the President displays indifference or hostility to the welfare of the nation in a sense that is independent of current political controversies. Sufficiently serious crimes which are not directly of that type should nevertheless be impeachable if it can be (honestly) argued that a person who would do X would also probably have no compunction in harming the nation, or could no longer have enough respect among the people to be able to lead them effectively, but those are slippery slopes that one should

resist going down except in uncontroversial cases.

It is not the fact that impeachment is a political process that made this particular one seem like a 'Star Chamber' proceeding to me. It is the fact that it did not meet most of the above criteria for being a morally right political process.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Sat, 06/26/2004 - 02:01 | [reply](#)

Clinton defamed office?

stuff and nonsense from a Clinton hater...explore the record of all of our presidents before you condemn one you so dislike...try reading up on the subject.

by a reader on Sat, 06/26/2004 - 14:42 | [reply](#)

DD,

I do not mean that it is morally OK (even though it is Constitutional) for legislators to use the process to remove a President because his political policies are harmful or because they hate him

How about cuz he broke the law and they think so? You impugn the motives of the (R) impeachment voters and in some/many cases you may be right, but again this is a criticism which can be made of any vote to impeach. You're entitled to be suspicious of motives of course but "be suspicious of their motives!" is obviously always going to be the rallying cry of the accused in any impeachment. Can't **always** be correct

Therefore honourable legislators should formulate, in their own minds, a criterion of impeachability which gives the same answer if they imagine a President of the opposite party being accused of the same misdeeds.

Sounds good to me. No doubt in my mind that these activities by an (R) President would have garnered lots of "guilty" votes from (D)s, but of course YMMV.

The criterion should be non-judicial in another sense too: the purpose of impeachment in the US system should not be to punish wrongdoers who happen to be President: that should be the job of normal courts. It should be to prevent the nation from being harmed by a bad President, acting as President.

Hm. I'll go with this too, with two caveats: (1) in some cases normal courts could be prevented from going after the President for reasons of "executive privilege" etc; (2) the "prevent harm" criterion could actually **lower** the bar for impeachment not raise it, in some cases. (example: it came out in the Clinton investigations that he had told Lewinsky they had to be careful on the phone cuz some foreign intel service [some say: Israeli] was probably snooping; was he just talkin', or did he really know this?

did this leave him open to blackmail? Blackmail re: an affair could

harm the country even if there were no illegalities involved. And notice how his reaction to knowing about foreign snoops on to his affair - assuming there really were some - was "continue the affair but try to be more secret", not "discontinue the affair because it's recklessly leaving me open to exposure and/or blackmail". Wouldn't the latter have been better for the country? Isn't it valid to think a President who chooses the former has made a choice which harms the country to at least some extent?)

Impeachable crimes or wrongdoings should therefore be actions, such as accepting bribes or committing treason, in which the President displays indifference or hostility to the welfare of the nation in a sense that is independent of current political controversies.

Bribery and Treason are no-brainers seeing as how they are specifically mentioned in the Constitution. Obviously it's in the "high Crimes and Misdemeanors" part where all the wiggle room is. Unless this was a vacuous addition to the Constitution then "Treason, Bribery" cannot be an exhaustive list of "impeachable" offenses.

And as for "indifference or hostility to the welfare of the nation" what exactly is "I'm being snooped on in my secret affair, but I'll keep doing it"? Maybe the threat this posed to the welfare of the nation was *small*, but I don't think it nonzero.

BTW I don't know what you mean by "independent of current political controversies"; aside from the impeachment scandal, what current political controversies do you have in mind?

Sufficiently serious crimes which are not directly of that type should nevertheless be impeachable if it can be (honestly) argued that a person who would do X would also probably have no compunction in harming the nation, or could no longer have enough respect among the people to be able to lead them effectively, but those are slippery slopes that one should resist going down except in uncontroversial cases.

Why? Why not err on the side of caution and, When in doubt kick him out? I say follow those slippery slopes pretty darn far.

Again: if we learn that X is of a type who will have silly illicit affairs, with the full knowledge that foreign intelligence services may try to learn about them (thus tries doubly-hard, futilely, to keep them secret), it's only a short step (down that slippery slope) to get you to exposure and blackmail. Why bother the risk?

Are individual Presidents *that* important? I still don't understand the "person-centric" thinking here, why all the focus on how high a bar there should be for removing an Important Person from office and the burden against. IMHO it's the *office* that's important, not the person. (Maybe I have to be a more Important person myself to instinctively sympathize with the person over the office, who knows... ;-)

It is not the fact that impeachment is a political process that made

this particular one seem like a 'Star Chamber' proceeding to me. It is the fact that it did not meet most of the above criteria for being a morally right political process.

I see, fair enough. IMHO it did meet most of those criteria *shrug* So, we have an honest difference of opinion. Obviously mine could be wrong but I still don't think it's as cut and dried as you'd made it out to be. Or perhaps (now seems likely) you didn't make it out to be as such, and I just overreacted to your assertion of immorality, which I should have better understood implicitly connotes "in your opinion" :-)

Best,

--Blix

by a reader on Mon, 06/28/2004 - 22:19 | [reply](#)

current politics controversies

like, you wouldn't impeach a president for lowering taxes, or for abolishing social security, or for banning gay marriage. these are all current controversies.

also, you seem to have said that b/c many Ds would have voted guilty for a R prez, they should have voted guilty for Clinton to avoid a double standard. well, you could just as well say, b/c they voted not guilty for clinton, they should also vote not guilty for the R prez. their votes should be the same in both cases, but that could mean twice guilty *or* twice not guilty.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 06/28/2004 - 22:49 | [reply](#)

When in doubt, kick them out?

Why not err on the side of caution and, When in doubt kick him out?

Because the ability of our political system to foster the creation of knowledge depends on its ability to focus debate and creativity on the rival theories of what the nation as a whole should do, and abandon ones that are deemed to have failed to survive testing or criticism. For instance, at present, one of the most important areas is the area of how best to avoid 9-11-type disasters. Another one that has been near the top of the list for many decades is how much the government should intervene in the economy with taxes, subsidies and government services. If it were to become commonplace for politicians to lose or gain power for reasons independent of their positions on such issues, the creation of political knowledge would cease.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Mon, 06/28/2004 - 22:57 | [reply](#)

to elliot

[current politics] like, you wouldn't impeach a president for lowering taxes, or for abolishing social security, or for banning gay marriage. these are all current controversies.

None of those (rather, their inverses) had anything to do with what Clinton was impeached "for". I'm still confused. There seems to be an assumption here that (R)s had some boring wonky reasons for wanting to impeach Clinton. I really don't get that, I thought the standard party line was that they were salacious puritanical reasons? which is it? ;-)

Explicitly: what "current politics controversies" is it being alleged here had something to do with the impeachment vote/trial? Again, aside from the actual impeachment scandal itself.

gays in the military? I really can't think of anything else.

well, you could just as well say, b/c they voted not guilty for clinton, they should also vote not guilty for the R prez.

I could've, but I didn't, because I don't think in such hypothetical they should've ;-). You're right tho. Consistency by itself only demands the votes be the same. One needs additional criteria to break the symmetry to select either "GG" or "NN", and I'm supplying one: "perjury = you're out". K? --Blix

by a reader on Tue, 06/29/2004 - 00:19 | [reply](#)

DD,

I agree that "commonplace" goes too far but I did not intend to imply by "err on the side of caution" that they should become "commonplace" at all. (We can make huge errors on the side of caution before impeachment convictions of Presidents would become anything close to commonplace.)

As for improving our political knowledge, the problem is you (like many) artificially circumscribe what is political knowledge and what isn't. One kind of, nontrivial IMHO, political knowledge you have ignored is, What kinds of people should we select to be our leaders. Rather, you short-circuit that question by effectively insisting that {has a more correct laundry list of positions on what the nation as a whole should do} be the only, or almost only, criteria for selecting leaders.

I think this is flawed because it ignores a leader's character completely. But surely you agree that to ignore a potential leader's character and vote for him because (you think) he will point "what the nation as a whole should do" in a more correct direction is foolish. Of what use is a seriously morally damaged spokesman for a correct cause? (The Left would do well to heed this lesson in Michael Moore's case, for example.)

Had Clinton lost power it would indeed have been for reasons independent of his (correct, let's stipulate) policy positions on, for example, NAFTA and gays in the military. You are right that this

would strike a blow against our polity learning/encoding/whatever the correct political knowledge in those areas. *However*, the reasons he would have lost power would still have constituted important political knowledge in and of themselves which (perhaps...) could outweigh those losses.

"Do not lie while under oath" is not a trivial message to be sending to either potential future leaders or to the public (by example). The idea that lying-under-oath should not be selected against in leaders means we never improve our political knowledge to an extent necessary to weed out Liars from seeking office. (Not that we ever will, but we can't even *try*?) Neither is "The President is not above the law" as political knowledge completely devoid of salutary benefits.

I do not accept "let's separate the personal from the political". Many people who insist upon doing this have all too understandable reasons for desiring that it be done: raw political ambition and "personal" skeletons. I do not accept that making it easier for such people to enter and hold political offices - rather, that forcing a kind of compartmentalization between the "personal" and the "political" which really amounts to insisting that voters vote based only on laundry lists of positions - is some kind of imperative for improving political knowledge. In fact I don't really even think it *will* improve political knowledge, but something like the opposite.

(Consider an extreme compartmentalization effect: the role abortion plays in U.S. politics. To extreme "pro-choice" people, being "pro-choice" is essentially the only variable they consider in a candidate... to "pro-life" people, just the opposite. In effect the candidates themselves never actually really matter as long as they are on the "correct" side, and the extremists from both sides will bend over backwards distorting their arguments to disingenuously laud "their" guy. This helps political knowledge how?)

Are (were) there no potential Democratic Presidential officeholders who would have supported gays in the military and NAFTA but have been wise enough not to engage in silly affairs with silly girls, let alone tried to cover it up with behavior up to and including perjury? Is it so quixotic for me to wish that our politics would at least have the *potential* for selecting for such people just a *little* bit? ;-)

Wouldn't convicting Clinton upon impeachment have, in fact, not only *not* destroyed whatever Political Knowledge he supposedly created, but, actually, sent the message "be more like Gore [Clinton-like policies but more squeaky-clean] than Clinton"?

And what's wrong with that? (not that I'm a Gore fan, just saying...)

--Blix

by a reader on Tue, 06/29/2004 - 00:56 | [reply](#)

Lying Liars

Blix,

I sympathise with your points above, but I think you're missing an important aspect of this. I'm not sure that it's helpful to select for truth-telling politicians before it's the case that the public generally prefers such people in office. All of the evidence that I see points to the contrary. Clinton was obviously a liar before he was elected the first time (Gennifer Flowers, "I didn't inhale", etc.)

People chose to elect him anyway because they didn't really care that he's a scumbag and a reflexive liar. He had charisma and charm and made them feel comfortable. Many people like being lied to. They want to believe that Social Security is solvent, that minimum wage laws help the poor, and that the rich are probably guilty of something and should be made to suffer. Most people lie themselves (as often they should) and don't want to be made to feel more guilty by a public punishment of just "lying about sex".

Try to change that. Good Luck. But, until that change happens most people will resent the removal of their lying politicians. They'll continue to vote for other lying politicians until they don't want to anymore. I suspect that impeachments will just entrench this preference.

The changes we seek will have to come from general changes in knowledge and opinions; not from isolated legalistic processes.

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 06/29/2004 - 05:11 | [reply](#)

Gil,

People chose to elect him anyway because they didn't really care that he's a scumbag and a reflexive liar.

That ain't good & demonstrates a distinct lack of "political knowledge". Which, I gather, we're trying to build.

Or, at the very least, not destroy. DD's position is (according to my parody) "keep him in there cuz the public should only select based on laundry-lists of issues and to remove him [&people like him] destroys that method of creating political knowledge". I doubt it does.

I suspect that impeachments will just entrench this preference.

Well we'll never really find out will we. You're so worried about a phenomenon which isn't actually in evidence and likely never will be.

The changes we seek will have to come from general changes in knowledge and opinions; not from isolated legalistic processes.

To be clear, I'm not here proposing that an "err on the side of caution" standard of impeachment would necessarily help create the "changes you seek" in political knowledge. I'm saying that it won't **destroy** that knowledge, and that this proposed firewall between the "personal" (BTW perjury is not "personal" but I digress and this

was my usage anyway..) and "political" which people seek (especially if they have political ambition & personal skeletons) does not help preserve or enshrine any valuable knowledge. I don't know why a lot of people have convinced themselves that it does (unless that ambition thing is the entire explanation).

--Blix

by a reader on Tue, 06/29/2004 - 13:56 | [reply](#)

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Vote No To The New EU Constitution

As the **Daily Telegraph** says today:

this mind-numbing, 260-page document [...] is the capstone of a federal state, and gives the EU a foreign minister, a criminal code, a European prosecutor and a police force. We face a net loss of vetoes in about 40 areas and the constitution sets in stone an outdated, over-regulated economic model just at the moment that it is failing.

As **Perry de Havilland of Samizdata** says:

it is a constitution quite unlike the more famous US one. The EU constitution will incorporate, amongst other things, the essence of the **Charter of Fundamental Rights**, which requires not that the state refrain from making laws in many areas of life but that laws be mandated to ensure 'rights'. This includes such wonders as the 'right to education' including the phrase "this right includes the possibility to receive free compulsory education" (which is of course not in fact free at all and suggests we have a 'right to be compelled'). And wonders of double talk such as:

Equality between men and women must be ensured in all areas, including employment, work and pay. The principle of equality shall not prevent the maintenance or adoption of measures providing for specific advantages in favour of the under-represented sex.

So the much awaited document will prohibit discrimination between men and women... unless it is decided to pass laws *requiring* discrimination between men and woman. Clearly the Charter of Fundamental Rights which the new EU Constitution will aim to enforce is nothing less that the 'right' to require all European states to maintain regulatory welfare states. The much vaunted priests of democracy want to make sure that the constitution ensures that all you can vote for is who gets

to regulate you rather than whether or not you will be

regulated at all.

It is not too late for Britain but the last bastion is indeed the one on which the battle will be fought. Perhaps, just perhaps, when comes time for the UK referendum, that vast and growing tower will be struck by lightning and come crashing down.

Cast your votes accordingly, readers.

Perhaps the most important consideration here is one that is hardly ever mentioned – perhaps for reasons of unconscious political correctness – even by the staunchest opponents of British integration into a European entity: *Britain's existing (unwritten) constitution and political culture are incomparably better than their European counterparts*. Even if the proposed new order were an improvement for the rest of Europe, which it probably is not, it would still be a catastrophe for Britain and a tragic loss for the world.

It isn't going to happen.

Sat, 06/19/2004 - 20:25 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

"It isn't going to happen."

Let's hope so but, like for the war in Irak as should be obvious by now, wishful thinking does not suffice.

by a reader on Sun, 06/20/2004 - 00:57 | [reply](#)

wishful thinking works great

aren't you aware that we favoured the war in iraq?

-- Elliot Temple

by a reader on Sun, 06/20/2004 - 03:04 | [reply](#)

Seeing how English Hooligans

Seeing how English Hooligans are behaving in my country, I wouldn't be so sure in your cultural superiority.

Where can you actually read the EU thing?

by a reader on Sun, 06/20/2004 - 09:05 | [reply](#)

English Hooligans and French Judges

Somebody wrote:

'Seeing how English Hooligans are behaving in my country, I wouldn't be so sure in your cultural superiority.'

These hooligans are not politicians, merely common thugs.

However, when these common thugs come back to Britain if criminal charges are filed against them they may get trial by jury, unlike France where they would be tried by a judge. Accordingly, in this sense, our laws are more open to discussion than French laws since a jury may choose not to enforce a law they think is being wrongly applied or a law they think is just plain pants.

Also, our thugs don't seem quite as bad as the French ones:

http://www.littlegreenfootballs.com/weblog/?entry=10860_French_Antisemitism_Watch

by **Alan Forrester** on Mon, 06/21/2004 - 00:54 | [reply](#)

Here it is

the EU thing, if you really want to read it. 275 pages of EU constitution. "Reader friendly!"

by a reader on Mon, 06/21/2004 - 09:29 | [reply](#)

Alan, I think the way people

Alan, I think the way people behave says a lot about a country's political culture.

And the EU thing keeps crashing my browser. :P

by a reader on Mon, 06/21/2004 - 14:01 | [reply](#)

Wouldn't it help parents in Germany?

There's the stupid contradiction you pointed out, but point 3 of the same article guarantees parents to educate their children as they see fit.

by a reader on Mon, 06/21/2004 - 14:33 | [reply](#)

YES TO THE EU CONSTITUTION

As we all know, a tree can not make a forest. We all need each other to survive and that is the essence of washing our hands when in essence it's one that requires it.

All Farm Animals are not equal, but with the EU constitution in existence in Europe, all Farm Animals will be PROTECTED at the least which is a fundamental objective of A.V Dicey's doctrine of Rule of Law and Separation of Power... .

by **PI** on Wed, 02/02/2005 - 20:19 | [reply](#)

YES TO THE EU CONSTITUTION?

PI wrote:

'As we all know, a tree can not make a forest. We all need each

other to survive and that is the essence of washing our hands when in essence it's one that requires it.'

What does that have to do with the EU Constitution? Without the EU Constitution we will be able to trade and interact with people in other EU countries without the regulations and bureaucracy of that pointless document getting in the way. So we will have more access to other Europeans without the Constitution, not less.

'All Farm Animals are not equal, but with the EU constitution in existence in Europe, all Farm Animals will be PROTECTED at the least which is a fundamental objective of A.V Diecy's doctrine of Rule of Law and Separation of Power...'

Protected from what? People already feed and house farm animals, they don't need protection.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Mon, 02/21/2005 - 18:10 | [reply](#)

political and cultural superiority of britain?

british political and cultural superiority is a joke, how can a country that throught the ages sought the desruction of so many states see itself as this great nation. what half decent country would allow the suffering of others simply because it ensured its self-enrichment. the malvinas are so rich in natural resources that would be of great use for the argentinian economy, yet the greedy culture of britain is willing to kill innocents to enrich itself. i'm sure you can be proud of your nation, who wouldn't be, coming from a country that has left countless other countries detroyed all the while not allowing them to recover from the mess your 'great culture' left them? very proud indeed.

by the way what is the culture of britain? it seems to me you try to hijack the cultures of those countries you've conquered during your sick military campaigns. without the many immigrants that are forced to look for work in your country due to your gluttonous culture, there would be no worthwile culture worth mentioning.

i suggest the british take a good long look at themselves before commenting on the political and cultural aspects of other countries, maybe if they do, people might actually have some sort of respect for a country void of political and cultural morality.

by a reader, from an occupied country on Sat, 04/22/2006 - 21:09 | [reply](#)

The UN And The Rule Of Law

Kofi Annan is complaining that the US should sign up to the International Criminal Court rather than seeking an exemption **because:**

"It would discredit the council and the United Nations that stands for rule of law."

We should like to make something clear to Mr Annan. The United Nations does not stand for the rule of law and never has.

No doubt there are many pieces of paper in the UN building on which the word law appears. But those words confer upon the UN neither the right nor the ability to enforce the rule of law. For there are at least two additional requirements.

The first is that legitimate laws come about via a process that allows the people subject to those laws to replace the lawmakers by voting them out of office. The UN's 'laws' do not satisfy this criterion since (amongst other reasons) dictatorships are allowed to participate in making them.

The second requirement is that legitimate laws are enforced impartially on all parties subject to them. But suppose, for example, that the UN General Assembly passes a resolution condemning Israel for its **accidental** killing of children while it is trying to take out terrorists. Then it must also be willing to pass a **resolution** condemning Palestinian terrorists who deliberately murder Israeli children. The UN **does not** pass this test.

If the UN stands for any kind of rule, it is not the rule of law. It is the arbitrary rule of corrupt bureaucrats at the behest of mass-murdering tyrants.

Sun, 06/20/2004 - 23:39 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Rule Of Law

1. The UN's 'laws' do not satisfy this criterion since (amongst other reasons) dictatorships are allowed to participate in making them.

Does this also mean that U.S. laws do not satisfy this criterion since corrupt state regimes (such as Richard Daley's Illinois or Huey Long's Louisiana) are allowed to participate in making them?

2.The second requirement is that legitimate laws are enforced impartially on all parties subject to them. This a nice fantasy, do U.S. judges stopped for DUIs get the same treatment as a poor immigrant stopped for the same offense?

by a reader on Mon, 06/21/2004 - 03:39 | [reply](#)

Re: Rule Of Law

1) Umm, I googled those people and they *aren't in charge anymore*. Thus they are good examples of how corrupt leaders are replaced (well I didn't actually check if they were corrupt, but whatever). You'd need like some current governors who rig elections to have a case.

2) Although I expect you can find a few unfortunate example cases (no one is perfect), can you demonstrate that this happens consistently?

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 06/21/2004 - 04:52 | [reply](#)

Re: Rule Of Law

Perhaps the difference is that the UN has laws which dictatorships are allowed to participate in making them *indefinitely*, whereas damage caused by a corrupt mayor or governor in the US is limited by a finite term and impeachability.

-Nic

by a reader on Mon, 06/21/2004 - 16:58 | [reply](#)

Re: Rule Of Law

I agree with the above comment by Nic. The UN has no mechanism, even in principle, for excluding dictators from its decision making.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Mon, 06/21/2004 - 17:31 | [reply](#)

Make a new rule

I know this might not be easy to do given the structure of the U.N. as a world body which is not a world government. It does seem vital to have a U.N.. Therefore we might reasonably expect the U.N., or a viable world body alternative, to be an evolving body. This flaw needs to be corrected by the U.N. governing council or the U.N. will always be limited in its moral power and therefore also in its moral usefulness. Some dictators might not like it but rules can change for the better by a majority vote or by governing council action. The one problem with dictators is that they can be expected

to represent themselves but not the peoples of their country. How

might such resolutions regarding decision making be introduced?

by a reader on Mon, 06/21/2004 - 18:15 | [reply](#)

Why

...do we need a UN?

What has the UN ever achieved? How much has it cost, in money and in lives?

What *could* the UN ever achieve that voluntary international agreements and 'coalitions of the willing' could not?

There's no a priori advantage to uniting nations. Diversity and spontaneous order rule.

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Mon, 06/21/2004 - 21:52 | [reply](#)

As far as I can tell, we need

As far as I can tell, we need the UN because, even if it accomplishes little, its presence provides a useful focus of attention, and emotional outlet, for the types of people inclined to think that we need a UN. Those people might cause real trouble otherwise. ;-)

--Blix

by a reader on Mon, 06/21/2004 - 23:29 | [reply](#)

they *aren't in charge anymore*

because they are dead. Not good examples of how corrupt leaders are replaced. When they were alive they were notorious for their rigged elections.

by a reader on Mon, 06/21/2004 - 23:47 | [reply](#)

Re: they *aren't in charge anymore*

Are their sons in charge now? Isn't that how it works with dictators?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 06/22/2004 - 15:41 | [reply](#)

Re: they *aren't in charge anymore*

Vladimir Lenin. Joseph Stalin. Nikita Khrushchev. Leonid Brezhnev. Konstantin Chernenko. Yuri Andropov. None of these men had their sons as successors.

by a reader on Wed, 06/23/2004 - 13:35 | [reply](#)

sheesh

ummm, so? it doesn't have to literally be a son. are you saying these ppl were succeeded in a corrupt dynasty, and elections are rigged today, etc, or is it fixed and over and done with?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 06/23/2004 - 17:24 | [reply](#)

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Royal Navy Gives Credence To Psychics

Even at the best of times, but especially in the middle of a war of reason against unreason, public institutions such as the Royal Navy ought to set an example to the public and to their employees, and also be held to a high standard of accountability in how they use their valuable time and resources.

Therefore they should not call in "**psychics, mediums and paranormal scientists**" to investigate why naval ratings don't like one of their buildings:

Top brass at Plymouth's naval dockyard have called in ghost-busting experts - to see if the base is haunted.

A team of paranormal investigators will arrive at Devonport Dockyard on Friday armed with night-vision cameras, **dowsing rods** and sound equipment.

The research will focus on the Hangman's Cell where naval ratings have been spooked by a strange "atmosphere".

Something stinks there, and it isn't ghosts.

Tue, 06/22/2004 - 19:21 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

I smell no stink

This is a spooky historic building, with a visitor centre. Presumably a section of the naval employees there are actually performing duties to do with tourist revenue rather than doing anything military. The paranormal research drummed up plenty of media attention from dozens of TV stations and newspapers around the world, and it emphasises the spooky appeal of the dockyard, with its working gallows and ghost legends, so it must have gained Devonport Dockyard lots of extra visitors and cash.

I don't understand what exactly makes this irresponsible. People who make money from the belief in the supernatural range from mystics who will take you under their wing and relieve you of all your material possessions to the authors of ghost stories who exploit the merest twinge of metaphysical doubt to give you a bit of a thrill. Many of the people along this range must be entirely

innocent of doing any harm. Perhaps all of them are. People who believe in the paranormal presumably benefit from exploring that belief. Besides, there is a guilty pleasure - which ought not really be guilty - for some of the most sensible people in a pretense of belief in the supernatural. Examples are prayer, pretending to talk with dead loved ones (the very rational Richard Feynman admitted to this), and talking to pets (**Churchill**). I'm sure we ought not feel guilty for casual flirtation with illogical beliefs, and I don't see how the navy is doing wrong by providing people with the opportunity.

If it was an encyclopedia offering unscientific information, or the navy attempting to develop psychic communication with submarines in a 1960s cold war stylee, I would be disgusted, but we don't rely on the navy's visitor centres for accurate information about the status in reality of ghosts, whereas we do expect them to be entertaining, so the Devonport people have done the right thing.

Pseudoscientists deserve to be constantly debunked, but they are amusing, and are not a credible threat to science, are they?

by a reader on Thu, 06/24/2004 - 17:02 | [reply](#)

Churchill's Parrot myth

This isn't relevant to the argument here either way, but it appears that the Churchill parrot story is a **myth**.

by **David Deutsch** on Thu, 06/24/2004 - 17:34 | [reply](#)

what exactly makes this irresponsible

Why is this irresponsible? One reason (of several) is that the "psychics, mediums and paranormal scientists" will now be able to say in their advertising that they have worked for the Royal Navy. This will, as the title of the World piece says, give credence to their claims.

by **David Deutsch** on Fri, 06/25/2004 - 19:17 | [reply](#)

an idiotarian responds to randi-an spam

hi. new here. found this site in my bookmarks, wasn't sure why, checking it out. you link to tcs, which is a good thing. i'm not sure quite how you use the term idiotarian. but i'm from the lunatic fringe of the libertarian movement, call myself an idiot-savant, and will discuss your claims from that perspective.

The randi link reminded me of nigerian spam. "i have \$1 million in negotiable bonds in a european bank, and i need your help getting it out. all you have to do is..." There are no objective criteria to claim the prize, no independent auditor, no formal set of rules applicable to everyone. key terms like occult are left undefined. so if, say, a guy can turn water into wine, and lead into gold, and find water, and diagnose problems with sick buildings, this wouldn't count, if the means were not occult by some moveable definition.

the X prize, as a counterexample, has specific disclosed objective

criteria about building and flying a private spacecraft.
back to the naval college. [aside: is that the one at dartmouth? to americans, dartmouth is a college in new hampshire with an arbitrary name, to brits, it's the mouth of the river dart.]
One day, a group of wise men appear, dressed in flowing robes, carrying dowsing rods and such like. We'll call them hercule, sherlock, lord peter, lassie, and fung sueh-tsu.
They sniff, collect samples, walk around, set up equipment to measure auras and orgone flow and such, test dowsing rods, talk to residents, and say they will return when the moon is full to make their report. They speak amongst themselves, muttering occult-sounding spells. 'Aspergillus flavus?' 'serpula lachrymans. phoma.' 'grandfaloons?' 'no, not foma, phoma.'
On the day when the moon is full, they return, and suggest the following. Compact flourescent lighting. A fan to blow outside air from west to east. A radio playing classical music at low volume. And they bring a nightingale in a silver cage, with instructions for its care, but warn that if the bird dies, it should be sent to them at once. "Do these things, and the curse is lifted."
And so it was.
ok, silly story, but my point is that just because somebody calls themself a dowser or an efficiency consultant or a psychic doesn't establish whether or not they are able to solve problems at hand. Lord Peter is a wine expert; he has a sensitive nose which would detect and assess data you or i would miss. doubly true for lassie. some dowsers can smell water, or smell the conditions in which water is found. they may not consciously be aware of what they know and how they know it, but they can locate sites for wells. others can sense the presence of molds and germs which create health problems.
songbirds make inexpensive environmental monitoring systems.
etc.

by a reader on Sun, 06/27/2004 - 16:30 | [reply](#)

Randi

I think that the above has an unfair characterization of the Randi Challenge.

It's not that the criteria are subjective. It's just that the test procedures are determined in conjunction with the claimant and tailored to his specific claims. What's wrong with that?

It seems to me that describing the exact test conditions in advance for all conceivable paranormal claims is impractical as well as unfair; as it might provide a good magician with enough information to figure out how to defeat inadequate test conditions.

I don't think that the question of whether or not the claim is paranormal or not is likely to be controversial or unfairly defined. If the reader has some conflicting actual knowledge about this, I'd be very interested to hear about it.

Gil

by Gil on Mon, 06/28/2004 - 17:19 | [reply](#)

Plymouth Naval Base

Interesting comments, thank you. However, the Naval project was my own private project and still is, we all reasons for doing things and mine is learning, I hope the amount of money, time and effort I have spent in my studies and research will provide the navy with something concrete, as the organiser of the project I refrained from giving interviews after the investigation, if you can find me a tabloid where I did, I may chase another ghost for you! When you lose someone you love to wherever they may go, isnt it worth knowing more? millions of people who have seen ghosts, including me can't be mad! you never really know someone not here or on the other side so if someone wants to do something for a good cause .. who are you to stop them? and why dont you encourage them instead of discourage them? I never asked nor received any payment for the investigation, further more I have been asked for features for magazines and asked that any compensation be rewarded to the RSPCA, my favourite charity, we have free will, animals don't. We have a choice who we love, animals don't. As I said 'FREEWILL', whether Im criticised or not, I love the paranormal work, its my hobby, its my heart. So is the Naval base haunted? It's your choice to believe or disbelieve. God Bless

by a reader on Tue, 06/29/2004 - 21:47 | [reply](#)

Telling The Truth About The Middle East

Go and read [Solomonias's transcription](#) [scroll down a little: it's near the top] of a speech by Charles Jacobs at the recent Boston For Israel Rally.

“The distortion is so great I fear many people in Boston cannot see that bus. And I'm afraid that if we filled up this Plaza with buses and pizza parlors, and Passover celebrations and family cars with pregnant wives and little children . all with murdered Jews, many in Boston could not see it. They would dismiss the murder. More than a few would want to blame the Jews.

And so it's time for us to learn how to simply and powerfully to tell the truth.”

Read the whole thing. And the rest of the report is very interesting too.

Fri, 06/25/2004 - 18:19 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Proportional Representation In Iraq

The UN, in its infinite lack of wisdom, has proposed that Iraq should have a proportional representation (PR) election system. The Coalition Provisional Authority has agreed to this.

In PR, the people vote for a party and that party is allocated legislators in proportion to the number of votes they get. The best system is First Past the Post in which people elect a representative in a region rather than a whole country. As we have **written before**, proportional representation is bad, and we expect Iraq to provide an illustration of this in due course.

What do the Iraqis think? Aside from the Islamists, most Iraqis **favour First Past the Post**, according to Michael Rubin, Editor of the *Middle East Quarterly*. Why? Because they distrust political parties. This brings out an important point: In PR, there is simply no room for a candidate who represents local issues.

So why did the UN advocate PR? They say it will allow ethnic minorities to vote together across the country and get their interests represented. But according to Rubin, the fact of the matter on the ground is that these minorities often do not have many interests in common. For example, Shiite Turkmen in Tel Afar have little in common with Turkish speaking people in Erbil or Kirkuk. And of course, any minority that does not have its own party is in deep trouble under PR. Under First Past the Post, if a minority is concentrated in some areas, as Christians are, they could have chosen the candidate that best suited them without having to set up a party.

We guess that the UN has chosen PR more because of their collectivist world-view than any actual analysis of what would be best for Iraq. They think of people in terms of what groups they belong to rather than as individuals, and so they chose the most collectivist form of democracy they could find.

Sat, 06/26/2004 - 18:58 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

I gave some comments earlier

I gave **some comments** earlier about this issue. So I won't again go into my point that PR also has advantages which the district

system does not. But now I am interested in the following:

They think of people in terms of what groups they belong to rather than as individuals, and so they chose the most collectivist form of democracy they could find.

To be sure, any form of democracy is a form of collectivism. But could you expand on the question in what regard do you consider PR to be more collectivist than the district system?

Another point is, if you think that members of parliament should be representatives of their voters, why then should this representation be geographically oriented? In other words, why should people be limited to voting for people living within a certain distance from their home? Why not allow people to vote for any representative country wide (instead of for a political party) and then give each representative a voting power in parliament in proportion to the number of people he represents? For example, if there are 100 seats and person A gets 5% of the vote in the country, he would get 5 votes in parliament. If B gets 1% of the vote, he gets one vote in parliament.

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Sun, 06/27/2004 - 13:43 | [reply](#)

Collectivist PR

'To be sure, any form of democracy is a form of collectivism.'

No. It's an imperfect individualist institution that allows individuals to criticise governments.

'But could you expand on the question in what regard do you consider PR to be more collectivist than the district system?'

In PR you vote for parties not for individuals, thus it is impossible to elect an individual who is not affiliated to a party.

by **Alan Forrester** on Mon, 06/28/2004 - 01:21 | [reply](#)

an idiotarian responds

interesting contrarian perspective.

forgot to introduce myself, arbitrary aardvark.

my blog on election law issues is at ballots.blogspot.com.

first past the post systems tend to coalesce into one-party or two-party systems, and offer stability of a sort, and enable strong leaders. sometimes these elected bodies become facades for a strong-man with a military power-base. dissent tends to be limited, to the handful of issues at the location where party a differs, at least nominally, from party b. party c can have input into the debate if it willing to forgo power for truth.

PR does a better job of ensuring oppressed minorities get some voice and a piece of the action. However, some PR systems have had stability issues. Italy. Whether this was due to defects in the

form of PR used, or is inherent, i leave to the political scientists -

i'm just a lawyer, and a crazy one.

I spent much of my life working with the LP in the USA. Over 30 years, it's never elected a congresscritter, and most of its state reps have been in pockets where PR or fusion is allowed.

Here and there, the lp is emerging as a second party in one-party districts, but that is rare and mostly accidental.

The LP is as successful as it is precisely because it occupies a niche no one else wants. If therewere a move to PR, there would be lots of small parties, each looking after their own bloc or issue.

Currently, these tend to be factions within the two big parties.

The serious players have factions in both the big parties.

by a reader on Mon, 06/28/2004 - 01:27 | [reply](#)

huh?

You are (deliberately?) confusing two orthogonal concepts.

You shouldn't complain about PR because you want local representatives. The two have nothing to do with each other.

You should complain about having a single national constituency if you prefer local representatives.

Single Transferrable Vote PR-alike systems are fairer than first past the post, and can be used for local candidates.

by a reader on Mon, 06/28/2004 - 14:32 | [reply](#)

elitism

The appeal of PR for the UN may lie in simple elitism rather than in "collectivism". Ensuring that people vote for a "party" rather than individuals inserts an extra layer of abstraction between people and their leaders. This allows for some amount of control of who gets seats, at the party level, by elites in the proverbial smoke filled rooms. (Honestly, being in the US I have no idea how a party's "slate" (is that the word?) is chosen in PR.) The UN may hope to influence or control this process or at least have some reason to believe that the people who likely will, will do a "good" job of it by whatever criteria the UN has.

There may be some value in doing this, for reasons along lines outlined by reader #1 above, i.e. fear that direct "first past the post" elections (I don't quite understand that phrase - whaddya mean "first"? how did *time* enter this equation? - except that I know it's what the US has :) would lead to a stable but no-dissent strongman. (Although isn't that what the UN *wants* for Iraq? ;-)

However persuasive that reasoning may be, myself I oppose PR for my country and thus do not wish it on Iraqis. Of course, there are many things I would not wish for myself and do not wish on Iraqis to which they will be nevertheless subjected; the UN nontrivially influencing the direction of their country, for example. This PR thing is just an artifact of that, larger, tragedy IMHO.

--Blix

PR

Proportional Representation is not "just one thing" (in terms of election system)

Proportional Representation is in general achieved, more or less, in all other election systems but the single-seat-district system.

That is, it is kind of "ignorant" to say "this or that" about PR without specifying what the actual election system is, as well as what the political, economic, regional, historic, social, etc, etc realities are.

PR is often done per regions, to achieve Local Representation.

PR in general uses "Party lists", but they can either so-called "Closed Lists", the order pre-done before the election, or "Open Lists", the order is according to the personal votes the candidates get.

For larger populations PR is usually implemented through a "mixed" system, 50% of seats through local districts, 50% through larger region lists, closed or open. Furthermore the possibilities of having two votes, one local FPTP vote and one PR vote, or one must chose in which system one votes (nationwide party or local person).

That is, there are a minimum of two basic, major different dimensions to PR-systems, plus a handful of others.

Btw, Italy has actually been very stable, they have just had the same party shuffle some seats in the government every year... (additionally I doubt that many non-Italians understand what their election system is, it just as a much an election system as an PR system as an FPTP system, plus much more)

For anyone who wants to understand some of the basics (from an anglo-american perspective), some of it explained in these lectures

http://www.citizensassembly.bc.ca/public/learning_resources/learning_materials/av

PPS I was actually searching fro that Bremer edict on Iraq getting the worst and most extreme of all PR systems, the one with a nationwide closed partylist, ridiculous to define something like that from USA...

PR

Btw, AEI did a "thing" on this topic today, somewhat tragic and funny.

http://www.aei.org/events/eventID.853,filter./event_detail.asp

SIkorski, frmr polish "Nato-guy", said

- americans do not usually understand PR

- then he talked about how bad PR is, repeated all the ignorant stuff, then that Poland is reforming, etc..

the funny one

- at the ends he recommended a PR system based on a mixed system..

That is, he obviously knew "it", but talked kind of differently until the very end..

by a reader on Tue, 06/29/2004 - 23:05 | [reply](#)

PR

are mostly for Nations who are already "stuck" with single-seat-districts, a certain number of seats on parliament, and can neither

- combine former single-seat-districts to larger districts nor multimember districts

- add more seats to the parliament

Compare all those former single-seat-winner-takes-all anglo-american nations which already have changed, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, North Ireland, Wales, Scotland..Malta... most former colonies..

Even India has a PR senate..

Fairly well explained in that British COlumbia link I gave above

http://www.aei.org/events/eventID.853,filter./event_detail.asp

That is, seems Canada too has come to the end of FPTP...

by a reader on Tue, 06/29/2004 - 23:12 | [reply](#)

PR

Correction, addition to the comment above, I had included it as a comment to

"Single Transferrable Vote PR-alike systems "

as in old newsgroup style, but it became html-tags..

by a reader on Tue, 06/29/2004 - 23:15 | [reply](#)

PR

However, this a good explanation for nation wide list, although it does not specify "Open" or "Closed" lists

=====

The U.N. team decided that January's election for a 275-member national assembly will use a system of proportional representation based on lists. With the signatures of just 500 supporters, political parties, political groups and individuals can submit a list with up to

275 candidates' names to contest the election.

"I'm very much aware that one of the problems this election might have is intimidation of candidates," Perelli said.

"It is for this reason that choosing proportional representation at a national level - removing the politics from just the local level where people can be easily identified and taken down - is an extra layer of security for the candidates."

But Perelli said special measures will still be needed to use "the full powers" of Iraq's judicial system and the commission "to basically not allow people who make acts of intimidation to run for the election."

The commission and U.N. advisers also must guard against the intimidation of electoral authorities, election workers and observers, and voters, she said.

"The whole issue of fear is going to be a theme in this election," Perelli said, explaining that it is essential to overcome "the culture of fear" that surrounded elections under Saddam Hussein.

"This election will work as long as Iraqis start to trust the process" and recognize that their votes will be secret, "that the possibilities of retaliation against them are going to be minimized, that the electoral authority is going to play a fair game ... (and) that the vulnerable will be able to express their voice," she said.

Perelli said she believes "a silent majority" of Iraqis is eager to vote if "they were certain that there's not going to be a retribution or a retaliation."

=====

<http://www.iraq.net/printarticle4284.html>

by a reader on Tue, 06/29/2004 - 23:22 | [reply](#)

Re: Collectivist PR

"It's an imperfect individualist institution that allows individuals to criticize governments." It allows the criticism of certain government institutions, but does it allow criticism of (democracy) itself? A monarchy could allow criticism of the monarch (e.g. "Prince Philip would be a better king than King Richard") but not allow criticism of the institution of monarchy.

Could armed revolt be considered another institution that allows individuals to criticize governments?

by a reader on Wed, 06/30/2004 - 00:16 | [reply](#)

Two Clashes Of Cultures

Today President Bush enraged President Chirac and many other denizens of Old Europe by strongly **endorsing the entry of Turkey into the European Union.**

President Bush said on Tuesday that Turkey belongs in the European Union and that Europe is "not the exclusive club of a single religion" in what amounted to a rejection of French President Jacques Chirac.

[...]

Bush held up Turkey as an example of a Muslim democracy and said its entry to the EU would be "a crucial advance in relations between the Muslim world and the West, because you are part of both."

"Including Turkey in the EU would prove that Europe is not the exclusive club of a single religion, and it would expose the 'clash of civilizations' as a passing myth of history," Bush said.

Mr Chirac, as is his custom, responded not by addressing what was said but by complaining about who was saying it:

Chirac said on Monday that Bush should not comment on Turkey's EU entry hopes as EU affairs were none of his business.

[...]

"It is like me trying to tell the United States how it should manage its relations with Mexico," he added.

Indeed. Or with Iraq?

Anyway, this clash between the two Presidents nicely encapsulates the difference between two rival conceptions of the European Union. In one conception, it is a glorified Customs Union, in which the members solemnly promise not to prevent the free exchange of goods and services, or the free movement of workers or tourists, from one member state to another. It could also regulate such things as the colours of electrical wiring, so that goods manufactured in one member state do not cause unnecessary shocks in another. This conception has largely been realized, and is

on balance a good thing. In the other conception, the EU is a new European nation, complete with armed forces and a unified foreign policy and taxation system, outranking all its members' existing institutions and becoming a 'counterweight' (i.e. an enemy) to the United States in world politics.

The latter vision is insane as well as thoroughly bad in every detail. Nevertheless, it is widely held in Europe, and the conflict between that and the sane conception of the EU, which is also widely held, is the real 'clash of civilisations', or cultures, that is relevant to this issue. This is the reason for President Chirac's visceral rejection of EU membership for Turkey. For in his conception of what 'EU membership' would mean, not only would unlimited numbers of Turkish people be able to trade freely, travel and work in France, to the benefit of all, they would be able to vote there.

By the way, as long as that other clash of civilizations remains unresolved – between Islamofascism and the rest of the world including in particular the secular half of Turkish political culture – we should regard Turkish membership of even the first type of EU with some suspicion. But if carefully implemented, it could help the right side to prevail in both clashes.

Tue, 06/29/2004 - 17:57 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Trading EU seats for support

Why didn't Bush invited Turkey into unified US of A & T?

If you don't like EU economy or politics then why would you advise your friend to go into it? How can Bush possibly promise Turkey to assist with EU membership?

Many questions like this can be raised. Not all of them are irrational.

by a reader on Thu, 07/01/2004 - 09:04 | [reply](#)

Turkey and the EU

As surprising as it might seem, even though the EU is a festering pool of economically illiterate surrender monkeys with delusions of grandeur, there are worse people, like the group to whom they want to surrender.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sat, 11/20/2004 - 02:10 | [reply](#)

Turkey and bush

its just not right to do things like that even if you are President

by kristie on Wed, 11/24/2004 - 02:18 | [reply](#)

you are so right

you are so right

by kristie Leigh on Wed, 11/24/2004 - 02:20 | [reply](#)

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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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Conspiracy Theories Kill And Cripple On Schedule

A few months ago we reported on a lunatic conspiracy theory adopted by the Islamist authorities in Kano, northern Nigeria: **Islamism, Lunatic Conspiracy Theories, And Death**. Their holy men had told them that that the polio vaccine donated by America had been poisoned in a plot to sterilise Nigerian Muslims. We remarked:

Conspiracy theories kill. And cripple.

Unfortunately, this is now **happening** in Kano:

An outbreak of polio has hit children in the Nigerian state of Kano. Kano is one of the Muslim states that had boycotted the use of the polio vaccine. Many Muslim states in Nigeria banned the polio vaccine because those in charge said the Americans were using the vaccines to make their population infertile. Many of them said the vaccine would also be used to spread AIDS in the region. Despite appeals from neighbouring countries to vaccinate its population, the conspiracy theorists in Nigeria got their way.

Now, as expected, polio is beginning to spread among children in the region. Now the local authorities are appealing for urgent assistance.

What sort of assistance do they mean? Regime change? Well, they're not going to get that as a gift from the West. Nor would it be right if they did. Yet nothing less can prevent such obscenities – and far worse ones – from happening again. And again. It is a terrible shame.

Sat, 07/03/2004 - 23:22 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

In The Tradition Of Roosevelt

Scott Ott of Scappleface urges the Democratic Party to adopt the war philosophy of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt:

"We are not a warlike people. We have never sought glory as a nation of warriors. We are not interested in aggression. We are not interested--as the dictators are-- in looting. We do not covet one square inch of the territory of any other nation. Our vast effort, and the unity of purpose which inspires that effort are due solely to our recognition of the fact that our fundamental rights are threatened...These rights were established by our forefathers on the field of battle. They have been defended--at great cost but with great success--on the field of battle, here on our own soil, and in foreign lands, and on all the seas all over the world. There has never been a moment in our history when Americans were not ready to stand up as free men and fight for their rights."
[Radio address from Hyde Park Library, September 1, 1941]

The contrast between Roosevelt's values and those of the inheritors of his party today is stark and depressing. One could equally well quote a **more recent President from the same party**:

The world is very different now. For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life. And yet the same revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought are still at issue around the globe--the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state but from the hand of God.

We dare not forget today that we are the heirs of that first revolution. Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans--born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage--and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed,

and to which we are committed today at home and

around the world.

Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill,
that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any
hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure
the survival and the success of liberty.

This much we pledge--and more. [President John F
Kennedy, Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961.]

Some time between then and now, something terrible happened to
the Democratic Party. And therefore to America, and the world.

Mon, 07/05/2004 - 13:27 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

here's a difference

the second speech twice mentions enemy nations. it seems to take
it for granted there are such things. this defeats JFK's message,
because according to the message rather than talking to these
enemy nations he ought to be blowing them up.

i think two major, related parts of what changed are: the left got
friendly with atheism, and the left adopted mechanical
pseudovalues and began trying to see the world in terms of them
(this is evident when they try to analyse moral choices in terms of:
greed, money, multilateral agreement, number of dead soldiers,
number of dead civilians, or the root cause of terrorism is that we
do things that upset their ideology. they don't seem to notice that
the ideology itself is immoral and invalid.)

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 07/05/2004 - 16:41 | [reply](#)

Changes

I'd like to add another factor regarding this change. Whenever the
Democratic Party is in power, the change is not as big as it may
now seem. President Clinton was also prepared to defend liberty at
home and abroad with military might. See Serbia and Somalia. Now
the fact is, those were very bad choices for military interference,
but it does demonstrate the principle that Democrats are not always
pacifists. They are only pacifists when the Republicans are in power.
Democrats do not oppose the war in Irak because they oppose the
war in Irak. They oppose the ware in Irak because they oppose
President Bush. If Clinton had gone to war in Irak, all of them would
be cheering about the liberation of Irak.

A pacifist is someone who lets other people fight his wars.

A pacifist is someone who prefers slavery over war.

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Tue, 07/06/2004 - 10:54 | [reply](#)

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Released Guantanamo Detainees Return To Battle

This [via [Belmont Club](#)]

"We've already had instances where we know that people who have been released from our detention have gone back and have become combatants again," said Rep. Porter J. Goss, Florida Republican, chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence.

is reminiscent of [this](#).

Fri, 07/09/2004 - 02:02 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Don't release them after you torture them!

by a reader on Sat, 07/10/2004 - 22:50 | [reply](#)

Riiight

When faced with theories:

a) These are zealous combatants whose commitment to killing for their cause is much stronger than their concern over repeated detention by Americans.

and

b) These are innocent people who happened to end up in American detention and turned to active combat because of American torture.

What kind of person thinks b) is more plausible?

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Sun, 07/11/2004 - 19:50 | [reply](#)

Re: Riiight

I didn't say "These are innocent people who happened to end up in American detention and turned to active combat because of American torture." I wanted to bring up torture because "**The**

World" consistently ignores or glazes over aspects of reality that

don't fit their "theories". e.g. That the Guantanamo detentions are in violation of the Geneva Convention - that the U.S. signed. The the Bush admin violated the U.S. Constitution requiring a declaration of war - in which case they would be POWs not illegal combatants. Of course "**The World**" in its wisdom knows that it is OK to violate such documents as long as you are working for a "higher" moral purpose.

by a reader on Tue, 07/13/2004 - 01:53 | [reply](#)

making things up..?

when has the world ever invoked argument by "higher" moral purpose? source plz.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 07/13/2004 - 04:42 | [reply](#)

to 1:53 GMT

I'm against torture and all, but

1. Detained unlawful combatants (to the extent that these are who is housed at Gitmo) do not enjoy Geneva Convention protections. That's their fault not ours, for having engaged in some set of behaviors or another which causes them not to fit the definition of people covered by the Geneva Conventions. (People tend to assume the Geneva Conventions (of which there are more than one) all say something akin to "Signatories must be Nice to all people under all circumstances"; this is not the case.) There may be some being held at Gitmo who *do* fit the definition of someone covered by Geneva Convention protections - we'd have to check - but I don't guess you know one way or the other any more than I do. If so (it's certainly possible), those individual cases ought to be remedied to be sure they are being given GC-conforming treatment.

Of course, none of that need entail releasing them back into Afghanistan anytime in the near future.

2. Whether they are illegal combatants is not determined per se by whether the US declared war. On the other hand, someone in the Bush admin may have actually made that argument (I don't know - it does sound familiar). What I do know is that the US Declaring War would not automatically transmogrify all belligerents into legal combatants entitled to full GC protections. It doesn't really work that way, they have to satisfy some criteria (chain of command, distinguishing mark or uniform, can't engage in war crimes, etc.)

(Incidentally a better bet for you here, if you want to complain about torture, is just to bring up the international treaty on torture (I'm not sure that's what it's called), which I believe the US has signed...you would actually have a point there, probably...).

3. The "War Powers authorization" system of commencing war is

not my favorite thing in the world, but it has passed Constitutional muster according to the Supreme Court, and anyway, if the Bush admin violated the Constitution in commencing a war within the rubric of the War Powers Act, then so did the Clinton admin, Bush 1 admin, etc. And at least they did their thing under an actual Congressional act; for Korea and Vietnam they just kinda called them "police actions"... As I'm sure you well know there's been no "Declaration of War" since WW2, making this kind of a silly complaint.

--Blix

by a reader on Tue, 07/13/2004 - 07:50 | [reply](#)

Re: making things up..?

I don't mean "higher" in the sense of a "higher authority", only in the sense that the of waging war seems highest value - to which all other values are subordinate. But there is more to it than that; "**The World**" doesn't even acknowledge that certain values might be significant (such as constitutionality). This implies to me that "**The World**" has contempt for such values - that the end justifies the means.

by a reader on Wed, 07/14/2004 - 23:55 | [reply](#)

Bizarre

Some bloke wrote:

'I don't mean "higher" in the sense of a "higher authority", only in the sense that the of waging war seems highest value - to which all other values are subordinate.'

Waging war is not a high value, it the least crappy of a crappy set of choices.

'But there is more to it than that; "**The World**" doesn't even acknowledge that certain values might be significant (such as constitutionality).'

We don't fetishise the Constitution and mention it all the time. America might be a better place in some ways if the US government stuck to the powers awarded to it by the Constitution. However, I fail to see the relevance of this as it would still require the government to defend America and part of that would involve fighting a war against Islamists, rogue regimes and so on who want to murder Americans.

'This implies to me that "**The World**" has contempt for such values - that the end justifies the means.'

A bizarre interpretation of the World's writings to match a bizarre complaint about them.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Thu, 07/15/2004 - 01:03 | [reply](#)

Where does it end?

If "the world" has no problem with violating the constitution to wage war what else is it willing to accept? Rounding up people with arabic sounding names? How about conscription? Here's your chance "**The World**". Tell us...is the war still worth fighting if our children are forced into the military? Come on TCSer's, carefully nurture your children - so we can throw them into the meat grinder when they turn 18!

So what if you end up becoming more like your enemy, it is still worth it.

by a reader on Fri, 07/16/2004 - 03:50 | [reply](#)

err

Are you saying that rounding up arabs into camps is only wrong b/c of what the Constitution says?

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 07/16/2004 - 15:41 | [reply](#)

No...

I'm asking what other (presumably) values "**The World**" would abandon in the name of fighting Islamists.

by a reader on Sat, 07/17/2004 - 01:20 | [reply](#)

If...

...you were a tree...

'If "the world" has no problem with violating the constitution to wage war what else is it willing to accept?'

Yes, that tricky word 'if'. Meaning 'on condition that' in this context. I have yet to see any specific allegation about what part of the Constitution you think the World is in favour of violating.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sun, 07/18/2004 - 01:02 | [reply](#)

International Money Fountain

Jeffrey Sachs, an economic advisor to Kofi Annan, has said that African countries should renege on their debts:

“The time has come to end this charade. The debts are unaffordable,” said Jeffrey Sachs, director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University and special adviser to Annan on global anti-poverty targets. “If they won't cancel the debts I would suggest obstruction; you do it yourselves.”

No doubt many of them will follow this advice, for the simple reason that they never had any intention of paying their debts. Many of them are torn apart by civil war and/or ruled by vicious thug regimes that are the very reasons why they are poor in the first place. They are obviously not good loan risks. So who is lending to them?

The short answer is taxpayers. The somewhat longer answer is the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)**. For all practical purposes, the IMF is a tax funded institution for showering money on governments. But not all governments qualify. Only those who have caused economic catastrophes in their countries.

The IMF also showers these governments with advice (**often bad advice**) on how to be more financially responsible. However, whether or not the governments follow this advice, the IMF will usually keep 'lending' them money anyway.

This pretence that the IMF (directly or through its pretend-bank, the World Bank) is giving loans is indeed a silly and destructive charade. It causes companies to invest in non-viable projects in non-viable countries on the understanding that they will be wholly or partially bailed out if it all goes wrong. If Western governments really insist on giving money to charity they should insist on giving it to suffering people, not those who make them suffer. The only good reasons for a government to give money to another government are strategic or military ones, or as payment for doing something they want them to do, like fighting terrorism. The hostile and/or bad governments who form the IMF's main client base deserve nothing. And the IMF itself should be closed down.

Damned, good post. --Blix

by a reader on Mon, 07/12/2004 - 22:22 | [reply](#)

Good Article

The IMF is clearly the guarantor (or partial guarantor) of bad credit of their rather unmandated choice and should be scrapped.

However (re 1st bit of last para)

I don't really see the effective difference between the IMF/World Bank in this role or if they were partially or wholly funding the loans themselves ...or have I missed something? Doesn't a guarantee or unguaranteed loan have, in this case, the same exposure?

by a reader on Tue, 07/13/2004 - 15:58 | [reply](#)

Insane Conspiracy Theories In Influential Circles

The significant, often determining role played by insane **conspiracy theories** in current affairs is being dangerously underestimated. Here are some that have been espoused recently by prominent people:

- The **Supreme Leader of Iran**, Ayatollah Khamenei, thinks that the United States and Israel are behind the recent spate of kidnappings and beheadings of foreign nationals in Iraq.
- Crown Prince Abdullah, the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia, is **95% certain** that the recent terrorist attacks against Westerners and oil installations in Saudi Arabia were perpetrated by "Zionists". Other Saudi officials were quick to agree and expand on this thesis: Prince Nayef, the Saudi Interior Minister said, "Al-Qaida is backed by Israel and Zionism."
- A **successful popular song** in the United States contains the lyrics "Why did Bush knock down the Towers?" Jadakiss, the singer, commented: "A lot of my people felt that he [Bush] had something to do with [the destruction of the World Trade Center]."
- Michael Moore's **conspiracy-theory-laden movie Fahrenheit 9/11** won the Palme d'Or at Cannes and is enjoying huge success at the box office.
- Yasser Arafat has said that the recent bus bombing in Tel Aviv was **masterminded by Israel**. (The attack was in fact carried out by his own Aksa Martyrs Brigades terrorists.)
- Vanessa Redgrave, the celebrated actress and United Nations 'Goodwill Ambassador' has **stated** as fact that Israeli snipers habitually murder Palestinian schoolchildren in their classrooms.

No mother could possibly be accustomed to the fact that her little girl will go to school "and will sit with her classmates and an Israeli sniper will shoot at a classroom full of Palestinian children who are in their uniforms with their little scarves," she said in Jerusalem.

"Any Palestinian mother or schoolchild knows that a

schoolchild who is dressed in the uniform can be and is frequently shot in the head – not in the chest, not in the legs, in the head,” she said,

Leaders of countries, role models, and shapers of opinion are affected just as much as billions of people not in the public eye. Anyone who wants to understand world affairs today has to take on board that extreme irrationality of this type, often with a powerful antisemitic component, is a major determinant of opinions and actions worldwide. Restricting one's attention to the factors more usually considered, such as political or economic self-interest, ideology, nationalism, or even strategy or tactics, is like denying the role of viruses in causing influenza.

Tue, 07/13/2004 - 13:22 | [permalink](#)

Can make a modest contribution

Woman oppression in muslim countries is caused (allegedly) by US politics, because: 1) US created Bin Laden, 2) "supports illegal regimes" of Saudi family and Iran's shakh (in the past). Afganistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia represent the worst woman oppression examples - USA is to blame.

How do you like this sort of logic?

See for yourself:

<http://www.fpif.org/pdf/vol5/30ifwomen.pdf>

by a reader on Tue, 07/13/2004 - 15:22 | [reply](#)

Goodwill...?

I'm sensing Vanessa Redgrave doesn't understand the term 'Goodwill Ambassador'. Just a hunch, not quite sure where it came from.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Thu, 07/15/2004 - 01:09 | [reply](#)

Michael Moore

See also [this site](#) and [this one](#) about Michael Moore.

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Fri, 07/16/2004 - 12:43 | [reply](#)

“Worth Achieving At Any Cost”

The Times **claims** to have inside information that the Bush Administration is planning to “act to foment revolt” in Iran, in order to achieve regime change there without military action. A pre-emptive strike on Iran's nuclear-weapons manufacturing facilities is also allegedly mooted.

Of course, Iran vitriolically **denies** having any such facilities.

However, at at the end of the article, we find:

Despite the US threats one of Iran’s top ruling clerics vowed yesterday that the Islamic republic would continue to pursue its controversial nuclear programme. “We are resolute. It is worth achieving it at any cost,” Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, head of the Guardians Council, said.

Yes: increasing Iran's electricity supply by 1% outweighs any other national goal and is worth achieving at all costs.

That *is* what their nuclear programme is for, isn't it?

Sun, 07/18/2004 - 00:35 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

1%?

Not that the figure sounds very far off, just curious where *The World* got its projection of 1% electricity increase. Is it a guess or a calculated value? Of course, even it was significantly more, its still not worth achieving "at all costs".

by a reader on Mon, 07/19/2004 - 20:27 | [reply](#)

Re: 1%

It was a pure guess.

A more accurate guess would be:

Iran's **annual electricity production**: 124.6 billion kWh (2001), which is equivalent to a power of about 14GW. The installed capacity must be at least that. Capacity of the **power station**

under construction: 1GW. So the proposed increase in capacity is

no more than 7%.

Close enough.

by **Editor** on Mon, 07/19/2004 - 21:14 | [reply](#)

Re: 1%

Yes, but that's the wrong calculation.

If this was really about increasing electric power, you'd have to subtract from your 7% the electricity they would get by spending the same money on conventional power stations. So the net increase might be 1% after all. Or even negative.

by a reader on Tue, 07/20/2004 - 04:12 | [reply](#)

Nothing There To Vote For

Michael Howard is now sounding increasingly like a parody of himself. His latest statement on Iraq is that he **would not** have voted to go to war in Iraq on the basis of WMD if he had known about flaws in the intelligence. But...

Mr Howard said he could not have backed the Commons pre-war motion on WMD, but he would have still supported going to war by backing a different motion.

Intellectually, this is pure sophistry. Politically, it is yet more **cynical opportunism**, designed for nothing other than to pick up a few careless votes by provoking the inevitable headline "Howard changes mind on WMD vote".

Several leading Conservatives have made similar noises. But if a political party gives up on the quaint old idea of having political positions and arguing in their favour, who can support it? What is there to support?

Thu, 07/22/2004 - 23:35 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

erm, how will this get him votes?

NT

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 07/23/2004 - 02:30 | [reply](#)

But...

... where is Bin Laden?

by a reader on Sat, 07/24/2004 - 18:55 | [reply](#)

in answer to your non sequitur

Bin Laden's dead. --Blix

by a reader on Mon, 07/26/2004 - 22:37 | [reply](#)

dead people still have a location

(or multiple locations)

so your answer isn't really an answer ;-p

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 07/26/2004 - 23:48 | [reply](#)

Re: dead people still have a location

Not necessarily, since atoms of a given element are fungible.

by **David Deutsch** on Tue, 07/27/2004 - 00:16 | [reply](#)

touche

Well either way, Elliot's got me there, I didn't really answer the question. ;-)

by a reader on Tue, 07/27/2004 - 01:27 | [reply](#)

It was an answer

I think your response implied that the question had no answer in the form of a location.

I think most questions really mean "Tell me what I'm asking for, or explain why what I'm asking for doesn't make sense, or can't be answered in the way I expect. I don't want a false answer just for the sake of giving me something in the form I requested... I want a response that satisfies me so that I don't have to keep asking the question. I would consider such a response an answer."

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 07/27/2004 - 17:28 | [reply](#)

Yeah but

I was gonna say something like that Gil, but I didn't want to arrogantly presume to speak for A Reader @18:55 by telling him what his question "really" was. Maybe he *really did* want to know where Bin Laden's remains are! And if so, I didn't, and couldn't, answer his question. ;-)

by a reader on Tue, 07/27/2004 - 18:31 | [reply](#)

Speaking For Others

What Blix meant to say is that speaking for other people is a great idea, and hard to mess up.

-- Elliot

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 07/28/2004 - 01:25 | [reply](#)

I don't understand this post.

I don't understand this post. Michael Howard would not have voted to go to war in Iraq on the basis of WMD if he had known about flaws in the intelligence. But he would have voted to go to war based on other arguments. That seems like an entirely consistent, logical, clear and good view point to me. What is your point?

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Wed, 07/28/2004 - 08:01 | [reply](#)

This is nuts

Nothing to vote for? How about the best available side- how about working to *improve* that side, even?

Or, we could just give up, and watch the UK slide into oblivion. I call that passive cynicism.

Whither principled *active* optimism?

Alice

by a reader on Wed, 07/28/2004 - 13:35 | [reply](#)

Equivocation

Henry:

When Michael Howard says that he would not have voted for the war on the basis of WMD, he equivocates between two possible interpretations of his words:

1. That if he had known at the time that there were no WMD stockpiles, he would have insisted, before endorsing the Parliamentary motion to back the war, that it not say that there was good evidence that such stockpiles existed.

Not only is that Howard's position, it is also Prime Minister Blair's position and the position of every MP (and probably every person without exception) who backed the war. It is not something that any sane person would bother to assert, being rather like saying that if he had known in advance that a particular bomb was going to go astray and cause collateral damage, he would not have advocated dropping that particular bomb, but that he would still have backed the general policy of dropping bombs as a tactic in the war.

2. That Tony Blair is guilty of wrongdoing in that he knew (or through negligence did not know) that the intelligence referred to in the motion was false.

Only the interpretation (2) constitutes a 'U-turn' or a 'change of mind' or a criticism of the government or a statement with any political import whatsoever. Howard is not willing or able to defend

position (2) -- because it is indefensible -- which is why he equivocates: to any serious enquiry, he can always claim he meant (1). But he wants to reap some of the political benefit of (2), which is a popular belief. Though his words were very carefully chosen to be slightly closer to (1) than (2), his tone of voice and body language were totally appropriate to (2) and not at all to (1), and given the context, he knew that the press, eager for sensational developments, especially those that tend to justify the anti-war position, would adopt interpretation (2). That is why the headlines were all along those lines. And these events would constitute some much-needed positive press coverage for Howard and the Conservatives on the subject of the war.

by **David Deutsch** on Wed, 07/28/2004 - 13:59 | [reply](#)

Mad vs Bad

The Scotsman tells us (via **Daniel Pipes**) that an international terror suspect is **ill**. What illness afflicts him? Flu? Syphilis? Pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis? Well, no. Nothing like that:

An international terrorist suspect held at a top security psychiatric hospital is seeking bail so that his mental health problems can be treated "in the community", the High Court heard today...

He was held on the grounds that he was suspected of actively supporting and raising funds for various international terrorist groups, including those linked to Osama Bin Laden.

As we have noted before, mental illness **is not a real illness**. This incident nicely illustrates the silliness of the whole idea of mental illness. If someone is capable of raising money to kill infidels, then it seems to us that he is perfectly capable of coping with being in hospital until his trial. We also think that a man who is capable of raising money for a mass murderer must be fairly difficult to upset. We also think he should be in jail so he doesn't run away. That such a capable person has been diagnosed with mental illness says more about the credulousness of psychiatrists than about his state of health.

We also wish to mention, in case it has slipped the government's notice, that we are at war. The government suspects this man of adhering to the enemy. Therefore he should not be running around and whether he is happy or unhappy about this should not be the determining consideration.

Wed, 07/28/2004 - 21:30 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

we are at war????

When was it declared? If it doesn't need to be declared, then when haven't we been at war?

by a reader on Fri, 07/30/2004 - 02:57 | [reply](#)

Sheesh

Is it July?

When was it declared?

If it wasn't declared, then when hasn't it been July?

How can anything be true without a formal declaraction by congress???

Gil

by **Gil** on Fri, 07/30/2004 - 18:37 | [reply](#)

I get it!

Then it must be an undeclared war, ho hum.

by a reader on Fri, 07/30/2004 - 22:54 | [reply](#)

It was declared

it was declared [here](#).

by a reader on Fri, 07/30/2004 - 23:19 | [reply](#)

Setting The World To Rights

Ideas have consequences.

John Kerry Doesn't Get It

John Kerry made a **speech** at the Democratic Convention last night. In it, he demonstrated that he does not understand the War on Terror:

Let there be no mistake: I will never hesitate to use force when it is required. Any attack will be met with a swift and certain response. I will never give any nation or international institution a veto over our national security. And I will build a stronger American military...

We will add 40,000 active duty troops not in Iraq, but to strengthen American forces that are now overstretched, overextended, and under pressure. We will double our special forces to conduct anti-terrorist operations.

The purpose of the War on Terror is not to go after terrorists who have attacked America. The purpose is not to deter future attacks by assuring prospective perpetrators that they would suffer a "swift and certain response". Both these approaches are ineffective in an era of suicide-terrorism, proliferating weapons of mass destruction, and terrorist-supporting states. Worse than ineffective: they are invitations to attack.

The terrorists are driven by evil ideologies, especially (though not exclusively) Islamism. These ideologies are based on **conspiracy theories** that furnish blanket justifications on demand for unlimited, savage violence against anyone who does not submit to their narrow and twisted vision of how people, and governments, ought to behave. These ideologies do not promise their followers life, so threats of retaliation are ineffective against them. But they do promise the satisfaction of inflicting suffering in the short run, and they promise that in the long run they will prevail by being intrinsically more willing to die. It is only by refuting those promises that the civilised world can end the fear, suffering and poisoning of our political cultures that are brought about by the terrorist threat. Every time a terrorist dies before hurting innocent people, these promises are refuted. Every time a terrorist, and especially a terrorist leader, surrenders in disillusionment with the attractions of death, these promises are refuted. Every time a terrorist-supporting regime ends, and its subjects embark on a decent way of life with life-affirming aspirations, these promises are refuted.

So long as those promises are not refuted, terrorists will hurt and kill innocent people in America and other free countries. It is not a question of if, but of when, how often, and how badly.

The War on Terror is not about responding to terrorist attacks, but putting an end to them. It is not about training special forces to hunt down perpetrators one at a time. It is about destroying the terrorist organisations, the terrorist-supporting regimes, and the evil ideologies that drive them. Anyone who does not understand that is not fit to be President.

Fri, 07/30/2004 - 14:58 | [permalink](#)

how many ppl know this, in the USA?

nt

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 07/30/2004 - 16:07 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

Excellent Post

I think it's possible that John Kerry knows that it would be good to refute these theories, but he doesn't know of a way to do this that would be acceptable to the left.

I think he hopes that a broad western alliance will make this possible. I don't think so. An alliance that opposes terrorism on paper but is unwilling to take effective action to prevent it will not help us. And, I think the alliance he envisions will be unlikely to agree on effective steps to take.

And, rather than discouraging terrorists from attacking such an alliance, I think it might just create a more ambitious target.

I don't think they attacked the United States because they thought it's a weak enemy. They attacked the United States because it's a strong enemy and they think such an attack makes them great, or seem great to followers.

Gil

by **Gil** on Fri, 07/30/2004 - 18:25 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

Very well said

Now lets hope the American people will make the right choice in November.

AIS

by a reader on Fri, 07/30/2004 - 19:08 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

Deterrence could work

The enemy does not believe that he can get to heaven without

sacrificing himself for ends that are both feasible and forewarded by the sacrifice. He has aims on earth, even if those are ultimately only means to get to heaven. If we loom over the clerical regimes and threaten their destruction if terrorists attack, it may deter them. The only way to deter those willing to die is to threaten that which they are willing to die for.


by a reader on Sat, 07/31/2004 - 02:03 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments


Rabin's assasin was driven by an evil ideology.

This ideology is based on a conspiracy theory that furnish blanket justifications on demand for unlimited, savage violence against anyone who does not submit to the assasin's narrow and twisted vision of how people, and governments, ought to behave.

by a reader on Sat, 07/31/2004 - 03:38 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

readers

That a reader @23:03 has difficulty trying to "infer" who the World thinks doesn't get it from a post entitled "John Kerry doesn't get it" is quite puzzling. Reader, the evidence that John Kerry does not understand something crucial is, his words. If that is not good enough evidence for what he does and does not understand then what is?

Reader @2:03 fantasizes that deterrence could work by, I think, threatening to nuke Iran (?) under all circumstances involving a terror attack. That is wrong in general. Reader's post is also wrong in detail; this is wrong - "The enemy does not believe that he can get to heaven without sacrificing himself for ends that are both feasible and forewarded by the sacrifice." What "feasible ends" were forwarded by the 9/11 hijackers' sacrifices? The theory seems to have been that, You strike America at its core, then magically (or, Allah intervening?) America topples. There is also a healthy dose of naive semi Marxist type thinking about how key events can manipulate classes of people whose actions are somehow pseudo scientifically predictable (such and such will "inflame the Muslim world", and then... magically, or Allah intervening, we win (somehow)). So is this wrong - "He has aims on earth, even if those are ultimately only means to get to heaven. If we loom over the clerical regimes and threaten their destruction if terrorists attack, it may deter them." It is true that the Islamofascist has aims on earth, and that these aims involve a global Islamist state, but threatening to attack "the clerical regimes" (Iran..) will not accomplish what you think/imagine. First it would merely prove the Islamofascist correct that we are the Great Satan. Second the Islamofascist cannot but know that Allah would intervene on the side of the faithful and not allow us to carry out the proposed threat, or if he did, it would be part of a larger plan involving bringing about the world under Islam, some other way (i.e. that "the Muslim world gets inflamed, and then magically, because of this, wins" jazz). There is no real deterring someone who is secure in the knowledge that God is on his side and that for their cause to

lose - not just have setbacks, but lose - is metaphysically impossible, a denial of everything they know about their God.

Anyway, I'm not too keen on placing all my chips on a lame "may deter them" construction. "May" doesn't cut it for me, sorry.

This is the type of thing John Kerry does not seem to get.

--Blix

by a reader on Sat, 07/31/2004 - 14:24 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

There is no real deterring

someone who is secure in the knowledge that God is on his side and that for their cause to lose - not just have setbacks, but lose - is metaphysically impossible, a denial of everything they know about their God.

How is there real refuting of someone like this?

by a reader on Sat, 07/31/2004 - 22:14 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

Invalid inference

"If he has not made sure that everyone knows that he does get it, then, under the circumstances, that is in itself evidence that he does not."

No, that is not evidence. First it is a convoluted way of getting to reinforce your own ideas of what you appear to believe. Second, the 'if' in your statement is not based on anything particular other than your inferred ability to read one's mind, or at the least every past and future word. The campaign is young, there are many words to be spoken before its over. I get it. Is that enough to make you sure?

I also read in another post that someone infers that I fantasize that deterrence could work by nuking Iran. Hah. Of course you didn't mean that and I might infer that it was just wild speculation for effect. Otherwise I am sure you are mistaken.

What other inferences would you, Blix, wish to make that are unfounded? My only hope is to make sure that you know that I support George Bush in his divinely guided mission which apparently ensures that all his words show that he is divinely guided. How could he be wrong?

The fact that John Kerry has some experience in war where 'terrorists' wanted to sink his boat and were unsuccessful because he acted correctly both with aforethought and response, however, is of course meaningless. These are surely different times.

Regardless, your inferences about his understanding are nonsense.

A general guideline if you want to convince someone of the strength

of your argument: Stop inferring if you aren't going to make sure that you have ample evidence to back up your allegations. If you don't have ample evidence, make sure that everyone gets your drift, your bias.

What is your drift by the way?

by a reader on Sat, 07/31/2004 - 22:52 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

Correction

Blixa, upon rereading I see that you did not infer that I in particular, but rather another reader fantasizes that threatening to nuke Iran could be a deterrence. I stand corrected of that misreading by my own second reading.

Other than that, my post stands.

by a reader on Sat, 07/31/2004 - 23:01 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

stop saying infer

Reader who uses word "infer",

The only one "inferring" here is you. Or I should say, failing to "infer". Let us recap: **The World** writes a post "John Kerry Doesn't Get It", using John Kerry's words to show that he indeed, doesn't get it. You comment saying that (unbelievably) you find it difficult to infer who **The World** means (and also using "infer" in places where you mean "imply", I think).

You have now been answered: **The World** means John Kerry. Ok? **The World's** evidence for what John Kerry does and doesn't get is, the words of John Kerry. Got a better suggestion? If not, what's your point?

--Blixa

by a reader on Sun, 08/01/2004 - 00:07 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

arg does work

part of Getting It is realising how important it is. if Kerry got it, he would understand it should be the first thing he says, the last thing he says, the thing he says the most, etc, and we would have heard it more times than we heard he served in Vietnam.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 08/01/2004 - 00:39 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

George Bush does not really get it either

"It is about destroying the terrorist organisations, the terrorist-

supporting regimes, and the evil ideologies that drive them."

In this regard, Saddam's Iraq was a but a little league player. And by committing a major part of America's resources to the overthrow of Saddam's regime *at this time* shows that George Bush does not really get it. The major terrorist organisations and terrorist supporting regimes have not been destroyed. The year 2003 was a **21 year high for terrorist attacks. And even in Iraq there is no evidence that terrorist attacks are on the decline. Take a look at the casualty count. You would expect coalition casualties to be on the decline this year. They are not. Rather, 2004 has been a worse year than 2003. Why? It is because Iraq's neighbours are the true hot-beds of terrorism, and these regimes have not been dealt with. The war in Iraq should have been an all out war against Iran, against Pakistan, against Saudi Arabia, and against Israel's enemies in Palestine. These are the countries where Islamism is at its hottest. George Bush never had the balls to tackle such a war, however, preferring the much easier target of Iraq.**

by a reader on Sun, 08/01/2004 - 09:59 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

sorry, not that easy

sometimes tactics don't dictate attacking the hardest target first. often tactics dictate only attacking one target at a time.

it would take a very extensive argument to be persuasive that you understand the relevant tactics better than our military planners.

on the other hand, I'd be happy to see Iran attacked approximately now, and I admit I don't know why they don't start. but that doesn't mean they haven't got reasons! I'm out of that loop.

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sun, 08/01/2004 - 16:03 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

silly

Let's use reader's logic elsewhere--

Big losses at Normandy (a much lesser threat than Berlin BTW - why didn't they attack Berlin first?? who the f**k cares about Normandy??) demonstrated that FDR and Churchill DID NOT GET IT!! ;-)

by a reader on Sun, 08/01/2004 - 17:50 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

"Anyone who does not understand that is not fit to be

President.

Blixa, this is the inference, pertaining to John Kerry, that I find galling. "Anyone who does not understand that is not fit to be President."

For example, "When did you stop beating your wife?"; you would have certainly made sure prior to this that I knew that you don't beat your wife anymore if you no longer beat your wife. Therefore, since you didn't make sure I knew that, you must by your silence on the specifics of this topic have beaten your wife, and now please tell me when you stopped doing this.

You and the World or anyone can state what you think. However **The World** by its use of the inferring statement at the end of the post, John Kerry Doesn't Get It, "Anyone who does not understand that is not fit to be President." juxtaposes lack of evidence in words to infer not 'getting it'. That I can deal with. People do that all the time, base conclusions on insufficient evidence or marginal excerpts.

However, to infer that John Kerry is unfit to be President in the same post by a blanket closing inference is neither reasoned or warranted. It reads like the commentary for a thirty second attack ad. The effect of an attack ad is to bias. Often the intent is to smear. I cannot know that the intent is there, however the effect is certainly one of saying:

A) Words were not spoken to satisfy, "make sure" that **The World** and everyone in it knows that preemptive destruction will be used.

B) Therefore it is a foregone conclusion that John Kerry 'does not get it'. Preemptive destruction must be used when it is warranted.


C) Anyone who does not get it, that preemptive destruction must be used, is unfit to be president of the United States.

D) Inference: therefore John Kerry is unfit to be president.

Biased Attack ad evidence: Invalid inference. Sound reasoning does not work by invalid inference. John Kerry may choose on good evidence when he becomes president to use justified preemptive destruction. It would be most illogical to not consider preemptive destruction as a means where warranted. This falls within the powers of the president. We have no reason to declare that he would not.

by a reader on Sun, 08/01/2004 - 19:33 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

side note: reader@17:50 was

side note: reader @17:50 was me. I want the credit for a good point! ;-)

reader who likes the word "infer" writes:

Blixa, this is the inference, pertaining to John Kerry, that I find

galling. "Anyone who does not understand that is not fit to be President."

Why do you call that an "inference"? Who's inferring what from what? The quote you cite is not an "inference", it's an assertion, a statement, or something like that. You can disagree with that assertion (in which case an argument for why you disagree, might be nice). Or, you can disagree that John Kerry falls into that category (in which case, you have a lot of his own words to explain away). You have done neither.

[wife beating example which I had to read 3 times]

Does not apply. See Elliot's response to you. Me not beating my wife does not require me to convince you I don't beat my wife; it's possible for me to do the former without doing the latter. But in this context (the assertion is..) it's NOT possible to Get It without at the same time understanding the importance of Communicating It.

Anyway, at the very best you're left arguing that *perhaps* John Kerry *does* Get It internally, he's just chosen to say words which convey a failure of Getting It. This would be bad enough on its own - why would he do that? It's also a theory in search of evidence. ("John Kerry Gets It, even though there's no actual evidence that he Gets It from any of his words" is not all that comforting.)

*However **The World** by its use of the inferring statement at the end of the post, John Kerry Doesn't Get It, "Anyone who does not understand that is not fit to be President." juxtaposes lack of evidence in words to infer not 'getting it'.*

There's not a "lack of evidence in words" [that Kerry Gets It]. It's a different situation: there is a *definite wealth of evidence in his words* that he *doesn't* get it. Get it? ;-)

. The effect of an attack ad is to bias.

I suspect **The World** would admit to having a bias. What's your point.

*(A) Words were not spoken to satisfy, "make sure" that **The World** and everyone in it knows that preemptive destruction will be used.*

Again, that's not quite all. In fact words were spoken to indicate that preemptive destruction will NOT be used.

B) Therefore it is a foregone conclusion that John Kerry 'does not get it'.

It's not a "foregone" conclusion. It's a conclusion which follows from his actual words. You're left arguing that at best his words do not indicate his "real" thoughts. Well, let's hope!

Biased Attack ad evidence: Invalid inference

In a sentence please? To the extent I can parse this you're saying

that **The World's** "inference" (conclusion) that John Kerry doesn't Get It is invalid. You haven't explained why however.

John Kerry may choose on good evidence when he becomes president to use justified preemptive destruction.

He "may" choose to nuke the moon, but there's no evidence for either. All we have are his words to go on, and his words indicate that his approach to terrorism will be reflexive and reactive. Do you seriously dispute that? then what?

It would be most illogical to not consider preemptive destruction as a means where warranted.

The question is what qualifies for "warranted". All indications are that Kerry's bar is extremely high.

We have no reason to declare that he would not.

Yes we do. We have the words spoken by John Kerry, which are (usually) in the English language, and thus can be read, understood, and interpreted by people conversant in that language. I still can't figure out why you seem to think his actual words convey nothing about what he thinks or will do. Maybe your contrary position in this thread is really that it's not that John Kerry doesn't Get It, it's that he's a big fat liar and phony? Let us know,

--Blix

by a reader on Sun, 08/01/2004 - 23:58 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

Re:Good point

The editor's comparison of Norway and Iraq may be very appropriate. The Nazi's discovered Britain's plans to invade and invaded as well. Britain lost, and Norway went from a neutral state to a member of the Axis. The particulars may be different in Iraq but the results may be similar i.e.: a strengthening of the enemy. This time in the form of an Iraqi theocracy.

by a reader on Mon, 08/02/2004 - 00:53 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

Normandy comparison invalid

The comparison with Normandy is invalid because there is no evidence that Iraq is being used as a platform in the larger war on terrorism in the way that Normandy was used as a platform for taking Berlin. Where is the big military build-up in Iraq in preparation for, say, the invasion of Iran? Tactics may dictate that only one target be attacked at a time, and I can appreciate that, but Iraq is clearly not being leveraged for military advantage elsewhere. This should be a matter of urgency, and not something that is done if and when the peace is won in Iraq. The Allies did not dither around in Normandy before pressing on. Elliot, I think you are being disingenuous when you say you don't know why the invasion of Iran has not been started. I think you know why and the

reason has nothing to do with tactics. It is because GW does not take the war on terrorism seriously enough.

Reader @09:59

by a reader on Mon, 08/02/2004 - 01:32 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

errr

I'm disingenuous if I don't agree with you and think Bush is doing the war wrong and unfit to be president? Are you kidding? That's no way to argue.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 08/02/2004 - 04:22 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

Well, has it not crossed your mind that...

... there may be a lack of political will to invade Iran?

Reader @09:59

by a reader on Mon, 08/02/2004 - 05:50 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

if i don't put something in the Subject line it'll look weird

The comparison with Normandy is invalid because there is no evidence that Iraq is being used as a platform in the larger war on terrorism in the way that Normandy was used as a platform for taking Berlin.

So the invasion of Iraq could become justified (via becoming analogous to Normandy), though it is now (presumably) not so, but only if the US were to use it to stage an invasion of somewhere else. Fascinating! One answer to you is "stay tuned". (Unless Kerry is elected, presumably.)

Tactics may dictate that only one target be attacked at a time, and I can appreciate that, but Iraq is clearly not being leveraged for military advantage elsewhere.

Not yet (stay tuned), although it has been and is being leveraged for (a) military advantage *in Iraq* ("flytrap" for "foreign fighters") and (b) nonmilitary advantage elsewhere (cf. Libya).

The Allies did not dither around in Normandy before pressing on.

So? I never said the situations were identical thus the idea that all analogous events would occur on precisely analogous timescales, or even that it was meant to be an event-for-event analogy, is rather silly. I freely concede that World War 2 is not a literal blow-by-blow

allegorical template for the current war, if that's what you're

saying.... --Blix

by a reader on Mon, 08/02/2004 - 06:59 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

Where is the urgency in "Stay tuned"?

"So the invasion of Iraq could become justified (via becoming analogous to Normandy), though it is now (presumably) not so, but only if the US were to use it to stage an invasion of somewhere else"

Well, according to the World, the war on terrorism is about destroying terrorist organisations, terrorist-supporting regimes, and the evil ideologies that drive them. I agree with this 100%. But Saddam's Iraq constituted a *possible* future threat. The clear and present danger lay - as it still does - elsewhere in the Middle East (and I applaud GW for taking out the Taliban, for they were one of these dangers). So although Iraq deserved to be taken out, it cannot be the primary objective and the war on terrorism will be lost if it is an end in itself. "Stay tuned" is not a good enough answer, and I'm wondering on what basis you say it. The war on terrorism is not something that can wait. The invasion of Iran should be well underway already. What reason can there be for holding back? Flypaper is all well and good, but flypaper does not win wars.

Sure WWII is not a literal blow-by-blow allegorical template for the current war, but strategy is strategy and I would have thought that, as in Normandy, speed and follow-through are essential in the war on terrorism. Dithering will cost lives.

by a reader on Mon, 08/02/2004 - 09:01 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

I merely said "stay tuned" wa

I merely said "stay tuned" was a possible answer. I don't know what is in the heads of either Bush (..or his neocon puppetmasters as the case may be ;-). For all I know there will be no more invasions due to skittishness caused by fallout from the Iraq war that he "lied us into". A better phrasing of that explanation is that a decision was made to eschew high profile military use "until the election" due to political considerations. If so, that is the reason holding them back (public opinion). That's a shame but cannot be unexpected in a democracy.

That being said I don't know that Invading Iran per se is the clear-cut necessary thing to do in the first place. Yes I would be all in favor of an invasion of Iran to destroy that regime. However I am aware that there is an alternate view than invading Iran would be counterproductive because it is "ripe for revolution" due to all the young people etc. and some kind of undermining the regime/aiding the rebels strategy would be better. Sounds plausible to me *shrug* If you have some sort of Urgency-Of-Invasion calculation device which allows you to make these sweeping proclamations of who must be invaded before whom thus second-guessing more

professional strategists, please share it with the rest of the class. (In arguments like these, a lot of people seem to have such a device but won't show it to me. So frustrating!)

I also am not as convinced that "speed" is as necessary as you are. Strategy does not always or uniformly dictate speed. If you are holding a position of strategical strength, enemy forces attacking from weakness idiotically, and you are destroying them with high ratios, I would think that strategy could in that case dictate that you stay put as long as possible.

The caveat there is Iran's rush to go nuclear, and I admit to hoping for an Osirik-like attack to stave that off, because there is little else that seems likely to work.

No, "flypaper" does not win wars. A single battle does not win wars. A maneuver does not win wars. Soldier #XYZ taking his ABC'th step will not win the war. This is a silly way to speak; parsing the events and circumstances of a war, and viewing each one in isolation, you can always make the case that such and such (by itself) "will not win the war". That doesn't mean it can't be part of a larger strategy which will win the war. This is a global war but that does not mean we can or that it is even desirable for us to rush from front to front as quickly as possible. In fact, it is in our interest to serialize our enemies as much as possible, not openly starting a fight until we are ready to do so and/or until we need to.

Again, I agree this all goes out the window if Iran does indeed go nuclear and becomes "untouchable". If this comes too close to happening this could certainly place Iran into that "need to" category, but if you have some definite knowledge that it's there right now, on 8/2/2004, you're better informed about the progress of Iran's nuclear program than I am.

by a reader on Mon, 08/02/2004 - 16:07 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

A Blix-style non-empty subject line so it won't be all wierd

"For all I know there will be no more invasions due to skittishness caused by fallout from the Iraq war that he "lied us into". A better phrasing of that explanation is that a decision was made to eschew high profile military use "until the election" due to political considerations. If so, that is the reason holding them back (public opinion). That's a shame but cannot be unexpected in a democracy."

Which is just a polite form of my argument. But to let the politicians off with an "that's a shame but cannot be unexpected in a democracy." doesn't cut it. If it is just a matter of time before the next 9-11, then time is a luxury we do not have, and that is why I believe speed is necessary (tho' I don't have some magic urgency-of-invasion calculator). There may be tactical and strategic reasons I am unaware of for not invading Iran - and I do understand the

points you have made, but I don't think it is that subtle. And if the

reason is indeed political skittishness, then GW's war on terrorism will turn out to be no better than JK's. For what sort of war on terrorism do you have if you allow fear of the consequences of your past mistakes ("lying" etc) to dictate the future cause of the war?

BTW, I see that "stay tuned" was a just a possible answer, but I'm still wondering if you know something I do not. If "stay tuned" is just a desire on your part for action, then it is no argument for why GW's future war on terrorism would be any better than JK's.

Reader @09:59

by a reader on Tue, 08/03/2004 - 01:16 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

An Obervation On War Strategy

There's an excellent reason for taking Iraq first. Oil. (Keep reading, god dammit)

Since the dawn of war, prime targets have **always** been those that in some way pay for the operation needed to take them. In times long past this often meant striking at weak agrarian areas (for food) before moving on to hit other, more important (from a military perspective) targets.

It follows that, in a long-term military campaign against terrorism, it would be beneficial to strike at weaker targets with greater payoff.

This appears to be sound military strategy... to this untrained strategist, anyway.

And no, I have nothing to say on Kerry. Everyone else is doing fine in that department.

-Dan

by a reader on Wed, 08/04/2004 - 16:54 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

Russia

On the question of oil, watch Russia. She recognizes the economic threat of China and the developing Far East to crude oil, refining, and energy access in the future. She is silently positioning herself to control not only her oil reserves but access to all other available oil resources around the world. This has been done without war, but rather with careful political maneuvering within the economic and capitalist centers of the country and with quiet strategic alliances outside the country but in related and nonrelated states and regimes. That is all I wish to say on Kerry and Bush. Putin is one smart cookie.

by a reader on Thu, 08/05/2004 - 11:46 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

You know, whether or not Bush

You know, whether or not Bush made a valid decision in striking

Iraq was an issue, right? Offering a theory on why it was a useful military move was actually on topic. Really, it was.

-Dan

by a reader on Fri, 08/06/2004 - 02:26 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

9/11 Three Years On - The State of Things

Here is a link to Mark Helprin's column in today's WSJ. This type of clear, thoughtful and informed analysis is not something that we see much nowadays. It shows that one's thinking can be decisive without falling into the trap of being overly simplistic in the effort to make a point.

<http://www.opinionjournal.com/columnists/mhelprin/?id=110005589>

by **Michael Bacon** on Fri, 09/10/2004 - 21:04 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

The Olympics: A Celebration Of What?

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said on CNN television today:

“The greatest moment of the race is not the touching of the wall, or when one swimmer begins to pull ahead of the pack. The greatest moment takes place before the pistol even fires, when, for a brief time, no nation is greater or smaller, stronger or weaker, than any other. For me, that is the Olympic moment.”

Should the Olympics be more a celebration of equality than excellence, then?

A charitable interpretation of Annan's statement would call it a celebration of a moment of fairness, openness and civility among nations, and not as a howl of deep, suppressed resentment that there is a nation (let's not name it, shall we?) that *is* both greater and stronger, politically as well as athletically, than any other. But on either interpretation, this quote illustrates the fact that it is high time that the Olympic Games, and sport generally, ceased to be about *nations*. The spirit of the Olympic Games should become more like that of the Wimbledon Open Championship and less like that of the United Nations General Assembly.

Sun, 08/01/2004 - 21:31 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Fix the Scoring Too

It would be nice if the events with subjective scoring involved voting that was less like the UN as well.

by [Gil](#) on Wed, 08/04/2004 - 01:00 | [reply](#)

Subjective Scoring

I agree. But subjective scoring is highly unsatisfactory in any case. Perhaps one day, technology would allow the judges to watch performances in high-resolution virtual reality, with the competitors disguised by some real-time algorithms.

Even then, I suppose in many cases competitors could be recognised by their style alone. Well, ultimately, computers should do the judging...

But who would do the programming?

Oh well, back to the drawing board.

by **David Deutsch** on Wed, 08/04/2004 - 02:40 | [reply](#)

objective scoring

Would we want to remove the human element from scoring competitions?

I mean, humans have bias in the forms they prefer in any given endeavor. And if a judge has indigestion from lunch or had a fight with his spouse before leaving the house that morning, it might influence how the judge is going to score that day's competitors.

Seems to me that competitors know this, going in, as part of the conditions of competition.

A computer does not have- and I question as to whether it will ever be possible or desirable for a computer to have- the inexplicit knowledge to be able to judge, say, a Grand Prix dressage horse and rider. Yes, it could perhaps record the mechanical completion of the required pattern to be ridden, but to 'get' the intangibles such as the presence of the horse and rider and how they work together... I don't know that a human judge can pull out and make explicit the process by which such things are judged. Can a computer have and interpret a 'gut feeling'? And yes, I think that gut feelings are important and to be taken into account when making decisions in life, even though such things cannot necessarily be quantified in the harsh light of day.

On another note, I thought the Olympics were supposed to be a competition among amateurs but it seems that most competitors are amateur in name only. Are these competitors nurses and accountants who indulge their passion for their sport on weekends? And are never paid for the practice of their sport, in any way?

Reading on this site:

http://www.olympic.org/uk/organisation/movement/index_uk.asp

it does seem that equality and peace are the goals of the Olympic movement, not excellence. I am particularly intrigued by these stated activities of the Olympic Movement:

"Opposition to all forms of commercial exploitation of sport and athletes"

and

"Raising awareness of environmental problems."

Perhaps the Olympic Movement is actually the UN in disguise! hoping to do away with capitalism and save the world by substituting sports for wars...

by a reader on Wed, 08/04/2004 - 15:46 | [reply](#)

Commercial exploitation of sport etc.

Interesting that an organisation that states they are opposed to commercial exploitation of sport and want to raise awareness of environmental problems seems to be based around a four year cycle of countries having to bid (commercial exploitation) to host the olympics at a huge cost entailing the building of large sports stadiums (environmental impact). Will the white water canoing facility built in Athens be used for training amateur canoists for the next olympics? More likely it will become part of a nice commercial enterprise known as a theme park.

by a reader on Wed, 09/15/2004 - 14:53 | [reply](#)

Academic Study Lets Wal-Mart Off Far Too Lightly

A **study** by University of California researchers claims that the Wal-Mart chain of stores is costing the State of California a mere \$86 million a year. How did they arrive at this absurdly low figure? Like this:

“Wal-Mart workers' reliance on public assistance due to substandard wages and benefits has become a form of indirect public subsidy to the company,” said the report issued by the University of California, Berkeley Labor Center.

“[It] comes at a cost to the taxpayers of an estimated \$86 million annually; this is comprised of \$32 million in health related expenses and \$54 million in other assistance.”

But this method of calculation wilfully neglects the far greater costs that Wal-Mart inflicts on the people whom it *refuses* to employ, or pay, at all! – namely all the other welfare recipients in the State. And it shamelessly ignores the wrongdoing of all the higher-wage employers in California, whose conspiracy not to employ fleeing Wal-Mart workers is a necessary condition for them to be a burden on the State, and for Wal-Mart to exist in the first place.

What could have caused supposedly impartial academic researchers to display such blatant right-wing bias, ignore the massive conspiracy that is staring them in the face, and whitewash a bunch of companies who are, quite frankly, capitalist? The answer to any such question is always the same: *follow the money*. Who do you think pays the salaries of these idle, bourgeois parasites on the backs of the working people of California? Why, the taxpayer, of course – in other words, *Wal-Mart*, and the other employers. Is it any wonder that their lackeys are reluctant to bite the hand that feeds them?

Tue, 08/03/2004 - 20:54 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

What I can't imagine

is why anyone would be so dumb as to work at Walmart if they were capable of doing anything else. However I also wonder why migrants pick oranges. Maybe it is because people need to eat to

live and nothing is free even if you live in California. I would rather work at Walmart then pick oranges. I would also rather not live in California among the millions of idle burzwazie parasites. So I do none of the above.

by a reader on Wed, 08/04/2004 - 01:56 | [reply](#)

satisfying

i just want to say i admire the elegance and self-consistency of this post. ;-)--Blix

by a reader on Fri, 08/06/2004 - 04:44 | [reply](#)

Re: satisfying

Thank you! :)

by **Editor** on Fri, 08/06/2004 - 16:48 | [reply](#)

Who Do They Think Joe Lieberman Is?

In a sad op-ed entitled **Joe Lieberman: A lonely voice of moderation**, (via **InstaPundit**), James Kirchick ponders the change in the stance of the Democratic Party since the last election (part of a wider a change that we, too, have **commented** on):

It was only four years ago that Lieberman was his party's vice-presidential candidate. Now, following a war that he strongly supported but was unpopular with the base, Lieberman has lost his luster within the Democratic Party. Slighted by Al Gore, upstaged by Howard Dean and largely ignored by the delegates, Lieberman is truly now a man without a party.

[...]

One would have thought that American victories in Afghanistan and Iraq, specifically the liberation of some 50 million once-terrorized people, would be a source of pride for the party of Wilson, Roosevelt and Kennedy. True, this administration made mistakes in pressing the case for war, but at the end of the day, citizens of this country can be unequivocally proud of the fact that we are attempting to impart, however imperfectly, liberal democracy to nations that up until recently squirmed under the dual jackboots of religious fascism and Stalinist terror.

Lieberman told the Democrats in Boston that they should appreciate the magnitude of what our military has accomplished, and there is little doubt that the Republicans will use American victories in Afghanistan and Iraq to portray President Bush as liberator. But Democrats should not forget that an admirable tradition of liberal internationalism exists within their party. It's a shame that the standard bearer of this legacy would be so spurned by the party that asked him to help lead it a mere four years ago.

Our question is: if Lieberman is a man without a party, what does his party think he is? Not 'a lonely voice of moderation', surely, for most people do not think of themselves as lunatic extremists. So

what is Lieberman, to his party? The lone voice of the Bush-Hitler

administration? The lone dupe of the neo-con conspiracy? A madman who still believes in liberal international values? Or what?

Fri, 08/06/2004 - 16:31 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

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Water Alarm

Prozac has been found in our drinking water. Norman Baker MP, Liberal Democrat shadow environment secretary, can't have been drinking much water lately because he seems very upset:

Mr Baker said: "This looks like a case of hidden mass medication of the unsuspecting public and is potentially a very worrying health issue..."

"It is alarming that there is no monitoring of levels of Prozac and other pharmacy residues in our drinking water..."

We have bad news for Mr Baker: water isn't perfectly clean and it never will be. Even the freshest mountain stream contains traces of the **EU's dreaded nitrates**, from thunderstorms – and is quite frighteningly open to anything that might happen to fall into it out of a bird overhead. Enclose all mountain streams in hygienic plastic pipes, we say! The more chemicals you want to take out of the water, the more money it costs, and there is a limit to how much you can spend before it becomes harmful to divert any more money from other goods. Nor is it alarming that the government doesn't look for Prozac in our drinking water, because there is no reason to think that it will be there in toxic levels. Looking would be a waste of money.

However, we expect that Mr Baker's attempts to make a molehill into the Matterhorn will continue because he, like many other environmentalists, suffers from such a deficiency of proportion and perspective that no conceivable level of precaution would satisfy him and no amount of Prozac-laced drinking water would calm him.

Mon, 08/09/2004 - 22:06 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

That's Not All

I hope he doesn't find out about all of the dihydrogen monoxide in the water!

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 08/10/2004 - 03:43 | [reply](#)

Shouldn't the comment 'Subject' be optional?

I'm more upset by all the PrO.zac!! in my mailbox.

by [Kevin](#) on Tue, 08/10/2004 - 12:52 | [reply](#)

Hear hear!

Most people seem to think there's a fundamental aura-like difference between molecules that come from "pure", "natural" sources and dirty, man-made "chemicals". But they all pop into and out of existence within the same planetary system and they're all composed of atoms, which are in turn composed of protons, neutrons and electrons, which are in turn ... blah blah. A molecule of dihydrogen monoxide produced by a car engine is *exactly* the same as the water molecule that gently diffuses from the leaf of an alpine shrub.

Another common error is to assume that an impurity is undesirable or toxic at any concentration, however low. So, no level of prozac is acceptable. Even 1 molecule of prozac per litre of river water is unacceptable. This is nuts - the dose makes the poison.

Environmentalists might do better to draw attention to certain other molecules which are *deliberately* introduced into mammalian bodies with government approval.

Hexafluorosilicic acid and ethylmercury are both highly toxic. It's illegal to pour them down the sink, put them in rivers or release them into the open air. However, the first is added to public water supplies in several parts of the world because it supposedly reduces tooth decay slightly in young teenagers. (The studies that support this practice are dated and dubious, for example they were not performed blindly.) The second substance is a breakdown product of thiomersal, a preservative used in vaccines injected into small babies in the UK (while stocks last). The microgram quantities involved probably haven't caused any harm, but ... whoa! Considering the large number of other activities in our culture where the use of heavy metals has been phased out, did vaccines have to come last?

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Wed, 08/11/2004 - 00:14 | [reply](#)

the point?

Is that by the pint or the liter or by the hogshead?

I say ban ridiculous stories. Remove the nut cases. Without ridiculous stories and nut cases there would be nothing to rail on about.

Water is the universal solvent. Large amounts of water drunk in immoderation are toxic. Too much water and vital balances of the body are disturbed.

Beware of water overdose. Alarum, alarum!

by a reader on Wed, 08/11/2004 - 02:42 | [reply](#)

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Al Qaeda's Candidate?

The impending US Presidential election and the recent terror alerts have caused many commentators to speculate about which of the candidates Al Qaeda would prefer. Bush's supporters tend to conclude that Kerry is Al Qaeda's candidate, because he has **no idea** what the war is about and might therefore be expected to pursue it less effectively. Kerry's supporters say that Al Qaeda wants Bush to win, because, by fighting without the approval of France and Germany, he is increasing the rage and alienation of Muslims everywhere and thus assisting terrorist recruitment.

Both these theories are false. They both make the fundamental mistake of assuming that Al Qaeda has a strategy. It does not. It merely has a **fantasy ideology**. Yes, Al Qaeda and its countless supporters are all yearning for a mega-attack on Americans before the election. Yes, they yearn to 'have an effect' on that election. But there is no such thing as 'the effect that they want' – or, to put that another way, provided that an attack causes death and pain and fear, there is no such thing, to them, as its not having had the desired effect. If they succeed in perpetrating such an attack, then whatever the outcome of the election, it will immediately go on their hallowed list of anti-American successes. And as they strut and bluster and celebrate, they will pick one of the two rationales mentioned above (they can always change it again later if circumstances dictate), and say that it was theirs.

Wed, 08/11/2004 - 21:59 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

There is a difference...

I think you, and perhaps also the commentators you (don't actually) cite, are conflating Al Qaeda with Islamism as an (anti)intellectual movement. Just as surely as George Bush is the candidate in this election who will best serve the long-term interests of Israel and of those who would live free of Islamism everywhere, John Kerry is the candidate who is most likely to revivify the policies of habitual capitulation that are necessary for Islamism to prosper in the West. Whatever Al Qaeda happens to say, now or later, John Kerry is clearly their man.

by a reader on Thu, 08/12/2004 - 17:37 | [reply](#)

Read Al Qaeda correspondence

Atlantic Monthly article has the actual correspondence of Al Qaeda up to and including October 2001 from actual hard drive information. To say that Al Qaeda has no strategy is false. Strategy may be flawed but it is clearly calculated and different from what you assume.

by a reader on Fri, 08/13/2004 - 02:25 | [reply](#)

Where's the beef?

Lovely. So what is it?

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 08/13/2004 - 05:40 | [reply](#)

Atlantic

Atlantic, September 2004, Al Quaida's Hard Drive. On Newstands.

by a reader on Fri, 08/13/2004 - 14:54 | [reply](#)

Arguments or at least links

Summarise it. You haven't given a reason to think you're source is worth checking out, b/c you haven't said anything of meaning yet.

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 08/13/2004 - 19:11 | [reply](#)

Don't Look

Please don't look. Atlantic Monthly is not worth checking out. Ever.

Read it unless you don't want to read it. I don't summarize on agricultural matters or on letters home.

I would not want to bias anyone's view. Even on choices of fundamentalist underwear, which seemed to bear more discussion than political parties or regime changes, and much less on why Al Quaida mullahed on inciting the invasion of Afghanistan. On that latter point a strategy flaw.

by a reader on Fri, 08/13/2004 - 20:40 | [reply](#)

Greek Civilisation

With the world's attention focused via the Olympic Games on Greek civilisation, the **Simon Wiesental Center** has taken the opportunity to do its job as the ghost at the feast.

When renowned "Zorba" composer Mikis Theodorakis described **Jews as "the root of evil,"** Culture Minister Evangelos Venizelos and Education Minister Petros Efthymiou stood beside him, smiling, at a book signing ceremony heavily covered by the Greek media. Not too long ago, Giorgos Karatzafer, leader of the extreme right Popular Orthodox Party, used the party-owned Piraeus television station to denounce Greek politicians with "Jewish origins" and to claim, "**Jews were behind the 9/11 attacks.**"

[...]

Earlier dialogue between senior Greek diplomats and Wiesenthal Center officials from New York to Berlin has been met with largely empty promises.

And so the Center invites us all to sign a protest addressed to Karamanlis, urging him to "take prompt and vigorous steps to denounce and contain antisemitism and other expressions of hate".

Well, what are you waiting for?

Fri, 08/13/2004 - 22:30 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

What I'm Waiting For

A reason to think this petition is more worth my time than all the rest of them. Being true doesn't mean it's worth the bother. Will it do anything? And more to the point, will me signing or not effect whether it does anything?

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 08/13/2004 - 23:11 | [reply](#)

Why sign?

Let's ask an earlier Greek leader, from the civilisation whose

reputation Karamanlis is attempting to borrow:

There is no exclusiveness in our public life, and in our private business we are not suspicious of one another, nor angry with our neighbor if he does what he likes; we do not put on sour looks at him which, though harmless, are not pleasant. While we are thus unconstrained in our private business, a spirit of reverence pervades our public acts; we are prevented from doing wrong by respect for the authorities and for the laws, having a particular regard to those which are ordained for the protection of the injured as well as those unwritten laws which bring upon the transgressor of them the reprobation of the general sentiment.

So, let us bring upon the transgressor ... the reprobation of the general sentiment.

by **Editor** on Fri, 08/13/2004 - 23:35 | [reply](#)

Our 2¢ Worth On Kerry's Christmas In Cambodia

If you're unaware of the story, blame (and change) your current sources of news, and look, for instance, [here](#). In short, the Democratic Presidential candidate John Kerry has said many times, including in a speech on the floor of the Senate in 1986, that he spent Christmas 1968 in Cambodia while the then-President was denying that there were any US troops there. It has emerged that this cannot be true, but most of the mainstream media, including the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, have yet to mention the controversy. The Kerry campaign is saying that although Kerry made a mistake about the details, something substantially like that did indeed happen.

We are not yet ready to venture an opinion about whether it did or not, but we have two questions. First: why is no one asking Kerry the question: 'who ordered you into Cambodia?' Kerry's commanding officer at the time denies that there were any such missions. And second: why does a substantial segment of opinion well understand, when Kerry allegedly does it, that saying what one believes to be true cannot be lying, but when Bush allegedly does it they become as **thick as two planks**?

Update: Check out [Solomon](#)'s take on this as well.

Sun, 08/15/2004 - 16:47 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Q2

Because in Bush's case they are starting with a conclusion (Bush wicked), then twisting stuff to fit it.

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sun, 08/15/2004 - 18:02 | [reply](#)

Neither candidate

Texans are known for tall tales. So are politicians that are worth their salt. However George Bush does not lie. Nor does John Kerry.

As to Cambodia, it is common knowledge that U.S. special forces

and swiftboats too strayed into Cambodia. The Vietnam war was never defined by mere borders or middles of rivers. Sometimes the intrusions were by intent. Whether or not Christmas dinner was had in Cambodia it makes a good tall tale. I am waiting to hear a better one from the Bush camp. Christmas in Alabama? Naw.

by a reader on Sun, 08/15/2004 - 19:32 | [reply](#)

So, what's the beef?

You link to Instapundit who links to a [Telegraph](#) article that quotes Kerry's biographer:

"On Christmas Eve he was near Cambodia; he was around 50 miles from the Cambodian border. There's no indictment of Kerry to be made, but he was mistaken about Christmas in Cambodia," said Douglas Brinkley, who has unique access to the candidate's wartime journals.

But Mr Brinkley rejected accusations that the senator had never been to Cambodia, insisting he was telling the truth about running undisclosed "black" missions there at the height of the war.

He said: "Kerry went into Cambodian waters three or four times in January and February 1969 on clandestine missions. He had a run dropping off US Navy Seals, Green Berets and CIA guys." The missions were not armed attacks on Cambodia, said Mr Brinkley, who did not include the clandestine missions in his wartime biography of Mr Kerry, Tour of Duty.

"He was a ferry master, a drop-off guy, but it was dangerous as hell. Kerry carries a hat he was given by one CIA operative. In a part of his journals which I didn't use he writes about discussions with CIA guys he was dropping off."

So although Brinkley says Kerry was not in Cambodia on Christmas Day, he does say that Kerry was in Cambodia near that time. So what's the beef: that Kerry slightly changed the dates in his story to tug at a few heartstrings? Is this supposed to be a headline-grapping controversy?

by a reader on Sun, 08/15/2004 - 22:54 | [reply](#)

Where's the beef?

I don't know if there's any beef in this story. Quite possibly there's an innocent explanation, as [The World](#) admits. But the fact that Kerry made this embarrassing mistake, the fact that Kerry's commanding officer denies that there were any missions to Cambodia, the fact that other Swift Boat vets also say there weren't any, and the fact that the vets from Kerry's own Swift Boat who

have been loudly supporting him have not come forward to say that there were, and the fact that Kerry himself is keeping quiet, **is all tremendously newsworthy**. Isn't it?? The fact that the media aren't buzzing with it, and many of them aren't even mentioning it at all is extremely bizarre.

by a reader on Sun, 08/15/2004 - 23:24 | [reply](#)

He-says She-says

The reason the story is not news is that there is no substance to it. It is just he-says she-says and, frankly, has the hallmarks of a smear campaign. Produce some hard evidence to show that Kerry was or was not in Cambodia and you'll have your headline.

by a reader on Thu, 08/19/2004 - 02:35 | [reply](#)

He-says Everybody-Else-says

His own journal says he wasn't there; his commanding officers say he wasn't there; nobody who served with him says he was there.

What kind of evidence would give the story substance?

Gil

by **Gil** on Thu, 08/19/2004 - 15:32 | [reply](#)

What kind of evidence

how about video footage?

;-P

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 08/19/2004 - 23:16 | [reply](#)

E. Nough Ought To Be A Bush Speechwriter

He suggests a **quip**. Brilliant!

[Note: Readers who had no interest in politics in 1988 should look **here** first for one of the great put-downs. Readers who are unaware that the John Kerry campaign have just, embarrassingly, mistaken their candidate for a different Senator, Bob Kerrey, look **here**.]

Tue, 08/17/2004 - 23:32 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Reagan Did It Best

I remember loving it when at the 1992 Republican convention, Ronald Reagan made fun of Bill Clinton for comparing himself to Thomas Jefferson.

Reagan made fun of his own age and put down Clinton by saying:

"This fellow they've nominated claims he's the new Thomas Jefferson. Well let me tell you something:

I knew Thomas Jefferson.

He was a friend of mine.

Governor, *you're no Thomas Jefferson!*"

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Wed, 08/18/2004 - 04:25 | [reply](#)

Ya know, you're the second pe

Ya know, you're the second person so far who has told me that I should write speeches for Republicans. Really, folks, I'm quite happy in my current, not-at-all-political job. ;-)

A belated thanks for the compliment,

E. Nough

by a reader on Wed, 09/01/2004 - 03:55 | [reply](#)

Terrorism In Support Of Evil In Nepal

Islamist conspiracy theories act as the ideological fuel for the actions of many terrorist groups and their supporters, but not all. Anti-capitalism is another major conspiracy theory. It is behind the actions of **Maoist terrorists** in Nepal. Their conspiracy theory holds that economically successful people are responsible (in some never-quite-specified way) for all of the world's ills. Their "solution" is to use violence to impose a communist dictatorship in Nepal, whereupon they will kill all the rich people, thus making everything turn out for the best.

The Nepalese government is pursuing an ominously ill-conceived "peace process" with these terrorists. Naturally the BBC **supports** this because "there is a real concern that Washington is nourishing the belief that this war is winnable", and that would never do. As everyone knows, the only winnable wars are those against America and/or its values.

The difference between this and, say, the Palestinian-Israeli peace process is that there is nothing to negotiate about. It is one thing to say that the Palestinians can have a state if they cease to support terrorism and negotiate about borders, but no civilised country can support any measure of communist tyranny. The only peace terms that the Nepalese government should offer are that the terrorist movement must be disbanded and the future of the country decided by politics not revolutionary violence.

Wed, 08/18/2004 - 20:29 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

“All You Need To Know”

We **said recently** that we were not yet ready to venture an opinion on whether John Kerry's Christmas in Cambodia story was in essence true. Now Senator Kerry has **explained** the basis on which he wants us to form that opinion:

Speaking of the organization airing the ads that challenge his war record, Kerry said, “Of course, this group isn't interested in the truth and they're not telling the truth. ...

“But here's what you really need to know about them. They're funded by hundreds of thousands of dollars from a Republican contributor out of Texas. They're a front for the Bush campaign. And the fact that the President won't denounce what they're up to tells you everything you need to know.”

Some might say that *that* is all you really need to know. We disagree. The fact that the Senator is being evasive, petulant and paternalistic does not prove that he is a liar.

Thu, 08/19/2004 - 20:13 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Right. It's Not Proof.

The World is correct that this statement doesn't prove that Kerry is a liar (well, he's a liar about what is, in fact, "everything you really need to know", but not necessarily about the facts of his service).

However, it does prove that he encourages people to draw conclusions using heuristics that are so bad that they would make the job of a would-be liar much easier.

This seems more consistent with the theory that he's interested in getting away with lying to them, than that he's interested in them knowing the truth.

Still not proof; but that's the way to bet.

Gil

by **Gil** on Thu, 08/19/2004 - 21:56 | [reply](#)

Campaign Financing Subterfuges

And for another side, about neither Bush nor Kerry being liars.

How about those ads? Is it dishonest to fund ads which are not telling the truth and loaded with contradictions? More than that, is it dishonest to orchestrate and fund smear campaigns and not identify yourself?

More than that, is it dishonest to conveniently forget that your time-honored political campaign contributors, wealthy texans which by itself is no crime, are the very same ones who are doing the dirty work, no, rather paying for the dirty work, and expecting political favors in return? Now that's too harsh, really they just believe in those ideals of some republican swift boat vets put to good and nasty use through influence and money and the in the righteous self interest of supporting the right wing republican principles of god and a former texas governor.

Bring it on.

by a reader on Sat, 08/21/2004 - 15:56 | [reply](#)

Re: Campaign Financing Subterfuges

The anonymous reader who finds the funding of non-Party ads more fascinating than their content will no doubt enjoy browsing [opensecrets.org](#), and comparing the financing & budget of **Swift Boat Veterans for Truth** with those of **a group running anti-Bush ads**.

by [Kevin](#) on Sat, 08/21/2004 - 17:21 | [reply](#)

Karl Rove, bigots, and smearing John McCain

Let's get down to brass tacks and talk about Karl Rove and Karl Rove's apparent opinion of veterans who served their country honorably.

John McCain, a Republican and Vietnam war hero, was attacked by Karl Rove and Christian Right Wingers in South Carolina. Rove and his sneaks implied that McCain fathered a black illegitimate child to gain votes from the bigots, take votes from McCain. Rove and his righteous sneaks implied also in a separate tactic that McCain fathered an illegitimate Cambodian child while in a POW camp thereby gaining gentle treatment from Cambodians. That approach was targeted to religious right vets in South Carolina to swing them away from McCain. In actuality, McCain had neither fathered a black child or an asian child.

McCain and his wife had adopted a Bangladeshi orphan years after the war from Mother Theresa's orphanage in Bangladesh, helping her also with medical treatment. The child was just dark enough to pass for black, for the South Carolinian bigots, or Cambodian for the South Carolinian angry vets. That's how Karl Rove and his sneaks work.

Who is Karl Rove? The former texas governor's prayer partner. That

is the kind of person you are dealing with from the righteous right when it comes to ad and campaign design. Just the facts. Connect the political dots. Draw your own conclusions as to trusted insiders and dishonest silence.

Source, Bill Rauch, speaking about Politicking, in response to a question from the audience about campaign tactics.

by a reader on Sat, 08/21/2004 - 19:13 | [reply](#)

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Was John Kerry Ordered Illegally Into Cambodia?

Yes

17% (73 votes)

No

26% (117 votes)

That question is flawed

24% (107 votes)

You're Republicans, aren't you?

33% (145 votes)

Total votes: 442

Sat, 08/21/2004 - 15:56 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Not illegal

Being in Cambodia wasn't illegal by any reasonable standard, only by the standards of 'international law'.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sat, 08/21/2004 - 18:15

And Reasonable Standards meant you had to go over...

Kerry is not the only one who says he was in Cambodia. The late Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt Jr., who was chief of naval operations in the early 1970's, has **written** that his son, whom he commanded, was there also. Zumwalt writes:

"The major problem we faced was the continued infiltration of enemy arms and men into South Vietnam, primarily along the Cambodian border."

And his son writes:

"At dusk one day late in 1969, we slipped under the overhanging jungle growth along a canal bank. I knew we were a few hundred yards inside Cambodia. I also knew that just by crossing into Cambodia I was in violation of direct orders. But I disobeyed the orders because I was sure the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese were infiltrating along this particular river, even though Navy intelligence said they were not. I thought this would be the best

way to prove my point. Several hours later, we heard noises coming from downriver. The South Vietnamese had been warned not to be on the rivers at night, so we could be pretty damn sure it was the enemy. It was a convoy of sampans. When they drew to within 20 or so feet of our hiding place, we opened fire. We took some return fire, but then they fled, leaving behind some sampans loaded with weapons."

The Zumwalts also say that such missions were common and that "No serious thought was given to court-martialing..." (See their book "My Father, My Son", pg 90)

So it is not implausible that Kerry was in Cambodia. The navy evidently applied 'reasonable standards' and not the standards of 'international law'.

by a reader on Sun, 08/22/2004 - 00:22

sheesh

guys, guys, read the question. it has little to do with whether kerry was in cambodia.

it asks about what his orders were. and it modifies them with the adjective illegal. if kerry was ordered into cambodia, and this order was illegal, vote yes. otherwise, vote no. simple.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 08/22/2004 - 14:13

editing comments

hey, whatever happened to editing comments? it was added but now it's gone?

anyhow, was gonna change "sheesh" to "look closely" and "guys guys read the question" to "look at the question closely"

also there is an alternative interpretation of the question: such orders would be illegal, and you're simply asked if he had them. but however you read it, the question is what he was ordered to do, not where he was.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 08/22/2004 - 14:22

Zumwalt example shows flaw in Kerry's story

Climate and topography work against the Kerry story. Zumwalt's example illustrates this.

Zumwalt made his ambush along the bank of a small canal near an

undisclosed river near the border. This was in October, during the height of the rainy season when the water levels would have been elevated throughout the Delta water routes. Also Zumwalt did this at night when tidal conditions were favorable for his relatively large boat. He probably was situated near the coastline northwest of Ha Tien and not in the normal inshore area of his patrol.

As a result of his successful ambush (unauthorized as it was), the Navy gained confidence in sending river boats (not Swift boats) to probe the canals and steams that they would previously block or surround. The PBRs had jet propulsion and could do 20-plus knots in less than a foot of water. The Swift boats needed water 4 feet deep and they had to be careful of damaging their screw propellers. So the Swifts would do the blocking and provide firepower support and the PBRs would poke around looking for the enemy. PBRs routinely setup ambushes in the shallow and narrow routes in the interior of the Delta. But there were several weeks each year that even PBRs could not navigate through the Vinh Te Canal to connect Chau Doc to Ha Tien via the Rach Giang Thanh. That would be the driest part of the dry season.

A year earlier Kerry patrolled in the vicinity of Cambodia during the peak of the dry season when water levels were about 3 meters lower than their maximum, the small streams and canals were shallower and narrower, and tidal conditions were less influential upstream in rivers that emptied into the Gulf of Siam side of the Delta.

The river that ran along the border in Kerry's patrol area was the Rach Giang Thanh and there were no routes navigable by Swift Boat from that stream into Cambodia. The only route he could have taken was via the Vinh Te canal to Chau Doc (and beyond) which was too shallow in Feb-March when Kerry was on that patrol.

The Rach Giang Thanh is not a tributary of the Mekong River. It is a relatively small stream that is widest close to the sea coast -- in fact there is a sea inlet at the coast -- and very narrow at its top farther inland. Kerry would have run out of water at that time of the year. At most, he might have towed a smaller boat used for insertion of SEALs but they would not have told him their objective let alone their destination.

Kerry just exaggerated and that turned into a fib that got bigger and bigger over the years. He had not transformative moment while on a Swift Boat in Cambodia, because he was not in Cambodia, at all.

by a reader on Tue, 10/19/2004 - 04:08

BUSH SUCKS

I CANT STAND BUSH

by a reader on Thu, 11/04/2004 - 13:38

4 MORE YEARS

4 MORE YEARS OF HELL....

HE'S NOT RUNNING THE COUNTRY ..HIS PUPPETS ARE...HE
COULDN'T RUN A COUNTRY IF HE TRIED. HE'S OUT FOR HIMSELF
AND HIS RICH "FRIENDS".

PEOPLE WHO VOTED FOR HIM...DONT KNOW WHAT ELSE TO SAY
BUT..GOOD LUCK...WE'LL NEED IT...

by a reader on Thu, 11/04/2004 - 13:42

Re: The two comments above

It is important to bear in mind that most people who voted for John Kerry are ordinary, decent people. People make mistakes: that is to be expected. There's nothing especially sinister in their motives or objectives. Yet ... there is no denying that idiotic **conspiracy theories** play a causal role in many of their world views. This is frightening.

Turning now to the comments above, note the poster's almost total lack of interest in the content of his or her own conspiracy theory: the assertion "[Bush is] not running the country ... his puppets are" is directly self-contradictory. But the poster is only interested in the narrow ground that the two opposite explanations have in common: that President Bush's purported motives, the ones that voters have just endorsed, are not his real motives; and that his overt actions as President, whose continuation the voters have just authorised, are a cover for secret actions with a different and incompatible purpose.

by **Editor** on Thu, 11/04/2004 - 14:18

BUSH SUX

I'm sick of everyone thinking Kerry was any better than Bushy. . .
THEY BOTH SUCK!

by Kellibellijelli on Sun, 02/13/2005 - 17:58

Kerry and Bush - This argument sounds way too familiar

Look. We're halfway into 2006; I'm no fan of Bush, nor of Kerry. I didn't vote for either of them. The lesser of two evils, to my mind, is still evil. At the same time, as long as we look back, we cannot look forward. We will NEVER get out of the quagmire that is Iraq, if we continue to rehash Vietnam, name-call Bush even though, to my mind, he should at least fire Rumsfeld, and bring in fresh military leadership for Mess'o'potamia, someone who understands how to lead troops in a situation involving urban warfare, guerilla tactics - which, basically, include suicide bombings, and the like. We either get down and dirty, and save lives, and fight this to the end, or we don't. But screwing around with the past, and obsessing about it, is useless, and a waste of time.

In my mind, we should have stayed out of Vietnam altogether, and

several presidents lied to the American people about our extensive involvement. On the other hand, it was yet another case of "shit or get off the pot". Leadership couldn't decide what our role there was, so... we did a lot of nothing and 58,168 (from http://www.historyguy.com/american_war_casualties.html) American soldiers, Marines and others were killed, with well over 130,000 wounded. Untold thousands of Vietnamese were killed and wounded.

Is THIS what we want to happen in the Middle East now? Here at home we continue to argue two presidential elections that have been over for the better part of two years. This fatalism ill-becomes us as a people. I think we can do better. Let's focus on what we can change: the MAJORITY in Congress the next two elections, and the White House occupant in 2008. There ARE qualified men and women who are electable, and not beholden to big oil, or the big corporations. People power has worked in other countries. It can work here; it did 250 years ago; it can work now.

by **PSmith** on Mon, 05/22/2006 - 11:08

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New Poll: Was John Kerry Ordered Illegally Into Cambodia?

Further to our recent items [here](#) and [here](#), we invite you to vote in our new poll.

Sat, 08/21/2004 - 16:51 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

From the "Truth is determined by opinion polls" department

by a reader on Sun, 08/22/2004 - 13:41 | [reply](#)

In A Parallel Universe – Vote For John Kerry!

InstaPundit peeks into a parallel universe and finds a John Kerry whom we would probably support for the Presidency. Whether that universe is really as close to ours as Glenn Reynolds thinks, is doubtful, unfortunately. The trouble is not only that **Kerry doesn't get it**, it's that the **Democratic Party**, and much of its constituency, have gone on a long long journey into fantasy land.

Mon, 08/23/2004 - 00:21 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Still not good enough

But even if all this was true, Kerry would still be the wrong man. Nothing in the parallel universe mentioned morality. Bush *does*...

A plan to deal with Iraq and Al Qaeda is all well and good, but what if something doesn't go according to it? We need someone who understands how to decide what to do

~curi

by a reader on Mon, 08/23/2004 - 01:39 | [reply](#)

Gol darn Kerry just doesn't know what to do; BCCI

<http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/>
read the Follow the Money story by Sirota.
Kerry and BCCI.

by a reader on Mon, 08/23/2004 - 14:48 | [reply](#)

Kerry doesn't understand morality?

> We need someone who understands how to decide what to do

lol. Let's see, here's a guy fresh out of college and his country is at war. So what does he do? He volunteers for the Navy, volunteers to go to Vietnam, and volunteers for Swift Boat duty. And he does this despite misgivings. He earns a Silver Star, a Bronze Star with Combat V, and three Purple Hearts. He saves a man's life. And then, later, after seeing how crazy and fucked-up the war had

become, he speaks out about it. Seems like someone's got a moral

compass.

by a reader on Mon, 08/23/2004 - 22:14 | [reply](#)

errr

Why didn't he analyse if the war was Right before joining? How does earning medals mean he understands right and wrong? Are olympic athletes good at morality too?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 08/24/2004 - 00:03 | [reply](#)

Kerry's moral compass

...pointed due East then, and it still does.

by a reader on Tue, 08/24/2004 - 00:48 | [reply](#)

They Should Keep Their Fantasies At Home

A committee of MPs, the Environmental Audit Committee have declared that the government ought to **raise petrol taxes**. Their stated reason is that otherwise people will keep using petrol at a rate that is incompatible with satisfying the demands of the Kyoto Protocol. First, we can't help but note that the only way they can think of to persuade people to do what they think will save the world is through coercion in the form of taxation. They themselves were persuaded by reason and motivated by benevolence, but neither of those qualities exists outside Westminster, apparently. However, that is a rather commonplace fetish among MPs. Their use of the Kyoto Protocol as an excuse is a little more florid.

Even if everybody had implemented the Kyoto Protocol it would have cost **several trillion dollars** and delivered nothing. And the United States and (probably) Russia have not signed up to it. So the Kyoto Protocol is dead and good riddance.

So why does the Committee insist on the price rise? Because it conforms to a little fantasy in their minds. It goes like this. The common folk are stupid or wicked enough to think it's okay to use their cars when doing so will actually destroy the world. But wait! Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No, it's the Environmental Audit Committee! They've come to save us by raising fuel taxes and so reducing petrol usage by several percent – hooray! Quick, let's give them a ticker-tape parade through the heart of London! And if they fail, well, at least they fought the good fight against the evil oil companies, motorists, President Bush, and other agents of destruction.

If they do succeed, their fantasy is going to be damned expensive to indulge.

Thu, 08/26/2004 - 21:08 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

florid?

i looked it up and still don't get it

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 08/26/2004 - 23:33 | [reply](#)

Florid

Think of it as 'stylish'.

Gil

by **Gil** on Fri, 08/27/2004 - 06:46 | [reply](#)

Adjective: Florid -

Elaborately or excessively ornamented

by a reader on Fri, 08/27/2004 - 08:25 | [reply](#)

florid

i don't see how stylish makes sense in context

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 08/27/2004 - 15:26 | [reply](#)

re: florid

It was a rather lame joke based on **this** usage of the word.

Sorry for the confusion.

by **Editor** on Fri, 08/27/2004 - 16:59 | [reply](#)

Re: florid

Aw, darn. I thought it was **this** kind of florid (if there's a difference).

by **Kevin** on Fri, 08/27/2004 - 18:36 | [reply](#)

HonestReporting Makes Progress On The T-Word

HonestReporting says that some news media have begun to use the word 'terrorism' when referring to terrorism against Israel.

Other agencies, alas, continue to use that term only when the victims are not Israelis. *HonestReporting* provides a handy list of the e-mail addresses where you can complain to those agencies. We agree with *HonestReporting* that biases such as these are not just an irritation. They have an effect on public opinion.

Sun, 08/29/2004 - 11:34 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Terrorism

Terrorism is in the intent to create terror and fear. It is planned to harm and maim and kill for media effect. It should be clear to all the media of the world that terrorism crosses all boundaries, geographic and political and social. It is the war of evil in action against humans, man, woman, and child. It respects no boundary and respects no noble cause. The purpose is to cause fear and mayhem to gain attention for a slogan of words. Terrorism is the right name for it.

by a reader on Sun, 08/29/2004 - 18:08 | [reply](#)

G.Shippey

All this talk of terrorism and the fight back helps nothing, if anything both the use to the term Terror and the actual terror act side tracks us from the real issue's and the causes that help terror to fester and grow(what ever they may be)we must tackle the causes.....the problem is that most countries fail to do this because it may interfere with corporate interests or political wills. So terror may transcend boundaries but the causes are another thing else, something we are far more afraid of than the act or word?

by a reader on Tue, 08/31/2004 - 17:19 | [reply](#)

what "causes" terrorism

reader@1719,

But what if one of the "causes" of terror is that it works and

achieves results, and what if this fact is at least partially due to the (odd) reticence on the part of some to speak out against acts of terror and terrorists and to banish them from the realm of legitimate political expression and/or warfare, by (among other things) correctly labelling terrorism terrorism?

(Which "corporate interest" does that reticence serve, BTW?)

Just wondering,
--Blix

by a reader on Tue, 08/31/2004 - 20:54 | [reply](#)

"Terrorism is in the intent t

"Terrorism is in the intent to create terror and fear. It is planned to harm and maim and kill for media effect."

is that why Yitzhak Shamir ordered the murder of UN peace negotiator Bernadotte ?

is that why Israel bombed the UN base at Qana in 1996 ?

by a reader on Tue, 09/21/2004 - 12:14 | [reply](#)

The Baffled French

Two French journalists have been kidnapped in Iraq by terrorists who are threatening to kill them if France does not repeal its new law banning Islamic headscraves (and all other conspicuous religious symbols) from state schools.

The people of France are at a loss to understand this development. They are "**baffled**"...

by the fact that the country's citizens should have been targeted by Iraqi militants, given France's vocal opposition to the US-led invasion of Iraq.

French President Jacques Chirac appealed to the kidnappers to release the journalists, using the following argument:

"France ensures equality, the respect and protection of the free practising of all religions," he said.

"These values of respect and tolerance inspire our actions everywhere in the world"

Are these the very values that also motivate the terrorists?

We guess that what's really happening is that Chirac is hoping to buy the journalists' lives with a large ransom payment, as others have done. If this succeeds, the sophisticated French will yet again become sponsors and collaborators in terrorism. They have infinite faith that by sacrificing others they will persuade the crocodile to devour them last. But shouldn't these very events be causing them to question that faith? Isn't it time for them to stop being baffled?

Mon, 08/30/2004 - 21:40 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

The War Against Conspiracy Theories

Regular readers will know that we consider the prevalence of **conspiracy theories**, both in the West and among its enemies, to be a major and grossly under-recognised cause of the current world crisis.

We have also **remarked** that the real alliances, the real loyalties and the real conflicts in world affairs are not between states, nations or religions, but between subcultures defined not only by their values, but also by how they think the world works. This has always been true, but it is especially true of the current war.

Much has been written about the deficiencies of the term 'War on Terrorism'. Terrorism is a method not an enemy. And yet the alternative names that have been proposed – such as the War Against Islamism – are equally inaccurate. The Maoist terrorists of **Nepal** are not Islamists. Nor are the rulers of North Korea.

Putting all these ideas together, we have come to the conclusion that the only accurate term for the current war is **The War Against Conspiracy Theories**. It is a war between conspiracy-theory-based subcultures and those based on truth and reason. It is a war between those who judge 'narratives' according *whom* they validate, and those who seek explanations that correspond to reality. Every perpetrator of violence against the West (or against Americans, or Jews, or even Christians) today is possessed by an utterly false causal explanation of how the West works and what the West is. Every other person, however well-meaning, who gives credence to such an explanation is in some measure an ally of those murderers.

In a recent **opinion poll**, nearly half of New Yorkers said that people in the United States Government "knew in advance that attacks were planned on or around September 11, 2001, and that they consciously failed to act". Everyone reading this must know people whose political thinking is similarly tainted by, if not utterly based on, conspiracy theories at least as insane as that. Go out and persuade them. Persuade them not only that their particular conspiracy theory doesn't make sense but that the underlying world view isn't true. That it is no more than a nasty little fantasy that is hurting and crippling them even as it offers them the specious simplicity and comfort of blaming others. That the world is better

than that and that if they choose to, they can be part of its

improving further. Persuade them because in the long run, if you fail to persuade them, they will kill you.

Thu, 09/02/2004 - 23:12 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Please explain

What is the the difference between a conspiracy theory and a valid theory? e.g.: "The US went to Iraq for the oil." vs. "The US went to Iraq so as to use it as a base to attack terrorist sponsoring states."

Both theories explain motives in terms other than what the official government position is. Or are both of these conspiracy theories? Or neither?

by a reader on Fri, 09/03/2004 - 02:21 | [reply](#)

click on links

the world wrote, and linked, a whole series on the matter

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 09/03/2004 - 04:04 | [reply](#)

Not Quite

I don't think "**The War Against Conspiracy Theories**" is quite right.

Perhaps it's **The War Against Conspiracy-Theory-Inspired Violence**. We shouldn't fight wars against people who are merely wrong. We actually encourage an environment where various theories (sound and unsound) can be peacefully held, expressed and debated. What we are at "war" against are those who use conspiracy theories as justification to threaten and attack others, and the idea that this is ok.

I think the intellectual battle against many sorts of fantasy thinking is worthy also, but it's something other than this war.

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Fri, 09/03/2004 - 15:48 | [reply](#)

Re: Not Quite

Our conclusion was: 'persuade them before they kill you', *not* 'kill them before they kill you'.

The war and the persuasion are intimately connected. One cannot hope to succeed in either without the other.

by [Editor](#) on Fri, 09/03/2004 - 17:23 | [reply](#)

The West

I am struck by the idea that "The West" is in itself a geographic conspiracy theory against global ignorance found upon three corners of the earth's surface, although i have no other word to describe it. There is no West without an East, a South, a North. However "The West" could be what we call it, another word for enlightenment thought wherever and whenever it is found.

Gil's point is well taken.

by a reader on Sat, 09/04/2004 - 00:22 | [reply](#)

Re: Not Quite

I agree that the two are related. But, I don't like referring to the ideological conflict itself as a "war". I really don't like conflating it with this war.

We don't have to persuade them to drop their conspiracy theories, in order to win this war. We just have to persuade them that there are better ways to live than killing people over those theories.

If we have to persuade them to drop their conspiracies in order to win this war, then I'm afraid we're doomed. I'll believe that that can be done right after someone successfully convinces everyone to drop their theistic theories (which are also related to this problem).

I understand that Daniel C. Dennett is going to try with his upcoming book.

I wish him luck.

Gil

by **Gil** on Sat, 09/04/2004 - 00:35 | [reply](#)

Re: Not Quite

The problem is: ideas have consequences.

Fortunately, that is also the solution.

by **Editor** on Sat, 09/04/2004 - 00:56 | [reply](#)

Re: Not Quite

Persuasion is not just about talking to people. It's also about getting people to listen to you in the first place. The war part of the war on terror is the battle against not even being **able** to communicate: the brick wall of unlistening that Islamists have around their core values. That this is not the same thing as theism is evidenced by the fact that Jews, Christians and Hindus are not instigating horrors upon either each other or the secular values of the West. Attacking theism as a way of attacking terrorism is like banning guns to stop violent crime: not the point, won't work.

But I do agree with Gil's distinction between ideas and actions. The

ability to discuss one's ideas is predicated on the idea that not all ideas do actually necessitate certain kinds of unthinking immediate action: and that is why I personally would characterise the evil out there, whatever one wants to call it, not by its wrong-thinking but by its *lack* of thinking. It is not flawed ideas that are the problem, but the failure of flawed ideas to grow by coming into contact with other ideas (criticism and improvement).

Not everyone who believes conspiracy theories therefore decides to strap explosives on their body and go and murder schoolchildren. This is a huge and fundamental difference between New Yorkers and Chechen "rebels". Western liberals may be mistaken in implicitly supporting the bad guys, but they are not the *cause* of the war: in order to end terrorism, we have primarily to attack not the conscious ideas of liberals or Islamists, but the unconscious culture of non-growth that prevails in the Islamic world. This is a deeper thing than the higher-level conspiracy theories it includes about the way the rest of the world works.

If you argue with A Western liberal for long enough, well enough, then eventually you may cause some improvement in his world view. But this is not going to happen between you and a terrorist hell bent on besieging a school. To persuade the people at the bottom of the trouble (not exactly the same thing as the "root cause", but not dissimilar- more like the most active enactors of the theories, or the leading troublemakers) you have to get *those* people (and all potential would-bes) to listen.

This is done by force, and force is very different from persuasion. Democracy is not, in itself, growth or better ideas than Islamism- it can, potentially, allow for all kinds of ideas, including tyranny. But it doesn't generally, because democracy *allows for* the growth of ideas within its debate-based traditions, and this tends to happen quickly as soon as it is set in process.

The idea that everything human beings do, including war and political systems, is theoretical, is, I think wrong: there is a real material world out there, and we do interact with it, whether or not our theories recognise that fact. Therefore, the war is fundamentally not against any theoretical idea: it is a war against destructive *activity*, born of lack of growth protected by other destructive activity. As terror is an active verb, I think it is not a bad name for this. Islamism, which is the enactment of certain Islamic religious ideas in a certain way, embodies both belief and action in its meaning, and is, I think, also appropriate.

In other words, actions are more fundamental than theories. This is why we fight this war instead of being pacifists: you can't persuade anyone of anything once you've had your head sawn off.

Alice

by a reader on Sat, 09/04/2004 - 05:05 | [reply](#)

The West doesn't exactly have "secular" values

nt

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 09/04/2004 - 16:28 | [reply](#)

Ideas or actions?

Certainly there's a huge difference between doing something and merely advocating it. And another difference between advocating it and merely believing it to be right. And these are just three points on a continuum.

It is also true that how people act depends on their situation as well as their ideas (broadly construed). But how a person behaves in a given situation depends on nothing other than those ideas. If one denies that, one runs straight into the **homunculus fallacy**. So if a person with (say) President Bush's ideas becomes President, he *will* behave as President Bush does. There is no further decision required - no possible state of having those ideas but somehow not acting accordingly. That would be the homunculus fallacy again. And the same is true of someone with the ideas of a terrorist who happens to be given an opportunity to become one.

by **David Deutsch** on Sat, 09/04/2004 - 20:22 | [reply](#)

Re: Ideas or actions?

i agree, but i don't follow how it's the homunculus fallacy in particular.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 09/05/2004 - 00:39 | [reply](#)

Re: Ideas or actions?

Well, if you think in terms of something more causing a person's behaviour than ideas - if you think of ideas as something a person has rather than is, then you'll think in terms of someone (the real inner you, the homunculus) making the decision whether to act on your ideas.

by **David Deutsch** on Sun, 09/05/2004 - 01:40 | [reply](#)

Re:Please Explain

I haven't heard the second theory advocated before as the primary explanation for the war. As such it does seem to satisfy the conditions for being a conspiracy theory. But if one is merely asserting that this was one of the many possible contingencies that were being planned for, then I disagree that it requires the government's motives to be different from what they claimed and

so I disagree that it's a conspiracy theory. They are open about

wanting regime change in other states, and open in refusing to rule out pre-emptive force if they deem a regime to be a threat. Obviously, once it was decided that Iraq should be next after Afghanistan, any such contingency plans would involve using Iraq as a base.

Under the interpretation where it is a conspiracy theory, it is a much less severe one than the oil theory, because it involves coordination among only a handful of people (in principle, it need not be a conspiracy at all: the President could be the only conspirator), it involves no spoils and therefore no coordination over them, and also because the purported motives and moral values would be very close to the conspirators' allegedly actual motives and values.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Sun, 09/05/2004 - 01:59 | [reply](#)

conspiracies need to be illicit

Note: technically the "second theory" is not a conspiracy theory (generic def.) because a conspiracy by def. is not just any old secret agreement, but a secret agreement to do something wrong/illicit. Creating/having bases from which to attack terrorists is not by itself illicit; depends on where/how those bases are created. In this context (ousting a dictator / having troops there to midwife a reasonably consensual gov't / which stay there for some time) I see nothing wrong with it. The "second theory" is less a "conspiracy theory" than a *strategy theory*. It is a theory that the invasion of Iraq was in accord with some secret *strategy*; were that strategy illicit, it could rise to conspiracy theory... but it's not.

It may however satisfy [The World's](#) def. of a conspiracy theory (not sure).

Personally, I'd prefer to call this war **The War On What Ultimately Causes Conspiracy Theories To Flourish**. I mean a war against conspiracy theories per se... wouldn't it be better to fight what causes them?

But I say that mostly cuz I'd like to fish for [The World's](#) take on what causes conspiracy theories to flourish... ;-)

--Blix

by a reader on Sun, 09/05/2004 - 04:52 | [reply](#)

Oil theory:

A. President Bush wants to be re-elected.

B. A robust economy is a key factor in an incumbent president's re-election.

C. A cheap and reliable oil supply is a key factor in a robust economy.

D. Iraq has a large supply of oil.

Therefore: Iraq war.

Is this a conspiracy theory?

by a reader on Sun, 09/05/2004 - 15:34 | [reply](#)

war is expensive

the war costs more than the monetary gain from free trade with Iraq (at least in shortterm like a decade). if he just wanted strong economy, he could have spent the same money on taxcuts.

also, Iraq could choose not to sell us oil, so what does the supply being "stable" mean? if it just means someone less nuts than Saddam is in charge, then I guess this is one tiny tiny reason we went to Iraq. but it'd be an economic blunder if that was the reason, and this theory ignores Bush's proclaimed motives (he thinks it's right to free people, protect ourselves).

often people mean either the US will *steal* oil, or the US will control the Iraqi government to make sure the oil keeps flowing. those are conspiracy theories.

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sun, 09/05/2004 - 16:52 | [reply](#)

changing situations

how a person behaves in a given situation depends on nothing other than those ideas

So changing people's situations is the answer. This seems to me to be the prime motive of the war; changing the situations that enable the enactment of terrorist ideas (as Blix says). You can change people's situations: what can't be done is persuading people of different ideas when their situations render them deaf.

The situation than most helps the growth of terrorist ideas, is terrorist states (states which terrorise their own people). The situation which is worst for terrorism is democracy, because the process of debate enables good ideas to gain ascendancy. The primary target in the war is not bad ideas themselves, but the systems which are obstacles to the growth of ideas in general.

Alice

by a reader on Mon, 09/06/2004 - 03:01 | [reply](#)

Changing Ideas

"how a person behaves in a given situation depends on nothing other than those ideas"

So changing people's situations is the answer. This seems to me to

be the prime motive of the war; changing the situations that enable the enaction of terrorist ideas (as Blix says). You can change people's situations: what can't be done is persuading people of different ideas when their situations render them deaf.

Changing people's situations is only part of the answer. But it is conspiracy theories that drove the likes of Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols. And to a large extent, it is conspiracy theories that hamper those of us who have the capability for changing other people's situations from doing so. Ideas must change first. The systems which are obstacles to the growth of ideas are in fact just systems of ideas.

by a reader on Mon, 09/06/2004 - 08:13 | [reply](#)

if systems are systems of ideas...

... then what is the difference between those and situations, as in:

*how a person behaves **in a given situation** depends on those ideas (my bolds) ?*

I can rephrase my entire comment substituting "system of ideas" for "situation", but that would be boring.

Now, if only *ideas* need to change, how does bombing cities and changing governments help? Is that not precisely *changing a situation* (slash "system of ideas")?

Bombing a weapons factory is not the persuasion of human beings to believe different things than they believed the day before the bombing. It may lead to people changing their ideas but it is not in itself *the changing of ideas*.

Is the priority in dealing with terrorism persuasion, or is it *making persuasion more possible* (which is what has happened in Iraq, with the replacement by force of the terrorist government that murdered people for dissent, with some kind of democratic system that allows for debate and therefore the growth of ideas)?

It seems to me that the difference between those two is the difference between pacifism and rightness. Not everything in the universe is theoretical. Planet earth would not cease to exist if the human race died out. And if everyone in Iran decided they wanted democracy, they would still have to depose the government before setting up elections.

by a reader on Wed, 09/08/2004 - 08:30 | [reply](#)

Persuasion

Two good points. Changing a government and an economic system may make persuasion possible. However, removing an entire populace that has learned to live by ideas that are stalinist, control-persuade-purge, is not feasible. Changing minds takes time.

Democracy in the normal sense is as foreign an idea as "benign"

socialism when an entire country has experienced stalinism in its purest, harshest form. It will take some time to persuade people who have lived with very different practical ideas of what it means to stay alive and prosper under a stalinist regime, to understand that another idea of practical life is even feasible. Persuasion takes foresight and many many tools. Persuasion takes people within the country who have their own ideas of citizen inspired change and an extensive opportunity to practice them. Cultivation of a climate of persuasion must follow overthrow of even the worst dictator if there is to be any hope of sowing seeds of even the most rudimentary form of democracy. Ideas take time but they are all there is to work with when it comes down to change.

by a reader on Wed, 09/08/2004 - 14:21 | [reply](#)

Re: Conspiracies need to be illicit

Why? What if someone has a theory that their "great leader" has a secret weapon or strategy that will destroy their enemy? Isn't that a conspiracy theory? I would imagine that this was quite common among Germans when it was evident that they were losing WWII.

by a reader on Thu, 09/09/2004 - 01:31 | [reply](#)

yes and what

conspire: to join in a secret agreement to do an **unlawful or wrongful act** or an act which becomes unlawful as a result of the secret agreement

Yes I suppose Germans (and others) who thought Hitler was working on a 'secret weapon' were holding to a conspiracy theory. That conspiracy theory happens to have been correct as I understand it (not all conspiracy theories are incorrect, right?); the Germans were working on atomic weapons (though did not succeed).

Not sure why you (I infer) think this example a contradiction. Perhaps because you don't think the Nazis working on an atomic weapon to destroy the Allied Powers was a wrongful act. It most certainly was. But then again lotsa things the Nazis did were wrong. The Nazis' existence in power was wrong (even if it arose constitutionally), and much follows from that easily.

caveat - I may not be adhering to [The World's](#) def. of conspiracy theory in any of this

--Blix

by a reader on Thu, 09/09/2004 - 06:30 | [reply](#)

re: persuasion

Evil regimes do not brainwash every member of their populations. They brainwash some, they threaten the majority into conforming, and a few manage to conspire against the regime and not get hung

in the market square.

The difference between democracy and terrorist dictatorship is this: in terrorist dictatorship, only those who agree with the government have a public voice. Those with good ideas are silenced.

One of the vilest things about the antiwar left is their argument that ordinary Iraqis did not want the invasion. As there was no democracy in Iraq, it was more or less impossible to gauge how many ordinary Iraqis wanted the invasion. But it took more than three or four to destroy all those statues of Saddam; cheer the American troops; run the new interim Iraqi democratic government. Let's see how many turn out to vote, and how many refuse to participate in democracy on the grounds that they prefer to live under dictatorship.

There are, of course, be some people in Iraq who think they want (or really do want) an evil terrorising dictatorship. Most of those want it because they want to *be* it. However, there are an awful lot of people who do not want that. All they have been needing is the opportunity to argue their ideas in the public arena without being murdered (ie, to argue their ideas in the public arena period).

All this is far, far more fundamental and important than *anything* to do with the actual nature of the ideas they want to discuss. Where there is debate, there can be political growth. Where there is no debate, it's impossible.

That is why this is a war on more than just ideas. It is a physical, material war, involving real deaths and real bombings: yes, *driven* by conscious thinking humans, with the ambition of enabling people's ideas to grow, but still a *war* and not a chat round a big round table (or on the internet). The difference between those two things is the difference between civilised growth and barbarism. In other words, we are having to act according to the rules of the barbaric in order to attempt to institute something better in the moral blackspots of the world, for the sake of everyone's future. It's not pretty, and it's not persuasion. But sometimes, civilised people have to meet barbaric people on the only ground those people are prepared to occupy, in order to defeat them. And that means, by the use of *force*. Not discussion.

Then the war (not really a war at all- a process of rational growth by the exchange of *ideas* instead of violence) on conspiracy theories can begin.

Alice

by a reader on Thu, 09/09/2004 - 09:01 | [reply](#)

v nice, alice

good post

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 09/09/2004 - 15:02 | [reply](#)

Re:yes and what

"Not sure why you (I infer) think this example a contradiction."

Because conspiracy is not illicit from the view point conspiracy theorist(in this case a German).

by a reader on Thu, 09/09/2004 - 19:22 | [reply](#)

doesn't matter

doesn't matter

by a reader on Fri, 09/10/2004 - 04:55 | [reply](#)

Don't They Know There's A War On?

If there is one respect in which President Bush is not serious about the war, it is his support for an irrational and divisive Constitutional amendment preventing States from legalising gay marriage.

If there is one respect in which the **Log Cabin Republicans** and **Andrew Sullivan** are not serious about the war, it is their belief that the issue of gay marriage should be a factor in a reasonable voter's choice for President in the forthcoming election.

Wed, 09/08/2004 - 14:03 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Don't You Know There's A Democracy On?

If there is one respect in which **The World** is not serious about democracy, it is their belief that issues such as gay marriage should not be a factor in a reasonable voter's choice for President in the forthcoming election.

Whether or not it should be a *decisive* factor is a different question.

The Log Cabin Republicans have not endorsed Kerry. They have merely withheld their endorsement of Bush. They have criticised Kerry's positions on these issues as well. And, they have repeated their support of the president's strategy for winning the war on terror.

Bush has clearly decided on the strategy of encouraging the turnout of anti-gay bigots by pursuing this horrible agenda. He seems indifferent to any criticisms that do not affect his re-election prospects; so, that's the type of criticism the Log Cabin Republicans have decided to pursue. Bush's policy deserves effective criticism, and this is their way of giving it.

If we are supposed to suspend criticism of politicians (in a way they care about) during wartime, then there will always be a war and there will seldom be progress.

And, we will have lost what we sought to defend.

Gil

by **Gil** on Thu, 09/09/2004 - 16:08 | [reply](#)

What's a decisive factor?

What is a non-decisive factor in a choice, and why do non-decisive factors matter?

by a reader on Thu, 09/09/2004 - 18:36 | [reply](#)

one not like the other

Agree that both are silly. Disagree about how much.

The marriage amendment is (probably - I don't actually know the details of whatever dead-letter amendment (R)s are pretending (for their supporters' sake) is currently on the table) a horrible idea. Bush is wrong for advocating it. It's correct to lament the needless, and pointless, division of the country this engenders, particularly in wartime when division is most harmful.

However... well, in slight defense, Presidents cannot be expected to refrain from all non-war-related proposals "because there's a war on". Bush is the President and as such has done many other things (signing prescription drug bill, cutting ribbons, etc), some good some bad, which have nothing to do with the war - and rightly so. Of each one you could probably say "doesn't he know there's a war on?" but this doesn't really work as an independent criticism in its own right. If Bush favoring this amendment is wrong it's wrong because the amendment is wrong (which I tend to agree it is), not "because there's a war on". But Gil is right in this regard, you don't just suspend democratic politics and debate.

It might be added that the amendment (correct me if I'm wrong) isn't going anywhere at all, and Bush's "favoring" of it seems (from what I can tell) to be limited to spending perhaps less than a grand total of 20 minutes all told *talking about it* (i.e. saying the words "I support a federal marriage amendment..") in perhaps a handful of speeches. It's doubtful therefore that the war that's "on" has been hampered or even affected in any way by his doing so, apart from the needless-divisiveness as I've conceded above.

Of course, the divisiveness is needless in more than one sense, because the people who are all up in arms and angered by the not-going-anywhere, silly, political-posturing amendment (e.g. **The World**), *could* choose to just look past it and ignore it, recognizing it as a political stunt. You know, because it's not going anywhere - and because there's a war on. This brings us to Sullivan...

And Sullivan's position by contrast is just pure unadulterated 100% foolishness, with no saving grace. To believe in the "war on terror" or whatever you call it, and think it's important, and think that Bush is the superior candidate for leading it (all of which, I gather, Sullivan seems to have, at least purportedly), but then decide to favor the other guy solely because (as far as anyone can tell) of a stupid frickin' gay-marriage amendment that ain't going anywhere in the first place, is just beyond belief. I don't even see how it's possible without being disingenuous or deluded somewhere along the way.

--Blix

Sullivan

Has Sullivan said he endorses Kerry, or just that he can't endorse Bush?

I know it's a weird distinction, but people are weird about elections and voting.

To some people, endorsing and voting is the same as expressing which of the candidates you would prefer to win.

But, to others it means expressing an alignment of core values; and if one can't do that with any candidate, he can't bring himself to endorse or vote for any of them.

I suspect that Sullivan is in the latter group.

I also suspect that he would really prefer that Bush win the election, but doesn't want to dirty himself by explicitly aligning himself with Bush. But, I could be wrong about that.

I tend to think that this position isn't really a bad one for a "reasonable voter" to take, since his individual vote will almost certainly not determine the outcome of the election.

It might be an unreasonable position for a popular and influential pundit to take, though.

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Thu, 09/09/2004 - 20:14 | [reply](#)

either way

Whether he has endorsed Kerry, or just "can't endorse" Bush, this would be a marked change from earlier writings, and although no one (besides him, perhaps) can say for sure, it seems to appear to most observers (I'm not much of a regular AS reader anymore BTW) that the primary spark driving this shift is the gay-marriage issue. And IF the gay-marriage issue has indeed shifted Sullivan in that direction as is popularly supposed, then given what his purported position on "war on terror" related things has always seemed to be, it is profoundly silly of him.

note: a quick search found [this article](#) where Sullivan says "I may not find myself the only conservative moving slowly and reluctantly toward the notion that Kerry may be the right man - and the conservative choice - for a difficult and perilous time." Not clear what to make of this, it's not "I endorse Kerry!" but neither is it "I can endorse neither". From here it appears as if he kinda-sorta wants to endorse Kerry while leaving wiggle room. And if so, this is a change, and the reason for that change seems to be.... well, see previous paragraph.

Decisiveness

I was trying to make the distinction between something being "a factor" and being so compelling as to change one's final decision. I think that many things should be "a factor" for a reasonable voter, and perhaps the aggregation of enough of these factors might be sufficient to change the decision, but no individual factor would be.

For example, perhaps Bush's support for the Federal Marriage Amendment on its own is insufficient to cause a reasonable voter to change his vote. But, when combined with many other factors, perhaps a picture emerges of a man with sufficient character and judgment flaws that it could persuade a reasonable voter that the man is insufficiently reliable to be President, or that the future benefits of punishing this bad, unprincipled, behavior justifies the costs of accepting an inferior wartime President.

I'm not claiming that the above is true. But it's conceivable. And, thus, considering this position to be a factor does not prove that a reasonable voter is insufficiently serious about the war.

Gil

by **Gil** on Thu, 09/09/2004 - 21:38 | [reply](#)

No Right To Self-Determination

The twentieth century's greatest philosopher of freedom and reason, Sir Karl Popper, regarded the 'alleged right of nations to self-determination' as a catastrophic error. In one of his last speeches, in Prague in 1994, he **said**

I think that all lovers of peace and a civilized life should work to enlighten the world about the impracticability and inhumanity of that famous – or shall I say notorious? – Principle of National Self-Determination, which now has degenerated into that ultimate horror, ethnic terrorism.

We must fight against such horrors.

It does not follow from this that all secessionist (or unionist) movements are immoral. It is just that the issue of how territory should be divided up into states must never be decided on the basis of the 'rights' of nations (or states, or races, or religions...), whether to self-determination or anything else, nor in terms of an alleged right of individuals to be ruled by members of 'their own' group. Claims to sovereignty must be independently justified, and for all the usual conservative reasons, the burden of justification falls on whoever wants to change the status quo. And the only legitimate consideration is:

- What do the claimants intend to do with the sovereignty, once they have it?

Thus, if a faction wants sovereignty because they would repeal bad laws and pass good ones, and the existing political tradition is incapable of doing that, then their claim is, *prima facie*, justified.

But if they want sovereignty because they don't like the colour of the people currently in the government, then they have no case. If they want sovereignty because it would give them a monopoly on the revenue from a certain canal, or certain natural resources, then again, they have no case. If they want to repeal good laws and pass bad ones, then they certainly have no case. It may sometimes be best to let them make their own mistakes – which always means, in practice, tyrannising those among them who are not party to the mistake – but that is not because they have a right to do so.

Furthermore, even an entirely justified secessionist or unionist

movement is not entitled to use violence unless their reason for wanting sovereignty is that it is the only way to protect the lives or other rights of the people they represent. Violence is legitimate only in defence of human rights. *Political independence is not a human right*, and therefore cannot justify violence.

Sun, 09/12/2004 - 02:04 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Yes, But...

It's not always clear to all participants and observers which side's proposed laws are good, and which side's are bad.

I'm curious. Given these standards, does **The World** think that the American Revolution against England was justified?

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Sun, 09/12/2004 - 03:25 | [reply](#)

Re: Yes, But...

Well, the secessionists seem to have agreed with our basic position:

Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security. --Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government.

It's plausible that the following account is largely accurate:

The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.

He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has refused to pass other Laws for the

accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only.

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.

He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.

He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers.

He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance.

He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the consent of our legislatures.

He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power.

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation:

For Quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:

For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:

For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:

For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:

For depriving us, in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury:

For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences:

For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies:

For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:

For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty and perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation.

He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executioners of their friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.

He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

In which case, by our criterion, the answer to your question is yes.

by [Editor](#) on Sun, 09/12/2004 - 04:30 | [reply](#)

So.....

Given the historical and current situation of the Kurds in Iraq **The**

World would be in favor of a Kurdish state? (Kurds were clearly persecuted by the previous regime and the current regime has been unable to provide for their security.)

by a reader on Sun, 09/12/2004 - 16:59 | [reply](#)

no answer

IANTW (I Am Not **The World**), but: By my reading of **The World's** post, one consequence is that it makes little sense to be in favor of a "***ish state" as a blanket position, without knowing more details. --Blix

by a reader on Sun, 09/12/2004 - 19:16 | [reply](#)

kurds

well, is the current regime preventing the kurds from securing themselves? (for example banning them from owning guns). If not, how would the Kurds having their own state make them more secure? What new measures would it allow them that they can't do now?

PS brilliant post.

PPS anyone notice what this means for Palestinians and Chechans(sp)?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 09/12/2004 - 19:48 | [reply](#)

Re:kurds

The only reference to individual ownership of arms is in Article 17 of the Iraqi constitution:

"It shall not be permitted to possess, bear, buy, or sell arms except on licensure issued in accordance with the law." Not exactly the right to bear arms.

The Kurds having their own state make them more secure by being able to secure their borders.

by a reader on Sun, 09/12/2004 - 20:24 | [reply](#)

Alternative theory

I do agree with the World, that in the current context a "Right To Self-Determination" is a bad thing. On the other hand, if that right were consistently applied, it would be a good thing. That is, if people understood that if any group has a combined right (the added rights of all individuals) to self-determination, that logically implies that each individual has that right as well, and understood this right has nothing to do with a right to be ruled by one's own people, it would

be a good thing. For then we would have libertarian anarchy. For then if Wales were to secede from the UK, any city in Wales could in turn secede from Wales, and any street in that city could secede from the city, and any individual on the street could secede from the street. So if the rule of self-determination is consistently applied to any group or individual, there's no problem, and in fact many problems are solved, because then all governments would be truly voluntary, and therefore no longer would be governments.

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Mon, 09/13/2004 - 12:15 | [reply](#)

Re: Alternative Theory

Henry Sturman wrote:

'That is, if people understood that if any group has a combined right (the added rights of all individuals) to self-determination, that logically implies that each individual has that right as well, and understood this right has nothing to do with a right to be ruled by one's own people, it would be a good thing.'

Well, actually it doesn't imply any such thing. One could consistently hold that nations have rights and individuals do not because nations have some mystical property or other that makes them superior to individuals. This theory is balderdash but it is certainly possible to believe it. It is also possible to believe, as the Southern secessionists did before the American Civil War, that certain types of individuals are inferior to other types and that self-determination consists in superior people being allowed to make laws allowing them to enslave, torture and rape inferior people without interference. National self-determination would only work in the way you described if all people thought that individualism was true and they don't. Even then it would be redundant since political institutions would be judged largely on the basis of whether or not they promote individual freedom.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Mon, 09/13/2004 - 15:52 | [reply](#)

I'm no expert by any means on

I'm no expert by any means on the current Kurd situation but reader asserts that if a "Kurdish state" were made, they would be better able to defend their borders than currently. I don't know how it's possible for reader to know this, without specifying, among other things, *who* he proposes be put in charge of the proposed Kurdistan. (It *matters*.) If the answer is, "the guys who are basically in charge of semi-independent Kurdistan right now", then what's the point?

This is just one of the reasons why being in favor of a "***ish state" qua ***ish state is untenable. What bothers me about the "right to self-determination" is that it masks the reality in a way that sounds uniformly, deceptively nice. What most listeners (to whom this all sounds very Nice) will fail to grasp is: Saying "There

should be a ***ish state" is functionally equivalent to saying "such and such group of people should be given monopoly on the use of force over all of the (much larger group of) people in such-and-such geographic region". I don't know how one can possibly endorse or reject such a claim without actually specifying who that group of people is, what sorts of checks would be placed on their behavior, etc. It literally makes no sense.

(This is why I was so pleased to see this, excellent, World post.)

Back to the Kurds, from where does the biggest threat to Kurdistan come? From Turkey? (Honestly curious.) What would be the likely response of Turkey to the creation of an independent Kurdistan - more belligerence or less? What would you predict? Has this prediction been factored into the assertion that Kurds would be better able to secure their borders if they had "their own state"?

Would Kurdistan require US military assistance in securing their borders? If so, what exactly would be so different from the current situation? What's the point here? I think one of the lessons of the World's post is that, at the very least, you ought to be sure that you're not favoring a ***ish state just for the sake of there being a ***ish state i.e. because that would be nice and swell.

For the record, I've got no particular gripe with there being a separate Kurdish state and I'm certainly open to being convinced that it is a necessity.

--blix

by a reader on Mon, 09/13/2004 - 18:21 | [reply](#)

intentions vs results

"And the only legitimate consideration is:

What do the claimants intend to do with the sovereignty, once they have it?"

So the probability of them actually achieving their intentions don't matter?

by a reader on Tue, 09/14/2004 - 00:40 | [reply](#)

Re: intentions vs results

Yes, it does matter, but that's implicit. Our judgement of whether what they intend to do is right or wrong will usually depend in part on what we think the outcome would be.

by [Editor](#) on Tue, 09/14/2004 - 00:55 | [reply](#)

curious

I'm curious to read what Elliot Temple, or anyone else, thinks this

means for Palestinians and Chechyan(I don't know how to spell it either). I know what it means if certain factions of the Palestinians, like Hamas, were to gain control of such a state. But some factions have claimed that they want a secular, democratic government. Not that that alone puts it in the "good" category.

by a reader on Thu, 09/16/2004 - 23:28 | [reply](#)

my 2 cents

IMHO,

Essentially it means that arguments of the form "we must ____ because the [Palestians/Chechnians] have the Right To Their Own State" are, on the face of it, nonsensical and false.

You mention that there are factions in each place who talk about wanting a secular, democratic government. That's very nice to hear. What will it take to put such a faction in power? Keep them in power? Will they be able to stay in power? Can they be believed about what they say they want? Can they be trusted (rather, to what extent can they be trusted)? Will they become corrupt (rather, to what extent will they become corrupt)? What are the realistic outlooks for the country if all this is attempted? Will it become a failed state? terrorist haven? will factions inside launch attacks on neighbors [Israel/Russia resp.]? will the newly-made government be able to stop this effectively? Will third-party nations such as Iran Syria Jordan Pakistan whoever attempt to influence matters? in what way? with what results, broadly speaking?

Answer those questions and if the answers sound good to me (like if I come to believe that your plan can actually create a Chechnya which doesn't contain gangs which regularly kidnap and ransom Russians, or a Palestine from which guerrillas won't be regularly firing mortars into Israel), you might start to build a case which I could support that e.g. yes we ought to support the creation of a [Palestinian/Chechenian] state with the properties you just described. The devil is in the details, **all** in the details. This is why "Right to their own state!" is such a dangerous principle; it ignores details (all of them) as if they are unimportant, when they are **everything**.

-Blixa

by a reader on Fri, 09/17/2004 - 00:22 | [reply](#)

Creamface

didn't Bill Bryson uncover facts behind the US statement of grievances ?

namely the calling "together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable" - only 3 states had had their legislative bodies moved - at most to a distance of 4 miles or so.

and most of the tax raised (the colonists were taxed at a very low level compared to the Brits) was used to defend the colonies.

by a reader on Tue, 09/21/2004 - 12:11 | [reply](#)

Who determined that "Libertar

Who determined that "Libertarian Anarchy" was a "good" thing?? I don't want to live in an anarchic society, and most people don't. I read your personal webpage, so I know what your opinions are, and I strongly disagree with them. Who are you to tell me that I must accept your ideas? I don't think total personal freedom is necessary. I see nothing wrong with the government doing things for the benefit of society, as long as it doesn't become totally oppressive in their means. Democracy is NOT a failure and in most democracies the minorities are protected, not oppressed. Democracy works very well, that's why it is the most popular system ever created. It isn't perfect by any means, and nothing is perfect and never will be. Also, I disagree with the idea that people have no right to self-determination. If a group of white people want to live with only a group of white people, that should be their right as long as they don't harm others or take away their rights. I completely agree that people should be able to live the way they want if the majority approve. Those not wanting to participate should be able to freely choose something else, and if they want to be part of a conglomerate society, they should be able to. I see no legitimate argument to convince me otherwise.

Incidentally, I thought the purpose of this was to demolish all these pro-left wing, self-righteous intellectually pretentious arguments and conspiracy theories, not support nonsense such as this? I just lost my respect for this website.

by Christopher on Sun, 04/02/2006 - 20:27 | [reply](#)

The Lasting Consequences Of Rathergate

[Note: For a summary of Rathergate so far, see [here](#).]

What do CBS and suicide bombers have in common? They have each taken their chosen form of political intervention to its appalling and self-destructive logical conclusion, and have thereby, as **PowerLine** very perceptively points out, changed the world in somewhat analogous ways:

Before September 11, important aspects of our security arrangements were based on the assumption that people, even terrorists, want to live. For example, airlines followed the rule that if a passenger's bags were checked but the person failed to appear for the flight, his bags would be removed from the airplane. The idea was that a bomb could have been planted in the luggage. But as long as the passenger was on the airplane, it was assumed that his bags were safe, since no one -- it was thought -- would blow up an airplane with himself on it. After September 11, security arrangements were changed to take into account the new reality (or newly recognized reality) of the suicide bomber.

When he defended CBS's publication of forged documents, Dan Rather spoke of the "checks and balances" that ensure the reliability of news coming from CBS, as opposed to news and commentary from the blogosphere. What are those checks and balances? Ultimately, the main check on the danger that a powerful media giant like CBS might abuse its position of trust by deliberately propagating falsehoods is the assumption that the network values its reputation for accuracy and trustworthiness. In the past, most people have assumed that while broadcast networks, wire services like the Associated Press, and newspapers will occasionally make mistakes, and will certainly spin the news consistent with their political biases, concern for their reputation in the marketplace, and even more among their peers, would prevent them from spreading outright falsehoods.

In the wake of the CBS scandal, that assumption must

be reevaluated.

Yes. But also, given this and many other recent scandals with a similar aetiology, we have to doubt that newspapers and television networks ever deserved the trust that was placed in them. We may well be witnessing a significant moment in the history of news media: a radical restructuring of patterns of criticism and authentication into a decentralised and non-authoritarian form.

This is not (as some have said) the end of the traditional news media. Quite the contrary, for just as Karl Popper said that the point of politics is not 'who should rule' but how bad rulers and bad policies can be replaced, so the point of (news-oriented) blogs is not to replace news organisations: it is to cause bad stories and bad reporters to be replaced. Which is to the benefit of everyone, traditional news media included.

We expect that among these benefits will eventually be the destruction of the culture of manipulation and left-wing paternalism in the traditional media, which has done so much harm (as well as some occasional good, by the way) over so many decades. But we also hope that that will be only the beginning. Who knows what the first ever society with deservedly high-reputation news media will be like?

Mon, 09/13/2004 - 00:58 | [permlink](#)

Comparisons

This is a document typed on a IBM Selectric Composer:

The ability to justify copy easily and quickly is one of the distinct advantages of the new IBM "Selectric" Composer. By merely typing copy once, taking a reading from a scale on the Justification Tube, then setting the Justification Dial, copy is automatically aligned at the right margin as it is typed a second time. Color coding is used to designate pitch on the Type Element, Escapement Lever, and Justification Tube. The idea of color coding for simplicity is used again for taking a reading on the Justification Tube and making the appropriate adjustment on the Justification Dial.

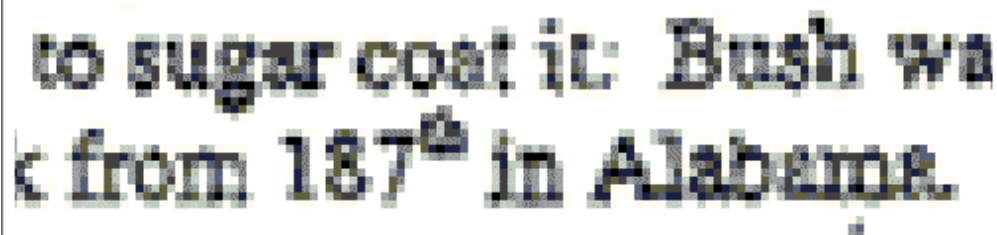
Same document in Word:

The ability to justify copy easily and quickly is one of the distinct advantages of the new IBM "Selectric" Composer. By merely typing copy once, taking a reading from a scale on the Justification Tube, then setting the Justification Dial, copy is automatically aligned at the right margin as it is typed a second time. Color coding is used to designate pitch on the Type Element, Escapement Lever, and Justification Tube. The idea of color coding for simplicity is used again for taking a reading on the Justification Tube and making the appropriate adjustment on the Justification Dial.

Instruction manual for the IBM Selectric Composer.

Comparison of enlargements of CBS "original" and Word document:

CBS DOCUMENT



to sugar coat it: Bush wa
c from 187th in Alabama.

MS WORD SAMPLE



sugar coat it. Bush was
rom 187th in Alabama.

by a reader on Mon, 09/13/2004 - 10:54 | [reply](#)

LOL: Comparisons

You can't have been following the debate very closely.

The differences you have found are due to you comparing a screen image with a printed image. Printing uses slightly different font settings. If, instead of looking at your Microsoft Word doc on screen and taking screen shots, you print it out and then scan it back in, you will see that the 'th' aligns precisely where it does in the CBS forgery. If you also photocopy it a few times, you will get random variations similar to the ones you are holding up as differences.

Try it. Then adjust your world view. Then report back.

by a reader on Mon, 09/13/2004 - 12:29 | [reply](#)

Re: Comparisons

This is a document typed in MS Word:

.

This is the same document written with a No 2 pencil on the back of an envelope:

.

See? They're identical.

by [Kevin](#) on Mon, 09/13/2004 - 16:18 | [reply](#)

partial touche

Let's grant that, if nothing else, the anti-forgery side can indeed point to an uneven baseline; this feature would not be produced by a computer nor (I think) would the errors induced by repeated xeroxing (which I presume would all be deformation + noise) would cause this effect. I have not seen this point rebutted (feel free to point me to such a rebuttal).

But even ignoring typographical issues - indeed, even if the memos were in fact typed - there are still tons of contextual reasons to believe the documents are forgeries (2 of them; keep in mind that it is only 2 out of CBS's 4 "memos" which are in dispute). Just from memory: reference to a retired person putting pressure, no motive for writing something essentially self-incriminating, the purported author didn't type and there's no secretary/typist initials so who the f*** typed it?, the family has no idea where this thing would have been kept or came from, use of military terminology that doesn't square (see Donald Sensing), an order given weeks before regulations would require it....

Meanwhile on the other side, baseline aside we do still have the striking coincidence that the text (horizontally) lines up perfectly, with perfect centered header and all the line-breaks in the right place (but no hyphens!), including the whole "kerning" thing -- with a casually-inputted Word document. We are also supposed to believe that this thing's author (who is the typist again?) found it SO important to have a raised "th" in a private, informal memo that he switched font balls to do it. (WTF?)

The weight of evidence just points to this thing being a fraud and I have actually seen no convincing reason at all not to think it a fraud, so I'm going with "fraud" until given a convincing reason otherwise.

Which points to a larger issue. Some (see for example Matthew Yglesias) seem to be speaking as if we are somehow required to grant CBS provisional truth on this matter unless/until proven definitively otherwise. Essentially CBS/Dan Rather gets the presumptive benefit of the doubt in all that they put forward. I don't agree with this methodology; I don't see where they have earned it. Am I the only one who finds it ironic that the supposedly "liberal" side is in effect arguing from Authority?

Finally CBS's defense has been so staggeringly weak that even this fact alone gives one pause. Key testimony on which their story was based came from someone who has now backed down and said he was tricked (the memo he vouched for was read to him *over the phone* - well, parts of it). (!) Even more damning, CBS's lone "expert" to "verify" the document is a *handwriting expert*. He "verified" the signature of a person ON A FRICKING PHOTOCOPY. In the real world which you and I inhabit, verification of a signature ON A PHOTOCOPY means precisely ZILCH. I don't know which world CBS inhabits.

This laughable, even absurd supporting evidence simply does not

point to CBS having the truth on their side. Explaining why, if the truth is on their side, their defense consists of pure BS which only an idiot would accept, and their behavior does not coincide more with what one would expect of people confident in the veracity of the memos, is quite difficult. There is an utter failure to resolve more than 1% of the issues and problems raised by the memos' doubters. (I mean yes: typewriters existed which could make a raised "th". Aside from that?)

As such, the most reasonable surmise is that the memos are frauds.

Again, the only reason on earth to think otherwise is if you side with the Yglesias epistemology which (to paraphrase) seems to simply assert that because CBS is a Big News Organization and all, you have to provisionally accept whatever they foist as Truth unless/until you can build a beyond-reasonable-doubt case against it. I think that's moronic but YMMV.

--Blixa

by a reader on Mon, 09/13/2004 - 18:07 | [reply](#)

arguments from authority

I don't think it's ironic that liberals do it. It was never a right-wing phenomenon. It is part of our culture. The left, for example, is more statist. *shrug*

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 09/13/2004 - 20:48 | [reply](#)

well, semantics

But I find the left being more statist ironic too. ;-D To be clear: the irony I speak of is only w/r to the *actual* meaning of "liberal", not w/r to common U.S. usage (in which essentially, "liberal" = "(D) party fan"). You're right there's nothing ironic about it in the second sense.

by a reader on Mon, 09/13/2004 - 20:53 | [reply](#)

It is

A right wing IBM Selectric Conspiracy Theory. All the conspiracy theory cells are working overtime on this one. This post is being typed on an IBM Selectric and scanned. At least I suspect that it is.

by a reader on Tue, 09/14/2004 - 21:33 | [reply](#)

Who knows?

"Who knows what the first ever society with deservedly high-reputation news media will be like?"

One thing we can surmise about the first ever society is that it will

be made up of human beings who truly value Truth.

To say that more precisely, such a society will be made of up human beings who truly value the search for the processes of ascertaining Reality, which appear to hinge on a constant personal quest for falsifiability and encompass both unbiased seeking as well as reporting.

Truth is not what is required or purchased and therein is a problem. Truth is rather constrained by what we consciously seek to find and therefore requires a society of individuals with open minds.

by a reader on Thu, 09/16/2004 - 20:20 | [reply](#)

Death and Tax Evasion

Tax Evasion. Illegal Possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction. At first glance these two crimes may not appear to have much in common, but they share a significant attribute: they are both considered serious crimes by the authorities in the United States, but are more or less condoned by many people.

The reason why the authorities consider both these crimes to be serious may be the same: they are both relatively easy to prove by courtroom standards, and they are both often committed by people who also commit crimes which are far more serious by any standards, yet also far harder to prove.

Al Capone, the notorious prohibition-era gangster, committed many crimes, of which the most serious was mass murder and perhaps the least serious was tax evasion. Yet he was prosecuted only for tax evasion. That is because it could be proved in court, not because anybody believed that this was an adequate or representative summary of his crimes.

Saddam Hussein is likewise a gangster and mass murderer – though on a scale that makes Capone look benevolent by comparison – and a torturer, thief and ... an illegal owner of WMDs. Consider also Slobodan Milosevic: somewhere between the two, *he* has been charged with **Genocide**, the most serious of all crimes – but even as we write this he is locked in a Byzantine legal process that may well fail to find him guilty simply because of the inherent difficulty of proving the charges.

And so after 9/11, when the safety of the world became a clear issue in our minds, and Saddam's malevolent influence on regional and world affairs became intolerable, we found ourselves casting around among his many crimes for one that would be easy to prove at the quasi-legal court of the UN Security Council. Ironically we chose one which, for reasons that have yet to be satisfactorily explained, he appears to have been innocent (at the time we happened to catch him): possession of WMDs.

If Al Capone had been found not guilty of tax evasion for lack of evidence, would that have made the war against organised crime unjust? Would the media have proclaimed that it would have been better if Capone had been left alone? That the US government should apologise for 'lying' about the tax evasion? Of course not, because it was beyond doubt that he was as guilty as sin of a

multitude of crimes, any one of which justified pursuing him, capturing him, and putting an end to his power.

Wed, 09/15/2004 - 00:22 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

familiar

Good post but, hey! I've been using this analogy forever ;-)

Small correction: contrary to what you say, Saddam was, in fact, proven Guilty of the "charges" we brought against him, by Hans Blix of all people. Blix's report cited (buried?) the Hussein regime's possession of a UAV which he had not reported and which he was prohibited from having. This was not a "WMD" per se but still, this alone placed Saddam in violation of Resolution 1441. (Remember, the "charges" were much more specific and tangible than "He has 'stockpiles' of WMD!", as one might think from e.g. the way the Associated Press reports on these matters. He was required to report or document the destruction of a list of banned objects. This list of banned objects is not adequately summarized by the phrase "stockpiles of WMD".)

Obviously, if I say all this to an antiwar person they come back with "that's no reason to start a war! we fought a war because he had a model airplane? we fought a war because of a centrifuge in a backyard? (etc)" which is precisely when I trot out the Al Capone example ;-)

No, it doesn't work, of course. The point remains valid however and you state it better than I have.

--Blix

by a reader on Wed, 09/15/2004 - 01:20 | [reply](#)

Guilty as charged

Blix: yes you're right, he was guilty as charged. We plead guilty as charged.

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 09/15/2004 - 01:49 | [reply](#)

Unprovable beyond doubt

"it was beyond doubt that he was as guilty as sin of a multitude of crimes"

Then, why could it not be proven?

by a reader on Wed, 09/15/2004 - 10:44 | [reply](#)

Why Not Proved W/ Capone?

Why couldn't it be proven with Al Capone? or do you dispute that? then take answers to Capone question, apply to Saddam. throw in that it's 10x harder to get evidence about someone in a different

country, and 50x harder when that country isn't some friendly, open ally.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 09/15/2004 - 15:44 | [reply](#)

Why It Was Hard To Prove Al Capone's Guilt

Because he was the head of an organisation one of whose main functions was to conceal precisely such evidence. All his financial transactions were done through proxies with whom he had no legal connection. When he gave an order which resulted in someone being killed, he never wrote it down. The only witnesses were his most loyal subordinates, and even then, he did not have to be all that explicit because they had all known him for a long time and knew what he meant. There was a system of intimidation and savage revenge against anyone whom he suspected of revealing information to the authorities. Intimidation, and also lavish bribery, was used to suborn juries and policemen and politicians.

How do we know all this? That is not the problem. It is not controversial among historians and none of it was secret, even at the time. The atmosphere of fear and corruption was easily observable by any visitor to Chicago, and its origin was well known to the inhabitants because their lives depended on it: if someone made a mistake and assumed it was safe to cross a gang leader because he was just an innocent businessman, they really would die. But that is not evidence for a court.

by **Editor** on Wed, 09/15/2004 - 19:06 | [reply](#)

That Quote Was About Capone

If Al Capone had been found not guilty of tax evasion for lack of evidence,...Of course not, because it was beyond doubt that he was as guilty as sin of a multitude of crimes, any one of which justified pursuing him, capturing him, and putting an end to his power.

Is **The World** suggesting that domestic criminal justice should pursue, capture, etc. people who cannot be proven to have committed crimes?

Maybe we shouldn't bother with trials at all and just lock up everybody who prosecutors know are guilty!

I think it's a good thing for governments to have significant burdens to justify their use of power.

The problem is that in the case of going to war, we have strong disagreements about what that burden should be.

I don't really believe that the major issue is whether or not Saddam

actually had WMDs or WMD programs.

Most war opponents believed that he did, and *still* opposed the war.

Most war supporters still support the war even though we can't prove that he had them.

The disagreements are about what justifies the use of american military power.

The war opponents are just harping on the issue to try to convince those who might have been unsure about the strength of the case, and to give those who now regret it an excuse (that they were misled) to now oppose it without admitting that they were wrong.

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 09/15/2004 - 19:10 | [reply](#)

Maybe we shouldn't bother with trials at all?

Gil asked:

Is **The World** suggesting that domestic criminal justice should pursue, capture, etc. people who cannot be proven to have committed crimes?

No.

by **Editor** on Wed, 09/15/2004 - 20:20 | [reply](#)

Death To The Wicked

Is Gil suggesting that life would be better if everyone always focussed on what the law says, instead of what is right? Why should we need a law before we can kill bad men? Isn't that authoritarian?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 09/15/2004 - 20:36 | [reply](#)

Re: Death To The Wicked

Why should we need a law before we can kill bad men?

One reason is that there are rules of procedure with the property that if everyone is held to them, even the best people will do the wrong thing less often than if they did not defer to such rules.

Another reason is that codifying the rules under which bad people can be punished improves the growth of knowledge about what constitutes 'bad', and who meets the criterion for being bad.

Another thing that is essential to the growth of political knowledge is that people feel confident in doing things that most other people consider immoral, provided that they are not breaking the codified

law.

by **David Deutsch** on Wed, 09/15/2004 - 21:03 | [reply](#)

sure but

A) this only applies much to **evolved** laws, not ones designed by central planners. (though sometimes the idea evolves, not in law form, then central planners say it's a law). law by fiat tends not to have the less mistakes property. which leads into:

B) if those people who should follow laws to avoid mistakes, consider specific laws bad, they should not follow those laws. for example, maybe downloading music and killing dictators aren't bad ideas (not that second is actually against law). in other words, only follow laws you agree with for their sake (follow others for sake of not getting thrown in jail, as needed)

also, some laws have the property that for most people following them will involve less mistakes. **But** we can certainly imagine a person who has a life where he really ought to break laws. especially if he is ahead of his time morally. and especially if he is powerful. and it works just as well for a group of people as an individual. examples include wizards and the USA.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 09/15/2004 - 22:32 | [reply](#)

nod

Gil writes,

The war opponents are just harping on the issue [WMD] to try to convince those who might have been unsure about the strength of the case, and to give those who now regret it an excuse (that they were misled) to now oppose it without admitting that they were wrong.

Right. And this World post helps to counter that effort.

by a reader on Thu, 09/16/2004 - 00:37 | [reply](#)

What was the justification for what?

I'm not sure how the Capone analogy is especially applicable in the Saddam case. It implies that the government's primary agenda was to overthrow a murderous despot, and the whole WMD thing was just some technicality that we could prove in order to justify that overthrow. If anything, we used the murderous despot part to help sell the overthrow of a guy who had WMD that could potentially be handed off to terrorists and harm Americans. The "lesser" crime (akin to tax evasion), when it comes to a forced regime change through military might, is the damage he has done to his own people and the people of the region, while the crime that actually

justifies it to the American people is the threat he posed to American civilians. The Bush administration has never claimed to be in the business of overthrowing all murderous dictators if only they can prove the crime, or prove a lesser loophole type crime. Not that the murdering part was as insignificant as the Capone tax evasion thing, it was simply sold as part of the over all package of a crazy guy who was the absolute last person on earth to be trusted with WMD. To paraphrase Capone in "The Untouchables" who said, "A kind word and a gun will get you further than just a kind word," being a crazy tyrant with WMD will get you invaded a lot quicker than just being a crazy tyrant.

And, to be clear, I believe the war was and is justified. I just don't think the Capone argument is a compelling enough one to convince anyone who believes otherwise.

by **R** on Thu, 09/16/2004 - 01:10 | [reply](#)

Re: What was the justification for what?

It wasn't the being-a-murderous-dictator that made Saddam's removal imperative either. It was, as we said, that

the safety of the world became a clear issue in our minds, and Saddam's malevolent influence on regional and world affairs became intolerable

However, his WMD posture (stockpiles or no stockpiles) was part of what made his influence malevolent and intolerable, as was his being a mass-murdering dictator and other things too.

by **Editor** on Thu, 09/16/2004 - 01:47 | [reply](#)

I agree completely. It was t

I agree completely. It was the entire package that made Saddam intolerable. Unlike Cappone. It wasn't his murderous regime plus his questionable tax practices that made him intolerable.

But even if it was, I don't think that was your point. Your original analogy seemed to imply that if we can't nail him (Saaddam and Cappone) on the big crime (murder, theft and intimidation in both cases) then we nail him on the little crime (possesing WMD that he could hand over to terrorists, and tax evasion respectively.)

It is this analogy that I take issue with. Or am I misunderstanding you?

by **R** on Thu, 09/16/2004 - 03:21 | [reply](#)

The Analogy

I also don't see how this analogy is enough to sway anybody who thinks that the WMD issue is important.

It seems to me that **The World** is trying to argue that the WMD

charge, like the Capone tax evasion charge, was merely a convenient thing to pin a legalistic justification for attack on; that the truth of the charge wasn't really an essential part of the justification.

But, the people who care about WMDs are the people who think that the truth of that charge *was* an essential part of the justification.

In order to affect these people's opinion, I think **The World** (or somebody) has to go further and explain why those people are wrong.

Just asserting that there is an analogy is not enough.

Of course, I'm assuming that this was intended to be an argument meant to explain something to those who didn't already agree about this, rather than merely an interesting observation to share with those who did.

Gil

by **Gil** on Thu, 09/16/2004 - 03:22 | [reply](#)

Just a general question -

Is it always good to overthrow evil dictators?

by a reader on Thu, 09/16/2004 - 03:58 | [reply](#)

The Details Of The Analogy

Saddam **is to** Capone **as**

WMD possession **is to** tax evasion **and as**

Being an intolerable malevolent influence on the world **is to** committing multiple murder and leading organised crime.

WMD *stance* and being a mass-murdering dictator and terrorist sponsor are all part of being an intolerable malevolent influence on the world.

by **Editor** on Thu, 09/16/2004 - 04:51 | [reply](#)

Re: is it always good to overthrow evil dictators?

Not always. Not if you replace him by an even more evil dictator, for example.

by a reader on Thu, 09/16/2004 - 04:54 | [reply](#)

two cases not one

As always in these conversations it's important to distinguish between two issues, as in places Gil and R. fail to:

1. For what reasons did the US [or Britain, as applicable] decide it

necessary to wage the war?

2. For what reasons did the US (unsuccessfully as it turned out) argue that the UNSC ought to endorse such a war?

These need not be the same thing and, in fact, were not. The US didn't wage the war because of "WMD". "WMD" was *among* the reasons (which you can look up yourself by googling the actual war powers declaration) but it was not 'the' reason (1.)

However, it *was* 'the' reason given for 2. That's because "WMD" was actually something within the UNSC's "jurisdiction" (to continue the analogy). It was one of the few things we could have reasonably expected the UNSC to actually care about. (Of course, we were wrong - in particular Colin Powell and Tony Blair were wrong - and they didn't.)

That's why saying we went after Saddam "because he (we thought) had WMD" is wrong. *We argued that the UNSC should support us because he (we thought) had WMD, but that's not the same thing. We went after Saddam for a list of reasons one of which was the "WMD" issue.*

This is all still clarified better by the Capone analogy but that analogy must actually be understood, which evidently it hasn't been. FYI here's the analogous 1. and 2. for Capone:

1. Why was the government interested in putting Capone away to the point of putting Elliot Ness types on his tail (yes all my knowledge of Capone does come from the De Palma movie)?

2. Why did government prosecutors argue that a jury should find a guilty verdict on the charge of tax evasion?

Not the same. No reason for them to be the same. There are *two* cases to speak about, not only one.

by a reader on Thu, 09/16/2004 - 04:55 | [reply](#)

--blix

--blix

by a reader on Thu, 09/16/2004 - 04:55 | [reply](#)

Why Bush Went To War

Has anyone read *Misunderestimated*? It's by a guy who got to talk with Bush. Anyhow, Bush explains there were three main arguments for war, in his mind: 1) to make the world safer and to stop Saddam from sponsoring terrorism. 2) WMD 3) to free the Iraqi people. they decided to focus on the WMD issue b/c, in the administration's own words, paraphrased, they wanted to present a case for war that had nothing debatable -- only the most solid, unquestionable evidence was to be used. WMD was thought to be much better than the other 2 issues in that regard. they never thought WMD was more important than the other reasons for war,

only easier to prove, and that's exactly why it got focussed on.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 09/16/2004 - 05:07 | [reply](#)

Re: is it always good to overthrow evil dictators?

Not always. Not if you replace him by an even more evil dictator, for example.

But you wouldn't replace the dictator with a more evil dictator if you held it true that "it always good to overthrow evil dictators". So I don't think the example is a good one.

by a reader on Thu, 09/16/2004 - 05:20 | [reply](#)

But It's Not A Complete Argument

Blixa,

I understand the distinction you make. I (and R) am (are) making a different point. When I read **The World** asking:

If Al Capone had been found not guilty of tax evasion for lack of evidence, would that have made the war against organised crime unjust? Would the media have proclaimed that it would have been better if Capone had been left alone? That the US government should apologise for 'lying' about the tax evasion?

I assume that they are trying to speak to people who ask these questions of the Coalition because of a failure to prove the WMD charges.

In order for the analogy to carry any weight with those people, an argument must be made that the ability to prove the WMD charge, like ability to prove the tax evasion charge, was not an essential aspect of the justification for using force.

It's not obvious. As you say yourself, our belief that Saddam was involved in seeking WMDs was a part of our rationale; moreso than the tax evasion issue was a part of the rationale for the campaign against Capone, so the analogy is definitely not perfect.

What I'm saying is that persuading the people (not me!) that I describe above requires an explanation for why our ability to prove this charge was not essential. Not just that other reasons were mentioned, but that they (along with the reasonableness, given imperfect information, of presuming that Saddam was seeking WMD capability) constitute a sufficient justification.

Gil

by **Gil** on Thu, 09/16/2004 - 05:23 | [reply](#)

persuading ppl

Gil,

I think you greatly overestimate your knowledge of what will and won't persuade people. People are really complex. In general we should just use whatever arguments we find best, unless we have a **specific** reason to go with another one. And I think we should never declare arguments useless because of some imagined notion that no one will get it. No one ever understands everything you say, but even when you say very tricky things, many people will understand some.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 09/16/2004 - 05:35 | [reply](#)

RE: Persuading People

Well, it seems pretty clear to me that people who hold the opinions described will need more than an assertion that they have been wrong about what is important to justify this war. And, I don't see much more to this argument than that.

But, I suppose I could be wrong about that.

If any reader came to this post in opposition to the invasion of Iraq because of the lack of Weapons of Mass Destruction, and was persuaded by the post's argument that the invasion was justified, please add a comment declaring that, and explaining it if possible.

Thanks.

Gil

by **Gil** on Thu, 09/16/2004 - 06:40 | [reply](#)

true dat

Gil,

I like Elliot's response. Seconded. In general I make no claims that this argument **will** persuade people, just that it **should**. ;-)

But I do think you have a point that while, in reality, tax evasion was a miniscule part of the reasons for going after Capone, "WMD" was a **significant** part of the reasons for the US going after Saddam (i.e. 1. not merely 2.). In that sense, the analogy isn't perfect. Indeed.

Best,

-Blixa

by a reader on Thu, 09/16/2004 - 15:08 | [reply](#)

Re: is it always good to overthrow evil dictators?

But you wouldn't replace the dictator with a more evil dictator if you held it true that "it always good to overthrow evil dictators".

Yeah, you might. Because you don't always get what you intend. This is actually very common in revolutions. Someone works out how to overthrow a tyrant by force but fails to work out how to install a system of government in which the next leader won't either be overthrown by force or stay in power by tyranny.

by a reader on Thu, 09/16/2004 - 15:45 | [reply](#)

using the arguement

There's a guy at my work who was sold on the war when he believed Saddam had WMD, but is against the war now. He is an intelligent guy who will listen to reasonable arguements (and doesn't fall into the group Gil was talking about who were never going to be for the war even if we found stockpiles of WMD.) In presenting this arguement to him, I just want to be clear on what conclusion I want him to reach. Is it something like: Even if Saddam didn't have WMD, he deserved to be overthrown because he was a murderer theif, etc. much the same way that Capone deserved to be in prison whether or not you think tax evasion is a big deal. We just couldn't have brought justice to either one had it not been for the WMD arguement and the tax evasion business?

I imagine he'd argue back, "yes Saddam is a murderer who deserves to die or spend the rest of his life in prison, but not at the expense of 1000 plus American lives. Plus we were decieved into thinking the case for war was A when really it was B, when in the Capone case no one had any problem with putting him away for just B if only they could prove it, etc."

Perhaps I'm not the one who should be making the analogy arguement. I'll let him read the entire string of posts. Maybe I'll be proved wrong. Not that I consider a poll of one to be the least bit scientific. Perhaps some of you posters have friends with similar stances as my co-worker and can direct them to these posts and see what they think.

by **R** on Thu, 09/16/2004 - 16:12 | [reply](#)

Re: using the argument

R asked:

Is it something like: Even if Saddam didn't have WMD, he deserved to be overthrown because he was a murderer thief, etc. much the same way that Capone deserved to be in prison whether or not you think tax evasion is a big deal. We just couldn't have brought justice to either one had it not been for the WMD argument and the tax evasion business?

No.

It's that Saddam's posture and role in regional and world affairs made his removal a necessary condition for not losing the war (where 'losing' means becoming increasingly subject to attacks like 9/11 or much worse).

by [Editor](#) on Thu, 09/16/2004 - 16:54 | [reply](#)

2 cases part 2

Small point, to R:

[your friend would say] "Plus we were deceived into thinking the case for war was A when really it was B"

No. "We" [the US, let's say] were presented a "case" (B). This "case" was fine, and succeeded, convincing us to support a war and to support our Congress in authorizing a war.

Later, an effort was made (a foolish one in retrospect, I would argue) to get UN help. Indeed a different, and more specific, "case" (A) was presented to the UN than the one which convinced "us" (B). Case A relied more heavily on "WMD" which is why most people now think it discredited. (For the record: I don't for one damn second think that "Saddam didn't have any WMD" is a true statement.)

Now if your friend thinks that "we were deceived into thinking the case for war was A when really it was B" this is because he has deceived **himself**, in thinking that the "case" which convinced us (B) and the "case" we presented to the UN (A) need to be or even were intended to be one and the same. Case A was not being pitched to **him** in the first place, it was being pitched to the UN Security Council.

And there is no "deception" in presenting different "cases" before different venues with different concerns, interests, and jurisdictions.

At root, the Feds (presumably, unless their priorities were out of whack) wanted to get Capone because he was a **gangster**, not because he evaded taxes. Was Capone's tax-evasion jury, then, "deceived" because the case they heard (one assumes) focused on all that tax-evasion jazz?

2 cases not 1.

-Blix

by a reader on Thu, 09/16/2004 - 17:55 | [reply](#)

R's colleague might be interested in this too

[Tommy Franks, King Abdullah, and WMD.](#)

by [Editor](#) on Thu, 09/16/2004 - 19:40 | [reply](#)

Re: using the argument

Blixa,

I'm not sure we're on the same page as to what A and B are. The way I'm interpreting the original analogy, A is the "legal" means in which we sold the war and B is the only necessary justification for war. A is the WMD issue (which I agree is far more than him simply possessing stockpiles of them at this exact moment, but for the sake of simplicity let's just call it the WMD issue) B is the murderer/tyrant/thief etc issue.

I don't think "we" (meaning the U.S.) were sold on the war with just B and the U.N. was never sold on the war even with both A and B.

Again, just an interpretation of the original analogy, but I see B as his crimes and threat to the region, and A as his threat to us. I don't ever remember hearing a case made for war based on just B, and having failed to sell it, they came back with A as well.

The reason I still believe that removing him was the right thing to do is that A (the threat to us) is still satisfied even though we didn't find stockpiles of WMD (all those reasons have already been listed by others: his active desire to acquire them, his use of them in the past etc.) In the Capone case A (the tax evasion) is not necessary to justify getting rid of him, it's just the legal means.

Now if you were to re-define A and B so that A = Saddam having stockpiles of WMD right now at this exact second, and B = everything else, including his active desire to acquire them etc., then yes, A is not a necessary justification for the war. But in this case, A is not the legal justification for war, only a small part of it. Most of it being his violations of U.N. resolutions, his links to terrorists, and his growing threat to us. All of which are parts of B.

In answer to my question about what conclusion I want my co-worker to come to as a result of the Capone analogy, the editor writes:

"It's that Saddam's posture and role in regional and world affairs made his removal a necessary condition for not losing the war (where 'losing' means becoming increasingly subject to attacks like 9/11 or much worse)."

I agree that there a lot of compelling arguments to be made so that one might reach this conclusion, but tax evasion is to Capone as WMD is to Saddam, is not getting me there. But again, I could still be missing something.

by a reader on Thu, 09/16/2004 - 20:52 | [reply](#)

WMD stockpiles vs stance

Tax evasion is to Capone as WMD *stockpiles* are to Saddam.

WMD *stance* is a different issue from that of WMD stockpiles.

by **Editor** on Thu, 09/16/2004 - 21:12 | [reply](#)

A better understanding

So it is basically the second scenario I presented. A = WMD stockpiles and B = everything else he's guilty of. But doesn't that mean that anyone who was only sold on the war because of the addition of A to the argument would now be saying that the war was not justified since A turned out to be false? The analogy here would only, at best, be preaching to the choir, and at worst, be more fuel for those who think they were deceived. "Aha! They never needed A to be true, so they played on our fears to justify a war that they wanted to wage even without A. They think WMD stockpiles is just some trivial addendum, akin to tax evasion, that needed to be tacked on to convince us gullible idiots to go along with a war they were already planning on waging."

But then again, you never said anything in your original post about this being a persuasive argument for the unconverted. It's just an interesting way of putting the justification for emphasizing A at the time, when A was never a necessary criteria for those of us who already believed in overthrowing Saddam. In either case, thank you for clarifying the analogy for me.

by a reader on Thu, 09/16/2004 - 22:51 | [reply](#)

Apology

By the way, the last two posts by "a reader" are "R." I just didn't log in on this computer.

And please forgive me for channeling Al Gore in my last post. It won't happen again.

R

by a reader on Thu, 09/16/2004 - 22:59 | [reply](#)

A & B

R,

To try not to make this needlessly confusing let me start by giving you my definitions in my analogy (which may slightly differ from **The World's** BTW). You had introduced cases A & B into the mix with this hypothesized retort: "we were deceived into thinking the case for war was A when really it was B". From this I surmised that A=WMD and B=Saddam_is_a_bad_man (to speak very loosely ;-). From this I got the general pattern (please correct me if I'm wrong):

B: the "real reasons" we wanna go after him

A: what can we get him on / spur a jury into action with?

Notice that B applies to us (what convinced *us*, the "police" or actors who have decided to do this thing?), whereas A is an argument presented to some specific *jury* (and has no general

moral applicability outside of that jury, not even necessarily with us).

In Capone's case this plays out as follows:

B: he's a damn dirty gangster, just plain trouble, smashes

underlings with baseball bats (at least in Robert Deniro version)

A: he evaded taxes and we can prove it before you 12 of his peers

In Saddam's case we all agree that

A: "WMD" etc. The "jury" being, the UN Security Council.

But there is confusion about B. You complain, "I don't ever remember hearing a case made for war based on just B". This is to misunderstand case B (the way I'm using it, anyway). Case B = our reasons for doing it *by definition*. Thus, *whatever* our reasons - more to the point Congress's reasons - for supporting the war, I'm bundling them up and calling them "Case B". Case B in fact happens to include aspects of Case A (WMD), it's just not **limited** to Case A (which is one of the main things so many fail to grasp, and why the Capone analogy is necessary).

It's hard to pin down exactly what our case B was for deciding on war, but a good objective place to start might be to examine the war powers declaration passed by Congress. You'll see that it mentions WMD but it mentions lotsa other stuff too. Well, **that's** Case B. That's why we (through our Congressmen) decided to do the war, for better or worse. We/they can't have been "tricked" into supporting it for some other reasons, because after all Congress wrote down their reasons, voted on it, and it passed. End of that phase of the "trial".

Case A was for a *different trial phase* in front of a *different jury*, the UN. Case A was not for your friend, nor for me, nor for Congress. It was for the UN Security Council. And it failed. Your friend should not have been "tricked" into thinking case A was "the" case for war because he should have, rather, understood that case A was tailored toward a specific jury (the UN Security Council), and not him. The case which was pitched, indirectly, to him (case B) had *already succeeded*, in October 2002. After this point he, and I, and you, were irrelevant to the debate. Our part in the "trial" had concluded.

Now obviously your friend is not alone in feeling "tricked". This is what bothered me about Bush caving to Powell and Blair and deciding to go to the UN in the first place, because (in addition to the fact that it gave Saddam time to ship his WMDs out of country and plead innocent - which, I believe, is exactly what he did!) I knew that it would warp the debate in precisely this manner, by causing a myopic focus on "WMD". Bush had **already** gotten a War Powers vote but by going to the UN, and (*necessarily*) tailoring his argument for the UN only, it was inevitable that a lot of US observers would get the idea that those arguments *and those arguments alone* constituted the "case for war", as if there was still something to discuss. In US terms, there wasn't.

So if your friend was "tricked" into thinking we went to war

"because of WMD" that is because he did not understand that the WMD pitch (case A) was never intended for him in the first place. The only case which was intended for him (case B) was conducted via open and honest debate (well, we presume ;-) in the halls of Congress. It succeeded. A majority of our representatives were convinced by it. After the fact they, and your friend, and I, can still go back and look up just what exactly the "case" was based on. It's written down in the War Powers Resolution. No "trickery", just confusion about just what exactly the purpose of the UN debate was: it wasn't for deciding whether there would be a war, but whether the UN would help. (It didn't.)

The Capone analogy, if understood, helps clarify that confusion.

by a reader on Fri, 09/17/2004 - 00:02 | [reply](#)

P.S.

And just to be clear, I see that your construction is A=WMD, B=everything else besides WMD. That's not my construction. Mine is: A=WMD, B=everything which convinced a majority of Congress to vote "yes" on War Powers, *including* perhaps WMD if and where applicable.

this has been,

-Blix

by a reader on Fri, 09/17/2004 - 00:05 | [reply](#)

The War Powers Resolution

FYI, folks.

by [Editor](#) on Fri, 09/17/2004 - 00:40 | [reply](#)

Purpose of the Argument

With due credence to the existence of R's friend, I suspect that there are very few people in the world who were for the war when it was about WMD, but have now changed their mind since said weapons have failed to materialise. I do not believe this is how people's convictions tend to work. It seems to me more likely that a number of people who support the war felt comfortable about their convictions when they believed the issue was WMD, but now that the consensus is that it wasn't/isn't have become uncomfortable because they cannot find an explicit argument to support their convictions.

Perhaps the purpose of this post was to provide said argument in order to restore faith to such people.

Socrates

by a reader on Sun, 09/19/2004 - 23:42 | [reply](#)

re: purpose of argument

I think we can all agree that most Americans were either in the pro-war faction or the anti-war faction before the WMD stockpiles argument was introduced, and for the most part their position was unaffected by it. But there has to be a significant group that falls between these groups, right? People who changed their minds about the war after being convinced that Saddam had WMD, even if most people at **The World** agree that the argument wasn't for them?

Upon further reflection, and deeper discussions with my friend, I think the answer may be a little more complicated. I think it may be a version of liberal guilt.

My friend is a liberal who was deeply affected, as we all were, by 9/11. He's from New York. He was angry. He got caught up, in what he believes, was the frenzy of post 9/11 anger. At the time he was easily convinced that Saddam was a threat to us, but now, with the dissipation of that initial anger, the clear thinking liberal has reemerged and feels bad. And if he feels bad, he must be a victim. He was duped. One part of Bush's argument turned out to not be true, so that must be the argument that convinced him to go astray from his normal views. He was deceived. Perhaps not out right lied to, but he figures Bush told his guys (and apparently the intelligence services of like seven other countries including Russia and Jordan, but I digress) to find stuff for him to use in the argument. No one working for Bush was going to win any gold stars by bringing up the idea that the WMD intelligence was unreliable, or the link between Saddam and AQ was shaky. Or so the thinking goes.

I know this seems to have gone a bit off topic, but to bring it back to the Capone analogy and how it might possibly prove useful with this group of people – I'm still not sure. No one wants to be told that they're remembering history wrong; that they were for the war without the WMD argument, and only think that was what convinced them, but we at **The World** forums know better. And even if they are convinced, I don't think it will change their position on the war, it will only make them feel worse about their initial wrong headedness.

by **R** on Mon, 09/20/2004 - 15:51 | [reply](#)

41st post!

R, again, it might **not** prove useful. That's ok.

I wouldn't presume to tell someone they're "remembering history wrong" or what they were for the war, er, for. If your friend were to tell me he opposed the war w/o WMD but favored it with, I might think it weird but I'd certainly **believe** him.

This isn't about what **your friend** was for the war for. It's about what **our Congress** was for the war for. This opinion (of Congress) can have been different, in various ways, from the opinion of your friend, as it was different from the opinions of Noam

Chomsky or Pat Buchanan. Indeed it could have been slightly different for each Congressman who voted Yes. There's nothing wrong with or unusual about any of that. I have disagreements with Congress myself on various things.

My point is that Congress had a collection of reasons for thinking war with Iraq was warranted, but only a subset, and not necessarily a pivotal subset (WMD), was actionable before the UNSC when (unsuccessfully) trying to get them on board. You're saying that (for whatever reason) it was precisely that subset which was seemingly most important to your friend; that, for him, WMD **was** the pivotal issue.

I suspect the resolution then is to say to your friend, If WMD was the pivotal issue for you then (assuming "no WMD") yes I certainly understand why you now feel the war was bad (or whatever). There's no arguing with this; "Saddam had no WMD!", rightly or wrongly, is now the Conventional Wisdom, and thus someone with your friend's WMD-pivotal view, necessarily, de-supports the war. As is his right.

My only problem would be if he claims that WMD was pivotal in some **objective** sense, external to his private priorities. In other words, if he got his idea that "the war was only justified with WMD" **from the UN debate**, I think that would be wrong because that would represent a distinct failure to understand what was actually being attempted before the UN. At the UN we were **not** attempting to make a case for "There Should Be A War" but, rather, for "The UN Should Help".

To conclude from observing the **latter** case that "it was all about WMD" is like observing Al Capone's tax evasion trial and concluding that federal prosecutors, the FBI, etc care more about tax evasion than about racketeering and murder. Again, it's ok if your **friend** actually has those WMD-centric priorities (war ok if WMD, not if not), just not if he continues to try to claim that this somehow objectively follows **from the fact that the UN debate focused on WMDs**. It doesn't. Best,

--Blix

by a reader on Mon, 09/20/2004 - 23:25 | [reply](#)

42 42 42

assuming blix can count, i get post 42. mwahahaha

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 09/21/2004 - 00:12 | [reply](#)

what ideas appeal to who

just a random example of how unpredictable it is: of the very few

strangers who've liked my blog enough to email me, two are in porn/sex industry. and they are both leftists, too. who would have predicted that?

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 09/21/2004 - 21:20 | [reply](#)

Not controversial among historians?

"Prohibition brought into being a new kind of criminal—the bootlegger. The career of Al Capone was a dramatic instance of the development of bootlegging on a large scale. His annual earnings were estimated at \$60,000,000. The rise of the bootlegging gangs led to a succession of gang wars and murders. A notorious incident was the St. Valentine's Day Massacre in Chicago in 1929, when the Capone gang shot to death seven members of the rival "Bugs" Moran gang. Historians of the underworld, however, suggest that by the late 1920s bootlegging was on the verge of semimonopoly control and that the end of gang wars was approaching." Encyclopaedia Britannica, article "Prohibition"

The article on "Al Capone" is more nuanced, but still implies that Capone was a product of the creation of victimless crimes.

by a reader on Sat, 10/16/2004 - 03:42 | [reply](#)

No To Chechen Independence For The Foreseeable Future

We are no fans of President Putin – far from it – nor apologists for his handling of the Chechnya issue. *But...*

There are no 'moderate' leaders seeking Chechen independence.

If there were, then following the recent mass murder of Russian children and others, to which a Chechen terrorist leader has **confessed**, the moderate leaders would have done much more than issue meaningless condemnations which do nothing but insult the dead and the bereaved. They would have declared:

- That they are diverting all their resources to the capture and/or punishment of those who sent the perpetrators;
- That they will not rest until all terrorist organisations based in Chechnya are eradicated;
- That they offer to cooperate with the Russian authorities in every possible way to achieve that;
- And that their claim for independence has been put on hold until that is achieved.

Since none of them have done this, we have to conclude that the cause of Chechen independence is not **legitimate**.

Sun, 09/19/2004 - 01:50 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Independence

I would agree.

I also wonder why Chechnya has a special claim to independence. There are several former Russian states which now exist on their own. Each has some degree of economic tie to the former Soviet Union, now as Russia. Terrorism was irrelevant to their independence although each country had particular issues. Terrorism has never created an independent state nor does it have that true goal. Revolution is a different story, although peaceful it might be.

by a reader on Mon, 09/20/2004 - 14:50 | [reply](#)

Bewildered

Although I would agree with your conclusion, I can hardly agree with your logic. Terrorism is a method of making one's voice heard; it does not by itself make a cause illegitimate, especially if used with declared and careful discretion. The African National Congress had decided on performing sabotage and possibly terrorist attacks on the apartheid government in the heat of the suppression in South Africa. In their case, I would not agree with your conclusion. The Chechen cause for independence, and the role the Islamists play in it is illegitimate for other reasons, correlated but not due to their methods.

by a reader on Thu, 09/23/2004 - 06:11 | [reply](#)

This Cause is inseparable from the actors

The issue is not whether terrorism "makes" a cause illegitimate. Of course it cannot (else some e.g. animal-rights bombers would "prove" that it's ok to be mean to animals).

The problem is that **this** cause (unlike other causes one might name) is **inseparable** from the issue of who would be placed in power were the cause's goal achieved. The "cause" is not just some abstract proposition but is simultaneously, in practice, an attempt at a power-grab. As **The World** explained, there do not seem to be any voices of moderation willing and/or able to assume such power, only terrorists and defacto tacit (or cowed) terrorist supporters, therefore it is not right to support the cause.

So in this particular case, terrorism doesn't "make the cause illegitimate" per se, but the fact that there are **only** terrorists, and no viable moderates to be found to assume the mantle of power, actually kinda does.

--Blix

by a reader on Fri, 09/24/2004 - 00:49 | [reply](#)

Terrorism can only fill a vacuum

Terror is a tactic. It thrives only when there is a frustrated stupefied audience drawn into witnessing a turmoil of imbalance of power, lack of initiative, and lost foresight. In some rare cases by filling a vacuum of leadership and vision terror tactics may eventually spark a reaction, a change or shift, but only through the unbearability of chaos. Terrorism thus fills a vacuum of civilization, but only briefly in the course of human events. Nature, including human nature, abhors a vacuum. Terror on the fringe never brings the change that terrorists seek. It fosters instead an alternative stability which terrorists abhor, either the dead stability of dictatorship or the living dynamic of representative freedom. Peoples always have choices. To permanently live in fear of being blown up is not one of them.

by a reader on Fri, 09/24/2004 - 14:54 | [reply](#)

Point of Agreement

Blixa, this is the Bewildered "reader" from the second comment above. I wanted to thank you for your comment, and say, I think I see the point you and perhaps the author(s) of the original post make. I agree with this:

Since the cause in question is pursued by "terrorists" who are going, most likely, to continue their terrorising even after they grab the power, it is illegitimate. That seems to me to be the only way terrorism could make a cause illegitimate: terrorism as a way of government. But terrorism as a way of taking control of the government, as exemplified by the ANC case I wrote above, is only a tactic.

Cheers!

by a reader on Sat, 09/25/2004 - 10:28 | [reply](#)

correction

That seems to me to be the only way terrorism could make a cause *illegitimate*: terrorism as a way of government.

Apologies!

Editor's note: Corrected.

by a reader on Mon, 09/27/2004 - 19:22 | [reply](#)

They Have to be Moderate to Have a Right to Independence?

I don't know a whole lot about Cechnya and don't really care to. From my standpoint, they could all commit a mass suicide and I'd only be frustrated at one more (albiet last) headline that doesn't interest me on the front page of my newspaper.

I do object to your implication that Cechnya has to have moderate leaders in order to have a right to sovereignty. (Pardon my spelling.) Because Hussein was extremist, the U.S. could rightfully colonize Iraq now? (Think about it, it's a solution.) Either people have a right to decide how they're governed, or they don't.

Don't blame their leaders' political leanings.

by a reader on Wed, 09/29/2004 - 23:30 | [reply](#)

I am a 14 year old student.

I am a 14 year old student. I think that chechnya deserves freedom and if they are not granted it they should do hatever it takes to get it. It is sad that thee people are being deprived of what is rightfully theirs and it also hurts e to see humans being treated like pets or animals. This sickens me and makes me scared to grow up in a

world were I an american could one day be like the cechnians and

be own by another. Give the people what they want. god bless

by a reader on Fri, 01/07/2005 - 21:29 | [reply](#)

chechnya islamo-psychopaths

The problem in chechnya is trhat islamo-fascist psychopaths have not yet been vanquished and totally destroyed. This is the only way to deal with anyone or any group or nation infected with the scourge of islamo-lunacy.

by pilgrim on Sun, 01/09/2005 - 19:07 | [reply](#)

What Is The Foreign Office Good For?

A Foreign Office official has said that the UN **should not** impose sanctions on Sudan:

“[They] must remain an option but ... there is a danger that the albeit limited cooperation that Sudanese government has offered so far would be withdrawn if the international community failed to acknowledge the small things that have changed for the better.”

Is *that* the main danger that the Foreign Office fears? For over a decade, the Islamist government in Sudan has been **waging** a genocidal campaign against Christians and black Africans. They are not doing this by mistake. They do not just have lax security, they are actively sponsoring mass murder.

And the Foreign Office wants the free, powerful nations of the world to *back off* for fear that the vicious tyrannical thugs might undo even the “small things that have changed for the better”? Is that all that the future victims of genocide can expect from the West? is that all we are good for?

Vicious tyrannical thugs do not lightly abandon attempts to destroy those whom they see as their enemies or their rightful prey. Even now they **will not admit** that they are responsible for the current crisis. Why are they now even slightly less uncooperative than in the past? It is not because of any sudden access of good will, either to their victims or to the West. It is solely because they rightly perceive that the US is now starting to pay attention to them and they are afraid, as they ought to be. If the West is to make the Sudanese government disarm the militias and cease their totalitarian violence, we must openly threaten them. Sanctions would be a start. Begging them not to undo even the few cosmetic concessions they have so far made would not.

Fri, 09/24/2004 - 23:31 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

Sanctions?

To be sure, it's a good idea to punish people or governments when they commit crimes, so as to give them an incentive to stop. In the case of Sudan, military action (ground or air strikes) might be a start. But sanctions mean that people living in the territory of a bad

government are punished for the actions of that government, even though many may well disagree with those actions. Under sanctions those people are no longer allowed to trade with foreigners. Many of these people will be the very victims of the government aggression the sanctions seek to address. Furthermore, all people in the whole world are punished by not being able to trade with people living in that country. What is the justification for this?

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Sat, 09/25/2004 - 14:49 | [reply](#)

collateral damage

that effect is collateral damage, and just like with bombing, sometimes it's worth it. though i do find it hard to imagine when sanctions on everything would help, sanctioning say *weapons* sounds reasonable enough. No need to sell big bombs to someone the day before we invade.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 09/25/2004 - 17:47 | [reply](#)

Middle-East Experts

A noted **democracy expert** has expressed his opinion about the prospects for democracy in Iraq:

Jordan's King Abdullah has said it will be impossible to hold fair elections in Iraq in the current state of chaos

His Majesty also announced upcoming free and fair elections for the post of ruler of Jordan.

(Just kidding.)

Some noted **surrender experts** have been giving the Coalition forces in Iraq advice on – well – surrender.

Withdrawal of US-led forces must be on the agenda if an international summit on Iraq is to go ahead, France's Foreign Minister Michel Barnier said

Or they'll do what?

Some experts on **turning the other cheek** have been showing the world how it's done:

Roman Catholic and Orthodox clerics have exchanged blows inside Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre, one of Christianity's holiest sites.

Thwack! "Forgive *that!*"

And a noted terrorism expert has been **giving advice** to – well – terrorists:

Yasser Arafat has promised to intercede on behalf of British hostage Ken Bigley

[...]

[T]he Palestinian leader had allocated one of his senior ministers "who had spent many years on the ground in Iraq" to try and make contact with Mr Bigley's captors.

"I think that what is important is that, in the past, President Arafat has influenced the network of

communication about other hostages so it was in that

context that I decided this would be something very positive to do."

Saddest of all, an **ex-President of the United States** has become enamoured of **conspiracy theories** (via **Allah**):

Carter responded to personal question as well. He said his two favorite movies are "Casablanca" and "Fahrenheit 9/11."

[Sigh.]

Tue, 09/28/2004 - 21:20 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

casablanca

out of curiosity, anything wrong with casablanca? I liked it. But was not looking for deep meaning while watching.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 09/28/2004 - 23:13 | [reply](#)

Carter

My client, Mr. Carter, wishes it to be known that Fahrenheit 9/11 is his favorite purely for artistic reasons. He believes the results achieved by the talented director, surpass even those of the most distinguished and critical cineast Lenie Riefenstahl - his second favorite movie maker. Mr. Carter's favorite movies are gripping realistic fictional movies, hence his choice for a top two in that category.

Mr. Carter feels both his favorite movies provide the purest romantic dramatisation of respectively love and hate. Oh, and by the way, obviously Mr. Carter meant Fahrenheit 415 and not Fahrenheit 9/11 and he apologises for any inconvenience which might have been caused by this unfortunate mistake.

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Tue, 09/28/2004 - 23:30 | [reply](#)

Brokaw, Jennings Rally Round Rather

Acting firmly to dispel any impression that the sickness in the mainstream media is confined to CBS, Dan Rather's opposite numbers in ABC and NBC have rallied round to **support him**:

competing news anchors Tom Brokaw and Peter Jennings offered support Saturday for the beleaguered newsman.

[...]

"What I think is highly inappropriate is what going on across the Internet, a kind of political jihad ... that is quite outrageous,"

That's an interesting choice of insult: can anyone recall Brokaw or Jennings ever using the term 'jihad' in a pejorative sense before? Can anyone even recall them conceding that a jihad is under way – not a 'political' one but a real one that maims and slaughters children? Or that *jihadis* ever do anything at all reprehensible, let alone 'outrageous'?

Perhaps when their white hot rage that someone in pyjamas has dared to criticise a senior member of their guild has abated a little, they'll withdraw the comment and replace it by a less offensive one. Let's see ... what about 'what's going on across the Internet, a kind of political *Americanism* ... is quite outrageous'? Yes, that would express the same sentiment perfectly, and offend no one of consequence.

Sat, 10/02/2004 - 22:23 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

What's it going to take...

...for Rather to get the boot?

The BBC's example is not encouraging, it took a public inquiry saying they were a bunch of lying appeasement weasels (paraphrasing slightly inaccurately) to get Greg Dyke and some other lying pillock fired.

Alan

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sun, 10/03/2004 - 01:57 | [reply](#)

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'Deterrence' by Bill Whittle

Bill Whittle has written another **outstanding essay**. Go and read it.

Wed, 10/06/2004 - 17:19 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

I agree

It is a good essay.

I have been reading your blog since I learned Mr Deutsch was involved. I liked his book and Edge article.

My blog is www.legenda.blogspot.com. It is about the war. I hope you will read it.

by a reader on Thu, 10/07/2004 - 06:51 | [reply](#)

comments

yeah David Deutsch rules.

ur blog doesn't have comments or even contact info (email), so not so much fun to read if I can't reply :-/

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 10/07/2004 - 17:33 | [reply](#)

Democracy

Interesting article. I can't help thinking though that Bush and Kerry have absolutely nothing to do with government. They are vying to be puppets of the real ruling class. Is democracy an illusion? I lose sleep over this these days. Not that I'm a conspiracy theorist, but why did 9-11 happen? this is not a question I hear asked often. Why would anyone want to do such a thing - surely - 'they' feel they have a reason. I wonder what that reason is? What's clear to me is, the threat of Saddam revaluing his oil in euros, the succession of Turkey into Europe and the free market, oil buying muscle of China is now (post non-UN endorsed invasion of

Afghanistan/Iraq) much less of a concern to the USA. - Geokker,

Re: Democracy

Not that I'm a **conspiracy theorist**, but why did 9-11 happen? this is not a question I hear asked often.

Perhaps it should be asked and answered more often.

Why would anyone want to do such a thing - surely - 'they' feel they have a reason. I wonder what that reason is?

Perhaps 'their' **stated reason** would be a good place to start.

(BTW, those keywords in the middle of your home page? They should be links. Surely I'm not the only person who has clicked on 'dumbDesign' a few times before thinking that yes, indeed, it is a dumb design to make me go find the matching word in the sidebar.)

by **Kevin** on Fri, 10/08/2004 - 23:27 | [reply](#)

Geokker, "Not that I'm a c

Geokker,

"Not that I'm a conspiracy theorist, but why did 9-11 happen? this is not a question I hear asked often."

You don't have to be a conspiracy 'theorist' to ask that question and it's not true that it is not asked often. In fact 9-11 *was* a conspiracy by definition, involving at the very least 19 men (plus we now know about the "mastermind" KSM, etc, so there were more than just 19, but 19 is surely enough for a conspiracy). There were many articles about why this happened at the time and it boiled down to the fact that this conspiracy of 19+ men wanted to kill a lot of Americans, cause mayhem, and tear down what they considered to be a hugely important symbol of American power (this excludes any of those 19 who may not have known the true aim of the hijacking, but even those men will still a part of the *conspiracy*). Anyway, that's why it happened. Glad I could set the record straight.

"Why would anyone want to do such a thing - surely - 'they' feel they have a reason. I wonder what that reason is?"

All people have reasons for everything that they do. Sometimes, for some things, they are crazy reasons. Yes you are right they felt they had a reason. That reason was looney tunes. But follow Kevin's link to find the reason, FWIW. They wanted to do such a thing because they were fanatics.

--Blix

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Ishmael Khaldi

If you don't know Ishmael Khaldi's story, you should:

In my years of speaking to people, I've never received threats or personal attacks like I did speaking on campuses. There were threatening incidents at both the University of Florida and at California State University. Both were chilling. The crowd in Florida was one full of anger and hatred, yet I had to stand before them unsure of the enemy who had sent threats earlier that day...

Can you guess **what** made so many people so angry with Ishmael?

Fri, 10/08/2004 - 00:46 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

He found the one way...

He found the one and only way a Muslim Arab can get himself hated by the American Left.

by a reader on Fri, 10/08/2004 - 01:36 | [reply](#)

He found the one way ...

Actually, Ishmael Khaldi is an Israeli Bedouin. True the Bedouin are Arabs and Muslim, but they are also Israeli citizens. Seventy percent of Bedouin men serve in the Israeli military. Ishmael speaks about his being a minority in Israel and encourages American Jewish college students to educate themselves about their heritage and the past, present and future of Israel.

Ishmael's allegiance to Israel angers many pro-Palestinian activists. They are the people who do not want Ish to speak.

by a reader on Thu, 10/14/2004 - 03:37 | [reply](#)

The Mosque

Solomon has an excellent, careful account of why anyone should care that a new mosque is being built in Boston.

Sat, 10/09/2004 - 19:51 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

And Now He's Dead

Israel Kills Islamic Jihad Leader in Gaza Strike:

GAZA (Reuters) - Israel killed the military chief of the Palestinian militant group Islamic Jihad in a Gaza City air strike on Tuesday that drew vows of revenge and could complicate efforts to end a huge Israeli offensive.

Under what circumstances does success in a military operation "complicate efforts" to end it? Only when the best hope for peace is the defeat of the army in question. This is the objective towards which Reuters is tirelessly working. This is also why they call the murder gang a 'militant group' and its leader a 'military chief'. And it is why they endorse, as they invariably do, the murderers' transparent lie that their next mass murder will be an act of revenge. In reality the murderers howl "Death to Jews" continuously, and perpetrate it too, regardless of whether Israel has recently killed a terrorist leader or not. The only difference is that Reuters never reports the howls except on occasions like this, when they can be given the tawdry legitimacy of 'vows of revenge' and can thus reinforce the evil myth that the conflict is a 'cycle of violence'.

[...]

Dabbash's death also fanned tension just as Israeli and Palestinian officials were trying to work out a deal on ending a six-day-old Israeli offensive

His death did not 'fan tension'. His associates were already at boiling point and killing as fast and furiously as they possibly could. In the minds of all decent people, it caused nothing but relief.

into the densely populated Gaza Strip to quell rocket fire into Israel by militants.

Is "densely populated" really the best adjective to describe the Gaza Strip for the purposes of this news report? Of course not. So why was it chosen? To imply that Israel is recklessly killing civilians.

[...]

Dabbash, 38, was the leader in Palestinian lands of a

group sworn to destroying Israel and at the forefront of a suicide bombing campaign during a 4-year-old Palestinian uprising.

Now there's a rare admission, buried in the middle of the piece – a hard fact that contradicts the earlier spin. They should have started with it. Then next paragraph: "*Now he's dead!*" Third paragraph: "And we have Israel to thank, which has also killed such noted enemies of peace and freedom as..."

Mon, 10/11/2004 - 22:44 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

How can anybody look at this

How can anybody look at this as anything less than a great thing? Isreal killed a murderous thug who has the blood of many innocents on his hands, and one more jackhole gets martyred... which happens to be the greatest thing in the minds of these jackholes. Is there any clearer example of a win-win?

by a reader on Tue, 10/12/2004 - 02:42 | [reply](#)

more win-win

terrorist dies and israel gets *good* press would be more win/win

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 10/12/2004 - 19:34 | [reply](#)

I agree, that one's a better

I agree, that one's a better win/win, but it's about as likely as, terrorist dies and Christopher Reeve comes back to life... and can walk. Of course that would be a win/win/win, but since in we're in make believe land, why not?

by a reader on Tue, 10/12/2004 - 20:35 | [reply](#)

Another Faked Grade Scandal

We have already written about the **scandal** of faked grades where a student's grade can be raised or lowered as a method of discipline. Now we have heard of **another** scandal of faked grades where a student's marks can be raised or lowered depending on whether they have "made an effort":

Two Benedict College science professors have been fired after they refused to assign grades that rewarded students' effort as much as acquired knowledge.

President David Swinton dismissed Milwood Motley and Larry Williams when they defied his Success Equals Effort policy, which Swinton said provides struggling freshmen a leg up in adapting to college academics.

Swinton implemented SEE at the historically black private college in the 2003-04 school year. The formula calls for calculating freshman grades based on a 60-40 formula, with effort counting for 60 percent and academics counting for 40 percent.

There are many good ways for a university to help students to adapt to academic life, but this policy is not one of them. Grades must be based on competence not effort, otherwise they are either fraudulent or worthless. This policy can only hurt the students at the college and we salute Motley and Williams for refusing to participate.

Wed, 10/13/2004 - 20:06 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Tutorial

Confused about the difference between science, pseudo-science and all that? Fear not, with Teresa Heinz Kerry's **help**, we can now present a short tutorial:

Heinz Kerry ended with what she called "a highly effective" remedy for arthritis that drew laughter and some skepticism from the audience.

That laughter and scepticism were **science**.

"You get some gin and get some white raisins — and only white raisins — and soak them in the gin for two weeks," she said. "Then eat nine of the raisins a day."

That was **magical thinking**.

Despite the laughter, Dr. Steven Phillips, director of Geriatric Medicine at the University of Nevada quickly supported the prescription.

That was the **politicisation of science**.

Phillips, on stage with Heinz Kerry as part of the panel, said sulfur and sulfides found in grapes are increased by the alcohol and could perhaps alleviate joint pain.

That was **scientism**.

Dr. Michael Gerber, a noted homeopathic doctor

That was **pseudo-science**.

in Reno, also said the formula has merit.

"It makes sense," said Gerber from his office. "People go to hot springs to soak in the water and that water is very high in sulfur. So Mrs. Kerry's remedy is pretty plausible."

That was **bad science**.

Dolores Jackson of Reno, a Kerry supporter who attended the rally, took the raisin and gin remedy seriously.

"There are really other remedies where we don't have to

use so many drugs," Jackson said. "I really believe in alternative medicine."

And that was old-fashioned gullibility. Alas, there's a lot of it about.

Sat, 10/16/2004 - 01:02 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

query

Phillips, on stage with Heinz Kerry as part of the panel, said sulfur and sulfides found in grapes are increased by the alcohol and could perhaps alleviate joint pain.

That was scientism.

Don't understand - why is this bit scientism?

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Sat, 10/16/2004 - 02:14 | [reply](#)

Re: query

OK perhaps that one was a bit of a stretch. We usually define scientism as the purported use of science to resolve non-scientific issues, especially moral issues. But a closely related pattern of irrationality, for which there is no specific name at present, is the purported explanation of mystical, magical, fraudulent etc claims for which there is no evidence by postulating a physical mechanism for which there is no evidence. Thus people say 'maybe telepathy exists and is caused by electromagnetic communication between one brain and another -- after all, brains are electrical'. Or they say 'maybe Teresa's gin-raisins really are "highly effective" against arthritis -- after all, some raisins contain sulphur and some researchers hope that some sulphur-containing drugs might have a beneficial effect on arthritis'.

by [Editor](#) on Sat, 10/16/2004 - 03:05 | [reply](#)

And note that even the "scien

And note that even the "scientism" explanation couldn't explain why ONLY white raisins. I mean, right? --Blix

by a reader on Sat, 10/16/2004 - 03:38 | [reply](#)

Only white raisins? Sounds l

Only white raisins? Sounds like scieracism to me.

by a reader on Sun, 10/17/2004 - 15:07 | [reply](#)

anti-racism

actually, b/c most raisins are black, and have been for ages, it's

anti-racism to advocate for the under-represented white raisins.
they are just victims and need a boost now to restore equality.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 10/17/2004 - 17:06 | [reply](#)

There is now

"But a closely related pattern of irrationality, for which there is no specific name at present, is the purported explanation of mystical, magical, fraudulent etc claims for which there is no evidence by postulating a physical mechanism for which there is no evidence."

The Geller-Taylor syndrome.

by **Alan Furman** on Mon, 10/18/2004 - 11:31 | [reply](#)

Elliot, Try and tell the S

Elliot,

Try and tell the South African black raisins that a minority can't be the beneficiaries of racism.

by a reader on Tue, 10/19/2004 - 14:49 | [reply](#)

d00d i was joking

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 10/19/2004 - 19:32 | [reply](#)

gin raisins - and running!

This recipe was given to me by a friend when I had mentioned all my new aches and pains as I increased my miles while training for a marathon. Amazingly enough, after weeks of eating my raisins (although I covered them and some gin remains in them) my aches and pains are gone. My hips and knee feel better from the raisins - more so then when I was taking the "now bad for you" Celebrex.

by a reader on Sat, 12/18/2004 - 13:08 | [reply](#)

An Agonising Choice

This year's Academy Award for Best Motion Picture is thought to be **likely to be awarded** either to Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* or to Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*. It will be an agonising choice for the Academy, involving a rare conflict between the two great principles – antisemitism and idiotarianism – that currently trump every other consideration in the minds of the fashionable.

The two movies are somewhat similar symptoms of the same serious malaise in Western society: the widespread loss of confidence in its secular moral values. Both are personal statements made by charming rogues who have a sense of humour, are very good at their jobs, and are driven by a core of gibbering hatred. Both peddle incendiary falsehoods that have caused murder and destruction beyond measure, been a blight on every kind of progress and will undoubtedly do a great deal more harm before they are extirpated.

Ignore them. Follow **Gil's** reasonable example and watch *Team America*.

Sun, 10/17/2004 - 17:18 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

Team America rocks

interview about the movie. v good. they are on our side.

nice post.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 10/17/2004 - 18:43 | [reply](#)

Forced

Don't agree about *The Passion*; I did not see whatever you saw in it. Not saying it was my favorite film of the year (*Team America* has a reasonable shot - can't wait to see it!) or even that I liked it all that much (I'm pretty sure I liked, for example, *"Mean Girls"* better :), but the "hatred" parallel you attempt to set up between it and *F9/11* rings false and seems forced. Just cuz both films are

controversial doesn't make them equivalent parallel mirror images

of each other.

But this discrepancy often arises because I actually watched the movie and whoever I'm talking to did not. Telling part of the article you link: "A lot of older Academy voters, who are largely Jewish, refuse to even see this movie". It's probably easy to decide a movie is "antisemitic" if you don't watch it. I know the antisemitic history of passion plays and all but um if I judge the movie based on, like, its own terms and not thinking about other stuff (besides, you know, the actual movie)... I just don't see it.

Did you watch it? Bombastic yes, antisemitic?... sorry I just don't get it. Story took place amongst a bunch of Jews, some good some bad... so what? --Blix

by a reader on Sun, 10/17/2004 - 20:34 | [reply](#)

Re: Forced

Say some thugs attack a non-Jewish hook-nosed guy in an alley, shouting "Hepp! Hepp!", and carve a swastika on his face. Someone who wasn't aware of certain memes might say: "criminal, yes; antisemitic? ... sorry I just don't get it". Anyone who *is* aware of those memes would know for certain that this is the very heart and soul of antisemitism in action.

by [Editor](#) on Sun, 10/17/2004 - 21:10 | [reply](#)

hmm

No seriously. Have you seen the film? It's nothin' like that --Blix

by a reader on Sun, 10/17/2004 - 23:50 | [reply](#)

Blix - are you...

Blix - are you saying that the events in the film are nothing like the events in the Editor's comment "Re: forced" above? That would be a misreading.

Or are you saying that the film is not based with loving and admiring fidelity on Emmerich's book? Or that Emmerich's book is not part of the ancient pattern of antisemitism?

I have not watched the movie because I have read enough of Emmerich's book to know that I don't want to. **Check it out.**

by [David Deutsch](#) on Mon, 10/18/2004 - 00:51 | [reply](#)

3cents

i haven't watched any michael moore movies, but i know they are bad. don't have to watch to know that.

or, before I saw Mean Girls, i knew I was gonna like it. then when i

watched it three times I did.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 10/18/2004 - 01:43 | [reply](#)

the passion is anti-semitic

Don't agree about The Passion; I did not see whatever you saw in it.

"I do not see anti-semitism here" is an argument from ignorance, which is a fallacy. That you don't know a reason to think something doesn't argue in the slightest it's false.

If you want to argue it's not anti-semitic, you must first find out the specific charges (learn the argument that it *is*) and then criticize that. In this case the argument it's anti-semitic is that it's a passion play in the grand tradition of anti-semitic passion plays. To refute this, you can explain how it's not a passion play (in the sense of the tradition not name) (good luck :D), explain how the tradition isn't anti-semitic, or come up with something else.

as for the argument that the plays are anti-semitic, so you can engage with and refute it if you like, **The World** posted about it [here](#). the link for passion plays in particular is [this](#). also The Passion was based off Emmerich's book in part, and Emmerich says in very short that jews killed jesus, became cursed, and were themselves at fault for all this. also that the jews were evil, and that this evil transmits itself to babies so it'll last through the generations.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 10/18/2004 - 02:36 | [reply](#)

heh

DD,

"are you saying that the events in the film are nothing like the events in the Editor's comment "Re: forced" above? That would be a misreading."

Heh. That it would be. No I'm not. I'm saying The Passion is not analogous to that example. What I meant by this is that the example contains elements that are recognizably antisemitic but this (maybe..) needs to be explained. However having thought about it most of those elements don't even need to be explained. Anyway, The Passion (the movie (ITSELF)) does not contain analogous elements, whether explainable or not. (I've heard some attempted explanations and consider them bogus.)

I might listen to your attempts at rebutting my assertion that said

explanations (of why elements X Y Z of The Passion are antisemitic) are bogus but, alas, as you have not seen the film, you're not in a position to do it....

I have not read the Emmerich book. I'm judging the film (ITSELF).

Elliot (and DD),

It sounds to me as if you simply wouldn't think it is possible to tell the story of "the passion" (=a certain rather short period in the life of the literary character "Jesus"), i.e. make a "passion play", without being antisemitic. If not, then fine, I admit that The Passion is antisemitic under that standard, a standard I'm not very interested in.

If it is possible to tell a non-antisemitic "passion" story (by your standard), how would one go about doing it?

--Blix

by a reader on Mon, 10/18/2004 - 04:00 | [reply](#)

P.S. (not T.S.) Elliot

BTW "I saw the movie and did not find it antisemitic" is not an argument from ignorance despite my perhaps poor choice of words which gave you that opening. I am not ignorant of it having been antisemitic, I have knowledge of it NOT being antisemitic, namely from having seen it, which many of those who are calling it antisemitic ("less ignorant" than I, apparently?) haven't. If I see your red shirt and say "gee that doesn't look blue to me" am I "arguing from ignorance"?

I've heard and read many of the arguments as to why The Passion is antisemitic and found them bogus, like I said. Interestingly, it's not necessary for me rebut those arguments here, because none such have been advanced by anyone, not in this post nor in the prior post you linked. There is an argument that "Matthew"'s author, or at least the later author/insertor of a certain infamous line, had antisemitic intent, and an argument that some chick named Emmerich was obsessed with antisemitic thoughts, neither of which I dispute. There is no argument, there or here, that the film "The Passion of the Christ" is antisemitic. There is an assertion. Onus is not on me but on the asserters. Which will be - or should be - hard to do without having seen the movie.

It's easy to do however if your standard for antisemitism is "if it's a passion play [=tells the story of JC's last day] it's antisemitic".

by a reader on Mon, 10/18/2004 - 07:51 | [reply](#)

compare and contrast

<http://web.israelinsider.com/...>

><http://www.womentodaymagazine.com/contact/antisemitic.html>

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 10/18/2004 - 18:08 | [reply](#)

I have actually seen the movi

I have actually seen the movie and to me it was indeed anti-semitic: Stereo-typical Jews (with hooked nose and kippa) taking bribes to give false witness against Jesus, a group of blood thirsty psychopathic priests who, for no apparent reason but their innate vengefulness, keep on asking for Jesus' death to the very end despite Jesus' bloody and injured condition (itself much exaggerated compared to the account in the Gospels), the faces of the priests and their hypocritical soft talk to the Romans in charge, a very kind and benevolent Pilate looking desperately for "truth" and having to deal with a bloodthirsty Jewish rabble in complete contrast to real historical accounts, well known antisemitic symbolisms like showing Satan repeatedly walking among the Jews-his people(?), the famous "his blood be on us and our children" line that was still there, left without a subscript only at the pressure of ADL....

I come from Iran. So I think I know what I'm talking about when it comes to these things. I have seen many propaganda TV series depicting Zionists, Freemasons etc. This film was disturbingly similar to them.

Actually a couple of years ago the Iranian regime had made a TV series about Mary and the infant Jesus. There you also had evil Jews always in defiance of God's will, but even THEY had the Jewish authorities divided in two opposing camps, one benevolent and moral and the other evil predecessors of Zionism or whatever. (It was filled with historical mistakes, priests and rabbis were all mixed up so the two camps were based on those of Hillel and Shammai as Temple priests!)

My point is that Mel Gibson's film lacked even this. (unless you want to count one or two ordinary Jews who weren't THAT bad...put there as embellishments I guess.)

AIS

by a reader on Mon, 10/18/2004 - 19:59 | [reply](#)

How the West is lost...

I wrote this at presenceofmind.net, but I'm posting it here, also.

Greg Swann

How the West is lost...

Citing a dumb [MSNBC article](#) (Drudge had it, too), David Deutsch of [Setting the World to Rights](#) offers this:

This year's Academy Award for Best Motion Picture is

thought to be likely to be awarded either to Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* or to Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*. It will be an agonising choice for the Academy, involving a rare conflict between the two great principles -- antisemitism and idiotarianism -- that currently trump every other consideration in the minds of the fashionable.

The two movies are somewhat similar symptoms of the same serious malaise in Western society: the widespread loss of confidence in its secular moral values. Both are personal statements made by charming rogues who have a sense of humour, are very good at their jobs, and are driven by a core of gibbering hatred. Both peddle incendiary falsehoods that have caused murder and destruction beyond measure, been a blight on every kind of progress and will undoubtedly do a great deal more harm before they are extirpated.

Privately, by email to Sarah Fitz-Claridge, whom I had thought had written the piece, I wrote:

> Both [.....] are driven by a core of gibbering hatred.

This is beneath you. You have no evidence of gibbering hatred in Gibson and no shortage from Moore. This is moral relativism at its worst. Whatever Gibson's faults may be, he is motivated by nothing but benevolent ends. And whatever Moore's virtues, if any, his objectives are openly malevolent. Even taking account that neither film will attract any Oscar votes--why would that matter? are you misled or just counting coup?--this is a completely invalid comparison.

[snipped]

It is not necessary to insist that Gibson is right about anything to understand that, by grouping him with Moore, you are crediting an unearned merit to Moore.

It was Sarah who told me that the author was David Deutsch. In the mean time, I had these further thoughts:

The best-light form of the equation is:

life-loving small-l libertarian film-maker carried away by his religious faith, who may have been influenced by an antique anti-semitist, produces a film that consists of a particularly gory *Stations of the Cross* with a particularly saccharine *Pieta* as coda, which film, contrary to hysterical predictions, has had zero negative consequences and may have had some salutary positive consequences, and has no movement-oriented or anti-civilization objectives whatever

equals

life-loathing Socialist propagandist desperate to deprive

honest but ignorant voters of their right to an informed consent by deliberately promoting vicious mis- and disinformation, thereby intentionally undermining American and allied troops in war and openly making common cause with the worst enemies Western civilization has ever known

This is an obviously invalid equation. When we despoil thought we despoil the very thing we have that our enemies lack. We surrender that which cannot ever be conquered.

I don't like the non-concepts "idiotarian" and "anti-idiotarian", a pair of junk drawers of the mind, but whatever the poster thinks--or doesn't think--about **The Passion**, Mel Gibson is beyond all doubt an important voice in the ancient and continuing war against tyranny. Not only does the poster elevate his undoubted enemies, he denigrates a true friend of liberty far more important than any of us. This would be nothing more than detestable snobbery if it did not effect by erosion the enemy's objectives.

The West will fall, if it does, not because it was knocked down from the outside, but because it was not held up from the inside. That little post, of less, even, than passing moment, is how that will be done.

I have defended *The Passion of the Christ* at length, not just because it is a great movie, but also because it is *not* an evil movie. It is a good deal less important to the cause of human liberty than **Braveheart** or **The Patriot**, but it is a good and valuable and important film. Moreover, Gibson's entire corpus is entirely benevolent, where Moore's is entirely malevolent. To compare these two men in any way at all is the kind of obscenity, that, if indulged, *will* contribute to the fall of the West.

by [gswann](#) on Mon, 10/18/2004 - 20:25 | [reply](#)

to AIS

"Stereo-typical Jews (with hooked nose and kippa)"

Apparently there are many many Jews who are Stereo-typical Jews (a former co-worker of mine could be described this way - great guy btw) and thus should not appear on movie screens being portrayed doing things. Kippa = yarmulke right? For crying out loud, you can't show a Jew wearing a yarmulke doing something bad?

"Jews... taking bribes to give false witness against Jesus"

I think you have in mind Judas (one character), although I'm not sure he "bore false witness" he just turned the wanted guy in, seems like that's bearing true witness to me. Anyway, why did you

use the plural? Apparently now if you portray a Jewish character in

a film doing a negative thing that's "antisemitic". This is precisely why I get annoyed by the complaint and argue against it BTW. It's so condescending. Look: Jews are people & are capable of doing bad things, like other people. To imply that all stories must pretend otherwise is to coddle Jews as like pets.

"a group of blood thirsty psychopathic priests who, for no apparent reason but their innate vengefulness, keep on asking for Jesus' death to the very end"

It wasn't for no apparent reason, it was for an obvious reason which was perfectly apparent: because Jesus had blasphemed against the Lord their God, had claimed to be the "messiah". Had I been a member of the Sanhedrin (which implies, living in that society, having the religious views they did, etc) I reckon I would have voted the exact same way and called for his death as well. The case against him was pretty clear-cut and his own testimony was all one needed. But anyway, let's stipulate that the audience will come away thinking that particular group of Jews (the pro-crucifixion faction of the Sanhedrin - remember, there was an anti-faction as well, they just lost the vote) was portrayed doing bad stuff/having bad feelings in this film.

Thing is, other Jews were portrayed doing good stuff/having good feelings in the exact same film. Again, this is because Jews are, you know, people, some of them good some bad.

"itself much exaggerated compared to the account in the Gospels"

The account in the Gospels is sketchy so there's no disputing that the film writer filled in details according to how he felt like. Any writer of this story would have to. Anyway so you're asserting (probably correctly) that the film exaggerated the extent to which a bunch of ROMAN soldiers (or perhaps Syrians working as Roman soldiers? not clear but historically many of them would have been Syrians AFAIK) scourged JC etc. and somehow this exaggeration is an example of... antisemitism?

"the faces of the priests and their hypocritical soft talk to the Romans in charge"

Explain hypocritical. I don't even see them as hypocritical to begin with. They were priests in a theocratic society being occupied by a pagan empire; thus they had a very difficult fence to straddle. Again, I'd probably have acted pretty much the same way in their place.

"a very kind and benevolent Pilate"

Again, like Judas, Pilate is one (1) character. Does the movie Forrest Gump accuse all Americans of being simpletons? (Hmm don't answer that :) Now, I understand perfectly well that in the Bible stories Pilate's role was probably soft-pedaled/gussied up for later, Roman audiences. I understand that this aspect of the story, like many other aspects, was used in antisemitic ways in passion plays. But I don't see "the Jewish priests wanted him executed and the Roman proconsul guy was a soul searching Hamlet", however

dubious historically (and literarily), as being antisemitic. This is because: I didn't see a problem with the Jewish priests' position (contextually) in the first place; Pilate came off like a cowardly bureaucrat; and I don't take either one of them to Represent The Races They Come From. And you really **can't** do this if you watch the whole movie, as I said there were Jews who **didn't** want JC to be killed, and Romans who were bloodthirsty monsters. Why pick on Pilate, and Caiphas, and say "the film's making The Romans look good and The Jews look bad" instead of picking on say Head Sadistic Roman Guard, and Jew Who Helps Carry Jesus's Cross, and say "the film's making The Romans look like monsters and The Jews look compassionate"?

Objectively I don't see why one would pick one interpretation over the other.

"bloodthirsty Jewish rabble in complete contrast to real historical accounts"

I don't know what "real historical accounts" there are of the Jesus Of Nazareth Case which you could be basing this on. The Bible story goes that there was some crowd outside the courthouse and they wanted Barabbas spared and not Jesus. This film portrays that story. BTW everyone assumes this was a "bloodthirsty Jewish rabble" but supposing such an incident really did take place no one here knows what would have been the demographic makeup of that particular crowd of some (200? 300?) people outside Pilate's offices. Could some have been Syrian? Ethiopian? Could there have been anti-Jesus plants in the or Roman instigators in the crowd? Sure. Could the crowd have been majority pro-Jesus but this was a silent majority? Sure. The leap from "that crowd wanted Barabbas" to "this says something bad about The Jews" is one that I simply don't make.

Maybe my problem is that I think to some extent antisemitism in a film/story depends on **two** people to exist, the one who writes the story and the one who hears the story and **interprets** it in antisemitic ways. Since I didn't, I don't see the problem... For the record I don't dispute that if you show this film in many parts of Arabia you'll get an antisemitic reaction.

"well known antisemitic symbolisms like showing Satan repeatedly walking among the Jews-his people(?)"

WTF? Who said "the Jews" are "his people"? Jesus was also walking amongst the Jews, and besides he WAS one, doesn't this outweigh the other?

"the famous "his blood be on us and our children" line that was still there"

"still there"? Well I guess.. it's "still" in the Bible after all. Granted perhaps the Bible is simply antisemitic and you simply can't tell this particular story therefore without being antisemitic or leaving out certain aspects of it found in the Bible. That seems to be what others here are saying, in which case, so be it.

"even THEY had the Jewish authorities divided in two opposing

camps ... My point is that Mel Gibson's film lacked even this."

No it didn't. At least in the film I saw it was evident that the Sanhedrin were divided, although obviously the "guilty" side won out.

Of course, again, I'm in a rather strange position because I too would've voted "guilty", I don't see why it's so shocking that an overt blasphemer would've been voted guilty by priests in such a society (ANY such society). Nor do I see why that reflects poorly on the race from which those priests come - or even on those priests themselves.

by a reader on Mon, 10/18/2004 - 21:01 | [reply](#)

Elliot, In what way am I m

Elliot,

In what way am I meant to compare and contrast those two articles?

The first one was - oh what's the word I'm looking for - stupid. Also hateful (far more "hateful" than The Passion IMHO). I stopped reading halfway through. It's junk.

As for the second article, I don't agree with its attempted arguments. It does not speak for me.

by a reader on Mon, 10/18/2004 - 21:09 | [reply](#)

OK. Let's see if I can make m

OK. Let's see if I can make my points more clear this time around. The issue was whether there were identifiable antisemitic symbols/stereotypes/stances...in the film which would make the film (deliberately?) antisemitic, besides the fact that the storyline is based on the Gospels. (Themselves already antisemitic in some parts(esp. Mathew and John))

I think it was. There are other films made about Jesus, and they all entail the trial, the role of Jewish priesthood and so on. So you can argue they all have some elements of antisemitism no matter what. This film however has gone beyond this limit and the examples I gave were to show this, so your arguments about the historic events or the Gospel connection are not really relevant.

Use of 'stereotypical "Jewish" look doing stereotypically "Jewish" things like taking bribes or coveting for money' is antisemitic. Jews like any other people have different looks. That particular look IS an old time antisemitic symbol. Just look at the cartoons in Der Streicher or today's arab media.

(And I didn't mean Judas, but others who were contacted in the middle of the night and hired by the Temple to come and testify, and there were more than one, hence my use of plural tense)
As for psychopathic priests, that was they way they were portrayed, the acting styles , the faces, the hateful use of language, the way

they readily chose Barabbas instead, their sometimes satisfied mostly indifferent and cold looks, while watching the most painful and inhuman torture. I think all you said about performing their religious duties could have been portrayed easily without all this. As for the soft talk, again Jews being rash on those they have power over, but instead cuddling to those in power in a servant like and humble tone thus making them do their evil plans is an oldie. Have you seen "Jude süss" by any chance?

"a very kind and benevolent Pilate... having to deal with a bloodthirsty Jewish rabble in complete contrast to real historical accounts"

I meant historical account about Pilate. (sorry for my poor English) Pilate was a murderous sadist by all those accounts, sadist even by Roman standards of the time. In the film he looked, at least to me, like a kind and perplexed poor guy in charge of a stinking hateful people asking philosophical questions about "truth". You didn't see that? Don't you think Gibson could have portrayed him a bit more accurate historically? Don't you wonder why he didn't?

If the "blood" sentence is OK, why did he choose to omit the subtitle? If it was so problematic, why did he insist on keeping it there? Deliberate?

I also said there were one or two Jews who weren't that bad. The scene with the Sanhedrin(?) members opposing nightly trial lasted what...5 seconds? In contrast to near two hours of hateful priests? Simon of Cyrene, bearing the cross, became a Christian saint later as tradition goes, so that doesn't really count. Christian anti-semitism was against Jews who chose to remain Jews and thus remain cursed, not the Jews who became Christians and were forgiven of their sins, as all Jesus disciples were Jews too as you said, but that is irrelevant.

In any case, 1 or 2 little shots like this can't compensate all the rest of the film.

The Devil walking among Jews. Well, Jews being devil's lot and the Devil doing his work through them is a well known part of Christian anti-semitism and went on for centuries. What do you think those scenes in the film would convey? Why are they there? Do you see the Devil walking among Roman soldiers or guards? Why only among the Jews and behind the priests? Coincidence again?

Depicting Jews in films sometimes doing bad things is not antisemitic. Depicting them, including their high priests, evil for being or remaining Jews or acting according to their beliefs is.

BTW, I didn't understand what you meant, but Jews are no "race".

hope that helps. :)

AIS

by a reader on Mon, 10/18/2004 - 22:14 | [reply](#)

Blixa,

Nevermind compare/contrast. What was wrong with the first article?

I found it persuasive.

Also, notice what this film has done: it has set people all on the Side Of Good, who I believe all strongly support Israel, to arguing about whether it is anti-semitic or not. This Jew-baiting was one of the charges in the first article.

AIS, nice posts, I agree.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 10/18/2004 - 22:28 | [reply](#)

Non-antisemitic Passion story?

Blixa asked:

[is it] possible to tell a non-antisemitic "passion" story (by your standard), [and] how would one go about doing it?

Yes. Basically you follow the guidelines laid down by the Second Vatican Council, the rejection of which is the defining doctrine of Gibson's religion.

This question is on the [Anti-Defamation League's FAQ](#) on *The Passion* (the whole of which is worth reading – though I suppose not if you find it hateful, stupid, junk, and obscene). They say:

The story of the Passion can be told without disparaging the Jewish people. Such an account is mandated by the Catholic Church as a result of the Second Vatican Council, which in 1965 repudiated both the deicide charge and all forms of anti-Semitism in its document, *Nostra Aetate*. Most Protestant churches followed suit, and since 1965 Christians have worked cooperatively with Jews to correct anti-Semitic interpretations within Christian theology. Aside from theological considerations, artists have a moral and social responsibility to avoid promoting material that may foster hatred, bigotry and anti-Semitism.

by **David Deutsch** on Mon, 10/18/2004 - 23:27 | [reply](#)

AIS,

Before I try point-by-point, overall let me just say I think there's an inherent problem with saying that a *symbol* is inherently racist/antisemitic/whatever because symbols can be interpreted differently. A lot of what's going on here, admittedly, is that the symbols which to someone who's been more exposed to antisemitic stuff may be obvious, went over my head :-). But, if symbols go completely over the head of X% of the audience do you think X can ever reach a point where you can admit well heck maybe it's not intrinsically antisemitic after all? At what point do you start blaming

not the film but the people who see all sorts of "symbols" therein?
For example,

-You saw Satan walking "amongst the Jews" and thought that was an obvious symbol. I just saw Satan (we assume he's Satan/know this only from prior familiarity w/the story - he actually looked mostly like a Sith Lord to me ;-), who was a character in this film, therefore they had to put him somewhere. The story took place mostly in/around Jerusalem, amongst people who (mostly - we don't know actually but will assume) are Jews, so if you plopped him in a scene in this film it follows he's gonna be amongst mostly Jews. Where exactly should he have been shown observing all these events from, Korea, amongst a bunch o'Koreans? In other words if Satan Standing Near Jews *was* a "symbol" for Jews=Evil, it went completely over my head; who the heck cares who Satan is walking "amongst"? He's Satan, he's like totally evil, so I blame him not them. If I see Satan glowering over a bunch of kids at a children's playground I don't start thinking "dude those kids must be like totally evil"; if there are people who *do* interpret it that way, that's their problem IMHO.

-As for the "stereotypical Jewish look" thing, it's simply true that as a general characteristic a lot of Jews (not all), have prominent noses, is it not? (Same seems true of other nationalities from/around the Levant.) So what? And some of them are actors. (BTW I didn't really notice anything especially out-of-the-ordinary "hook-nosed" about any of the actors...you did? Which ones?) But ok, if I hire such an actor to play the role of a character who's Jewish (and heck why wouldn't I?), and (historically correctly) plopped a yarmulke on his head, you get to accuse me of using a "stereotypical Jewish look"? or I can't have that character holding money or whatever?

This is all reminding me of an old Onion piece (which I can't find) titled something like "Chinese Laundromat Owner Decried For Perpetuating Racial Stereotypes". What sort of actor should have played those roles, Jackie Chan? What sort of hat should he have worn, a foam-and-mesh that reads "Craftsman" on the front? Should we measure actors' noses and tell some of them "sorry I can't give you this part, you look JUST TOO STEREOTYPICALLY JEWISH"? I just don't know how it would be possible to make this film and survive this particular objection of yours. Apparently I'd have to (a) go out of my way to hire an actor who DOESN'T look "stereotypically Jewish", (b) dress him in clothing (Adidas sweatsuit perhaps) which doesn't in any way look like the sort of clothing a Jewish person of that time and place would have worn, and (c) make sure it's made clear he HATES MONEY. At some point can we acknowledge that it's possible to uh get a little INSANE, going too far with these objections?

-I don't know about (don't remember) the "bribed" characters you're talking about (I honestly thought the guys who were woken up in the middle of the night were simply all the other Sanhedrin members who had to get up to come to the full emergency "trial" or whatever it was; I interpreted much of what I saw as, say, "lobbying"/pressuring by the anti-Jesus faction to shore up support,

but I don't remember any of them getting "bribed"...may have happened, just don't remember). But in the case of at least Judas we have a Hebrew character who (1) presumably looked like a Hebrew and not some other nationality, and (2) according to the story, took some money. By your rules it seems I simply can't portray both (1) and (2) and survive your antisemitism charge.

In other words, it gets back to this: maybe one just can't create a film based faithfully on the passion story without being antisemitic (a consensus does seem to be forming around that point, anyway, since Matthew & John are, themselves, "antisemitic in parts").

-I agreed totally that the character of Pilate is whitewashed but we are talking about whether the film is antisemitic not whether it is historically accurate. I agree that it's (almost certainly) not historically accurate. That doesn't make it antisemitic. If Pilate had sprouted wings and flown to the moon or whipped out a Nintendo Gameboy and started playing Tetris this would have been historically inaccurate but not antisemitic. In any event despite his whitewash I still did not have a favorable impression of Pilate in this film by any means. Seriously: I sympathized completely with the Sanhedrin. (Maybe I'm just weird ;-)

-Why did Gibson omit the subtitle? To lessen the controversy, of course: so people wouldn't complain as much about it. That doesn't make the complaints valid.

-You do what amounts to some scorecard analysis of how much time is devoted to good Jews vs. how much to bad Jews. I honestly don't know (don't care much either) how the ratio comes out but IMHO at some point this becomes hair-splitting. I hope that films don't need to engage in a kind of "affirmative action" regarding how screen-time is split amongst good/bad characters. Imagine applying this rule to the Godfather films for example - a large percentage of the Italian characters are murderous gangsters or associated with same. Anti-Italian! Should all those scenes have been "balanced" by showing some nice, law abiding Italians from time to time? Perish the thought.

-Simon of Cyrene "doesn't count" because Christians like him?? Ok gimme a break. Are you going to be here saying all the positive Jewish characters (Jesus, disciples, Mary Magdalene, Simon of Cyrene, girl who wiped his face..) "don't count"? If so well then I just can't win; yes of course all the Jews in this film are portrayed negatively *if all the positive ones "don't count"*. Talk about an absurd standard however. Again it just sounds like you're saying one can't tell this story without being antisemitic.

"Do you see the Devil walking among Roman soldiers or gurads? Why only among the Jews and behind the priests? Coincidence again?"

See here's the interesting thing. *I didn't notice that*, perhaps because I wasn't looking for it. Why, were you? I'm taking your word for it that in no scenes is Satan shown "amongst" any Romans. But to be honest I'm not sure that's even true. I wasn't mentally clocking Satan's screen time or cataloguing which people

he was next to/behind. Didn't occur to me and I still don't even really see the relevance. What sort of person would? Well, in addition to you, an anti-semite would perhaps.

But I readily concede that this film could be interpreted in an antisemitic way by antisemites. Lots of things, rightly or not, are interpreted in antisemitic ways by antisemites, because antisemites are messed-up people.

"Depicting Jews in films sometimes doing bad things is not antisemitic. Depicting them, including their high priests, evil for being or remaining Jews or acting according to their beliefs is."

Interesting. But see, in the story I saw, "[they] including their high priests" were not "depicted as evil" in the first place. Like I said, I thought the priests acted understandably and rationally in the context of their society. I didn't see the general Jewish public, as presented in the film, as being or acting uniformly "evil" (some in the crowd were more bloodthirsty than others, but the same phenomenon exists on the streets of New York City :-). And I certainly didn't see any Jews who were depicted as "evil" "for being or remaining Jews".

Did you? Who? Which Jewish characters in The Passion did you find "evil"? Caiaphas? I'd disagree. And which did The Passion assert were "evil" "for being or remaining Jews"?

The one semi-exception seems to be Judas since his name is virtually treacherous by tradition, but even he is really more an object of pity than anything else. It's made clear that he was tricked, he really thought turning Jesus in was a way to keep him safe (I don't know how closely that hews to RC tradition BTW... it seems more consistent with e.g. how the Anthony Burgess "Man from Nazareth" novel presents it...). I guess the other "evil" characters are the kid-demons who chase after Judas but they're, like, not human. Did you think they were "Jews"? If so, why? :)

At some point IMHO antisemitism requires active participation on the part of the beholder. Maybe all I'm saying is I did not participate, and have a hard time understanding why anyone would.

-Re: whether Jews are a "race", I didn't "mean" anything by it, nor could I have since I don't really think "race" has a coherent definition. (Note I apparently also called "The Romans" a "race", equally wrongly I suppose, but that didn't seem to bother you. :-) Judaism is a religion, it's also a nationality, and/or a tribe (you belong to by virtue of your mother); yet not quite because people can convert, there's intermarriages and mixing, plus a while ago there was a split between what are called "Sephardic" and "Ashkenazi" Jews, some point to certain tribes in Africa as being long lost Jews, some people may descend from e.g. Spanish crypto-Jews and not even know they're Jews so what are they?... whatever. It's a culture, a nationality, with, at the same time, at least some degree of genetic commonality... so I have no idea (and don't think it matters much) what to call it but if "race" offended

you for some reason please just substitute whatever word you think

is Correct, ok? Thanks,

--Blixa

by a reader on Tue, 10/19/2004 - 00:52 | [reply](#)

DD

You explain:

The story of the Passion can be told without disparaging the Jewish people. Such an account is mandated by the Catholic Church as a result of the Second Vatican Council

Well, good. And happily, Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion of the Christ* was, indeed, such an account: It told the story of the Passion and it did not "disparage the Jewish people" to any reasonable interpreter. (I make no claims as to how unreasonable folks will interpret it.) And since you agree with the ADL that this (telling the Passion story w/o disparaging the Jewish people) is possible to do, merely noting that it's a passion play is therefore insufficient to prove the charge that it's antisemitic.

Another way to formulate such a charge would be to watch the film or otherwise learn a sufficient amount about what's in the film, and based upon this knowledge, point out the ways in which you think it disparages the Jewish people or otherwise violates the Vatican 2 proscriptions. I would be open to such arguments even if (as with those of AIS) I might find most or all of them wanting.

Alas, this option is not yet available to you....

Best,

by a reader on Tue, 10/19/2004 - 01:05 | [reply](#)

symbols

But, if symbols go completely over the head of X% of the audience do you think X can ever reach a point where you can admit well heck maybe it's not intrinsically antisemitic after all?

They don't go over the heads of latent anti-semites.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 10/19/2004 - 01:15 | [reply](#)

I think we should basically a

I think we should basically agree to disagree on this.

I had a hard time watching this film, partly because of the bloodshed and torture and partly because continuous antisemitic scenes atleast the way I understood them maybe as you say because of having been predisposed to such things more than you.

I'm happy your experience was different and that you witnessed an elevating and rewarding rendering of the Passion.

I just add two more points as my final post in this thread:
Obviously Mel Gibson didn't include all the Biblical details about the Passion in this film.

Just as one example take the remark about "a certain young man" who was following Jesus and his captors, when they laid hold on him so casting off his cloth he ran away naked..." (Mark 14:51-52)

Yet he made sure the "blood" scene and the "bribing" scene etc. remain in the film, although they put fingers on such sensitive and painful issues, issues that have left a long history of discrimination, oppression and even massacer in their wake.

Second, there are an abundance of extra-Biblical material on Passion, yet he chose one of the sickest, most hateful and perverse hallucinations of a (quite disturbed) nun to "fill in the gaps".

To me this all passes well with all that I thought I saw while watching this particular film. That's all.

AIS

by a reader on Tue, 10/19/2004 - 01:38 | [reply](#)

Elliot

You really want me to do this? Just remember u asked 4 it.

"The poor lady in Kansas who suffered a heart attack and died as Jesus was being scourged may be the first to die from The Passion of The Christ, but I doubt she'll be the last."

Right off we start with demagoguery. People are gonna DIE from this movie! Well Elliot it was released, it's out on DVD now, you tell me, did that happen? Kindly point out links to Gibson-inspired pogroms, please. I shall peruse them if proffered.

"there's no proof for just about anything that appears in the movie, except that there was a city called Jerusalem [...]"

Stupid (and unfair) objection. Movie is explicitly based on the Bible not history texts. There's no "proof" for just about anything that happens in *The Ten Commandments* or *Clash of the Titans* either. But "proof" is the standard a Passion story, as opposed to those others, must meet because why? There's no "proof" that JC as such actually existed, let alone that he was the "son of God" (obviously), so, what, Christians can't make movies premised on those things?

"The Christian faithful believe the Gospels, but everyone knows that they were written a generation after the events they are supposed to describe."

What's that "but" doing there? The Christian faithful believe the Gospels, AND everyone knows that they (in the forms we know them) were written later. So what? He's dangerously beginning to

sound like he's constructing an argument that the Christian faithful need to reject their books, on some level, to make him happy.

"At worst, they had their own motives to make the Jews look bad, not least of which was that the Jews were not buying in to their message that Jesus was messiah, and the gentiles -- Romans, Greeks and other foreigners -- were not relishing the idea of being circumcised."

Ok so here's speculation about the motives of "Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John". Nice simplistic analysis too, apparently this guy's sure that there were four guys with these 4 names. Ignorant of all that "Q" type scholarship about how the Gospels *really* evolved, of course.

"The solution was to make it easy for the Gentiles to accept Jesus without accepting the Torah"

Well of course. This notion was very important to early Christianity. He's criticizing an aspect of Christianity which was at its core, that you can be "saved" (or whatever) without not eating shellfish (and so on). He's saying it's like not ok for Christianity to have developed that concept because this is mean to Jews. Well clearly Christianity is inimical to Judaism (in that it's *not* Judaism but uses some Jewish books and notions) but stated that way it doesn't seem like such a valid complaint now does it?

"just believe that he died for your sins and you will be saved, while everyone else will go to Hell."

Heh. "everyone else"? Nice straw-man cartoon of what Christians believe. Who's the one employing stereotypes?

"I have no objection to those who believe in every word as the Gospel Truth."

Course not. Ok so I can ignore the preceding coupla paragraphs.

"But Mel Gibson set out to kill this Jesus. [...]"

Now we get a bunch of stuff which is basically saying "I don't think it's ok for Mel to have set out to make this movie". Ok sorry but what? Yes we can all recognize that Mel's belief has a curiously hyper-Catholic fixation on the suffering and the pain and the flaying and the whatnot. That's his deal, that's the movie he wanted to make, and he did. Not ok, I guess?

"What is important, it seems, is "who done it." And here Gibson stacks the decks and makes it clear as day that the Jewish priests pushed and manipulated and howled for Jesus to be killed and tortured."

So what? First of all is that not what the source material states? David Deutsch just explained to me that the ADL says it's perfectly possible to make a story from said source material about said events and not be antisemitic. Who cares if "the Jewish priests" (=a majority of the Sanhedrin) pushed for his execution? 1) On the face of it, they were correct to do so as a matter of religious law. 2)

Even if you think they weren't - even if you think this makes those Jewish priests monsters or look like monsters (I don't) - this is a slander against *the Jewish people* HOW, exactly? Only if you're stupid enough to see it that way, to equate "those Jewish priests" with "all Jews". Who is? Show of hands please?

"Gibson's public statements that all mankind sinned, and that Jesus took all those sins upon himself, and that this is a movie about love and forgiveness, or that he is just telling the truth -- well, that may sound good to Diane Sawyer, but it doesn't wash"

=I have read Gibson's mind and he's lying about the stuff he believes. He says he believes X but I know better!

"And yes, if it was foreordained that Jesus should die, then everyone was just playing their part in this passion play and no one should be blamed. That may operate for those of deep faith, but that is not the director's intention."

More wonderful mind-reading. Does this guy do parties?

"No, this is a movie about bloody premeditated murder"

Wrong, it's a movie about an execution. The bloodiness and the gore of that execution can be chalked up to the fact that the ruling power in that place and time (NOT Jews) had an especially barbaric way of executing people. If there was something unlawful about the execution so as to make it murder this can be blamed on the Roman who ordered it.

"a murder of Christ by the Jews."

Funny in the movie I saw a bunch of Roman brutes did the deed.

"As The Lovingway United Pentecostal Church in Denver so lovingly put it, on opening night, in a sign it posted opposite the local movie theater: "Jews Killed the Lord Jesus.""

Wow. If he can point to some extremists that totally proves something!

"and now a Roman Catholic rich boy says,"

FYI Elliot (and David, who seems to have been offended by this fact), this is the part where I stopped reading this wonderful, marvelous, informative article earlier. Do you really blame me? "Roman Catholic rich boy"? We are veering into immature name-calling territory here. (Now I may do that at times, but I don't get published on Israel Insider ;-)

"says.. that it was the Jews who did it, after all."

Sigh. Watch the movie: he does not. The Romans did it, the council of Jewish priests asked them to because Jesus had blasphemed. This is how the frickin story goes! You can't tell this story if it doesn't go like that. Bottom line here with these objections is "you just can't tell this story".

"The Satanic Jews,"

!!! Is this guy trying to win a straw-man record or what.

"Christian critics wondered why the resurrection scene was so short, why the redemptive power of Jesus was hardly touched upon."

I didn't "wonder" at all, I knew the answer, because Gibson's particular sect/faith is particularly obsessed by the passion as opposed to the resurrection. Although that emphasis may ring hollow/unsatisfying to Protestants, etc, (incl. myself) that's still allowed, isn't it? What I'm hearing here: "no, it's not! not allowed!" This article-writer is telling Gibson what sort of faith he's allowed to adhere to. I don't presume to do so.

"We're not talking about the twenty million bucks...[etc]"

Weird recital of how much money the movie made. What does this have to do with whether it's antisemitic?

"this movie is designed from day one to advance the theology of the cultish sect of retro-Catholics to which Mel and his wacked-out, hated-consumed mother and father belong"

1) From what I've heard, that's basically true, Mel makes no secret that he made the film to advance his religion. Not ok? 2) Dunno anything about Mel's mother, I'm sure the "wacked-out" charge is correct when it comes to his father, but nevertheless this kind of name-calling and guilt-by-association would be beneath a better, more responsible writer who wasn't writing a stupid, hate-filled article. Alas....

"anti-Popes, his dad calls them"

More crap about his dad, relevant why?

"This is his attempt at payback for those Hollywood Jews who resisted his idea, and the anti-Christian (i.e., Jew-dominated) Media."

Wow this writer's really riffing now. He's spun a whole theory about Mel's private thoughts and everything. I was supposed to continue reading because this is all so brilliant, right David?

[more about imagined-Gibson's take on "Hollywood Jews", Gibson's father, etc... getting bored]

"Gibson left it in but "generously" didn't add a subtitle. He didn't need to: he ensured there was so much press coverage, attracting attention not only to the line but to the Jewish efforts to remove it, that he fixated viewers on finding the Aramaic curse and on Jewish "censorship" of that "truth." "

He's claiming that Gibson "fixated" viewers on finding the Aramaic curse. Interestingly he produces no such viewers who were so "fixated". He imagines that they were. That is what I call junk. Maybe *he* was fixated on it. That is what I call projection. Frankly when I saw the film I forgot to look for Caiaphas saying those lines.

Probably my fixation was so subconscious that I looked for it

subconsciously

[mind reading bla bla]

"Mel tries to portray himself as the poor victim of the Jews"

where? how?

"The truth is that Mel's technique -- inducing trauma and fixation to that trauma by the use of violence -- is a famous method acted out not only in his previous bloody films"

Can't resist dig against other Mel Gibson films. No relevance, just couldn't resist. This is more stupidity.

"so that one can proudly say that "Jews killed Lord Jesus" and feel exalted."

Who said that? (Yes I know some church the author pointed to. Who else?)

"Mel has whipped all this anger and left the audience with "nowhere to go.""

As a result, they promptly went out and committed a bunch of pogroms, right?

You know, if I took articles like this more seriously I might actually be offended at the vile slander against Americans and American society, that we're all JUST SO ITCHIN' to pogromize a bunch o'Jews that all it takes is a Mel Gibson movie. Thanks for the confidence, dude. Nice to know I'm a hair-trigger away from being a Nazi in your eyes.

"It's a straight line from the Damascus Road to the Damascus Blood Libel, to the Dachau Camp to Denver's Lovingway Church and Cineplex."

The alliteration here is perhaps the least dumb thing in the article. Of course associating Dachau Camp (murder count: N) to Denver's Lovingway Church and Cineplex (murder count: 0) is not anything like what one would call *proportion* but hey, it's clever (both start with D, get it?)

[more Mel's-his-father's-son guilt by association (dare I say "blood-guilt"?)...]

"let them realize too that the Gospels, of Mark and of Mel, try to obscure that Jesus was a Jew killed by Gentiles."

Yeah I'm such a maroon I didn't even know that Jesus guy was a Jew. Goll-ee I thought he was from Texas, thanks for setting me straight.

"The story-tellers, ancient and modern, blame the Jews so they can feel some relief for betraying and distorting the faith to which their presumed Savior belonged."

CMIIW but he's charging here that Christians are "betraying" and

"distorting" Judaism. Christianity, apparently, is just not a very valid religion to belong to.

"Christians should say not "everyone sinned against Christ, and I am a sinner too""

Presumes to tell Christians what they 'should' say. He's anointed himself Pope/minister now, essentially. His authority on matters Christian must not be questioned.

"Besides, the good Christian is tempted to say, "I accept killing God, and therefore am saved, whereas the Jews do not, and therefore are damned.""

He is? Wow good to know. I never knew these things about myself till this expert on my thoughts informed me of them.

"Rather they should consider: "Christians have historically turned against the people of Jesus, the people of his God, have killed them cruelly in every generation, and I must struggle within my soul never to do so too and to confront with courage those who do.""

Well of course Christians should say that, as should everyone else. Don't be a stupid frickin antisemite. I'm on board with that and I'm all in favor of confronting with courage those who kill Jews cruelly.

Notice that Mel Gibson ain't such a person, and to focus on him, when there are, like, REAL antisemite killers REALLY KILLING JEWS, is wacky at best.

"But that, needless to say, is not Mel Gibson's intent."

Heh. Ok if you say so. This mind-reading stuff is awesome!

"The Passion of the Christ, amplifying and embellishing the inherent anti-Jewishness of the Gospels, is a real-life Lethal Weapon 5, already at a theater near you, and aimed straight at the nearest Jew."

If so then it was a total dud, wasn't it? Missed the nearest Jew and the second-nearest Jew and the Nth nearest Jew and, well, frankly failed to hit any of 'em at all. The only casualty I know of in fact is some lady in Kansas who had a heart attack mentioned at the beginning of the article, and she may not have even been a Jew (blast - Mel must've been disappointed!).

If Gibson really had wanted to kill a bunch of Jews, making this movie was like the worst way he could've chosen to do it.

"Daddy must be proud."

At some point can we agree that this daddy stuff is a low blow? Really now.

I feel dirty from having read through that whole thing. Thanks Elliot

by a reader on Tue, 10/19/2004 - 02:14 | [reply](#)

AIS,

Yes we agree to disagree :-)

"I'm happy your experience was different and that you witnessed an elevating and rewarding rendering of the Passion."

Heh... WHOA there I never said that! I did not find it particularly elevating nor rewarding. I liked it ok but not great. I think the best thing I can say about the film is that it was technically well-produced. best,

--Blixa

by a reader on Tue, 10/19/2004 - 02:16 | [reply](#)

wow u write a lot blixa

I feel dirty from having read through that whole thing. Thanks Elliot

gulp. don't blame me! I agree with David that you shouldn't read things you don't enjoy. I really only meant for you to answer my question from memory in a few sentences, unless you wanted to do otherwise.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 10/19/2004 - 05:20 | [reply](#)

Heh yeah sorry there, sane now

No worries Elliot, sorry for overreaction. On the bright side, I had some spare time to kill yesterday (as you can see) & you helped ;-)

"[symbols] They don't go over the heads of latent anti-semites."

Nothin' much goes over the heads of latent anti-semites does it? Anything you say or do or point to (that penny on the ground.. that comedian on TV) can stand as proof that Jews are evil to latent anti-semites. This is cuz latent (and non latent) anti-semites are messed-up pathetic people whose thinking is on the fritz. My hope here is that we don't convince ourselves that movies et al must pass the standard "can't possibly be interpreted so as to hate Jews by any antisemite" in order not to be considered antisemitic itself, as a movie. That would be a difficult test. Best,

by a reader on Tue, 10/19/2004 - 17:43 | [reply](#)

Confused

I can't make head or tail of most of this.

First of all, is there a difference between material that *may* induce hatred, and material that is actually objectively *anti-Semitic*? Surely a lot of *good* material induces hatred?

Secondly, I haven't seen a single convincing argument that this film

contains anything that is demonstrably anti-Semitic as opposed to criticising *specific Jews*. And what is more, I cannot see how, in a work of drama, such a thing is even *possible*. Is there a voiceover saying "Like all Jews, this guy did X terrible thing," or something? Are characters portrayed in ways that are patently *unrealistic and false* and which convey mythical anti-Semitic libels?

Surely one does not have to avoid criticising all Jews in order not to be accused of anti-Semitism?

I think to compare this film with Michael Moore's piece of trash is really obscene. There are degrees of evil, and not being able to distinguish the ground between them is a serious moral error that undermines our attempts to spread good ideas. Moore is full of virulent hatred, and he tells lies to further his cause. Where are the deliberate falsehoods in Gibson's film? Where is there objectively extreme hatred towards the whole of the Jewish people?

I haven't seen "The Passion", but I can see no possible way that any depiction of this story can be interpreted as definitely and objectively attacking Jews as a whole, as opposed to attacking the actions of certain Jews at the time of those events. There are historical reasons why the Jewish authorities at the time would have a) not been the best of Jews, and b) not been very positive about Jesus.

The last thing we need is political correctness on the right side of the fence as well!

And if anyone thinks this comment means that *I* must be anti-Semitic, I'm just going to crawl off into a hole and die.

by a reader on Tue, 10/19/2004 - 17:55 | [reply](#)

Moral Equivalence

I agree with the readers who are upset by the suggestion that there is a moral equivalence between Moore and Gibson. I agree that Moore's actions are much worse. Moore is knowingly lying to further a bad agenda, and Gibson is probably telling a story that he believes to be true and important, although I think he's wrong and doing something dangerous.

But, **The World** didn't claim that they are morally equivalent. The post said:

The two movies are somewhat similar symptoms of the same serious malaise in Western society: the widespread loss of confidence in its secular moral values. Both are personal statements made by charming rogues who have a sense of humour, are very good at their jobs, and are driven by a core of gibbering hatred. Both peddle incendiary falsehoods that have caused murder and destruction beyond measure, been a blight on every kind

of progress and will undoubtedly do a great deal more

harm before they are extirpated.

I suppose the line about hatred could be reaching. Maybe David is more familiar with Gibson's motivations than I am, but I'm willing to concede that he might not be motivated by hatred, but is stupidly repeating likely falsehoods that have a history of fostering hatred.

Either way, I think both films do intentionally appeal to bad elements of popular culture, and they should be criticized for it.

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 10/19/2004 - 22:18 | [reply](#)

"secular moral values"

I don't think there's any such thing as "secular moral values". They all originate in religious philosophy. Or maybe someone can tell me the difference between religious moral values and secular moral values (secular ones happen to be adopted by people who don't believe in God is not a good enough answer).

I do think the values of some religions are more sensible than the values of others.

The malaise in the West is loss of confidence in *moral* values, not "secular" moral values, whatever they are (who invented them? where are they written down? how we do know they're *essentially* different than religious ones?)

Alice

by a reader on Wed, 10/20/2004 - 02:38 | [reply](#)

re: "secular moral values"

my values are secular moral values, aren't they?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 10/20/2004 - 03:19 | [reply](#)

re: Secular Moral Values

Alice doubts the existence of "secular moral values" and then admits:

I do think the values of some religions are more sensible than the values of others.

What does that mean? Does reasonableness matter? Does it help us to determine what's right? Don't we have to appeal to some mystical commandments to know what's right? If you don't think so, then you believe in "secular moral values".

If your claim is merely that religion has played an important

historical role in the development of moral philosophy, then you're right. If you claim that religion is necessary (or even reliably helpful) to pursue morality, then I think you're wrong.

Religions are powerful mechanisms for developing and transmitting moral ideas (some good, and some bad). But, I think that there are better ways to pursue the truth.

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 10/20/2004 - 04:01 | [reply](#)

passion and anti-semitism

The critics of the Passion in here are saying that because the movie had old men in headresses (who looked middle-eastern not "hooknosed") that is was degrading to the Jewish community? Are you critics denying that old men (Pharisees and Sadducees sp?) wore robes, headresses, and were extremely severe in punishing any dissenters in the ancient Jewish community? Are you denying that a crowd of people in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago would not have been mostly made up of Jewish people?

If you are denying these facts of history, then I would suggest that you reference your own website here, you sound like you may fit in with an "anti-semitic conspiracy theory" crowd -- refusing to accept that the Jewish people of 2,000 years ago DID wear headresses and robes, and DID have religious rulers that ruled Mosaic Law (common law as well) and were NOT flexible in their decisions, as demonstrated in the ancient writings of Josephus where all sorts of atrocities are documented - ALONG WITH THE STORY OF CHRIST'S PASSION. Josephus was a JEWISH scribe, well accepted by even the most athiestic scholars as a viable source of biblical historical facts.

A little personal info. I have been to Israel twice before, my wife is a Jewish convert to Christianity. I am not anti-semitic, and I love all my Jewish brothers and sisters. I implore that you must stop calling everyone Anti-semitic- who thinks that during the passover festival 2,000 years ago, in Jerusalem, that a crowd of mostly Jewish people argued for our Christ's death. Also, all the bloody violence, in the movie, and in the new testament of the Bible, state that the ROMANS with "pointy noses" were the ones who did all the torture, passed the death sentence, and performed the execution.

You seem to be logical people, I must ask, are you trying to tell me that 2,000 years ago, during passover, in Jerusalem, that it was not 90-95% Jewish population in the city? Logically, if 90% of the population is Jewish, and it is passover festival, one could safely deduce that the "crowd" of people in front of the Roman palace was made up mostly of either Jewish followers of Jesus, regular Jewish people of faith, and secular Romans (maybe a few easterners and africans as well) .

All this being said, I think that actual Jewish folks in here and

elsewhere, who are claiming "anti-semitism" from the Passion story, they FEEL like CHRISTIANS somehow think that they are SOLELY responsible for Christs death, which you are obviously not... I put forth that you are insecure in your Jewishness (if you're jewish), or plain anti-passion story in general. These people claim anti-semitism when anyone dares to suggest that the Messiah was indeed condemned to death due to false witness before the Religious leaders in charge at the time. Jewish people can not possibly be held accountable, when it was a mob type crowd, during passover festival 2,000 years ago in Jerusalem.

All peoples are responsible for putting the Messiah to death (which really was part of God's plan anyway, so how could we blame the Jewish people?)

by a reader on Thu, 10/21/2004 - 05:20 | [reply](#)

Jesus would have been brown

As for the "stereotypical Jewish look" thing, it's simply true that as a general characteristic a lot of Jews (not all), have prominent noses, is it not? (Same seems true of other nationalities from/around the Levant.) So what? And some of them are actors. (BTW I didn't really notice anything especially out-of-the-ordinary "hook-nosed" about any of the actors...you did? Which ones?) But ok, if I hire such an actor to play the role of a character who's Jewish (and heck why wouldn't I?), and (historically correctly) plop a yarmulke on his head, you get to accuse me of using a "stereotypical Jewish look"? or I can't have that character holding money or whatever?

But the stereo-type you are depicting here is of a white anglo-saxon Jew. Is this really how a Jew living in the middle East 2000 years ago would have looked? Don't you think he or she would have had a more distinctly middle Eastern appearance? That he or she would have been more brown than white? That his or her hair would have been more dark than light? If the film was being accurate, then surely Jesus should have been brown and those Jews persecuting him brown also? The white people would have been the Romans. So, then, why did Gibson - who despite his pretences to accuracy in other aspects of the film - choose to depict Jews of the Middle East from 2000 years ago according to the white anglo-saxon stereotype?

by a reader on Thu, 10/21/2004 - 08:26 | [reply](#)

that was to me, guess I gotta answer

Someone writes to me:

"But the stereo-type you are depicting here is of a white anglo-saxon Jew."

Wait, what? The stereotype *I* am depicting? I didn't make the

movie. Nor am I the one who is calling any of "The Passion"'s actors a "stereotype" in the first place. (Come now, isn't this on some level demeaning - to those actors? I reject this whole nonsense equation where actors=stereotype. They're *people*, ok! They look how they look. Hiring actor XYZ to play character ABC is 'perpetuating a stereotype'? That's almost an offensive concept in itself.)

I did say that what another commenter (not me BTW) called a "hooknose", and portrayed as offensive (to have "hooknosed" actors in a movie about Jews, I guess(?)), was, in reality, simply a physical characteristic often found in people who are Jewish. (And *not* Jewish IMHO, but that's another story, and this is all so boring that I don't really care.)

But anyway, are you, or anyone else disputing that? Let me know.

If all the actors in the film had the nose of Nicole Kidman (just to name someone off the top of my head who seems to have a skinny, delicate, almost nonexistent nose to my eye) would that make the complaint go away? Is that, therefore, what filmmakers should do - ONLY use actors with a Kidman type nose to play Jews? (Careful how you answer that.)

"Is this really how a Jew living in the middle East 2000 years ago would have looked?"

Heck if I know. Photography didn't exist back then. You're saying No? How do you know? Are *you* subscribing to stereotypes?

Anyway what you're saying now is that the filmmakers should have labored more thoroughly to hire ONLY actors who looked "more Middle Eastern Jewish", whatever you think that means. (And it's really not clear where your notion of what looks and doesn't look "Middle Eastern Jewish 2000 years ago" comes from.) But hey, perhaps so. I wasn't bothered by it but evidently you *were* bothered by how some of the actors... looked. (?)

"That he or she would have been more brown than white?"

Again, I have no idea whether people in that place and time would have looked "more brown than white", beyond some vague notion that they would have appeared "semitic", and this notion was not violated in the film. Anyway, I didn't take spectrographic type measurements of the skin colors of any of the actors. Depending on what metric you have in mind, maybe the actors' skins *were* more brown than white? You disagree? Tell me which actors you think had skin which was "too white".

"That his or her hair would have been more dark than light?"

Um, to my eyes virtually everyone in the film had dark hair. Let's just cut to the chase shall we: Which actors do you think should have been kicked off the project for not being dark enough for your taste? Hristo Jivkov who played John? Francesco de Vito (Peter)? Mattia Sbragia (Caiaphas)? Who? ([reference](#))

"If the film was being accurate, then surely Jesus should have been

brown"

Again I don't know how you know these things, but anyway the guy seemed brown to me. I look at **this photo** and it seems pretty brown. Not brown enough? What color was "Jesus Christ" in your opinion? And where did that opinion come from?

Maybe it's just me but "Jim Caviezel's not brown enough!" as an argument for antisemitism just tickles my funny bone. I'm so glad there are people who bravely boldly stand up...against (?) racism/bigotry by... complaining about the skin hues of actors.

"If the film was being accurate, then surely Jesus should have been brown and those Jews persecuting him brown also?"

There **were no** Jews persecuting him that I saw in this story. There was a council of priests which convicted him of blasphemy but did not carry out the punishment. There were Jews yelling at him from crowds etc, is that "persecuting"? Anyway they looked 'brown' AFAIK (if you disagree tell me which ones you think weren't brown enough). The people actually **persecuting** him however were Romans. Granted some of them perhaps should have "looked brown" because as I understand it historically (I could be wrong), many of the "Roman" soldiers would in fact have been Syrians in Roman employ. But hey.

"So, then, why did Gibson - who despite his pretences to accuracy in other aspects of the film - choose to depict Jews of the Middle East from 2000 years ago according to the white anglo-saxon stereotype?"

I don't know what you mean. What is the "white anglo-saxon stereotype"? Are you saying those characters meant to be Jews looked instead like white anglo-saxons? But they did not (not to me), not that I'm at all sure what a "white anglo-saxon" is in the first place, of course. Anyway this is an odd complaint compared with that other person's complaint that everyone was too "hooknosed". Which is it? It seems like you're complaining both that they looked "too Jewish" and yet not Jewish enough. Granted if these actors' names are any indication, they seem to have been mostly a bunch of Italians.

The fact that the outdoor scenes of the film were filmed primarily in Italy may go a long way towards explaining that. (Yes, when there's a perfectly logical **practical** explanation for these circumstances you're complaining about, it's better to go with the "antisemitism" charge. That's not conspiracy thinking at all, is it, **The World?**)

Question: Do you actually have any good reason to believe that the actors in that film, in aggregate, looked markedly different than a snapshot of that society would have looked 2000 years ago? (Answer: No you most certainly do not.)

Maybe we need to set up some guidelines about what facial characteristics an actor must have to play a Jew in a film and not be a "stereotype". It seems to be a tricky thing, you straddle a thin line; you **have** to look like a Jew but you **can't** have what

anyone can characterize as a "hooknose".. you *have* to be "Brown" (if playing a Jew in the Middle East) but on the other hand be sure you're not "swarthy" because then people will complain about that too. (See [this](#), complains about "Swarthy Middle Eastern Stereotype".) And so on.

I've no doubt whatsoever that if Mel Gibson had filmed the entire project in Israel and hired all Israeli-Jewish extras (actually: for true "authenticity" he'd have had to be more careful than that, to take painstaking care not to hire any e.g. recent Russian immigrants there, perhaps even eschewing those from Europe in the past 50 years, and use *only* those Israeli Jews with sufficient Middle Eastern bona fides), people would still have whined about him "using stereotypes". Actually they would have whined even more because their complaints would have been even *more* valid. Just look at those crowd scenes: They're ALL so "stereotyped"! Too "hooknosed"! Too "swarthy"! Elliot made the point a while back that a bad result of the Gibson film is that it has led to people, all on the good side, bickering about whether it's "antisemitic". This is undoubtedly true and undoubtedly regrettable but it would not have been the case, conceivably, if the complainers (some of which are in evidence here) would not have lodged such frivolous, overreaching, in some cases downright childish complaints in the first place.

Anyway, back to this burning issue of how actors look, I now idly wonder if anybody has ever undertaken the project of defining *authentic* Jewish facial characteristics, complete with measurements and definitions of features, strict categories, etc. I'll go look up whether there's ever been any organized, meticulous research - research done with, one might say, a Bavarian's eye for detail - in this area. If so, adhering to such guidelines when hiring actors who play Jews seems to be the only way to really be sure not to be antisemitic. ;-P

--Blix

by a reader on Thu, 10/21/2004 - 15:23 | [reply](#)

Q 4 Blix

Do you see our criticism of the movie as parallel to the many variations of minority criticisms of racism, many of which indeed are oversensitive, or a different sort of thing?

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 10/21/2004 - 19:15 | [reply](#)

both I think

Elliot,

I think it's only fair of me to acknowledge a distinction between what are probably *two* main antisemitism arguments being made against *Passion*, here:

1. The story's content, primarily the "blood" curse, which (if taken literally and as historically has been done) implies a slanderous, dangerous idea about Jews which has caused much damage

2. Litany of various aesthetic features and details of the movie such as racial makeup of actors, editorial choices, casting choices, staging, etc. which are all thought or argued to reinforce symbolically the antisemitic content, or betray some feeling Mel Gibson is thought to have

The World's original complaint, I'd guess, was centered mostly on 1; for 1, whether any complaints #2 are valid is really neither here nor there. Meanwhile, a few other commenters have chimed in to agree with **The World**, but dissing the movie based on things which basically fall into category 2. Category 2, I do see as quite parallel to the usual racial griping, yes. Category 1, I recognize to be a far different, unique animal.

I'm not trying to imply that the two categories are totally independent of course. Like I said, 2 (if/when it is there) reinforces 1 (if/when it is interpreted in the slanderous way). My point here I think has been to try to argue that few in the West interpret 1 in the slanderous way anymore, and most of the complaints in 2 are frivolous.

Does this answer your question (not sure :),

--Blix

by a reader on Thu, 10/21/2004 - 22:40 | [reply](#)

re: both i think

My point here I think has been to try to argue that few in the West interpret 1 in the slanderous way anymore

I'm not so sure. If the anti-Israel media is any guide...

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 10/21/2004 - 23:00 | [reply](#)

semi touche

But,

the anti-Israel media

...does not believe in anything from "the Bible" in the first place. The "blood libel" is on the face of it meaningless if there's no real reason to care just who killed that dude anyway.

Although the point that the anti-Israel media, and other flavors of neo-antisemites, could subconsciously be operating from believing in some secular parallel residual version of the blood libel, is well taken. ;-) But their anti-Jewish efforts are not really aided/abetted

by the telling of a pop-culture passion play. As we saw, the major media was quite hostile to Gibson's movie and only too happy to raise the antisemitism flag on this one.

It's an easy way to cover their ass for all that crap they write about Israel.

Like I said, complaining about a Mel Gibson movie when there's, like, REAL Jew-killing going on is wacky at best.

--Blix

by a reader on Thu, 10/21/2004 - 23:35 | [reply](#)

Re: "secular moral values"

I think that there is a useful distinction to be made between moral values whose justification depends on supernatural sources and those that do not - even though there is some overlap between the two, and even though historically they affected each other's evolution to some extent. For instance, the idea that a single-celled organism is entitled to protection as a human being is defended only by people who believe (whether they use this terminology or not) that such organisms have supernatural human souls, and that morality is different for souled and non-souled entities. These are purely religious values.

At the other end of the scale, the idea that freedom of religion, freedom of speech and of the press, limited government, presumption of innocence and so on, should be overriding regulatory principles when human beings organise themselves in groups, is not present, even in rudimentary form, in any evolved religious tradition. These are purely secular values. They were invented partly by anonymous thinkers over the millennia, each of whom contributed an idea here and there to traditions like the English Common Law and its predecessors, and partly by philosophers such as Locke, Hume and Mill.

In the large overlap- and co-evolved regions there are things like equality before the law, the objectivity and universality of morality itself, and the intrinsic value of human beings and of human life and well-being (though the moral value of human knowledge and human creativity belongs entirely to the secular category).

by [David Deutsch](#) on Wed, 10/27/2004 - 03:49 | [reply](#)

Re: "secular moral values"

David Deutsch posts a series of assertions, none well argued or particularly connected to anything. I would welcome better defense of the first set of assertions. To wit: Can we have an example by direct testimony from the man's own mouth of "gibbering hatred" from Mel Gibson? Can Deutsch enumerate the criteria by which he supposes Gibson and Michael Moore to be equivalent menaces? Would it be too much to ask for Deutsch to explain why his original post is not a manifestation of the epidemic anti-Hellenism that is

Islamism's best ally?

Just as a side note, and not to frustrate Deutsch in the public practice of what is clearly a matter of religion to him, but thoughtful athiests oppose abortion not because of the baby's humanity but because of their own.

presenceofmind.net

by **gswann** on Wed, 10/27/2004 - 14:06 | [reply](#)

not "well argued"

David's post is a conjecture. It is bold (that's good). It says a lot about the world (that's good). It is meant for a certain problem situation (one aspect of this: the post has nothing much to do with the Gibson stuff, directly). It is not supposed to have positive arguments for it, because such things don't work epistemically. It is not supposed to preemptively head off all the bad rival theories possible, because doing so would be boring.

So, you say it's not "well argued" but that is to miss the point. Which part do you have a criticism of, and what rival theory do you prefer?

I do not understand the question about Hellenism (Greeks, right?).

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 10/27/2004 - 15:07 | [reply](#)

A rival theory:

People have "lost faith" in secular arguments because secular movements murdered at least 160 million innocents in the last century. I do not uphold this theory--I would not even frame the debate as secular v. ecclesiastical (or whatever it is Duetsch (mis-)aims to scourge)--but this is certainly a better theory than the one he propped and has not defended.

Hellenism = Occidentalism = Westernism = the vanishing transnational culture of pluralistic bourgeois capitalism. I'm betting you could have worked this out on your own.

Greg Swann, **presenceofmind.net**

by **gswann** on Wed, 10/27/2004 - 16:08 | [reply](#)

Evidence of Mel Gibson's Motivation In His Own Words

I guess you can all use Google at least as well as I can, but there's a quotation [here](#) and some more [here](#).

by **David Deutsch** on Wed, 10/27/2004 - 16:32 | [reply](#)

I know I've "lost faith" in

I know I've "lost faith" in secular murderers. Time to put murder back in the hands of those who really know what they're doing: religious fanatics. Don't worry. Already happening.

by a reader on Wed, 10/27/2004 - 16:48 | [reply](#)

google

how and when to use google is not manifest, nor even easy.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 10/27/2004 - 17:37 | [reply](#)

f*** yeah

Anyway, I finally got to see "Team America" this weekend, and I think one thing we can all agree on, it's HILARIOUS. :-)

--Blix

by a reader on Wed, 10/27/2004 - 19:00 | [reply](#)

Who hates whom?

So we have this:

"I have friends and parents of friends who have numbers on their arms. The guy who taught me Spanish was a Holocaust survivor. He worked in a concentration camp in France. Yes, of course. Atrocities happened. War is horrible. The Second World War killed tens of millions of people. Some of them were Jews in concentration camps. Many people lost their lives. In the Ukraine, several million starved to death between 1932 and 1933. During the last century, 20 million people died in the Soviet Union."

And this:

"Why are they calling her a Nazi? Because modern secular Judaism wants to blame the Holocaust on the Catholic Church. And it's revisionism. And they've been working on that one for a while."

This is your evidence of "gibbering hatred" and your justification for smearing a great libertarian artist with a vile propagandist of tyranny. I think we have discovered where the "gibbering hatred" resides.

Greg Swann, presenceofmind.net

by [gswann](#) on Wed, 10/27/2004 - 22:47 | [reply](#)

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Reuters Makes Up Israeli History

Seizing on the over-the-top rhetoric of some Israeli politicians, Reuters gleefully **talks up** the non-existent possibility of a forthcoming civil war in Israel. To reinforce its point, it invents some past history as well. It says that the forthcoming decisions about the Gaza disengagement plan will

show whether Israel is ready to cede occupied land for the first time in more than two decades

In reality, Israel ceded occupied land four years ago in May, 2000, when it **withdrew unilaterally from the Lebanon buffer zone**. Ten years ago, in 1994, it ceded occupied Jordanian land under the **Israel-Jordan peace treaty**. Sixteen years ago, in 1988, Israel **ceded the disputed Taba region to Egypt**.

Moreover the arbitrary formula 'for the first time in more than two decades' conceals the fact that Israel has withdrawn from occupied or disputed land on every occasion when some of its enemies have seen fit to end their campaign to destroy it – and also on several occasions when they have not.

What is Reuters playing at?

Thu, 10/21/2004 - 13:17 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

A New Blasphemy Law

The British Home Secretary David Blunkett says that he plans to **repeal** the blasphemy law. Most people don't know that there is a blasphemy law on the books in Britain. Nor is there any reason why they should, as it is almost never enforced. We nevertheless welcome its repeal. But there is a catch: Blunkett also plans to enact a law banning incitement to religious hatred.

We don't support religious hatred, but such a law would be a bad one. For one thing, incitement to hatred is different from the already-illegal incitement to violence. It is wrong to argue that all people with particular beliefs or skin colour or whatever ought to be killed or hurt and it should be illegal. However, there is nothing necessarily wrong with hating people who advocate tyranny, or despising those who apologise for it, provided that one does not also advocate their murder. It is also legitimate to say that particular ideas are evil – in other words to incite hatred against those ideas – again, so long as this does not amount to inciting violence against their holders.

And in all these case, it should make no difference either way if the hated people or ideas are religious. Why does the proposed law specify incitement to *religious* hatred? The US Constitution separates the Church and the state for good reason, they go together very badly. People seldom do evil so gladly as when they delude themselves that they are doing it for God. What is this law but a modern blasphemy law? Not blasphemy against God but blasphemy against the pseudoreligion of political correctness. A religion that puts the politeness of an argument above its truth. Freedom of speech means being allowed to say unpleasant things about religious beliefs moderated by personal judgement rather than fear of violent retribution, legal or otherwise. Like so many of Blunkett's ideas, this law would be a step backward from a free society and the proper respect for personal responsibility. We oppose it.

Sun, 10/24/2004 - 18:05 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

That law

That law would never fly in the United States. It would be ruled unconstitutional the first time it was used. Over here, you actually can incite people to violence all you want, as long as you aren't

standing in front of an armed mob. That is the standard of case law.

I have often wondered, in Britain, is there any way for the courts to strike down acts of parliament? Before the Constitution and the Bill of Rights in America, Hamilton was a lawyer. One of his legal principles was that the English common law could trump state legislation. Is it that way in Britain?

Nick
legenda.blogspot.com

by a reader on Sun, 10/24/2004 - 22:56 | [reply](#)

I don't know, it sounds like

I don't know, it sounds like a pretty good God damn law to me.

by a reader on Mon, 10/25/2004 - 03:18 | [reply](#)

Unintended consequences?

With such a law, a lot of religious leaders should be worried. No more preaching that it's required to kill Jews and enslave Christians.

John Anderson teqjack@wowmail.com

by a reader on Sun, 10/31/2004 - 16:01 | [reply](#)

Re: Unintended consequences?

Yes, and therefore one of the down-sides would be that the public would be systematically misled about how widespread murderous opinions are among the leaders of certain religions.

by [Editor](#) on Sun, 10/31/2004 - 17:08 | [reply](#)

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Open Letter To Libertarians

A former Libertarian candidate for President vigorously **urges Libertarians to vote to re-elect President Bush**. [Via **A Reasonable Man**.]

If the election is as close as it was in 2000, libertarian voters may make the difference as to who wins in various critical "Battle Ground" states and therefore the presidency itself. That is the situation in which we find ourselves in 2004. And that is why I believe voting for George W. Bush is the most libertarian thing we can do.

We stand today at an important electoral crossroads for the future of liberty, and as libertarians our first priority is to promote liberty and free markets, which is not necessarily the same as to promote the Libertarian Party. This time, if we vote Libertarian, we may win a tiny rhetorical battle, but lose the larger war.

Compare this with another **open letter** which we published last year.

Tue, 10/26/2004 - 11:29 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

Ducking And Weaving

A soldier is running towards an enemy position that he must capture or the battle is lost.

He is fired on: he zigs to the left. He is fired on again: he zags to the right. He is about to fire when some unarmed children run out and attack him. He holds his fire and runs round them. He reaches the enemy position and captures it.

'Criminal incompetence – give that soldier a dishonourable discharge', cries **Andrew Sullivan**. 'Look at all those zig zags: they prove he never had a plan!'

Fri, 10/29/2004 - 01:06 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

zig zags

Tend to support the theory that there is a plan. Teamed with events that correlate with the zag or zig tends to support the theory that the plan was modified by the actor. People zig zag when they are on purpose. To state that they never waver or change their mind about the rightness of a particular tac-tic, or never admit to the wrong zag or corrective zig would be at odds with the evidence.

by a reader on Fri, 10/29/2004 - 14:21 | [reply](#)

Thank you!

I've had it about up to here with this infantile talk about "Plans". Apparently in the eyes of some of these armchair generals the way you fight a war is you literally plot out all events beforehand based on research and data. The "Plan", I can only surmise, is like a PhD thesis or something, only bigger. (May explain why left/academe/ivory tower types think this is how it should be done; to them this is how **everything** is done.)

You're also supposed to foresee everything that the enemy does and third parties do and "Plan" those contingents in advance. Flexibility is bad, calling audibles is bad, (ironically) adapting to events is... **bad**. (This is ironic because an alleged failure/unwillingness to adapt to events is another favorite Bush criticism.)

Meanwhile if one thing goes wrong that proves you "didn't have a

Plan". Now, you might think that in all human endeavors something is bound to go wrong. NOT SO. If you "Plan" correctly you can solve for the Right Answer to all war questions and construct the PERFECT "Plan" such that NOTHING will go wrong. So, if a few things *do* go wrong, you can cherry-pick that data, ignore everything that goes right, and conclude that they "didn't have a Plan" or had "horrible Planning".

Now I may not be the world's biggest expert on wars but I do know one thing, people who speak that way don't know what the f*** they're talking about.

--Blix

by a reader on Fri, 10/29/2004 - 15:07 | [reply](#)

yay

v nice post.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 10/29/2004 - 15:14 | [reply](#)

The only thing is, Bush hasn'

The only thing is, Bush hasn't captured the enemy position yet. But I don't know how to go about making the case that Bush is incompetent. How do you judge the competence of someone who is battling the unknown? Debaathification, sovereignty, and democracy are fine from the standpoint of principle. If they fail, the tactics have to be changed. But if they had never been tried, that would be a point of criticism, not on the basis of tactics, but on the basis of good will and principle. If they had not been tried, we would never know the truth.

<http://www.legendablogspot.com>

by a reader on Sat, 10/30/2004 - 03:53 | [reply](#)

Re: The only thing is, Bush hasn't...

First, our criticism of those who take Sullivan's view would hold just as well if the soldier in the story was still only halfway there.

Second, Bush (or his Administration) *has* captured many enemy positions, both literally and in the figurative sense of having succeeded at tasks that many naysayers said were impossible.

As for your other comments – agreed.

by [Editor](#) on Sat, 10/30/2004 - 04:12 | [reply](#)

Walter Cronkite, Conspiracy Theorist?

Yesterday Walter Cronkite, the veteran CBS anchorman, became the latest public figure to replace political analysis by **conspiracy-theory** lunacy. Interviewed on CNN by Larry King, he **said**:

So now the question is basically right now, how will this affect the election? And I have a feeling that it could tilt the election a bit. In fact, I'm a little inclined to think that Karl Rove, the political manager at the White House, who is a very clever man, he probably set up bin Laden to this thing. The advantage to the Republican side is to get rid of, as a principal subject of the campaigns right now, get rid of the whole problem of the al Qaqa explosive dump.

Let's assume he was joking (which is by no means obvious). Even so, let's not laugh. The **position of the enemy** in the current war consists essentially of that sort of explanation of current affairs and history, and its spread into the mainstream is poisoning political discourse in the West.

Sat, 10/30/2004 - 21:17 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Karl Rove as the "clever man"

Surely Walter C. you are joking. However not to make light of K. Rove. The guy stops at nothing. He is master of conspiracy and uses the blinders of others to spin his political schemes. No way that his tentacles could reasonably extend beyond borders and he doesn't mess with things he can't spin. Be glad it was old newscaster Walter C. doing the talking and not K. Rove conspiracy theory spinner. Conspiracy theory Walter? Bah. Good joke. K. Rove likely chuckled.

by a reader on Sat, 10/30/2004 - 23:10 | [reply](#)

Re: Karl Rove as the "clever man"

"The guy stops at nothing. He is master of conspiracy and uses the blinders of others to spin his political schemes."

Is this a conspiracy that everyone knows about? If so, why call it a

'conspiracy'?

by **David Deutsch** on Sun, 10/31/2004 - 13:36 | [reply](#)

"clever man"

Right to the point and gets to what is a conspiracy v.s. conspiracy theory. K. Rove has spun fantastic political tales and rumors to get his candidate elected. Disprove that. K. Rove is a political conspiracist and technically not a conspiracy theorist. He conspires to spin particles of truth and untruth alike to mold opinion to bias the particular electorates. The evidence abounds for this despite the fact that K. Rove covers most of his trails. He distances himself from questions of morality in a strategy that results cover means. Confusion trumps rationality. That is part of his game. McCain campaign in South Carolina is only one obvious example. Karl Rove likely chuckles as he applies his clever bag of tricks.

by a reader on Sun, 10/31/2004 - 14:27 | [reply](#)

Re: "clever man"

"K. Rove covers most of his trails"

How do we know that?

by **David Deutsch** on Sun, 10/31/2004 - 14:42 | [reply](#)

LOL

LOL this is priceless. Do keep replying, reader. Tell us more of what you know about Rove's secret schemes. --Blix

by a reader on Sun, 10/31/2004 - 18:29 | [reply](#)

my Theory

Personally I think Cronkite said this stuff *because Rove wanted him to*. (Brainwashed?) You see, on the face of it, Cronkite's spewings are idiotic. They make Cronkite seem like an addled moron. This will discredit the content of what he is saying (being made to say? controlled by computer chip?).

And the thing is, what Cronkite is saying is 100% true, of course.

It's reverse psychology!

That diabolical genius Rove. As we all know, he will stop at nothing. NOTHING!

--Blix

by a reader on Sun, 10/31/2004 - 20:44 | [reply](#)

Rove LOL

Rove got us to change the subject did he not? Diabolical spin

specialist. Humor added by Walter Cronkite.

Secret schemes? As for that only the mind of Karl Rove deduces the extent of public gullibility. At the moment he is not telling.

by a reader on Sun, 10/31/2004 - 21:42 | [reply](#)

Nicholas Lemann interviews Karl Rove

Fair and concise question from Nicholas Lemann (New Yorker article, May 2003)to Karl Rove and a fair and concise answer:

Lemann: "But do you weaken a political party, either by turning what they see as assets into liabilities, and/or by taking issues they consider to be theirs, and raiding them?" The thought brought to his round, unlined, guileless face a boyish look of pure delight. "Absolutely!"

by a reader on Sun, 10/31/2004 - 22:08 | [reply](#)

Re: Nicholas Lemann interviews Karl Rove

A reader writes:

Lemann: "But do you weaken a political party, either by turning what they see as assets into liabilities, and/or by taking issues they consider to be theirs, and raiding them?" The thought brought to his round, unlined, guileless face a boyish look of pure delight. "Absolutely!"

Oh my God! It's almost like he gives arguments about why his opponents' positions are wrong and so changes people minds about them! And to think I thought America was a democracy?! After all, a real democracy wouldn't allow representatives of political parties to say things that might make other political parties seem less attractive, that's just not cricket.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Mon, 11/01/2004 - 01:19 | [reply](#)

cynicism

Alan,

i honestly read that guys post as pro karl rove.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 11/01/2004 - 01:24 | [reply](#)

Correct!

The post was intended as pro Karl Rove. Pure and simple politics.

"But do you weaken a political party, either by turning what they

see as assets into liabilities, and/or by taking issues they consider to be theirs, and raiding them?" ----"Absolutely!"

Political assets hinge on funding as any good political conspiracist knows. The assets that Rove referred to were in context to a Lemann scenario regarding a tripartite consortium of key funders, "trial lawyers, Jews, and labor unions":

Lemann: "The Party has three key funding sources: trial lawyers, Jews, and labor unions. One could systematically disable all three, by passing tort-reform legislation that would cut off the trial lawyers' incomes, by tilting pro-Israel in Middle East policy and thus changing the loyalties of big Jewish contributors, and by trying to shrink the part of the labor force which belongs to the newer, and more Democratic, public-employee unions."

Politics ala Rove. After all American democracy is no morality play. Or is it?

by a reader on Mon, 11/01/2004 - 02:23 | [reply](#)

My bad

My bad.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Tue, 11/02/2004 - 15:55 | [reply](#)

No Apology

Her Majesty the Queen is **visiting Dresden** to host a concert to pay for the rebuilding of Dresden cathedral, which was levelled during a bombing raid in World War 2 that killed at least 25,000 German civilians. The German newspaper *Bild* has asked if the Queen will apologise for this. Neither the Queen nor any other representative of Britain should ever apologise for what happened to Dresden. During World War Two, **Dresden** was a railhead and the site of factories making military equipment. British bombers could not bomb accurately because they flew at night to avoid being shot down by anti-aircraft fire and because they didn't have smart bombs. So they levelled the whole city killing thousands of innocents. Hitler and his fellow Nazis and their collaborators bear the sole responsibility for those deaths; not Britain and not Churchill. German people today are free to make outrageous demands *because* Britain bombed their cities. They are free because the Allies destroyed the Nazis by force – something that the German people failed in their moral responsibility to do long before. They should never forget that.

Sun, 10/31/2004 - 13:59 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

"they"?

Aren't you using the word "they" in the last two sentences in at least three different ways? "They", meaning German people today, "they", meaning German people in WW2 times who had the opportunity to depose the Nazis, and "they" meaning all German people in WW2 times, including completely innocent ones. Isn't the point that some of the last group were killed for crimes they did not commit?

by a reader on Sun, 10/31/2004 - 14:51 | [reply](#)

to whom

Ok a reader, good point.

Who, then, is the Queen supposed to Apologize too? She can't go back in time to speak directly to the second (or third?) They. And why on earth would the FIRST They ask her to Apologize (to Them)?

For what? The first They by now consists largely of folks born after

these events even occurred. What has England (or any subgroup of England) done to the first They which requires apology? Sent the Beatles to Hamburg?

Another interesting question to ponder: why would the Queen of England, Elizabeth, apologize for this at all? She was not the sovereign of England at the time in the first place. And CMIIW but the sovereign at the time did not have power anyway. And (I think) Churchill is dead.

So who in the heck is supposed to "Apologize" to whom? The whole thing becomes just a bizarre non sequitur now that you've helpfully forced me to sort out all the different Theys involved.

Should I ask the Queen to apologize to me for the burning of the White House in the War of 1812? Do let me know,

--Blix

by a reader on Sun, 10/31/2004 - 18:28 | [reply](#)

Collective guilt?

"something that the German people failed in their moral responsibility to do long before"

by a reader on Mon, 11/01/2004 - 03:29 | [reply](#)

More collective guilt

"The German newspaper Bild has asked if the Queen will apologise for this"

by a reader on Mon, 11/01/2004 - 03:37 | [reply](#)

Terrorist means and ends

There were thousands of civilians killed at Dresden. You claim that it was an industrial site that was strategic in the war. I don't doubt it. But as an American, I know what we did to those two Japanese cities. There was an industrial and strategic aspect. And there was a terrorist aspect. To this time I do not know if the terrorism was justified under the circumstances. But I do know that, whether it was justified or not, there are hypothetical circumstances where terrorism, as a method of war, could be and would be justified. That is why I have never characterised the current war as a "war against terrorism". You can never divorce terrorism as a means from its ends. The terrorism of the Islamist can never be interpreted without reference to its ends. If the ends were noble, it would be a harder case to judge. Knowing what the ends are, I see the terrorist method of warfare as an indication of the terrorist method of government. But knowing nothing about the ends and the situation, I could never come to such a conclusion.

-Nick

legenda.blogspot.com

Re: Collective guilt

A reader described this comment "something that the German people failed in their moral responsibility to do long before" as ascribing collective guilt.

Over 30% of Germans voted for a ticket with Hitler's name on it in many successive elections. Every one of these people bears some of the responsibility for subsequent events. Furthermore, many of the people who didn't care enough to go out and change the minds of those who voted for Hitler bear some of the responsibility. There can't have been many people in Germany who didn't know what Hitler was up to, he said it repeatedly and loudly in public and wrote about his plans for conquest and genocide in Mein Kampf. So many of them were in fact partly responsible for Hitler's rise to power despite knowing what he stood for.

And to prevent misinterpretation, it wasn't that the people who got bombed deserved to die. Rather, the Allies had been put in a position where there was no other viable option.

As for the claim that describing the Bild as German is collectivist, well, it is published in Germany and written in Germany and is published in the German language.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Mon, 11/01/2004 - 16:56 | [reply](#)

2 things

1. Actually Alan I read the second "collective guilt" comment as a retort to the first one. The Bild, after all, has ascribed collective guilt to the people of England, including Queen Elizabeth, for acts which - even leaving aside the issue of whether those acts were justified - not all of them (and, not Elizabeth) had anything to do with. Even to the point of asking Elizabeth (who again had nothing to do with it) to "apologize" for those acts. That's collective guilt *too*.

I thought it was a clever retort, but let me know (reader) if I misinterpreted.

2. To Nick, much of your comment is mooted if one stipulates that actions by a uniformed military in wartime are by definition not "terrorism". (They may be many things - war crimes, etc. - just not "terrorism".) I know that not all (perhaps not [The World](#) for example) subscribe to this definition of "terrorism". I do (following Armed Liberal at Winds of Change who had a good post a while back explaining why the distinction is interesting, and which convinced me).

You like millions of others who've made the same exact point for 3 years are right of course that this is not a "war against terrorism"

per se. It's a war against a certain enemy which primarily uses

terrorism and "war on terror" is just a convenient (and politically acceptable) shorthand. So what? I can never understand why people think that the observation that it's not a LITERAL "war on terror" is supposed to be so earth shattering or scintillating. Is what we *call it* really, in the end, so important? I've never thought so but YMMV I guess.

--Blix

by a reader on Mon, 11/01/2004 - 21:58 | [reply](#)

reply to Blix

Yes you're right, that's what I meant. But I see now that Alan Forrester's interpretation was a natural one to make. Sorry, I should have been clear rather than clever.

by a reader on Mon, 11/01/2004 - 23:01 | [reply](#)

If this is true:

something that the German people failed in their moral responsibility to do long before. They should never forget that. Then this is true: The British people failed in their moral responsibility to repeal the Corn laws that led to the starvation of thousands (if not millions) of Irish. They should never forget that.

P.S. Over the historical span of the British Empire how many millions of innocent lives were snuffed out by the British?

by a reader on Tue, 11/02/2004 - 02:37 | [reply](#)

Re: If this is true:

A reader wrote:

something that the German people failed in their moral responsibility to do long before. They should never forget that.

Then this is true: The British people failed in their moral responsibility to repeal the Corn laws that led to the starvation of thousands (if not millions) of Irish. They should never forget that.

The Corn Laws did lead to the deaths of millions of Irish people and the British should never forget that. However, there is a difference between making a mistake that leads to millions dying and choosing to destroy millions of lives as a matter of deliberate policy or supporting someone who favours such policies.

P.S. Over the historical span of the British Empire how many millions of innocent lives were snuffed out by the British?

Again, those people were not killed as a matter of a deliberate

policy of genocide, although many were killed for bad reasons, like sheer greed. However, we could also equally ask how many lives were saved and how much freedom was spread by the Empire. Would India be a democratic, free society today if the British had not trained many Indians in the workings of democracy? How many people would still be in chains if the British Empire had not decided to try to eliminate slavery? It isn't really something anyone should want to go back to, but the Empire wasn't all bad either in intention or in practise. The Nazis were all bad.

by **Alan Forrester** on Tue, 11/02/2004 - 15:53 | [reply](#)

And besides

and besides, AFAIK there's no Brit newspaper asking like the President of India, or Ireland, to apologize for this or that historical uprising or other violence against Brits.

Assuming the analogy holds in the first place, that would be the analogous thing.

by a reader on Tue, 11/02/2004 - 16:21 | [reply](#)

Heh

"The Nazis were all bad."

Alan, I don't know if you're up to date on Californian slang, but that phrase is hilarious.

Before you wonder, no, in this context 'bad' does not mean 'good'.

"The Nazis were all bad" is true in slang or in literal interpretation.

by a reader on Wed, 11/03/2004 - 20:00 | [reply](#)

say what you mean

instead of teasing Alan, could you just tell us what you mean?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 11/03/2004 - 23:42 | [reply](#)

Apology

Apologise for What? It was the Nazis stupid fault that we were involved in the war anyway. In my belief we had to bomb the fascists out of the civilians in order to crush the resistance. The German Prime Minister is himself a swastika wearer and how dare he ask our Queen to apologise! Its unbelievable. We should still be dropping bombs nowadays for what they did. The amount of Jews killed in the concentration camps around 5 Million and they want an

apology for 25,000 Hitler supporters. What a pile of *#!\$ in my

opinion.

by Harley on Thu, 12/02/2004 - 22:57 | [reply](#)

We disagree

We disagree with several points in the above comment.

Chancellor Schroder was born in 1944 and is in no sense a 'swastika wearer'. Resistance in Germany after the war was suppressed by making it clear that those who resisted would be killed and those who did not resist would (in the Western sectors at least) have their rights respected: it had nothing to do with casualties inflicted during the war. The 25,000 or more killed in Dresden were not all 'Hitler supporters', which is why anyone, such as ourselves, who supports the raid that killed them has to argue, as we did, that it was a moral necessity *despite* many of those deaths, not because of them. And of course violence against Germans today would be totally unjustified.

by [Editor](#) on Fri, 12/03/2004 - 03:01 | [reply](#)

yeah!

Apologise for What? It was the Nazis stupid fault that we were involved in the war anyway.

I know he didn't mean it, but I agree with this. All the deaths on both sides are the Nazis fault and responsibility, not ours. (Except the ones that should be blamed on Japan, USSR, or whoever else)

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 12/03/2004 - 18:44 | [reply](#)

Sorry

Thank You For supporting me Elliot. I'm sorry though for going so overboard. I guess i was just incensed about the situation. Normally it was just words from my Grandad who served in the 6th Airborne in WW2. He was there from D-Day to the end of the war. He was a Captain and a commander of one of the companies. He told me that he saw alot of distressing things, and lost many good friends to a War started by the Germans. I hope you now understand why I said what i did, and i'm sorry to anyone who found this unnecessary.

by Harley on Fri, 12/03/2004 - 20:44 | [reply](#)

Sarcasm

I think the Editor thought you were being sarcastic. Actually, so did I. But I think it's truer as meaning it seriously, than as meaning the opposite.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 12/03/2004 - 22:13 | [reply](#)

No!

I agree with the Editor, and disagree with Harley and Elliot about the claim that all the German deaths were the fault of the Nazis.

The Nazis bear a lot of responsibility, but that doesn't mean that there could be no unjustified killings while battling them, or that perpetrators bear none of the responsibility.

We may disagree about which killings were, in fact, unjustified, but I think we should agree that it's possible for members of the right side to be at fault for bad things that they do while engaged in a good cause.

And, since there were so many armed people and so many killings, and since we do not know the details about all of them, it seems unreasonable to assert that the Nazis were responsible for *all* of them.

Gil

by **Gil** on Sat, 12/04/2004 - 03:39 | [reply](#)

yes!

Gil,

Yeah, good guys can wage war wrongly, but... you can't expect the military to be perfect, has so many ppl, as you say. therefore, forcing us to use it at all, makes the bad side-effects the nazis fault.

we designed our military reasonably. what more could be asked of us?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 12/04/2004 - 05:54 | [reply](#)

Huh?

I'm not suggesting that it's wrong to have a military because not every member behaves perfectly.

I'm just saying that being a part of a good institution that often performs its justified tasks well and nobly, doesn't absolve one of responsibility for his actions.

If there's a murderer in the military and he commits murder during a just war, *he* is responsible for that murder; not the bad guys who caused the war (except for a tiny part of it).

Every situation that a wrong-doer is in is "caused" to some extent

by other people beyond his control. That doesn't mean that those others are responsible for his actions because if not for them he wouldn't have been there.

Does it?

Gil

by **Gil** on Sat, 12/04/2004 - 06:48 | [reply](#)

how about this:

When the Germans deploy an army with some murderers in it, we blame the murderers, and their leaders (for deploying them). When Britain does, we blame the murderers, and the *German* leaders (for making us deploy them).

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 12/04/2004 - 16:07 | [reply](#)

OK

That's better.

But, if while battling Germany's military Britain's leaders order unjustified killing, we blame Britain's leaders for that.

We can blame Germany's leaders for putting Britain's leaders into a situation where none of their choices were pleasant. But, we can blame Britain's leaders for making bad choices when better choices were available. We can say that they are responsible for the difference between their morally worse choices and their morally better choices. Or, something like that.

Gil

by **Gil** on Sat, 12/04/2004 - 23:35 | [reply](#)

agreed (nt)

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 12/05/2004 - 06:01 | [reply](#)

A free and democratic India?

Alan: You're assuming that people in India were unfree and undemocratic before the British got there. People didn't exactly live in desperate squalor before the British came to save them from themselves. Although the people may have not have had 'freedom' and 'democracy' as we think of them today, they were generally

content in their political systems. India along only became unfree

and undemocratic, with people in chains, with the arrival of British colonizers. Really, I can't see how many good things British or any other colonialism spread.

by Tomas on Mon, 04/18/2005 - 01:22 | [reply](#)

British Empire

Tomas wrote:

You're assuming that people in India were unfree and undemocratic before the British got there. People didn't exactly live in desperate squalor before the British came to save them from themselves. Although the people may have not have had 'freedom' and 'democracy' as we think of them today, they were generally content in their political systems. India along only became unfree and undemocratic, with people in chains, with the arrival of British colonizers.

Yeah, nobody was in chains, except all the slaves of course. And the British **banned** slavery in India in 1860. As I said, the British Empire did some good things and some bad things, here's an **interesting article** for you to read.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Tue, 04/19/2005 - 01:38 | [reply](#)

Politicised Junk Published As Medical Research

The Lancet has published a study claiming that about 100,000 Iraqis have died violently since the end of the war – in other words, more than 150 a day for the 87 weeks since then – mostly in Coalition air strikes. The study contains very bad science, as **Tim Worstall at Tech Central Station** explains, and its conclusion is wildly false.

UPDATE: Tim Worstall has **withdrawn** all his criticisms of the science in the article! We therefore withdraw the corresponding criticisms in this article, and thank reader **Henry Sturman** for pointing this out. We apologise for inadvertently misleading our readers. (But see also **this** article on the politicised *Lancet*.)

We find the blatant political agenda of the *Lancet*'s editor Richard Horton very worrying:

The invasion of Iraq, the displacement of a cruel dictator, and the attempt to impose a liberal democracy by force have, by themselves, been insufficient to bring peace and security to the civilian population. Democratic imperialism has led to more deaths not fewer.

The real reason for the publication of this worthless and tendentious study was that the *Lancet* was attempting to influence the American election. This is bad politics as well as bad science. Does Mr Horton really want Coalition forces to base future policy decisions on bad data? And doesn't this say rather more about his own lack of scientific integrity than about the morality of any war?

Furthermore, trying to turn moral judgements of the war into this sort of numbers game is a trivialisation of the issues involved. We suspect that this fatuous game is being played only because those who oppose the war have run headlong into moral no-man's-land without a compass. After all, what else are they going to say, that spreading democracy and human rights is *intrinsically* wrong?

Meanwhile, the *British Medical Journal* has **joined in the war against Israel** in what is, if anything, an even more foul and unprincipled abdication from its scientific and moral responsibilities.

Re:Politicised Junk

"We suspect that this fatuous game is being played only because those who oppose the war have run headlong into moral no-man's-land without a compass. After all, what else are they going to say, that spreading democracy and human rights is intrinsically wrong?"

It is "**The World**" that has run headlong into moral no-man's-land without a compass. The invasion of Iraq has not spread democracy or human rights.

by a reader on Fri, 11/05/2004 - 02:04 | [reply](#)

Also,

Putting the batter in the oven for one minute has not created a cake.

by a reader on Fri, 11/05/2004 - 19:17 | [reply](#)

As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free!

by a reader on Sat, 11/06/2004 - 01:16 | [reply](#)

Tech Central Article retracted

At the end of [this page](#) the author of the Tech Central Station article retracted all his arguments against the Lancet article and admits that leaves him nothing but personal prejudice upon which to stand.

So until a genuine critique of the Lancet appears, the article stands.

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Sat, 11/06/2004 - 01:36 | [reply](#)

What About This One?

Are the criticisms in [this](#) article valid?

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Sat, 11/06/2004 - 03:57 | [reply](#)

yes

I think the criticisms Slate article are indeed valid.

To those criticisms I will add another: I cannot imagine how,

exactly, they determine whether a reported dead person was a "civilian". Women, and children less than 14 - sure. But the dead males in Iraqi households are far more difficult to assume away (or take the family's word) as being "civilians", which they admit. Take a man who was shot by a sniper while planting a roadside bomb, or indeed who died while plowing a car bomb into coalition forces (or even into a crowd of Iraqis) - it appears as if the Lancet survey would count him as a "civilian who died following the invasion". (Please correct me if I'm wrong.)

On a more general level, part of my problem with this study is different. Granted it does not appear to be of much scientific merit, but even if it *were*, what's it doing in a *medical* journal? As with many studies involving handgun deaths we see getting published, studies of this kind, even if one can contemplate doing them in a scientifically valid way, are simply NOT medical in nature. This subject is not within the purview of the field of medicine, and so attempts to include it are disturbing and speak of a political agenda rather than sincere search for truth.

--Blix

by a reader on Sat, 11/06/2004 - 04:40 | [reply](#)

Tech Central Article retracted?

Looking indeed at the [Slate article](#) they mention some of the same arguments that the Tech Central Station article mentioned. In the [Lancet article](#) it says:

We estimate that 98 000 more deaths than expected (8000–194 000) happened after the invasion outside of Falluja and far more if the outlier Falluja cluster is included.

This is indeed remarkably unspecific. The authors themselves admit that their 98 000 figure has such a large margin of error it could even be as low as 8000, which would be 10 fold less than the estimate.

So in hindsight I'm not really clear why the Tech Central Station author retracted his scientific arguments against the Lancet article, and it's unfortunate that he didn't explain more specifically what his errors were. His main point about the enormous error margins does seem to be valid.

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Sat, 11/06/2004 - 15:46 | [reply](#)

Explanation of retraction

For explanation, see [this](#), [this](#) and [this](#).

by a reader on Thu, 11/11/2004 - 01:12 | [reply](#)

Whoops, the third "this" should be...

this!

by a reader on Thu, 11/11/2004 - 01:18 | [reply](#)

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We Endorse...

We agree with **E. Nough's assessment**:

Tomorrow, I will vote. I will vote for George W. Bush. It's not a tough decision. Bush is a lousy communicator and has an uninspiring presence. True. But his opponent is, at core, a thoroughly deluded fool. Not only deluded, but arrogant. The man actually thinks he can bring France and Germany into Iraq by "explaining" to them "the stakes." Right. As if they don't know. What a vacuous, pompous buffoon. And, as I write this, there's a real chance it'll be *President-elect Buffoon* by this time next week.

Oh, and by the way, we endorse Rudi Giuliani for President in 2008.

Tue, 11/02/2004 - 18:21 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Not Condi?

What happened to Condi 2008?

I was looking forward to Hillary vs Condi.

by a reader on Wed, 11/03/2004 - 09:50 | [reply](#)

Condi

Condi would be great too, maybe even better, but we are having trouble ascertaining her views on issues not related to national security. Also, Rudi has a lot more political leadership experience, doesn't he?

by **Editor** on Fri, 11/05/2004 - 06:02 | [reply](#)

Rudi

I want Rudi in 2008

by a reader on Mon, 06/20/2005 - 15:07 | [reply](#)

Goodbye Colin

Following his election victory, President Bush has an opportunity for a reshuffle of his cabinet. Of all the people he should replace, there is one man who stands head and shoulders above the rest – Colin Powell. In his chosen area of foreign policy, Powell is not the sharpest pencil in the box. The latest example of this involves Taiwan. Taiwan is an island off mainland China with a democratic system of government. The communist Chinese state claims sovereignty over it and Powell has effectively **supported** this claim:

Aiming a few well-placed kicks at the groin of a former ally, Powell informed the Hong Kong station: "Taiwan is not independent" and "does not enjoy sovereignty as a nation, and that remains our policy, our firm policy."

We have commented that the current conflict is a **war on conspiracy theories**. Communist ideology is riddled with conspiracy theories and so China is a cause for concern even if it not presently threatening us. We recognise that since the US is currently trying to get China to lean on North Korea, it would be a bad idea to annoy the Chinese government too much. However, there is a difference between Colin Powell not going out of his way to annoy the Chinese government and casually conceding their legitimacy to destroy a democratic country. Since Powell does not recognise this it seems that he is not a good diplomat nor, therefore, a good Secretary of State. We would be surprised if the Bush administration could not find a better one.

Thu, 11/04/2004 - 02:45 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Goodbye Colin

A good move to replace him after 4 years and search the field. Colin Powell is planning on leaving it seems so however it might be phrased, he is going. Not surprising that he represented the administration's views on Taiwan. He has toed the line as a message bearer however his actions and statements might have appeared to the world. Secretary of State is a quietly private as well as public position with most lasting diplomatic efforts evolving in the private sphere and within the department and cabinet. He never was cut out for the role as the U.S. chief diplomat despite his willingness to serve.

by a reader on Thu, 11/04/2004 - 15:14 | [reply](#)

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George W. Bush – Secular Hero

Christopher Hitchens **writes**:

George Bush may subjectively be a Christian, but he—and the U.S. armed forces—have objectively done more for secularism than the whole of the American agnostic community combined and doubled.

We agree. This is one way of stating, in short, why we, as atheists, supported this deeply religious man for the Presidency.

The demolition of the Taliban, the huge damage inflicted on the al-Qaida network, and the confrontation with theocratic saboteurs in Iraq represent huge advances for the non-fundamentalist forces in many countries.

Indeed. And Hitchens uncharacteristically omits to mention that Bush and the US armed forces have done all this in the teeth of the uncompromising opposition of the Vatican and most other Christian churches, not to mention certain other faiths, in unholy alliance with most atheists – but with the support of American Christians of all denominations in whom (contrary to what most of them claim) the secular values of the West are alive and on the ascendant.

The "antiwar" faction even recognizes this achievement, if only indirectly, by complaining about the way in which it has infuriated the Islamic religious extremists around the world. But does it accept the apparent corollary—that we should have been pursuing a policy to which the fanatics had no objection?

Again, we agree. And here comes the reason:

Secularism is not just a smug attitude. It is a possible way of democratic and pluralistic life that only became thinkable after several wars and revolutions had ruthlessly smashed the hold of the clergy on the state. We are now in the middle of another such war and revolution, and the liberals have gone AWOL.

He means 'liberals' in the American sense of the word, namely leftists. One has to wonder whether the left was ever truly onside

with the project of liberalism: to liberate human beings, in body and

mind, from tyranny and slavery.

Tue, 11/09/2004 - 22:00 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Horse \$h!t

This post reminds me of the of the joke about the boy who is exited about being put in a stable full of manure - there has to be a pony in here somewhere!

I think this administration is similar to the Johnson administration in that it is fighting a movement that is a radicalised reflection of itself. To say that this administration is advancing secularism is like saying that LBJ is was a friend of free markets.

by a reader on Wed, 11/10/2004 - 01:13 | [reply](#)

Another religion

Another religion that Bush rides roughshod over is environmentalism.

by a reader on Wed, 11/10/2004 - 02:11 | [reply](#)

Re: Horse

To say that this administration is advancing secularism is like saying that LBJ is was a friend of free markets.

Fair comment. But did Hitchens or **The World** claim that Bush is a *friend* of secularism? If not, why didn't you write: "to say that this administration is advancing secularism is like saying that LBJ is was *advancing* free markets when he tried to halt the spread of communism"?

by [David Deutsch](#) on Wed, 11/10/2004 - 02:36 | [reply](#)

Re: Re: Horse

Look at the historical record of LBJ's domestic policies and the actual results of his foreign policy = hardly a bulwark of capitalism.

by a reader on Wed, 11/10/2004 - 02:58 | [reply](#)

Horsefeathers

GWB now talks about freedom like he used to talk about Jesus. He believes in the power of freedom to change lives. Like LBJ and Communism, GWB has the right idea. Like LBJ, he may still fail.

By the way, was FDR a de facto Fascist because of his corporatist policies? Or was he an enemy of Fascism because he fought it world-wide? Did he do more to promote it, or to destroy it?

legenda.blogspot.com

by Nick on Wed, 11/10/2004 - 04:20 | [reply](#)

Big Improvement over Dad

I think it's clear that Hitchens and **The World** are right about Bush and secularism.

What I think everyone should agree with, is that George W. Bush has a much better attitude towards atheists than his father did:

See **this**.

On the contrary, George W. Bush has made repeated comments expressing respect for those of us who don't worship any God.

He's not perfect, but his generation is better than the last one. Hopefully the next one will be even better.

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 11/10/2004 - 17:13 | [reply](#)

RE: horsefeathers

LBJ failed because his beliefs (and many of his constituents) were really not that different from the Viet Cong. e.g.:The Viet Cong wanted "just" redistribution of wealth - so did LBJ. LBJ's fallback position was that South Vietnam should be "democratic" i.e. majority rule. So (in theory) thousands of Americans needed to die so that South Vietnam could hold elections- and then vote for communist rulers! Similarly, Bush can't announce a war against mystic, Biblically inspired dogma (Islam) because he (and many of his constituents) are adherents to a similar kind of dogma.

by a reader on Wed, 11/10/2004 - 19:29 | [reply](#)

vietnam

Are you familiar with the Domino theory? i assume you disagree with it. But it's clearly false to give a supposedly complete description of the *reasons* we went to war in Vietnam, while leaving it out. Even if we were wrong about that, it was still a reason we went.

And, the Domino theory doesn't seem obviously unreasonable to me. Maybe you know some important detail I don't, but it'd be better to tell me about that detail than imagine I'm actually going to agree to your description of the reasons for the war while you leave out the most famous one.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 11/10/2004 - 19:36 | [reply](#)

Evangelistic Atheism

Sermon on the mount, or a tale of the horse they rode in on.

If it gets votes and sounds good, preach it. Atheists and evangelists are suitably good in bed together for that very reason, by definition in verbiage and not in sin. For the record atheists are not like those flippy-floppy godly-godless agnostics. Atheists and evangelists both know they are right about one thing. God either exists because He does or because the idea of Him exists. Agnostics doubt the existence of God and know they might be wrong either way. Agnostics therefore are mightily confused. True leaders are believers and certainty triumphs over doubt. In that these horses are about due to sprout wings any day now, we all will have a new way to fly and horsefeathers shall aboundeth. Tie the the reins of these pipe dreams together to make a tall tale and name her Objectivity. Mount up!

It was good, and on the seventh day they rested and we babbled.

Hallelujah! I'll believe it when I see it.

by a reader on Thu, 11/11/2004 - 03:38 | [reply](#)

RE: Evangelistic Atheism

Reader, you're definitions are wrong. Atheism is the lack of theistic belief. "A" means without. "Theism" means, the belief in god or gods. Atheism is not the belief that there is no god of any kind (although people who believe this are atheists, it is merely a subset of atheism, the way believers in Norse mythology are a subset of theists.)

Atheism is not a belief system. It is the absence of belief. It covers a lot of ground. For example, infants are atheists (implicit atheists) not because they are sure that there is no god, but because they simply lack belief.

"Agnostic" was a term coined by Thomas Huxley, referring to the religious sect known as "Gnostics" as an example of men who claim knowledge of the supernatural without justification. By deciding that he was "a-gnostic", Huxley was saying that even if the supernatural does exist, it is unknowable to man. An "Agnostic" has come to be understood as someone who maintains that some aspect of the supernatural is forever closed to human knowledge.

Agnosticism is not a third alternative to theism and atheism. "Theists" and "atheists" covers everyone on the planet. Either you believe that god(s) exists or you are without that belief. Agnostics can be a subset of either of the two. Generally speaking, agnostic theists believe in god but believe that the true nature of god is unknowable. Agnostic atheists maintain that the supernatural is inherently unknowable, so the agnostic can neither affirm nor deny the existence of god. But since this person lacks actual belief in god(s), he is not a theist, and is therefore an atheist.

Agnostics are not necessarily confused or flip-floppy about any of this.

The idea that atheists, by their nature, are evangelical is false.

Although there may very well be evangelical atheists, the vast majority are not. In fact, most atheists probably don't even know that they're atheists.

by **R** on Thu, 11/11/2004 - 16:33 | [reply](#)

Useful Distinction

Theists, Atheists, and Agnostics are all subsets of the same, humans postulating with their different shadings of belief. Satire is useful in dealing with rampant belief systems to which ironically each of all of us subscribe to some degree. Beliefs change. Reality rules.

Your explanation of the differences is useful however. The life cycle of beliefs would seem to indicate that we are born as atheists, wonder a bit about various theisms, and then assume with some certainty that the rest of the gnostics are a bunch of babbling fools - which of course might be wrong - agnostically.

by a reader on Fri, 11/12/2004 - 01:37 | [reply](#)

"If it gets votes and sounds

"If it gets votes and sounds good, preach it. Atheists and evangelists are suitably good in bed together for that very reason, by definition in verbiage and not in sin. For the record atheists are not like those flippy-floppy godly-godless agnostics. Atheists and evangels both know they are right about one thing."

Atheists know they are right that there is no god and theists know they are right that there is a god. I'm an atheist conservative, btw.. great post!

by a reader on Fri, 07/15/2005 - 04:55 | [reply](#)

God bless George W. Bush our hero

Hi,

I am a proud supporter of George W. Bush!
because he:

- protects us - homeland security
- creates jobs
- renewal in iraq
- honoring our veterans
- rebuilding the gulf coast region
- education reform - no child left behind
- protecting our nation's enviroment

That's why I like him. We have one America and President George

W. Bush is defending with all his heart and soul.
It will be sad day for the USA and the world when bush leaves
office. Too bad he can't be president again. He's done more in the
past 2 years than most presidents ever do.

If someone have any questions contact me!
(www.georgewbushthehero.piczo.com)

Faithfully Steven Freeling (George W. Bush the hero)

God bless America

by George W. Bush the hero on Thu, 10/04/2007 - 16:13 | [reply](#)

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Good Riddance

Solomon has a nice round-up of reactions to the death of Yasser Arafat, the mass murderer who won the Nobel Peace Prize for doing more harm to peace than anyone else since Hitler and Stalin.

This is a moment to remember his victims.

Thu, 11/11/2004 - 17:49 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Absolutely

I really liked David Carr's comment at Samizdata:

Reports from Paris indicate that there has been a marked improvement in the condition of Yasser Arafat.

He's dead.

Gil

by **Gil** on Thu, 11/11/2004 - 18:20 | [reply](#)

One major piece of filth gone

One major piece of filth gone for ever.

Very good news.

by AIS on Fri, 11/12/2004 - 10:11 | [reply](#)

An Early Test

Yasser Arafat's death makes it possible for the Palestinians to choose peace. It also makes it possible for them to re-package and continue their existing policy – misleadingly named 'the peace process' – of ensuring that the murder of Jews remains institutionalised and legitimised by the international community.

To ascertain (and also to influence) which of these options the Palestinian body politic is going to choose, it is essential that any agreement with them be conditional on early progress on certain issues, most importantly the disarming and disbanding of terrorist organisations and the introduction of a liberal-democratic system of government. All concessions to them, not only by the Israelis but by the Americans too (except possibly for purely symbolic negotiations), should follow, not precede, their compliance with these conditions.

Whether the new Bush Administration sees it that way will itself be an early test of whether they are serious about achieving peace in the Middle East, and indeed about winning the war on terror.

Sun, 11/14/2004 - 17:54 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

peace possible?

Yasser Arafat's death makes it *easier* for the Palestinians to choose peace. They could have chosen peace already. Is it significantly easier now? I'm not convinced.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 11/15/2004 - 03:10 | [reply](#)

Difficult condition to achieve

I might be too pessimistic but...

Taking into account the fact that it is next door to impossible for "Palestinian leaders" whoever they are now to stop violence against Israelis we have to come to terms with the fact that the violence will not stop and the preliminary condition for peace talks is just the

way to stop any peace talks in general. In a similar way "right to

return" is just a way of refusing to negotiate at all from the Palestinian side. So, it is pointless to ask for that on both sides. On the other hand it absolutely pointless to negotiate in such situation. Having the other side saying in arabic "we don't want peace with Israel at all, we want only better position to attack them" makes all "reasonable attempt to save lives" a waist of time. The only choice in this situation should be to either separate from Palestinians or re-occupy them. The last option has already been tried on (after 1967) and failed. Having the only possible choice of separating completely we need to forget about peace talks, preliminary conditions etc. It only contributes towards unfulfilled child dreams and provoked public opinion which always favors peace talks. Let's be realistic.

by a reader on Mon, 11/22/2004 - 11:25 | [reply](#)

Re: Difficult condition to achieve

We think that is indeed too pessimistic.

We agree with [Natan Sharansky](#) that genuine democracy is an attainable goal for all the peoples of the world.

by [Editor](#) on Tue, 11/23/2004 - 18:28 | [reply](#)

White Poppies

Read Oliver Kamm on the White Poppy ~~fascist~~ peace movement in the 1930s, 1940s, and today, [here](#) and [here](#).

Wed, 11/17/2004 - 00:56 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Great links. When people thi

Great links. When people think "pacifist" they tend to equate that with overall peacefulness and a distaste for violence, but if you look deeper, that doesn't appear to be so. I found the George Orwell quote especially relevant.

"Pacifist propaganda usually boils down to saying that one side is as bad as the other, but if one looks closely at the writings of younger intellectual pacifists, one finds that they do not by any means express impartial disapproval but are directed almost entirely against Britain and the United States. Moreover they do not as a rule condemn violence as such, but only violence used in defense of western countries..."

As a fairly young guy, I tend to think of anti-Western sentiments coming from within our own society as a relatively new thing. Perhaps they just have a louder voice now, or maybe historians tended to view them as a minor footnote, and will ultimately treat them similarly after this particular period of war is done. Either way, it's good to be reminded that a misguided dove can be just as dangerous as a misguided hawk.

by [R](#) on Thu, 11/18/2004 - 00:42 | [reply](#)

John Kerry, Cambodia, And Iraq

John Kerry claimed that he was in Cambodia during the Vietnam war. If he was, he failed to appreciate features of the Cambodia campaign that are analogous to the role of Iraq in the War on Terror. Why did Nixon order troops into Cambodia? First, he wanted to prop up an anti-Communist leader Lon Nol who was under attack from Pol Pot's Communist forces. Second, he wanted to cut off North Vietnamese supply lines in Cambodia. This was a single offensive in a much larger campaign. If Kerry had understood the strategic situation, he might not have objected to the incursion into Cambodia then, and he might be President now.

Pol Pot wasn't an immediate threat to American forces, let alone the American people. However, he was an ally of the Communists of North Vietnam, whom he allowed to operate in regions that he controlled. As a result, the North Vietnamese Army had supply bases in Cambodia. Also, as a Communist, Pol Pot was dedicated to the destruction of freedom and so would harm the United States if he were given the chance, just as the North Vietnamese Communists would.

Was Saddam the biggest threat to the civilised world? In the immediate sense, no. However, like Pol Pot, Saddam supported enemies of freedom, such as Palestinian suicide bombers. Like Pol Pot, he was utterly hostile, ideologically, to the United States and was bound to act upon this enmity sooner or later because the very existence of the United States and its allies would be a standing rebuke to his evil regime. Saddam had to go: the only question was when and how.

The main reason to choose to liberate Iraq by force in 2003 was tactical: Saddam was the most convenient target who couldn't be disposed of by other means.

Any war consists of many small campaigns that don't achieve much on their own but add up to something larger. This is the business of war, the day-to-day substance behind the glamour of declaring victory over the forces of evil. Iraq's liberation is already a great achievement but it is only the start of something much larger. One day, all of the citizens of the Middle East will be free and America will only be safe when they are. This is at the heart of the Bush

Doctrine. Kerry showed no sign of understanding it. The majority of

Americans did.

Fri, 11/19/2004 - 04:51 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Flaws and Strengths

As an editorial opinion there is no argument with the central point of the above. However it is an opinion obscured by some nebulous reverse geopolitical crystal ball gazing as well as a train of thought which seems to be a rather frayed string of mostly unconnected threads. What does John Kerry have to do with any of it? Nixon and Pol Pot? Who knows that a majority of Americans understand the Bush Doctrine? It is likely a jolly good waste of time to try to answer such questions. Anyway, these loose asides make the editorial statements seem like an exercise in flamboyant name dropping. We need not answer such distant questions in order to draw a sound conclusion.

If the writer were a journalist he or she might be justly accused of sloppy journalism or ill-defined sweeping editorialism. The writer is not beholden to this standard. Therefore it can be conjectured all over the blogosphere as to the meanings and connections without risk of anyone being sent to the back copy room. Yet, redeemingly, despite the sweeping banter and conjectural historic asides, the core argument is beyond reproach. It can be stated in a dozen words.

Freedom in the Middle East is better and safer for us all.

by a reader on Sat, 11/20/2004 - 01:06 | [reply](#)

Flaws?

Some bloke wrote:

'What does John Kerry have to do with any of it?'

John Kerry supposedly went into Cambodia then bitched about it being illegal. Also he was a Presidential candidate for the Dems, which kinda makes him important, after a fashion.

'Nixon and Pol Pot?'

Nixon: American President fighting a war. Pol Pot: rather beastly tyrant. Note the similarity to the current situation. Note also that John Kerry understood neither situation.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sat, 11/20/2004 - 01:38 | [reply](#)

An offer

to Alan Forrester, Elliot Temple, David Deutsch, Gil, Sarah, et al. I will donate \$200 for the airline ticket so any one of you can fly to Iraq and pursue your passion for liberating the Middle East.

by a reader on Sat, 11/20/2004 - 03:59 | [reply](#)

A Counter-Offer

A counter-offer: for a mere \$100 we'll explain the fallacies in the **chickenhawk** argument to you.

by **Editor** on Sat, 11/20/2004 - 04:24 | [reply](#)

i'm famous

you just made my 15 minutes (i was doing fun stuff b4...). i know it was meant as a criticism, but, well, unintended consequences ;-P

Anyway, I'm scared of getting sand in my laptop.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 11/20/2004 - 05:26 | [reply](#)

If you believe in your cause

why are you not willing to fight and possibly die for it?

by a reader on Sat, 11/20/2004 - 15:14 | [reply](#)

Re: if you believe in your cause

"Why are you not willing" in the question above is an equivocation on the word "willing".

One meaning of "willing to do X" is that one will do X if not physically prevented. (Or financially prevented, or legally prevented, or prevented in some way considered to be force majeure.)

Another meaning is that one will do X if necessary -- and again, there is a range of meanings of 'necessary', such as 'if you are the most skilled at doing X', or 'if no one else is able (see above) to do X', and so on.

By equivocating between these two meanings, one can construct, at will, a specious argument for any proposition whatever. For instance, an arsonist (or apologist for arsonists) could accuse soldiers serving in Iraq of not really believing in the cause of firefighting in their own home towns.

by **David Deutsch** on Sat, 11/20/2004 - 16:14 | [reply](#)

I believe in other things too

I'm busy.

Also I believe in specialisation and division of labor. I like computers, but no one asks me to build them.

I'm not avoiding going to Iraq out of fear of death. I don't think I

should go.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 11/20/2004 - 16:15 | [reply](#)

To David and Elliot:

When should it be your turn? Should you go to war ahead of those who do not believe in your cause (such as draftees)? Should you go to war ahead of those who believed they were going to war for some other reason (such as a threat from WMDs)?

by a reader on Sat, 11/20/2004 - 18:12 | [reply](#)

turns?

I don't take turns doing the computer building. Nor the firefighting.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 11/20/2004 - 18:38 | [reply](#)

It's odd that reader expects

It's odd that reader expects **The World** to go to Iraq and fight for a flat sum of \$200, what I assume is far less than soldiers are getting. Will \$200 even cover the airfare? Anyway I think reader should just take up **The World's** generous offer of \$100 to explain the fallacy. Reader would save \$100 and end up sounding less moronic for his trouble.

Reader, I sure hope your home never catches fire. Because unless you are or have been a firefighter, evidently by your stout principles you have no right to call the fire department and expect them to do anything.

That said, I'm not sure what Kerry/Cambodia has to do with any of this either. AFAIK it's simply not true that Kerry was in Cambodia in the first place. What the two military campaigns seem to really have in common, vis-a-vis Kerry, is that in both cases he made stuff up (I was in Cambodia, Bush misled...) so that he could accuse the US government of duplicity in their carrying out.

They are different in an important way, however, which is that the Cambodia campaign was "secret" and non authorized (AFAIK) - making that criticism at least partially valid - whereas the Iraq invasion was authorized by act of Congress, and Kerry voted *in favor*, making his criticism of *that* utterly hypocritical and irresponsible.

by Blixa on Sat, 11/20/2004 - 19:23 | [reply](#)

Re: turns?

Elliot, I take your response to mean: Never. If the 140,000+ troops in Iraq were all killed or disabled, you still would be under no obligation to take up arms for your cause. Some of the troops there are less skilled (and certainly less motivated) than you would be.

by a reader on Sat, 11/20/2004 - 20:16 | [reply](#)

\$200

Blixa the \$200 is for part of the air fare I'm sure you could find a well paying job with Haliburton or some other contractor once you are there... and you will be supporting your cause!

by a reader on Sat, 11/20/2004 - 20:20 | [reply](#)

the fire station fallacy

Guess who argued in real life that since GW Bush is spending money to build fire stations in Iraq, he can't be serious about fighting fires at home?

<http://www.cfr.org/publication.php?id=6532.xml>

Hint: this person also said, in the same speech: "I know something about aircraft carriers for real. And if George Bush wants to make this election about national security, I have three words for him he'll understand: Bring. It. On."

by a reader on Sat, 11/20/2004 - 20:27 | [reply](#)

Tastes like chicken

'Blixa the \$200 is for part of the air fare I'm sure you could find a well paying job with Haliburton or some other contractor once you are there... and you will be supporting your cause!'

You're sure? Really? Cause I'm not. Haliburton is an oil company and I don't know much about oil or geology and so I wouldn't be of much use to them.

I also don't currently know how to shoot and I can't really learn in Britain due to the government being a bunch of pansies who wouldn't even let Derren Brown play Russian Roulette :-P. So somebody would have to pay for firearm training in another country where the government isn't a bunch of pantywaists too.

Then there's the fact that if everyone who fought the war went off to fight it there'd be no one left back home to argue in favour of it and get funding and so on. There are also other things I'd like to argue for too, like going back to the good old days when you could shoot a burglar stone dead and a police officer would pat you on the back instead of clapping on a pair of handcuffs.

Also, the whole death thing sounds a bit boring. What? Am I just

supposed to lie around all day? Without anything to read or a decent selection of TV programmes?

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sat, 11/20/2004 - 21:45 | [reply](#)

So Alan,

you are too busy making arguments for the war to actually participate in it?

by a reader on Sun, 11/21/2004 - 01:54 | [reply](#)

So, "a reader",

Why aren't you in Iraq fighting for *your* side?

by another reader on Sun, 11/21/2004 - 02:47 | [reply](#)

I really doubt that the US ar

I really doubt that the US army would be interested in having David or Elliot on their side. Don't mean to be rude, chaps, but they don't take just **anybody**, you know!

by a reader on Sun, 11/21/2004 - 05:12 | [reply](#)

Stupid-Fallacy-Spouting Reade

Stupid-Fallacy-Spouting Reader persists:

Blixa the \$200 is for part of the air fare

That's swell. So you're generously offering to pay **only part of the air fare**. Meanwhile if Elliot or whoever would just **enlist**, he'd get there free, plus a salary. Now, given that (I think) he hasn't done that, you can expect your - less lucrative - offer to hold no appeal. Why bother making it then?

What is your point? Do you have one? Ok I actually know the answer to that, but what is it that you **think** your point is?

Still waiting to hear about what you will do in the event of a fire. Or burglary, robbery, assault, accident, garbage pickup, or... well, frankly, any service the government provides which involves workers performing tasks that you yourself do not do. You must be a jack of all trades!

by Blixa on Sun, 11/21/2004 - 06:16 | [reply](#)

Re: Why aren't you in Iraq fighting for your side?

Because the insurgents are not on "my" side. I know this wouldn't make sense to someone with an "either you are with us or against us" mentality.

by a reader on Sun, 11/21/2004 - 14:31 | [reply](#)

\$200

Blixa the point is this: Should those that advocate war bear any additional burden in that war vs those who oppose it or remained silent? I am not contesting the concept of social division of labor.

P.S. I'm sorry if I offended you by not mentioning you by name in my initial offer.

by a reader on Sun, 11/21/2004 - 14:43 | [reply](#)

Re: Why aren't you in Iraq fighting for your side?

Oh, I know there are billions of people who are not on either side. *You* aren't one of them; you have clearly picked a side. You're engaging in argument for your side exacty* as the World is for theirs. (You are, I'm sure, perfectly aware of how important this activity is, since it was vital for your side in taking Vietnam.) You're a propagandist, not a soldier, and that's why you're not actually in Iraq fighting any more than the World's writers are.

* OK, not exactly. Not nearly as well, for one thing.

by another reader on Sun, 11/21/2004 - 16:27 | [reply](#)

Strategy and Tactics

"What happens now is that we (by which I mean the West) eradicate state-sponsored terrorism. And we can achieve that only by replacing all political systems that perpetrate or collaborate with terrorism, by systems that respect human rights both domestically and internationally." – David Deutsch.

"The main reason to choose to liberate Iraq by force in 2003 was tactical . . ." – [The World](#).

Let's assume (which I do) that David's strategic assumption is true. Assume, as well, another time, not so differentiated from ours, where in light of the world situation taken as a whole, certain tactical choices have been made differently.

Afghanistan, the launching pad for 9/11, a nerve center of state-sponsored terrorism, and a historically strategic asset, bordering Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Pakistan and Iran, is attacked and liberated. Large numbers of troops, money and human resources are poured into the near far-East. The first democratic country in the region is assured and secure military bases are established that directly threaten Iran – the chief, long-term threat to Israel. Russia and China (long interested in the region) take note and there is increased pressure on them to help achieve the West's strategic objectives in connection with Iran and North Korea. Our historical allies are pressured (perhaps with some success, perhaps not) to assist us to increase military, political and economic pressure on Iraq – but we proceed in any event, and our relations

with our allies are no better or worse than in our time. Yassar Arafat dies . . .

In this world, albeit presented in a very simple and truncated manner, policy makers have decided that Saddam wasn't "the most convenient target who couldn't be disposed of by other means." They chose different tactics to achieve strategic goals. Arguably, these tactics involved a broader, longer-term play, with perhaps a greater chance of, among other things, (i) forestalling future 9/11's, (ii) increasing pressure on Iran and North Korea, (iii) confronting Iraq without creating the chaos and risks that we see currently, (iv) transforming the Middle East, and (v) maintaining our strategic alliances. Or, perhaps not!

We know that this history and the future(s) that flow from it has occurred. We don't know how many worlds bear a closer resemblance to this history or to the one in which we find ourselves today – perhaps fewer. In any event, we find ourselves in this world, and we know that choosing to cut and run in Iraq, does not seem to point to any favorable strategic outcome.

My main point, however, is simply this: these questions are complicated, the variables numerous and there is a real difference between strategy and tactics. Contributors to **The World** would be well advised not to dismiss each others views by confusing the two.

by Mike Bacon on Sun, 11/21/2004 - 17:28 | [reply](#)

Should those that advocate wa

Should those that advocate war bear any additional burden in that war vs those who oppose it or remained silent?

If you advocate a social program which I do not, and it passes, should you be required pay extra for it?

If you advocate a regulation which I do not (such as carpool lanes), and it passes, do I get to disobey it more than you do?

If you advocate protectionism and I do not, and it passes, do I still get to conduct free trade?

If you vote for a bond measure which I do not....

If you vote for a candidate which I do not....

If you supported the US's actions in Yugoslavia - which I did not - did you pay extra for its funding? did you sign up to fly on an air force bomber plane?

Um. So it looks as if the answer is no. In fact I reckon the principle you are (pretending to be) sincerely suggesting, as conceived, has never actually been implemented in the history of human government.

I am not contesting the concept of social division of labor.

Actually you are. You are arguing that at least **some** people

should become soldiers solely on the basis of their political opinions rather than on whatever factors currently attract people to and make them good at soldiering. In essence, if Stephen Hawking had favored the war you'd be here saying "then go and become a soldier".

This is clearly, if not a rejection of division of labor altogether, a sub-optimal application of it. We have an all-volunteer army and a democratic republic. Most people understand these processes and institutions quite well enough without needing these explanations.

by Blixa on Sun, 11/21/2004 - 18:18 | [reply](#)

Re: Should those that advocate wa...

Blixa, I have never advocated or voted for any of those things you mentioned. And I was not asking if the principle has actually been implemented in the history of human government. I was posing the question to David and Elliot as a moral issue (since they are presumably interested in such issues).

Re: social division of labor: to be sure, Stephen Hawking would not make a good soldier, but motivation is a very significant factor in the performance of an army, if not, most wars could be won with mercenary armies.

by a reader on Sun, 11/21/2004 - 23:51 | [reply](#)

Re:Re: Why aren't you in Iraq fighting for your side?

Wow! You nailed me exactly! Yes, I am part of a vast Islamo-communist-KKK-Freemason conspiracy! I am also opposed to motherhood and apple pie!

by a reader on Sun, 11/21/2004 - 23:58 | [reply](#)

And I was not asking if the p

And I was not asking if the principle has actually been implemented in the history of human government. I was posing the question to David and Elliot as a moral issue

Ok well then you have my answer. They'll have to speak for themselves although I doubt theirs are all that substantially different.

motivation is a very significant factor in the performance of an army

Indeed. One of the strongest arguments for an all-volunteer army rather than an army constituted by some other rule, like universal involuntary conscription, or for that matter a partial conscription based on "if you're in favor of the war taking place you must join the army".....

Best,

by Blixa on Mon, 11/22/2004 - 00:34 | [reply](#)

moral issues

I am interested in this moral issue. in fact, i thought about it before you brought it up here. and, in fact, nothing you've said here is a new argument to me.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 11/22/2004 - 00:45 | [reply](#)

partial conscription??

I don't know exactly what that is, but which is more involuntary: "if you're in favor of the war taking place you must join the army" or "even though your joined the National Guard mainly to keep order in case of natural disasters you must now go to war in another country for a cause you don't understand and the rational for which keeps changing"

by a reader on Mon, 11/22/2004 - 01:36 | [reply](#)

Re:moral issues

So what is your answer?

by a reader on Mon, 11/22/2004 - 01:38 | [reply](#)

"even though your joined the

"even though your joined the National Guard mainly to keep order in case of natural disasters"

Nobody should join the National Guard thinking that this is all that will or could ever be required of them. You may as well ask me to take into consideration that there are people who join the Army thinking they'll spend most of their time playing ping pong because of Forrest Gump. There may (for all I know) be people who think this way, but if so, their misapprehensions about what they are getting into are not my fault.

by Blixa on Mon, 11/22/2004 - 01:43 | [reply](#)

my answer

I am still in the US, with no plans to leave.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 11/22/2004 - 02:45 | [reply](#)

Moral Issue?

Sorry, I'm arriving late to this. I just wanted to add how perplexing

this complete non-sequitur "moral issue" is to me.

What I should do with my life depends on a great many factors including my values, skills, obligations, plans, etc. I advocate a great many things. I couldn't possibly personally commit all of my time to each of them, and my lack of personal participation in implementing them is no argument at all that I'm not seriously committed to them, nor that I have insufficient regard for the contributions of others.

I think that the firefighter analogy is a good one. Did the reader who poses this issue agree that his lack of personal involvement in firefighting exposes his hypocrisy about advocating professional firefighting?

Those who volunteered to fight in the US military had (or should have had) no expectation that he would be able to pick and choose the battles he would be asked to fight. There was an expectation that he would be asked to fight battles that were within the historical range of causes to which the military has been committed. I don't think that the Iraqi engagement falls outside of this range, so I'm not sure if there's anything at all to any aspect of this "moral issue".

Gil

by **Gil** on Mon, 11/22/2004 - 17:46 | [reply](#)

Re: Moral Issue?

Gil, I'm not sure you understand the issue I was bringing up.

It is clear that David and Elliot feel they have other priorities based on their response to my initial offer. I was then asking if they would ever feel any obligation to fight in the war they advocated. To give an extreme example, what if the only people left to fight the war were David, Elliot, and pregnant women & children. Would they then feel obligated to fight? Where on their hierarchy of priorities would such an obligation lie?

As a side note, it has not been that uncommon for intellectuals to participate in the wars they believed in, Ernest Hemingway and Jean Paul Satre come to mind.

by a reader on Tue, 11/23/2004 - 00:51 | [reply](#)

Moral Issue?

I'm still not clear. Is this really a serious question?

I'm sure that there is a point where David, Elliot, and I would decide that the best thing for us to do would be to fight for a good cause (perhaps not the same point, but each of us has one).

What "point" are you trying to make? Are you implying that we are bad at choosing for ourselves the proper points where we should fight?

Do you think we don't think any cause is worth risking our own lives for?

We risk our lives every day! It really seems to be a silly line of inquiry.

Please come out and be explicit about what you're trying to argue.

Do you think we under-value the risks that soldiers take when they fight a war that we support? Why would you think so? Surely not because we are not fighting it ourselves, because that's an absurdly invalid inference.

So, what *do* you think?

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 11/23/2004 - 01:37 | [reply](#)

It's odd indeed. Given that

It's odd indeed. Given that presumably everyone in question lives in countries which have provisions for conscripting people if need be, Reader can already surmise that an upper bound for the "point" at which Elliot, David etc. would fight is: "If drafted." Unless of course one of them would, if drafted, *dodge* that draft.

In other words, Reader appears to be asking folks if they would dodge a hypothetical draft. Well.. everyone will have to answer for themselves. In case you're interested, Reader, here's my answer: No. Now that you have your answer, what interesting things have we learned from this exercise? Anything?

by Blixa on Tue, 11/23/2004 - 01:45 | [reply](#)

Re: Moral Issue?

"Are you implying that we are bad at choosing for ourselves the proper points where we should fight?" No, I am asking what you think that "proper point" should be. If you want to answer a specific question answer this: Do you think you, as an advocate of the war, should go to war before my children? Would you volunteer before they were conscripted?

by a reader on Tue, 11/23/2004 - 02:31 | [reply](#)

Conscription

The World is vigorously opposed to conscription, whether in the UK or the US, under all foreseeable circumstances.

by **Editor** on Tue, 11/23/2004 - 03:22 | [reply](#)

Volunteering Before Conscription

If your children don't want to fight in the war, then they shouldn't.

Everyone who wants to, and can be helpful, should do so before anyone else is conscripted.

I don't know when they would be conscripted in this alternate universe you're imagining, so I can't really answer directly about whether I would volunteer first. My decision would be based on many things, perhaps including delaying an impending draft, but that wouldn't and shouldn't be decisive.

But, I do think that the war should be fought entirely by volunteers; so I think your children should never be conscripted.

And, I would volunteer to fight before never.

Does that answer your question?

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 11/23/2004 - 08:00 | [reply](#)

Do you think you, as an advoc

Do you think you, as an advocate of the war, should go to war before my children?

Sheesh. How old are your children? If they are *children* I don't want them sent to war in any event. If they aren't children, and don't volunteer, this would mean that we can presume that they and **The World** and Elliot and I are all in the same boat: won't be going unless conscripted (and in **The World**'s case perhaps not even then?).

In that case whether or not your children go first or someone else goes first would depend on a number of factors: age, able-bodiedness, etc. If your children are between say 18-22, and could pass a physical, then because I am older than that, they would likely go before me, were there a draft, which there's not, nor is there going to be.

Does that answer your question?

BTW I too oppose a draft, except in rather armageddon-like or perhaps Red Dawn type emergency situations which are rather difficult even to envision. So the real answer is that if your children don't want to fight in a war then neither do I want them to. K?

by Blixa on Tue, 11/23/2004 - 15:37 | [reply](#)

Re: Moral Issue?

"what if the only people left to fight the war were David, Elliot, and pregnant women & children."

Send the pregnant children.

Seriously, do you think the only way to contribute to a war is to

carry a gun?* Back when the USofA actually had conscription and rationing and all, should **these guys** have been handed M14s and shipped off to the south Pacific? Would that have helped win the war?**

* **Rhetorical question.**

** Also a rhetorical question. Answer: No. But *winning* the war is not a reader's goal, is it?***

*** Not necessarily a rhetorical question.

by another reader on Tue, 11/23/2004 - 15:39 | [reply](#)

Do We Need a Draft?

Here's part of a piece I ran across by Dennis Rodgers, who writes at newsobserver.com. He was a former Army NCO who voluntarily enlisted in 1962 and re-upped for six years in 1964. I'm currently unclear regarding my own view on the question; but by way of full disclosure, I fervently opposed the draft in the early 70's, when I was eligible and in the midst of a very unpopular war.

In any event, I thought it would be useful to quote some reasons why a reasonable person could, in the current circumstances, consider supporting a draft. I think this piece at least raises certain questions that should be addressed -- not that more general philosophical opposition alone is without merit -- by those who strongly oppose a draft and wish to convince others of the merits of their view.

I believe that some of his points can be answered pretty easily (some have already been addressed in prior posts), but others need more serious consideration. Anyway, here it goes:

"We need the warm bodies. There are simply not enough active-duty soldiers or reservists to do the job today.

It would be cheaper. Draftees would get a hefty pay raise only if they re-enlisted.

It would keep the reserves strong. The minimum service should be two years active and two years of reserve meetings.

A military hitch would bond those who served with a shared cultural experience that doesn't exist in America today except for TV and franchise stores.

It would improve the nation's health. At least for two years, people would be forced to eat right and stay in shape.

It would bridge the wide social gap between races, ethnic cultures and economic classes. Taking showers together breaks down all sorts of barriers.

No politician should send Americans to war unless that person has served in uniform and appreciates the sacrifice they're asking of others.

It would end disputes over the physical and mental equality of races and genders.

Society would be better off if more young people received a dose of discipline from a tough-as-nails drill sergeant at 5 a.m.

It's high time children of the rich and powerful did their share of the fighting and dying for this country. They get the biggest rewards from living here, so it only seems fair they shoulder more of the burden."

by Mike Bacon on Tue, 11/23/2004 - 16:11 | [reply](#)

Re: Do We Need A Draft?

Um...

Which points do you think need serious consideration?

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 11/23/2004 - 16:29 | [reply](#)

Re: Do We Need A Draft?

Surely one could only consider the draft *cheaper* if one makes the mistake of ignoring the forgone productivity of the drafted people in their preferred occupations, the poor performance of people working under threat rather than incentive, and the costs of enforcing the draft. Slavery is highly inefficient economically.

And that is to say nothing of the effect of conscription on war fighting. If you were to conceal from generals, say, the cost of a certain munition, then they would tend to over-use it, thus reducing the overall capacity of the economy to supply war materials. This is just as true if you provide them with 'free' recruits as if you provide them with 'free' aircraft carriers. And 'over-using' troops in this sense probably means causing excessive casualties as well as fighting less effectively.

by **David Deutsch** on Tue, 11/23/2004 - 17:25 | [reply](#)

Kids today... They could u

Kids today...

They could use a nice healthy dose of slavery.

As for bridging the races... The Vietnam draft sure did wonders in that department. If we could only return to the racial harmony of those days...

by **R** on Tue, 11/23/2004 - 17:54 | [reply](#)

weird

Reading over this exchange again, I just want to note how odd

Reader's question turned out to be, when pressed. Essentially it boiled down to: Would e.g. David Deutsch and Elliot Temple agree to fight in a war if only they and pregnant women & children, remained among non-combatants on our side?

I dare say that if we ever got to that point our resp. nations would be in a heap of trouble and it really wouldn't matter who did or did not agree to fight. :-) But Reader was intensely curious nonetheless! "What if that happens!! I must know!!"

by Blixa on Tue, 11/23/2004 - 18:51 | [reply](#)

Parents Today

Parents could use a nice healthy dosage of slavery. To prevent them from enslaving their children, I guess. Or maybe just for fun.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 11/23/2004 - 19:46 | [reply](#)

Re: Do We Need A Draft?

Thanks to David for seriously addressing some of the points I quoted in my post.

David's economic analysis is surely right. Correctly pricing things is notoriously difficult and one would be hard-pressed to support the claim that a draft is ultimately cheaper and more cost-efficient than a voluntary army.

In a similar vein, it has been argued that the incorrect pricing of oil (ignoring necessary environmental remediation caused by production and use) and water (almost universal governmental subsidization) has led to gross over-consumption and has otherwise distorted rational decision making.

David's final thought, that ". . . 'over-using' troops in this sense probably means causing excessive casualties as well as fighting less effectively," also seems right, but raises for me a further question. Assuming the assertion is true – which seems highly likely – how should we measure its applicability and helpfulness in solving actual war fighting problems that we may face?

The assertion is consistent with good economic analysis, and with a broad, coherent philosophical theory that to a significant approximation seems to reflect the way the world works – in this sense it is true and should almost always be. However, while correct in principle in each of these ways, and undoubtedly correct in fact in a variety of times and situations, there also must be times and situations when, for example, the use of overwhelming force made up largely of conscripts has led to the best result possible in the circumstances – less casualties than would otherwise have occurred, victory by the forces of progress, and effective fighting in the sense of actually winning a war that might otherwise have been

lost.

It may never be that the most desirable option is to institute a draft. It may be that, even in very dire circumstances, it should still be opposed on moral, economic and philosophical grounds. But from time to time, when confronted by a terrible and ruthless enemy, limited by other military commitments, and faced with domestic and international political and economic problems, there may simply be no other rational choice.

Maybe WWII was close to this type of situation. While it was a great patriotic war drawing huge numbers of men to fight for a clearly defined objective against a truly evil enemy, the need for soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines was so great that most objective observers agree that the military could not have been adequately manned to fight on two fronts without conscription. The lack of a draft could have led to greater casualties and ultimate defeat. Of course, we do not seem to be in such a situation today. Nevertheless, the theoretical question remains.

Regarding R's comment that "[a]s for bridging the races... The Vietnam draft sure did wonders in that department. If we could only return to the racial harmony of those days..." he's certainly right that the relationship between the races was not very good in the 60's. Most people agree, however, that it was much worse in the 30's and even worse farther back as you approach real, direct and unambiguous slavery in the United States. Most historians also believe, with pretty good evidence, that the WWII armed services, into which large numbers of racially, ethnically, religiously and economically diverse men were conscripted, had more than a little to do with the rapid racial progress that was made in the United States during and after the war, because although forced, it helped break down irrational stereotypes and prejudices through mutual efforts and bravery.

The extent to which the Vietnam era draft helped or hindered racial progress is an open question – much else, including the civil rights movement, was taking place during the same time.

Another question also remains open: if institutions like the draft favorably affect human progress, even if only at the margins, should this ever be taken into account when trying to decide whether a draft, however distasteful, is needed in a particular set of difficult circumstances? Of course, this question is only relevant to the extent that one would ever, in any circumstances, consider a draft.

by Mike Bacon on Tue, 11/23/2004 - 23:02 | [reply](#)

Re: draft

We need the warm bodies. There are simply not enough active-duty soldiers or reservists to do the job today.

Doesn't this depend on what "the job" is? This is like saying "there

aren't enough tax dollars to fund all government programs"... no, not if you do too many government programs... As of now from everything I've heard the army has met their recruiting goals. But of course we could not invade and occupy all of China. I suppose "the job" is somewhere in between but it needs to be specified. In context I guess the author is talking about Iraq, but there is no sign that the administration has any desire to double the # of troops in Iraq, even if you or I may think that's required...

A military hitch would bond those who served with a shared cultural experience that doesn't exist in America today except for TV and franchise stores.

So would forced-labor camps...

It would bridge the wide social gap between races, ethnic cultures and economic classes. Taking showers together breaks down all sorts of barriers.

Can't we just have the communal showers w/o the draft then? ;-)

No politician should send Americans to war unless that person has served in uniform and appreciates the sacrifice they're asking of others.

I object the most to this one. Civilian control has been tossed out the window, apparently? Also, "can't appreciate the sacrifice unless he served" is just a dumb fallacy. I do not want to see it propagated and indulged any more than it already is.

It would end disputes over the physical and mental equality of races and genders.

Yes, in many cases presumably it would end those disputes in the negative: such equality does not hold. Now, expanding our knowledge of humans is always nice, but listing this as a significant benefit of instituting a draft is a bit strange. Or am I misreading?

It's high time children of the rich and powerful did their share of the fighting and dying for this country.

This sounds nice, or at least "fair", as a rhetorically stated principle but as a practical matter it's a non-starter. Who would be implementing this draft? The "powerful", by definition.... Recall that we *had* a draft, during Vietnam, and there were plenty of complaints about the "children of the rich and powerful" getting shielded from it. I'm quite sure the same was true of all preceding drafts as well. It will be different this time around, because...? because we'll just do it right this time, because...? because we *say so*?

The most perplexing thing about most pro-draft arguments I've seen is that the desire to implement a draft seems to run several laps ahead of any actual conceivable need for one in the immediate future. Is this author arguing that we need a draft because the military is too small, or is he arguing that the military is too small because he wants there to be a draft? Not clear. I hasten to add that Congress could expand the size of the military at virtually any

time if it wanted to. Failing any sign of an effort on their part to do so, why people indulge in these draft arguments in the first place is beyond me.

Prior to the election I had assumed it was all electoral posturing on the part of the Democratic party - scaring people into voting for them by raising the spectre of a draft as a serious possibility - but now I'm not so sure....

by Blix on Wed, 11/24/2004 - 00:31 | [reply](#)

Mike, you're right. I don

Mike, you're right. I don't know whether the Vietnam draft helped, hindered or was inconsequential to race relations. It just seemed like an odd argument in favor of it. It reminds me of a joke I heard in the eighties about the positive aspect of rampant cocaine use in this country: It teaches our kids the metric system.

I oppose the draft on some practical grounds (like the example David gave) but mostly moral ones. To talk about the great bonding experience and exercise benefits that slavery brings seems to detract from any reasonable argument one could make in favor of a draft.

I like to think that WWII could have been won without a draft, but as you pointed out, we'll never know for sure what the differences would have been.

Many argue that Israel could not exist if not for their constant draft. One could also argue, that if a nation cannot exist without conscription, then it should perish. At any rate, it makes for an interesting discussion

by R on Wed, 11/24/2004 - 01:56 | [reply](#)

Re: Do We Need A Draft?

Mike Bacon wrote:

Maybe WWII was close to this type of situation. While it was a great patriotic war drawing huge numbers of men to fight for a clearly defined objective against a truly evil enemy, the need for soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines was so great that most objective observers agree that the military could not have been adequately manned to fight on two fronts without conscription. The lack of a draft could have led to greater casualties and ultimate defeat.

It seems to me that there is a paradox here. In a situation where a significant fraction of the population is needed to fight a war, one needs overwhelming political support for the draft to be viable. In other words, one needs the overwhelming majority of the population to agree with an analysis such as the above. But if everyone agrees that a large army is needed to avoid defeat (and that defeat is bad enough to be worth fighting to prevent), then why don't they just form one? Are they just going to sit around and

wait for doom? Why would they do that?

Because they can't solve the free rider problem? Pschaw. First of all, I don't think that exists at all. Second, there are cases in history where large armies have in fact been formed without any draft.

In reply to R: well, yes, but the cases where a draft has broad support and where it does not, are utterly different. In the former case, as I just said, a draft isn't really needed, but whether it is enacted or not says little about whether the society 'deserves' to survive. In the latter case, it won't work, and *that's* when the society is doomed.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Wed, 11/24/2004 - 03:40 | [reply](#)

Re: Draft

I agree that a draft could not be sustained over a significant period of time other than in a situation where it had overwhelming (but not necessarily universal) support among the population. Is this a true paradox? Might not a draft still be ultimately necessary for victory in some circumstances? Perhaps the leaders and populations of the US during WWII and Israel today, were and are wrong in believing in the need for a draft. This is certainly a possibility. In any event, whether or not correct in supporting a draft, I would agree that their willingness to do so in the face of a real threat to survival, at the very least demonstrates an attitude of determination and sacrifice that enhances their ultimate chances for survival.

by Mike Bacon on Wed, 11/24/2004 - 05:56 | [reply](#)

Re: Draft

I disagree that societies who institute drafts should be praised for their determination. They should be criticized for their lack of respect for individual autonomy, and lack of confidence that their people will respond to real needs when they occur.

Yes, there are lifeboat scenarios when it can be right to violate other people's normal rights. But those are exceptional cases and can be handled that way. Normally, there is enough time and enough reasonableness that people agree to do what's necessary and right.

Institutionalizing the emergency case will cause more harm than good. Violating more and more rights will be seen as normal.

That slippery slope is best avoided.

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Wed, 11/24/2004 - 18:01 | [reply](#)

Re: Draft

Gil,

I wasn't as clear as I should have been. Did I say that a people (e.g. the Israelis today, or Americans during WWII) should be praised for their "determination" to institute a draft? Regardless of their perception of the circumstances in which they find themselves, it may well be that they should still be criticized for seriously misunderstanding the true situation, as well as for, as you say, their lack of respect for individual autonomy and their lack of confidence that their people will respond. What I meant to say was that, even if they are wrong in instituting a draft, their willingness to go to such lengths to defend themselves at the very least reflects an attitude of determination and sacrifice (even if misplaced in connection with their draft decision) that gives them a real fighting chance to win on the battlefield. Perhaps you view this as a distinction without a difference. Nevertheless, it's what I meant.

by Mike Bacon on Wed, 11/24/2004 - 18:54 | [reply](#)

Praise

Mike,

I read: "Their willingness to do so in the face of a real threat to survival, at the very least demonstrates an attitude of determination and sacrifice that enhances their ultimate chances for survival." as praise.

If one were to write "Castro's communist revolution demonstrated his determination to improve the lot of poor Cubans." Without adding "but it turned out to be a humanitarian disaster that revealed just how much his lust for power exceeded his concern for human liberty and welfare." I would assume that the first quote alone was a form of praise. Even with a qualification, I'd think the author was trying to say something like "Well, he may have been mistaken about the best policies; but his heart was in the right place."

Isn't "an attitude of determination and sacrifice" usually interpreted as virtuous and praiseworthy?

I think we should be clear that trampling on other people's liberty, and using their lives as means to your ends, is serious business; and good intentions of the tyrants should not soften our attitude about how wrong it is.

Gil

by Gil on Wed, 11/24/2004 - 20:21 | [reply](#)

Gil, I don't think your an

Gil,

I don't think your analogy to Castro is apt, and in fact, its use points out what I see as a basic flaw in your argument. To

paraphrase David Deutsch from his answer to the Edge Question

"What Now?", (David, I apologize if I'm misinterpreting or misapplying your reasoning), I don't think that Castro is motivated by a state of mind similar to that which is motivating Israel or that motivated the US during WWII. The US and Israeli actions — and even the mistakes, like supporting a draft, are driven fundamentally by respect for human beings, human choices and human life. These values are life-affirming and life-seeking. The values that drive Castro are antithetical to this. There is no symmetry between between the two positions. I continue to believe that the determination and sacrifice shown by the Israelis and the Americans, despite their mistakes, is praiseworthy, and in that sense, their hearts are in the right place.

Mike

by Mike Bacon on Wed, 11/24/2004 - 20:57 | [reply](#)

Analogies

Mike,

I agree about Israel and the US. I wasn't implying that they have/had attitudes similar to Castro. I was just using the Castro line as an example of wrongly implying praise.

Gil

by **Gil** on Thu, 11/25/2004 - 01:41 | [reply](#)

Mike, I don't think you've

Mike, I don't think you've pointed out a flaw in Gil's argument. I don't think the assumption that: the Americans in WWII and the Israelis were (are) well intentioned, and that Castro is not (an assumption that I happen to agree with by the way), has anything to do with the fact that Gil took your earlier statement as praise. In fact you seem to be saying that he was right to interpret your statement that way. You wrote:

"I continue to believe that the determination and sacrifice shown by the Israelis and the Americans, despite their mistakes, is praiseworthy, and in that sense, their hearts are in the right place."

Perhaps I'm misinterpreting your point about Gil's argument. Maybe you're just saying that doing the wrong thing with good intentions is better than doing the wrong thing with bad intentions. At any rate, for the sake of argument, (yes, I used that expression for you, Gil) let's assume that you and I are wrong, Mike, and that Castro's intentions were good, however misguided. Should we then praise him for his determination and sacrifice given the results, and the means he used to achieve these results?

Anyway, all of us seem to be around the same place morally, when it comes to the draft. But I would like to hear more from David (or

anyone else) about its futility. I would like to believe that what

David is saying is true, but I'm not entirely convinced.

In the case of Israel, I tend to think that you are right. If they ended their conscription, I believe that they would still get enough volunteers to defend themselves. But you seem to be saying that the fact that they have a draft proves that the draft is overwhelmingly popular and therefore proves that they would get enough volunteers without it.

Does your logic follow that there is no social program in this country, that is currently funded with coerced tax dollars, that would vanish if left to survive on volunteer dollars, by virtue of the fact that we, as a society, allow the money to be taken from us in the first place? Maybe that's a bad analogy, and I'm probably completely misunderstanding you, but I'll go on with my questions.

Have there not been drafts in countries, at different times historically, that were not overwhelmingly popular (at least not by those who were being drafted) but still viable? Or are you saying that any wars won by those armies could have also been won with an all volunteer army?

Or is it more of combination of practicality and morality? Something like: any war where conscription made the difference between winning and losing, shouldn't have been fought in the first place because it didn't have enough of a mandate from the people in order to be fought effectively without it?

Anyway, I'm sure you can make your own point better than I can.

by [R](#) on Thu, 11/25/2004 - 02:08 | [reply](#)

Re:Conscription

The editor wrote:

"**The World** is vigorously opposed to conscription, whether in the UK or the US, under all foreseeable circumstances." yet **The World** is in favor of the war. How is this different from me saying: "I'm in favor of national free lunches but I'm opposed to raising taxes." Having a war doesn't guarantee that there will be a draft and having free lunches doesn't guarantee that taxes will increase, but the chances are dramatically better. And someone is paying the price in any event.

by a reader on Thu, 11/25/2004 - 02:46 | [reply](#)

taxes

well, we're aware the war costs money, and so could lead to higher taxes in the same way free lunches could. however, are you aware of this method of recruiting more soldiers: you offer them higher pay. thus you can get a war for just money, no draft.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 11/25/2004 - 03:00 | [reply](#)

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Civil Liberties And Politicians

While our troops are fighting for our liberties abroad it seems that the politicians at home are dead set on eroding them – if the **Queen's Speech** is anything to go by.

The government is planning to introduce a Mental Health Bill that will give GPs the power to compulsorily “treat” people whom they deem to be “**mentally ill**”. The bill will also increase the number of behaviours that are deemed to be “mental illness”. Let us translate this for people who are not used to psychiatric doublespeak: doctors will be given the power to chemically subdue, or torture, people whose behaviour they dislike, even when these people have committed no crime.

The speech also refers to a Consumer Credit Bill and a **European Union** Bill. The former is intended to **prevent** lenders from conning people; the latter to **enable** the government to con people:

The spending of the "yes" and "no" campaigns is limited by the Political Parties Elections and Referendums Act for up to six months before a referendum, but the government's own spending is not limited until the last 28 days of a referendum campaign, the Vote No campaign said.

The government is also persevering with its ridiculous quest to **impose ID cards** upon the public. ID cards are an infringement upon our civil liberties: innocent people should not have to present cards at police stations to “prove” they are not criminals. As ID cards will be forged as soon as they hit the streets and quite likely earlier, they will also be utterly useless for security purposes just as they have been in every other country with ID cards. And they will create a completely new type of completely harmless ‘criminal’ (the ID-card non-carrier) on whom the security services' efforts and resources will be wasted at a time when we are in great danger from real enemies. We are also disgusted by the Conservatives' **spinelessness** over this issue:

The Conservatives say people needs [sic] answers to key questions before knowing whether the planned national ID card scheme will work and protect people's liberties.

Successive governments have eroded Britons' right to defend

themselves, by **banning guns** and prosecuting people who choose to defend themselves. That the state can be everywhere at once is both ridiculous and undesirable: it is long past time that the ~~petty, officious bureaucrats~~ caring, competent representatives in the House of Commons realised that.

Tue, 11/23/2004 - 19:55 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

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Secular-Religious Insanity In Education

The narrowness of the schoolteacher subculture; the confusion between form and substance caused by over-reliance on a written Constitution; and Political Correctness. These three blights on American society have combined to bring about a lunatic reversal of the meanings of 'secular' and 'religious' in school curricula:

On the one hand, the teaching of the foundation stone of the United States' secular political culture, the Declaration of Independence, has been made **taboo** on the grounds that it constitutes 'religion'.

On the other, **Muslim missionary work in American schools** is being encouraged on the grounds that it is 'multicultural' – i.e. promotes secular values.

Thu, 11/25/2004 - 17:47 | [permalink](#)

u r brilliant, they r nutz

u r brilliant, they r nutz

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 11/25/2004 - 19:32 | [reply](#)

Some Questions

Who is encouraging Muslim missionary work, the public schools? Of the thousands upon thousands of public schools, which ones are banning the Declaration of Independence?

I do not see a reversal of secular and religious. I do see an intrusion upon the separation of church and state.

I also see a greater failure of the public school systems in America. By mandating attendance of all students in public school systems and mandating twelve years of public school we run the high risk of wearing down and dumbing down every attendee into numb complacency. School has become a factory of education to produce the new proletariat.

by a reader on Fri, 11/26/2004 - 02:45 | [reply](#)

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Three Links About Middle-Eastern Death Cults

MEMRI TV Project monitors the Hizbollah television station in Lebanon: **Mothers of Hizbullah Martyrs: We are Very Happy and Want to Sacrifice More Children.**

HonestReporting **describes** some of the so-called 'incitement' by which Palestinians are drawn, from earliest childhood, into the suicide-bombing death cult:

'The venomous propaganda in the Palestinian media and education system is the root and foundation of the expansion of the suicide terrorism phenomenon,' said Sharon.

Unfortunately, the typical news consumer has no idea what Sharon is talking about, since, as HonestReporting has continually indicated, the western media have largely turned a blind eye to the incitement against Israel and the U.S. that permeates Palestinian culture.

Meanwhile in Iran:

The Islamic death cult in Iran is running a registration drive, signing up thousands of would-be murderers to carry out attacks against the US, Israel, and ... Salman Rushdie

The world will not be at peace until such cults are history. Why do the media barely mention them and never discuss their mode of operation and their political effects?

Sun, 11/28/2004 - 18:59 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Why?

Because the model of the world that they are selling doesn't have a space into which this information fits.

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Mon, 11/29/2004 - 05:57 | [reply](#)

Indeed

That is indeed the question. As far as Iran goes, even the US

administration falls way short of confronting the Iranian regime the way it deserves (and which is the only reasonable policy if worse tragedies are to be avoided in the future)

by AIS on Mon, 11/29/2004 - 06:51 | [reply](#)

Islamic murdering cults

Why don't the leaders of those cults commit suicide instead, They would do the world a hell of a favor> and we wouldn't have to look at their ugly bearded faces any more. Young people should be taught to live not to die. They really prove that they hate God and all his children which are all the human race. Religion has no impact on God. It's what is in your heart. I hate those idiots who preach hatred and strive on dominating women and killing innocent civilians. They are cowards of the worst kind and makes me ashamed to be human

by a reader on Sun, 01/02/2005 - 19:59 | [reply](#)

Is Islam sick ?

Islam and the Arab world have been sick, psychopathic religion/cultures for hundreds of years. The West and President Bush had better face up to this and prepare plans to finally and completely end the psychopathology and lunacy of the fascist Islamo/Arab societies, just as President Roosevelt and Churchill confronted the psychopathic German Nazis and the brutal Japanese militarist expansionists and totally vanquished and destroyed them. Notice how democratic and peaceful these former enemies have been for 60 years now. The same must be done with the Islamofascist psychopaths and the lunatic Islamo/Arab clergy.

by pilgrim on Mon, 01/03/2005 - 01:09 | [reply](#)

Natan Sharansky On Democracy And Peace

The death of Yasser Arafat provides an opportunity for peace between Israel and a new state of Palestine, but only if the peace process is linked to genuine freedom and democracy for the Palestinians, **writes Natan Sharansky**. Go and read it all.

Then **buy the book**.

Mon, 11/29/2004 - 02:17 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

This book?

(Not that that report is credible: *everyone* knows Bush can't read.)

by **Kevin** on Mon, 11/29/2004 - 20:57 | [reply](#)

The Case For Democracy

I am so admired by the book (The Case for Democracy) and want to express my deep impression about that book . I greet the Author (Natan Sharansky) for his interest in liberating the oppressed Peoples world wide and in the Middle East in particular . Most of the points mentioned in the book describes exactly waht was happening in Iraq under the tyranny and Terror of Saddam Hussein's regime , and the differences between the Fear and Free Societies and the effect of the Freedom on my life in Iraq even though the evilish campaign to repress Iraqi Freedom . I hope that the Free World , led by the United States , would take the advantage from this great thinker and get the Moral Clarity to see the evil , so as to support the dissidents and freedom lovers around the world who are fighting tyranny and terror in the non-democratic regimes and those are confronting evil .President George W. Bush & PM Tony Blair were the only two who have this moral Clarity -as the graet author saw - and liberated me and my own people , the Iraqi People .

by IRAQI CITIZEN on Mon, 06/20/2005 - 12:01 | [reply](#)

Drupal add-ons

Here are some modules, themes, and other tools to be used with **Drupal**, the software that runs this site.

These are generally not polished (and in particular, not *documented*) to official Drupal contrib standards. Some of them are tailored to the specific needs of this site, and might not be directly usable on sites with different policies and conventions. The copies here may be updated occasionally, but they are not necessarily up-to-date with — or used on — this site.

Everything here is provided *as-is*, and absolutely no (unpaid) support whatsoever will be provided. (You can send bug reports to kpschoedel@gmail.com, but we do not guarantee we will do anything with them.)

Theme Preprocessor

This allows one to write themes in a 'template' style, but runs at theme-install time for maximum efficiency (that is, it produces a pure PHP theme, and is *not* itself present as part of a Drupal installation). It provides inclusions, conditionals, macros, etc.; its main design goal was to allow one to easily share code/design between themes.

It requires a command-line-accessible PHP; it is written in PHP because that language will be familiar to people working on Drupal.

- [documentation \(PDF\)](#)
- [preprocessor](#)
- [sample themes \(4.5\)](#)

Modules

- [alertype \(4.6\)](#)
Allows editors to change a node's type.
- [captcharith \(4.6\)](#)
A captcha plug-in that provides a simple arithmetic question as the challenge. Derived from an early version of the captcha module.

Note: at time of writing, this requires a **patch** to

captcha.module; see drupal.org/node/20653.

- copyright (**4.5, 4.6**)
Adds a copyright notice (automatically using the current year) at the bottom of each page.
- extralinks (**4.5, 4.6**)
Optionally adds (a) an "edit" link to teaser displays (like Drupal 4.4), and (b) "next", "previous", and "latest" links to node pages, based on the front page display order.
- forumup (**4.6**)
Allows editors to promote an unpublished forum item to a story.
- ii404 (**4.5, 4.6**)
Perform a search when a page is not found. Derived from **i404.module** by Steven Wittens.
- insertions (**4.5, 4.6**)
Provides XML-style tags to insert information (e.g. title, teaser, body, link list, etc.) about nodes and comments. Similar in spirit to the **Attached node** contrib module.
- linebreak (**4.5, 4.6**)
An extension to the line break filter. Converts line breaks into HTML, but only if the user has not supplied explicit <p>, <div>, or
 tags.
- nlist (**4.5, 4.6**)
An adjunct to insertions.module, this lists the nodes in a taxonomy in <n> form, so that the editor can copy them to easily build custom article lists.
- notemailer (**4.5, 4.6**)
Allows the admin to suppress teasers for particular node types. See <http://drupal.org/node/12667>.
- replace (**4.5, 4.6**)
An input filter that provides two functions: (a) turn '@' characters into images, to discourage email address harvesting; (b) turn the site's name into a link.
- results (**4.5, 4.6**)
In 4.5, this module merely suppresses the author field in search results, for 'editorially' unsigned collaborative sites.

From 4.6, this module allows the administrator to configure, for each node type, what information will be displayed in search results.
- safemail (**4.6**)

An input filter to protect email addresses from automated

harvesting.

This filter converts email addresses (either in mailto: links or in text) into links to an internal URL ?q=safemail/etc. Access to the decoded email address may be restricted by role and/or guarded with a captcha.

Note: at time of writing, this requires a **patch** to captcha.module; see drupal.org/node/20653.

- searchers (**4.5, 4.6**)

This module provides an alternate report of external referrers, parsing search engine referrers and excluding unwanted referrers.

- shuffler (**4.5, 4.6**)

Present a "random" selection of articles in a sidebar block. Nodes are selected and weighted by taxonomy. Reasonably efficient, since the list of links is generated by a cron hook rather than on every page load. (On the other hand, it does not take node permissions into account.)

- spantell (**4.6**)

This is a plug-in for the spam module, which notifies users when their content appears to be spam. (The hope is that they will then be less likely to wonder why their content does not appear, and resubmit it repeatedly.)

- teaserless (**4.5, 4.6**)

Handle old database nodes with no/empty teaser field.

- tracking (**4.5, 4.6**)

Similar to the core tracker.module, but primarily focussed on providing registered users with personalized lists of unread content.

- zminoredit (**4.5, 4.6**)

Allows editors to mark node edits as 'minor', so that the content does not appear to be 'new' in the tracker. (Renamed from 'minoredit' so that it appears just above the 'Submit' button.)

PHP pages

- fc (**4.5, 4.6**)

Flushes the Drupal cache when loaded. Useful while working on code that uses the cache.

- node (**4.5, 4.6**)

Redirect old node URLs. Better than the standard Apache redirect because it handles links to comments.

Patches

- captcha-api.patch (**4.6**)

Provides an API for captcha.module, so that third-party modules can provide and use captcha tests.

See drupal.org/node/20653.

Note: the 4.6 patch applies to the CVS version of captcha.module current at the time of the 4.6.0 release, since as of this writing captcha.module has not been released for 4.6.

- comment-admin-show-node.patch (**4.5, 4.6**)

Makes admin/comment/edit/... pages provide the title and link of the associated node, so that the administrator can easily verify that the comment has been posted in the correct place.

See drupal.org/node/11782

- comment-delete-one.patch (**4.5, 4.6**)

Permit the administrator to delete a single comment, without also deleting all of its descendents.

See drupal.org/node/11877

I still can't believe Drupal actually thinks it's a good idea to force an editor, who wants to remove one little piece of content, to also remove other content, sight unseen. This is Drupal's biggest flaw — it's should be a content-*management* system, not a content-*arbitrarily-discarding* system.

- comment-theme.patch (**4.6**)

Adds theme('comment_start') and theme('comment_end') around the comment display section of a node page, so that, for example, the entire comment section can be enclosed in its own styled div.

- drupal-options.patch (**4.5, 4.6**)

Makes the two functions of drupal.module — remote authentication and the remote directory — separately configurable.

See drupal.org/node/12143

- excerpt-admin.patch (**4.5, 4.6**)

Modifies excerpt.module to allows an administrator to create an excerpt, even if excerpts are not normally configured for that node type.

Note: the 4.6 patch applies to the CVS version of excerpt.module current at the time of the 4.6.0 release, since as of this writing excerpt.module has not been released for 4.6.

- node-history.patch (**4.5, 4.6**)

Stops node.module from discarding history entries older than

a month. I think keeping track of what a user has read is a useful service, and don't want it arbitrarily sabotaged.

- password-trim.patch (**4.5**, **4.6**, fixed in 4.6.1)

Trim white space from entered passwords. New users who cut-and-paste from their introductory email message often end up with the preceding blank and/or trailing newline.

See drupal.org/node/11791

- poll-theme.patch (**4.5**, **4.6**)

Makes poll results themeable.

Obsolete Items

- updatecommentcount (**4.5**)

Repairs the node_comment_statistics table after an upgrade to 4.5.0. Probably won't be necessary for 4.5.1 or later; see

<http://drupal.org/node/11366>

- comment-save-count.patch (**4.5**, fixed in 4.6)

Update the comment count when a comment is saved, so that changes to its publication status will be reflected in the count.

See drupal.org/node/11933

- excerpt-read-more.patch (**4.5**, fixed in 4.6)

Modifies excerpt.module to correct the 'read more' flag.

See drupal.org/node/11289

- node-post.patch (**4.5**, fixed in 4.6)

Stops a user being redirected to a page they don't have permission to view, after submitting a node.

See drupal.org/node/11940

Mon, 11/29/2004 - 18:35 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Conspiracy Theories About Controlling Democracies

What do a retired Egyptian general and The Guardian have in common? OK, many things, but what we have in mind today is that they both peddle anti-democratic conspiracy theories. The general in question, Sallah Al-Din Salim, recently **spoke** on a Lebanese TV channel and his words were recorded by **MEMRI**:

[The US] wants a collaborating [Iraqi] government and a collaborating national assembly, which it can later use to control Iraq, and build military bases, in order to distance Iraq from the Arab path and then to use Iraq's land to attack Iran.

So the United States is going to control voting in the Iraqi parliament. In a similar vein, Ian Traynor of the Guardian **writes** that a "US campaign [is] behind the turmoil in Kiev" in Ukraine:

With their websites and stickers, their pranks and slogans aimed at banishing widespread fear of a corrupt regime, the democracy guerrillas of the Ukrainian Pora youth movement have already notched up a famous victory - whatever the outcome of the dangerous stand-off in Kiev.

Funded and organised by the US government, deploying US consultancies, pollsters, diplomats, the two big American parties and US non-government organisations, the campaign was first used in Europe in Belgrade in 2000 to beat Slobodan Milosevic at the ballot box.

He then lists the many means that such organisations deployed to try to prevent electoral fraud and sway the election in favour of Viktor Yushchenko. All of this is rather admirable and does not amount to the US being behind Ukraine's electoral problems. However, the article gets even more ridiculous:

Officially, the US government spent \$41m (£21.7m) organising and funding the year-long operation to get rid of Milosevic from October 1999. In Ukraine, the figure is said to be around \$14m.

Let's just see if we understand this correctly. The US has supposedly delivered a victory to Yushchenko with an investment of only \$14m? This suggestion is ludicrous and insulting to the

Ukrainians. It is astronomically unlikely that a \$14m intervention could be the deciding factor in the race – and if it had been, why were the Americans not outbid by other interested parties like Mr Putin or the Ukrainian – er – parties? In reality, the incumbent Ukrainian Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich's attempts to **rig** the **vote** are behind Ukraine's electoral problems. No American organisation has attempted to rig the election and they are not behind the Ukraine's problems.

A world in which the United States can control the actions of parliaments and the votes of electorates exists only in the fevered imaginations of people like Egyptian ex-Generals and Guardian writers. If they have a penchant for writing fiction they should get it out of their system by writing a bad novel instead of inflicting it on people watching and reading the news.

Fri, 12/03/2004 - 15:20 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

investment

The statement is indeed ridiculous taking into account official figures of what Yanukovich spend for his election campaign. Just to remind you - it is about \$600 mln.

by a reader on Tue, 12/07/2004 - 15:42 | [reply](#)

Conspiracism

Conspiracy theorists will always be with us--and always corrosive.

by [Dean Esmay](#) on Wed, 12/08/2004 - 05:22 | [reply](#)

devil's advocate

Maybe the conspiracy charges make sense if one stipulates that Yanukovich's side had calculated **very precisely**, given control of state media & plans for vote-stealing & whatnot, how much extra money (\$600 million, apparently) they'd have to spend on the campaign, and the extra infusion of \$14 million for the opposition screwed up their balance sheet **just enough** to throw a wrench in the works. :-)

by Blix on Wed, 12/08/2004 - 21:53 | [reply](#)

Re: devil's advocate

Yes. But if a person is capable of calculating the exact cost of a \$600 million public-relations project to an accuracy of less than \$14 million and being sure of getting it right, then they must be capable of foreseeing the effect of obvious (and, apparently, public!) sources of assistance for their opposition.

But what if the situation were this: *Both* sides employ Machiavellian operatives of this calibre. Both knew that the \$14m would make the difference, and both knew that if the other side matched it, the

bottomless coffers of the CIA would simply outbid them again.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Wed, 12/08/2004 - 22:19 | [reply](#)

no single opinion

It is ridiculous to speculate without facts about who gave money to whom. And I haven't seen any evidence of "Western money" in Ukraine. However, Yushenko did paid "salaries" to his supporters in Kiev! And food-supply was organised, and tents had been purchased in advance, and buses had been arranged just in time. And these facts are not speculations (however, they are not official). The reason I am sure is that my relatives who live in central Ukraine have a plant with many employees around 400 km from Kiev, and a certain number of workers took "a holiday", explaining later that they were offered an "allowance" of 40 Hrivna (about £4) per day not including free meal and a place in a tent if they agree to take "a trip" to the independence square in Kiev in a comfy bus. And they agreed to support what they called "birth of democracy in Ukraine".

So, a lot of money had been thrown in. We just don't know by whom.

Moreover, several years ago, they rehearsed this with a very similar scenario. Yushenko and Co again announced election results wrong and said that their supporters will stay in tents in Kiev until the true result are pronounced. It was VERY much similar to what happened this time but without enough resorces. Another difference was that eventually, police came and removed all the tents and arrested some members. That was about it. This time they just achived more. However, I doubt if that could be called a democratic shift of power. I wold call it a "technological process" rather.

And western countries should be ashamed of who they supported.

BBC news translated a footage from the independence square ("maidan nezalezhnosti") in Kiev on the second day of the first elections. It was nice to see that by failing to translate from Ukranian language can cause damage too. When Yushenko appeared on tribunes he was announced as a president of Ukraine. Half of Ukraine population laughed at this moment. To avoid confusions, I must point out that that was short after the FIRST election that indeed went totally wrong with a totally wrong number of votes.

But what it turned out to be afterwards is not 70% of votes in favor of him as it was purported by western mass-media. It he is not a prominent democrat at all.

So, the elections were not as clear as they seem.

by a reader on Thu, 01/13/2005 - 13:44 | [reply](#)

Democracy

On September 3, 1939, Britain and France declared war on Germany. If it had somehow been possible to impose a free and fair election on Germany that day instead of a world war, Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party would undoubtedly have won a landslide victory and a wholehearted mandate for their policies. So the war would have followed anyway, the only difference being that the West would now have been fighting a regime that was unequivocally legitimate by the West's own standards. It would have been fighting a nation. A people. And of course, that is what it was fighting, in the actual war.

Facts such as these are cited by the many opponents of the Bush Doctrine (or the **Sharansky** doctrine) of victory through the imposition of democracy. Opponents of all types, from enemy sympathisers to defeatists to neo-imperialists to **idiotarians**, and even anxious supporters, think that they see a fatal flaw in this doctrine: what if the enemy, once democratised, votes the bad guys back into power?

The naive answer, that 'the people' – the majority – never have evil objectives that they value above their own safety and prosperity, and that all the harm is done against their will by their evil rulers, is simply false. Fortunately, the Bush Doctrine does not depend on such a fairy-tale premise. The doctrine is not about relying on the goodwill of a supposed silent majority of liberal democrats among the enemy population. It is about allowing such a majority, and the associated institutions of an open society, to evolve where they did not exist before, by actively destabilising – if necessary by force or the threat of force – the inherently fragile fear-based regimes that prevent their evolution. This is a much harder and more complex task than merely forcing free and fair elections at gunpoint (which, by the way, *can* be done and often has been, and is indeed sometimes part of the solution). But it is feasible.

Wed, 12/08/2004 - 17:01 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Does the editor also believe that sexual promiscuity

is a way to promote virginity?

by a reader on Thu, 12/09/2004 - 13:21 | [reply](#)

Re: Does the editor also believe

Does the editor also believe that sexual promiscuity is a way to promote virginity?

Of course it is! You think virgins grow on trees?

by a non- editor answering anyway on Thu, 12/09/2004 - 14:52 | [reply](#)

What is destabilising a regime?

When you contrast regime destabilisation with merely imposing a free and fair vote--as you seem to be doing--what are the concrete differences of policy that, for instance, make the former a harder task? In both cases, the regime must be removed from absolute control of politics.

My thought is that destabilisation involves destroying and discrediting the regime militarily before the election while hinting that you may continue to destroy and discredit it after the election even if major regime elements come into the government. That way the regime party is not a viable option for stability when the election is held. Is that the policy of the administration? And if that is not the policy you have in mind, what is the difference between forcing an election and destabilising the regime?

by [Nick](#) on Thu, 12/09/2004 - 19:15 | [reply](#)

Re: What is destabilising a regime?

You're presumably asking about what sort of things can be done to destabilise [the remnants of] a fear regime after it has been removed from power. Stability would mean its finding a way to prevent its decline into oblivion. Presumably there are two classes of measures the West could take to prevent this: one is to reduce the power of those people to instil fear today – by hunting them, defeating them militarily, defending against their attacks, ridiculing them, suborning their allies and so on. The other is to promote the institutions of an open society, which, uniquely, actually work to help people get what they want without having to hurt others to do so. The more such institutions are up and running, the more the bad guys' supporters will be persuaded to ditch them, the fewer recruits they will get, the more they will despair of winning, betray each other, and so on.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Thu, 12/09/2004 - 22:20 | [reply](#)

Re: Fear-based regimes

Are regimes such as Iran's really fear based? I think they derive their power more from the fact that they are considered virtuous by a large portion (if not the majority) of a country's population. The perceived virtue could be mild e.g. "this government prevents chaos from erupting" to extreme e.g. "this government is enforcing god's will on earth", but it is essential to the regimes power.

by a reader on Fri, 12/10/2004 - 13:03 | [reply](#)

What is much more likely is t

What is much more likely is that the cost of expressing dissatisfaction with any aspect of the regime is so high that almost nobody does it. Its more or less a fact that people who deviate from orthodoxy in Iran face violence against them and their loved ones. This constitutes a fear society regardless of the nominal ideology of its subjects.

-Dan Strimpel

by a reader on Fri, 12/10/2004 - 15:24 | [reply](#)

Re: What is much more likely

Why? Does it make more sense that a small group of armed men can physically intimidate a nation of millions? or that the nation's leader (like the leader of a cult) is giving a large portion of the nation something they need i.e.: a cause to identify with and a reason to believe in their own virtue.

by a reader on Sat, 12/11/2004 - 12:31 | [reply](#)

"a cause to identify with"

Reader,

Fortunately, that's not the case, at least if you believe the very limited opinion polling that is available. In the last poll conducted, a large majority of those sampled favored some kind of reform, either in politics or administration, with 45 per cent in favor of regime change, even with outside intervention. As to the explanation of how the regime is able to maintain itself in power, it is mainly by a combination fierceness and holding out the possibility that the parliament could reform the government without revolution.

by [Nick](#) on Sat, 12/11/2004 - 17:58 | [reply](#)

Democracy in Iraq

Here is a [positive note on the development of democracy in Iraq](#).

[Henry Sturman](#)

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Sun, 12/26/2004 - 10:34 | [reply](#)

Mauritania's Best Kept Secret

Under the headline **Slavery: Mauritania's best kept secret**, the BBC expresses righteous indignation about the continued existence of chattel slavery, with government connivance, in Mauritania: an open secret.

But why does the BBC see fit not to mention an even better-kept open secret? The word 'Arab' does not occur in the article; nor does the word 'race', even though the **slave-owners** are Arabs and Berbers while the slaves are black. The words 'Muslim' and 'Islam' do not appear in the article, even though the 800-year-old institution of slavery in Mauritania began with the enslavement of non-Muslim black Africans by invading Muslims from the North, and today a local form of Islamism is integral to its justification and day-to-day operation.

Mon, 12/13/2004 - 15:10 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Tradition

It is the way it is because it is the way it always was. God said so.

by a reader on Wed, 12/15/2004 - 15:21 | [reply](#)

Hurray For The French Government!

Hurray for the French Government! President Chirac was absolutely right...

...to celebrate the completion of **this**:

it is the tallest bridge in the world.

The ribbon of steel which forms the highway in the sky is 270m (885ft) above the river, but the central pillar is 343m (1125ft) high.

That makes it taller than the Eiffel Tower and four times the height of Big Ben in central London.

And it was 100% privately funded.

Wed, 12/15/2004 - 16:10 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Hurrah for France

Yep lovely piece of work, and British designed too! I wonder what the toll fee is though. The Severn Bridges are French owned, and we Welsh are very fed up with paying £4.60 to get into our own country.

by RAB on Thu, 12/16/2004 - 16:29 | [reply](#)

Peace And Genocide

Nothing expresses the monstrous depravity of today's 'peace movement' better than Nobel Peace Prize winner Mairead Corrigan Maguire's **description** of Israel's nuclear weapons as the gas chambers of Auschwitz, "perfected".

Thus she equates machines whose only purpose was to commit genocide, with machines whose only purpose is to prevent genocide.

Mairead Corrigan Maguire is moral inversion, perfected.

Mon, 12/20/2004 - 00:27 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

inversion?

she seems to invert some things (israel's nukes) but not others (hitler gas chambers). or do you think she only attacks the gas chambers (implicitly, b/c she is saying Israel is *bad*) b/c it's convenient b/c they are accepted as bad?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 12/20/2004 - 08:16 | [reply](#)

Mairead Corrigan Maguire's comments

Equating nuclear weapons to Hitler's gas chambers??? That is the stupidest thing I have ever read in my life. The gas chambers were torture devices created by many evil people led by a psychotic megalomaniac. How can you compare one to the other?.. and Mairead Corrigan Maguire is a nobel peace prize winner?

by Cyndi on Sun, 03/27/2005 - 05:36 | [reply](#)

Why Doesn't Jimmy Walter Take Jimmy Walter Seriously?

Jimmy Walter is a millionaire and a **conspiracy theorist** who thinks the US government was responsible for the 9/11 attack. He is annoyed because people **don't take him seriously**:

"I am a patriot fighting the real traitors who are destroying our democracy. I resent it when they call me delusional," he said.

His second mistake is to try to solve this problem by offering \$100,000 to the first engineering student who can show that the World Trade Center collapsed in the manner described by the government. Walter said that the contest would be judged by a panel of expert engineers. He imagines that nobody will manage to win and so he will be vindicated.

Now, before we consider that, we have to wonder why anybody should take Mr Walter's ideas seriously when Mr Walter himself does not? Why do we say this? Mr Walter does not believe the government's story, but there is no reason why one has to believe it in order to test it. The laws of physics and chemistry governing the behaviour of towers and aircraft are fairly uncontroversial. So a decent team of engineers could run a computer simulation, build scale model, and so on, of how *the government said* the crash happened. If the towers don't fall down during this test then it would constitute a prima facie criticism of the government's explanation of the events of 9/11. If his panel of engineers is competent to judge candidate explanations for 9/11 then surely they ought to be able to come up with such a test themselves. So why doesn't Mr Walter simply hire his own panel of engineers to conduct the relevant test and see what happens?

The **National Institute of Standards and Technology** is conducting tests to understand exactly how the World Trade Centre collapsed. So the US government is taking its own **explanation** of what happened on 9/11 seriously and is trying to understand what happened in more depth in order to make future attacks less damaging.

So why does Mr Walter does not take his own explanation as seriously? We guess the reason is this: His explanation requires the

US government to have organised a vast conspiracy that works

perfectly to deceive the American people. He arrived at this nonsense not by contemplating problems of engineering but because he dislikes Republicans. He dislikes them for having confidence in Western institutions, which he lacks. Mr Walter **prefers** the doctrines of **environmentalism** and **socialism** to those of the free society that allowed him to become a millionaire. The US government's explanation just requires the existence of some very evil enemies, which is rather uncontroversial, plus government complacency and incompetence, which are never in short supply.

Update: Check out **this** debunking by *Popular Mechanics* of several such conspiracy theories.

Tue, 12/28/2004 - 12:10 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

A Non-Problem Seeking a Non-Solution?

The towers collapsed because of structural members weakened by high heat melting steel. When internal structural parts of the building collapsed above, the forces of mass, momentum, and gravity brought about the rest of the disaster. Has Jimmy ever built a house of cards? The house of cards becomes more unstable the taller it is built. Structural members such as toothpicks and glue need to be added to keep it standing.

A panel of engineers would only complicate the problem. There's always wind shear and pigeon droppings to account for. No expensive computer simulation is necessary. Non-Problem solved. Mail the 100,000 to the Editor, but convert quickly to Euros before the dollar drops further.

by a reader on Tue, 12/28/2004 - 15:14 | [reply](#)

jimmy walter

Im a journalist in Manchester England. Jimmy Walter is organising truth about 911 conferences all over the UK including Manchester at the moment. His web page is linked to some anti-semitic conspiracy theories. Is he an anti-Semite.

If so, please, urgently send me web site addresses. I need to get his meeting stopped.

Estelle

by a reader on Tue, 05/31/2005 - 18:43 | [reply](#)

Answers for those not paying attention

Here's some info that will hopefully open your eyes, especially to the posters from 12/28 and 5/31.

Regarding Jimmy Walter taking Jimmy Walter seriously:

The reason he doesn't hire his own engineers to do the research is for PUBLICITY. He honestly doesn't care whether or not he gives away the prize. What he wants to do is get lots of engineers (and others) thinking about the issue.

Regarding a Non-Problem:

Fire didn't cause the towers to collapse. Look carefully at some of the pictures of the holes caused by the "commercial" airliners. You'll see people in the holes. How hellishly hot could those impacts have been, if people survived to go and stand in the impact sites? What's more, is that the remainder of the towers were officially undamaged. Why, then, did they crumble like dust, if the rest of the building hadn't been bombarded by airliners as well? In case you still don't have your thinking caps on, I'll answer the above questions. The crash sites weren't very hot at all, and not capable of melting steel. The remainder of the towers crumbled because they were demolished by explosives from the inside.

Regarding Estelle's post:

What's more important - the fact that an anti-Semite (assuming he is) wants to have meetings, or the likely chance that portions of the US government caused 9/11 to happen?

Please think critically readers, and don't blindly swallow what the mass media feeds you.

by Free Thinker on Sun, 06/12/2005 - 06:02 | [reply](#)

this is a ridiculous essay.

This is the first I'm hearing about Jimmy Walter and from this angle the man's a hero.

All this essay consists of is fingerpointing and namecalling. "Jimmy Walter is a conspiracy theorist. Whine whine whine. The Bush/Cheney axis never lied to ME! I'm disturbed now. Someone tell Jimmy to stop."

THE U.S. GOVERNMENT WAS THE ONLY INSTITUTION THAT COULD HAVE GIVEN THE GREEN LIGHT TO ALLOW 9-11 TO HAPPEN. Tenet had been working on it since before Bush was even elected, so don't accuse those who have more information than you of being "anti-Republican"; we know this is far deeper than just Republicans.

This essay is all the more annoying because of the smarmy, condescending attitude of the writer. As if he were the "smart" one who KNOWS the Bush mafia is telling the truth, and Wilson and everyone who's thinking about 9-11 for themselves is _____ (insert insult here). Is this what you mean by "idiotarian"? I define "idiotarian" as "idiotic pseudoliberalism" which is certainly an accurate characterization of this site as I read more and more of it!

by a reader on Sat, 12/03/2005 - 22:20 | [reply](#)

Idiotarians are, roughly, the

Idiotarians are, roughly, the people who side with our enemies, but do not themselves wish to hurt us.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 12/03/2005 - 22:32 | [reply](#)

the reason Wilson is having a

the reason Wilson is having a contest rather than just hiring some engineers is because then theoretically the results are unbiased. personally i would have spent the \$100,000 to assist some of the victims' families to hire an ace investigator and public relations firm.

accusing Wilson of being a socialist - labelling him one just for 9-11 skepticism - that's IDIOTIC. and look at Estelle labelling him an anti-Semite for the same "crime". look i have no idea what Mr. Wilson is up to but the way you two leapt to those conclusions is WEIRD!

what's wrong with environmentalism? factory smoke is not a sign of progress! and i do not see where believing that there was government involvement with the crime makes one a socialist - if anything the fact that the government sees itself as able to murder us at will is a huge reason to OPPOSE a strong central government!

I'm scanning the NIST report - thank you for that link - but my bet is that just like the congressional 9-11 inquiry it will take the concept that "fires brought the towers down" as a holy grail and do everything possible to make the data fit that conclusion - and tilt most of its work towards "preventing this from ever happening again!" to which i must riposte that a discussion of prevention should include "never allow republicans anywhere near the intelligence or foreign policy apparatus" and "throw as many of the people with foreknowledge of 9-11 in jail". that of course includes bush, cheney, and everyone surrounding them.

Fires from jet fuel did not bring WTC7 down, because no jet ever struck it. The collapse patterns exactly match that of controlled structural demolition. There is video showing the explosions starting at the GROUND FLOOR and working their way up the building. The second plane did not even hit the towers head on, spilling most of its fuel out into the sky in the form of a fireball. If you GO to ground zero, even today, you will feel as I do certain that this event was engineered by the American military-republican complex.

by a reader on Sat, 12/03/2005 - 22:48 | [reply](#)

nice people

by the way, you all seem like nice people, and we are all on the same side here - not left, not right, just Americans who want justice

for 9-11 - and i genuinely appreciate the thought stimulus this site

has offered.

i just have done a lot of investigating myself, autonomously, not influenced by any -ism, simply having not bought the official story for one minute, and nothing i have read in your defense of the "official" story has caused even an iota of doubt in me that the 9-11 disaster was sold to us fraudulently as the actions of Osama bin Laden by the truly guilty - Cheney, Tenet, Rice, Bush etc.

believing these things hopefully does not give aid nor comfort to the pathetic specimens who are suicide bombing innocents in israel and iraq. i choose to believe that if we americans see through the 9-11 lies that we'll throw the murderers in office into prison and maybe elect someone who can REALLY lead us out of the bush armageddon matrix.

by a reader on Sat, 12/03/2005 - 22:57 | [reply](#)

Just My Thoughts Regarding 9/11

I've read on and on about conspiracy theories regarding various aspects of 9/11. I'm inclined to believe that hi-jackers did take control of the planes that crashed into the WTC, the Pentagon and the field in Pennsylvania. And I don't believe that the planes had any kind of "missile" or any other kind of alteration.

What I do believe is that the powers that be (And I don't necessarily mean specifically the President - plausible deniability) knew for an unknown period of time that attacks were going to take place on September 11th, 2001. My guess is that they had a general sense of what was going to take place, but didn't have enough information to stop it BEFORE THE PLANES LEFT THE GROUND. That statement is important. If the government knew who the specific terrorist were that were getting on the planes, I truly believe that they would have stopped the attack. Instead, the terrorists managed to get on the planes and get off the ground.

Now here is where I think the "conspiracy" comes in.

I DO think that, once the planes were hi-jacked, that they were allowed to hit their assigned targets, and here's why:

Imagine the media fiasco that would have been generated if the planes never hit their targets, but instead were shot down by our own military over American soil...American neighborhoods. Think of it: civilian airliners shot down, killing everyone on board and countless others on the ground, by our own US Military, authorized by our own Government.

There would be no evidence of the terrorist's plans, other than there intentions to hi-jack. Up until September 11th, the only thing we knew hi-jackers were capable of was killing passengers and asking for safe passage to the country of their choice.

If the planes were shot down, then there would be no horrific images of the towers collapsing to rally the nation together.

Instead, the government would have to spend the next several

years validating their reasons for shooting down four civilian aircraft and killing hundreds of Americans. The GOVERNMENT would be made to blame for the tragedies on September 11th, and NOT the terrorists.

Instead, the "powers that be" allowed the planes to hit their targets. The situation, while horrific, does wonders for the Bush Administration, and rallies the country behind it's president, giving him and his administration it's best poll numbers of Bush's presidency. In addition, it gives the government the motive it needs to pursue their oil interests overseas with full backing of the American public and even the Democrats.

...something to think about. Somewhere between what is thrust in front of us and what is absurd...is the truth.

by [swellfoop2002](#) on Sat, 01/28/2006 - 00:31 | [reply](#)

Loose Change - Watch It!

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-8260059923762628848&q=loose+change&pl=true>

Click on the link

by Anonymous on Thu, 04/27/2006 - 03:54 | [reply](#)

Jimmy Walter

Jimmy Walter has increased the prize to \$1M.
<http://reopen911.org/>

Yet still no one has claimed the prize. If the official story is so simple, why not? If one can simply enter the information into a computer simulator and watch the buildings go down why haven't they?

To answer your question, why can't Jimmy Walter pay his engineers to tell him how the buildings collapsed? The answer is this, Fima shipped all the evidence (Steel can be examined to see why it broke, eg. pressure, explosives, heat etc) to china to be recycled as soon as possible. The government concealed the evidence and then told the media who was to blame, without letting an independent investigation take place.

Of WT7 the commission had this to say:

"Loss of structural integrity was likely a result of weakening caused by fires on the 5th to 7th floors. The specifics of the fires in WTC 7 and how they caused the building to collapse remain unknown at this time. Although the total diesel fuel on the premises contained massive potential energy, the best hypothesis has only a low probability of occurrence. Further research, investigation, and analyses are needed to resolve this issue." (Chapter 5, pg 31.)

So the commission can't even speculate how WT7 collapsed (they

made an attempt with building 1 & 2), yet Jimmy Walter should be able to hire engineers to do so?

Again: "the best hypothesis has only a low probability of occurrence".

As to say Jimmy Walters dislikes Republicans, I think this is a stretch. I see no evidence of this at his website at all. Most people who support the 911 truth movement believe the problem to be deeper than Republican vs. Democrat. Yet if I was to elaborate into theories on Bohemian grove and the new world order (which are speculation not fact) then I would be labeled a crazy tinfoil turban wearing conspiradroid, and none of the facts that I have put forward would be addressed.

- Molten hot iron was found at the base of the twin towers, jet fuel or office supplies don't burn hot enough to melt titanium reinforced steel, or normal steel.

- William Rodriguez, the last man to be pulled from the rubble, an eye witness and hero of September 11th reports hearing bombs going off. He even reported one blast in the basement before the first plane hit.

- Marvin Bush was head of security at the world trade center up until Sept 10th 2001, possibly allowing bombs to be planted.

- The list goes on check out Physics911.org infowars.org 911truth.net letsroll911.org etc

Peace!

by a reader on Fri, 05/05/2006 - 14:51 | [reply](#)

anti-semitism

He's not an anti-semit, he's an anti-zionist ... that's practically the same thing as an anti-fascist ... he is not anti-jew, he's anti-zionism, that's a small, but leading group of Jews who have rather different beliefs than Judaism, they believe they're the chosen ones and must do anything to reach their goal, even if they have to kill "inferior" people ... it's a far-right sort of thinking ... very narrow-minded, tunnelvision like philosophy which leads to self-destruction anyway ...

by a reader on Wed, 11/08/2006 - 09:56 | [reply](#)

Too much evidence

There is far too much evidence to avoid the conclusion that other foul play, aside from the airplanes crashing into towers 1 and 2, occurred on 09/11/01. The largest single piece of evidence is the collapse of wtc7. You can find photographs of the building, with two or three small well contained office fires, no broken windows, yet the building collapsed to dust. The leaseholder said, in an interview on public television, that they decided to "pull" the building.

So, why are there, have there been, no subpoenas?

by a reader on Sat, 05/05/2007 - 22:46 | [reply](#)

Let's not call the man by the wrong name, please.

His name is Mr. Walter. Mr. Jimmy Walter.

The good man is trying in every which way to get the truth out about 9/11. His theory is beyond valid, his argument well-researched...and yet so many refuse to take him seriously. If we, his supporters, err in these most basic details, if we aren't even capable of referring to him by his given name, we risk giving those who openly insult him one more weapon: "The whole thing is foolish: his supporters don't even know his name!".

Mr. Walter is doing something incredible...let's not ruin it more than it is already being ruined.

Thank you.

by a reader on Tue, 07/17/2007 - 09:47 | [reply](#)

Government Cover-Up? More like "How Many"

Simply, if the Bush administration has nothing to hide, why are they hiding EVERYTHING. They deny, lie, obfuscate, take the fifth, fire whistleblowers, make threats. There are literally thousands of examples since 911. If they are not hiding the truth, what the hell "ARE" they doing, lying for fun and playing cat and mouse games with congress and the American people? This charades ceases to be Rep. vs. Dems. We should unite as Americans that want to protect "OUR" freedoms, "OUR" constitution, and the lives of "OUR" soldiers from those who want to exploit "ALL" of "US" for their greed, power, and agenda. The only way to win as PEOPLE is to stick together and agree to disagree on some issues, however, we all need to stay focused on the The larger picture as well. This is not the first time weve been lied to as a nation to cover up the real motive for war (see Gulf of Tonkin Resolution) initiated by LBJ however, this just might be the broadest lie ever perpetuated on our poor souls. Lets get fair, remove political bias, and ask the hard questions that remain troubling. I believe there are those people that do not want to know the truth about 911 or cannot begin to accept even the possibility of such treason and some that are just closed minded and politically hypnotized into believing they are "unpatriotic to even ask questions". I'm sure the nazi's felt the same way about their "fatherland" but look at what coward's they really turned out to be. Hmm. Homeland-Fatherland. The Nurenberg trials illuminated how disturbingly passive the masses became to atrocities. The routine acceptance of torture, police state tactics, military dominance. It is so ironic this administration fights so hard for the very freedoms it wipes out daily in the name of fighting terror. Its all so familiar. Lets lose our petty bias's, shake hands, and get together for "OUR" country's sake. United we stand, divided we fail or something like that. Not your either with us or go straight to hell or something like "that".

by Jacqueline Cloud on Sun, 08/19/2007 - 15:46 | [reply](#)

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The Joy Of Giving

As usual, both the people and the government of the United States have outclassed the rest of the world in the speed and scale of their response to human suffering – in this case, that caused by the tsunami in the Indian Ocean. **InstaPundit** notes some of this:

AMAZON.COM is accepting donations for Tsunami relief. The total is currently \$112,000.00, but it's rising very rapidly.

[At the time we are writing this, Amazon.com's customers' donations stand at just under one *million* dollars.]

Jeff Jarvis says that Amazon is already sending more money for tsunami relief than the French government.

[...]

The Everett-based aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln is headed to the Indian Ocean to help with tsunami relief efforts.

[...]

More than 5,000 military personnel of the Navy's Expeditionary Strike Group 5 will skip their New Year's holiday on Guam to fulfill a humanitarian mission in Sri Lanka.

Total US aid for the tsunami disaster is expected to run into **billions of dollars**.

Jan Egeland, chief of 'humanitarian aid' for the UN, described the 'rich countries'' response as 'stingy'. The US Government interpreted this as an insult to America in particular, as indeed it was intended to be.

A.E.Brain responds as follows to similar insults to another exemplary donor, Australia:

Like the War on Terror, we're all in this together. In cases like this, we don't worry about what stupid and insulting things various Malaysian government bigwigs have said about us recently, nor even whether today's victims in Aceh were slaughtering Christians and burning

down Churches last week. When Mother Nature throws a tantrum, we save 'em all, and let God sort them out.

However, the country that that romps home with first prize in the no-good-deed-ever-goes-unpunished category is **Israel**. Within hours of the disaster, the IDF who, by sad necessity, are world leaders in disaster relief expertise and technology, put together a rescue package. It consisted of a jumbo jet containing 80 tons of food and medical supplies, plus, crucially, 150 medical and other disaster relief specialists. They were due to fly out to Sri Lanka this morning.

What happened next? Unfortunately, you will not guess, because you can't make this stuff up.

First of all, the Sri Lankan government refused permission for any Israeli relief workers to enter the country. They graciously accepted the supplies, though. So the IDF sent the supplies (who knows where they will end up?) and told the volunteers – 60 military and 90 civilian – who would have set up emergency field hospitals including surgical and pediatric units, to go back home.

The Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* **commented** on these events:

The Vatican newspaper has denounced what it called a decision by the IDF to deny emergency help to disaster victims in Sri Lanka.

Calling for "a radical and dramatic change of perspective" among people "too often preoccupied with making war," *L'Osservatore Romano* singled out Israeli military leaders for declining a request for emergency medical help.

At the time of the non-existent '**Jenin massacre**', *L'Osservatore* got equally excited about Israel's '**aggression that turns into extermination**'. Israel's extraordinary humanitarian actions in the middle of a war were drowned in a tsunami of unmerited hatred.

Update: The Diplomat helpfully distinguishes US aid from UN babble.

Further Update: More **Diplomatic comments** on more unmerited hatred.

Yet another update – Vatican newspaper story was a 'translation error', says **Catholic World News** (they don't say what the error was or who made it):

Vatican, Dec. 28 (CWNews.com) - The Vatican newspaper has denounced a decision by Sri Lanka to reject emergency aid offered by the Israeli government. Sri Lanka declined the Israeli aid because it would have been furnished by a military team.

Calling for "a radical and dramatic change of perspective" among people "too often preoccupied with making war," *L'Osservatore Romano* chastised the government of the

stricken Asian nation for putting unnecessary restrictions on an Israeli offer to furnish medical help.

And still more: The UN is a sham. Indeed. And a scam.

Wed, 12/29/2004 - 07:09 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Has anyone noticed how many a

Has anyone noticed how many articles on this site are linked back to poor hard-done-by Isreal in some way. I think this tradegy in Asia is awful and you spend the last third of the article feeling sorry for your pet country - it's disgusting!

by a reader on Wed, 12/29/2004 - 14:00 | [reply](#)

Disgust

Different people are disgusted by different things, I suppose. Idiotic, self-defeating hatred causing Sri Lanka to keep out people WHO WANT TO HELP DISASTER VICTIMS is one of the most disgusting things I have heard in a long, long time.

But I can see that, for you, the fact that the website "[Setting the World to Rights](#)" mentions Israel often, is more disgusting. Well, we all have our priorities.

by Blixia on Wed, 12/29/2004 - 17:09 | [reply](#)

Disgusting?

(I tried to edit this entry several times and it kept disappearing. If duplicates appear, I apologize.)

I don't understand this objection at all.

It would be useless to write posts that merely repeat known facts about events.

What's useful to readers is analysis of how some events relate to others; and what truths about how the world works are revealed by reactions to events.

Yes, [The World](#) is interested in Israel. It believes that opinions about Israel often expose an important, pervasive, moral problem that needs to be explored, understood, and solved.

I think that the reader who says "It's disgusting" for [The World](#) to notice, again, how unfairly Israel is regularly treated around the world only helps to support the World's point.

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Wed, 12/29/2004 - 23:07 | [reply](#)

Lileks

I notice that Lileks [comments](#) on the Sri Lanka/Israel incident, too.

He makes a good point:

It's always instructive to see what people revert back to after a tragedy, and how long it takes. But in this case it would be churlish to close the purse. There's the government, and then there's the people. No need here to punish the latter for the idiocy of the former.

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 12/29/2004 - 23:08 | [reply](#)

Not Unnoticed

It has not gone unnoticed that among the first to offer a hand to help SE Asia were Jewish service organizations in and across the United States. I applaud those selfless actions of so many. I appreciate the text of the above. It should be noted that some do not understand. It should be noted that such persons and organizations respond to great need anyway. Humanitarian aid says it all. These are people and organizations that care what happens to other human beings.

by a reader on Thu, 12/30/2004 - 22:02 | [reply](#)

Cheap Shots Abounding, UN and Nation States

The UN is neither a scam or a sham. It is toothless in its pronouncements and still a pesky thorn in every leader's side but so be it. All Nation states wish it to be toothless unless it suits their politics. When UN meddling doesn't suit their political interests, say, go away UN don't bother me.

As the UN slogan says, "Its your World". Make of it what you will.

by a reader on Sat, 01/01/2005 - 16:39 | [reply](#)

Not cheap shots

We recommend that the reader read the links we provided to The Diplomad. The allegations made there are neither cheap shots nor related to the ones s/he is countering.

by **Editor** on Sat, 01/01/2005 - 18:00 | [reply](#)

Diplomad is not the subject

The Editor must have misunderstood. Cheap shots are taken all the time at and between the nation states on various subjects. That is the point. Yet the current coalition of the willing includes the United States, France, United Kingdom, India, and the United Nations. That fact of willing participation is neither a sham or a scam.

by a reader on Sat, 01/01/2005 - 23:01 | [reply](#)

Islamofascist Tsunami Charity

I wonder how much the supporters and financiers of islamofascism will contribute to the relief of those suffering from the great tsunami calamity in southeast asia?

The saudi and iranian and other islamo clergy and terrorist psychopathic islamo lunatics will probably see this as a message from allah for everyone to convert to islamo lunacy.

by pilgrim on Sat, 01/01/2005 - 23:34 | [reply](#)

Democracy – Part 1: Vox Populi Vox Dei?

A widespread false idea about how democracy works can be stated concisely as *Vox Populi Vox Dei* (the voice of The People is the voice of God). In other words, democracy is morally right because the majority defines what is right and the government must follow the will of The People™.

But in reality The People™ does not have a will. It is a group of individuals with conflicting aims and theories about the world, and ideas for what should be done. There are countless ways of notionally aggregating those aims and ideas into a single 'will'. Not only do these ways not agree, **all** of them are conceptually inconsistent and paradoxical.

Those who vote Conservative in an election in which Labour wins by a landslide will accept the result. But they will hardly do so because they agree that the Labour party, or The People, are right about what would be best for the country! Nor is the majority always right: majorities can, and frequently do, vote for mistaken policies like socialism, or for evil people like Hitler.

Furthermore, The People does not write laws; politicians write laws. Nor does The People enforce laws; the Police and the Courts do that.

So what role do The People play in democracy? Democracy ought not to be about who rules whom. As Karl Popper pointed out, political philosophers should not to answer the question 'Who should rule?' This question has no answer because human beings are fallible and so there is no way of designating a person or group as being the right ones to rule others. Popper suggested that instead we ought to ask 'How can we prevent those in charge from doing too much damage?' and democracy provides the best answer yet discovered to this question. The People get to vote every four years or so and on those occasions they may throw incompetent or malicious politicians out of office if they think somebody better is available. As Pericles of Athens (an advocate of the open society) once said: "Although only a few may originate policy, we are all able to judge it."

"Popper suggested that instead we ought to ask 'How can we prevent those in charge from doing too much damage?' and democracy provides the best answer yet discovered to this question."

First, recognize the individual right of every citizen in a democracy to participate in person. This is an individual responsibility which can not be deferred to those in power as some distant and passive trust of representation.

Second, use the faculties of reason to determine competence and act accordingly as individuals, not once every four years or so.

Third, let the citizen beware and be aware.

Fourth, speak your mind in public places, consider counterarguments, and act according to your considered will to strengthen this right.

Five, recognize that Democracy is only a state of imagination unless it understood in reason, principle, and personal action and is pursued relentlessly by every citizen.

by a reader on Mon, 01/03/2005 - 15:21 | [reply](#)

Please explain

Why democracy prevent's those in charge from doing too much damage. It seems to me that a monarch, for example, has more incentive to prevent damage to his country and it's citizens than an elected official. The monarch is in essence the "owner" of the government. The elected official is on a short term lease and has many incentives to treat the land and it's citizens as, well, rental property. The elected official can always blame the previous administration for the country's problems, the monarch cannot. The elected official may need to "scapegoat" certain minorities to become popular enough to be elected. These minorities could ethnic, economic, or religious. The monarch does not need to do this to aquire power.

by a reader on Wed, 01/05/2005 - 01:02 | [reply](#)

Re: Please explain

Thanks for the question. We have answered it [here](#).

by [Editor](#) on Mon, 01/10/2005 - 21:54 | [reply](#)

"But wait a minute, Dad; did you actually say 'Freedom?'"

The statement, "Vox populi, vox Dei," is about a great deal more than politics. Which is a lucky thing, because your politics are *atrocious*. Socialism is relegated to "mistaken policies?" Of course, I suppose all centralization is by nature oppressive. Nevermind

Northern European countries which shame our economic precariousness with their mixed economies, their "welfare capitalism." Who needs a budget surplus anyway? Socialist leanings are evil, regardless of the standard of living in many countries that incorporate it into that precious bastion: democracy. And let's make sure we put Socialists right next to Hitler, because that is a fair comparison.

Let's stop talking about democracy and start talking about what truly rules us: the free market. Kind of a misnomer, don't you think? **How free can we be if we are all slaves to the dollar?**

Allow me to quote an under-appreciated punk band that pretty much sums up my whole perspective of this site...

"So this is your Promised Land? Your deed is that gun in your hand."

by Jez on Tue, 01/25/2005 - 01:44 | [reply](#)

Pest-Powered Robots

This would be cool if it could be perfected:

British scientists are developing a robot that will generate its own power by eating flies.

The idea is to produce electricity by catching flies and digesting them in special fuel cells...

the robot is part of a drive to make "release and forget" robots that can be sent into dangerous or inhospitable areas to carry our remote industrial or military monitoring...

Even better would be a scaled-up version that eats terrorists.

Tue, 01/04/2005 - 17:20 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Balance

I'm sure some eco-fanatics will complain that machines that consume flies will upset some kind of sacred natural balance, though.

I doubt they'd have a problem with it consuming humans.

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Tue, 01/04/2005 - 20:31 | [reply](#)

Flies

Flies are one thing, those pesky little creatures with wings and big eyes that feed on carrion.

Terrorists tho all look the same on the outside like those flies. A mistake of discrimination and the wrong human gets eaten.

Efficient tho.

by a reader on Wed, 01/05/2005 - 16:19 | [reply](#)

Flypaper

Flypaper is cool too and it is already perfected. Flys flock to it

because it smells sweet and stick to it because it is very very sticky.

Certainly some bright scientific group could invent terrorist paper?

by a reader on Wed, 01/05/2005 - 16:25 | [reply](#)

Flies and Flypaper

To solve the discrimination problem, they should just incorporate our **handy guide** into the robot's ROM.

As for terrorist flypaper, some people say that it has **already been invented**.

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 01/05/2005 - 18:20 | [reply](#)

Handy guide?

It's a great guide but the rules are somewhat high level, the ROM is going to have to be pretty large to hold the complex discrimination software.

A practical solution would be to strap a political philosopher onto the sensor arm of the robot. He or she would then press a button if the next encountered human is a terrorist.

I volunteer Gil for the test phase.

Please don't wave your arms around too much, Gil, or you may repel the flies :p

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Wed, 01/05/2005 - 20:33 | [reply](#)

Um...

Why would I have to be strapped to the thing?

Can't I watch video camera output remotely?

Perhaps Tom should do the testing until Beta 2 is ready.

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Wed, 01/05/2005 - 22:27 | [reply](#)

There Are Very Few Natural Disasters Nowadays

A Reasonable Man makes an excellent point about military humanitarian aid:

I seem to recall a lot of people objecting to the US invasion of Iraq by saying that while they agree that Saddam was brutal and terrible, etc., it isn't appropriate to use and risk US military forces for humanitarian missions.

[...]

I don't hear many of these people complaining of the military assets used now to help tsunami victims

[...]

I can only conclude that [they believe] that helping people hit by a natural disaster is fine, but from a murderous regime is wrong.

It seems to me that many of them honor state power, even the worst sort, because it's something they respect and would like to be held sacred so that they can more easily use it to impose their visions on others.

Indeed. But the two types of disaster are not really that different. 'Natural' disasters are, fundamentally, caused by poverty, not by the various 'acts of God' that happen to deliver the coups de grace. (**Oliver Kamm** gets himself tangled in some rickety theology by missing this point.) And poverty, in this day and age, is fundamentally caused by bad government.

Fri, 01/07/2005 - 18:17 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

It appears that the "Reasonable Man"

and "**The World**" are from the "two wrongs make a right" school of ethics.

by a reader on Sat, 01/08/2005 - 13:59 | [reply](#)

Re: two wrongs

Could you tell us briefly what the two wrongs in question are?

by **Editor** on Sat, 01/08/2005 - 14:06 | [reply](#)

2 wrongs

they are 1) disaster 2) use of military

and they *do* make a right.

the problem is the military isn't wrong...

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 01/08/2005 - 16:43 | [reply](#)

Does the world advocate the u

Does **The World** advocate the use of our military for purely humanitarian purposes?

by **R** on Sat, 01/08/2005 - 18:44 | [reply](#)

No Other Purpose Is Legitimate

*Does **The World** advocate the use of our military for purely humanitarian purposes?*

Yes, **solely**.

by **Editor** on Sun, 01/09/2005 - 07:29 | [reply](#)

Thanks for the link

By the way, I agree with the point about bad government/natural disaster link as well; as indicated by my earlier link to [this post](#).

Gil (A Reasonable Man)

by **Gil** on Sun, 01/09/2005 - 21:30 | [reply](#)

Democracy – Part 2: The Dependent Leader

A reader asked us to **explain**:

Why democracy prevents those in charge from doing too much damage. It seems to me that a monarch, for example, has more incentive to prevent damage to his country and its citizens than an elected official.

But how will the monarch decide what counts as 'damage', and how it is best repaired? Rulers are often wrong. Queen Mary thought that 'damage' was measured by the number of Protestants in the country, so she had them set on fire. Prince Charles talks to plants and **thinks** that

buried deep within each and every one of us, there is an instinctive, heart-felt awareness that provides -if we will allow it to- the most reliable guide as to whether or not our actions are really in the long term interests of our planet and all the life it supports.

Here speaks the voice of well-meaning tyranny and earnest unreason. Yet Charles' mistake is not that he wants to use intuition. For how else will the monarch – or any leader – decide when to overrule the experts, when to overrule the majority, when to overrule his advisers, and on the other hand, when to let some of those groups have their way despite his own contrary opinion? Charles' mistake is in his very conception of the problem: he conceives of it as being *how to find a reliable guide*, and it is implicit, as it always is with who-should-rule theories, that once we have found the reliable guide it is best to impose its judgements on everyone. How could it be otherwise?

But there is no such thing as a reliable guide. What makes the crucial difference between the possibility and impossibility of progress is not how reliable our leaders are, but how good our institutions for removing bad leaders and bad policies are. A key feature of good institutions is that under them, leaders are dependent on the people they lead. Democratic politicians are dependent on their constituents' good will for the political survival, and one mistake is sometimes enough to end a democratic politician's career. A key feature of bad institutions is that the subjects are dependent on the ruler: they are kept at the mercy of whatever intuitions, good or bad, he may suck out of who knows

where, and after they have paid for his mistakes, they are obliged to do whatever he says all over again.

The monarch is in essence the "owner" of the government. The elected official is on a short term lease and has many incentives to treat the land and its citizens as, well, rental property.

The analogy does not hold. Neither being a monarch nor being an owner gives one automatic knowledge of how to serve one's own best interests, let alone the country's. In a free society, owners who ruin their property, gradually cease to be owners of anything. But monarchs who ruin their countries still get to rule poor countries (which generally does not affect their own standard of living at all). And if they just don't know what to do for the best, having an 'incentive to treat people well' won't help. After all, everyone has an incentive to become a billionaire, but few know how.

A king cannot live among his people. He will have held a position of power before his ascension to the throne. He will have shared the king's tribute and been complicit in his crimes. As such, he will want to avoid being removed from his throne and demoted to the level of an ordinary person for fear of retribution. When a democratic politician retires from public office he usually stays in the country he formerly helped to govern. As such, he will want to ensure that when he leaves office he can earn a living on the free market.

The elected official can always blame the previous administration for the country's problems, the monarch cannot.

That's a feature, not a bug. A democratic politician gets into office by convincing people that previous policies caused problems that he can fix. People will vote him out of office if they think that explanation has not panned out. A monarch never has to face this issue as he cannot be removed from power when he makes mistakes. Democratic politicians are accountable for their mistakes, monarchs are not.

The elected official may need to "scapegoat" certain minorities to become popular enough to be elected. These minorities could be ethnic, economic, or religious. The monarch does not need to do this to acquire power.

This assumes that the monarch does not have to exert much effort to stay in power. In fact, a monarch has to work hard to stay in power because the only way of removing him is to kill him. Since he justifies his power by saying that his policies are right, he must blame other people for not following these policies. As such, he has an incentive to find scapegoats he can sacrifice to appease his subjects' anger. Furthermore, his family and friends have everything to gain by orchestrating his death and they too are gangsters and thugs. So, as history shows, destructive civil wars are common in monarchies.

Nobody has a monopoly on wisdom, so monarchs can only maintain

power by murdering people who have better ideas. In this respect, monarchy is no different from any other form of tyranny and is just as evil.

Mon, 01/10/2005 - 08:49 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Wow good response.

Worth the wait.

by Blixa on Mon, 01/10/2005 - 22:37 | [reply](#)

Niceness

A democratic politician gets into office by convincing people that previous policies caused problems that he can fix.

True, but many people seem to vote according to whether they think democrats or republicans are nicer people, and more specifically, whether one presidential candidate is nicer than the other.

The approach isn't without merit. If you don't understand much about policy then at least vote for a politician who is a good person, so that they will hopefully do the right thing in office.

David Blunkett, a former minister in the Labour Government here in the UK, left the cabinet as a result of mistakes made in his private life. In the eyes of most ordinary people these made him a bad person, and therefore not suitable for office.

A more knowledgeable electorate would have insisted on his departure much sooner for his centralizing and authoritarian policy initiatives.

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Tue, 01/11/2005 - 00:02 | [reply](#)

True but

"niceness" will probably tend to be a factor in inverse proportion to whether either of the candidates has a serious record of mistakes that the public perceives to be worthy of correction/punishment. If "niceness" is a significant factor this just means there aren't serious mistakes to punish in that particular election. When there are, "niceness" isn't - so this feature of democracies remains.

Jimmy Carter for example was and is widely perceived as very "nice".

by Blixa on Tue, 01/11/2005 - 00:33 | [reply](#)

Re: True but

Agree without reservation.

Btw, the "niceness" quotient is calculated from the sort of theories

that apply commonly in family relationships and IRL friendships.

Part of socialists' appeal is their aspiration to scale up these theories to govern interactions between millions of strangers -- war, agriculture, healthcare, etc.

by **Tom Robinson** on Tue, 01/11/2005 - 01:46 | [reply](#)

Contradiction:

The editor states: "But monarchs who ruin their countries still get to rule poor countries"

Yet in a following paragraph states: "In fact, a monarch has to work hard to stay in power because the only way of removing him is to kill him.....As such, he has an incentive to find scapegoats he can sacrifice to appease his subjects' anger. Furthermore, his family and friends have everything to gain by orchestrating his death and they too are gangsters and thugs."

On the one hand the editor is saying: "Monarchs are not held accountable for their actions." and on the other hand saying: "The monarch's subjects, friends and family will hold him accountable for his actions"

by a reader on Tue, 01/11/2005 - 02:43 | [reply](#)

uhh

No, he was saying monarchs who ruin their countries, still get to rule poor countries. This means if they have bad policies that make it a crappy place to live, they still get to rule. All they have to do is not get killed, or thrown out or somesuch. if they ruin the economy, say, they still get to rule.

btw awesome post :)

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 01/11/2005 - 05:22 | [reply](#)

Re: Contradiction

All rulers want to get their way, which usually means staying in power. All rulers try hard to do so. All rulers are removed if they play their cards wrong. In these respects, tyrants and democratic leaders are alike, and open societies and fear societies are alike too.

The difference lies in where a leader's creativity and effort have to be directed – what problems a leader has to solve, and what a leader has do, to get his way. In a fear society, a leader gets into power by killing the previous leader, and/or by killing or intimidating all others who might wish to step into the dead leader's shoes. In an open society, a leader gets into power by persuading people that he has better policies than the old leader. In a fear

society, the leader stays in power by creating a climate in which people are afraid to criticise his policies because if they do, they risk being hurt or killed. In an open society, a leader stays in power by persuading people that his policies are right.

Even more fundamental than these differences is that in an open society the creativity of both the leader *and his rivals* goes into creating knowledge that people will voluntarily agree with, while in a fear society the leader's creativity goes into suppressing knowledge and creating fear and suffering, while his opponents' creativity is either suppressed or goes into schemes to remove him by force.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Tue, 01/11/2005 - 11:13 | [reply](#)

Monarchy, democracy, aristocracy

Hans Hoppe wrote a book (Democracy, the God that failed) with these ideas that somehow a king will rule a country better than a democracy because a king has an incentive to maximize "his" country's value. True, to be sure. But maximizing a country's value to the king as an individual means maximizing taxes, maximizing his power over his subjects to benefit his ego, expending his subjects' lives so as to gain prestige in wars of conquest, etc. So Hoppe got it all backwards, since it's obvious that a king's motives will tend to be diametrically opposed to those of his subjects, **precisely because** he'll act as an owner so as to increase his own personal value he gets out of his subjects - unless the king happens to be a benevolent dictator, which indeed sometimes happens.

Furthermore, Hoppe could have been spared this mistake had he simply looked at history and the current world, which is full of examples of despotic oppressive kings and dictators far worse than any democracy.

That said, Hoppe is still right that democracy is a particularly bad system, though not as bad as absolute monarchy. A limited elitist form of democracy is actually much better than full democracy, as history clearly shows.

The Netherlands, for example, has been a "democracy" since 1848. But in the 19th century democracy meant only that men paying a minimum amount of taxes were allowed to vote. In that period only 10% of the populace was eligible to vote. And indeed it worked pretty well, with a relatively high degree of freedom and economic growth. After they increased suffrage to 100% around 1900 bad things started to happen almost immediately. Government slowly grew more oppressive and large and regulatory, and eventually that culminated in a giganticly inefficient welfare state, as it did in all other Western countries which all moved toward full democracy in a similar way.

The reason for this is not hard to understand. If you allow only an intelligent elite to rule, you'll tend get reasonably intelligent policy, as long as there are enough of them who care about justice rather than oppression of other groups - which is usually the case. If you

allow people of an average IQ of 100 to vote, you'll get reasonably stupid policy - since the average person is, unfortunately, not very insightful about politics and economics - and mostly just interested in getting more personal benefits.

The British parliamentary monarchy of the centuries before the 20th century and the Dutch elitist republic of the 17th century are more examples of aristocracies which did quite well, and had much better policies than our current democracies can deliver.

Yes, a system which allows criticism of bad policies is important. But the criticism is only half of the equation. There has to be a mechanism where good criticism tends to win over bad criticism. That works extremely poorly in full democracy. The mechanism is there to some extent, but it functions very badly and very slowly, simply because democracy by definition gives the power to judge the criticism to the average person rather than the wisest person.

There's plenty of good criticism of bad policy, but the bad policy continues because the stupid are very slow to accept it, and they've got the majority vote. Ludwig von Mises explained in 1922 that socialism wouldn't work, Hayek explained in the early 40s that the welfare state would lead to inefficiency and a loss of freedom. The criticism has always been there, it was never refuted, but only now is a change starting for the better, a change which might take another 50 years to get fully implemented.

So ordering political systems from worst to best I'd say this is the list:

1. absolute dictatorship / absolute monarchy (no mechanism for criticism)
2. full democracy (a good mechanism for criticism, but a very poor mechanism for processing the criticism)
3. parliamentary monarchy / elitist republic / very limited democracy / any other type of aristocracy (both a good mechanism for criticism and a good mechanism for processing the criticism)

Of course on 4 I'd put anarcho-kapitalism, but that's another story.

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Tue, 01/11/2005 - 23:30 | [reply](#)

Re: Fear

Monarchies and democracies both use fear, though the objects of the fear may differ. The leaders in democracies prey upon the fears of their constituents. "The Republicans will gut social security!" "The Democrats are corrupting the institution of marriage!" Fear.

I think leaders in democracies are good at creating consensus, not knowledge e.g: "wage and price controls will stop inflation" or "drug interdiction will stop drug abuse".

by a reader on Wed, 01/12/2005 - 05:06 | [reply](#)

Thanks

That was a great post.

AIS

by a reader on Thu, 01/13/2005 - 09:47 | [reply](#)

Re: Monarchy, democracy, aristocracy

But is it really true that an intelligent elite would choose better policies? If the last US election had been left to university professors to decide, Kerry would have won by a landslide.

If the last US election had been decided by who put up the most money, then again, Kerry would have won.

Isn't the idea of an elite electorate just another scheme for finding a 'reliable guide'? Isn't it just another 'who should rule' fallacy?

by a reader on Thu, 01/13/2005 - 12:07 | [reply](#)

Re: Fear

A reader wrote:

'Monarchies and democracies both use fear, though the objects of the fear may differ. The leaders in democracies prey upon the fears of their constituents. "The Republicans will gut social security!" "The Democrats are corrupting the institution of marriage!" Fear.'

They say that their opponents are backing policies that will have bad consequences. This is rather different from persecuting, torturing or murdering people who disagree with the government.

'I think leaders in democracies are good at creating consensus, not knowledge e.g: "wage and price controls will stop inflation" or "drug interdiction will stop drug abuse".'

On those particular issues, most politicians have not created much worthwhile knowledge. However, two exceptions to this rule spring to mind: Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, who created some practical knowledge about how to switch from socialism to a free market. The prevailing worldview in the West is soaked through with scientific nonsense and leftist cant and politicians are mostly just as ignorant and uncritical as most of the rest of the public. This is not praiseworthy, but it's not solely the politicians who are to blame.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Fri, 01/14/2005 - 03:09 | [reply](#)

But is it really true that an

But is it really true that an intelligent elite would choose better policies? If the last US election had been left to university professors to decide, Kerry would have won by a landslide.

It depends on who the elite is. An elite of university professors or

journalists would have done worse in this case, indeed. But there are other collections of elites who might have done better. An elite based on who pays most taxes might have done better. It's just my impression based on history and logic that generally intelligent elites will do better in decision making than full democracies. But it's not something I can prove, nor is it something I expect to be valid all the time.

Certainly if there is an elite which rules, it has to be an open community of elites, with membership based on some type of accomplishment, and with open debate. Something like a communist elite, for example, where your membership depends on full loyalty to the dictatorship or party, obviously works much worse than democracy.

If the last US election had been decided by who put up the most money, then again, Kerry would have won.

Not necessarily. If that were the rule, many more people would have put in money, and there's no telling who would have won under such conditions.

Isn't the idea of an elite electorate just another scheme for finding a 'reliable guide'? Isn't it just another 'who should rule' fallacy?

Yes, sure. It would be even better to get rid of politics altogether, and leave everything to the market. The market is the perfect process for testing ideas. Many companies or communities can all experiment with different policies or products or whatever, and competition will make the best ideas win.

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Fri, 01/14/2005 - 16:44 | [reply](#)

The Memos Are Fakes!

Here's an extremely apposite **cartoon** from the always excellent Cox & Forkum, on the occasion of the publication of the independent report into the Rathergate scandal.

Wed, 01/12/2005 - 21:38 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Democracy – Part 3: Mediocracy

The idea that the majority is always right, or that the majority *defines* rightness, is a **meme** which has contributed to the spread and legitimisation of democratic institutions. Nevertheless, as we have **argued**, it is a false idea and a mistaken justification. Despite its historically progressive role, it has also had, and continues to have, a destructive effect on political and moral discussion in the West.

New ideas always start out being held by a minority. Hence this meme automatically demonises new ideas. For example, **we** think the forcing children to go to school against their will is **wrong**. Most people still do not agree with us in this matter. The majority-is-right meme has the effect that anyone who challenges this form of coercion is challenging the democratic principle itself. And worse: since the majority is right, and in consequence has the right to rule, there is a ready-made argument that they ought to take control and suppress home education. Otherwise (for instance) weird extremists will allow their children to run around in ignorance rather than forcing them to go to school.

And so it is in every case when something better is proposed. The meme authorises, and then by the same logic mandates, the rule of the mediocre: — mediocracy.

The meme even makes it difficult to state criticisms of prevailing views without being misinterpreted. For example, if we say “Anti-semitism is rife in Europe.”, how will people interpret this statement? The principle that the majority is always right allows only interpretations like:

- the Nazis are about to come to power, or
- a tiny minority are playing up again, or
- **The World’s** writers are paranoid slanderers of The European People.

Yet it is possible, without any of those things being true, to hold the opinion that a large number of nice, non-Nazi people give credence to ludicrous conspiracy theories in which Jews play a large part. The idea that the majority is always right makes this suggestion almost literally unthinkable to many.

And no, we are not advocating that Europeans be deprived of the

right to vote.

Sun, 01/16/2005 - 13:00 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

How to change the majority opinion

The majority is right meme demonises new ideas

Yes, most especially new moral ideas.

However, the meme has almost zero effect on new consumer product ideas especially in sexy areas like mobile information technology.

In order to bring about moral climate change perhaps the key is to identify small economic steps which take us closer to the point where the majority moral opinion may tip over.

For example, how do we best promote choice between school and home education?

One idea: by creating business plans for an asynchronous internet exam and qualification system.

A company creates links over the internet between examiners, academics, students and a dynamic knowledge base of problems and tasks. Students can be examined in private booths equipped with large screens and broadband connections. Multiple choice, written paragraph style answers, sketches and diagrams, oral questioning would all be possible. You pay a fee and take the test, which is pass-or-fail. Age, attendance record, number of previous attempts and classroom bullies would all become irrelevant. The market sorts out which qualifications are most valuable to employers and universities. Global standards emerge.

If such a thing happened parents would quickly turn against schools and syllabuses as they themselves are liberated by just-in-time knowledge and fresh opportunities. It would change the way they see education, and it would become more obvious what a poor motive for learning is boredom (the last remaining weapon in the school arsenal). Children would learn faster on the internet at home and with friends. Private tutors would spring up to assist small local groups.

The moral machinery of ideas to sanction all this (which already exists) would then be heartily embraced by the majority.

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Mon, 01/17/2005 - 06:33 | [reply](#)

Example of a good idea.

Idea: Economic Tipping Points

"In order to bring about moral climate change perhaps the key is to

identify small economic steps which take us closer to the point where the majority moral opinion may tip over."

The majority moral opinion always does tip based on small and repetitive glimpses of a different order. Economic steps are visible everywhere people are affected by them. If something which on the surface is neutral is perceived as good by the majority, by "goodness" the moral climate changes. While economic change is not the only view of "goodness" it is an all-pervasive one. Everyone consumes.

by a reader on Mon, 01/17/2005 - 17:14 | [reply](#)

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The Secular Inaugural

In President Bush's historic Second Inaugural Address, he gave an inspiring re-statement of the Bush Doctrine. Some passages contain references to God. As atheists, we nevertheless wholeheartedly support those passages, such as this crucial one [emphasis ours]:

America's vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one. From the day of our founding, we have proclaimed that every man and woman on this earth has rights, and dignity, and matchless value, **because they bear the image of the maker of heaven and earth**. Across the generations, we have proclaimed the imperative of self-government, because no one is fit to be a master, and no one deserves to be a slave. Advancing these ideals is the mission that created our nation. It is the honorable achievement of our fathers. Now it is the urgent requirement of our nation's security, and the calling of our time.

That is because the appeal to the supernatural there is purely formal: the substance of the argument is relentlessly rational. As a public service, we offer the following translation of the sentence in question:

From the day of our founding, we have proclaimed that every man and woman on this earth has rights, and dignity, and matchless value, because whenever any arguments to the contrary have been subjected to rational criticism, they have invariably turned out to rely on supernatural justifications, from King Charles' divine right of kings, to Hegel's divinity of the State, to Rousseau's '**infallibility of the general will**'. Of all the regulatory principles ever proposed for human affairs, only our doctrine of the rights and value of each individual passes that cold test of reason. Furthermore, only political programmes that give effect to that doctrine have ever created institutions and policies that allow themselves to be subjected to a test of reason at all. And only they have ever created a community of nations among whom war is unknown.

We modestly hope that our version is more precise. On the other

hand, it is longer and, we have to admit, less punchy. There is room for both.

God bless America.

Fri, 01/21/2005 - 11:15 | [permalink](#)

Devil in the Details

I would like to second **The World's** endorsement of the strategic vision outlined in the President's inaugural address. I also think appropriate the understanding shown in connection with the President's references to the supernatural. In this spirit, I want to point out that the "devil" is in the details. His strategic vision, however correct, will succeed more or less quickly and effectively, depending on the tactics that are adopted in connection with its implementation. As I mentioned in a **post** back on November 21, 2004, the problems to be faced are "complicated, the variables numerous, and there is a real difference between strategy and tactics." There is nothing wrong (in fact, everything is right) with a healthy debate regarding how we are to achieve our mutually agreed goals.

by **Michael Bacon** on Fri, 01/21/2005 - 15:29 | [reply](#)

justification not needed

I think you should just say: he says the image of maker thing is his reason. He is wrong. And it doesn't really matter. He does not need any 'because' statement at all. You can just delete the bold phrase and not replace it. Don't try to put justification in.

Nothing ever wins when you concede it needs some kind of justification, and try to give it. for example the version you give .. you used a partial list of rivals!! come on, that can't be a very solid argument. you can come to all sorts of conclusions by giving a partial list of opposing views that are bad, then concluding you are right. and you didn't even refute the ones you mentioned.

and not all the theories to the contrary are supernatural. for example my conjecture about the justified authority of people who like bright lamps.

Michael Bacon: uhh, yeah sure. as long as this isn't a bad excuse to go "oh my god, iraq is such a mess!!" (it's unclear what your point is, and that's the normal one.)

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 01/21/2005 - 16:37 | [reply](#)

My Point

My point, Elliot, is that too often the hard questions are avoided,

while emphasis is placed on the quick, grand theoretical (albeit correct) construct, particularly where there already is relative agreement with respect to philosophy and overall goals. Regarding Iraq, I partially addressed this in my November 21, 2004 **post**, which I won't repeat, other than to say (i) our strategic goal is replacing all political systems that perpetuate or collaborate with terrorism with systems that respect human rights; (ii) the main reason to choose to liberate Iraq in 2003 was tactical; and (iii) there were other tactical choices possible (made) that could (did) result in better (worse) outcomes -- although it is impossible (given our current level of knowledge) to know with what frequency. My conclusion was that in the world in which we now find ourselves " . . . choosing to cut and run in Iraq, does not seem to point to any favorable strategic outcome." Nothing has occurred in the interim to change my thinking in this regard.

by **Michael Bacon** on Fri, 01/21/2005 - 17:16 | [reply](#)

Sorry, No

I agree with Elliot that the statement would have been better with the bold text removed entirely. It's simply a false justification.

And although I agree with your "translation", I think it does not reflect what Bush meant to say. I suspect that if you asked him, he would agree with me on this point.

He meant to say what he said, and it's wrong. It serves some purposes, but truth and understanding aren't among them.

Gil

by **Gil** on Fri, 01/21/2005 - 17:48 | [reply](#)

And although I agree with you

And although I agree with your "translation", I think it does not reflect what Bush meant to say. I suspect that if you asked him, he would agree with me on this point.

Good point. The "translation" is really just an alternative phrasing/argument to appeal to a different set of people.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 01/21/2005 - 18:55 | [reply](#)

what kind of atheist are you?

what kind of atheist are you? do you really believe bush meant that in some kind of "supernatural" or spiritual way?

don't you think, just by example of his stated beliefs, he means it in some nasty christian way, where he wants to strip gays of their

rights, females of their abortion rights, and the world of their right

to research stem cells?

how can you think he has the rights of these people in his mind while he has completely disregarded the rights of those domestically?

by a reader on Fri, 01/21/2005 - 23:15 | [reply](#)

What Bush Intended

President Bush clearly believes, and intended to say, that he derives his justification for the Bush Doctrine at least in part from the passage in Genesis 1:26-7 in the Bible:

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

However, equally clearly, he did not in fact derive it from there. For it does not, in fact, follow. Moreover, most people who claim to have derived their political principles from the Bible – including the Pope and the leaders and foremost theologians of most Christian sects as well as the great majority of professed Christians outside the US – oppose the Bush Doctrine. Bush himself vehemently opposed it before 9-11. Calling it a religious doctrine or attributing religious content to it is absolutely absurd, notwithstanding the shared opinion of Bush and most of his enemies such as 'a reader' above.

The actual justification of the Bush Doctrine, both in Bush's mind and in the minds of virtually all of its supporters, is that the existing world order has permitted a terrible and rapidly escalating danger to emerge – forced to our attention by 9-11 – and that the only available defence is the complete abolition of certain types of tyranny. Bush said that explicitly in his Second Inaugural Address, and in every one of his speeches on the subject.

by [Editor](#) on Sat, 01/22/2005 - 11:57 | [reply](#)

So, what's the point of this post?

Please help me understand.

On one hand you "wholeheartedly endorse" the passage, and even bolded the phrase that you now admit is an absurd justification even though it was worded as a justification.

So, why not say that that it was an unfortunate blemish on an otherwise good passage, rather than giving a completely different "translation"?

Gil

Re: So, what's the point of this post?

Suppose we need to build a bridge across the Great Chasm. We put the job out to tender. All but one of the engineers who apply say that there is no need for a bridge because one can get across just by flapping one's arms hard enough, taking a long enough running jump, and suchlike expedients. Where they mention their previous chasm-crossing failures at all, they attribute them to things like: not enough money was spent on research into flapping techniques; The Jews diluted the glue holding the feathers on the wings; building the bridge is all about oil; and there wouldn't be a chasm at all if we hadn't offended the Earth Goddess.

But one engineer delivers a different kind of report. It explains why previous chasm-crossing ideas will not work: they violate Newton's laws; they depend on impossibly strong materials; and so on. And at the end of the report, it says: "and so we have no option but to use a bridge, and to use our particular design. That it will work despite the fact that no bridge of this design has ever been attempted before, and that none of the rival proposals can possibly work, is implied by the laws of physics which are not only agreed by all rational people, but ordained by the Creator of Heaven and Earth".

There is no flaw that tender, nor with the justification that it gives for its proposal. That fact that it happens to mention that the authors hold a false metaphysical belief does not constitute such a flaw because it is no part of their argument. They say that it is, but they are mistaken, and the mistake – serious in some contexts – is completely harmless in this one.

by **David Deutsch** on Sun, 01/23/2005 - 14:13 | [reply](#)

yeah but

I think Editor and David Deutsch explain well in comments, but that the original post was less good.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 01/23/2005 - 17:01 | [reply](#)

Secular?

Look, you wrote a post called "The Secular Inaugural".

You admit that it includes a mistaken non-secular phrase.

I think it's good that we can overlook the religious part and see that the rest contains a powerful, and valid statement. But we should

not go further and pretend that that makes the entire passage

secular.

I think it would have been an even better statement without that phrase; just as I think the Declaration of Independence would have been even better without "Nature's God", "Endowed by their Creator", "Divine Providence" and any such other theological references that I may have forgotten.

Bush and his speech writers make some excellent statements. But when they make mistakes I think it's better to recognize them than to pretend that every aspect of every message is perfect and worthy of adulation. Doing the latter is obviously wrong, and reduces the credibility of those who praise the genuinely good aspects of the message.

Gil

by **Gil** on Sun, 01/23/2005 - 22:12 | [reply](#)

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Maybe the title, "The Secular Inaugural", means the argument in the Inaugural was secular.

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by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 01/23/2005 - 22:49 | [reply](#)

Re: Secular

Well, the winning engineer in my example mentioned Newton's laws as well as God. Newton's laws are false: there is no such thing in reality as a 'gravitational force'. So the tender appealed for justification to at least two non-existent entities, not just one. Both are serious errors in some contexts. Both are harmless in the stated context. Why shouldn't we take the same attitude towards both?

by **David Deutsch** on Mon, 01/24/2005 - 00:15 | [reply](#)

harmless because

In the stated context the remarks are harmless. It might well have included some good words about the blessings of UFOs upon the land but then some might have thought that the President's speechwriter has a screw loose.

Remarks in inaugural addresses are always included for a reason, especially when a phrase includes the word, 'because'. Such remarks do not appear in inaugural addresses by accident and are intended to be heard. I do not know the reason for including the metaphysical reference in the inaugural address but there is one and it is likely more than the stating of a fond sentiment or an oath such as "by Jove's britches".

The larger context of meaning is often broader than the stated

context. It is worthwhile to note that point so I am.

by a reader on Mon, 01/24/2005 - 02:44 | [reply](#)

Against moral relativism

Well, to use David's example, suppose another set of rival plans for crossing the bridge was that over that particular chasm the fundamental laws of physics themselves are different from where we are standing, so that there if you just walk over it on air while doing some strange symbolic rituals with your fingers you won't fall down, but if you did the same thing around here you will fall. Then the remark about the "laws...ordained by the creator of heaven and earth" could be a poetic way of insisting on the fact that the laws of physics are by definition universal and shouldn't change from one chasm to the other. Seeing it this way the remark would have been there for a reason, despite the literal meta-physical nature of the allegory.

AIS

by a reader on Mon, 01/24/2005 - 07:00 | [reply](#)

Re: Against moral relativism

Yes, exactly.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Mon, 01/24/2005 - 11:21 | [reply](#)

OK

I agree that the statement could be interpreted to mean that human nature is universal enough that rights apply to all people; and that this would have been a reasonable thing to add, since it segues nicely into "no one is fit to be a master, and no one deserves to be a slave."

I still maintain that, even if that was the intent, it could have been conveyed much better.

I note, also, that [The World](#) did not seem to take that interpretation when it attempted to "translate" that sentence; so even the most generous listeners were likely to misinterpret the phrase.

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by [Gil](#) on Mon, 01/24/2005 - 17:14 | [reply](#)

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Touché.

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Why The Words Were There

The words were in the speech for at least two reasons: Bush believes them, but even if he didn't, these words or others like them would have been included to rally the many US citizens who generally believe in such things, in order to actually build the bridge across the great chasm. In the original post, [The World](#) asserted that "[s]ome passages contain references to God. As atheists, we nevertheless wholeheartedly support them". I agreed with that assertion, but not because I can establish a justification along the lines of the "laws of physics are by definition universal and shouldn't change form one chasm to the other," or that "human nature is universal enough that rights apply to all people." Each of the alternatives (including removing the offending language altogether) that have been suggested are more scientific and more correct – but none would have been better in the speech. The harm done (and I think that any deviation from the truth results in some harm), is outweighed by the good that flows from clarity regarding the overall strategic issue and the political acumen necessary to understand how to effectively wage the war on terror in the real world. It's a trade off that we will often need to accept as we work together with allies of various stripes to achieve our goals.

by [Michael Bacon](#) on Mon, 01/24/2005 - 21:10 | [reply](#)

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When famed Reagan speechwriter Peggy Noonan writes an [article](#) entitled "Way Too Much God", I think it's fair to conclude that it probably went too far.

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Tue, 01/25/2005 - 02:47 | [reply](#)

The Words

Gil,

I think your last post is a very fruitful way of approaching the issue. Is there a qualitative difference between the words used by Bush and "Our prayers are with them" or "God Bless America"? I don't believe so. Nevertheless, whether the words were optimal is another matter. I agree that Peggy Noonan's response is

informative in this regard. That Bush may have gone too far is a reasonable conclusion.

by **Michael Bacon** on Tue, 01/25/2005 - 15:03 | [reply](#)

Differences

Michael,

It's difficult to say with precision, but I think that listeners to speeches like this have grown accustomed to phrases such as the ones I mentioned, and have learned to accept that they are "purely formal" and "completely harmless".

But, it seems the Bush went further than this and injected many more references into the substance of his arguments. It seems that he was intentionally pushing the religious content so that it is made qualitatively different from conventional use. He seems to have wanted to make it difficult to overlook.

He succeeded. And it's a disappointment (to people like me).

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 01/25/2005 - 16:28 | [reply](#)

Perhaps

Gil,

Perhaps you're right. The very fact that people have become accustomed to such phrases might, in the mind of a speech writer, or Bush himself, argue for an escalation in rhetoric sufficient to impress those have become blasé. Perhaps Noonan's response is best understood as disappointment that the language wasn't in fact more conventional. However, I wasn't that disappointed, but perhaps that's because I had lower expectations regarding what he would say.

by **Michael Bacon** on Tue, 01/25/2005 - 17:04 | [reply](#)

abortion

whatever

by a reader on Fri, 04/22/2005 - 09:58 | [reply](#)

Letting Theories Die Instead of People

This article is posted as part of the January 27, 2005, **BlogBurst**, to commemorate the liberation of the **Auschwitz death camp**, sixty years ago, on January 27, 1945.

January 20th was the anniversary of the 1942 **Wannsee Conference**, in the course of which the Nazi hierarchy formalised Hitler's plan to annihilate the Jewish people. Understanding the horrors of Auschwitz requires that one be aware of the premeditated mass murder that was presented at Wannsee.

Highlighting these events now is important. Even as the press reports that 45% of Britons have **never heard** of Auschwitz, a group of 500 Russian intellectuals, including 19 members of Parliament, marked the anniversary with an **open letter** linking Judaism to ritual murder, and calling on the authorities to close down Jewish organisations across Russia. The Muslim Council of Britain, representing 350 Muslim organisations, is **boycotting the official commemoration** because it makes no reference to the "holocaust of the Palestinian intifada". A British Muslim MP has opposed the boycott, saying "if people are boycotting this then I think it's a mistake. People who were exterminated in the Holocaust were not just Jews".

The World's tiny contribution is to write about a key difference between the Nazis and the West: their view of the best way to change the world.

As a result of an antisemitic **conspiracy theory**, the Nazis saw The Jews as their enemy. Their response to this perceived problem was to kill all Jews. In addition to antisemitism, this policy also implemented two other fundamental principles of Nazism: that there are no individuals, only groups; and that differences between groups can be resolved only by violence. Thus they embarked, collectively, upon the mass murder known as the Holocaust. Nevertheless, each of the murderers committed murder individually, and each of the victims suffered it individually.

When the Allies liberated the few surviving Jews of Europe in 1945, including some in Auschwitz itself, Allied governments, who were themselves largely antisemitic, weren't pleased to have about 250,000 surplus Jews on their hands. However, the Western Allies took for granted that human life is intrinsically valuable and the idea of killing those Jews did not occur to them. They recognised

that there is no problem so bad that people can't fix it by spreading good ideas. Germany is a democratic country today because the Western Allies spread some of their good ideas to the Germans. And we support **Israel** as part of our struggle against bad ideas including the antisemitism that has survived to this day even in the open societies of the West.

Wed, 01/26/2005 - 14:22 | [permalink](#)

Only groups

"In addition to antisemitism, this policy also implemented two other fundamental principles of Nazism: that there are no individuals, only groups; and that differences between groups can be resolved only by violence."

In this statement, the World hones in on two fundamental principles that have caused and continue to cause great problems within the group we call humanity. Nazism was the worst of this thinking but not the only recent historical example of it. The principles are subtle and underpin most violent abuses of and by "groups". There is the oppositional nature of the principles which create the group ideal and the offending group other. The group ideal, named, creates a name or names for the 'other' group and then en masse sorts individuals into one or the other.

Witness, for example, the intentional starvation and extermination of nearly 8 million agrarian Russians prior to World War II. It was necessary in the eyes of Stalin in order to collectivise farms and labor to eliminate the individual peasant and his family by the will of the supreme state. In contrast to antisemitism the group other, peasant, was by transformed into the group ideal, peasant labor collectivised. Mass starvation which ensued by collective method was excused as incidental.

Hundreds of examples of this thinking exist, but it is sufficient here to name only a few. We can mention Nazism and Stalinism, to name two. The reasons stated and the specific tactics may appear different, but the impetus always comes from the same deadly principles: There are only groups. Groups rise or fall by violent dominance. The individual means nothing. Ideas must become group ideologies. Ideology is supreme over all.

by a reader on Wed, 01/26/2005 - 16:42 | [reply](#)

The Secular Inaugural

In President Bush's historic Second Inaugural Address, he gave an inspiring re-statement of the Bush Doctrine. Some passages contain references to God. As atheists, we nevertheless wholeheartedly support those passages, such as this crucial one [emphasis ours]:

America's vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one. From the day of our founding, we have proclaimed that every man and woman on this earth has rights, and dignity, and matchless value, **because they bear the image of the maker of heaven and earth**. Across the generations, we have proclaimed the imperative of self-government, because no one is fit to be a master, and no one deserves to be a slave. Advancing these ideals is the mission that created our nation. It is the honorable achievement of our fathers. Now it is the urgent requirement of our nation's security, and the calling of our time.

That is because the appeal to the supernatural there is purely formal: the substance of the argument is relentlessly rational. As a public service, we offer the following translation of the sentence in question:

From the day of our founding, we have proclaimed that every man and woman on this earth has rights, and dignity, and matchless value, because whenever any arguments to the contrary have been subjected to rational criticism, they have invariably turned out to rely on supernatural justifications, from King Charles' divine right of kings, to Hegel's divinity of the State, to Rousseau's '**infallibility of the general will**'. Of all the regulatory principles ever proposed for human affairs, only our doctrine of the rights and value of each individual passes that cold test of reason. Furthermore, only political programmes that give effect to that doctrine have ever created institutions and policies that allow themselves to be subjected to a test of reason at all. And only they have ever created a community of nations among whom war is unknown.

We modestly hope that our version is more precise. On the other

hand, it is longer and, we have to admit, less punchy. There is room for both.

God bless America.

Fri, 01/21/2005 - 11:15 | [permalink](#)

Devil in the Details

I would like to second **The World's** endorsement of the strategic vision outlined in the President's inaugural address. I also think appropriate the understanding shown in connection with the President's references to the supernatural. In this spirit, I want to point out that the "devil" is in the details. His strategic vision, however correct, will succeed more or less quickly and effectively, depending on the tactics that are adopted in connection with its implementation. As I mentioned in a **post** back on November 21, 2004, the problems to be faced are "complicated, the variables numerous, and there is a real difference between strategy and tactics." There is nothing wrong (in fact, everything is right) with a healthy debate regarding how we are to achieve our mutually agreed goals.

by **Michael Bacon** on Fri, 01/21/2005 - 15:29 | [reply](#)

justification not needed

I think you should just say: he says the image of maker thing is his reason. He is wrong. And it doesn't really matter. He does not need any 'because' statement at all. You can just delete the bold phrase and not replace it. Don't try to put justification in.

Nothing ever wins when you concede it needs some kind of justification, and try to give it. for example the version you give .. you used a partial list of rivals!! come on, that can't be a very solid argument. you can come to all sorts of conclusions by giving a partial list of opposing views that are bad, then concluding you are right. and you didn't even refute the ones you mentioned.

and not all the theories to the contrary are supernatural. for example my conjecture about the justified authority of people who like bright lamps.

Michael Bacon: uhh, yeah sure. as long as this isn't a bad excuse to go "oh my god, iraq is such a mess!!" (it's unclear what your point is, and that's the normal one.)

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 01/21/2005 - 16:37 | [reply](#)

My Point

My point, Elliot, is that too often the hard questions are avoided,

while emphasis is placed on the quick, grand theoretical (albeit correct) construct, particularly where there already is relative agreement with respect to philosophy and overall goals. Regarding Iraq, I partially addressed this in my November 21, 2004 **post**, which I won't repeat, other than to say (i) our strategic goal is replacing all political systems that perpetuate or collaborate with terrorism with systems that respect human rights; (ii) the main reason to choose to liberate Iraq in 2003 was tactical; and (iii) there were other tactical choices possible (made) that could (did) result in better (worse) outcomes -- although it is impossible (given our current level of knowledge) to know with what frequency. My conclusion was that in the world in which we now find ourselves " . . . choosing to cut and run in Iraq, does not seem to point to any favorable strategic outcome." Nothing has occurred in the interim to change my thinking in this regard.

by **Michael Bacon** on Fri, 01/21/2005 - 17:16 | [reply](#)

Sorry, No

I agree with Elliot that the statement would have been better with the bold text removed entirely. It's simply a false justification.

And although I agree with your "translation", I think it does not reflect what Bush meant to say. I suspect that if you asked him, he would agree with me on this point.

He meant to say what he said, and it's wrong. It serves some purposes, but truth and understanding aren't among them.

Gil

by **Gil** on Fri, 01/21/2005 - 17:48 | [reply](#)

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Good point. The "translation" is really just an alternative phrasing/argument to appeal to a different set of people.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 01/21/2005 - 18:55 | [reply](#)

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Michael,

It's difficult to say with precision, but I think that listeners to speeches like this have grown accustomed to phrases such as the ones I mentioned, and have learned to accept that they are "purely formal" and "completely harmless".

But, it seems the Bush went further than this and injected many more references into the substance of his arguments. It seems that he was intentionally pushing the religious content so that it is made qualitatively different from conventional use. He seems to have wanted to make it difficult to overlook.

He succeeded. And it's a disappointment (to people like me).

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 01/25/2005 - 16:28 | [reply](#)

Perhaps

Gil,

Perhaps you're right. The very fact that people have become accustomed to such phrases might, in the mind of a speech writer, or Bush himself, argue for an escalation in rhetoric sufficient to impress those have become blasé. Perhaps Noonan's response is best understood as disappointment that the language wasn't in fact more conventional. However, I wasn't that disappointed, but perhaps that's because I had lower expectations regarding what he would say.

by **Michael Bacon** on Tue, 01/25/2005 - 17:04 | [reply](#)

abortion

whatever

by a reader on Fri, 04/22/2005 - 09:58 | [reply](#)

“Let the remaining tyrants of the world learn the lesson from this day”

“Let the remaining tyrants of the world learn the lesson from this day”, say Mohammed and Omar at **Iraq the Model**. “No more confusion about what the people want, they have said their word and they said it loud and the world has got to respect and support the people's will”. (Read the whole thing!). Yes indeed, every one of those tyrants is feeling justifiable fear today, while every decent person shares Mohammed and Omar's sense that today is a historic turning point for Iraq and for the world.

Reuters says:

Voters, some ululating with joy, others hiding their faces in fear, cast ballots in higher-than-expected numbers in Iraq's first multi-party election in half a century.

Samir Hassan, 32, who lost his leg in a car bomb blast last year, said as he waited to vote in Baghdad: "I would have crawled here if I had to. I don't want terrorists to kill other Iraqis like they tried to kill me."

John Kerry doesn't agree with them, though. He doesn't think it's that big a deal:

Sen. John Kerry says the vote is significant, but shouldn't be “overhyped”

Meanwhile, for some reason the bad guys tried their murderous best to prevent this ‘overhyped’ event from happening:

Despite draconian security measures imposed by Iraq's U.S.-backed interim government, militants launched a string of attacks to try to torpedo the polls.

They struck mainly in Baghdad, rocking the capital with nine suicide blasts in rapid succession. The Iraqi wing of al Qaeda, led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, claimed responsibility.

It had declared war on the election, vowing to kill any “infidel” who voted.

John Kerry's opinion?

“It is hard to say that something is legitimate when whole portions of the country can't vote and doesn't vote.”

In other words, John Kerry finds it hard to accept the legitimacy of any election that is not approved by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

Update: Andrew Sullivan is **euphoric**. Good. Now, Andrew: why exactly is **John Kerry** not euphoric?

Sun, 01/30/2005 - 17:28 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Who is John Kerry?

Neither John Kerry or Andrew Sullivan have anything relevant to say. The Iraqi election speaks for itself. George Bush, Tony Blair, Vladimir Putin, Jacques Chirac, Saddam Hussein, and so on and so forth have about as much relevance to this election in their certainly to be publicized comments as the guy next door, and words mean much less than the individual millions who marched their two feet to their polling places and voted. Their votes say more than any pundit or politician. That is the way it should be.

by a reader on Sun, 01/30/2005 - 20:29 | [reply](#)

Joy

George W Bush, thank you.

by AIS on Sun, 01/30/2005 - 22:07 | [reply](#)

Appreciation

Thank you American soldiers and British soldiers and their families who made this possible regardless of political and headline rhetoric. Thank you Iraqi citizens who once free did the same.

by a reader on Mon, 01/31/2005 - 14:27 | [reply](#)

A Time Bomb

Imagine that we discover that a nuclear weapon has been hidden somewhere in one of the world's great cities. We don't know which city, or where it is hidden. We know that it is due to be set off by a timer, but we do not know when. It might be today, or it might be ten years from now. But we do know that the timer is already running.

What should be done?

The *value* of a great city is unimaginably large. In terms of human life. In terms of culture. And in raw economic terms. Hence the resources that it would be worth devoting to the task of preventing such a loss would be correspondingly tremendous.

This is not a hypothetical situation. It is the situation that we are actually in. With the minor difference that the weapon of mass destruction has not been planted yet. But it will be. And with the major difference that it is not just one city but all of them, because it not just a matter of nuclear weapons but biological doomsday weapons as well.

That is why one of the smartest people in the world, Britain's Astronomer Royal Sir Martin Rees, thinks that civilisation has only a fifty percent chance of surviving the twenty-first century. See his book **Our Final Century**.

He is dead wrong. Civilisation is going to survive. But only because the United States and its few real allies are going to achieve something that is, at present, almost inconceivable. That's why Professor Rees didn't conceive of it when he was writing his book. And they are going to achieve this in the teeth of the most frenzied opposition from everyone else in the world, including many **American Conservatives**, who are dead wrong too on this issue, as on many others.

For it turns out that to prevent this ultimate catastrophe, the least expensive option – again, in terms of loss of human lives and culture, and economic cost – depends, among other things, on ending certain types of tyranny everywhere in the world, and on doing so soon.

Say more. Is it testable? Can it be refined or refuted?

Part II?

by a reader on Tue, 02/01/2005 - 18:59 | [reply](#)

What Time Frame?

I think Peggy Noonan's (and others') problem with the rhetoric was that it seemed to imply that the US policy was to attempt to end tyranny *immediately*; and that's just not realistic. Setting false expectations causes it's own problems.

I think she agrees with the current strategy.

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 02/01/2005 - 19:03 | [reply](#)

What about the Doomsday Argument

I think you are right: civilisation will survive, and that will be in no small part due to the United States and its Allies. But one thing worries me. If civilization survives indefinitely into the future then - unlikely as it may seem - I exist among the first humans. However if civilisation dies off in the near future then in fact I exist among the mainstream of humanity. This seems the more likely of the two hypotheses. How does the World refute the Doomsday Argument?

by a reader on Wed, 02/02/2005 - 00:53 | [reply](#)

doomsday arg

uhh, well how do you prove which is more likely for you to be anyway?

also: if civ dies off soon, you lived near the very end. unlikely by your logic? but anyway, living in the very middle, or any other specific spot, would be equally "unlikely" but of course you must live at some (unlikely) time cause you do live.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 02/02/2005 - 07:14 | [reply](#)

Re: doomsday arg

-> if civ dies off soon, you lived near the very end. unlikely -> by your logic?

No, because you are forgetting that the population of Earth has grown exponentially...if civilisation dies off soonish - say at the end of this century - then of all the people that have ever existed most of them will have existed in the 20th and 21st centuries. Ergo you

should expect to be born in one of these centuries.

- > but anyway, living in the very middle, or any other
- > specific spot, would be equally "unlikely" but of course
- > you must live at some (unlikely) time cause you do live

Exactly...you do live...and you live now, not in 350BC or in 1 million AD. Suppose I have two barrels, one barrel contains balls numbered 1 thro 10 and the other barrel contains balls numbered 1 thro 100000. I draw a ball from one of these barrels, but I don't tell you which barrel. The ball I drew is number 7. Given that fact, which barrel was the ball most likely to have come from? Obviously 1 thro 10, no? You are something like the 110,506,704,114 person to have existed. Given that fact, are you likely to have been born into a civilisation in which 200 billion people total will ever exist or one in which 200 trillion people will ever exist?

by a reader on Wed, 02/02/2005 - 09:23 | [reply](#)

A reader, If you are a rando

A reader,

If you are a random person from history then the doomsday theory will tell you you are living at the end of days whether you are or not. So it cannot tell you whether you are. See?

by the gob on Wed, 02/02/2005 - 10:16 | [reply](#)

Prime numbers

British Prime Minister Tony Blair sat alone in his study and worried. With nuclear proliferation, bio-terrorism, natural disasters and a host of other calamities threatening the world, did the human race have much chance or surviving even the next century?

If I am an average human, thinks Blair, then I probably live somewhere in the middle of the distribution of human lives. Afterall, it would be very unlikely for me to be particularly near the beginning or the end. But the world population has more than doubled in the last fifty years! If my life is somewhere near the middle then the human race is unlikely to survive the next century! Blair was depressed. The mathematics were flawless, the human race was doomed and there was nothing even a British Prime Minister could do to stop it.

"Wait a minute!" exclaims Blair, "What if I am an average British Prime Minister!"

There have been 50 Prime Ministers before me, lasting in total 283 years, it would be very unlikely for me to be near the beginning or the end of the distribution, so Prime Ministers will probably last nearly 300 more years.

How reassuring, thinks Blair, British Prime Ministers will probably

outlive the human race.

by the gob on Wed, 02/02/2005 - 13:23 | [reply](#)

The 'Doomsday Argument' Doesn't Work

I agree with 'the gob' that the argument has no substance.

We are not chosen at random from the set of all humans, and you can prove any conclusion you like if you assume that we were.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Wed, 02/02/2005 - 23:46 | [reply](#)

Re: Well said theory

Is it testable? Can it be refined or refuted?

Yes: if civilisation is destroyed tomorrow, we are proved wrong. If policies change and civilisation survives, we are proved wrong too. And so on.

by [Editor](#) on Thu, 02/03/2005 - 00:01 | [reply](#)

Myself as a Random Person in History

David Deutsch: I understand that the explanation for why I am not a random person in history arises from the fact that in the multiverse there are an infinite number of people and an infinite number of versions of me. The problem is how to define what it is to randomly select one person/version from an infinite set. I see this...and yet...and yet it seems like the DA is being hooked on a technicality. Somehow *I* did get to be just one of those infinite people/versions. So my intuition is yelling out that I can consider myself to be a random sample from an infinite set. Is the infinite set problem the only objection to considering myself a random sample or are there other objections?

The Gob: Nice one, though I can see that TB becoming Prime Minister was probably not a random event: he made choices throughout his life that led him to become Prime Minister.

by a reader on Thu, 02/03/2005 - 07:45 | [reply](#)

random person

Using your logic about Prime Ministers: you being alive isn't a random event. your parents made choices throughout their lives that led to you being born.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 02/03/2005 - 16:08 | [reply](#)

Re: Well Said Theory

"For it turns out that to prevent this ultimate catastrophe, the least

expensive option – again, in terms of loss of human lives and culture, and economic cost – depends, among other things, on ending certain types of tyranny everywhere in the world, and on doing so soon."

Testing and refining this would seem to be a noble purpose. I would prefer that the hypothesis that would be refuted again and again would be the doomsday one and not only soon but daily. It seems reasonable to acknowledge that there is no one doomsday to refute. Refutable doomsdays might become cumulative tho.

Replacing tyrannies large and small would be also a cumulative step in the refutative direction. Replacing them with a viable preferred alternative of a virus of useful freedoms would seem almost contagious like a contracted immunity.

The theory to be tested today is that useful freedoms are contagious as well as widely preferred to the virus of tyranny. The appropriate means by which the viruses of useful freedoms are spread from person to person and nation to nation would seem to be both testable and subject to refinement. All this would be cost effective if it is urgently and meticulously conducted as a search for the ultimate anti-doomsday truth serum.

by a reader on Thu, 02/03/2005 - 17:41 | [reply](#)

Re: random person

Yes, my parents made choices that led to me being born. But in the multiverse those same choices also led to countless other versions of myself being born. That I experience life as this version and not one of those other versions does not seem to be a result of anything my parents did.

by a reader on Fri, 02/04/2005 - 19:33 | [reply](#)

Re: random person

Yes, my parents made choices that led to me being born. But in the multiverse those same choices also led to countless other versions of myself being born. That I experience life as this version and not one of those other versions does not seem to be a result of anything my parents did.

Well there were countless versions of Tony Blair born, right?. That we have this one in particular, by your logic, isn't the result of choices?

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 02/04/2005 - 20:19 | [reply](#)

Re: Re: random person

Yes, as I said before, TB becoming Prime Minister was a result of

choices he made. He can look back at his life and point to those choices and tell a story about how he became Prime Minister. Some versions of TB did not become Prime Minister, but those versions would not be contemplating the question "What if I am an average British Prime Minister".

Unlike TB as Prime Minister, I cannot tell a story about why I experience the particular version of me that I do (can you?). Certainly I can tell a story about how all the versions of me came to exist - that story involves choices made by my parents. But that is not a story of why I experience the version that is me.

by a reader on Fri, 02/04/2005 - 22:25 | [reply](#)

The set of all humans

David commented:

>We are not chosen at random from the set of all humans

If true does this also invalidate John Rawls' "Veil of Ignorance" approach to determining what a just society would look like?

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Sat, 02/05/2005 - 13:23 | [reply](#)

Veil of Ignorance

i think the point of the veil is you should design a society that is fair to everyone, not that works best for your particular type of life. ie, it just says not to be biased.

this part doesn't depend on the set of humans stuff. even if that metaphor is a good way to explain what he means.

(he also says many other things, but i believe most of the rest is silly)

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sat, 02/05/2005 - 16:55 | [reply](#)

Why only humans?

I must assume the Doomsday Argument works for other species than human. Why would it not?

The good news from this reasoning then is that we need never worry about endangered species again. After all how likely is it *really* that these two Siberian Purple-Spotted Pandas are the very last of their kind....?

The bad news (and, it's pretty bad):

What if some scientists create a new strain/species of bacteria, or whatever, in a Petri dish? Say that new species is now minutes old.

Ponder the question "will this species continue on forever?"

Supposing the answer were Yes then those members of the species currently living (in the Petri dish at the moment) would be among the first of their kind, which just seems *so unlikely*. It's far more likely they're among the middle cohort. Therefore, we conclude (or perhaps we "induce"?) that the species is going to come to end in a period of time comparable with how long it's existed, that is to say, in mere minutes. Yet the bacteria seem to be thriving in the Petri dish, no problems in sight. So how will this happen?

Well, I can only assume that the universe will implode in order to enforce the Doomsday Argument law of physics.

Unless, of course, the scientists do the right thing and kill off the bacteria strain intentionally.

In other words, we're gonna have to not just shut down all genetic research, but put some clamps on evolution. No more new species! That's just tempting the Doomsday Argument to come back and bite us.

by Blixa on Mon, 02/07/2005 - 20:22 | [reply](#)

Wow

No wonder they call it the Doomsday Argument.

It sure is powerful!

Gil

by Gil on Tue, 02/08/2005 - 00:50 | [reply](#)

First Person Perspective

Blixa - To apply the DA, you need to consider your existence from a first person perspective. This requires that you are a conscious observer. Last I heard, bacteria are not conscious, so your argument falls flat there. But I acknowledge that at some time in the future conscious bacteria may be possible through a combination of genetic engineering and nano-tech. Suppose that, in most possible futures, zillions of these conscious bacteria exist. Do you not think it surprising that you are born as a human being and not as one of these bacteria? Or that the fact you exist as a human being in these times gives you zero information?

It is easy to make fun of the DA, but the reasons why it is wrong aren't obvious. Just Google on it to see what I mean. You will find many refutations and many refutations of the refutations. Quite likely, the correct refutation of the DA requires a multiple-universes perspective and consideration of the infinite discrete set problem.

This paper is an example of such an approach. Though I don't vouch for its correctness, the paper does illustrate that you might discover something interesting by taking the DA seriously. The Intro. contains this interesting quotation:

[Einstein] told us once: "Life is finite. Time is infinite. The

probability that I am alive today is zero. In spite of this, I am now alive. Now, how is that?". None of his students had an answer. After a pause, Einstein said "Well, after the fact, one should not ask for probabilities".

by a reader on Tue, 02/08/2005 - 22:24 | [reply](#)

empathy

You seem to be saying I lack empathy. I maintain that I have the ability to put myself in the position of a member of some other species (bacteria was only an example BTW) and ponder a large number of things from their perspective. If I can sensibly wonder how "likely" it was that I was born at such and such time I don't see what prevents me from wondering the exactly analogous thing about a three-toed sloth or any other living thing.

p.s. You're really serious about all this, aren't you?? ;-)

by Blixa on Wed, 02/09/2005 - 02:07 | [reply](#)

Re: empathy

Blixa - Yes, I do take the DA seriously, but not because it is correct. I firmly believe it is wrong. However most alleged refutations do not hold up to critical scrutiny. Unfortunately that means I often end up defending the DA because I have heard most of these "refutations" before and know why they are wrong. The DA is one of those arguments that are interesting not because they are correct but because they are incorrect in rather interesting ways.

Yes, I believe you can empathize! You can apply the third person view and speculate on what some other person creature would conclude if they applied the DA to themselves. Obviously Adam would have got it all wrong. But that's probabilistic arguments for you: some people will draw the wrong conclusions. The horse that is a "dead-cert" may not in fact win. But irrespective of when the human race ends, most people who apply the DA to themselves will arrive at the "correct" conclusion. (BTW that conclusion is not nec. doom-soon because doom-soon depends on your model of how the humam population is growing - and if that model is inductivist it's probably a load of crap anyway).

Although you can empathize, I doubt you can consider what it is like to be a bacterium because there is no "what is it like" for a bacterium. They simply are not conscious/do not have a sense of existence. You may as well consider rocks and trees. That is to miss the part that consciousness and your sense of existence plays in the DA.

by a reader on Wed, 02/09/2005 - 03:30 | [reply](#)

Re: Myself as a Random Person in History

Is the infinite set problem the only objection to

considering myself a random sample or are there other objections?

That wasn't actually my objection. My objection is that it is invalid to go from "most members of a certain set have property X" to "this particular member of that set probably has property X" unless you have an independent reason to believe, at least, that this particular member *was chosen randomly with equal probabilities* from all the members of that set.

That is to say, an actual (i.e. not imaginary) physical process tantamount to choosing must have occurred. And you must have independent (i.e. logically prior to deploying this argument) knowledge (i.e. not ignorance) of what this process was.

I am saying that the 'frequency interpretation of probability', with a finite set of instances, is a fallacy. This is over and above the fact that with a discrete, infinite set of instances, it is impossible.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Wed, 02/09/2005 - 11:45 | [reply](#)

Ok so you (DA reader) think i

Ok so you (DA reader) think it's wrong and I think it's wrong. I can apply it to some other living thing of my choosing (or, "imagine being it and applying it to my/itself" although I don't think this 'empathy' step is logically necessary) and see that in 95% of such cases the DA will produce results that are already obviously incorrect. I don't put that forth as sufficient "disproof" but still, it does kinda go along with that whole "wrong" thing that, again, you and I both agree about.

by Blixa on Wed, 02/09/2005 - 15:56 | [reply](#)

Property X

David - In the context of the Doomsday Argument, what is "property X"?

by a reader on Thu, 02/10/2005 - 00:39 | [reply](#)

Re: Property X

In the words of the 'a reader' who introduced this topic, Property X would be 'not existing among the first humans'.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Thu, 02/10/2005 - 00:59 | [reply](#)

Re: Re: Myself as a Random Person in History

I am saying that the 'frequency interpretation of probability', with a finite set of instances, is a fallacy.

I agree about the frequency interpretation, but isn't "the probability that my birth rank is R given that we hypothesize that the total number of humans is N" necessarily a subjective probability?

by a reader on Thu, 02/10/2005 - 10:11 | [reply](#)

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The Media's Anti-Israel Two-Step

HonestReporting describes a particularly clear, and particularly nasty, example of what it calls the "media two-step" in reporting on Israel.

Our summary of the two-step in general:

Step 0: Report only violence. Never report anything like **this**.

Step 1 (a): If ~~Jews~~ Israelis have committed any act of violence, imply (or report as fact) that it was motivated by pure malevolence on their part.

Step 1 (b): If ~~Jews~~ Israelis haven't committed any act of violence, report as fact an allegation that they have, and proceed as in step 1(a).

Step 2: If violence is committed against ~~Jews~~ Israelis, report as fact that its motive was retaliation for previous violence by ~~Jews~~ Israelis.

Thu, 02/03/2005 - 22:22 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

The Media Are not 'Orwellian'

Regular readers will know that we are **not** enamoured of the mainstream **media**. However, **Belmont Club** have gone rather too far in their excoriation of the media when they compare them to the Ministry of Truth in George Orwell's book **1984**.

In *1984*, Orwell describes a totalitarian society in which the state controls newspapers, books, television and all other media through the cynically named Ministry of Truth. One of the Ministry's functions is to maintain the official fiction that the Party is always right – not only by lying about the present but by changing all historical evidence. In that society the role of the media is to parrot what the dictators want them to say about both the present and the past, without paying attention to the truth.

The media in the West currently peddle a set of myths about the way the world works. Myths in which they believe. These beliefs cause them to impose certain interpretations on events and to ignore stories that tend to suggest that perhaps the world works in a different way. When they feel strongly enough, they feel obliged bend the truth – to report something other than what literally happened, in the noble cause of conveying a deeper truth to the public who would otherwise be led astray.

But, they do not have the power physically to coerce people who do not share their beliefs.

In some cases most of the media professionals happen to share the same set of prejudices as state officials and publicise these prejudices at the expense of the truth. Sometimes they even allow state officials to **rewrite scripts** to fit in with the government's agenda – in this case their witch hunt against drug users. However, the media can be independent of the government when they choose to be, as with their campaign of opposition to the liberation of Iraq. Nor do most of the media spin their stories in favour of George Bush's **visceral and ignorant** dislike of stem cell research. So the media are not simply an extension of the state, even when they behave badly.

The media do not, and cannot, censor opposing views. The likes of **Thomas Szasz** and free market economists can't get much time on major networks, but this has not stopped such people from propagating their ideas. Even though the media tend to stick fairly closely to a common left-of-centre, elitist ideology, they are not

completely homogeneous. Fox News is more right wing than CNN and the blogosphere is becoming more important. Although they leave a lot to be desired, the media in a free society are not like the omnipresent state controlled television in 1984 in any important respect.

P.S. It doesn't help that Belmont Club link to a Holocaust-denying web site in that post, and approvingly quote from its tendentious interpretation of both Orwell and World War 2. What are they thinking of?

Mon, 02/07/2005 - 00:04 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Media Ignores?

What ever happened to good old investigative journalism? Does it cost too much and take too long to produce a good and carefully researched story? Is there a risk of libel and slander suits that scares big media off?

To ask another question, what ever happened to journalism? Is every story a simple headline and two-step of reporting the majority opinion with a insert on the direct opposite opinion? Is this balanced news reporting or is it a cop out? Does good journalism sell?

If the story can be summarized in half an hour of well edited programming can the same story be reduced to one minute and thirty seconds of editorial comment?

Is the standard question media bias or is it a broader and more complex multi-layered issue of how media-in-the-name-of ignorance sells?

What is "the media"?

by a reader on Wed, 02/09/2005 - 15:28 | [reply](#)

The Belmont Club: What are they thinking?

I think it would be useful for people to see the link you reference: http://www.ihr.org/jhr/v06/v06p--9_Bennett.html. It has been my experience that sometimes (less nowadays, but a lot when I was younger) people who take what is commonly (but not always accurately) referred to as "right wing" views, often carry a lot of baggage like anti-Semitism, racism, and the like. For example, when I was growing up, the open opposition of some to even the most modest demands of the civil rights movement, such as the right to vote, unfortunately made it harder to accept from these same people other views that turned out to be more or less correct -- such as extremely strong opposition to the tyrannical Soviet Union (clearly correct) and the war in Vietnam (in my opinion, less correct, but still analytically linked to the former). I'm afraid that

the question "[w]hat are they thinking" has a rather simple answer:

they have clear and unambiguous sympathy for these ugly and incorrect views.

by **Michael Bacon** on Wed, 02/09/2005 - 18:22 | [reply](#)

bias

For example, when I was growing up, the open opposition of some to even the most modest demands of the civil rights movement, such as the right to vote, unfortunately made it harder to accept from these same people other views that turned out to be more or less correct

Err, but doesn't that work just as well in reverse? ie, the left has baggage too. so that makes it hard to listen to the left, too. thus it is hard to listen to anyone?

I think we should analyse ideas independent of their source -- who believes something cannot make it more or less true.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 02/09/2005 - 22:10 | [reply](#)

WOW

For anyone who doesn't want to go look themselves, it was not just some subtle hint of holocaust denial. Read this:

The Holocaust story is repeated ad nauseam to drum up emotional support for Israel, and Zionist Jews have accurately described it as "Israel's number one propaganda weapon." Anti-Zionist Jews such as Dr. Alfred Lilienthal describe the constant Holocaust drum-beating as "holocaustomania" and point out that the Holocaust has become a kind of new religion among Jews. Jewish intellectual Noam Chomsky described Dr. Rubenstein's reactions to Professor Faurisson's claims that there were no gas chambers as the reactions of a religious fanatic. The Holocaust is so important to Zionist Jews that Professor Friedlander has said that "the Revisionist School of historians, those who say the Holocaust never existed, that it is a Jewish invention, are more worrying than countries' political positions," while Professor H. Littell has said "you can't discuss the truth of the Holocaust. That is a distortion of the concept of free speech. The United States should emulate West Germany which outlaws such exercises." Despite cogent evidence that revisionists are censored and persecuted, one so-called intellectual recently stated that it is fashionable to claim that Hitler's gas chambers did not exist.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 02/09/2005 - 22:23 | [reply](#)

What are they thinking

Would LFG put a holocaust-denier-sympathizer on their **blogroll**?

by a reader on Wed, 02/09/2005 - 23:10 | [reply](#)

LFG

I don't know, that is a big blogroll to look through. Why don't you tell us which blog you mean.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 02/10/2005 - 03:42 | [reply](#)

What are they thinking

I meant the Belmont Club, and I meant why would LFG continue to blogroll them if they (Belmont) sympathized with Holocaust deniers?

by a reader on Sat, 02/12/2005 - 02:52 | [reply](#)

Holocaust deniers

I agree with the World that it's not helpful that the Belmont Club links to a Holocaust-denying website. However, I disagree with the last reader that it's bad to sympathize with people who are mistaken. Any person in favor of scientific freedom and a free and open exchange of ideas should sympathize with Holocaust deniers, especially those who are persecuted and jailed in countries such as Germany and Austria, and the fact that Amnesty International does not defend those people is a scandal. Remember Voltaire's dictum: "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." Also remember that criticism and open debate of mainstream ideas is vital for the progress of science, even if that also means you'll see bad quality criticism from time to time. So although I do not believe the Holocaust deniers are right, I do sympathize with those of them who are well meaning and not motivated by anti-semitism.

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Sat, 02/12/2005 - 09:43 | [reply](#)

I am Curious

"...those of them [Holocaust deniers] who are well meaning and not motivated by anti-semitism"

Could you explain more? If they are not antisemitic, why do they

deny the reality of Holocaust? What other reason could there be?

by AIS on Sat, 02/12/2005 - 13:38 | [reply](#)

Igf links belmont club

the belmont club is not a holocaust denier sympathiser!

to call him that, he'd need to say something approving about that part of the site.

when leftists go to a peace rally organised by commies, many of them are not commie sympathisers. there is something wrong though.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sat, 02/12/2005 - 18:25 | [reply](#)

Re: I am curious

AIS wrote:

"...those of them [Holocaust deniers] who are well meaning and not motivated by anti-semitism"

Could you explain more? If they are not antisemitic, why do they deny the reality of Holocaust? What other reason could there be?

That they believe the Holocaust did not happen.

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Sun, 02/13/2005 - 01:10 | [reply](#)

But why?

That's my point: Why should people believe that it didn't happen in the first place?

And what would logically follow? a Jewish/Zionist conspiracy that has devised this fake history to take advantage of it. No?

What would that make of Jews/Zionists in the eyes of these people?

Aren't all that instances of antisemitism?

by AIS on Sun, 02/13/2005 - 06:46 | [reply](#)

That's my point: Why should

That's my point: Why should people believe that it didn't happen in the first place?

For their arguments you'd have to look at their sites. Many of them

are honest but simply mistaken, and others are anti-semites or neo-nazis. Your mistake is that you take it for granted that the Holocaust happened. If you take the scientific view, and take nothing for granted, you'll see that there is nothing particularly strange about other people coming to a different belief about things than you do. There are many examples of people who genuinely have mistaken beliefs, such as Duesberg who does not believe HIV causes AIDS, psychiatrists who think alcoholism is a disease, politicians who think socialism is good. And we need people who question standard wisdom, because sometimes those people are right, such as the person who first said the earth is round.

That is the reason why on some level I have more respect for Holocaust deniers who understand that propositions should be based on arguments and criticism, than I have for Holocaust believers who have nothing more to say than that everybody knows it and to question it is automatically anti-semitism. It's precisely this attitude, this presentation of the Holocaust as a belief rather than as a documented fact, that encourages Holocaust deniers to be sceptical of the Holocaust. Which is a shame, because the evidence for the Holocaust is overwhelming, and this simply needs to be pointed out. And if people still are not convinced this ought to be accepted.

And what would logically follow? a Jewish/Zionist conspiracy that has devised this fake history to take advantage of it. No?

No this does not logically follow. If it is a **conspiracy** it need not be Jewish, it could also be Allied or war propaganda or whatever. And they might argue that it doesn't have to be an organized conspiracy; it could simply be something many people happen to believe, just as many people happen to believe in God.

What would that make of Jews/Zionists in the eyes of these people?

You see, you keep using character arguments. The question of whether the Holocaust happened is a historical question which has been settled by arguments. Whether people might be anti-semites is irrelevant to what is true and what is false.

Aren't all that instances of antisemitism?

Those Holocaust deniers who believe that it is a Jewish conspiracy are probably very often anti-semites. But even then there is no logical contradiction between believing in a Jewish conspiracy and **not** being an anti-semite. Compare: if I believe that JFK was murdered by a conspiracy of men, that does not imply I am a sexist.

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Sun, 02/13/2005 - 11:37 | [reply](#)

Take Nothing For Granted

Really? I suppose in some universe the holocaust never happened,

but where we happen to be located, taking for granted that it did (based on the evidence) is like taking for granted the fact that the world is round and not flat (based on the evidence). I don't think it would be "scientific" at all to seriously doubt either fact or to give much credence or sympathy to those that do.

by **Michael Bacon** on Mon, 02/14/2005 - 21:09 | [reply](#)

Facts and Truth

I think we should make a distinction between facts and truth. What you said about scientific mentality isn't really relevant here. Holocaust was a historical fact. So saying it happened is different from proposing a theory about say a particular mechanism. Actually one way to refute theories is by experimental evidence, and although the interpretation of what an experimental result actually means is itself partly based on the existing still reliable theories (reliable in that particular case), the fact something has been observed or a change has taken place is there. There is every evidence that Holocaust did take place. There are films, photos, documents and witnesses from different nationalities and political orientation. It is a fact, why is it denied, where as many other facts of everyday life are taken for granted with much less "evidence".

As for Holocaust deniers, again let's compare it with other similar cases. There has been many genocides committed throughout human history against different groups of people, and although the perpetrators of the crime themselves usually deny the accusations like Turkey in the Armenian massacre or the Arabs right now in the case of Sudan, it is very rare for third parties, people who belong to neither side of the affair and in later times to deny so energetically and so blindly any other event with comparable magnitude. Why is the Holocaust different? That's my question.

Antisemitism is quite a common attitude in different degrees and it is not just about the "Jews" despite its own claims. Mostly it comes in mild doses among people who are otherwise normal, but it is there nevertheless. It even exists among the Jews although there the number is very limited for obvious reasons. I think it shares a lot with say anti-West or anti-Capitalist attitudes. (the latter is rampant among the Jews too which is an important point, since now the direct attack against one's ethnicity is replaced with a more subtle and abstract and less personal target.)

I don't think banning Holocaust deniers' works and speeches is a good idea either. It violates the principle of free speech and it only adds to their aura of being victims for their courageous struggle for freedom against censor. Where as refuting the evident nonsense they claim is both easy and useful for keeping the debate and the memory alive in a natural way, without falling into repetitions or cliches.

However that doesn't mean that I can feel respect for such people for even a second.

by AIS on Tue, 02/15/2005 - 02:49 | [reply](#)

Wildly Off Topic

The Media is Not Orwellian.

That was the original topic, was it not?

Though wildly interesting, I fail to understand what Holocaust deniers have to do with an Orwellian or non-Orwellian media.

Is it that "they", insert favorite crazy group, get free publicity for simply engaging in wild unsubstantiated speculation? This seems to be the fact of what happens. Crazy, inciteful stories get printed. If not, why do "they" do it?

Why does the media pick up on it? How are these strange non-events reported? What constitutes a critical mass for media reportage?

The World Ended Yesterday and Noone Has Yet Refuted It!

UPI Yesterday on Mt. Ararat a secret sect gathered to celebrate the end of the world. The sun went down, everything faded to black, and the world ended in less than one minute, said Harvey Wetbottom, PhD., spokesman for the sect. All the sect members gathered up their picnic lunches and marched down off the mountain, declaring that it was an absolute fact that the world ended yesterday. No one has so far proved otherwise although a group of scientists, **The World** Did Not End Coalition (WDNEC) is attempting to refute the claims of the no longer secret sect, World Ended International (WEI).

Stay tuned for late breaking news!

NOMNDS (Non-Orwellian Media News Distribution Service)

by a reader on Tue, 02/15/2005 - 16:35 | [reply](#)

Political speech and language of the Bush Administration

"War is Peace"

-George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four.

"The war in Iraq is really about peace"

-George Bush, April 2003.

Many such Orwellian parallels are to be found in the political language of the Bushites. For example, consider the now-famous phrase, "Axis of Evil," which was first used by the little Bush in his January 29, 2002, State of the Union address. Bush characterized Iran, Iraq and North Korea as an "axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger..."

Coined by David Frum, the phrase "axis of evil" is actually very

clever, and arguably Orwellian. The word "axis" naturally evokes memories of the "Axis Powers" of World War II (Germany, Italy, Japan, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria) and serves to prepare the public for the acceptance of war against nations said to belong to the axis. However, there is a very important difference between the two that makes the use of the term misleading. It suggests an confederation of states that pose a significant danger because of their alliance. Iran and Iraq have been bitter adversaries for decades, and there is no collaboration at all between North Korea and the other two countries.

Obviously, Iran, Iraq and North Korea have all committed violations of human rights which may allow them to be qualified as "evil." But the singling out of three states as evil surely begs the question of why the Bush administration failed to include nations that violate human rights on a similar scale. I shall attempt to clarify what I mean by the use of a satire borrowed from SatireWire.com:

Bitter after being snubbed for membership of the "Axis of Evil," Libya, China, and Syria today announced they had formed the "Axis of Just as evil." Cuba, Sudan, and Serbia said they had teamed up to form the "Axis of Somewhat Evil" and Bulgaria, Indonesia, and Russia had established the "Axis of Not So Much Evil Really As Just Generally Disagreeable."

Jokes notwithstanding, the term has played an important role in stigmatizing countries so as to justify military action against them. The media, however, uncritically repeats the term until it becomes part of popular parlance. An odd and lamentable principle of human psychology, well known and exploited by everyone from advertisers to evil demagogues like Goebbels, holds that the strangest of lies can win credibility simply by repetition.

There is a number of similar Orwellian phrases promulgated by the Bushites. 'Pre-emptive defence' (what, as opposed to attack?), 'unlawful combatants' (as in "their not Prisoner's of War...."), and a war on an abstract noun spring to mind. As to whether the American media is Orwellian, I don't know. I suspect not. They can probably be excused of dishonesty on the grounds that before deceiving others, they have gone to great lengths to deceive themselves.

Kieren

by Kieren on Fri, 04/15/2005 - 20:27 | [reply](#)

Not POWs

Kieren protests that the Bush administration shouldn't describe people as 'unlawful combatants' rather than POWs. They are unlawful combatants, see [this](#) and [this](#). And defence that pre-empts an attack is pre-emptive defence, I don't understand why we should look at that as Orwellian.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Tue, 04/19/2005 - 02:02 | [reply](#)

pre-emptive defence

To call the act of attacking first, without an overt act of provocation, "pre-emptive defence" is euphemistic. The substitution of "defence" for "war" is a classic use of Orwellian doublespeak that dates back in the United States to 1947, when the Department of War was renamed the "Department of Defense."

Kieren

by a reader on Tue, 04/19/2005 - 18:51 | [reply](#)

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Science And Superstition

At a local school in Dover, Pennsylvania, the school board decided to teach students **creationism**. Their excuse for this abrogation of even the minimum of scholarly standards is a mixture of falsehood, nonsense and double talk:

“Because Darwin's Theory is a theory, it continues to be tested as new evidence is discovered. The Theory is not a fact. Gaps in the Theory exist for which there is no evidence. A theory is defined as a well-tested explanation that unifies a broad range of observations. Intelligent Design is an explanation of the origin of life that differs from Darwin's view.”

Creationism (aka “Intelligent Design”) is a worthless pseudoexplanation, the sole function of which is to resist the implications of the theory of evolution. An *explanation* of the origins of life must explain how complex organisms arose from non-biological precursors. So any purported explanation that does not include a description of such a process is inherently worthless. Furthermore, an explanation of life as we see it today must explain how adaptations (purposeful properties) come into being. So any explanation that invokes a pre-existing purpose whose origin is itself inexplicable, is also inherently worthless. And since God could have made the world any way he liked, Creationism is also untestable and anti-scientific. Its purportedly authoritative advocates are intellectually **dishonest**.

By contrast, **evolution** is a scientific theory that has survived **rigorous critical scrutiny**. Evolution explains how life arose from simple non-biological precursors, and how it acquired its adaptations. Science teachers in Dover have quite correctly refused to read out any apology for creationism because by doing so they would promote rank superstition.

However, the religious world is not alone in having worthless superstitions. Secular mental health charities like Rethink promote a view of the world based on the idea of **mental illness**. According to Rethink's worldview people take actions based on chemicals buzzing around in their brain. In reality, people act on their theories and values and not on orders from mindless **chemicals** or **fictional mental illnesses**. Unfortunately, nonsense about mental illness is what passes for serious discussion of moral issues among large and influential sections of the secular world. This, too, is an abrogation of intellectual and moral standards. For the sake of science and freedom and reason, we must abandon these secular superstitions as well.

Sat, 02/12/2005 - 14:32 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

don't overlay your hand

Evolution explains how life arose from simple non-biological

precursor

Are you sure about that?

Doesn't evolution explain how life arose from other life, and how speciation occurs, and how common descent can have happened? If the theory of evolution-proper is thought to incorporate, as well, the explanation of how "how life arose from *non-biological* precursors", it's news to me.

Seems to me for that, you need some additional hypothesis, such as "lightning + amino acid soup" (I don't actually know what the current consensus is). Another possible hypothesis might be "seeding from outer space". But whatever that hypothesis (about origins of life) it would not be essential to the theory of *evolution* per se. In other words, even if "lightning + amino acid soup" is a wrong explanation of how the first RNA/DNA formed, it wouldn't make *evolution* wrong.

That's because evolution is not *about* the origin of life from non-biological precursors. It's about "change in the gene pool of a population over time" (got this from your link). Right?

Ob. Disclaimers: I am not a "creationist". I agree that "creationism" is nonsense. I agree that evolution should be taught in schools. I see no sense in "teaching creationism" in schools. Nor in slapping "only a theory" on evolution (everything in science is "only" a theory; typically, very strong ones, and evolution is one such). IMHO those who push "creationism" are misguided and reactionary at best. I just see no sense in overplaying your hand like this.

by Blixa on Sun, 02/13/2005 - 05:15 | [reply](#)

Re: don't overlay your hand

I take your point, which is a good one. Maybe **The World** should have drawn a distinction between our best explanations of the origin of *new adaptations* in existing organisms and our best explanations the origin of *the first replicators*, since the latter explanations are much more sketchy and more rickety.

Nevertheless, in the context of the controversy between evolution and creationism, the fact that one class of scientific explanations is more sketchy and rickety than another is not relevant. The issue there is not between a better and a worse explanation, but between explanation and non-explanation.

To forbid science to claim to have explained anything until we have a theory that we are sure will never be superseded, is holding it to an impossibly high standard, one that makes the above distinction impossible to state in words. Nevertheless it is a real distinction, crucial to all progress in understanding anything.

Science was right to claim that Newton had explained, with his theories of gravity and motion, why the planets move in ellipses with the sun at one focus. It explained it, and it explained it with good, independently-testable, scientific theories, while the theory that God had ordained ellipses because their shape pleased him would have been a non-explanation.

The fact that Newton's explanation was later superseded by one that denied the existence of gravitational forces is not relevant. Nor is the fact that neither Newton's nor any other scientific theory is an *ultimate* explanation (for instance, Newton did not explain why the gravitational force obeyed an inverse square law rather than some other formula). And furthermore, though it was false, Newton's theory contained a great deal of truth that survived into Einstein's theory. It could not have been as successful as it was in its

predictions if that had not been so. The divine-fiat theory, on the other hand, is always equally 'successful' no matter what is to be explained, and hence it is always equally empty.

Similarly, evolution theory today, with its replicators and genes and mutations and selections and genotypes and phenotypes, *has* explained the origin of life. The fact that a number of possibilities are still open for the actual sequence of chemical events, does not change the fact that when Darwin proposed his first, flawed, version of the theory, something fundamentally changed: what had previously been a mystery of 'how could that possibly be?', had become a mystery of 'what, specifically, happened'. The latter is an open-ended mystery. There will never be an ultimate explanation. Even if we had a video of the formation of the original ancestor-replicator out of non-replicating components, there would still be the mystery of why the laws of physics were such as to permit things like that to happen.

There will always be great mysteries, big gaps, and also serious mistakes, and we shall always be ignorant of what lies beyond, or beneath, or in the gaps between, our knowledge. That does not change the fact that we already have genuine explanations that contain an enormous amount of truth, and that there is a significant distinction between modes of thought that seek and discover and criticise and improve these explanations, and modes that seek only to bolster a fixed non-explanation.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Sun, 02/13/2005 - 11:17 | [reply](#)

Criticism

The one criticism of evolution by creationists that seems to make sense is they come up with examples where there would be no survival advantage if only part of it was present. For example, they may point out a mechanism in a cell where 10 different elements are needed for a certain function, and if only one of them is missing the other 9 elements absolutely do not function and do not even give a very slight survival advantage, just a car without a carburetor doesn't even function a little bit better than a car with no engine at all. Then they point out that this can't be explained by incremental random mutations, as the likelihood that a mutation happens that causes all these 10 things at once is just as unlikely as all molecules in a room moving to one corner. Does anybody have a link to a good article dealing with this criticism? I am familiar with the argument that an eye can start just very simply as a single light detecting cell which gives a very slight survival advantage, where a bunch of those tiny increments eventually lead to an eye. But I haven't seen an argument dealing with cases where there is absolutely no survival advantage unless a bunch of elements arise at the same time.

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Sun, 02/13/2005 - 11:50 | [reply](#)

Re: Criticism

...cases where there is absolutely no survival advantage unless a bunch of elements arise at the same time

The generic answer given by evolutionary theory is that there are no such cases in nature. Where there are groups of improvements where none of them would be of any use unless the others also happened, these always evolved from previous small changes which *were* of use without the others happening as well.

The most often-cited alleged example of adaptations that could not

possibly come about in that way (called "irreducible complexity" by creationists) are those of the eye. But this has been debunked so often and so thoroughly by evolutionists that, perhaps, it is not cited so often nowadays. Well, there's the case of the bombardier beetle, which is debunked [here](#).

As a non-specialist, I'd say that the state of the argument as a whole is one of blind hope and unsubstantiated claims by people who don't know what they're talking about, versus thorough – if at times rather patronising – debunkings by people who do. In short, there is no evidence whatsoever of the existence of "irreducible complexity" in biological adaptations.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Sun, 02/13/2005 - 13:55 | [reply](#)

2 theories

Ok David, we're definitely on the same page then. :-) Let me reiterate my Disclaimers by emphasizing that my post is **not** to be interpreted as an attempt to "forbid science to claim to have explained anything until we have a theory that we are sure will never be superseded". I just wanted (partially for my own sake) to clear up what evolution-proper is ("new adaptation"), and that it need not include an explanation of origins ("first replicators"). Because my impression was always that they are independent from one another, and in particular we can be more sure of one than the other with no contradiction.

You acknowledge, I think, that we are less sure of the first-replicators explanation than the adaptations part that is evolution-proper. You state that we should still teach the former as part of the explanation and indeed that the different-surenesses don't matter to this conversation. I agree with only the former statement; by all means let's teach "amino acid soup+lightning" as our first-replicators best explanation, but if in doing so we don't acknowledge that we're **less sure** of it than of evolution (or, "less sure of this part of evolution" if you like), we leave ourselves open to the obvious line of attack: "You're presenting a theory as fact when even you acknowledge it's far from certain that it's true!"

I'm concerned with staving off that line of attack which is why I'd say, let's divorce the "evolution" part from the "origins" part. Evolution does not stand or fall with the origins explanation: it is true (indeed, quite obvious) whatever origins explanation is correct, or even if you select some **wrong** origins explanation. The theory of origins thought to go along with evolution, meanwhile, can (and should) be taught as a best-explanation we're relatively less sure about.

Yes all science consists of best-explanations that need never be "final", but that doesn't mean science hides the relative status of its various explanations from observers, does it? (Even if those observers are behaving in a misguided, unscientific and reactionary way - as creationists are.)

It seems to me that if you insist that "amino acid soup + lightning" (or whatever) is part of The Theory Of Evolution, it becomes one of the main chinks in its armor, and then if you still stand there and insist that "all of evolution is true, there can be no doubt!" you're, like I said, overplaying your hand. Since it's nonessential, and has a lower-certainty-value, why not split it off and call it a Theory Of Origins?

The Theory Of Evolution is obvious and true. The most-often-pushed Theory Of Origins to go with it, is certainly a reasonable

explanation (and made far more plausible because of the facts of

Evolution) but is far less obviously true. Am I wrong?

by Blixa on Sun, 02/13/2005 - 16:18 | [reply](#)

Re: 2 Theories

We do not "insist that "amino acid soup + lightning" (or whatever) is part of The Theory Of Evolution". We do say that life began as the theory of evolution says it did, when replicators formed out of non-replicating molecules according to the laws of chemistry and without any intelligent design being involved.

by **Editor** on Wed, 02/16/2005 - 17:21 | [reply](#)

Does "the theory of evolution

Does "the theory of evolution" say anything one way or another about how life began? My position, as you surely understood despite however poorly I may have phrased it, is No. Evolution, as it is usually stated and presented, actually explains how life... well... *evol/ved*, not how it "began". For that you need a theory of origins to go along with it.

If you insist I'm happy to go with your preferred formulation of "the theory of evolution" that is meant to encompass both, however. In that case, what is that theory's explanation for how "replicators formed out of non-replicating molecules"? It appears to be: they did so in some way, according to the laws of chemistry.

Is that really an "explanation"? It's practically begging the question. At the very least does it not raise a host of additional questions? Can/has this chemical replicators-from-non-replicators process be replicated? (Honestly curious, actually... come to think of it I don't actually know.) If not, why then and not now? Why does it not continually take place?

In other words, the origins-explanation is a weak link in your theory of evolution. Some gaps need to be filled in to that part of the explanation.

This doesn't mean "God" is in those gaps by any means :-). But nevertheless the existence and relative size of the gaps (with respect to the *rest* of the theory, which is quite well established!) should be explicitly acknowledged whenever that theory is presented. A stubborn refusal to do so looks, to me, like a counter-reaction to the reactionaries. And not only that, it's tactically unwise because it damages attempts to defend the remainder of the theory (which again, is quite sound).

P.S. I hate this because it makes me sound like some creationist and that's totally not what I'm about here.

by Blixa on Wed, 02/16/2005 - 21:09 | [reply](#)

Just illustrating my point....

Is this a Scientific Explanation?

Q: How did all the stars and planets form?

A: They formed from matter, according to the laws of physics.

by Blixa on Wed, 02/16/2005 - 21:17 | [reply](#)

Just illustrating

The two cases, though faintly analogous, are very different in a

relevant way. The theory of evolution was invented to solve a problem, the problem of Design, as epitomised in the Argument from Design, namely, how could the adaptations of living organisms come into existence without design. (See William Paley's brilliant version of the Argument from Design, which Darwin refuted with his theory.) A proposed mechanism that started from designed precursors would not solve that problem. Hence the Theory of Evolution has to include the assertion that the first replicators formed, without design, from un-designed precursors.

There is no equivalent problem in the case of star formation.

Moreover the 'origin' process does constitute perfectly ordinary Darwinian evolution under the standard definition, because those first replicators were formed by variation, followed by natural selection, starting with a population of non-replicator precursors.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Thu, 02/17/2005 - 00:12 | [reply](#)

violent agreement

Hence the Theory of Evolution has to include the assertion that the first replicators formed, without design, from un-designed precursors.

Fair enough. And, in your preferred version of it, it does indeed include that assertion. I even believe that assertion.

However, its explanation of how this actually happened - of *how* the first replicators formed, without design, from un-designed precursors - remains somewhat lacking. Details can, and no doubt will, be filled in to make that explanation more satisfying. At present it is not, not very.

That's all I'm saying.

That, and the fact that this should be acknowledged, explicitly, when presenting the theory of evolution to someone. It is a property of the theory of evolution, at present, that its explanation of origins is relatively un-fleshed-out. Is it not?

those first replicators were formed by variation, followed by natural selection, starting with a population of non-replicator precursors.

Probably. And I see what you're saying about that explanation - pending a filling in of the details - fitting into the rubric of evolution-proper, i.e. variation & change. It's not clear, at present, how exactly this part of evolution happened, however. At least, it's far, far less clear than how the remainder of evolution happened, which is rather obvious and ought to be completely uncontroversial.

The origin explanation is currently the weakest link in the theory of evolution, in other words. And if you simply acknowledge that, you instantaneously and effortlessly defuse any attacks on "evolution" *overall* that are based solely on pointing to that weak link. By emphasizing that different aspects of evolution are established to different degrees (or adopting my preference, and saying that it is **two** theories, "evolution" and "origins"), you prevent people from being able to use evolution's weak link against it. Which is my only aim here.

Is this really not making sense or what?

by [Blixa](#) on Thu, 02/17/2005 - 20:15 | [reply](#)

Weak link?

Before the discovery of DNA, it was not known what specific

chemicals are the 'genes' that evolution theory refers to. Nor, therefore, was it known what specific chemical reactions correspond to the processes 'replication' or 'variation'. Nevertheless, there was, at that time, no weakness in the theory that random variation and natural selection have given rise to all adaptations in nature. In particular, at that time, there was no weakness in the theory that they gave rise to the earliest (?) adaptation, replication.

There still isn't. Discovering more details about one part of the story but not another has not introduced any weakness into our explanation of the latter.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Thu, 02/17/2005 - 22:57 | [reply](#)

well, I can only say I disagree

It seems to me that (unless you've changed the definition of "weakness" from the one I was clearly using), there's weakness in a theory precisely when, and to whatever extent, that theory's various explanations are incomplete - or "sketchy" or "rickety" (which is almost a synonym of "weak"), as someone put it earlier in this thread. If explanations being sketchy and rickety doesn't connote weakness what does? If you disallow the word weakness to refer to explanations that are by your own admission rickety, I'm happy to oblige but what word shall I use instead?

So, it seems to me that before the discovery of DNA, the theory of evolution was indeed weaker than it is now. To put it another way, the discovery of DNA helped to make the theory of evolution stronger (=less weak). I doubt you would even actually disagree with that outside of the context of the current conversation (i.e. if I had asked you out of the blue, "did discovery of DNA help bolster evolution?" - well, quick, what would you have said?).

So I'm honestly not sure why you're arguing at this point.

And although it was an attempt to refute a complete 180-degree misrepresentation of my position, obviously you are correct to say that discovering more details about one part of the story but not another has not introduced any weakness into our explanation of the latter. What it has done, instead, is **strengthened** the former part of the story while leaving the latter part in its extant - and, now, relatively quite weak by comparison - state.

Which is precisely what I've been saying this whole time, without being understood evidently. Best,

by a reader on Fri, 02/18/2005 - 00:35 | [reply](#)

Not a good way to defend science

Blix

what you are proposing- emphasizing the "strong" part of evolution theory to convince people of "that part"'s correctness, if I have understood you right- is not necessarily a good method for defending scientific theories. You would only be conceding to some of their irrational demands.

First because it is in the nature of science to have loopholes in its explanation at any given time. Solving one problem always creates more problems and more unanswered questions.

Science and reliable scientific theories are defensible because no matter what their "weaknesses" are at any given time, the less successful theories are, well, less successful and/or wrong and the non-scientific "solutions" are nonsense and no real explanations at all.

Your "weakness" criterion is not really suitable, because that kind of

"strength" that you are indirectly implying is never to be found in science. By adopting this approach you would be legitimising the demand for such "strength" in scientific theories before they are "good enough" to be "believed" or adopted and that is precisely what should be avoided.

The controversy about evolution is hot because of a deeper controversy: That of denying the legitimacy of science and of superiority of the worldview that is based on it to all others based on dogma (religious or otherwise, say communist for example). This is what the religious people, among others, have been pushing for all along.

The only reason they focus on Evolution is because they think it concerns an issue that their dogma is too specific about and hence can't be pushed under the rug as easily as they had managed to do about Physics and astronomy.

Evolution comes with its explanation of what the origin of life must have been like-ie what type of mechanisms "could" have been involved. That that part has still "more" unanswered questions changes nothing. If we are to apply "weakness" to it as a result of that, the rest of the theory would be as weak and attackable.

I'm pretty sure the "creationists" would embrace Evolution if they can have that "origin" part cloudy enough for them to insert their "intelligent design" in. Exactly the same way they embraced the Big Bang theory and thus the "rest of" cosmology and physics that led us to it, once they realized they could hide their dogma in the "initial conditions" or the "moment of creation". Their real folly would still remain unchallenged...well, actually we would be worse off because it would give them more room to maneuver. They can boast even more than they do now that they have no problem with "real science" since they only disagree with the "weak" and "problematic" parts which are "still debatable".

Science comes with its unresolved problems and its strength and validity is independent of the fact that (even more) questions remain unanswered. It should be accepted the way it is with all the logical consequences of a worldview that is based on it.

by AIS on Fri, 02/18/2005 - 04:29 | [reply](#)

AIS, I have long since pas

AIS,

I have long since passed the point of becoming repetitive so all I can say is you've said nothing that's new or changes the point I've been making. Yes it's the nature of science to have holes or gaps in its explanations. Yes it should be accepted that way and failure to do so is failure to understand what science is about (and this should be explained, which David is good at doing). And yes, The Religious People are resistant to science for essentially the reasons you characterize, and yes they are factually wrong.

But it's striking how *defensive*, even insecure, you sound about science when you say things like "If we are to apply "weakness" to [origins explanation] as a result of that, the rest of the theory would be as weak and attackable."

It would? be "attackable"? I totally disagree.

You, on the other hand, (ironically) evidently don't have confidence in the theory of evolution to stand up against illogical attacks based on irrelevantly pointing at gaps in the margin. If we give an inch,

they'll take a mile, eh? We must circle the wagons around science

against these attacks from The Religious People! Show them no weakness!!

This attitude is precisely what I mean to say is reactionary and unhelpful. When there's no question but that the origins explanation is rickety and yet you (apparently) insist we not acknowledge this, it's difficult for me to distinguish that from the attitude of a religious person who refuses to acknowledge that the Bible's creation story is rickety. It may be a difference of degree but not kind.

Moreover, it's difficult to recognize the fear "we would be worse off because it would give them more room to maneuver" as a valid concern of science or someone who's intellectually honest about presenting science's best-explanations.

They can boast even more than they do now that they have no problem with "real science" since they only disagree with the "weak" and "problematic" parts which are "still debatable".

Perhaps they can, and would. Yes they would cling to that gap. Which will, at some time or another, become ever smaller. So what? Let them. Science is unharmed by this. Moreover, the smaller the gaps get, the more difficult it becomes to mythologize them, and so the ranks of The Religious People Who Resist Science will be naturally lessened, over time (though evidently not soon enough for you). In the meantime we would have always presented science's explanations honestly and sincerely - which includes acknowledging where details are sketchy, *so that scientists know what must be filled in* by the way - and let the chips fall where they may.

But in all honesty it appears to me that you, and to some extent David, are primarily concerned with culture-war here, not science.

by blixia on Fri, 02/18/2005 - 19:06 | [reply](#)

What do you mean by bolster?

"did discovery of DNA help bolster evolution?"

Depends what you mean by "bolster" here. The discovery of DNA did not make the theory of evolution "truer". Nor did it increase the probability that evolution is true (like any theory, evolution is either true or false).

by a reader on Fri, 02/18/2005 - 22:29 | [reply](#)

insecure?

No where did I say anything about "hiding" the existence of unresolved problems in any theory! What I said was simply that they are always part and parcel of scientific theories and stressing them in such a debate has no bearing on what the real issue is. I don't see how that amounts to being dishonest in presenting science, or a sign of insecurity for that matter.

What I might be "insecure" about is the way subtle issues like these can be warped and misunderstood as they spread through society and the long term consequences of such accumulated misunderstandings. The creationists are not really important by themselves, for their's has been a lost cause for a long time. The main issue (for me) is missing the forest because of the trees: using the incomplete nature of scientific theories as an excuse to shy away from the consequences of taking them seriously as descriptions of reality-as David has argued admirably in his book. I think one of the historical reasons for this resistance has been the efforts of older, once prevalent religious dogmas to "tame" science

and keep it out of certain "sensitive" regions (once they realised they couldn't stop it completely) and that this played (and still plays) a part in what has brought about the general popular cynicism and the worrisome weakening of realist philosophy today, common among an ever growing number of people who are no longer able to believe in those outdated religious dogmas either. The view of science as a "useful myth" good as a book keeping scheme is quite widespread today and although it might seem farfetched, I believe this in its own turn has been a contributing factor to the rise and popularity of all the distrust in the foundations of modern Western civilisation (that comes in different forms like multiculturalism or post-modernism, moral relativism...and even Islamism). They are arguably more harmful than the older archaic dogmas of naive faith.

That for the time being science is going forward at this rate, seemingly unharmed by such things, is partly due to the impetus acquired through centuries of struggle by people who were "insecure" enough to wage "cultural wars" - head on - to defend science as a source of real knowledge and as an alternative to dogma.

Why should that struggle be abandoned now?

by AIS on Sat, 02/19/2005 - 01:39 | [reply](#)

Serious Mental Illness is Biologically Based

There is abundant evidence of brain disease causing what is defined as "mental illness." Individuals with strokes in various parts of their brains can behave in unusual but often somewhat predictable ways, and these individuals are said to be mentally ill according to common psychiatric nomenclature.

Bipolar illness is far more genetically based than most forms of heart disease, cancer, diabetes or hypertension; involves demonstrable brain changes and quite predictable overall behavioral changes; and is certainly defined as a "mental illness" by psychiatrists.

Those with major depression after a myocardial infarction are 3-5 times more likely to suffer morbidity and mortality 6 months after their event than their non-depressed peers, and this difference is not accounted for by more severe heart disease in those with depression. Indeed, major depression after MI, in many studies, predicts cardiovascular morbidity and mortality as well as or usually better than more common predictors of future vascular injury, including smoking, hypertension, diabetes, hypercholesterolemia, etc.

In unmedicated identical twins, one of whom has schizophrenia, there are often obvious visually accessible brain changes indicative of neurodegenerative and neurodevelopmental damage. Brains, like other organs, evolve in time.

Huh? Serious mental illness with no underlying brain disease?

There is more rational and scientific basis to believe in ghosts, pyramid power, ESP, and rhino horns as aphrodisiacs, than to doubt hundreds of thousands of studies, many accessible even to a lay audience, showing the ways in which serious mental illness is caused by complicated, often genetically mediated, neurodevelopmental and neurodegenerative processes gone awry.

Nowadays, failing to recognize this, even if ignorance is the reason for the oversight, in a forum where scientists, philosophers, and apparently pseudoscientists commingle, is nearly as provocative as denying the Holocaust or denying that slavery occurred. Yes, this

stupidity injures the mentally ill and causes discrimination and hardship.

Believing that mental illness in a person is "intelligently designed" by its owner is rather ironic, in an article criticizing intelligent design in evolutionary theory.

by Michael on Wed, 02/23/2005 - 04:09 | [reply](#)

Diseases of the mind

Michael, I don't think that **The World** denies that there are brain diseases and that these diseases can have a profound affect on behaviour. **The World** is arguing against the concept of mental illness, i.e., diseases of the mind. Such "diseases" do not have a physical cluster of symptoms, but are identified by behaviour e.g., Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Depression, and (yes) Schizophrenia. Minds cannot be infected with diseases because the mind is not material.

by a reader on Wed, 02/23/2005 - 10:03 | [reply](#)

Causation (Was: Serious Mental Illness is Biologically Based)

There is abundant evidence of brain disease causing what is defined as "mental illness"

The concept of causation is tricky even in the physical sciences. David Hume, for instance, denied that there can be such a thing as *evidence of causation*. He was wrong about that (because he was wrong about what evidence is), and indeed the existence of causation is essential to every scientific explanation. But it is tricky to define, and trickier to pin down *evidence* of causation. When it comes to explanations of anything involving human opinions and decisions, it becomes even trickier, but is equally essential. I think that some of the more vitriolic and long-lasting debates in the study of human behaviour – including the nature/nurture debates about IQ and about mental illness – are caused either by entrenched, rival conceptions of causality or by confused or inadequate conceptions.

Let me give two simple examples and then ask a question.

Let's define a cause as a factor with the property that if it had been different, the effect in question would not have happened (or, perhaps, would have been less likely). I think this is the common core of all definitions of causation. You mentioned the Holocaust. There are many levels at which one could address the issue of what caused it. According to my definition above, Hitler caused the Holocaust by ordering it: had he given different orders, it would not have happened. However, by the same definition, many other factors also caused it: the propensity of the German people to condone such orders is one of them. So is the propensity of the German political system a few years earlier to bring a tyrant to power.

That all makes sense, but unfortunately, according to the above definition, it is just as true that the Holocaust was 'caused' by the attributes of the victims – particularly by the fact that they were Jews, Gypsies, etc., for if any of them had lacked those attributes, they would almost certainly have survived. If a reputable historian were to insist on using that definition, and to publish studies of the 'causes' of historical events in that sense, you can imagine what legions of bad people, and bad journalists, would immediately and forever afterwards seize on the fact that "studies have shown" that the Jews themselves caused the Holocaust. So that definition of causation is inadequate – and highly misleading as it stands – for

use in an explanation of the cause of the Holocaust.

For the same reason, if we use that definition of causation in the study of the genetic origin of any other human behaviour, we shall make equally massive mistakes. For example, we would easily conduct a scientific study and find overwhelming evidence that lynchings of black people were caused by the black people's own genes.

Now I come to my question: when you say that there is abundant evidence of brain disease causing what is defined as "mental illness", what do you mean by "causing"? Do you mean that there is evidence that if certain brain lesions detected in the victims of, say, schizophrenia, had been absent, then the victims would not have displayed schizophrenic behaviour? (I.e. the same level of evidence as that which indicates that black people's genes were a cause of lynchings or Jewish genes were a cause of the Holocaust.) Or do you mean something more?

by [David Deutsch](#) on Wed, 02/23/2005 - 11:56 | [reply](#)

Best Explanation?

David,

I think we are comfortable about denying the role of the victims' genes in lynchings or the Holocaust as causes because we have better explanations that account for the observed genetic correlations as being non-causal factors in the explanations.

Do you have a better explanation for "mental illnesses" that correlate highly with physical brain abnormalities, that accounts for these abnormalities in a non-causal role?

If you don't, on what basis should one reject what seems to be the best explanation available?

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Wed, 02/23/2005 - 20:40 | [reply](#)

What brain abnormalities?

Gil,

I categorically dispute that there are well-established correlations between physical brain abnormalities and "mental illnesses" such as depression, schizophrenia or bipolar disorder.

All that is well established is that: 1) a lot of people have published papers claiming to have found such correlations, and that the later discoveries of such correlations tend to correlate poorly with the earlier discoveries; and 2) none of these discoveries have led to effective predictive tests (or even reliable diagnostic tests) for the "mental illnesses" they are supposed to correlate with.

by [KW](#) on Wed, 02/23/2005 - 22:41 | [reply](#)

Re: Best Explanation?

But in the examples I gave, the genes are not just non-causal factors and the observed effects are not merely correlations. The genes in question are perfectly genuine, overwhelmingly significant, *causes* of the given effects. But only in one sense, not in another.

I don't want to argue for my favoured explanation here. Only that scientific observations should not be cited as evidence for something they are not evidence of.

OK

KW and David,

I'm not disputing anything you have written.

I was just playing Devil's Advocate, and wondering if there have been observations that require explanation when formulating our best theories on the issues.

Gil

by **Gil** on Thu, 02/24/2005 - 00:56 | [reply](#)

Schizophrenia: there ARE correlations with genes

There's no diagnostic test, there's no method of treatment, there's no known biological mechanism, but there *are* correlations between some identified genes and the *risk* of schizophrenia.

This is what the director of the NIH said recently:

"Today, we lack a diagnostic test or a strategy for preventing schizophrenia. This situation is similar to cardiovascular disease 30 years ago in that we see schizophrenic patients only after their first episode equivalent to a "heart attack," and we do not have the equivalent of cholesterol level as an identifiable risk factor.

However, what we have done recently — and what holds great promise for those who are suffering — is identify 12 genes associated with risk. Our challenge now is to move from the discovery of those genes—most of which have no known function—to understanding the role these genes play in the onset and progression of this brain disease—and doing something about it.

Our hope is to use these genes to identify what is abnormal in the brains of schizophrenics, identify it early and thus provide the psychiatric diagnostic equivalent of serum cholesterol level. To accomplish this, we must study the protein products of these genes by using molecular tools that can make their function transparent."

by a reader on Thu, 02/24/2005 - 18:09 | [reply](#)

Only twelve?

How can there be only twelve genes known to be [statistically] associated with increased risk of schizophrenia? Since schizophrenia is **more common in males**, every gene on the Y chromosome must have this property.

That encyclopaedia article also contains some interesting information about the large differences in schizophrenia rates, and in the frequencies of the various symptoms of schizophrenia, in different countries.

by **David Deutsch** on Fri, 02/25/2005 - 00:19 | [reply](#)

The putative genetics of schizophrenia

what we have done recently ... is identify 12 genes associated with risk [of schizophrenia]

I'll start taking such claims seriously when this "associated risk" is demonstrated in a methodologically sound **prospective study** based on prenatal or neonatal genetic sampling.

Lynching Mental Illness and the Mentally Ill

In discussing lynching, David Deutsch says, "But in the examples I gave, the genes are not just non-causal factors and the observed effects are not merely correlations. The genes in question are perfectly genuine, overwhelmingly significant, causes of the given effects. But only in one sense, not in another." Yes David, there is a difference between necessary and necessary and sufficient. And yes, some "causes" seem more important than others.

Thank you for clarifying that.

Genes are (for the most part) necessary for the formation of brains and hearts; and necessary for the evolution of diseases and people. Yes, genes are important, even necessary, but they are not necessary and sufficient for the evolution of people and their parts. You need the protoplasm stuff ... and gravity and plants and food and a few other things, too -- even atoms and electrons help! Yes, the more you think about it, causation is a complicated concept when it comes to explaining things!

And yes, black people have a skin color which causes certain deranged white people to want to act very badly to those possessing this characteristic. And yes genes, in a causal chain, "cause" individuals to have a tendency to have black skin; so in a twisted sense, genes coding for the development of black skin can cause evil people to manifest their hostilities.

The only thing I can't figure out is how this discussion of causality has anything at all to do with whether brain pathology causes serious mental illness?

Most people and virtually all physicians are comfortable with the concept that diabetes is a cause of heart disease. But if one doesn't believe that diabetes causes heart disease, because diabetes is neither completely necessary nor completely sufficient to cause heart disease, then the discussion is effectively over. If one believes that only something that is completely necessary and completely sufficient can be said to "cause" something else in medicine, then one can say that there are no "causes" in medicine at all! There is literally nothing in medicine which causes anything so completely. So yes, if diabetes does not cause heart disease, then brain disease does not cause mental illness. But this argument is trivial.

David, you were discussing lynchings and the causes of the Holocaust to make the point that nothing in medicine can be said to completely cause something else? So Hitler was not the only cause of the Holocaust, smoking is not the only cause of cancer, major depression is not the exclusive cause of worsening heart disease, and brain disease is not the only cause of mental illness? With respect, it's rather obvious that any given phenomenon in medicine (and life) has multiple causes. Don't you think? Perhaps your point is different. Perhaps you think brain disease is not an important or relevant cause of mental illness, while diabetes is an important cause of heart disease. If so, on what basis do you choose to make this distinction? Your "prejudice" should be explicitly stated.

But if you believe that diabetes is a relevant cause of heart disease, then you can also logically believe that brain disease is a relevant cause of mental illness, just as major depression is a relevant cause of heart disease progression (But none of these causes are "necessary and sufficient!").

So the issue, then, is not really causality, the issue is evidence!

When Dr. Lieberman scans the brains of individuals with schizophrenia suffering their first psychotic break, in a double-blind experiment, and randomizes half to an ineffective treatment and half to an effective treatment, then watches the brains of the ineffectively treated shrink by 12 cc's in 12 weeks; few but the most stubborn and simplistic philosophers would logically doubt that schizophrenia is a horribly destructive brain disease. When the head of the NIH says a first episode psychotic break damages the brain in the same (logical) way that a heart-attack damages the heart, he is referring to precisely this type of evidence. When these same patients with schizophrenia are followed for two years and their brains are (partially) protected by a medication and don't shrink, and when in fact there is preliminary evidence of neural regeneration, that is cause for hope.

Now, if we had known who was going to develop a first-episode psychotic break, and had premedicated them with this same medication, before their first full psychotic period; that is if we had medicated them during the "prodromal period", would this intervention have completely prevented the subsequent brain damage?

That is a question worth asking. It is a good question, because a scientifically valid answer to it could prevent hardship, pain, and loss of life.

By the way, 12 cc's is quite visible and Dr. Lieberman has created movie-like 3- dimensional images of the shrinking brains using serial brain scanning.....quite frightening since the changes are so easily and dramatically seen.

As for the reader who said the following,. "**The World** is arguing against the concept of mental illness, i.e., diseases of the mind. Such "diseases" do not have a physical cluster of symptoms, but are identified by behaviour e.g., Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Depression, and (yes) Schizophrenia. Minds cannot be infected with diseases because the mind is not material."

To my way of thinking, the concept of "material" may be a little less "physical" than you think and "mind" may be a bit more. But I am not going to be able to change your world-view. Your dualistic philosophy is apparently assumed and therefore not a scientific proposition. Let me just point out the odd logical conclusions of your stance.

One hundred years ago, grand-mal seizures were described as tonic then clonic contractions of the limbs, with lack of speaking, much drooling, and frequent incontinence. (Yes, ALL of these "symptoms" are "just" BEHAVIORS)

And one hundred years ago there were those, just like some of the readership of **The World**, who claimed that these seizures could not be "diseases" because the condition was not described as a "physical cluster of symptoms" (to quote the critic above), but rather the condition was defined by behavior (tonic clonic movement of limbs and such). Indeed, individuals with seizures were housed in psychiatric facilities (with the rest of the poor souls who didn't have real "diseases".) Yes, ideas do have consequences. Not only were the mentally ill mistreated, so were those with epilepsy!

I also want to point out to my critic above that given your conceptions, grand-mal seizure behaviors, and especially temporal lobe seizure behaviors, until relatively recently, were not thought of as manifestations of brain disease. Rather they were thought to be manifestations of decisions made by individuals or of an invasion of evil spirits into the body. Amazing how this "cluster" of "behaviors"

became a disease in a few short years!! Between you and me, I bet grand mal epilepsy was a "disease" 100 years ago, just as it is today. What do you think?

Our minds allow us to organize events on various scales. We can look at the movement of muscle fiber in an arm on a molecular level (carbon compounds interacting with carbon compounds) we can look at the firing of neurons as they innervate an arm muscle (the physical "symptom" level, or we can watch the whole arm move as a consequence of its neuromuscular innervations.(i.e. we can watch the arms behavior) I'm not sure that one level is philosophically or scientifically superior to the other. We stimulate the occipital lobe of the brain, the person reports seeing colors. We stimulate the temporal lobes at key places, the person reports hearing things. We stimulate the motor cortex and limbs move. By any logical conception, stimulating the brain caused these BEHAVIORS, although as yet the mechanisms are not fully understood.

Would it not be odd if the brain (but no other organ in the body) could not malfunction and so cause inappropriate activation of particular brain areas, such that the initial visible manifestation of this brain malfunction was an observable "cluster of behaviors". Just as diabetes (by as yet not completely known mechanisms) causes deterioration in those with coronary artery disease, brain malfunction (by as yet not completely known mechanisms) causes deterioration in behavior.

What very obvious "symptoms" would a malfunctioning brain present with, if not abnormal clusters of unusual behaviors, otherwise known as "mental illnesses"? The brain is the organ of behavior, so when it malfunctions in "mental illness", the symptom clusters presented are behavioral in origin. To not believe in the existence of mental illness, one either has to believe that the brain cannot malfunction, or that the brain is not the organ of behavior!

And to my other critic (!?)

"There's no diagnostic test (yea, basically correct)

"There's no method of treatment"

.....No, that's quite wrong. I would invite you (or anyone with good intentions) to come to the psychiatric hospital and witness dramatic and often remarkable changes in many (but not all) patients with schizophrenia and other mental illnesses, once treated. It would not take more than a few months of observation, and your preconceptions would just evaporate. It's one thing to engage in philosophical speculation, and another to see things with your own eyes. ...I told some of my patients and their family members about the remarkable conversations taking place on this web site. They gave me a quizzical look and then uniformly laughed (a gentle laugh) I think many writing for this web site could learn a lot from the mentally ill!

"There's no known biological mechanism"

...Sort of. There's also no known biological mechanism for most "diseases" including hypertension, diabetes, bipolar disease, etc. Perhaps one could reasonably argue that there are better biological explanations of diabetes than schizophrenia, but we're still not doing so well in fully explaining (let alone defining) most medical illnesses, including diabetes. Unfortunately doctors are better treaters than diagnosticians. Just the way it is right now.

And....

"I'll start taking such claims seriously when this 'associated risk' is

demonstrated in a methodologically sound, prospective study based

on prenatal or neonatal genetic sampling”

To the author K.W., how much money do you have? To my knowledge, such human studies have not been done for most diseases with known genetic precipitants and causes. Do you really believe that specific human genes are not involved in the formation of corneas, because nobody has done a “methodologically sound, prospective study based on prenatal or neonatal genetic sampling” to find the specific genes which code for the proteins that lead to the development of corneas?

Finally, thank you for giving me the opportunity to respond to those commenting on my comments.

Michael

By the way, it is truly an honor to correspond with David Deutsch in one of multiple universes. I’ve loved your writing and your books.

by Michael on Sat, 02/26/2005 - 05:49 | [reply](#)

Re: Lynching Mental Illness and the Mentally III

Michael -

You raised the example of epilepsy as a brain disease that was first identified by its affect on behaviour. You pointed out that this disease was incorrectly classified as mental illness and that this classification led to unfortunate consequences for sufferers of the disease. I don't deny that there are brain diseases, nor that these diseases can affect behaviour, nor that the first indications of a brain disease may be behavioural. I do deny, however, that there is such a thing as mental illness. In the epilepsy example you in fact agree that epilepsy is not a mental illness. Your example is a fine example of the dangers of taking a set of behaviours and attributing them to a mental illness.

The term "mental illness" is an oxymoron. That which is mental cannot become ill. You say that the brain is the organ of behaviour. This is like saying the stomach is the organ of digestion or that the heart is the organ of circulation. But to make this analogy is to miss a crucial difference. People act according to the theories and values they hold to be true. Stomachs and hearts do not. To understand a stomach or heart, physics and biology suffices. To understand behaviour, we need non-physical modes of explanations. For example, George Bush's took the decision to invade Iraq because he believes that defeating certain types of tyranny is the best way to prevent future terrorist attacks. Knowing just the neurochemistry of George Bush's brain would not enable us to figure that out. George Bush's theories and values cannot become ill, or be infected with disease, although he may change some of his theories and values as a result of becoming ill. Now holding certain theories and values may cause distinctive changes to the brain, but we cannot "cure" a person of their theories and values by physically trying to undo the changes. That is to misunderstand how knowledge generation works.

by Erda Rae on Sun, 02/27/2005 - 01:36 | [reply](#)

Erda want to chat? you left

Erda want to chat? you left no contact info :(AIM curi42 or email curi AT curi.us

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sun, 02/27/2005 - 01:59 | [reply](#)

Don't blame Intel for security flaws in Internet Explorer

Michael,

The reason I believe the formation of corneas is genetically determined -- even though there have been no studies to identify the relevant genes -- is the same as why I believe that unexplained perturbations in the orbit of astronomical objects are due to the gravitational effect of unseen companions; namely that the general theory that morphology is genetically determined (and that orbits are gravitationally determined) has no serious rivals.

However when it comes to explaining human behaviour the situation is quite different. The difference is that there exists neither a known explanation for how genes shape human behaviour, nor is there a single unambiguous prospective study showing the existence of a correlation between genetic and behavioural variations, such as "mental illnesses" or non-pathological intellectual or psychological attributes.

Therefore the belief that genes determine human behaviour is predicated entirely on the analogy with biological attributes that are known to be genetically determined (including the behaviour of lower animals). But the validity of this analogy is suspect for the same reason as would be the dogma that because computers are just machines therefore variations in their "behaviour" must be determined by variations in their hardware design.

It is only in the context of this tendentious analogy that the alleged evidence supporting the genetic causation of variations in human behaviour seems at all credible. By the normal standards of science the evidence is astonishingly poor. The fact that the academic community seems oblivious to this state of affairs just shows that we are dealing with a scientific dogma rather than a scientific theory.

Seen in this light, and pending a good prospective study that demonstrates the existence of a genes-to-human-behaviour correlation, I think scepticism about genetic explanations of human behaviour is entirely justified.

by KW on Wed, 03/02/2005 - 13:58 | [reply](#)

Genetic Explanation of Cornea Development

Actually the specific and detailed effects of genes on the development of the cornea have been the subject of **a great deal of scientific study**.

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 03/02/2005 - 15:48 | [reply](#)

schizophrenia and gender

Deutsch wrote

'How can there be only twelve genes known to be [statistically] associated with increased risk of schizophrenia? Since schizophrenia is more common in males, every gene on the Y chromosome must have this property'.

This is untrue. Schizophrenia is no more common in males. The disease has an equal gender ratio. Males, however, tend to be affected earlier (mean 23yrs vs mean 28yrs) and more severely (i.e. males have a poorer prognosis).

Kieren.

Diseases vs. Syndromes

Diabetes (particularly type II), Hypertension, the Coronary Syndrome, Migraine/Tension Headaches, Major Depression, and many other illnesses are all considered "syndromes" because they have multiple causes and multiple effects and their definitions provide information about diseased organs and cells, but are not the diseased parts themselves. The mental illness called Major Depression, for example, is defined by what people say and do. But what people say and do is obviously not the disease itself, because it is the brain that is malfunctioning. Unusual responses of people to questions, however, can provide information about a malfunctioning brain. But recognizing that mental illness is a medical syndrome hardly makes mental illness unique, because most medical "diagnoses" have similar attributes!

For example, elevated fasting blood sugar (defining the diabetes syndrome) is not the disease itself, but rather is a manifestation of deficient cellular capacity to remove sugar from the blood stream, inadequate pancreatic capacity to produce insulin, and multiple known and unknown imbalanced metabolic factors. Often there are unknown mechanisms that cause abnormal metabolism, malfunctioning cells, and an abnormal pancreas; but elevated blood sugar is a final common result of the imbalances. Nonetheless, it is the elevated blood sugar that defines the illness, not the underlying pathophysiology!

Similarly, answers to interview questions define, for example the mental illness Major Depression; but Major Depression is a consequence of abnormal underlying brain physiology, and much of this underlying pathophysiology is still, just as with diabetes, unknown. Major Depression is the syndrome; underlying brain pathology is the disease. ST-T segment changes recorded on the "12-lead EKG" help define the "coronary syndrome", but elevations (or depressions) of ST-T wave segments on a piece of paper are hardly a "disease." When a patient is said to be suffering from a syndrome that is an illness, this illness gives information about a pathophysiological state, but is not the state itself!

Because elevated blood sugar is a consequence of an underlying pathophysiological state, just lowering blood sugar does not prevent all complications of the underlying disease. Insulin lowers blood sugar and helps to treat the abnormal metabolic state, but even those on enough insulin to keep their blood sugar low, still lose kidney function, heart function, and brain function. Elevated fasting blood sugar defines the syndrome called "diabetes," but elevated blood sugar is not the disease itself, or else just lowering the blood sugar would solve all the problems associated with diabetes, and insulin does not.

Another characteristic of syndromes is that their definitions are inherently subjective. Type II Diabetes, Hypertension, Major Depression, Migraine and Tension Headaches, and the Coronary Syndrome are defined by a committee of learned experts sitting in a room! Mental Illnesses are by no means the only "subjectively" defined syndromes.

I know the general public and no doubt some of the readers of "**The World**" wish this were not so, but just because something is subjectively defined, does not mean that the definitions are not clinically useful! The problem is that for much of medical practice, most "illnesses" are in fact subjectively defined entities (called syndromes). Syndromes are useful to know about, even if the underlying pathophysiology of a condition is not completely

understood, because they help physicians to predict other events of consequence (like pain or death) and because their "treatment" often (but not always) reduces the likelihood of the emergence of these events of consequence. Indeed, on a practical and historical level, syndromes will often gain prominence and be more formally recognized, precisely because they help predict other outcomes of consequence. In addition, syndromes often are defined because their treatment will decrease pain or suffering – even if the underlying pathophysiology of the syndrome is barely understood.

"Ahh," a critic could say, but a syndrome like Hypertension is measurable and Major Depression is not. Yes, the diagnosis of hypertension is relatively reliably made by a carefully trained person placing a properly fitting "blood pressure cuff" (sphygmomanometer) on a person's arm and then comparing the systolic and diastolic blood pressure measurements to a table of values defined by a group of experts. If the readings are "too high", according to an expert consensus panel, the patient is defined to have the syndrome, Hypertension. But a skilled clinical interviewer using a "SCID" diagnostic instrument can reliably diagnose Major Depression, also. Asking a series of questions and coding the patients' responses allows this diagnosis to be made. Once again, just like with Hypertension, experts define the mental illness called "Major Depression".

But even if it is granted that both Hypertension and Major Depression can be reliably diagnosed, a proposition that is really not debatable any more because of so much scientific/statistical evidence: Is not Hypertension somehow a more valid diagnosis? Obviously, one doesn't die directly of a subjectively defined syndrome like Hypertension; but do not the consequences of Hypertension predictably lead to terribly outcomes like death from coronary artery obstruction? How does one die from Major Depression?

Perhaps then Hypertension is a real medical illness, but Major Depression is not because of the morbidity that can be predicted after a diagnosis is made. Some individuals could die from suicide, as a consequence of Major Depression, but the act of suicide could arguably be considered more voluntary than developing clogged coronary arteries in someone dying from Hypertension. So perhaps Hypertension is a real illness because it leads to a real and measurable outcome (e.g. death), while Major Depression is not, because it does not seem to lead to any specific outcome that could not also be attributed to individual volition.

But patients with Hypertension certainly do make choices about diet and exercise and these choices do affect the way in which Hypertension changes coronary arteries. So perhaps coronary obstruction from Hypertension (like suicide from Major Depression) results from the voluntary choices of those with Hypertension, after all.

On the other hand, are there not some individuals who die from the consequences of Hypertension, even though they strictly followed dietary and exercise recommendations?"

So Hypertension (would seem) to cause a patient to have less control of his own death than Major Depression, because suicidal behavior in the depressed patient involves a degree of volition, whereas even those who properly eat and exercise could still die from Hypertension. So from this (in my view incorrect) perspective, Hypertension but not Major Depression is a "real illness" because one can predict certain clear-cut outcomes with Hypertension that are potentially independent of the patient's (or other people's choices.)

So real illnesses like Hypertension, unlike supposedly invented

illnesses like Major Depression, must be reliably diagnosed, there must be clearly measurable deleterious outcomes, and there must be at least some instances of the syndrome in which the individual's choices (and the choices of others) are virtually irrelevant to the ultimately bad outcomes. From this perspective, a real illness or syndrome must have some existence independent of individuals' choices and the choices made by others.

The relevant question then is: Does Major Depression, like Hypertension, also have a "life of its own", independent of the choices of people? If not, then solving the problem of Major Depression and other Mental Illnesses necessitates helping the afflicted to reason more effectively, but does not involve treating a medical syndrome, per se. From this perspective, diagnosing the mental illness Major Depression does nothing more than define a group of individuals who have not been taught to think correctly or solve particular problems very well. Philosophers and logicians, not physicians, should then treat it

Unfortunately for those who "don't believe" in mental illness, the argument that mental illness does not exist because people choose their behavior and speech, though plausible 20 years ago, is no longer valid today. Mental illnesses cause bodily deterioration at least as powerfully as many physical illnesses like Hypertension do. In fact, when the mental illness called Major Depression is compared to the physical illness called Hypertension, in terms of the syndromes' respective power to predict, for example, morbidity and mortality from coronary artery disease: Major Depression has been found to be at least as large and usually a larger risk factor for morbidity and mortality.

And it has been refuted that this association is an artifact caused by those with more severe heart disease calling themselves more "depressed," or those with Major Depression not complying with treatment. (Indeed those with Major Depression seem to have less severe heart disease when they present to the cardiologist complaining of chest pain; their coronary arteries just deteriorate faster).

Explanations are controversial but follow several lines of reasoning. Those with Major Depression tend to have increased cardiovascular reactivity to day-to-day events that individuals experience. These increased physiological responses are known to independently predict morbidity and mortality, possibly by increasing shear stress on vessel walls. This damage to the vessel wall may then lead to faster progression of plaques or increased likelihood that the plaque will burst into the lumen of the vessel. Other reasons include the fact that those with Major Depression have increased platelet aggregation and a greater tendency toward arrhythmias, probably due to increased vascular and neurological reactivity to stressful situations. In addition those with Major Depression (experiencing stress) have a decreased proportion of parasympathetic to sympathetic control of their heart's normal "beat to beat" variability (decreased "heart period" variability), and this is a known risk factor for death as well. In any case, Major Depression predicts progression of coronary artery disease at least as well as Hypertension in most studies in which they have been compared.

So like Hypertension, a committee of experts defines Major Depression, both syndromes are reliably diagnosed from a statistical perspective, and both lead to predictable and obviously negative outcomes (e.g. death). In both, to some extent, these outcomes are independent of the choices and effort of individuals with the illness.

We know that these deleterious cardiovascular outcomes are to

some extent independent of the efforts of individuals with Major Depression, because in one relatively large study involving thousands of patients with coronary artery disease and depression, making the choice to engage in "cognitive behavioral therapy" to treat their depression, DID NOT improve cardiovascular outcomes (ENRICHED). So even when patients work to learn to think more "rationally" (cognitive behavioral therapy) this treatment did not alter the progression of coronary artery disease. On the other hand in the same study, those with the most refractory depressions were allowed to receive SSRI antidepressant medication and morbidity was substantially reduced. In studies by Sauer and others, use of SSRI antidepressants is associated with decreased death rates in smokers, but the reasons for these results are not fully understood and much larger prospective trials are in process. Our group has published and is publishing data showing that SSRI antidepressants effectively decrease blood pressure variance, just as they seem to decrease extreme emotional vacillation during stressful situations in patients with Major Depression. Emotional and physical reactivity to stress in patients with a "unipolar" Major Depression are likely decreased by SSRI antidepressants.

So like Hypertension, Major Depression has a "life of its own" independent of the choices of those afflicted, and in particular Major Depression is at least as large a risk factor for death from progression of coronary artery disease, in studies in which Hypertension and Depression have been compared.

Therefore, the responses of patients to questions about their "mood" enables physicians to diagnose Major Depression. When a patient has this diagnosis, it enables physicians to make statistical predictions about the course of coronary disease and these predictions are at least as powerful as predictions made using a blood pressure cuff.

A syndrome is not a pathophysiological state. A syndrome is a consequence of a pathophysiological state. The field of medicine recognizes "syndromes" because they can help predict events that human beings care about and because "treatment" of syndromes, even when the underlying pathophysiology is not completely understood, reduces human suffering. These distinctions are clearly understood by physicians, and I would think by readers of the World.

Perhaps some readers of the World may consider physicians "sloppy" in their naming of syndromes like Hypertension, the Coronary Artery Syndrome, Migraine Headache, and Major Depression; but physicians and the general public are well aware that answers to questions are not a disease, a systolic blood pressure recording is not a disease, a blood sugar recording is not a disease, and lines on an EKG recording are not a disease; though all can predict disease.

The World is usually very careful to see various phenomena in context. For example when **The World** discusses Israel, it is recognized that Israel is at war and therefore alleged human rights violations are discussed in the context of this war. It is also understood that there are far worse abuses seen in countries around the world and in the Middle East. But most of these far more egregious human rights abuses are never mentioned. It is properly considered irrational to hold Israel to a standard that applies to no other nation. To do so is considered discrimination.

Why then must the World attack the phenomenon of mental illness, when similar attacks are logically as applicable to most other syndromes, indeed most diagnoses in the field of medicine? Do your headaches really not exist just because they are defined by a committee of experts and treated based upon your subjective

reports to your doctor? Should no research money go to treating headache syndromes just because the pathophysiology is not well understood? Anyone who has ever taken a Tylenol for a "Tension" headache understands all too well the reality of the affliction. Why then is it so hard to understand the reality of mental illness syndromes? Are we so solipsistic that we must experience mental illness ourselves before we understand its reality?

by Michael on Sat, 03/26/2005 - 00:07 | [reply](#)

Cause of "Mental Illness, Schizophrenia"

A new site has proposed a completely different theory for the disorganized thinking a psychotic beliefs we usually call "Mental Illness."

The examples of psychotic episodes associated with Qi Gong, the slow motion martial arts exercise and Kundalini Yoga are used as a model to explain the late adolescence onset of schizophrenia.

A common but little known feature of human physiology, a conflict of physiology related to the vision startle reflex, is known to cause a sudden dissociative/psychotic episode in Knowledge workers. The problem was discovered in the 1950/60's and the Cubicle solved it there.

Qi Gong and Kundalini Yoga demonstrate a 3000-year history for this phenomenon.

It has not occurred to anyone that the problem those designers and engineers discovered is one of physiology not desks, chairs, and repeating detectable movement in a business office.

Visit <http://VisionAndPsychosis.Net>. Start with the Demonstration page and the Everquest Connection. The site is over seven megabytes of text.

by [a reader](#) on Sun, 05/08/2005 - 01:11 | [reply](#)

Re: the Cubicle

Chronic Cubicle Syndrome.

by [Editor](#) on Sun, 05/08/2005 - 01:26 | [reply](#)

Serious Mental Illness is Hereditary

Professor David Deutsch is a physicist known for his brilliance in interpreting quantum mechanical principles and for his original theoretical ideas on quantum computing. And he apparently has some thought-provoking and interesting views on mental illness, as well.

In my view, his ideas about the mentally ill are quite wrong and even bigoted, but he is wrong in interesting ways, worthy of exploration.

Professor Deutsch, in editorial comments on his "[Setting the World to Rights](#)" blog, believes that illnesses of the mentally ill are "fake" and that studies demonstrating heritability of mental illness ("behavior") are seriously flawed because of misinterpretations of the concept of heritability. I presume that if Professor Deutsch felt that mental illnesses were meaningfully (technically "directly") heritable, he would change his mind about mental illnesses being "fake". For if genes meaningfully

A. Caused internal pathophysiological abnormalities which

subsequently caused brain damage, behavioral disorders, and reduced capacity for rational thinking, and if

B. These disorders were known to be mostly independent of the choices of the individual afflicted or others, and

C. These mental illnesses caused significant pain and suffering then,

it certainly would be hard to avoid calling these illnesses "real"! I think that is why it is important for those who don't wish to recognize mental illness to argue against hereditary factors as causative factors in the development of mental illness.

Some play semantic games to disenfranchise those with mental illness. For example a reader of the World Blog writes that the mind cannot be "infected with disease" so mental illnesses don't exist, forgetting, for example, that illnesses of the mind are syndromes, defined by their symptoms. And no syndrome, whether mental or physical can be "infected" with disease. A depressed mood in the syndrome "major depression, cannot be "infected by disease" any more than an elevated fasting blood sugar, in the type 2 diabetes syndrome! Mental illnesses and for example type 2 diabetes are defined by their symptoms but with multiple underlying causes that we don't yet understand. .

And multiple illnesses in medicine must be defined by their symptoms because of incomplete scientific understanding. Syndromes are useful and predictive substitutes for a complete description of a pathophysiological state. The language of "syndromes" creates a terminology amongst professionals that allows for treatment and research into conditions that often have a poorly understood genetic/pathophysiological basis but nonetheless cause pain and suffering and predict the evolution of other diseases and syndromes. Yet the editors don't disenfranchise those with: migraine headaches, "restless legs", chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), the coronary syndrome, and (as mentioned) type 2 diabetes -- all syndromes defined by their symptoms and not the underlying pathophysiology. Indeed, we understand the underlying causes of very few illnesses in medicine, but should we therefore say that virtually all illnesses in medicine are "fake" and none should be recognized and treated? We are often very good at helping to treat syndromes like type II diabetes and major depression, even if we don't know what causes them.

Some may want to say that mental illnesses are "fake" because there is no (identified at this point) specific "lesions" to point to. But where is the identified "lesion" in type 2 diabetes? [A damaged pancreas is an "effect" of the underlying (mostly unknown) metabolic abnormalities, not the cause!]. The fact that hereditary mental illness is more strongly genetically influenced than most other illnesses treated in medicine, implies that there are internal abnormal gene products causing cellular and neuro-architectural abnormalities i.e. "lesions" if that nomenclature is preferred. And we have certainly identified "lesions" that are the effect of mental illness (damaged hearts and brains, for example) as there are "lesions" that are the effects of other systemic illnesses like diabetes (damaged eyes, kidneys, and pancreas'). So, yes there are "lesions" in hereditary mental illness, as there are lesions in other most other illnesses, both causing and as a consequence of these syndromes.

But for some reason, Professor Deutsch attempts to disenfranchise the mentally ill by claiming that their hereditary mental illnesses could all be "caused...., 100%" by their choices as if other illnesses do not equally (or usually more so) involve "choices".

Responding to a reader who was defending the genetic basis of a

developmental disability (Aspergers's), Professor Deutsch says,

".....it is perfectly possible for a given behaviour to be 100% caused by "part of the brain not functioning ... due to genes ... [that] ... render a person unable to will themselves out", and yet also to be 100% due to the way other people have behaved towards that person, or 100% due to the person's own choices."

But, it is easier to argue that type II diabetes and/or the most common type of coronary artery disease are "100%" caused by people's choices, than to make a similar argument for hereditary mental illness syndromes like bipolar disease or schizophrenia. After all, we know that coronary artery disease can be at least partially reversed by lifestyle and nutritional choices (Ornish) without use of medications. Similarly, early Type II diabetes can often be eliminated (or more likely delayed) by substantial weight loss and very regular exercise. It is at least arguable (although data is not available) that given these results, if intensive dietary modification and exercise had begun as children, coronary artery disease (if not caused by hereditary dyslipidemias), might be completely avoided in most if not all those who subsequently develop it! If this were true, we could argue that common types of coronary artery disease were "100%" caused by people's choices, despite having a hereditary component. Similar evidence of reversibility has *NOT* been found for those who have developed bipolar illness and schizophrenia. Even those with bipolar disease and schizophrenia who are perfectly compliant with medications, therapy, exercise, nutritional interventions; nonetheless frequently experience relapses, although less frequently than the non-compliant.

Our multiple studies of heritability of mental illness, as well as frequent clinical experience, similarly shows us that even when children are adopted at birth into loving homes surrounded by generations of mentally healthy offspring, those adopted, if genetically related to biological families horribly afflicted by serious mental illness, often develop serious mental illness. This occurs, despite heroic efforts of very concerned parents and family members. And studies also reveal that adopted children from biological families of origin with no hereditary mental illnesses, usually do not develop hereditary mental illness even if adopted into families in which such conditions affect every generation.

Most doctors and scientists agree that hereditary mental illness syndromes are as real as any other syndromes in medicine, and are not waiting for Professor Deutsch's approval to treat patients! In fairness, however, I think Professor Deutsch would honestly acknowledge that his opinions are in the minority, but he would correctly tell us that that does not make him wrong. Nonetheless, when a famous physicist declares mental illness "fake," he implicitly states that literally hundreds of studies cited by the National Institute of Health are fundamentally flawed because of misinterpretation of results. That takes a good bit of chutzpah!

Unfortunately, Professor Deutsch does not say much about his, in my opinion, radical sociological theories that attempt to call mental illnesses "fake" and try to explain away heritability of mental illness as "choice"; but readers of this blog can get a (slightly) better insight into his thinking by reading more of his actual responses in the section "On Fake Diseases", "Science and Superstition", and "Mad vs. Bad," on his **"Setting the World to Rights"** blog, as I cite just a few of his quotes.

And here are a few of Professor Deutsch's direct quotes, to get a feel for his thinking in this area. The responses I quote first are to a letter that I wrote to the **"Setting the World to Rights"** blog when I claimed (I thought modestly!) that bipolar illness is "genetically based" (to my reading of the data 50-90%) and that biological

factors help to create (or cause) certain mental illnesses. The next set of quotes from Professor Deutsch are directed to a different reader.

Professor Deutsch -- "Let's define a cause as a factor with the property that if it had been different, the effect in question would not have happened (or, perhaps, would have been less likely). I think this is the common core of all definitions of causation....."

....., but unfortunately, according to the above definition, it is just as true that the Holocaust was 'caused' by the attributes of the victims – particularly by the fact that they were Jews, Gypsies, etc., for if any of them had lacked those attributes, they would almost certainly have survived.....

For the same reason, if we use that definition of causation in the study of the genetic origin of any other human behaviour, we shall make equally massive mistakes. For example, we would (sic) easily conduct a scientific study and find overwhelming evidence that lynchings of black people were caused by the black people's own genes..."

David Deutsch

Or, in a discussion of the causes of a developmental disorder, Aspergers, that Professor Deutsch titles, "Fake Diseases, Empty Explanations", a reader tried to counter Deutsch's unusual arguments against Aspergers by saying,

Reader -- "Given that Asperger Syndrome is much more frequent in monozygotic than fraternal twins, I think many brain doctors would say that it does have a genetic component."

To which Professor Deutsch responded,
Deutsch -- "It's true that they would. It's also true that they invariably become evasive when it is pointed out that by this definition of "have a genetic component", being the victim of racist attacks also "has a genetic component", as does being the beneficiary of favouritism due to one's looks.

The Reader also said,
Reader -- "It seems perfectly conceivable that there is simply a part of the brain that is not functioning, and that this is likely to be due to genes interacting with environment in ways that render a person unable to will themselves out this situation."

To which Professor Deutsch responded (as already noted above)

".....it is perfectly possible for a given behaviour to be 100% caused by "part of the brain not functioning ... due to genes ... [that] ... render a person unable to will themselves out", and yet also to be 100% due to the way other people have behaved towards that person, or 100% due to the person's own choices.

Therefore, even setting aside the philosophical complexities of the terms "conceivable" and "unable", the idea that a behaviour is "due to genes" has essentially no content in the absence of some theory about what sort of 'interaction with the environment' is deemed to be the mechanism through which the behaviour in question is 'due to genes'."

Professor Deutsch apparently wishes to argue that all of the studies looking at heritability of mental illnesses are completely irrelevant in terms of suggesting that heredity, rather than peoples choices, can help account for the development of complex behavioral disorders. The idea is that choices of people do not (necessarily) diminish just because a behavior has an increased risk of occurrence due to genetic factors. Indeed, to Professor Deutsch, saying that a behavioral syndrome is heritable says nothing about whether the

individual or someone else may have caused the behavior "100%".

This will certainly be a surprising conclusion to most brain scientists, geneticists, and probably to most scientists in general, but I will show later how someone could in fact come to this conclusion, but only in a few very special situations (two of which Professor Deutsch cites above), and virtually no situations that have much to do with serious mental illness. But Professor Deustch is a bright man, and so should not be dismissed, even though I believe most neurobiologists and biobehavioral geneticists would radically disagree with most of his conclusions about mental illness.

According to the National Institute of Health, data from more than 40 family and twin studies over 60 years clearly shows that bipolar illness is heritable. In the twin studies, estimates of concordance in monozygotic ("identical") twins range from 33-90% and in dizygotic ("fraternal twins") just 0-16%. In a large and rigorous study, cited by the NIH, concordance rates were 62% for monozygotic twins and only 8 % for dizygotic twins with a heritability estimate of 59%. However, in another study with the largest number of twins pairs evaluated, heretability of bipolar illness was found to be an astounding 85% (McGuffin P Arch Gen Psych, 2003). This is a figure as high or higher than most other heritable illnesses with polygenetic origins. These figures clearly show that genetic factors dramatically increase the risk of development of bipolar illness.

Observed heritability is less in essential hypertension (the most common type of hypertension), type I diabetes, and death from coronary artery disease. Since bipolar illness is heritable and genes code for proteins, differences in gene frequencies in those with and without bipolar illness imply structural and therefore physiological (likely cellular) differences in those predisposed to bipolar illness. And unlike genetic differences in hair or eye color, the genetic/structural differences in individuals who develop bipolar illness cause remarkable disability. In one of the best studies of brain differences in those with bipolar disorder (Nature, 1997), Drevets showed that those with bipolar disorder have 40% less gray matter volume relative to normal controls. Those with bipolar illness die an average of 9 years earlier than those not afflicted (Hirschfield, 2003).

Unmedicated first episode (first psychotic break) patients with schizophrenia (a 40-50% heritable illness) also show dramatic differences in brain structure relative to normal controls, and we now have sequential brain imaging studies of significant brain degeneration over two years in patients with schizophrenia suffering their first psychotic break, when given suboptimal pharmacotherapy versus optimal pharmacotherapy (Lieberman JA, ACNP 2002).

Previous data has shown that the same effective treatment offered to patients with schizophrenia (vs. ineffective treatment or placebo) leads to improvements in multiple measures of cognitive functioning (Wirshing). In other words, modern pharmacological treatment of schizophrenia preserves brain structure and enhances brain functioning (for example cognition) in individuals suffering a first psychotic break, at least over two years.

And for those readers and editors who don't understand the phenomenon of mental illness or the magnitude of the problem, and so prefer to make fun of individuals with schizophrenia (e.g. the "Qi Gong" reader), I would suggest meeting someone suffering with a first psychotic episode. Psychotic/hallucinating individuals often frighten themselves and all concerned, and even those who are making fun of them may learn a touch of compassion when observing someone so tortured by hallucinations and fear. No, psychotic behavior cannot just be imagined by the disinterested

philosopher or physicist: Learning about the mentally ill, like learning about physics, sometimes requires getting your hands dirty.

Remarkably enough Professor Deutsch singles out mental illness for approbation (amongst all illness with genetically mediated risks) by attempting to theoretically argue against any "genetic" (or even brain state) explanation of abnormal behavior. He claims that seeming genetic causality could also be explained ("100%") by the "choice" of an individual and/or "100%" by the "choice" of another. Professor Deutsch does not explain in detail how, despite obvious evidence to the contrary, "choice" could explain the known evidence for heritability of mental illness, preferring instead to give two examples of poorly interpreted hypothetical studies (that he concocts) to argue that the thousands of existing studies of heritability in bipolar illness and other illnesses could all be misleading.

One hypothetical study involves scientists trying to find the causes of "lynching" of black people, by examining the black person's genes! Another hypothetical study involves trying to find the causes of advancement in society, by examining the genetics of attractive and unattractive people. He uses these examples of the inappropriate use of genetic formulas, as if somehow acknowledging this possibility implies that hundreds of studies calculating hereditary factors in mental illness are all wrong.

Unfortunately, he says so little in his discussion and expects the arguments to be so self-evident that I am forced to try to fill in the details of his own arguments. And of course, as with most phenomena, the "devil is in the details". Once his own examples are explored in more detail, it becomes very obvious that hereditary mental illness has little or nothing to do with his examples!

Professor Deutsch is seriously wrong in a number of ways.

1. Hereditary mental illness is not "chosen". Rather, it restricts choice.
2. There are no "alternative" psychological explanations for hereditary mental illnesses that do not themselves strongly implicate hereditary factors.
3. High heritability estimates cannot be explained away by a radical sociological theory positing that heritable mental illness is actually caused by reaction to a genetically mediated characteristic to which others then respond (like black skin causing lynching). Instead high heritability, in the contemporary meaning of the term, implies genetically caused, internally created, physiological differences between those at risk and not at risk for developing the illness.
4. Mental Illness is hardly unique amongst medical illnesses in being caused by multiple etiologies, and so attempts to isolate the mentally ill, intentionally or unintentionally, promote bigotry.

SEVERE MENTAL ILLNESS IS NOT CHOSEN, IT RESTRICTS CHOICE, WHETHER CAUSED BY HEREDITARY FACTORS OR NOT

After Freud, it was commonly thought that mental illnesses, even schizophrenia and bipolar type illnesses, were caused by people's conscious or unconscious choices. Although this ideology was potentially liberating for individuals with neuroses and milder mental illnesses, because it returned ultimate responsibility to the individual; this view nonetheless added to the stigma already attached to those with serious mental illness. No matter what sick patients chose and no matter what their family members and friends chose, those with severe mental illnesses and their families were, in point of fact, stuck with horrible illnesses and their

consequences

Yet others, fortunate enough not to be so afflicted, could blame those suffering with mental illness for their own circumstances and therefore rationalize their own good fortune, and so feel less obligation to help those in need. In the age of superstition, it used to be that the mentally ill decided to become witches, or chose to "make a deal" with the devil. And now certain libertarians and "freedomists" have created a new kind of superstition, best described as a "totalitarian rationalist" ideology, an ideology that cannot admit that in some situations its tenets don't apply (i.e. can be falsified). In other words, they hypocritically argue that all ideas should be subject to attempts to falsify them, except their own extreme rationalist ideology! So even when patients become frightened by seeing and hearing things that cannot be heard or seen by anyone else, these hallucinations could somehow still be caused by the "choices" of the victims; because patients could have chosen otherwise and not subjected themselves to the frightening visions and torture that they experience. They could have chosen otherwise, because everyone has the potential to be equally rational, and so equally capable of allowing or not allowing mind-altering experiences. (Indeed the belief that everyone is capable of equal rationality defines what I would call "totalitarian rationalism").

So again, the mentally ill can be blamed for their choices, just as witches of old. In today's world, totalitarian rationalists will agree that individuals may have "problems" that need "solutions," but they don't have "mental illnesses" or "diseases", because according to the totalitarian rationalist, each individual can be "100%" responsible for his own mental state! Unlike those with "real disease," caused by impersonal factors like "lesions"; the mentally ill, in effect, choose their own circumstances and so can be held responsible for the consequences of their choice that then leads to what others call "mental illness."

And compassion and resources are often withheld for those who choose their own downfall. For example, those pleading for support for individuals with lung cancer (vastly under-funded relative to other illnesses with similar morbidity and mortality), always remind us that many individuals who get lung cancer never smoked! Just as with mental illness, many don't feel the need to be as compassionate towards those who substantially contributed to their own demise (by for example smoking), relative to those injured by impersonal factors over which the individual has little control. Blaming mental illness on the individual's choices, therefore diminishes the sense of obligation that people feel for the mentally ill, diminishes the money spent on research, and adds additional stigma to a group of people who arguably experience as much irrational hostility as any other large group of people in the world. I think many argue that mental illnesses could be caused by "choices" because they would like to shift blame to the mentally ill, but only Professor Deutsch knows his intentions.

But let us explore in some depth how Professor Deutsch might have come to the conclusion that severe mental illness could be caused by the mentally ill person himself, regardless of heritability estimates to the contrary; though Deutsch never really tells us how he came to his conclusions. We will exclude physical assaults of one person on another, for now.

Even if one person repeatedly chooses to psychologically assault another, in what sense could it be said that the victim caused his own subsequent painful feelings? Perhaps, just as the person expressing the hostility has a choice to express hostility, would not the individual hearing the hostile words have a "choice" whether to ignore the words or not? If giving someone a mental illness is a choice, is not receiving a mental illness also a choice? What a priori

reason do we have to believe that one person's hostile thoughts cannot be blocked by another's more rational thoughts, especially since unfounded hostility directed towards a person and allegedly causing mental illness, should seem irrational to the person hearing the words.

But some individuals may be young or inexperienced in fending off the blatant hostility of others. Even if true, surely these unfortunate individuals without experience could learn to fight back if their brain/mind has the capacity to make rational decisions. And why shouldn't brains/minds have the capacity to learn how to fight back and make rational decisions, despite attempts to teach irrational thinking? After all, those suggesting that genetics need not be involved in explaining mental illness would argue that genes will not make one brain/mind less capable of thinking rationally than another. And if a person becomes mentally ill because he did not fight irrational thoughts or learn the basic principles of combating irrational thinking, then he has, in effect, chosen to allow himself to be harmed and so possibly hastened the development of his own mental illness. Or at any rate some may argue that, and therefore shift blame to the individual with mental illness.

At this point we may wish to ask ourselves why two identical twins, assumed to have rational minds, would both "choose" to be vulnerable to hostility in such a way as to weaken their further ability to think, so when they are further attacked, they are even more sensitive? Perhaps to some reading this, increasingly irrational thought learned from others, coupled with increased vulnerability and sensitivity, may somehow cause severe mental illness, including bipolar disorder. But how can Professor Deutsch, in the absence of biological and genetic influences, say that people would choose such an outcome? We must

1. Conclude that having bipolar illness is a rational choice so people will choose it if offered the opportunity, but then everyone should, too, which does not fit with the evidence, although we will discuss this possibility later.

Or

2. Conclude that certain thoughts, perhaps seductively phrased or presented to the inexperienced, may initially be heard ("chosen" by the individual to be heard) and incorporated in his or her thinking scheme. But perhaps once the initial choice is made, the accepted thoughts permanently decrease the capacity of people to rationally evaluate future thoughts presented to them, perhaps even by physically damaging the brains of those so inflicted. To use a computer analogy, the initial software loaded damages the hardware, and therefore prevents different sorts of corrective software from being loaded in the future. (Like a computer virus attacking the virus scanner, or attacking the hardware responsible for loading updated anti-viral software).

Indeed, something like possibility 2 is possibly what causes some of the brain damage associated with (mostly) non-heritable mental illness like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Humans who experiencing even relatively infrequent and minor episodes of abuse as children show permanent increases in "stress reactivity" (physiological and psychological reactions to stressful situations) for the rest of their lives (Helm, Nemeroff JAMA). Similar results have been found in rigorously controlled studies of primate mothers. For example, heart rate during stress in women abused vs. not abused as children tends to be 4 beats per minute higher during *adulthood*, even in otherwise psychologically healthy women, presumably for the rest of these women's lives. A stress hormone precursor (ACTH) is more than double during stress, presumably also for the rest of these abused women's lives, even when they

exhibit no evidence of any mental illness. Arguably, being more physiologically reactive after early life trauma, could potentially be beneficial in the jungle if life is "brutish and short," and if early trauma predicts later attacks when an adult. But in contemporary Western nations, excess reactivity to stress may inhibit future learning because of its effects on flexible thinking, memory, and because strong reactions to others may cause some to deny such "overly emotional" individuals the opportunity to learn, if their reactions appear inappropriate in some situations. And certainly there are situations in which reacting calmly and with self-discipline, ultimately optimizes chances for success. And stress can permanently damage the brain. After the Sarin gas attacks in Tokyo, those subjects developing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder exhibited progressive brain shrinkage in areas of the brain previously known to be damaged in individuals experiencing extreme stress.(Yamasu, 2003, Proceed, Natl Acad. Science)

So Professor Deutshe's sense that one need not attribute brain abnormalities, and permanently different physiological/behavioral reactions only to genetic influence, is certainly correct. Unfortunately, as I will demonstrate later, his intuition applies to non-heritable mental illness (like PTSD) much more so than to heritable mental illnesses like bipolar illness or schizophrenia!

But if psychological stress permanently alters brains/minds to make them less able to think rationally in certain situations (i.e. if possibility 2 above is true), why would identical twins have higher rates of concordance than fraternal twins, for hereditary mental illness, allegedly caused by factors like this?

This is where Professor Deutsch's arguments come in. Perhaps there are genes, shared by identical twins, which create some type of innocuous "attribute", say red hair or black skin. Perhaps for some irrational reason, individuals tend to psychologically attack individuals who share this physical characteristic (red hair or black skin) in common. And if one identical twin has a given physical characteristic, the second identical twin is far more likely to have the same given physical characteristic. In effect, wherever they are, both twins bring, not only their "heredity", but because of reaction to a physical characteristic, their "environment" with them as well! If the presence of people with seemingly innocuous characteristics (like red hair or black skin) "causes" others to change their behavior and spew forth their hostile and irrational thoughts, then two identical twins with either red hair or black skin, even if raised apart, are more likely to share the experience of hearing the expressed hostility because of their red hair, and then share the effect of the hostility (the mental illness) in common. Technically, these types of effects are called "indirect heritability" with "reactive gene-environment correlation". This type of reactive covariance between a physical attribute and an intentional response to it, is not added into genetic variance when calculating heritability. Therefore, contrary to Professor Deutsch, discrimination based on red hair or black skin is (naturally) not considered hereditary, as discussed later! This is one of Professor Deutsch's primary technical misunderstandings of genetic theory.

But let us continue with Deutschian arguments anyway. If black people had a higher incidence of brain damage because of a higher incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder (due to racism), we should not conclude that black people's genes caused the brain damage, even though (very) simplistic statistical models would suggest exactly that. So a cultural phenomenon (racism) could be the logical culprit, even though genes for black skin could superficially seem to be responsible for brain damage.

Perhaps there is something similar going on in mental illness,

Professor Deutsch implicitly suggests, and the candidate genes identified by the National Institute of Health (in individuals with bipolar disease and schizophrenia), might actually be coding for an observable "attribute" or physical characteristic that then causes discrimination – the real culprit. Or so it could be argued.

Deutschian theory that choices could entirely explain seemingly heritable mental illness could proceed as follows, although he is not specific and does not explain his theories, so I have to guess the content of his arguments. Identical twins share some genetically mediated attributes in common (like red hair). This red hair attracts those who like to discriminate ("causes" them to discriminate). And this discrimination then permanently damages the brains of those affected. Once affected, the twins become more susceptible to accepting further hostile and irrational thoughts and the mental illness gets worse. Therefore individuals who develop bipolar disorder (assumed to be caused by accepting "irrational thoughts"), whether twins or not, will either share a common behavior developing before the illness ("prodromal behavior") or will share a visible attribute in common (like red hair). This characteristic attracts the discrimination of others based on the characteristic. And the discrimination causes brain damage, so the irrationality is perpetuated and enhanced by the individual, now with brain damage due to discrimination.

Professor Deutsch talks about African Americans getting lynched. In a very simplistic statistical model, Caucasians predisposed to vicious racism, can be influenced to change their ongoing behavior by the presence of an African American. Some may even lynch the individual appearing before them who happens to be black. So the presence of the African American (and his genes coding for black skin), in a twisted statistical sense, could be said to "cause" the rise in racist fervor that subsequently leads to lynching. Professor Deutsch argues similarly that genes coding for individuals who are perceived to be attractive, in a statistical sense, could be said to cause a social phenomenon like favoritism -- if those who happen to be more attractive are, for example, more likely to advance in society and if attractiveness is genetically mediated.

Professor Deutsch (correctly) wishes us to believe that black skin color, red hair, or unattractiveness are not illnesses even though they are caused by genes, precipitate lynching or mistreatment, lead to pain and suffering, and are heritable. We ought to believe that it is peoples (irrational) reactions to black skin color, red hair, or unattractive people, not the appearance itself, (nor the genes coding for the black skin) that is the root cause of racism or favoritism. Therefore it is argued that heritability studies in mental illness teach us very little about the genetic cause of mental illness, because environmental factors (for example the choice of someone to abuse someone with a given characteristic) could interact with an innocuous genetic factor (e.g. black skin, or some other trait). So even when identical twins share a given disabling mental illness much more frequently than similarly situated fraternal twins, the cause of this disability may still be peoples choices. Or so it is argued.

Deutschian models of mental illness, therefore, resemble sociological models of individuals experiencing racism and then possibly experiencing further injury because of their incomplete ability to cope with the initial racism. But please note that the victim of racism has fewer choices (indeed if lynched, he may be dead). So even (for now) granting Deutschian conceptions that seemingly heritable mental illness does not have to be caused by genetics; even accepting the whole interesting story about there being common physical characteristics or attributes of the mentally

ill to which others respond and neurobiologists don't know about:

Mental illness is still not caused by the "choices" of individuals with mental illness! Mental illness, rather, would be caused by the transmission of thoughts that *take choices away*, even if genetic factors are not involved.

So in what sense can Professor Deutsch argue that seemingly heritable mental illness is caused by the choices of the victim? Even if he wishes to try to maintain the illusion that genes do not substantially contribute to the risk of developing mental illness, in what sense is heritable mental illness potentially caused "100%" by the choices of the victim? This simply makes no sense.

Unless he wishes to argue that having a mental illness is not a disadvantage, as unattractiveness is, and perhaps he thinks mental illness is an advantage (like being attractive!) So perhaps Professor Deutsch believes mental illness adds opportunities for those afflicted, and so they choose amongst increased opportunities, relative to those without mental illness.

Professor Deutsch does not elaborate on how mental illness, despite high heritability, could nonetheless be caused "100%" by the choice of the afflicted individual. Professor Deutsch does use the example of individuals advancing in society because of their good looks, perhaps to argue that good-looking individuals who advance in society are analogous to the mentally ill (??), and in some sense, attractive individuals must still choose to advance, even if their good looks help to pave the way. Although Professor Deutsch does not offer an explanation for why he brings up attractiveness as a trait leading to advancement, I will try to make sense of what he said.

Assume attractiveness is to some extent genetically mediated. If an individual who is attractive happens to be offered more opportunities (more choices) than others equally talented but not as attractive, should we say that the genes coding for the person to be attractive caused the person's advancement? Perhaps. But maybe it was societal favoritism (cultural factors) causing the advancement? Or perhaps it was the attractive person's *choice* to take advantage of the opportunities afforded him?

So, if we were looking for genes in common to high achievers, we might identify certain candidate genes that seem to "cause" individuals to advance. But actually, if the candidate genes code for an attractive appearance, it is cultural favoritism that provides good-looking individuals with more opportunities. Finally, it is the individuals "choice" to take advantage of the opportunities afforded that leads to advancement, though an unthinking statistician might credit the genetics solely. But Professor Deutsch never says how this type of argument could apply to the mentally ill, only that mental illness could be the individuals "choice" (possibly?) in the same way that taking advantage of societal favoritism could be considered an attractive individual's choice.

But for this reasoning to apply to the mentally ill, seemingly heritable mental illness behavior would have to be linked to a gene coding for a physical characteristic or visible attribute that promotes advancement. Perhaps the mentally ill have a certain physical characteristic (say strikingly blue eyes). Because they have strikingly blue eyes, they are assumed to be confident, and so they are offered opportunities to advance more; but the opportunities require that they stay up later at night for periods of time (as if manic) and then later "sleep it off" (as if depressed.) If strikingly blue eyes earns patients reinforcement for acting in this somewhat bipolar way, then individuals with this supposed bipolar disorder could be said *to choose* bipolar behavior over "normal behavior" because it leads to their advancement! But the genes do not themselves increase the "risk" of someone exhibiting allegedly

bipolar behavior, although they might appear to do so in a simplistic model; but rather the genes code for blue eyes, which then causes others to reward this seemingly bipolar behavior.

But if someone really believes that bipolar disorder grants opportunities, he or she truly does not understand mental illness in the slightest. Individuals with bipolar illness may sleep 4 hours *per week* as if on massive doses of cocaine for 3-4 weeks. But at least those on cocaine "come down" after a day or two. Those with bipolar illness often do not slow down for weeks on end. With pressured speech, racing thoughts, and then paranoid hallucinations, they will feel no need for sleep for weeks, and even a few months. And then, for months on end, they may hibernate, sleeping 17 hours per day and feeling utter despair and depression. Those with bipolar disorder have approximately 2 – 3 times the rate of cerebrovascular, cardiovascular, and endocrine death (Osby, 2001), die an average of 9 years earlier (Hirschfield, 2003), and have nearly 30 times the rate of suicide relative to the non-mentally ill (Angst, F, 2002). Almost everyone with bipolar disorder wishes they did not have it. If Professor Deutsch feels bipolar disorder would grant him opportunities that he would like to choose, he is welcome to use massive doses of cocaine every day for a month until he cries for sleep, only to be afforded his wish a month later, when he will get to sleep 17 hours a day on massive doses of barbiturates for 8 months, only to begin again. Then with a little personal experience, he may be able to better understand the true meaning of "choice", rather than investigate it as a pleasant philosophical discussion in the security of his home or lab. .

Perhaps in believing that the mentally ill "choose" their mental illness ("behavior" to Professor Deutsch), Professor Deutsch instead means that individuals' genes increase risk for certain types of feelings, and then individuals "choose" how to handle these feelings, or place themselves in an environment which helps with that choice (so called "active" gene-environment correlation). For example, most individuals with schizophrenia, experience a degree of paranoia, likely heavily influenced by genetic factors. However the specific events or ideas which frighten those with schizophrenia, do in fact vary between people. Those with past experiences with the American government or who continually read the politics section of an American newspaper may become convinced that the CIA has implanted a transmitter in their ear, and demand to have it surgically removed. In effect, they hear a voice that they believe is absolutely real, often even rapidly turn their head to hear the "voice" more clearly, but seem to confabulate a scenario, in response to the voice that they hear. The confabulation, based on their underlying paranoia, seems to derive from themes from their own past or present, as interpreted through their paranoia, and indeed they will seem to be attracted to a wide variety of "conspiracy" theories and read about them. In this sense, we perceive them to "choose" the themes that are built around their paranoid illness. But the patient absolutely believes the delusions are real and DOES NOT perceive them to be his choices. Telling someone with schizophrenia that he did not really hear voices speaking to him will cause him to believe that YOU are crazy, just as if I spoke to one of the readers of the "World" and then told him that he did not "really" hear my voice. (Activation of parts of the brain interpreting "sound" are identical in those who hear my speech and in those who hallucinate voices, so from the perspective of the individual in either case, both "voices" are absolutely real). In short, we may perceive that the individual chooses the themes to build around his underlying paranoia, but the individual does not perceive he had any hand in his perceptions.

But what can be said about others "choosing" to cause bipolar

illness or schizophrenia in a victim? Is this the cause of bipolar illness? According to Deutschian arguments, saying that bipolar disorder is heritable, says nothing about whether genes really cause bipolar disorder, because a common set of genes between twins could cause them to have a given observable attribute (say red hair). This red hair could cause others to treat these twins badly in a systematic and predictable way. And of course, systematic and predictable mistreatment by others could then cause, equally predictable behavioral responses by the twins. Unthinking doctors could then label such predictable responses "bipolar" illness, for example. Therefore injured twins, mistreated due to red hair, could have similar behavioral responses and brains to each other, but different from others without red hair. Such abuse might cause predictable gray matter loss in brains, loss of cognitive ability, and death an average of 9 years earlier i.e. symptoms seemingly identical to bipolar illness. And so it could be argued that genetically based impersonal illnesses like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, could actually be caused by the planned choices ("intelligent design") of those who mistreat others. These abusers could injure others because these "others" have a common physical characteristic like red hair or other attribute. Just as racists choose to abuse those with African ancestry because of their skin color, so too could individuals mistreat or inappropriately reward or punish those with red hair, consequently leading to a predictable behavioral syndrome. So even a mental illness that is 59% heritable, like bipolar illness, could nonetheless be caused "100%" by the choices of others, not by specific genetic factors.

I will label these creative ideas of David Deutsch, the "Intelligent Design Identifies Traits that are Observable, Creating Heritable Mental Illness" (IDITO CHeMI). But Professor Deutsch may not be aware that brain changes have been studied when people and animals have been exposed to a variety of rewards and punishments and when people have been exposed to various types of discrimination. In particular, the consequences of episodes of abuse have been studied in great detail. Abuse victims tend to exhibit known and predictable reactions when particular dimensions of behavior are measured and when brain scans are performed. Never have various reinforcement and punishment schemes been found to cause schizophrenia or even bipolar illness, or the neurological changes associated with schizophrenia or bipolar illness. If a vulnerable individual experiences severe enough psychological trauma (e.g. unnatural death of loved ones), the patterns of behavioral response are called "post-traumatic stress" reactions. Sometimes individuals who have been abused develop "depressive" reactions in addition to post-traumatic reactions, or either independently. Although these post-traumatic reactions and depressive reactions do cause structural brain changes, the brain changes in bipolar illness and schizophrenia are remarkably different, even if those with bipolar disease and schizophrenia have also been abused (references available on request). Furthermore, the behavioral syndromes of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and major depression are also very different from the behavioral syndromes exhibited by those demonstrating manic behavior in bipolar disorder; or those experiencing psychotic episodes, in those with schizophrenia. In addition, the pharmacological treatments of bipolar disease, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and schizophrenia are entirely different.

In other words,

- a. Mistreatment of others because of a given physical or psychological characteristic (like black skin),
- b. Various types of reinforcement and punishment schemes (e.g. the "schizophrenogenic mother"),
- c. Discrimination based on unusual behavior, and

d. Discrimination because of religious preference or other psychological characteristics;

have all been studied over decades.

Therefore, individuals who happen to have grown up in situations in which others choose to (verbally) treat them cruelly after birth, do not physiologically, neuroanatomically, psychologically, or pharmacologically exhibit the same characteristics as those with bipolar illness or schizophrenia, (even if those with bipolar disorder and schizophrenia have also been mistreated). Especially in schizophrenia, but likely also in bipolar disorder, psychological abuse of an individual because of a physical, psychological, or behavioral "attribute"; has never been shown to cause the illnesses, despite being repeatedly studied, although stress can make existing psychotic symptoms worse or sometimes can precipitate a first manic or psychotic episode, but in individuals with predisposing risks factors (e.g. family history). On the contrary, hundreds of studies show that consistent abuse causes post-traumatic stress disorder and depressive symptoms, instead.

There are a few rare exceptions to the rule that choices do not seem to cause bipolar disease and schizophrenia. For example, if an individual is hit in the head severely, either because of an accident or the intentional behavior of someone else, such individuals with traumatic brain injury in particular locations can sometimes appear to have bipolar variants or even chronic psychotic variants (like schizophrenia) even when such individuals have no family history and no other seeming risk factors for the development of the illness.

Also, in utero abuse, for example *psychological stress of the mother*, particularly first trimester abuse or deprivation, does appear to lead to increased rates of development of schizophrenia and other brain disorders in the mother's offspring. For example, when the Nazis blockaded ("chose to blockade") Western Holland between 1944-1945, and so caused famine, women who were in their first trimester of pregnancy had more than twice the rate of ultimately hospitalized offspring with schizophrenia (Susser). In addition there is suggestive evidence that marijuana smoking significantly accelerates the development of schizophrenia in those who ultimately develop the illness. Contrary to Professor Deutsch, neurobiologists, psychiatrists, psychologists and others have looked for ways in which people's choices may cause schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, and despite an exhaustive search, there are vanishingly few choices that individuals can make that seem to cause these illnesses. Many studies, on the other hand, have in fact found that different disorders are partially caused by peoples choices (e.g. major depression and PTSD)].

But in general it is impersonal factors, for example, early life viral infections (perhaps in individuals with genetically mediated immune sensitivity) and/or susceptibility to various environmental toxins, lack of oxygen delivery during birth, small gestational size, family history of illness, etc. which are consistently found when looking for potential causative factors in the development of schizophrenia and bipolar illness.

Therefore, Professor Deutsch's theory that a visible "attribute" of all those who ultimately develop mental illness, could lead others to choose to respond to it, and the response to this attribute somehow causes schizophrenia or bipolar illness; does not line up with the evidence in the slightest. If individual choices do substantially cause bipolar illness or schizophrenia, they certainly do so in ways that patients, their doctors, and others don't know about, and so individuals cannot intentionally choose these illnesses.

So on the one hand we have Professor Deutsch's radical sociological

theory of people discriminating or acting differently towards someone because of an observable "attribute", and in treating someone badly somehow generate schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. But there is essentially nothing to support this line of reasoning. Indeed there are countless studies showing that the consequences of discrimination and unusual rewards and punishments are not schizophrenic behavior or bipolar behavior, but rather PTSD symptoms and Depressive symptoms! And on the other hand, there are hundreds of studies pointing to the opposite conclusion, namely that impersonal (not choice related) factors likely precipitate, mediate, and cause bipolar illness and schizophrenia.

GIVING PROFESSOR DEUTSCH A HEROIC BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

But let us nonetheless give Professor Deutsch a (truly heroic) benefit of the doubt (for a moment) and assume that heritable mental illnesses, like schizophrenia or bipolar illness, can be caused "100%" by intentional behavior directed toward those with an innocuous attribute (like red hair) even if there is essentially no evidence for this. We can ask what the world would look like if Professor Deutsch's remarkable ideas were true.

If Professor Deutsch is correct, in order for the "choices" of an individual who discriminates to be "100%" responsible for the bipolar behavior or schizophrenic behavior of identical twins, there must be a common observable attribute of the twins, to which those who wish to discriminate can consistently "choose" to react to (like red hair). Furthermore, since bipolar disorder and schizophrenia are worldwide illnesses, this characteristic of those with bipolar disorder or schizophrenia must be observable by individuals the world over.

But where is this observable characteristic (like black skin color or red hair) that individuals, the world over, "choose" to react to? If you ask a white racist what causes him to lynch one person rather than another, he can surely tell you that his choice of whom to lynch is made at least partially based on the color of the person's skin whom he wishes to attack. Precisely because the characteristics of victims of racism (and favoritism) are obvious to the person who discriminates, scientists can observe the practice of discrimination. But after thousands of years, and now intense scrutiny over decades, with multiple hypotheses tested and rejected, no scientist can find a stable and easily observed characteristic or "attribute" (like red hair or a behavior) reliably observed and common to all those who ultimately develop bipolar illness or schizophrenia. Schizophrenia and bipolar disorder usually are first diagnosed in young adults.

Concerning possible early behavioral tip-offs of future bipolar illness, for example, "offspring of (two) bipolar I parents *tend to appear well adjusted in early life*, but have significantly higher rates of bipolar I and bipolar II disorders (later in life)" [Kaplan and Sadock, Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry] But schizophrenia and bipolar illness are nonetheless reliably diagnosed once the full-blown syndromes have manifested themselves.

But the problem for Professor Deutsch's theory is even worse than scientists' inability to find consistently observable attributes of all or even most individuals prior to their developing schizophrenia and bipolar illness. If Professor Deutsch's "intelligent design" hypothesis of heritable mental illness were true, even though scientists can't find the heritable observable characteristics common to all destined to develop bipolar disease or schizophrenia, non-scientists must (remarkably enough) be able to see them, since they choose to discriminate because of them. They must be able to see them, because one cannot make a "choice" to treat some people consistently differently than others, if one cannot observe the

characteristics distinguishing those to be differently treated from those to be ignored!

Given that there are millions of people in the world who become bipolar or develop schizophrenia and identical twins usually share these disorders far more commonly than fraternal twins (3-8X more commonly!), there must be millions of people who see an observable and heritable physical "attribute" of individuals destined to develop bipolar disease or schizophrenia. This attribute must be substantially different between identical and fraternal twins. People must see this "MARK of the bipolar", for example, *before* the individual becomes bipolar; except for all scientists, for whom this absolutely consistent phenomenon is apparently invisible! Even Professor Deutsch, a scientist and apparent originator (?) of the theory that "Intelligent Design Identifies Traits that are Observable, Creating Heritable Mental Illness" (IDITO CHeMI), has no idea what millions of people the world over must see, according to his very own theory! On the other hand, if he does know what consistent characteristic the millions see and respond to, let him tell us what the characteristic is!

Unlike explanations of heritable mental illness that focus on unseen and impersonal factors like gene products in blood streams and receptors on neurons, (factors that usually cannot be seen with the naked eye) Professor Deutsch's theory presumes the presence of obvious attributes which miraculously appear and disappear depending upon who is looking for them, nonscientist or scientist. Faced with such argument, how could IDITO CHeMI proponents defend their conceptions?

Perhaps as soon as a scientist looks for the "MARK" of the bipolar that others react to, the "MARK" magically disappears before the scientist can see it?! (Like black skin miraculously turning white as soon as a scientist looks at it, but not when the racist looks at it!) Perhaps there is a conspiracy between everyone who can see the "MARK" of the bipolar, and they all decide to hide the truth from all scientists (except for Professor Deutsch who is the only privileged one to have been told about the conspiracy)?

THERE ARE NO "ALTERNATIVE" EXPLANATIONS FOR HEREDITARY MENTAL ILLNESSES THAT DO NOT THEMSELVES STRONGLY IMPLICATE HEREDITARY FACTORS.

Perhaps at this point Professor Deutsch would give in (a little) and try to claim that maybe there are a few relatively innocuous behaviors, in which risk of occurrence is determined by genes, and the general public can then respond to these behaviors. The public response to these genetically mediated behaviors might then cause schizophrenia or bipolar illness.

The problem is that many scientists, but not apparently Professor Deutsch, have been trying to find "prodromal behaviors" for years, since bipolar illness and schizophrenia do not often manifest until early adulthood. It is frightening to know that just 3 months after a first psychotic episode, the brain shrinks approximately 11 cc's (Lieberman, 2002 ACCP), an easily visible amount even to the untrained eye, if whole brain images prior to, during, and after the psychotic break are compared in movie-like succession, as Dr. Lieberman has done. As a point of reference, one can see this type of brain shrinkage after a small stroke, for example.

But we now have medications that (at least over two years) preserve brain function and prevent this neuro-degenerative disease from progressing. (Lieberman, ACCP 2002) It has therefore become of utmost importance to try to identify people at risk of developing serious mental illness, in order to start treatment before the full illness sets in. (Like treating hypertension before a heart

attack. Indeed the NIH is now using analogous language to describe what happens to brains during a first psychotic break.) The problem is, we are unable to find consistent behavioral characteristics that predict with sensitivity and specificity the ultimate manifestation of the illness, otherwise such individuals would be started on medication. Unfortunately, the prodromal behaviors are either non-existent in some or are far more complex and varied than the illness itself. We can consistently and reliably diagnose the illness, but not the prodromal behaviors that predict the illness!

There is some evidence that some of those destined to develop bipolar disorder as adults will seem to have "ADHD-like" or a "hyperthymic" temperament as children, but in general, even the "offspring of (two) bipolar I parents *tend to appear well adjusted in early life*, but have significantly higher rates of bipolar I and bipolar II disorders (later in life)" [Kaplan and Sadock] Furthermore, virtually all of those with prodromal ADHD-like symptoms or a "hyperthymic" temperament DO NOT develop bipolar disorder, regardless of how people react to these characteristics. Once again, "prodromal" behaviors, do not predict with much sensitivity or specificity the onset of bipolar illness or schizophrenia (though we wish it were so in order to start treatment earlier).

In other words, if someone wants to think that genes increase the risk for development of prodromal behaviors but not the actual illness (because they believe it is people's response to these prodromal "attributes" that cause heritable mental illness), they are then positing the ability of genes to be able to increase the risk for behavior at least as complicated as the actual disease itself! (And they would also believe that non-scientists can find these patterns of prodromal behavior substantially more easily than scientists, even though most in the general public can't even easily recognize the far more obvious bipolar or schizophrenic behaviors!) And again, no systematic pattern of "discrimination" has been shown to cause schizophrenia (rather than PTSD or Depression) even if the victims could be identified by their prodromal symptoms.

Or perhaps Professor Deutsch would cleverly try to argue that the very risk factors I previously mentioned -- getting a viral illness, getting hit in the head, low birth weight, etc. -- are precisely the characteristics that people notice, prior to attacking others with their schizophrenia-and-bipolar-generating environmental program! Once again, however, except in extreme cases, how would a casual observer know that a person was exposed to an in utero viral illness, or was hit in the head when younger, so they could begin the work of planning and creating someone else's schizophrenia or bipolar illness?

SERIOUS MENTAL ILLNESSES ARE HIGHLY HERITABLE AND THIS IMPLIES THE EXISTENCE OF GENETICALLY BASED, INTERNALLY CREATED, PHYSIOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THOSE AT RISK AND NOT AT RISK FOR DEVELOPING THE ILLNESS.

Heritability is usually divided into "direct heritability" and "indirect heritability". A direct genetic effect implies that genes code for a specific attribute of an individual by affecting or creating an internal physiological or pathophysiological process. For example genes coding for blue eyes are "directly" heritable. On the other hand, genes "indirectly" cause an *attribute* of an individual, if genes create a direct effect, the environment interacts with that effect, and the subsequent interaction changes or creates the attribute.

1. Indirect heritability (without human choice)

If genes create immune systems that are faulty in the newborn and

a vulnerability to a subsequent viral infection in the newborn then increases the risk of mental illness, then the mental illness would be considered an "indirect" effect of the genes coding for a compromised immune system, and so "indirectly heritable".

2. Indirect heritability (with discriminatory human choices)

If genes code for red hair and individuals *choose* to discriminate because of the red hair, and this causes a mental illness; the mental illness would be an indirect effect of the genes coding for red hair, and so indirectly heritable.

If an attribute is indirectly heritable because discriminatory human choices are involved (as in discrimination against someone with red hair), variance due to this gene-environment correlation is "factored out" and is NOT added to the genetic contribution to variance in calculating heritability, according to standard conventions. Indirect heritability without human choice (for example genetic vulnerability to infectious disease) is usually counted as part of the genetic component of variance.

For example, according to one of the authors of the first behavioral genetics textbooks, (Fuller, 1979)

"In our human societies discriminatory practices are often based upon superficial physical characteristics or upon cultural stereotypes. In these instances a G-E (gene environment) correlation will result. ...(And)..... any correlation between it (the physical characteristic) and behavior is logically attributable to *environmental influences*. (My emphasis, MG)

In other words, indirect heritability of an attribute due to the intentional choices of people (like effects from both racism and lynching behavior) should be factored out in making estimates of the genetic component of a characteristic or behavior. In Professor Deutsch's example of white people lynching black people, variance due to the positive correlation between genes coding for darker skin and the risk of being lynched, *would not be counted* in the genetic component of variance, when calculating the heritability of lynching. There are multiple methods of subtracting out this variance when it is known. So contrary to Professor Deutsch, the lynching of black people more than white people *would not* be considered heritable, once gene-environment covariance is taken into account. To repeat, contrary to Professor Deutsch, a professional bio-behavioral geneticist would report the phenomenon of black people being lynched as "0% heritable"! (Professor Deutsch needs to give modern scientists a bit more credit!)

Biobehavioral geneticists, neuropsychiatrists, and psychologists routinely take into account gene-environment correlations when estimating the genetic component of variance while calculating heritability. Difficulties can arise in estimating the extent of genetic-environmental correlation if :

1. There are clearly observable differences in groups of people that others then react to and
2. These reactions influence a trait of interest and
3. It is difficult to estimate the extent to which these reactions influence the trait of interest.

Controversies involving discrimination, as a cause of gene-environment covariance, do not arise when there are no known consistently observable differences between people and/or when the consequences of discrimination do not cause the development of a trait of interest. When there is doubt about whether a factor should be considered "environmental" or "genetic", it is simply considered one more source of variance in a statistical model, and

assigned to neither genetic variance nor environmental variance.

Indeed, IQ differences between racial groupings are controversial because there is argument about which category to place them in. Heritability estimates of IQ differences are confounded by gene-environment correlation because black skin is visible, a genetically mediated attribute, and black skin is correlated with discrimination, an environmentally mediated attribute. And discrimination can lower IQ. But the extent to which discrimination lowers IQ is not known and the extent of discrimination is not known.

But there is no evidence that bipolar illness is caused by individuals sharing a commonly observable attribute that attracts discrimination. And there is especially no evidence that there are commonly observed attributes in those who don't yet have bipolar disorder that everyone but scientists looking for the attributes can see. And there is no evidence that even if such remarkable attributes existed, that discrimination could create the illness, in those with no other propensity to develop bipolar illness. So there is no evidence for any substantial "reactive gene-environment" correlation effects with bipolar illness!

Once known "reactive" gene-environment correlations are factored out or found non-existent, given carefully done scientific experiments with proper controls of variables (e.g. controlling for "shared environments,"), a 59% heritability figure then implies that 59% of the risk for developing an illness like bipolar disorder, is explained by genetic (not environmental) factors and specifically not by discriminatory choices of people. Since genes code for proteins, differences in genetically determined risk of illness implies structural and therefore physiological (likely cellular) differences in those predisposed to bipolar illness. These genetic factors can cause:

- a. Internal changes leading to the pathophysiological attributes of an illness like bipolar directly, or
- b. The elaboration of other conditions which themselves increase risk of developing illness. For example, genetically mediated immuno-compromise could increase risk of an infection that then increases risk of bipolar illness.

The ability to make determinations that an illness is partly caused by a genetic liability is precisely why heritability studies are conducted. Finding the genes, then their pathophysiological products, helps the research effort in ultimately understanding the cause of the illness and then curing the illness. If Professor Deutsch believes the 59% figure quoted by the NIH is calculated incorrectly; he should recalculate the figure or voice his criticisms of the figure in a peer-reviewed forum. And as stated previously, very recent evidence for heritability in bipolar illness is actually far higher, in the 85% (McGuffin, Arch Gen Psych) range.

But it is illegitimate and unfair to dispute a 59% heritability figure by casting doubt about how neurobiologists calculate heritability (usually geneticists do the calculations). Suggesting that "brain doctors" become "evasive" about the concept of heritability because they would find a "genetic component" in those who have been lynched, is disingenuous and wrong. So (per Professor Deutsch) if neurobiologists or others would make such an egregious mistake, we shouldn't trust other estimates by those studying heritability. This argument reflects an unfortunate lack of understanding on Professor Deutsch's part about how heritability estimates are actually calculated, as discussed above.

And the 59% heritability figure cited by the NIH is potentially overly conservative, since a larger and statistically rigorous twin study done suggests heritability estimates over 80% in those with bipolar disorder. Indeed, Professor McGuffin, the author of the recent study (Arch General Psych, 2003) believes that figures as

high as this may leave essentially no room for familial environmental influences in the development of this highly heritable illness, *at all*.

"Univariate model fitting resulted in estimates of heritability in excess of 80% (with a lower confidence limit of more than 70%) whether a broad or narrow diagnostic perspective was taken, suggesting that all of the familiarity of BPD (bipolar affective disorder) could be accounted for by additive genetic effects with *no contribution* from family environment." [Emphasis mine, MG] (Arch Gen Psych, 2003)

As Professor McGuffin also realizes, it may be premature to eliminate familial environmental influences as causative factors in the development of bipolar illness. But Professor Deutsch and the editors of "**The World**" should understand: Our modern scientific questions about bipolar illness, no longer dispute that genetic influences profoundly shape this disorder. Rather, research now is attempting to find *how* genetic abnormalities cause bipolar illness, and to try to see what (if any) non-random environmental factors contribute to causing the illness, because maybe these can be controlled. Failing to understand this, can subject the editors of "**The World**" to legitimate charges of anti-scientific bias. Given current evidence, the hereditary basis of serious mental illness is no less a fact of life than the theory of evolution.

There likely is some over-diagnosis of schizophrenia in individuals in the black population and under-diagnosis of bipolar disease in the black population (Kilbourne), and this may reflect a number of sociological factors. However, studies of psychiatric patients reveal that when SCID and other structured diagnostic instruments are used and careful diagnostic criteria are applied, and especially when truly random samples are evaluated, there are significantly fewer differences in the rates of psychotic and mood disorders between ethnic groups (Cuffe, Strakowski) although differences still remain in the Cuffe but not in the epidemiological prevalence study of Strakowski.

CONCLUSION:

I have demonstrated that the remarkably high heritability estimates of bipolar illness, evaluated in carefully done studies, implies internally created, genetically based, pathophysiological abnormalities. These abnormalities are associated with remarkable brain damage; for example 40% decrease in brain gray matter (Drevets, Nature). The Lieberman data in schizophrenia is even more persuasive with 12 cc's of brain shrinkage observed over just 6 months after a first psychotic break, unless the patient is given a modern medication.(Lieberman, ACCP). The cognitive decline in those with schizophrenia and bipolar illness, as well as diminution of the rational capacity to make decisions, has been repeatedly documented as well. I have shown that patient choice and even the choice of others is not particularly involved in causing the initial presentation of highly heritable mental illnesses like bipolar illness and schizophrenia. I have shown that the consequences of these illnesses are devastating, and result in 30 times the normal rate of suicide in the general population (Angst, F J Affect Dis, 2002), and 2-3X increased risk of cardiovascular (e.g. heart attacks), endocrine (e.g diabetes) and neurovascular (e.g. stroke) death (Osby, 2001). And patients die an average of 9 years earlier (Hirschfield, J Clin Psych, 2003).

So if the risk of a syndromic condition is highly increased by genetically based pathophysiological abnormalities, associated with profound organ damage, loss of functionality, and consequent damage to other organs; if the onset of the condition has little to do with patient choice, and causes profound patient suffering, it then

becomes obvious that such conditions are as legitimate as any other syndromic illnesses in medicine. Yet the editors of the "World" must insist, despite all evidence to the contrary, that there is no mental illness, that choices could explain the cause of these "behaviors" as easily as genes, that charity should be withheld and that research funds cut off, and that sufferers should be subjected to public scorn (the Qi Gong reader with approving banter from the editors). See below for the editors comments in their own words, words that in my view promote bigotry.

"As we have noted before, mental illness is not a real illness." ---
Mad vs. Bad

"However, the religious world is not alone in having worthless superstitions. Secular mental health charities like Rethink promote a view of the world based on the idea of Mental illness." -- Science and Superstition

"Unfortunately, nonsense about mental illness is what passes for serious discussion of moral issues among large and influential sections of the secular world. This, too, is an abrogation of intellectual and moral standards. For the sake of science and freedom and reason, we must abandon these secular superstitions as well." -- Science and Superstition

A new site has proposed a completely different theory for psychotic beliefs (associated with) Mental Illness.....Psychotic episodes associated with Qi Gong.....a model to explain the late adolescent onset of..... schizophrenia...It has not occurred to anyone that the problem these designers and engineers discovered is one of desks, chairs, and repeating detectable movement in a business office.
Reader

"Chronic Cubicle Syndrome" (from the comic strip "Dilbert")

Editor

Editors: David Deutsch, Sarah Fitz-Claridge, Alan Forrester

Professor Deutsch and the editors of the "**Setting the World to Rights**" blog attack serious mental illness syndromes ("worthless superstition") by calling them "fake." In doing so they attempt to disenfranchise the mentally ill but also reveal their own profound ignorance, or ideologically motivated biases. One truly wonders why Professor Deutsch brings up concepts of "choice" when discussing some of the least "chosen" illnesses of any variety that one can think of: Schizophrenia and Bipolar illness. If someone reading this has actually spoken to someone with active schizophrenia, no evidence other than his/her own observation is needed to understand that no individual would choose such a condition.

Multiple illnesses develop partially because of peoples choices including, coronary artery disease, smoking induced chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, venereal disease, migraine headaches, viral sore throats (whose hand did you "choose" to shake?), gall bladder disease (how much fat did you "choose" to consume?), swimmers ear (where did you choose to swim?), fungal infections of the feet (where did you choose to walk?), institutional pneumonias (why did you "choose" to live there?), bacterial meningitis (why did you "choose" to associate with him?), osteoarthritis (why did you "choose" to get so heavy), hearing loss (choice of rock bands?), broken legs ("choice" of skiing?), lead poisoning ("choice" of living arrangement), etc, etc., etc..
Attempting to selectively attack the illnesses of the seriously mentally ill, stricken by their heredity and harmed by impersonal

forces, amongst all patients with illnesses more logically "caused

by" individual "choices", promotes bigotry against the mentally ill.

If Professor Deutsch wishes to make the argument that certain illnesses that the NIH attributes largely to heredity, could actually be caused by cultural discrimination based on an observable attribute, appearing before the onset of illness; why did he not pick illnesses that actually have a genetically mediated observable attribute? For example, those with pre-diabetic syndromes are far more likely to have a visible attribute like large stomachs with thin arms and legs, than those with prodromal bipolar illnesses or schizophrenic illnesses! And Type II diabetes is a remarkably hereditary illness after age 45. So perhaps people's discriminatory comments, when they see someone with a large stomach, completely cause diabetes, by increasing cortisol levels (a stress hormone that increases blood sugar) in those psychologically attacked and therefore "stressed" because of their large stomachs? Is heritability of diabetes over-estimated given this possibility of "reactive covariance"? Arguments about type 2 diabetes would actually fit so much more neatly with Professor Deutsch's sociological speculations about the potentially (non) genetic origin of seemingly genetically based illnesses, even though Professor Deutsch's arguments would still be wrong. And a (non-medical) sociological theory of the cause of diabetes would not necessitate Professor Deutsch positing the existence of clearly seen attributes that the general public can react to (but that apparently disappear when scientists study them) in those destined to develop bipolar illness or schizophrenia!

Yet Professor Deutsch decides to apply his bizarre arguments selectively against heritable mental illness syndromes, though diabetic conditions, coronary artery disease, and a host of other heritable illnesses usually present with visible traits potentially recognizable by observers to which others can "choose" to respond. These illnesses would fit better his unusual theories about responses to observable attributes causing seemingly heritable illness. This selective negative attention to those with mental illnesses also promotes bigotry against the mentally ill.

The World makes a big deal out of the fact that mental illness syndromes are defined by their symptoms rather than a pathophysiological condition. In fact the World calls mental illnesses "worthless superstitions." But as pointed out earlier, type 2 diabetes is a "syndrome" defined by its symptoms and with multiple underlying causes that we don't yet understand, as well. Multiple illnesses in medicine share this characteristic, and yet the editors don't disenfranchise those with: migraine headaches, "restless legs", chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and the coronary syndrome -- all syndromes defined by their symptoms and not their underlying pathophysiology. Indeed, biological scientists understand the underlying causes of very few illnesses, but should we say that most illnesses in medicine are "superstitions"? Holding mental illnesses to a standard so much higher than other medical illnesses, also not defined by pathophysiology, creates distinctions for no logical reason, and so also promotes bigotry against the mentally ill.

The "World" attacks mental illness syndromes because its editors erroneously believe that heritable mental illnesses cannot be defined or measured. Yet as previously argued in my response called "Diseases vs. Syndromes," mental illness syndromes are in fact reliably defined and measured when we use structured clinical instruments. Indeed, certain syndromes (for example major depression, but also bipolar disorder) predict certain cardiovascular end-points considerably better than many other "risk factors" for progression of heart disease. Attacking mental illness syndromes because they cannot be measured, or do not philosophically and

physiologically relate to other illnesses in medicine, is factually wrong, segregates the mentally ill, and therefore (once again) promotes bigotry.

Perhaps it goes without saying that those promoting bigotry would also attack charities helping some of the most disadvantaged people on earth, those with serious mental illness. When famous intellectuals like Professor Deutsch say that supporting charities like "Rethink" is effectively "worthless", this cannot be good for fund-raising. Rethink also sponsors research into mental illness; and yes, those supporting bigotry will often attack the scientific enterprise itself, by trying to cut off funding for research. One should not be surprised to find core anti-scientific and anti-charitable values underlying discriminatory views.

Those denying evolution, or even those denying the reality of the Holocaust, do not promote a bigotry that worldwide injures or kills millions of people, as those attacking the Mentally Ill do. When blatant Anti-Semitism, Racism, and/or bigotry against the seriously Mentally Ill (or the handicapped or disabled, for example) is stated in a public forum, particularly by well-known, influential, and public intellectuals like Professor David Deutsch; this seeming hatred (or hopefully significant ignorance) needs to be publicly rebutted, preferably in the very forum in which it was created. The bigotry must be exposed to the clear light of day.

As stated previously, Professor Deutsch is a well-known physicist and public intellectual whose excellent reputation precedes him. Even his patience as a teacher and kindness have become known world-wide. On a personal note, I have read many of Professor Deutsch's remarkable tracts on the nature of science and reality, and enjoyed his perspectives. That is why it is particularly disturbing to read Professor Deutsch's views about mental illness. I must assume that he has simply not been exposed to much of the scientific work performed over decades and is relying on information received from highly partisan, ideological sources, because I otherwise cannot understand why a great man like David Deutsch would promote anti-scientific nonsense that in turn promotes bigotry. I hope that all of the editors of "**The World**" are capable of rethinking their views, as honest intellectuals should, when confronted with the illogical, unscientific, and bigoted assumptions underlying their perspectives. It is possible for a Holocaust denier to genuinely believe that the Holocaust did not occur, but when confronted with evidence, the non-ideological and honest individual, should be able to "Rethink" his views.

All of us in the medical community want better nomenclature for our "syndromes," many of us even lecture about the philosophy of the DSM and some of its more unusual and less than elegant aspects. If the DSM were one's sole guide to understanding mental illnesses, I can see how one could get confused and irritated. But denying the obvious fact that genes can cause abnormalities in every organ including the brain, and denying that abnormalities in the brain can cause behavioral problems; requires remarkably illogical and unscientific thinking (to put it charitably). Such thinking requires a "totalitarian rationalist" perspective at the expense of a scientific perspective. Perhaps "All Minds are Equal," but so are all "Pigs" (in Orwell's totalitarian Animal Farm.)

In general, scientists enjoy when individuals from different fields utilize knowledge from their own fields to contribute to our common knowledge base. Cross-pollination in science is useful. But reckless attack, based on lack of knowledge or worse, certainly does not advance science, indirectly injures many the world over, and does nothing except excite controversy at the expense of collegiality.

Sincerely,

Michael Golding

by Michael Golding on Mon, 06/20/2005 - 04:28 | [reply](#)

Re: Serious Mental Illness is Hereditary

What does the verb 'to disenfranchise' mean, in this context?

by [David Deutsch](#) on Mon, 06/20/2005 - 16:37 | [reply](#)

Our “ideologically-motivated biases”...

... [may be genetic in origin](#):

These intensely charged political reflexes are shaped partly by inheritance, Dr. Lodge said.

It may be the clash of visceral, genetically primed social orientations that gives political debate its current malice and fire, the study suggests.

Although the two broad genetic types, more conservative and more progressive, may find some common ground on specific issues, they represent fundamental differences that go deeper than many people assume, the new research suggests.

"When people talk about the political debate becoming increasingly ugly, they often blame talk radio or the people doing the debating, but they've got it backward," Dr. Alford said. "These genetically predisposed ideologies are polarized, and that's what makes the debate so nasty.

This raises the question: should people with genetically predisposed ideologies caused by visceral, genetically primed social orientations – be allowed to vote?

by [Editor](#) on Tue, 06/21/2005 - 20:17 | [reply](#)

Re: Serious Mental Illness is Hereditary

I think Michael Golding got the wrong end of the stick on some issues.

He states that mental illness is like [Type 2 diabetes](#) and other illnesses for which we do not know the exact cause. Type 2 diabetes results when a person's body does not make enough insulin. As such, there is an objective chemical marker for Type 2 diabetes - lack of insulin. Pathologists call an objective marker like a chemical or physical abnormality a sign as distinct from a symptom, which is a complaint or behaviour displayed by a patient. A sign is easily testable and a patient cannot produce it as a direct result of his ideas about the world. He can get very angry as a direct result of his ideas about the world. He can imagine that he sees ghosts, or people who don't exist, or that is Abraham Lincoln, Napoleon, Hitler or William Shakespeare as a result of his ideas about the world. Nobody has ever found any objective chemical marker for schizophrenia, chemical or otherwise. So while a doctor may correctly claim that he can do an objective test to determine whether a person has Type 2 diabetes, he cannot correctly claim to have an objective test for schizophrenia, or for any other mental illness.

He says that adopted children develop mental illnesses if their family has a history of mental illness despite adopted parents' best efforts to stop this. But I can come up with many explanations that

don't involve genes. For example, if the adopted parents know that the child's family had mental illness and adopt policies that they think will prevent mental illness and these policies might cause the child problems that led to psychiatrists deeming him to be mentally ill. If the adopted parents try to stop their adopted child from becoming violent by stopping him from watching TV or playing video games he may get very angry with them if his friends have easy access to TV and games. They may then send him to a psychiatrist who might diagnose him as being paranoid because he thinks his adopted parents are persecuting him.

People also have access to a vast world of ideas about how people of different appearances ought to behave, though TV and other means of mass communication: children with glasses should be geeks, Hispanic children should sing like Jennifer Lopez and so on. No study can filter out the effects of these ideas, not least because people don't always consciously know they are conveying such ideas. My point is not that one of these explanations I've just thought of explains mental illness. It's that explanations of that kind, and many others I have not thought of, are just as compatible with the evidence he cites as the gene explanation is. Hence that evidence is not particularly evidence for the gene explanation.

I don't believe, and nor does **The World**, that people choose to become 'mentally ill', or that they should be blamed for it. As for being disenfranchised, surely our view is the opposite of that. We stand up for them to have the same rights as anyone else, including the right not to have unpleasant stuff done to them by force unless they have committed a crime.

The mere fact that a person chooses a particular behaviour does not necessarily mean that they should get any praise or blame for that choice. And definitely not when the choices and circumstances that led to that choice are still unknown. Michael Goldring seems to confuse criticism of a certain explanation of behaviours with 'bigotry' against the person doing them. But that isn't true. When cigarette smoking was first suggested to cause lung cancer, before there was evidence of this, that didn't mean that the people proposing that explanation were blaming cigarette smokers. Similarly today, if the non-gene explanation is true, then it is not known what, in a person's environment, causes them to behave like that, just as, if the gene explanation is true, it is not known how the genes cause it.

Michael Goldring may deny that a psychiatric patient has a will but the patient still exhibits behaviour that is very difficult to interpret as anything other than a deliberate and systematic attempt to undermine his 'treatment.' Such as saying 'I'm not taking this crap anymore!' I think the simplest explanation is true, i.e. - that he does not want to take the chemicals prescribed by the psychiatrist.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Wed, 06/22/2005 - 01:32 | [reply](#)

Perhaps not the best choice of words

Enfranchise = "to set free" (as from slavery)

By "disenfranchise", in the context used, I meant that certain opinions of the editors may (unintentionally) subject patients to the "slavery" imposed by their illnesses.

The word is too strong, however, because I don't think the editors would intentionally subject someone to slavery. But by denying the illnesses of the mentally ill (and the funding and the research and the respect these patients deserve) the editors may harm people that they don't mean to.

by Michael Goldring on Wed, 06/22/2005 - 02:31 | [reply](#)

Would You Help Them Vote Republican?

Should the editors vote? Well ...err.... grudgingly..... yes.

But if all Republicans were whisked by unseen forces into voting booths only during Democratic primaries and they were forced to see only a Democratic candidate on the ticket; and if all these Republicans were beaten over the head in the booth until their brain shrank, causing 3 times the rate of diabetes, heart attacks, and stroke; and if they bravely begged to vote Republican despite their torture; and if they killed themselves 30 times more frequently than Democrats so they would not be forced to vote against their will: Would you try to eliminate this political "sickness," or would you call it their "choice"? Would you try to help them out of the booth even if they didn't yet have the strength to vote Republican? But if you can only ignore them, can you at least not claim that there is no issue. And would you please not condemn the charities trying to get them out?

by Michael Golding on Wed, 06/22/2005 - 04:29 | [reply](#)

Respect?

Who is more respectful of patients?

Those who say that their behavior is largely beyond their control and that their ideas and choices cannot change it, so they must be continually coerced "for their own good"?

Or, those who deny this?

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 06/22/2005 - 16:17 | [reply](#)

Re: Perhaps not the best choice of words

So being 'enfranchised' in this context meant being set free ('emancipated'), which was in turn a metaphor for being cured of an illness (rather as we might say 'this person was set free from his wheelchair by surgery').

There is a much discussed practical difference between being set from from a mental illness on the one hand, and being set free from a wheelchair or prison on the other: The former sort of 'being freed' can involve a person who was already free to walk down the street at will (or instruct his friend or his wheelchair to take him), losing that entitlement. Instead he may be hunted down as he tries to escape, immobilised, taken into a room that is barred and locked from the outside, despite begging to be set free, and he may have drugs administered to him against his will, and so on. The latter kind of 'being set free' never involves any of these things.

There is, at least, a certain irony in the existence of these two contrasting, and sometimes incompatible, kinds of 'being set free'. And at the very least there is a certain terminological problem: for instance, when I described the person as 'begging to be set free', I should, within the context of this metaphor, have said 'begging to remain imprisoned'.

None of these ironies or terminological puzzles arises when the metaphor of 'being freed' is used in the wheelchair case. It only ever arises in the mental illness case. Being in a wheelchair, one remains entitled to refuse the treatment that would 'set one free', even if one is refusing for profoundly irrational reasons (such as religious ones) and even if this will result in one's certain death.

This entitlement is called, in the tradition of English law and legal philosophy, a 'right' or a 'freedom'.

Is it self-evident that the difference between these two types of 'enfranchisement' really is just a meaningless curiosity and an insignificant terminological puzzle? That they really are the same in all morally significant respects? And is it self-evident that there is no important philosophical difference between the two classes of state that are both conventionally known as 'illnesses', mental and physical?

by [David Deutsch](#) on Wed, 06/22/2005 - 17:55 | [reply](#)

Excuse me?

Professor Deutsch,

According to the NIMH, there are 40 million people in the United States with a diagnosable mental illness in a given year. However one arrives at this number, whether it should be calculated as greater or smaller, only the tiniest fraction of a percentage of patients is involuntarily treated. According to a commonly cited study (I'll find it later if you'd like), the mentally ill take their medications at the same rate as those with other medical illnesses. They want to feel better.

If I had said to you that I believe we should treat those with Tuberculosis with antibiotics and explained the reasons why (it's a dangerous disease, it can destroy the lungs and kidneys); if I described the many other ways in which TB can kill or injure people and then told you about a group of people who don't believe in infectious disease; if I further told you that I explained to them why they should believe in Tuberculosis because accurate beliefs tend to be both ethically reasonable and scientifically valid; if I explained that to you, and said that refusing to believe in the reality of infectious disease "disenfranchised" (enslaved) those with Tuberculosis, I think you may have congratulated me on bringing science to those with less information. I bet you would not have said the following:

"The former sort of 'being freed' can involve a person who was already free to walk down the street at will (or instruct his friend or his wheelchair to take him), losing that entitlement. Instead he may be hunted down as he tries to escape, immobilized, taken into a room that is barred and locked from the outside, despite begging to be set free, and he may have drugs administered to him against his will, and so on....

.....And at the very least there is a certain terminological problem: for instance, when I describe the person as 'begging to be set free', I should, within the context of this metaphor, have said 'begging to remain imprisoned'.

None of these ironies or terminological puzzles arises when the metaphor of 'being freed' is used in the wheelchair case (when a surgeon operates to allow a formerly wheelchair bound person to walk)"

Excuse me? You have very wrongly assumed that when I was talking about mental illness syndromes and the importance of treating the mentally ill, that I was talking about *involuntarily* treating them. I was discussing no such thing. Not in the slightest, and I must admit to being rather flabbergasted at your response. It took me 20 minutes or more of staring at what you said to figure out what you were assuming.

When I wrote my discussion about the genetics of certain mental

illnesses, I was (amongst other things) demonstrating that mental illness syndromes are devastating illnesses that can be hereditary and they hurt people. I was saying, "Please don't deny that they exist (because they do) and let's treat them."

Somehow, you then determined that I was (or perhaps could have been) talking about involuntary treatment. Would you truly have immediately jumped to the same conclusion if I were asking people to acknowledge the threat of Tuberculosis and the need to treat it? In the United States, those with Tuberculosis are (very rarely, like those with mental illness), involuntarily treated if they are a risk to others; but you must admit, involuntary treatment is not the first thing to come to mind when someone talks about the genetics of Tuberculosis susceptibility. So how did you jump from my discussion of the genetics of heritable mental illness and the need for research and support and treatment of the illnesses, to a discussion of coercive treatment? Is this on your mind? Perhaps I'm wrong, but I don't believe you would have come to that conclusion if I had been discussing TB.

I treat thousands of some of the sickest mentally ill patients in this city (mostly all Medicaid, many financially distressed, and many with schizophrenia) and not one is currently "involuntarily" treated, and not one is forced to take any medication whatsoever.

Thank you for demonstrating, more clearly than I could ever do myself, the horrible biases some people hold about the overwhelming majority of treatment rendered to those who are suffering with mental illness. Thank you for demonstrating the remarkably incorrect assumptions some hold about the desires of the overwhelming majority of the mentally ill in the United States.

Sincerely,

Michael Golding

by Michael Golding on Thu, 06/23/2005 - 06:39 | [reply](#)

Re: Excuse me?

What is the meaning of the quotation marks round "involuntarily" in the above?

by [David Deutsch](#) on Thu, 06/23/2005 - 12:57 | [reply](#)

Re: Serious Mental Illness is Hereditary

I have known Dr. Golding for many years as a very able and well-respected physician. He asked me to read this website and respond to the Science and Superstition articles if I wished.

I see the unfortunate legacy of the anti-psychiatry movement is alive and well at Oxford University! Somehow a few philosophers seem to be still reading this mostly unscientific material, without apparently the slightest cognizance that 99.9% of the learned commentary and essentially all of the scientific evidence on psychiatric issues in medicine has nothing to do with Thomas Szasz or his writings! Unfortunately, due to horrible discrimination, the overwhelming majority of contented psychiatric patients do not write about their experiences (because people like David Deutsch will call them "fake(rs)", and they are already embarrassed by the terrible stigma of mental illness. They tend to be vulnerable people anyway. That leaves a few libertarian philosophers, scientologists, Tom Cruise, David Deutsch, a small minority of unhappy and vocal psychiatric patients, and a few others to create a ruckus and a fuss, and make things worse for everybody.

I have been practicing medicine for many years. Alan F. is right

about signs being considered exam findings, and symptoms being considered the report of the patient. We used to use that language a lot. But those names don't matter so much because what we obtain in a clinical encounter is information, whether from the patient, the lab, or our exam. Our findings need to predict something useful to us and our patients, regardless of who says it or reports it. The issue is reliability and validity, not signs and symptoms.

Labs are correct within a certain range (and they have a certain reliability) and even if they are mostly accurate at a given time, they change all the time because the body keeps changing. A person can have non-insulin dependant diabetes (what Michael calls type 2) one day and not have it the next three but have it a week later, if you just follow the definition of diabetes. Type 2 diabetes, contrary to Alan F., is not defined in the slightest by the insulin level, and I will explain why later. If you wish to learn, Alan F., look up the definitions. Fasting blood sugar is one way of defining this syndrome. Endocrinologists define adult onset diabetes, and every few years, as evidence accumulates, they change the definition. But if someone is on the border of getting diabetes, he usually ultimately progresses to full-blown diabetes unless he loses an awful lot of weight and exercises, no matter what definition you use. It's not true (Alan F) that your "ideas" about the world can't change a "sign" of illness like blood sugar level. People with schizophrenia (odd ideas and much stress) and bipolar disease have many times the rate of diabetes and it is easy to change a fasting blood sugar level by what one thinks (because acute stress changes blood sugar levels). Michael cited studies to support this. Did you read what he said?

If you are under stress your cortisol (a steroid) level goes up and that changes the deposition of abdominal body fat and independently raises blood sugar. Look up Cushing's disease if you want to learn about it. When a relative takes prednisone (another steroid) for bad inflammatory arthritis, that raises blood sugar as well. Chronic mental illness can create, in effect, a minor form of Cushing's disease because of chronically elevated cortisol. Indeed the response of cortisol to exogenous steroids in fact CAN be used to diagnose major depressive disorder (dexamethasone suppression test); the only problem is that a clinical interview based diagnosis is better in predicting who will respond to treatment. So yes, acutely stressful feelings and thoughts acutely raise that "objective" and not quite so stable sign of illness that defines diabetes: Blood sugar. Chronic stress continues the pattern, likely by changing body fat deposition in those with major mental illness. One's ideas and thinking do change one's body and blood sugar level. So many things can "cause" adult diabetes, that's why it's a syndrome.

Even in infections, I bet you (Michael) would call these diseases, but how does the same colony count (of bacteria) in one person cause sickness and infection, and in another no problem at all? So is the cause of infection a bacteria or a susceptibility to infection? So there are multiple causes even of infections, thought to be "diseases." When a person is 10 years old, he gets the beginnings of coronary artery disease, a fatty streak in his arteries. So how much plaque build-up do you need before you have coronary artery "disease"? Coronary artery "disease" is defined by people, just like bipolar disease is, whether you want to call it a disease or a "syndrome". It's sometimes hard to get a pathologist to tell me, when they look at a slide of something I cut or swabbed from someone's body, whether I have to worry about the patient's condition getting worse, but that's what matters to me. Often, however, they just tell me about the pathology of the slide (the "lesion") and that doesn't help much. Some pathologists keep saying, for example, there are "atypical cells" on the slide, instead of telling me what I want to

know, which is "But will the cells keep dividing and injure my patient?" I'm exaggerating a little but a few pathologists hedge so much so nobody will sue them, that the family doctor or internist has to figure out whether the "atypical cells" are really a "cancer" (probably going to get worse) or not. I usually let the oncologists decide, but they disagree with each other, too. And some cancers are considered "normal," also, given the finite amount of time that we live and because they are so prevalent after a certain age (e.g. certain prostate cancers). So even the lesion called prostate "cancer" may not be that medically relevant in a few situations. So by the modern terms, shouldn't we call "cancer" a syndrome, too? When do atypical cells become cancer? Is a definition involved?

Modern doctors have come up with the language of syndromes (actually these terms are old but now more in vogue) because they think when they have finally found the "disease" (the "real" pathophysiological disturbance) they are going to take the art out of medicine by eliminating the gut feelings we have and the uniqueness of each patient sitting in front of us. Calling something a "disease" with a "cause" sounds precise and should lead to a precise treatment, but diseases and syndromes, are actually more alike than different, they just reflect more or less knowledge of something, not necessarily a different category of illness. Diseases and syndromes are definitions describing an aspect of reality, not more or less objective than the evidence supporting them. And diseases also have many causes, just like what Michael considers to be the defining characteristic of syndromes. Leave perfection to David in physics. Our job is to help patients feel better and live longer.

Our knowledge of what causes each illness is more or less. We know more about strep. throat (a "disease") than schizophrenia (a "syndrome"), but trust me, there's a lot more to know about strep. throat, too. As stated before, why does one person get it when the other doesn't and they both are infected with the same number of bugs?

Diseases are entities that cause disruptions of bodily function. They are internal to the individual and injure the combined physical and psychological health of people. A disease could imply, for example, a genetically based illness that causes some internal (known or logically necessary) pathophysiological state that causes shortened lifespan or suffering. Such conditions usually then damage organs or organ systems. Bipolar disease would fit in this category of illness. Or a disease could imply a pathophysiological state with some consequent damage to an organ (causing suffering and/or shortened lifespan), independent of genetic influence. A torn anterior cruciate ligament from a football injury would be an example of this. Or a disease could imply some other physical characteristic that causes people to suffer or shortens their lifespan (poor vestibular sense causing balance irregularities or nearsightedness would be examples). And diseases should exist at least to some extent independent of the reactions of people to an observable physical or psychological characteristic of a patient (i.e. independent of discrimination based on ones politics or skin color, for example). Diseases really imply current physical dysfunction or current vulnerability of a body part or organ to a future dysfunction (e.g. compromised immune function), which predictably causes people to suffer or not live as long. Bipolar disease, schizophrenia, and depression easily meet the first of these characteristics (genetically based and causing organ damage and suffering and death).

Many mental illnesses are diseases. They run in families so the genes are involved (the body is involved), they make people miserable (the psychology is involved), they severely damage the

rest of your body, so they relate to other illnesses; they shorten people's life and cause certain pathophysiological states, even though most known pathophysiological states due to mental diseases are not specific to a given mental disease, so they can not be used for diagnostic purposes. (For example, depression causes worsening heart disease, but many conditions also cause this). Furthermore, we know how to treat many mental diseases with drugs and therapy. I usually do better treating depression than chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and diabetes (all diseases, all caused by many things, mostly unknown). Some psychiatrists (and even a few young family doctors) are letting people fragment our profession. The body and mind work together. Using the concept of syndromes to define serious psychiatric illness is going to segregate psychiatry from the rest of the field of medicine even more in the public's mind, and there is no reason not to call major psychiatric illnesses diseases, given the genetics involved and the damage to organs they cause. In medicine, and I include serious mental illness, we have a unified set of diseases, a unified set of treatments, all involving how people feel and how the body works. That's how it's always been. Non-doctors just need a whole lot of education about the field of medicine. Obviously, just read this website.

Alan F. tries to say that bipolar illness doesn't have to be genetically based. He correctly argues that if Hispanic girls learn to sing like Jennifer Lopez, then that does not imply that genes, more common to Hispanics, cause Jennifer-Lopez-type singing. But Alan, I don't think you read what Michael said. Unlike Hispanics, there is no known physical appearance that bipolars have before the onset of their illness. The culture does not say, "bipolars have blonde hair and green eyes" and then condition bipolar disorder in individuals with these genetically based physical characteristics. Hispanics have (a few) physical characteristics that people can notice. If nobody has defined the appearance of somebody to be selected (for conditioning to be bipolar), then the patient can't be trained to be bipolar based on these undefined characteristics. So heritability studies can't accidentally attribute to genes what actually is a product of the training of people with blonde hair and green eyes. And no expert on "TV" can reveal these alleged characteristics (the blonde hair and green eyes) to others, as you suggest happens, because no one knows any such characteristics in individuals who are destined to become bipolar. Think about it. So identical twins shouldn't have a higher correlation of having (and not having) bipolar illness than fraternal twins. And children of families with bipolar disorder shouldn't have higher rates of bipolar when adopted out into other families. And children from families without bipolar illness, adopted into families with heritable mental illness, should not have lower rates of bipolar mental illness. Studies repeatedly demonstrate the heritability of bipolar disorder and therefore explain these findings. In addition, Michael also explained why it is problematic to consider it possible to condition someone to be bipolar even if bipolars all did have blonde hair and green eyes. Alan F., did you read what he said?

Alan F. you say that maybe families without mental illness adopt those who have a family history of an illness (like bipolar illness) but then create the (bipolar) illness in them because of the adoption process (so it's not the genetics) You say that because the adoptive family knows that the adoptee comes from a troubled family, they then try to raise them too well, which backfires. So the attempt at excellent parenting in fact causes the adoptive child to have the very mental illness the family was trying to prevent. But how to explain that adopted children without family-of-origin bipolar illness, tend not to develop bipolar illness even if their adoptive families have mental illnesses? Would you then claim that because the mentally ill tend to raise children badly, they of course make an

exception for adoptive children and raise them well, but this time it doesn't backfire? Or perhaps attempting to raise children a particular way will always backfire, so if you raise them badly, they will turn out well and not have mental illness? Don't you think it's a little (even logically) strange to argue that families without mental illness are more likely to raise their kids to develop mental illness, and families with mental illness are more likely to raise kids without mental illness (adopted or not)? I bet Michael could show you hundreds of studies disputing that! I can say, for example, that a bunch of wind blows the parts together to assemble a 747 airplane. If you show me movies of planes being put together by people, I can say that there were mirrors that fooled the cameramen and created the illusion of people involved, but actually the wind did it all by itself. And I could also argue that aeronautical engineers put all the sand dunes in the Saharra desert together. You guessed it. When the cameramen come to film the aeronautical engineers, the mirage demonstrates that the wind is partially doing it, but actually the engineers manufacture all the dunes. It's just a different explanation of sand dune creation and airplane construction. Not better or worse. Right? Michael is known for being a careful researcher and physician. He cites a number of studies and you (Alan) respond to none of them; indeed you repeat the fallacies that the studies cited dispute and his careful reasoning disputes.

And Alan, in addition to (not understanding?) twin studies, you don't know much about diabetes, either. You say that type 2 diabetes is a disease with a pathological marker, low insulin. But you are just wrong. In most of my patients, when it's early diabetes, the insulin is actually not low; but in the metabolic syndrome, in fact high. Blood sugar can even go up with HIGH insulin levels. But measuring insulin doesn't tell you much, anyway. In layman's terms, the pancreas tries to compensate for the person (usually) weighing too much and therefore requiring a lot of insulin, so the pancreas puts out more insulin into the blood stream and insulin levels go up. The cells in the body, for not completely known reasons, just can't pull enough glucose into the cell despite insulin, so blood sugar measurements can be higher. But if the body demands too much of the pancreas over too long a period of time, then the pancreas can dramatically decrease its production of insulin. Then the insulin levels get lower until they are below normal. So the insulin levels INCREASE as a person becomes (type 2) diabetic, and decrease later on. So Alan, you can't point to the pathological lesion that causes type 2 diabetes, because it seems to be inside cells, and we don't know what the many problems inside cells (or outside them) could be. Why did you claim that you could point to a lesion? So is diabetes a "fake" disease just like bipolar illness? Michael also briefly described why diabetes is a syndrome. Did you read what he said?

Finding a "lesion" is finding a bit of evidence, like hearing a sound with your stethoscope or listening to what a patient says. Either a lesion predicts something useful or it doesn't. Look at all the "lesions" on your skin, most are medically useless and predict nothing, though pathologists can deliver a whole report on each of them! If the sounds we hear with a stethoscope predict something, if what a patient says predicts something, if a lab result predicts something, and if something a pathologist says about a lesion predicts something, that's helpful. Otherwise any of the above is not useful; including the "lesions" Alan F. seems to think are important.

The editors have their mind made up because they've never really seen patients and they've made things up from what they've heard, apparently without studies. Alan F. is talking as if he knows something about diabetes and adoption studies and his ideas seem ...well, interesting at best. Everybody who's ever seen family upon

family member with mental diseases or diabetes knows that a lot of diseases have a genetic basis. There are hundreds of studies showing this (as Michael points out) in mental disease but also in diabetes. If hundreds of good scientific studies and beautifully converging data from dozens of fields, don't convince editors that genes cause all kinds of brain diseases with unusual behaviors and subsequent or concomitant diseases of other organs, then "where" the editors' are looking, is getting in the way of "what" they are seeing. You can't fight with people who won't read or listen to the scientific evidence. It's like trying to convince people whose pastor said the world was created in 7 days to look at the geological record or DNA. They can't and won't because it will disturb what they think they know. For reasons we don't know, the genes help make bodies and brains abnormal, and genes interact with the environment in a way that makes people suffer. This is known from hundreds of human and animal studies.

Sometimes differences in genes don't cause physical problems. David quotes one study that shows political progressives and conservatives may differ in their genes, but so do people with and without green eyes. It is a provocative study, nonetheless. David does come up with interesting examples to tease the mind. I will give him that. Sometimes differences in genes cause damage to the body and brain (in diabetes, heart disease, schizophrenia) and sometimes they don't (in progressive political beliefs and green eyes).

If "progressives" get punished in a conservative country, does that make being "progressive" a disease? (No, because it would be societies reaction to progressive politics, not their internal state that caused the suffering.) Plastic surgeons can change a big nose to a little nose. But a big nose is not considered a disease because it is society's reaction to the big nose that makes the patient with the big nose uncomfortable. But there are some cases in which it is hard to tell whether it is society's superficial reactions to people that make people feel sick, or whether it is their genetic/internal physiological state that causes a condition that makes them feel sick. Example. Are some shy people unhappy because of their physiology or because of a cultural value in America that tells people to dislike shy people? In Japan, shyness is appreciated more than America. And you can change shy people to more outgoing people with drugs (SSRI's and MAOI's.) If society values obesity and gives obese people more access to health care (?Sumo wrestlers), I think I still would not encourage obesity. But then I shouldn't treat shyness either, even if society values outgoing people and punishes shy people. In reality, I don't treat normal shyness and would not encourage a Sumo wrestler to gain weight. In general physicians try to separate out cultural reactions to attributes, from attributes themselves.

If cultural values tell us to not use antidepressants because depression has cultural aspects, and yet patients die of a depression factor that induces heart disease, should I not use possibly life-saving antidepressants just because society says not to do it? Should I not treat obesity just because T.V. commercials encourage people to eat, so obesity, causing diabetes, is partly culturally determined? No. I and other doctors use antidepressants and antidiabetic drugs and encourage weight loss.

David's quoted study suggests that being politically progressive (vs. conservative) can be genetically influenced. But physicians usually try to do the best we can to separate reactions to a genetically influenced trait (for example lynching of black people) from conditions that are internally created, caused by genetic inheritance and other factors. Lynching is not a medical disease. Michael

mentions discrimination against black skin (racism), and shows that

black skin isn't a disease either, even if genes cause black skin and someone suffers because of it. It's really the same thing with political preferences. Reaction by others to a (partially genetically determined) political stance is not a disease even if it causes injury. Let's say you are a person who is genetically influenced to be "progressive," but then you get physically attacked for being progressive. This discrimination is not a disease, nor is being a progressive, because it is society's reaction to the political opinion that is the problem. Eye color and political persuasion, though apparently genetically influenced, are not diseases because if they do cause problems, it is because of people's discriminatory reaction to them.

But bipolar disease and diabetes cause injury and unhappiness and death to people, all by themselves, without anyone having to react to patients with these illnesses, at all. As Michael says in his piece on syndromes, major depression (but also bipolar illness and diabetes) have "a life of (their) own". People can die from these illnesses without anyone saying a word or doing a thing! Actually, people die of these diseases sometimes because people in fact do not "say a word" or intervene to help. That is the problem. And it is made worse by people (like the editors) denying the existence of mental diseases that kill people. Michael is right about that, and it's a shame that such ignorance exists in the 21st century. Some philosophers like to discuss Szasz, but not, unfortunately the multiple premature deaths and suffering of individuals with the mental illnesses they don't believe in. That itself tells you something about priorities (More important to think in the abstract than reason in the present or help the suffering, I think) As healers of the body and mind, physicians treat bipolar disease and depression and diabetes and coronary disease, but not political progressives or people with blue eyes, and we'll argue with the plastic surgeons and psychiatrists about treating those with big noses and people who are shy.

Look at your grandmothers' medication lists. Medicines for pain are often "antidepressants" nowadays (e.g. Cymbalta, elavil). Anti-anxiety SSRI's may help those with heart disease. And the new cortisol releasing hormone antagonists (when available) may treat obesity, diabetes, coronary disease, and depression. Some, what Michael calls "totalitarian rationalist" philosophers, like a clean distinction between the body and the mind. But the body disagrees. And the mind disagrees.

The field of medicine does not so much want to define "what is wrong" but rather ultimately wants to use a definition of "what is wrong" to help people, no matter how you define "what is wrong". Our diseases predict things about progression of an internal pathophysiology that will shorten a person's life or make him uncomfortable, regardless of how much we know about the cause. That's why some pathologists need to stop talking about their "atypical cells" ("lesions" so to speak) and start telling us whether these "atypical cells" are going to keep growing into a cancer and hurt our patients. In fairness, most pathologists are actually pretty good about helping us in this way; but half the time, a lesion, or not a lesion, tells you very little. We want our diseases to help us predict what we should DO to stop internally bad things from happening to people. (Period) That is what is important to most doctors, and Michael says it a little bit, but it should be emphasized again. For the externally bad things that happen to people, we have to, unfortunately, rely on our politicians to help us. God help us all.

And yes, sometimes you have to help people who are not thinking correctly. Has anyone ever been to a post-op recovery suite, especially to see the patients after a transplant? It seems half the patients are in some kind of restraints because otherwise they'll pull

out their central line or their intubation tube and they'll die. When someone is not in their right mind, sometimes you have to help them until they can take care of themselves. The readers and the editors, if they have an ounce of common sense, would want that, too, if they were sick. Even if they can't say so right now because they are lost in their philosophy, I bet I know what they'd want for their family member in an emergency because philosophers, just like them, tell me to help their family members when their loved one is dying. Because almost nobody really wants to die, they'd tolerate a little restraint for their family members in exchange for another 30 years of good living. And the ones who want to die can often be fixed with a little talking, and a little antidepressant, too. But if not, sometimes you just have to get them better if they are totally psychotic and really don't know what's real yet, and almost always they'll thank you later. We're always fighting for patient's rationality, a component of health, whether fighting brain infections, dementia, strokes, or schizophrenia.

Dr. J.L.

by Dr. J.L. on Thu, 06/30/2005 - 00:16 | [reply](#)

Fakers

Dear Dr J.L.

Is it your opinion that the post 'Science and Superstition', or 'On Fake Diseases', on [The World](#), or some writings by me, here or elsewhere, carry the implication that people suffering from mental illnesses are fakers?

by [David Deutsch](#) on Mon, 07/04/2005 - 03:48 | [reply](#)

Confusing Premise of Question

Prof. Deutsch,
I don't understand the premise of the question you asked Dr. J. L.

You are saying,
"Secular mental health charities promote a view of the world based on the idea of mental illness."

And you claim that the idea of mental illness is "fictional" and "superstitious."

You say, "As we have noted before, mental illness is not a real illness."

Now you ask a question about people "suffering with mental illnesses" (!?)

How can one suffer from something that does not exist?
Please clarify.

Michael Golding

by Michael Golding on Tue, 07/05/2005 - 14:30 | [reply](#)

Re: Confusing Premise of Question

The idea is that the states in question do exist, but they are not illnesses.

Other examples of states that are not illnesses, but from which people do suffer are: inductivism, having a non-English accent, yearning for martyrdom as a suicide bomber, fear of a second heart attack.

The last of these is almost invariably caused by a disease, yet is not

a disease.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Tue, 07/05/2005 - 15:13 | [reply](#)

I think I understand what you are getting at.

OK.

When does a physiological state become an illness?
Must it evolve in some way?

If one takes a snapshot of someones body whom doctors call "type 2 diabetic", can a (very very detailed) snapshot document that type 2 diabetes is an illness, or does there need to be more?

It would seem that:

The smallest nanosecond of fear induced hypertension could not cause a second heart attack, so a nanosecond of fear is not an illness.

And the smallest nanosecond of hyperosmolarity in type 2 diabetes would not cause dehydration and hyperosmolar coma. So a very brief "state" of elevated blood sugar should not be an illness, either.

So, when does a physiological process become an illness, in your view?

by [Michael Golding](#) on Tue, 07/05/2005 - 16:46 | [reply](#)

What's An Illness?

What gets me is that I don't see psychologists as very interested in taking seriously what makes an illness and creating reasonable, precise criteria on the subject. Instead we have things like Asperger's Syndrome with it's catch-all set of "symptoms". When psychologists figure something out, maybe they'll interest me in helping out in their field. But at the moment I think other fields are more interesting.

(I am aware they do figure out the occasional thing, for example about how memory works.)

by [a reader](#) on Tue, 07/05/2005 - 22:54 | [reply](#)

Re: Excuse me?

What is the meaning of the quotation marks round "involuntarily" in [this](#) post above?

by [David Deutsch](#) on Thu, 07/07/2005 - 09:29 | [reply](#)

Re:Excuse me?

In the very few patients in whom this discussion is relevant, patients often change their mind about a procedure that at one point they say they did not want, but later say they are grateful for and were grateful for, and would want in the future under similar circumstances. Patient's conceptions of what is "voluntary" therefore changes.

So when does a physiological process become an illness in your view?

by [Michael Golding](#) on Thu, 07/07/2005 - 11:00 | [reply](#)

Professor Deutsch and Faking Mental Illness

Dr. J.L. asked me to respond to Professor Deutsch's question about

why we think Professor Deutsch may assume that the mentally ill "fake" their illnesses.

Professor Deutsch says that when someone attributes risk for development of mental illness to hereditary factors, the mental illness could also be "100% due to the persons own choices". If the victims can choose mental illness "states" or behaviors, then they can decide to not choose them, as well. So people can choose to be more rational, or less rational, at will. But if everyone can choose to be more or less rational and the mentally ill choose to behave irrationally, and they say this causes them anguish, then they must gain something from placing themselves in a state that they say causes them pain. Or they must *fake* their symptoms (being in pain) in order to derive the benefits without having to feel the pain.

When Professor Deutsch says that the choices of the mentally ill can "100%" explain the seemingly large hereditary risk for major mental illness, he implies that even those with the least rationality, the mentally ill with schizophrenia for example, can fully choose to be rational. Therefore, if even the mentally ill have this fully rational capacity, then everyone has this fully rational capacity.

Should we say that British citizens "chose" to be bombed a few days ago because, but for their "choice" to use public transportation, the bombs most certainly would not have been planted on the buses. Such argument is absurd and cruel. Imagine the British victim's and their family's reaction to such an argument. Now imagine the reaction of families and patients with mental illness when Professor Deutsch declares their mentally ill children's miserable feelings their "own choice" (can you?). But if simplistic statisticians studied the bus-bombing phenomenon, a causal relationship between bus riding and bus bombing could be experimentally found, to a high degree of statistical significance. The choice to use public transportation does cause (in one sense, but not another) the planting of bombs on public busses.

Prof. Deutsch specifically warns (with his genes-for-black skin do not cause racism argument) not to make this type of logical/statistical error. Yet he either

1. Precisely makes this type of logical error, exactly when he is arguing against it,
or
2. He DOES ASSUME that everyone is equally rational, including the mentally ill.

If a choice has an unintended consequence 'X', then one should not say that a person "chose" 'X'. Dr. J.L. (and I) assume that at a minimum Professor Deutsch is using the word "choose" in a logical way. We assume that when Prof. Deutsch says that behaviors thought to be hereditary in origin could be better accounted for by patient's "choice(s)", we assume he is talking about patient's choices, not the *unintended consequences* of patient's choices.

A reader says, "Given that Asperger Syndrome is much more frequent in monozygotic than fraternal twins," there likely is a hereditary component. Deutsch responds, "In view of the above, it is perfectly possible for a given behavior to be 100% due to the persons own choices."

"Given behavior" must imply a behavior that is part of the Asperger's syndrome or it would have been irrelevant for Deutsch to mention it.

Since the mentally ill/developmentally disabled often report that they are in great psychological pain, then if Professor Deutsch believes that these states come about as an intended consequence

of patients choices, then he either assumes patients are masochists, assumes they benefit from mental illness, and/or assumes they "fake" their symptoms for some type of gain. And yes, if people choose their patterns of behavior and their mental states, then he is also assuming that the mentally ill can choose not to exhibit mental illness behavior. If someone says heredity could explain an illness and Deutsch says patient's choice instead explains the illness, some of us take Professor Deutsch at his word.

If those with schizophrenia are in some respects the least rational, and if they can choose to simply change what they think, so can everyone else. So everyone has the capacity to be equally rational. Saying that mental illness is the choice of the mentally ill then blames the mentally ill, which is scientifically and ethically problematic.

It has been suggested to Dr. J.L. and me that perhaps when professor Deutsch writes about the mentally ill "choos(ing)" their mental illness behavior, that actually Professor Deutsch is saying that mental illness could be caused by the *unintended consequences* of patient's choices. But Professor Deutsch does not say this. Instead he says that an Asperger patient's behavior could be "100% due to the persons *OWN* choices." He specifically did not say that the patient's behavior could be "100% due to the UNINTENDED consequences of the persons own choices." I think Professor Deutsch knows the difference between something being the intended consequence and the unintended consequence of a person's choices.

If someone said that terrorism explains bus bombings, would it also be correct for Prof. Deutsch to respond that British citizens choose to use public transportation, so an alternative explanation is that British citizens cause bus bombing, "100%"? The maiming and killing on the buses were UNINTENDED consequences of riding the bus, as certain mental illness behaviors may be the UNINTENDED consequences of choices that people make. Saying that severe mental illness/developmental-disability is a consequence of a patient's "choice," involves the same logic as saying that getting blown up is a consequence of the British citizen's choice to ride a public bus. Such logic assumes that the intended consequence of a choice is the same thing as the unintended consequence.

So if someone chooses to handle meat products as a butcher, not knowing that a virus that causes schizophrenia contaminates the meat products, should we say that the person chose to develop schizophrenia by being a butcher? That's the same logical error as saying that if genes for black skin cause racists to decide to attack black people, then the genes for black skin cause racism! A reaction to a gene product causing black skin and a reaction to a choice to be a butcher cause the problems, not the genes for black skin or the persons choice to be a butcher. In arguing against an allegedly incorrect position of geneticists, Deutsch makes the identical logical error that he accuses the geneticists of making! The only difference is that the geneticists don't make the error, he does!

Dr. J.L. and I do not believe that Professor Deutsch is remarkably illogical. He has shown to us that he chooses his words very carefully. I believe that when someone says to Professor Deutsch that the risk for a set of behaviors is best explained by hereditary factors, and Prof. Deutsch responds that the illness can be due "100%" to the patient's "own choices", he means exactly that. Ultimately, Dr. J.L. and I do not believe that Professor Deutsch would make the same logical error that he accuses the geneticists of making. We believe that when Dr. Deutsch says that the mentally ill choose their behaviors 100%, he is not talking about the unintended consequences of their choices causing painful mental states and behaviors, but rather the intended consequence

of their choice causing these problems.

So yes, when Professor Deutsch says that the mentally ill choose their behaviors 100%, he implies that the seriously mentally ill choose their reportedly horrible and painful mental states and irrational behaviors. And if the mentally ill are not masochists, then *he must believe that they are faking their reports of pain and suffering*, exactly as Dr. J.L. suggests, presumably for some type of gain. And if the mentally ill choose their mental states and their patterns of behavior, then they can also choose to be mentally healthy. So yes, this implies that everyone has the capacity to be equally rational. So per Professor Deutsch, not only do doctors create "fake" mental illnesses, the patients create "fake symptoms",

And yes, that's a highly inaccurate point of view, with immoral consequences.

by Michael Golding on Sun, 07/10/2005 - 12:55 | [reply](#)

Re: Excuse me?

when does a physiological process become an illness in your view?

It's not just processes: it could be states too, such as blindness.

Issues of terminology, in themselves, don't matter. What matters is what is being asserted about reality – especially when the morality of people's behaviour depends on what the facts are.

In the case of physical illnesses, it never matters, morally, where one draws the line between states that are or are not illnesses. Indeed, we take it for granted that doctors should treat many conditions that no one would call illnesses, such as pregnancy, or less-than-perfect features (in the case of cosmetic surgeons), but on other occasions refuse to treat conditions that everyone calls illnesses, for instance, if the patient refuses consent for the treatment – even if this is for profoundly irrational reasons such as religion.

Sometimes the law authorises doctors to do things to patients against their will. For instance, quarantine laws allow some patients to be detained even if they do not consent. However, in all such cases, proponents of the relevant law do not deny that they are advocating involuntary detention. Even if the plague-carrier should later regret having refused, and thank the doctors for having detained him or even forced treatment on him, no one concerned is in any doubt that refusal, and forcible treatment, did in fact take place.

If the conventional picture of the nature of mental illness is true, then the refusal of a mentally ill person is a different species of thing from that of a mentally healthy person. For the content of the former refusal is provided by the disease, while the content of the latter is provided by thought. It may be foolish or ill-informed thought. It may be superstitious thought, or irrational thought or downright wicked thought, but it is his thought, and in some situations this makes a big difference morally. For example, the deepest values of our society require that if a doctor detains or treats a patient against his will for a physical condition (disease or otherwise), on the grounds that the patient is foolish, irrational, ignorant or downright wicked, or on the grounds that he will probably thank him afterwards, the doctor will go to prison. In the case of a mental illness, all these justifications for using force on the patient would be valid, if the nominal wishes of the patient were not really wishes but symptoms.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Sun, 07/10/2005 - 22:53 | [reply](#)

Faking mental illnesses

Well, I don't think they do fake them. And the argument (given two comments above) that I do think so is a series of nonsequiturs.

The first one is:

the mental illness could also be "100% due to the persons own choices". If the victims can choose mental illness "states" or behaviors

A state could be due to a person's choices without the person having chosen the state. (Or being in any way culpable.)

by [David Deutsch](#) on Sun, 07/10/2005 - 23:02 | [reply](#)

No

"For example, the deepest values of our society require that if a doctor detains or treats a patient against his will for a physical condition (disease or otherwise), on the grounds that the patient is foolish, irrational, ignorant or downright wicked, or on the grounds that he will probably thank him afterwards, the doctor will go to prison."

Not true. 50% of lung transplant patients end up in restraints. They violently shake their heads "no" while they try to pull out the tube which saves their life. Doctors and nurses tie them down to save their life. And no one goes to jail. And the patients thank them later.

by Michael Golding on Mon, 07/11/2005 - 21:08 | [reply](#)

Re: No

Do those patients agree to the whole procedure (including being tied down, which they want), or are they abducted and transplanted?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 07/11/2005 - 22:57 | [reply](#)

Re:Re: No

The tiniest fraction of a percentage of virtually anyones involuntary treatment, whether someone has an acute brain bleed or a lung transplant, is involuntary. No, most patients who are tied down do not initially agree to be tied down, but we save their lives nonetheless, as you would want your life saved if you were having an acute brain bleed and were refusing treatment. Go to any ER or intensive care unit if you would like to see what is done.

by Michael Golding on Tue, 07/12/2005 - 00:22 | [reply](#)

No

Sorry...first statement should be "The tiniest fraction of a percentage of anyones treatment, whether someone has an acute brain bleed with agitation, or a lung transplant, is involuntary"

Thanks.

by Michael Golding on Tue, 07/12/2005 - 00:41 | [reply](#)

Re: No

Performing a lung transplant or any other operation is illegal without the patient's informed consent. The consent document implies - and nowadays always includes a specific clause saying - that if the doctor should consider further procedures to be necessary while the patient is unconscious or too drugged to understand an explanation of them, or if time is too short to explain them, then the patient consents anyway. This form, and not the proposition that the patient would thank the doctor later, would constitute the doctor's entire legal defence, should the patient later attempt to sue or press charges.

If the patient refuses to sign such a form, the operation would be illegal. If the patient deletes or modifies the above-mentioned clause, the doctor may refuse to perform the operation, but if he does perform it, he will not be entitled to do things that the patient did not consent to. It is quite common for patients to specify exceptions to the standard consent form. For instance, people with religious objections to blood transfusions do it all the time. A doctor who overrode their refusal to consent would indeed be breaking the law.

In an urgent case where the patient is already unconscious or too drugged to understand an explanation of what surgery is proposed and why, their consent may be inferred in various ways. But if an unconscious or drugged patient has previously left instructions that he is not to receive the surgery, then he cannot legally receive it.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Tue, 07/12/2005 - 05:45 | [reply](#)

Consent forms

FYI, standard NHS **consent form**:

I understand that any procedure in addition to those described on this form will only be carried out if it is necessary to save my life or to prevent serious harm to my health. I have been told about additional procedures which may become necessary during my treatment. I have listed below any procedures that I do not wish, without further discussion, to be carried out.

Standard **modified** NHS consent form, for patients who refuse blood transfusions:

although it has been explained to me that in the course of or by reason of the said operation/procedure it may be necessary to give me a blood transfusion so as to render the operation/procedure successful, or to prevent injury to my health, or even to preserve my life, I hereby expressly withhold my consent to and forbid the administration to me of a blood transfusion in any circumstances or for any reason whatsoever

But of course you'd have to be crazy to sign the latter form, wouldn't you?

by [Editor](#) on Tue, 07/12/2005 - 05:57 | [reply](#)

Not So Simple

If one of your relatives fell to the floor screaming and confused in public, with obvious paralysis and weakness, with the beginnings of an immobile dilation of a pupil on one or both sides and paralysis; and this relative fought and screamed and kicked (as best as he can) and cursed to not go to the hospital and stay on the ground, the paramedics would involuntarily "abduct" your fighting and

screaming and kicking relative, tie him tightly to the stretcher, and promptly take him to the hospital. By the way, the family members usually scream and cry even louder, because of their appropriate concern. They demand action immediately!

At the hospital, after the appropriate CAT scan is performed, several holes would be (involuntarily) drilled into the skull (burr holes) to drain the blood and save his life. If successful, the patient and family member usually thank the doctor for involuntarily treating him.

Professor Deutsch, what does "inferred consent" mean?

by Michael Golding on Tue, 07/12/2005 - 11:04 | [reply](#)

Faking Mental Illnesses

"A state could be due to a person's choices without the person having chosen the state (or being in any way culpable)."

OK.

If a person did not choose a certain "mental state" and is not "in any way culpable (for it)", is a person always responsible for his behavior that is a consequence of the "mental state"?

Let's say Joe is in a "mental state" in which he is actively psychotic but never did anything intentional (like abuse drugs) to create this state. Joe is hallucinating and fully believes and sees that Harry has horns and is attacking him with a knife, but actually Harry has no horns and is just offering him a cigarette. He hits Harry over the head with a chair to "defend" himself. Is Joe culpable?

by a reader on Tue, 07/12/2005 - 13:33 | [reply](#)

Culpable

If I'm not culpable for something, anything, am I culpable for the consequences of it? No.

It's better not to change words casually because it's not clear if you mean 'culpable' and 'responsible' to be the same thing, or if not what difference do you mean them to have?

CULPABLE adjective

deserving blame : sometimes you're just as culpable when you watch something as when you actually participate.

RESPONSIBLE adjective [predic.]

having an obligation to do something, or having control over or care for someone, as part of one's job or role : the department responsible for education.

being the primary cause of something and so able to be blamed or credited for it : the gene was responsible for a rare type of eye cancer.

THE RIGHT WORD

Responsible is an adjective that applies to anyone who is in charge of an endeavor or to whom a duty has been delegated, and who is subject to penalty or blame in case of default (: responsible for getting everyone out of the building in the event of a fire).

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 07/12/2005 - 16:03 | [reply](#)

Inferred Consent

One test is: what would he say if you had asked him yesterday?
And the answer is he would like his life to be saved, and would not like his kicking/screaming to be interpreted as somehow meaning, "I want to die, please whatever you do, don't use medicine on me".

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 07/12/2005 - 16:10 | [reply](#)

Inferred Consent

Michael Golding "Is Joe Culpable?"

Dictionary Culpable -- Deserving of blame or censure as being wrong, evil, improper.

Elliot Temple "If I'm not culpable for something, am I culpable for the consequences of it? No."

Mr. Temple, Joe keeps hitting Harry in the head. What are you going to do? Should Joe be convicted and go to jail?

by Michael Golding on Tue, 07/12/2005 - 17:30 | [reply](#)

Culpable

If Harry kills someone, and I am not culpable, then I am not culpable for the consequences. If Harry is culpable, then Harry gets the consequences.

If I kill someone, and I am not culpable, then I am not culpable for the consequences. If Harry is culpable, then Harry gets the consequences.

Why would Harry be culpable for me killing someone? Who knows. Nevermind. I was only talking about the case where he really is.

BTW, this shouldn't be taken as an argument for some strange proposition. It's **what the word means**. The strange proposition is being made by whoever says "harry killed joe, but bob is culpable for the murder". Or in this case,

A state could be due to a person's choices without the person having chosen the state (or being in any way culpable).

You should declare that statement strange, not the meaning of culpable. And it **is** counter intuitive, and deserving of further explanation.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 07/12/2005 - 18:02 | [reply](#)

Mr. Temple

You haven't killed anyone (intentionally, to the best of my knowledge)

But we nonetheless have psychotic Joe hitting Harry. I presume, if you can, you intervene.

Joe is not that strong and Harry is not that injured. I'm asking what

you would do, to help Harry (or possibly Joe), in a situation where a psychotic person is hitting someone else. Would you call the police (most would). If you were a judge, what would you do?

by Michael Golding on Tue, 07/12/2005 - 20:07 | [reply](#)

Killing

Why do you think I haven't killed anyone?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 07/12/2005 - 21:53 | [reply](#)

Yes

P.S. It does seem that the formulation is unusual. I can come up with several explanations of Professor Deutsch's "choices" statement, but am not 100% sure which one he means. Perhaps he is referring to some reaction to a choice (e.g. a consequence of a choice that a. changes the brain, b. changes an internal semantic structure, or c. perhaps changes the reactions of somebody else); in such a way that the person could not predict the consequence of his choice and which subsequently renders the person unable to reverse course from a situation that is somehow not pleasant. Thank you for making the point that the language is a bit confusing.

by Michael Golding on Tue, 07/12/2005 - 22:00 | [reply](#)

Elliot the Killer

I doubt you have intentionally killed someone because on average most people have not, but not 100% sure. Are you in the military or a police officer?

And what about poor Harry and Joe? We'll use your word. Let's say Psychotic Joe thinks Harry has horns and is trying to stab him. But in fact Harry is trying to give Joe a cigarette. Joe is hitting Harry in the head.

You have declared Joe "not responsible"? because he is hallucinating an attack and defending himself (from his perspective).

What should be done? Harry is being hit in the head. Do you call the police? Should Joe go to jail?

On a slightly different topic
"But of course you'd have to be crazy to sign the latter form, wouldn't you?" Editors

Don't exactly know what "crazy" means in this context, but signing the form is not evidence of mental illness. It should, in almost all cases, be legally enforceable.

by Michael Golding on Wed, 07/13/2005 - 00:25 | [reply](#)

You have declared Joe "not re

You have declared Joe "not responsible"? because he is hallucinating an attack and defending himself (from his perspective).

What did I say that you are interpreting this way?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 07/13/2005 - 01:08 | [reply](#)

Deserving of Blame

I put a question mark because I wasn't sure what you thought. Professor Deutsch had said "not culpable." You don't like this language.

OK. So if Joe is psychotic (and hallucinating) and sees Harry as having horns and sees a knife coming towards him and hears Harry saying he's going to kill him, but you (in the room) and Harry as well as everyone else in the room see Harry kindly offering Joe a cigarette, but Joe sees an attack and defends himself.....

Do you think that Joe is morally responsible for the attack?

Do you believe that he should be held responsible for the attack?

Do you think Joe deserves to be blamed?

by Michael Golding on Wed, 07/13/2005 - 02:17 | [reply](#)

David Deutsch did not say "no

David Deutsch did not say "not culpable" about the situation you describe. I did not say I dislike his language (I like it).

In general, people are culpable for their hallucinations, but without knowing the details, one can't be sure.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 07/13/2005 - 02:22 | [reply](#)

Faking Mental Illness

"A state could be due to a person's choices without the person having chosen the state (or being in any way culpable)"
David Deutsch

Professor Deutsch,
If a person did not choose a "mental state" and is not "in any way culpable (for it)" is a person always responsible for his behavior that is a consequence of the "mental state"?

Let's say Joe is in a "mental state" in which he is actively psychotic but never did anything unintentional (like abuse drugs) to create this state. Joe is hallucinating and fully believes and sees that Harry has horns and is attacking him with a knife, but actually Harry has no horns and is just offering him a cigarette. He hits Harry over the head with a chair to "defend" himself.

Is Joe culpable?

Thanks.

by Michael Golding on Wed, 07/13/2005 - 03:32 | [reply](#)

Re: Faking Mental Illness

There isn't enough information in the example as given to determine whether he is culpable or not.

Information that would be relevant would include: has he had

hallucinations before, and if so, what did he do about it when they were over? Was he aware of any other evidence, in advance of this incident, that he was at risk of having such a hallucination? Has he attacked anyone unjustly before? Has he unreasonably believed that others were attacking him before (or were planning to)? Is he, in reality, in danger of being attacked for some reason? Say the attack happened in a pub: has he previously held beliefs, or experienced emotions, that were wrong, when in pubs, or in crowds, or when people offered him cigarettes, or when he was unhappy? And so on.

To address one extreme case: this was a one-off event; nothing like it has happened to him before and he had no evidence that it would. Then he is not culpable. He may, however, be under a special obligation to take certain precautions, and to adopt certain policies about violence, in future. (The logic of the situation, though, is that the legal system would have great difficulty detecting his innocence. This is one of those rare cases where he might indeed be 'faking it' -- so the jury would have to decide whether to believe his claim to have had such a hallucination, and whether, given that he had it, he behaved reasonably. They would want to know whether he might have had some other motive for the attack, and whether there was any other evidence about whether he might be lying.)

To address the opposite extreme case: He has attacked three people in pubs before, always unjustly (with or without hallucinations). Then he is culpable (unless there are further facts that turn the situation round again).

by [David Deutsch](#) on Wed, 07/13/2005 - 08:00 | [reply](#)

Enough already! Ideas have consequences!

I am a Professor of Family Medicine and a clinician, in practice now for 18 years. I find this whole discussion deeply disturbing from a number of perspectives. Some very intelligent philosophers, quite ignorant of the science and practice of medicine, attempt to argue either that mental illness does not exist, or that the behaviors accompanying the state of 'mental-illness' are (free) choices of the individuals displaying the behaviors. I wish I had the time to reply to the many scientifically erroneous assertions of Professor Deutsch and others on this blog. I do not, so I will be brief.

That bipolar disorder and schizophrenia are heritable brain diseases is not in question amongst scientists who study this area. The brain is an organ susceptible to disease. Diseases of the brain lead to specific, predictable clinical syndromes. Would Dr. Deutsch call OCD in a child triggered by a strep throat (one of the so-called 'PANDAS' conditions) a brain disease, but a condition with the exact same manifestations, affecting the same portions of the brain (as detected by neuroimaging) in an adult a "choice"?

From a physician's perspective, it is semantics only whether one chooses to call syndromes like OCD, major depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disease 'mental illness' or 'brain disease'. I don't believe there is a distinction. We do not at this point understand why some genes for brain disease have incompletely predictable penetrance patterns (they don't always pass from one generation to the next), and why these same genes may have variable expressivity (the conditions that result from the gene problem may look somewhat different from individual to individual), but this is true of all manner of genetic diseases. Certainly environmental factors play a key role too, but truly the situation is not 'nature vs. nurture'.... it is 'nature AND nurture'. I do not

dispute that human behavior is complex, and that it is simplistic to

say that all we are is chemicals. But we are certainly, at least in part chemicals also.

Mind-Body dualism is not helpful at all in the exam room, and when promulgated as truth by intelligent people like many of the participants in this forum, may result in terrible societal consequences. Saying "it's all in your head" allows society to discount and disregard the suffering of those with mental illness. It causes lawmakers to distribute financial resources toward 'real' illnesses like cancer and diabetes, but not to 'fake' illnesses like schizophrenia. It allows people to be cruel bigots to those with mental illness, because if one believes that the condition is all 'in the head', then the affected person should be able to just 'decide' to be well, and the fact that he or she doesn't 'decide' to be better means that s/he chooses his plight. It causes sufferers of these devastating diseases to feel responsible for and guilty about their conditions. It causes them to fear seeking treatment because someone may label them 'crazy'. This why I feel so strongly that using words like "superstition", "fake" illness, to describe these conditions, and comparing belief in mental illness to "creation science" (and particularly saying that a hereditary explanation can as easily be explained "due to....choice", leads to grossly immoral consequences.

Michael Golding and the other physicians in the discussion are correct that repeating myths about mental illness harms people. Prof. Deutsch and others are not aware that people stop life saving medicines and treatments because of these types of popular expressions against mental illness.

Finally, it is simply not within the norm of academic discourse to use the kind of inflammatory language I see in this blog. Repeating and reinforcing popular, but false cultural messages leads to needless suffering and death. I love being a family doctor. For years, I have noticed how rewarding it is to diagnose and treat many of these conditions. Treated properly, people get better, often very rapidly, and say things like "so this is what it is like to feel normal!". I wish I had the same power with diabetes, cancer, and heart disease.

by JR on Wed, 07/13/2005 - 13:39 | [reply](#)

Re: Enough already! Ideas have consequences!

I wish I had the time to reply to the many scientifically erroneous assertions of Professor Deutsch and others on this blog. I do not, so I will be brief.

That bipolar disorder and schizophrenia are heritable brain diseases is not in question amongst scientists who study this area.

Could you please provide a link to the erroneous assertion that this is intended to contradict?

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 07/13/2005 - 14:42 | [reply](#)

Faking Mental Illness

Thanks for your response. Makes sense.

To address one extreme case:

"This was a one-off event; nothing like it has happened to him before and he had no evidence that it would. Then he is not culpable."

Not exactly sure what "one-off event" means. Do you mean an event that happened once and we know that it (and events similar) will never happen again or do you mean a first-time event?

Thanks.

by Michael Golding on Thu, 07/14/2005 - 00:06 | [reply](#)

Fake Illnesses

Professor Deutsch,

Put another way, if Joe continues not to understand that his attack was unprovoked and wrong, even after the attack, and he continues to believe that the CIA is trying to control him and that everyone who explains that Harry is innocent is in league with the devil; and indeed Joe sees their horns and hears their voices threatening him (though they actually do not), and Joe honestly believes that Harry was and is trying to kill him because he saw him doing that, is Joe culpable for hitting Harry?

by Michael Golding on Thu, 07/14/2005 - 01:24 | [reply](#)

Mental Illness

At first, I couldn't see much point in saying mental illness doesn't exist and that it was something that could be used interchangeably with brain disease. It finally occurred to me to look at it another way:

With physical symptoms, there's usually some idea of harm they are doing to the person's body. With "mental illness", a set of "symptoms" based on behavior is likely to be very biased by what people think of as "normal" and people might be very wrong about what should be normal.

With behavior/mental "symptoms", sometimes what is harming the patient are other people's reactions to it. For example, some people might consider being homosexual "abnormal" and think of it as something that should be "treated" to prevent the tendency to behave in "self-harming" ways. In reality, I think such a person is likely healthy and trying to treat him or make him behave "normally" is likely harmful to him.

I can't be sure of this, but I think David's aversion toward using the term "mental illness" could actually be partly out of respect for individuals who are different but possibly not "diseased". Then again, once it is understood that a "mental illness" is actually normal, people could always recategorize it that way. This can be difficult for such people because the stigma of it being a mental illness can take a long time to go away within a culture. It still seems like there ought to be a term for labeling a set of behaviors/symptoms that we think are unhealthy/bad for the patient or could cause them to have bad interactions with people. I think illness offers the benefit of seeing it as something the person is working to have treated or overcome. I'm not sure what other term would be appropriate. I don't think being "mentally ill" would mean that a person has no responsibility or culpability. As David suggests, the person could be held responsible for harm he causes as a result of his failure to obtain and adhere to treatments.

As for deciding about culpability and responsibility, I think it's trickier than David has suggested, so it would be great if he'd expand on it a bit.

What if a person is unaware of the effects of a brain

disease/difference when he does something harmful to someone else? David suggests such a person wouldn't be culpable but he should seek to get help.

What if getting help is also risky? A person admitting to a mental difficulty could be barred from employment and find themselves rejected socially.

How much risk is the individual's responsibility to take on? Doesn't society have some responsibility for creating an environment where admitting to and receiving treatment is so risky?

Suppose a person is aware of his condition and takes what he thinks are reasonable measures which turn out to be insufficient. For example, he only has noticeable altered state type symptoms when he eats a particular food. He doesn't take medication but is careful to read labels and ask about ingredients in dishes in order to avoid the food. Despite his care, he unknowingly ingests some one day and as a result is in a bad mental state and harms someone. What then? Is the person "culpable" or "responsible"? Should people err on the side of taking whatever drugs or therapies offered to avoid harm even if the treatments are risky? (some anti-depressants have been linked with higher rates of suicide and aggressiveness, from what I understand) Would such a person then be responsible for being even more selective about his food choices (say only eating specific things that he's tested on himself with someone to supervise him) or would it be sufficient to tell everyone he knows about this risk and help him keep a look out for symptoms? Is he culpable for mistakes in treating his condition? Are treatment decisions something that should be assigned to another party?

What if part of a person's condition prevents him from being able to accurately assess the need for treatment? A person who is "manic" might feel "great" and not see any need to be treated and yet the person's behavior could become very harmful to himself and others. The same person might, in a different state, might be quite calm and non-violent and shocked by his own behavior in the past and not be able to understand how he could have done such things. How would one tell the difference between a "manic" person and a normal person who is simply making some bad choices because .. well why?

Becky Moon

by [beckyam](#) on Fri, 07/15/2005 - 16:02 | [reply](#)

Re: Mental Illness

Becky Moon wrote:

What if a person is unaware of the effects of a brain disease/difference when he does something harmful to someone else? David suggests such a person wouldn't be culpable but he should seek to get help.

What if getting help is also risky? A person admitting to a mental difficulty could be barred from employment and find themselves rejected socially.

Any system for judging whether or not people are culpable for certain acts is inevitably imperfect. Of course, we should try to improve our means of judging culpability and what we do to people who are culpable for criminal acts but that is a difficult task.

I should add that if a person experiences some difficulty because of

a brain disease which is cured by medication then he should be able to get a job and a social life. This would be a lot easier if psychiatrists did not conflate having unfortunate ideas about how to live one's life with brain diseases. The former is often a more serious problem than the latter, partly because bad ideas can be difficult to get rid of and partly because psychiatrists ignore these real problems in favour of pseudomedical gibberish. The answer to this problem is for psychiatrists and others to start admitting that some people have problems because of their ideas, to stop coercive practises for people who have not been convicted of criminal offences and for people to start looking for solutions for such problems much more seriously than they have to date.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sat, 07/16/2005 - 01:34 | [reply](#)

Re: Enough already! Ideas have consequences!

JR wrote:

Diseases of the brain lead to specific, predictable clinical syndromes. Would Dr. Deutsch call OCD in a child triggered by a strep throat (one of the so -called 'PANDAS' conditions) a brain disease, but a condition with the exact same manifestations, affecting the same portions of the brain (as detected by neuroimaging) in an adult a "choice"?

Your chosen example of OCD and strep throat and so on is a perfect example of the muddle people get into when they start thinking of undesirable behaviours as caused by brain diseases. Sometimes when the body responds to strep throat it gets things a bit wrong and antibodies attack the basal ganglia making them swell up. People with this specific medical condition **supposedly** behave in ways that psychiatrists characterise as obsessive more often than other people. Does it follow that this swelling causes OCD and therefore that it is a brain disease? No. Suppose that the swelling induces a sensation that makes people feel as if they are dirty or greasy when in fact they are not. then these people might wash their hands obsessively, or engage in other hygeinic practises obsessively. Or it might induce a sensation that they associate with feeling panic, it might make their chest feel slightly tight or whatever. However, some people might just ignore these sensations and get on with their life, so the 'mental illness' could be caused by the person's interpretation of certain sensations and not by the swelling. Treating people who engage in certain behaviours obsessively as if they had a medical illness is crude and scientific.

Mind-Body dualism is not helpful at all in the exam room, and when promulgated as truth by intelligent people like many of the participants in this forum, may result in terrible societal consequences. Saying "it's all in your head" allows society to discount and disregard the suffering of those with mental illness.

Mind-body dualism is nonsense. Nor have we said anywhere that it is true. Suppose I'm watching that dreadful National Lottery programme on the television. I might say that what I am watching is drivel, but I will not say that it is rubbish because my television is malfunctioning, it is rubbish because the programme is ill-conceived garbage. Needless to say, I do not believe in television/programme dualism. I do not disreagr the suffering of people who have ideas that make them unhappy, but I will not say that their bad ideas are brain diseases.

It causes lawmakers to distribute financial resources

toward 'real' illnesses like cancer and diabetes, but not to 'fake' illnesses like schizophrenia.

I don't want lawmakers to give out money for research into any disease. However, I even more strongly do not want them to underwrite a coercive, scientific fantasy that gets in the way of people tackling their personal problems.

Treated properly, people [diagnosed with mental illnesses] get better, often very rapidly, and say things like "so this is what it is like to feel normal!".

When Catholics who feel distant from God take communion they may feel better and closer to God afterward. Therefore, God exists, as does an illness called 'being distant from God' for which communion wafers and wine are the treatment. Sadly, Medicare does not cover these vital medical treatments. Quick, write to your Congressman!

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sat, 07/16/2005 - 02:14 | [reply](#)

Medical Science?

A recent series of court cases in London prove that it is possible to rise to the top of the medical profession without having **any clue** about what scientific evidence is.

by a reader on Sat, 07/16/2005 - 06:18 | [reply](#)

Re: Fake Illnesses

if Joe continues not to understand that his attack was unprovoked and wrong, even after the attack, and he continues to believe that the CIA is trying to control him and that everyone who explains that Harry is innocent is in league with the devil; and indeed Joe sees their horns and hears their voices threatening him (though they actually do not), and Joe honestly believes that Harry was and is trying to kill him because he saw him doing that, is Joe culpable for hitting Harry?

All these things happened after the attack. What happens after the attack cannot possibly affect whether someone was culpable for it.

It may be that what happens after the attack provides indirect evidence of what happened before and during it. But it's what happened before and during it that determines whether the attacker is culpable.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Sat, 07/16/2005 - 19:03 | [reply](#)

Culpability

People who are convicted of crimes should be locked up unless there are factors which indicate otherwise.

These factors cannot be summed up as whether someone was culpable for committing the crime. For instance, someone might steal under circumstances that are regarded as understandable but still criminal and receive a suspended sentence. (A poor person stealing jackets for their children in the middle of winter, maybe).

Hallucinations may or may not make it improper to jail someone. Someone who didn't know he sometimes hallucinates, fully regrets his crime, and intends to compensate for his hallucinations in the

future should not be locked up. These things happen, and people

shouldn't be jailed for them.

But someone who commits a crime while hallucinating and later categorically denies having committing it, has no remorse, or has no intention of compensating for his hallucinations in the future is just as criminal as they were when they committed the crime. There is no reasonable case for releasing such people.

It may be reasonable to treat prisoners who committed crimes under different circumstances differently, just as some prisons treat violent and non-violent offenders differently.

None of this depends on medicalizing mental problems or justifies locking people up who have not committed any crimes.

by **Woty** on Sat, 07/16/2005 - 20:26 | [reply](#)

Mental problems are real

Madness exists. Difficult mental problems exist. There are ways out of such states and problems, and they have to be found and created. People have to make choices and find solutions to their problems, and in many situations need a lot of really good help and support.

What people do not need is false medicalization of their problems. Mental problems, even deepset and difficult ones, are not diseases and cannot be fixed by medical intervention. Forcing people to comply with a false model of their problems can actually make it harder for them to find ways out of them.

(NB: proponents of the illness model advocate literally forcing people to comply with this model, not just trying to convince them that they are ill. It is disingenous to argue that asserting that mental problems are non-medical is the same type of act as imprisoning people in mental hospitals.)

by **Woty** on Sat, 07/16/2005 - 20:46 | [reply](#)

Medical Intervention

"Mental Problems, even deepset and difficult ones, are not diseases and cannot be fixed by medical intervention."

Woty

I'm not precisely sure what you mean. Are you saying that physicians trained to prescribe medication cannot treat bipolar illness? schizophrenia? major depression?, obsessive compulsive disorder?, medication induced depression?, medication induced psychosis? social phobia? panic? Tourettes? Alzheimers dementia?

I don't know what you mean by "false medicalization of their problem."

If you are saying that doctors trained to prescribe medication cannot improve the condition of those with the above conditions (considered mental illnesses), you are literally saying that thousands of studies are ALL WRONG.

Do you have evidence supporting this interesting assertion?

by Michael Golding on Sun, 07/17/2005 - 01:14 | [reply](#)

Illness model gets you off the hook

Woty said:

Forcing people to comply with a false model of their

problems can actually make it harder for them to find ways out of them

I bet that such forcing does occur, but also that a large proportion of supposed mental patients are willing from the start to embrace the illness model precisely in order to avoid addressing their real problems.

by **Tom Robinson** on Sun, 07/17/2005 - 01:31 | [reply](#)

Medicalization

Here are some OCD symptoms:

- Unfounded fears of contracting a dreadful illness
- Excessive concerns about dirt and germs (including the fear of spreading germs to others); and environmental contaminants, such as household cleaners
- Feelings of revulsion about bodily waste and secretions
- Obsessions about one's body
- Abnormal concerns about sticky substances or residues

From here: <http://www.brainphysics.com/checklist.php>

Notice each and every one is about undesirable behavior and ideas. While there is such thing as brain disease, there are "mental illnesses" that are actually behavior people disagree with. Those shouldn't be medicalised.

If you want to discuss studies, please find one (just one will do) with a valid methodology and say briefly how it contradicts my position.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 07/17/2005 - 01:48 | [reply](#)

Re: Fake Illness

"To address one extreme case: This was a one-off event, nothing like it has happened to him before and he had no evidence that it would. Then he is not culpable."

David Deutsch

"if Joe continues NOT TO UNDERSTAND that his attack was unprovoked..."

Michael Golding

"All these things happened after the attack. What happens after the attack cannot possibly affect whether someone was culpable for it."

David Deutsch

Thank you so much for responding. I assume that from your statements above that you believe Joe continues to be "not culpable."

Professor Deutsch,

Do you think it is possible for someone like Joe to continue to *not understand* an explanation given to him concerning why it was wrong to hit Harry, despite Joe's best efforts? In other words, do you think it is possible for someone like Joe to hallucinate so vividly and to be so paranoid and delusional, that he believes

1. that those explaining what actually happened to him are in league with the devil and the CIA and are trying to harm him, so he shouldn't listen to them when they talk about Harry being a nice man who was just offering him a cigarette?

2. that actually Harry *was* trying to stab him with a knife because he (Joe) saw the knife and he (Joe) heard Harry threaten him with it?

Is it possible that given Joe's hallucinations, Joe's best logical efforts lead him to believe that Harry was and is trying to hurt him? In short, is it possible for someone like Joe to continue to *not understand* that what he did was wrong?

Thanks. Have a great day.

by Michael Golding on Sun, 07/17/2005 - 03:27 | [reply](#)

Medicalization

Ahh. Mr Temple, are you aware that those with OCD *DO NOT WANT* their "undesirable behaviors and ideas"? They ask us to help them stop washing their hands 700 times per day, for example. Or in more extreme cases, they ask to not die, because they have to do so many rituals before they take a shower, that they can't take a shower because their rituals require more than 24 hours to complete so they haven't showered in two years. They are encrusted with disease causing organisms, they are not eating much because they don't have time, and they are on the verge of death.

Those with OCD are, in general, completely rational people. They ask us to help them eat and take a shower so they can have a little bit of a normal life.

Almost by definition, they would not have OCD unless the patient said the rituals were interfering with their life.

For scientific articles, read articles in the American Journal of Psychiatry, Biological Psychiatry, Annals of Psychiatry. Read articles on Psychiatric subjects from the Journal of the American Medical Association, the New England Journal of Medicine etc.

If you are serious, I will provide some articles that may be interesting!

Take care.

by a reader on Sun, 07/17/2005 - 14:08 | [reply](#)

ocd

They have conflicting ideas about hand washing. Their ideas (overall) may very well be a mess, and they may want help. That doesn't mean they need medicine, or that medicine can help. It's fully possible all they need is advice/knowledge.

Do you think any medicines contain knowledge about washing hands (a human activity)?

I don't think I'm serious the way you mean, because I already know what these articles are like. I want you to choose one (online), not me, so that you won't say I've chosen a bad one to criticise.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sun, 07/17/2005 - 14:54 | [reply](#)

OCD

I think a person having a particular habit or behavior that they want

to stop but also can't seem to make themselves stop doesn't make it an "illness". It seems like it would be better to first approach it as a problem they want solved. It might be caused by a brain disease, it might be related to a particular set of ideas or experiences, or it could be contributed to by both. The solution to their problem could be medicines or ideas or both. While I don't think a medicine can change a person's ideas directly, I think it could change their emotional state.

At the least, I think it might be possible to make a person feel more or less "extreme". In the hand washing example, the person might have a fear of germs. The experience of the fear could be very mild or it could feel very important and urgent and some of that feeling could be affected by other factors - lack of sleep, lack of food, other things going on in life. Suppose a medication made the person feel less anxious about things overall. The person is then able to focus more on his thoughts and better prioritize them, feel less anxious (and then feel less need to wash hands - something that might seem comforting in a way), break his hand washing pattern, and possibly even change his mental state overall to the point where he can drop the medication and have his problem solved. This could happen without his even understanding that's what's going on.

Becky Moon

by [beckyam](#) on Sun, 07/17/2005 - 16:59 | [reply](#)

medical intervention

I'm not precisely sure what you mean. Are you saying that physicians trained to prescribe medication cannot treat bipolar illness? schizophrenia? major depression?, obsessive compulsive disorder?, medication induced depression?, medication induced psychosis? social phobia? panic? Tourettes? Alzheimers dementia?

Most of the problems you list are not dysfunctions of the body, and cannot be fixed by fixing the body. So no one can treat them, even if they have been trained to prescribe drugs.

However, psychiatry has established some useful rules of thumb over the years, and people with problems are often genuinely helped by drugs. For this reason, involvement with psychiatry is often a good choice for people with serious problems to make. (Although by no means always should people who would be diagnosed with the conditions you listed if they consulted a psychiatrist seek psychiatric help.)

I don't know what you mean by "false medicalization of their problem."

Mental problems are not medical conditions. They are not dysfunctions of the body. People who have serious mental problems should not be told that they are simply ill and that fixing their bodies will fix their problems.

by [Woty](#) on Sun, 07/17/2005 - 17:48 | [reply](#)

Madness is real; but it's not an illness

Debilitating behavioural syndromes such as schizophrenia, manic depression and eating disorders are real. But it's highly tendentious to call them illnesses, because the prevailing theories about their causes, their consequences and their remedies are all morally very controversial. By calling these syndromes "illnesses" we gloss over that controversy and hand over authority to adjudicate on these moral issues to a "priesthood" of psychiatrists who lack any special

moral insights for dealing with them. While there exist some wise and humane psychiatrists and therapists, as an objective body of transmissible knowledge, psychiatry is, as Szasz rightly says, just like alchemy.

However, it would be ridiculous to suggest that just because the prevailing psychiatric theories are wrong, serious mental disorders don't exist. They exist all right; it's just that they are not illnesses in any useful sense of the word. Having said that, we cannot entirely de-couple the management of these problems from the medical profession, because prescription-only medication has a legitimate role to play in the management of mental disorders. Moreover, as some behavioural disturbances are caused by genuine illnesses such as thyroid malfunction, brain tumours and Alzheimer's, it makes sense for doctors to be involved in the evaluation of certain kinds of mental/behavioural disorders.

On the subject of culpability, I think there exists a lot of confusion about what this really is. People tend to assume that culpability is a fundamental quality like right and wrong. I don't go along with that. I think that assigning culpability is basically a way of coming to feel OK about the degree of coercion against a culprit that we judge to be optimal from a societal point of view. In other words, we deem people culpable in proportion to how severely we want to punish them or deter them or others. And this is strongly influenced by social trends and changes in our factual knowledge.

For example, whereas once it was deemed exculpating to have been drunk when causing a traffic accident, more recently the trend has been to consider inebriation an inculpatory factor. What this boils down to is that society has decided to increase the degree of deterrence against drunk driving, in order to exert a stronger influence on drivers to change their behaviour regarding drinking and driving.

It follows from this conception of culpability that a person's degree of culpability is a function of how susceptible that category of persons is to being deterred. That's why, generally speaking, the madder people are, and also the younger children are, the less culpable they are deemed to be. But culpability is not the only legitimate reason for coercing culprits. Sometimes we are justified in incarcerating people who are dangerous to others, even if we do not deem them culpable. But this kind of decision ought to be made by legislators and judges, not by psychiatrists and psychologists.

-- This comment was first posted in response to Becky's post on [Mental Illness](#).

by [Kolya](#) on Sun, 07/17/2005 - 19:10 | [reply](#)

Re: Mental Illness

Ms. Moon,
I enjoyed reading your thoughtful post.

"At first, I couldn't see much point in saying mental illness doesn't exist and that it was something that could be used interchangeably with brain disease. It finally occurred to me to look at it another way:"

Becky Moon

Shucks! Let me try to convince you to accept your former greater wisdom. Or at any rate, let me try to convince you that serious mental illness implies underlying brain disease, involves peoples choices and is affected by cultural phenomenon in the same way that type 2 diabetes implies the existence of an underlying endocrine disease, but also involves peoples choices and and is

affected by cultural involvement.

Age adjusted prevalence of diabetes in the United States increased 19% between 1980 and 1996 and incidence increased 18% (CDC). Since genes can't change that rapidly, cultural phenomena explain the increasing incidence and prevalence of diabetes in the United States. Actually, the risk of developing serious mental illness like bipolar illness, OCD, or schizophrenia, is increased far less by peoples choices and their interaction with others than type 2 diabetes, which in younger people is very much caused by peoples choices and their interactions with others, rather than genetics per se. The emergence of diabetes in older people, however, is very much a purely biological illness, like bipolar illness, schizophrenia, obsessive compulsive disorder, and also several other major mental illnesses like major depression.

But type 2 diabetes in young people is *still* a real illness, even though a substantial part of the risk of development of diabetes in someone who is 15 years old, is caused by his interactions with others and his consequent choices (eating too much and not exercising). Type 2 diabetes is a real illness in young people even if it is caused primarily by interactions with others because,

1. People are not intentionally causing diabetes in others (people just want to sell each other bad food and a sedentary lifestyle!)...but even if they were intentionally causing it...
2. The consequences to a person of a cultural phenomenon increasing the risk of development of diabetes, is a deleterious change in physiology that can lead to injury and death.

In my opinion, whether an illness is caused by an interaction with others or not, should not matter if the consequences to the person are a potentially permanent change in physiology which shortens his life and damages his organs. For example, even if Fred deserves to be punched in the nose, he still may have a crushed maxillary sinus from the punch, and a crushed maxillary sinus is certainly an illness, which should be treated by doctors.

So whether certain types of mental illness are caused by an interaction with other people should not be relevant, if such interaction causes a substantially increased risk for development of an abnormal physiology and if this pathophysiology shortens peoples lives and damages their organs. If obese children now are developing type 2 diabetes which damages their kidneys, if someone is punched in the nose and the damaged maxillary sinus is now prone to infection, or if someone is cruel to someone else and the victim becomes depressed, and this damages their heart; and if all of these are caused by interactions with other people, why is the depression the only one that is not an illness?

To use Mr. Forrester's analogies: In all of the above examples, the "programming" of the computer (or TV) could be bad. The person who gets punched could have failed to learn how to be nice to people. The child who gets type 2 diabetes could have failed to learn how to exercise and eat properly. The person who becomes depressed may have failed to learn how to deal with the cruel behavior of others. But in all the cases mentioned above, the "programming" failures damage the "computer hardware" (causing infections in the sinuses, damage to the kidney, and damage to the heart.) In short, the software damages the hardware.

The situation is actually a little more complicated than that. Genetic vulnerability to an illness makes the bodies organs more vulnerable to environmental influence. For example, the risk for developing type 2 diabetes and major depression is strongly influenced by genetic factors. In terms of Mr. Forrester's excellent analogy, some

computer hardware is more vulnerable to attack by malicious software.

For those who like "meme" language, some memes form symbiotic relationships with organs and genes, some are commensal with them, and some are parasitic on them. Mr. Forrester's possible small conceptual error (with big implications!) is to apparently assume that memes form only "commensal" and perhaps "symbiotic" relationships with people, while ignoring the possibility of a parasitic relationship. In such a situation, one can develop a mental illness with no biological predisposition at all, which nonetheless causes serious organ damage. Thoughts and feelings change nerves (often permanently) and change hormones (often permanently), and these changes subsequently damage organs. The work of Nemeroff (JAMA) and others, in primates (mildly) experimentally abused as infants, and women abused as children, provides ample scientific evidence of life-long damage to organ systems due to early childhood stress.

"With physical symptoms, there's usually some idea of harm they are doing to the person's body."

Becky Moon

Ms. Moon, you may be confusing cause and effect, just a little, in this statement. Physical symptoms don't (in general) cause harm in a person's body, they are a consequence of harm. For example, if someone says that he feels like scratching a small vesicular eruption that develops on his trunk after ingesting a new medication, the allergic reaction is the cause, but the "symptom" is the feeling that one needs to scratch. The need to scratch and the vesicular eruptions are effects (not causes) of the allergic reaction.

Serious mental illnesses profoundly damage the body, more so than most illnesses that people usually think of.

1. Major Depression increases the risk of developing heart disease, increases the rate of progression of heart disease, and increases the rate of death from heart disease. Physiological changes associated with depression and with adverse cardiovascular outcomes include increased platelet aggregability, decreased heart rate variability (roughly "parasympathetic" or relaxing neurological input to the heart vs. "fight or flight input"), and exaggerated cardiovascular reactivity to situations that provoke mental stress.

2. Major Depression and several other mental illnesses (e.g. PTSD) are strongly associated with increased psychological and physiological reactions to stressful situations. Individuals with above average sympathetic nervous system responses to stressful situations have an increased risk of developing atherosclerosis, of experiencing ischemic episodes once coronary artery disease (CAD) is present, and ultimately of dying once CAD is established.

I placed a brief reference list at the end of this section, if someone is interested in some of the reference papers supporting what I am saying, But there are so many more if someone is interested in the overwhelming scientific evidence supporting the contention that mental illnesses like major depression severely damage organs.

3. Major Depression damages the hippocampus (involved in memory) and multiple other areas of the brain (if you want more information let me know or I will be creating a laundry list of brain parts, and another laundry list of references). Suffice to say that the parts of the brain damaged in major depression correspond with the symptoms created, if for example a stroke damages the same part affected by the depression. Animal models also provide near perfect confirmation of these damaged brain parts causing unusual

behaviors. For example, we used to say that Major Depression

causes a "pseudodementia" of depression but now we know that "pseudodementia" of depression, if it goes on long enough, actually progresses to an actual dementia of depression.

Most readers have felt nervous enough to sometimes not remember the details of questions when they are about to take a test. A number of brain chemicals actually change the flow of blood and other parameters, away from certain memory centers during stress, and in addition, various "fight or flight" chemicals interfere with neuronal function that allows retrieval of memories. Furthermore, many fight or flight hormones are neurotoxic and ultimately kill nerve cells, for example associated with short-term memory. So unlike what still is being taught in some psychology classes, sometimes "pseudo-dementia" of depression is not a "pseudo" dementia at all, but an actual dementia with permanent loss of (particularly) short-term memory function.

4. Individuals with schizophrenia often appear perfectly normal as children and young adults. They graduate from high-school, begin a promising college education, but for unknown reasons they suffer their first psychotic break, and may hallucinate, and become paranoid, usually as late adolescents. Within 3 months, the brain of a young person just developing this illness, will shrink the equivalent of the amount one sees with a small stroke (an average of 11 cc's) (Lieberman JA, ACNP 2002).. And the patient loses approximately 15 points of IQ function (depending upon the study) in a few months, exactly the kind of results one would expect from certain types of acute brain injury. And, these are also the types of changes you see with a stroke in certain areas of the brain. Why is the acute brain shrinkage from a stroke the consequence of a "real" phenomenon, but the acute brain shrinkage from schizophrenia a consequence of a "Superstition", according to Mr. Alan Forrester. How can a "superstition" shrink a brain?

5. Those with bipolar illness have 2-3X increased risk of cardiovascular (e.g. heart attacks), endocrine (e.g diabetes) and neurovascular (e.g. stroke) death (Osby, 2001). And patients die an average of 9 years earlier (Hirschfield, J Clin Psych, 2003).

"With physical symptoms, there's usually some idea of harm they are doing to the person's body. .."
Becky Moon

So yes Ms. Moon, one would expect that if aspects of mental illnesses are brain diseases, one would expect systemic physical effects, and indeed that is exactly what you see!

"With behavior/mental "symptoms", sometimes what is harming the patient are other people's reactions to it. For example, some people might consider being homosexual "abnormal" and think of it as something that should be "treated" to prevent the tendency to behave in "self-harming" ways. In reality, I think such a person is likely healthy and trying to treat him or make him behave "normally" is likely harmful to him."
Becky Moon

Very perceptive comment, in my view. I agree with you 100%. Homosexuality is not considered an illness or a disability, nor should it be. Aspergers, Autism, and Mental Retardation are not considered illnesses, either, nor should they be, but are considered disabilities. Although psychiatrists don't treat these conditions, I venture to say that most psychiatrists would not consider congenital deafness or congenital blindness to be illnesses, either! I will explain why these distinctions are made, in a later post.

I will also respond to some of your other interesting comments in

one of my next posts.

Thanks.

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by Michael Golding on Sun, 07/17/2005 - 19:58 | [reply](#)

Depression

1. Major Depression increases the risk of developing heart disease, increases the rate of progression of heart disease, and increases the rate of death from heart disease.

But so does stupidity.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sun, 07/17/2005 - 20:41 | [reply](#)

OCD

Hi Ms. Moon,

I would prefer not to discuss OCD in depth because it is the most counterintuitive of perhaps all the psychiatric illnesses, and so would be counterproductive to discuss with individuals who appear not to have had the opportunity to read as much about most psychiatric illnesses and perhaps have not had that much experiences with individuals with psychiatric illness.

I really enjoyed your other comments and perhaps will pay more attention to them and less to the OCD stuff, if OK with you.

Suffice to say I can see how someone would believe that OCD is a "problem" that needs to be "solved" but not an illness. "Panic Disorder" and "Social Phobia" (not particularly genetically based), for example might be considered "problems" that need "solutions", but not OCD.

A very conservative estimate of genetic risk for development of OCD is 50%, and more recent studies are finding a far higher genetic involvement. OCD is more genetically based than schizophrenia or major depression. (And no, those with OCD do not look differently than others, so these findings cannot be explained away by "gene-environment" correlation!)

The only thing different about those with OCD and those not with OCD are their repetitive thoughts and behaviors, which they hate and want to get rid of!!

Most types of anti-anxiety medicine do not work for them, but some do to some extent. Behavioral treatment works on a specific compulsion, but individuals often then move to another one. Few long term studies have been done documenting efficacy of any intervention, and unlike most psychiatric illnesses, serious OCD is remarkably refractory to all forms of treatment.

OCD is the only psychiatric disorder for which brain surgery is indicated in the most refractory cases, and even then, the surgery is effective only 50% of the time.

In my own opinion, of all the psychiatric disorders in which the person usually maintains his complete rational faculties throughout the course of the illness, this is the most frightening precisely because the person is fully aware that what he is doing (e.g. washing for 16 hours per day) is completely insane. Indeed, patients with this disorder will tell you that their behavior is insane and beg for help. They fully well know (once explained to them) that washing their hands so frequently actually makes it more likely for them to get an infection, but they still can't stop. So they understand the scientific arguments very well.

The only analogy I could give to make compulsions understandable to some, might be to ask a young man to never have sex or experience any voluntary sexual release for the rest of his life. It is possible in the short-term, but virtually no one would succeed in the long-term.

Telling someone not to obsess "just get over it" would be like telling an average young man not to ever think about sex. Possible for some very strong-willed people to change their thoughts immediately....maybe....but not for most. Young men will think about sex, and those with OCD will think about their obsessions.

Interestingly, the same medications which will cause someone to

obsess less, will also cause him to think about sex less frequently.

Thanks.

by Michael Golding on Sun, 07/17/2005 - 21:29 | [reply](#)

Depression

Mr. Temple,
I wish you would do a little bit of reading, before you give such rash (and incorrect) responses.

Studies have controlled for compliance with treatment ("stupidity"). No, lower IQ is not a risk factor for heart disease if diet, exercise, compliance with treatment, and a host of other risk factors are taken into account.

Perhaps you should read a little bit?

Have a nice day.

by Michael Golding on Sun, 07/17/2005 - 21:41 | [reply](#)

Controls

I wasn't talking about IQ or using a technical term. Sorry if that was unclear, but I meant stupidity in the standard everyday usage.

I did in fact read the **study**. Please don't say I am unserious, ignorant or anything similar. It claimed:

After we controlled for the other significant multivariate predictors of mortality in the data set

However, it didn't explain how they did this. As there are no scientific tests or measures (and there cannot be) to test for certain forms of stupidity, I don't believe the sentence. For example, it **requires creativity and judgment** to decide if a person understands how to make good decisions about heart attack risks when confronted with fun activities or tasty foods. This cannot be controlled for.

If you disagree, please provide some explanation of how it can be controlled for. (And some reason to think the people who did the study actually used your method.)

Further, there could be a factor they don't know about that they didn't control for. They can't prove there isn't.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sun, 07/17/2005 - 23:12 | [reply](#)

Medical Intervention

"Most of the problems you list are not dysfunctions of the body, and cannot be fixed by fixing the body. So no one can treat them, even if they have been trained to prescribe drugs"
Woty

With the exception of Alzheimers, 1/3rd of the cases of schizophrenia, and OCD/Tourette spectrum disorders, (which in the long-term we are not particularly good at treating), we treat virtually all of the listed conditions reasonably well, and the same is true for psychiatric treatment of dozens of other illnesses, and we

are getting better. Thousands of studies document this relative

success.

Indeed, the treatment success rates of various medical professions have been studied, though obviously conclusions drawn by the studies must be somewhat subjective because of the meaning of the word "success".

But psychiatrists tend to have higher rates of success in treating illnesses that the profession handles, relative to general internists and neurologists, for example. Surgeons, however, seem to have the highest success rates.

Is your perspective two or three decades behind the times?

But thanks for recognizing the reality of bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. That's a start in this forum!

by Michael Golding on Mon, 07/18/2005 - 00:59 | [reply](#)

Kolya not Woty

Sorry. Kolya is the one who understands the reality of Bipolar illness and Schizophrenia.

by Michael Golding on Mon, 07/18/2005 - 01:04 | [reply](#)

Kolya

Actually, as I read it, Kolya denied it was an illness.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 07/18/2005 - 01:11 | [reply](#)

Bipolar Entity

Yes, Mr. Temple, you are right, he did. He called the Bipolar ? entity?, "real".

by Michael Golding on Mon, 07/18/2005 - 03:00 | [reply](#)

Real

We all agree it's real. (ie, that it exists). no one is saying: nah, everyone acts totally sane, all reports of sightings of crazy people are just ... umm well not from crazies ... all just mistakes.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 07/18/2005 - 03:18 | [reply](#)

What is real and what is not?

Dr Golding,

Not only do I agree that conditions such as bipolar disorder and schizophrenia are real, I also agree that they can cause profound unhappiness to those who are afflicted by them. I consider any attempt to construe them purely as unorthodox manifestations of free will, as plain silly. Let me also say that I have the highest regard for the scientific enterprise.

So why am I unimpressed by the voluminous literature about the physical basis of mental disorders? One reason is captured by the jocular saying: "If your only tool is a hammer, all problems are

liable to look like nails." The point being that for all its power, science is distinguished from other forms of enquiry by just one unique tool: empirical refutation. Therefore anybody who wants to publish a scientifically credible paper must present their conclusions in a form that is, at least in principle, empirically refutable.

Which is fine if your subject is celestial mechanics. But what if your subject is, by its very nature, not easily amenable to empirical testing. Take for example the recent controversy about whether the relative dearth of top rank female mathematicians has a genetic basis. I contend that this is not a problem that currently lends itself to conventional scientific discourse. Of course, if somebody found a gene for mathematical aptitude and was able successfully to predict future mathematical achievement, things might be different. But that hasn't happened. Not with mathematical aptitude and not with schizophrenia.

I know many people claim to have discovered all kinds of correlations between genes and mental disorders. I also know that for many years it was "established" that eating too many eggs elevates your blood cholesterol. Except it turns out that blood cholesterol is hardly affected by the levels of ingested cholesterol. Similarly, there must have been literally thousands of reported discoveries of correlations between this gene and that behavioural disorder, which have subsequently sunk without a trace.

Pending the completion of properly conducted prospective studies that successfully predict mental propensities based on genetic data, I contend that variations in human behaviour are not genetically determined (except for cases such as Down's syndrome). The main reason most of the relevant professionals assume otherwise is that their only tool requires them to theorise in terms of physical causation, if they are to retain scientific credibility. This is a case of the drunk looking for his wallet under the lamppost where the light is good, rather than in the dark alley where he dropped it.

In conclusion, let me point out that my stance is more refutable than the general doctrine of genetic causation. As soon as somebody publishes a genetic basis for successfully predicting which infant is likely to get schizophrenia, my stance will be refuted. But what would it take for the opposing genetic-causation doctrine to be refuted? As the adherents of that doctrine only admit empirically based arguments, it seems to me that if the doctrine were wrong, there is no conceivable experiment that would be accepted by them as a refutation. They would always do as they have done before, claim that the definitive physical causes of variations in human behaviour have not yet been discovered.

I mention in passing that such a strategy is also open to the defenders of astrology.

by [Kolya](#) on Mon, 07/18/2005 - 11:10 | [reply](#)

Re: Fake Illness

I assume that from your statements above that you believe Joe continues to be "not culpable."

Not culpable for his attack, yes.

Do you think it is possible for someone like Joe to continue to *not understand* an explanation given to him concerning why it was wrong to hit Harry [...]?

Actually we have already agreed that under the circumstances it was not wrong for him to hit Harry. But yes, it is very common for people, with or without hallucinations, to be mistaken about the

ideas and motivations of some other people, and to ignore all evidence and to fail to understand explanations showing that they are mistaken about these and other facts.

In other words, do you think it is possible for someone like Joe to hallucinate so vividly and to be so paranoid and delusional, that he believes

This is very far from being the previous question stated in other words. This is a substantive theory about the mechanism for Joe's resistance to evidence and argument, namely the vividness of the hallucinations, etc. As before, the example as given does not contain any of the details relevant to whether Joe's resistance to being persuaded is morally wrong, or what it is due to. So let me imagine some details that would be relevant: first of all, it wasn't just a hallucination in the sense of seeing and hearing things that weren't happening. Some of the things (horns) are so implausible that one would immediately assume one was having a hallucination, unless the hallucinations were combined with a hardware-induced feeling that they are authentic. So I'll assume they were. Then, let me assume, he ran out of the pub screaming that the horned, demonic CIA agents were trying to kill him. The bystanders called the police, who located him nearby and asked him to accompany them in order to investigate the attack in the pub. He accused them of being horned, demonic CIA agents out to kill him, but they overpowered and restrained him before he could attack them. Now he is sitting in a cell, powerless, and various people whom, on the face of it, he has reason to trust, have been telling him that he has been hallucinating, and he just accuses them all of being horned, demonic CIA agents out to kill him.

OK, now, could the vividness (and hardware-enhanced sense of authenticity) of the hallucination possibly explain this behaviour? No. Not by itself. Because, for instance, once he is helpless in the cell, and they have not killed him, then the theory that they are engaged in a murderous attack on him is refuted. He must change it to something else that explains both his old and his new experiences – for instance, he could decide that now he has been captured they are planning an anal probe, and only afterwards will they kill him. Or he could decide that the whole thing, including his feeling that it is very very real, is a hallucination. Indeed, it is common that people who suffer a sudden, unpredictable, bizarre and terrifying disaster, wonder whether this is all a nightmare or hallucination. In either case, or in any other case, the explanation that he tentatively adopts cannot possibly be coded for in a defective gene or poisonous chemical. It is too complex for that. It can only have come from his own creative thought.

Why has his creative thought settled on one particular explanation as being the best, out of the infinity of explanations that would cover the experiences he has had? The story hasn't told us, but my moral opinion of him depends crucially on this. So again, let me imagine two extreme cases. One is that, prior to this hallucination, he was already a fervent believer in evil conspiracy theories and in the supernatural, and was also a thug who took pleasure in attacking people he took a dislike to. Let me also imagine that he had a clear path to the exit of the pub at the time of the attack, and did not hallucinate that it was blocked, and hence could have fled rather than attack his imagined attacker. In that case, the fact that on this occasion it happened to be a hallucination that sparked his attack is just an accidental detail, and (contrary to what we thought before we knew this) he bears a great deal of moral responsibility for it, perhaps almost as much as if there had been no hallucination. And if that is also the reason for his subsequent intransigence (i.e. that he more or less believed that explanation already), that makes him morally wrong to be intransigent too, just as he was already

morally wrong to be intransigent about similar beliefs even before the hallucination.

At the other extreme, imagine that he is a fine, upstanding fellow with no relevant immoral ideas or habits, and that this sudden and unpredictable brain defect is not only causing hallucinations, it is affecting the transcription of his short- to longer-term memory. He can no longer recall the attack in the pub, but only waking up half a minute ago, imprisoned by demons. He is constantly in a state of being overwhelmed by this new and bizarre situation, and is therefore quite rightly devoting his attention, first, to analysing the possibility that it really is as it seems to be. By the time he gets round to considering other possible explanations, he has forgotten, and starts again at the beginning. In that case, he has done, and thought, nothing wrong.

1. that those explaining what actually happened to him are in league with the devil and the CIA and are trying to harm him, so he shouldn't listen to them when they talk about Harry being a nice man who was just offering him a cigarette?

It doesn't follow from the proposition that they are demons trying to harm him, that he should not listen to their explanations. On the contrary, once he is helpless and in their power, he should listen to them. If he had previously believed a religion that said otherwise, he may well have been at fault for doing so (though since this is such an unlikely outcome of believing the religion, his fault may not be commensurate with the harm it has caused).

2. that actually Harry *was* trying to stab him with a knife because he (Joe) saw the knife and he (Joe) heard Harry threaten him with it?

Memories, and experience, are fallible even in people who do not have hallucinations. So, again, the fact that Joe remembers this is not sufficient reason for him to reject arguments that he is mistaken.

Is it possible that given Joe's hallucinations, Joe's best logical efforts lead him to believe that Harry was and is trying to hurt him? In short, is it possible for someone like Joe to continue to *not understand* that what he did was wrong?

The hallucinations alone could not make his best logical efforts lead him to that explanation, and especially could not make him reject valid arguments for its being false. But there are other possible hardware failures, one of which I have indicated, which could.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Mon, 07/18/2005 - 11:40 | [reply](#)

Re: What is real and what is not

"Take for example the recent controversy about whether the relative dearth of top rank female mathematicians has a genetic basis. I contend that this is not a problem that currently lends itself to conventional scientific discourse".

"Of course, if somebody found a gene for mathematical aptitude and was able successfully to predict future mathematical achievement, things might be different. But that hasn't happened. Not with mathematical aptitude and not with schizophrenia".
Kolya

I assume you have not read what I said about gene-environment

correlation in any of my previous posts where I discussed this type of question, at one point at very great length. You have refuted none of the arguments I made. And data that could have refuted genetic arguments about bipolar disorder and schizophrenia could have easily been found by research conducted, just as it has been found for black-white differences in IQ and male-female differences in a number of traits.

Once again, one can not decide, using certain types of twin studies, male-female or black-white differences in gene frequency, because of gene-environment correlations. Even Murray and Hernstein (The Bell Curve) clearly understand this, yet you apparently don't. The possibility of gene-environment correlation has been extensively evaluated over decades in bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. But Mr./Dr. Kolya, feel free to be the last of the phrenologists. Tendentious?

"While there exist some wise and humane psychiatrists and therapists, as an objective body of transmissible knowledge, psychiatry is, as Szasz rightly says, just like alchemy."

Alchemy? Let's see. Thousands of well-controlled studies documenting the effectiveness of psychiatric intervention. Tendentious? No, I'm afraid worse than that.

by Michael Golding on Tue, 07/19/2005 - 01:28 | [reply](#)

Re: Mental Illness

Michael Golding wrote:

To use Mr. Forrester's analogies: In all of the above examples, the "programming" of the computer (or TV) could be bad. The person who gets punched could have failed to learn how to be nice to people. The child who gets type 2 diabetes could have failed to learn how to exercise and eat properly. The person who becomes depressed may have failed to learn how to deal with the cruel behavior of others. But in all the cases mentioned above, the "programming" failures damage the "computer hardware" (causing infections in the sinuses, damage to the kidney, and damage to the heart.) In short, the software damages the hardware.

Famine and warfare also cause damage to bodily tissues, so do you think famine and warfare are diseases?

Individuals with schizophrenia often appear perfectly normal as children and young adults. They graduate from high-school, begin a promising college education, but for unknown reasons they suffer their first psychotic break, and may hallucinate, and become paranoid, usually as late adolescents. Within 3 months, the brain of a young person just developing this illness, will shrink the equivalent of the amount one sees with a small stroke (an average of 11 cc's) (Lieberman JA, ACNP 2002).. And the patient loses approximately 15 points of IQ function (depending upon the study) in a few months, exactly the kind of results one would expect from certain types of acute brain injury. And, these are also the types of changes you see with a stroke in certain areas of the brain. Why is the acute brain shrinkage from a stroke the consequence of a "real" phenomenon, but the acute brain shrinkage from schizophrenia a consequence of a "Superstition", according to Mr. Alan Forrester. How can a "superstition" shrink a brain?

To translate from psychiatrist speak: from the time when the

mental patient begins to behave so strangely that his relatives report him to a psychiatrist his brain shrinks. Two things change under these circumstances. (1) Psychiatrists start to treat him, possibly with drugs. (2) He changes his behaviour. Either one of these might result in his brain shrinking. Medication might shrink his brain, or he might not be eating enough or...

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Tue, 07/19/2005 - 02:05 | [reply](#)

Well-Controlled

Please reply to the following:

Each and every one of those well-controlled studies is perfectly consistent with the existence of some other (unknown) factor, which was not controlled for. And it could be this factor causing the effect. And thus the conclusions of the studies could conceivably be wrong if it turns out there is such a factor. Do you agree with this so far?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 07/19/2005 - 02:12 | [reply](#)

Re Mental Illness

"Famine and warfare also cause damage to bodily tissues" so do you think famine and warfare are diseases?"

Mr. Forrester, I did not call the punch in the face the illness, I called the damage to the Maxillary Sinus an illness. But yes, diseases appear as a consequence of wars (for example infections), but wars are not diseases. Type 2 diabetes can appear as a consequence of overeating and failing to exercise in children, but the diabetes is the illness, not the overeating.

To translate from psychiatrist speak: "from the time when the mental patient begins to behave so strangely that his relatives report him to a psychiatrist, his brain shrinks."

No, that's not correct.

This study has been referenced several times and explained several times in these posts. If you have questions, please ask about it.

Your assumptions are, however, completely unfounded. This was a seminal study in the field, with remarkably tight controls, very careful definitions of "first onset" psychosis and etc. Commenting on well done studies sponsored by the NIH, that you have not read, nor asked about, nor thought about is not part of the scientific process.

If you wish to learn how to read and understand scientific papers, I would be pleased to give you references and excellent papers explaining the basics of the process.

Have a nice evening

by [Michael Golding](#) on Tue, 07/19/2005 - 02:57 | [reply](#)

Mental Illness

Mr. Golding and Kolya,
(I prefer to be addressed as Becky.) I appreciate your lengthy responses to my posts. I'm a bit caught up with work and home

responsibilities, atm, but I'll try to respond to them as soon as

possible.

Becky Moon

by [beckyam](#) on Tue, 07/19/2005 - 15:52 | [reply](#)

Reply to Mr. Golding

"Or at any rate, let me try to convince you that serious mental illness implies underlying brain disease, involves peoples choices and is affected by cultural phenomenon in the same way that type 2 diabetes implies the existence of an underlying endocrine disease, but also involves peoples choices and and is affected by cultural involvement." -Michael Golding

That's quite a bold statement (not necessarily untrue, just that it implies that serious mental illness couldn't exist without brain disease). How do you know serious mental illness implies underlying brain disease? Have all know mental illnesses been linked conclusively to brain disease? How do you distinguish a disease from a healthy difference? How is "serious mental illness" defined? Is there some mechanism for differentiating it with "extreme differences from cultural norms"? What if it's the "norm" that is "wrong"? What is the mechanism for addressing this? I suppose as with homosexuality, the medical community can correct mistakes about specific differences that they later realize to be healthy/normal. What about the harm done to healthy people in the meantime? This could be less harm than is done to people who avoid treatment because of the stigma attached to "mental illness". It might be good to drop "mental illness" simply because "brain disease" doesn't have the negative social connotations that mental illness does. (I'm not expecting answers to all of this. I often ask more than anyone, including myself, has time or inclination to answer or think about).

"In my opinion, whether an illness is caused by an interaction with others or not, should not matter if the consequences to the person are a potentially permanent change in physiology which shortens his life and damages his organs.

For example, even if Fred deserves to be punched in the nose, he still may have a crushed maxillary sinus from the punch, and a crushed maxillary sinus is certainly an illness, which should be treated by doctors." -Michael Golding

I agree that medically treatable aspects of the problem should be treated, of course, but what about the matter of the person punching him in the nose? Do we just chalk it up to Fred's nose-punched tendency or try to do something about nose punchers?

"So whether certain types of mental illness are caused by an interaction with other people should not be relevant, if such interaction causes a substantially increased risk for development of an abnormal physiology and if this pathophysiology shortens peoples lives and damages their organs. If obese children now are developing type 2 diabetes which damages their kidneys, if someone is punched in the nose and the damaged maxillary sinus is now prone to infection, or if someone is cruel to someone else and the victim becomes depressed, and this damages their heart; and if all of these are caused by interactions with other people, why is the depression the only one that is not an illness?" -Michael Golding

I think I'd agree if there weren't the problem as I mentioned above where mental differences are diagnosed and treated without a lot of consideration about whether they really are disorders and whether the more important cause and solution might be external. Just because the conditions required to ... "trigger" bipolar disorder

haven't been discovered, doesn't mean they don't exist. I would think it would very difficult to isolate or control for all social and ideologically oriented causes as it can be in medicine.

"In short, the software damages the hardware." -Michael Golding

Nice analogy.

"The work of Nemeroff (JAMA) and others, in primates (mildly) experimentally abused as infants, and women abused as children, provides ample scientific evidence of life-long damage to organ systems due to early childhood stress."-Michael Golding

That's very interesting and a bit discouraging.

"With physical symptoms, there's usually some idea of harm they are doing to the person's body." Becky Moon

"Ms. Moon, you may be confusing cause and effect, just a little, in this statement. Physical symptoms don't (in general) cause harm in a person's body, they are a consequence of harm." -Michael Golding

Oops, my bad.

" Why is the acute brain shrinkage from a stroke the consequence of a "real" phenomenon, but the acute brain shrinkage from schizophrenia a consequence of a "Superstition", according to Mr. Alan Forrester. How can a "superstition" shrink a brain?" -Michael Golding

I can't site a study or article for you. I've just assumed from the time it first occurred to me to think about the subject at all that thought affects the chemistry of the brain. I've seen articles that seem to support this. If this is so, then couldn't certain types of thought that contributes to brain shrinking? Is my assumption erroneous? I'm not claiming any knowledge about how brain chemistry is particularly affected. It could be that size isn't much related. I had thought I read something, though, that children (and animals) who were exposed to lots of stimulation had more of some type of brain matter (neurons? or links between neurons?) I don't see how this could be related to brain shrinkage though. A person who was very actively stimulated .. it would seem their brain would increase in size or connections.

Forgive if my lack of brain chemistry knowledge is getting me really far off track here, but I want to go off on a bit of some imagining about how thought could affect the brain: Could some bit of knowledge be so upsetting as to make a person "forget" large bits of knowledge as a sort of "self-defense"? It might only "work" for people with a particular genetic flaw or difference, or it could be that most people don't experience anything so upsetting or don't tend to try (or even be able to) forget things they find upsetting or overwhelming. If thoughts can change the brain, then it would be case for some thoughts even possibly harming the brain or causing disease.

"Very perceptive comment, in my view. I agree with you 100%. Homosexuality is not considered an illness or a disability, nor should it be. -Michael Golding"

Homosexuality was once thought of as a mental illness, though, wasn't it? (Or was that just something lay people thought?) Is this just a mistake that was unavoidable or could changing the way people approach mental issues have avoided this?

Cheers,
Becky

OCD

"Most types of anti-anxiety medicine do not work for them, but some do to some extent. Behavioral treatment works on a specific compulsion, but individuals often then move to another one. Few long term studies have been done documenting efficacy of any intervention, and unlike most psychiatric illnesses, serious OCD is remarkably refractory to all forms of treatment." -Michael Golding

I posted the comment as a suggestion to Elliot as to how medicine "might" work by helping thoughts to change indirectly. It seems OCD is a bad example.

I am familiar with people who have OCD-like symptoms (and at least one diagnosed), but not much with their treatment. At least some of them managed to quit things like hand-washing and not pick up any other habits that were a problem (at least they haven't been noticed by them or anyone else yet). By quit, I mean stop doing the action for a while and then eventually stop feeling obsessed about or thinking much about doing the action. It doesn't seem "easy" to do - just possible.

"They fully well know (once explained to them) that washing their hands so frequently actually makes it more likely for them to get an infection, but they still can't stop. So they understand the scientific arguments very well." -Michael Golding

In my experience, having a good understanding of why to stop doesn't always make a habit go away for people who don't seem to have OCD symptoms. It usually takes focusing on some new preferred habit, but I think knowing that the behavior isn't rational is probably a necessary prerequisite (then again, maybe not).

"Interestingly, the same medications which will cause someone to obsess less, will also cause him to think about sex less frequently." -Michael Golding

What sort of medications?

by [beckyam](#) on Wed, 07/20/2005 - 00:45 | [reply](#)

Indirect Help

I posted the comment as a suggestion to Elliot as to how medicine "might" work by helping thoughts to change indirectly.

Yes, I agree that medicine can work that way. So can tennis, ice cream, and movies. Medicines are part of a tradition of helping people, so they are particularly valuable for that reason. (Ice cream is actually also part of a tradition of helping people feel better, though quite a different one. In fact, sports and movies are too. But the tradition of medicine helping with this kind of issue is much stronger.) Kolya alluded to this above when he said that medicine has a legitimate role to play in helping with these issues.

Keep in mind that this is different from the medicine working in the way it is claimed to work.

- Elliot

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 07/20/2005 - 05:14 | [reply](#)

Elliot - Indirect Help

What way is it claiming to work? How is what I suggested different?

Becky

How Medicine Doesn't Work

Direct help -- take this medicine and it will change your personality.

Indirect help -- take this medicine, feel different in your new situation, *interpret this as important*, and change your own personality.

Medicine is generally purported to work in the direct way, and some medicine does (like pain killers), but some doesn't. The quirk and dirty criterion is: anything purported to change your personality in complex ways doesn't work directly.

For example drugs to turn Democrats into Republicans, shy people into outgoing people, or vegetarians into lovers of meat would all work in the indirect way, if they worked at all. More examples that could only work in the indirect way are drugs to make one happy, sad, in love, hateful or curious.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 07/20/2005 - 20:09 | [reply](#)

Comments of Becky, Mr. Temple

Becky,

I am busy as of now. I want to respond to your important comments and questions and hope to in a few days!

Mr. Temple and Becky,

FYI, 99% of psychiatrists would say that no medication can change personality, directly or indirectly!

On this issue, I happen to disagree very slightly with most psychiatrists, but totally agree with you and Becky: If personality could be changed, it would be indirectly. (FYI...depression, schizophrenia, bipolar illness, are not considered aspects of personality; although I could see how they could be thought of that way if not familiar with these illnesses!)

After major depression is treated, for example with medication, people's personality, thought to be unchangeable due to medications, then usually again becomes evident to the patient and his relatives. The patient says, "I feel like myself again."

This personality may make others happy or sad, or angry. But the personality is thought to be a composite creation of the functioning of large sections of the brain, including emotional centers interacting with life experience, and peoples choices. Personality composition, is not thought to be created by the functioning of specific or narrowly defined parts of the brain.

For example the Canadian surgeon who recently operated on a group of patient's brains, whose depression treatment was refractory to virtually every treatment imagineable, achieved success (but in an uncontrolled experiment that has not yet been repeated) by surgically operating on a part of the brain that is universally hyperactive in individuals with depression. Certain drugs and other interventions usually return the functioning of these parts of the brain to normal, but likely did not in these individual's cases: But the surgeon certainly did not try to alter large sections of the brain!

A surprising percentage of the patients dramatically improved after

surgery, but only per their own reports, so obviously sham surgeries and other placebo controlled trials are needed, before we can get too excited about this last ditch intervention. But in most of our lifetimes, surgery certainly will become part of normal psychiatric interventions when medicines fail....and no, if anyone really thought that a surgery we do to help, for example a depression, would dramatically change someones personality, I think virtually no one would do it.

It would properly be considered immoral, unless to save the very life of the person (e.g. brain tumor).

We know from animal models of depression (e.g. forced swim tests) that genetically modified animals are more vulnerable to stressors leading to behaviors that mimic major depression in humans. But with more extreme types of stress, animal mimics of depression can be induced even in animals without genetic predisposition. We know that virtually all medications which work to reverse the behavior in animals that mimics depressive behavior in humans, almost always work to treat depression in humans, if the medicines are found to be safe to try in humans. We also know the reverse is true. All known medicines that have for some reason been tried in humans first, and reverse their major depression (like antidepressant herbs), will reverse animal behavior mimicing depression, as well.

That is why the Canadian surgeon was taking a huge gamble, but not making a completely wild guess, when he operated on the brains of those with repeatedly treatment refractory depression. Operations have repeatedly been done on animal brains in animals exhibiting behavioral mimics of a variety of human mental illnesses, with reversal of these conditions with different types of surgery, just as a variety of medications do in both animals and humans.

And of course, the same parts of the brain that are overactive in animals exhibiting "depression", are also overactive in humans with depression (Overactivity meaning markedly increased excitatory activity with subsequent destruction of nerves, for example in the anterior cingulate gyrus and the hippocampus, as documented by functional neuroimaging)

Overactivity in parts of the anterior cingulate cause both emotional and blood pressure reactivity (Critchley) and hormonal reactivity to stress seen in those with depression. Increased blood pressure reactivity means that the blood pressure goes up more in response to stress.

Animals with experimentally induced "depressions", whether genetically modified to be predisposed to "depression" or not, also will lose (particularly short-term) memory function temporarily, then permanently if their depression is not treated with particular anti-depressants, which protect the brain from this excitatory neurotoxicity (Excitatory neurotoxicity means chemicals released by brain cells killing other brain cells or themselves, and therefore damaging the brain.)

In both humans and animals, the partial destruction of the hippocampus causes the sometimes permanent loss of short term memory encoding, associated with depression in humans and depression mimicing behavior in animals. Certain antidepressants prevent and protect against this brain damage (depression induced dementia), as documented in live animals by direct examination, and as documented in humans by various types of functional neuroimaging.

Although a little off topic, the basic idea is that major depression and other serious psychiatric illnesses (I'll define this later), are superimposed on personality, and these serious illnesses are

treatable by a variety of interventions, and will be treatable in our lifetimes by direct nerve cell modifications and surgeries, to alter the disease processes.

As mentioned, it has previously been shown that certain antidepressants protect against hippocampal damage in depression. Our group just showed (preliminarily) that certain antidepressants, not only decrease emotional reactions to stressful situations, but blood pressure reactions as well. Increased blood pressure reactivity to emotional stress is beginning to be known as a major reason for the increased cardiovascular death associated with heart disease and depression. And it is certainly provocative that certain antidepressants are known to protect the hippocampus, decrease anterior cingulate activity, and now decrease blood pressure reactivity.

Preliminary studies even show that certain antidepressants may protect against heart disease as well (Sauer). Although too early to celebrate, we may one day be treating heart disease with antidepressants!

Animals with their "fight or flight" nerve removed at birth (stelletomy) can not develop heart disease, no matter how much you feed them, no matter what you feed them, no matter what they weigh. So brain involvement is (at least in animals) a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the development of heart disease. Gaining better insight into psychiatric illness helps to bridge the gap between multiple fields in medicine, including neurology, cardiology and endocrinology.

I am always astounded by the coincidences found in medicine and psychiatry as we advance. Astounding coincidences keep popping up, like the fact that those illnesses found to be primarily genetic in humans cannot be easily behaviorally conditioned in animals, if at all. But those illnesses found to be primarily non-genetic in humans can be. What is the relationship between an identical twin studied by a geneticist and a rat studied by a behaviorist? Evolution is wonderful in creating such beautiful connections even between such seemingly different creatures like rats and humans (although obviously our moral sense dramatically separates us from other animals).

Dozens of fields are finding the same converging evidence using totally different methodologies. Those who ignore the significance of these findings, do so at their own physical and psychological risk.

I'll be back in a few days.
Take care.

by Michael Golding on Thu, 07/21/2005 - 00:20 | [reply](#)

Fake Mental Illness

Professor Deutsch,

Thank you for your interesting response.

"This is very far from being the previous question stated in other words. This is a substantive theory about the mechanism for Joe's resistance to evidence and argument, namely the vividness of the hallucinations, etc."

Professor Deutsch

I said "let's say Joe is in a mental state in which he is *actively psychotic*. ...

And in the next post I said,

Do you think it is possible for Joe to continue to not understand....

In other words, do you think it is possible for someone like Joe to hallucinate so vividly and to be so paranoid and delusional, that he believes..."

"This is very far from being the previous question stated in other words. This is a substantive theory about the mechanism for Joe's resistance to evidence and argument, namely the vividness of the hallucinations, etc."

Professor Deutsch

Psychosis -- A mental distortion causing gross distortion or disorganization of a person's mental capacity, affective response, and capacity to recognize reality.....

Stedman's Medical Dictionary

Affective – Pertaining to emotion, feeling, sensibility.....

Stedman's Medical Dictionary

If someone is hallucinating but he knows the hallucinations are not real, he is not psychotic! When I defined Joe's mental state as being "actively psychotic" and later said "in other words", he was "hallucinat(ing) so vividly" and acting in a "paranoid" and "delusional" fashion, one statement follows precisely logically from the other, when one understands the meaning of the word "psychosis"! But these are semantics.

Joe is a 21 year-old white male from North Carolina in the Southeastern part of the United States. He was born in rural Eastern North Carolina . He is the second of three children. He was a full-term infant, mild meconium present at birth, immediate and 5-minute Apgars were a little low but by 15 minutes were completely normal. He had normal childhood immunizations, and usual illnesses. He achieved his normal developmental milestones on time, or even a little early, usually was in the 40th percentile for weight and 50th percentile for height. He was an A and B student and well-liked throughout school. He played football in Junior High, and was a member of the band and chess team in high-school.

His family was religious, indeed his father was a "lay minister" at the local Southern Baptist church and a senior manager of a tobacco distributing company. Joe, unlike his father, had no exposure to farm pesticides like organophosphates.

Joe attended church weekly with his family. His father was known for his fiery sermons, and excellent command of the English language. Joe also was known to be rather above average in his intelligence, and indeed on standardized testing at school Joe was usually above the 80th percentile in both math and reading skills. It was said that he did not "apply" himself or he would have achieved all A's. Because of Joe's rural background, the fact that his father was a University of North Carolina business graduate, and the fact that Joe had good SAT scores, despite modest grades, he was accepted into the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Prior to college, during his senior year in high-school, he experimented a few times with marijuana, felt it relaxed him but was concerned that it was illegal and he did not want to get caught. One night he was offered the opportunity to take his friends Ritalin when he was up studying for a test at the last minute. He absolutely loved this drug, felt it made him feel better and function better. Indeed he went to his physician and asked for it, because he said it helped him to study, but his physician suggested several new study habits and refused to write the Ritalin, because he could not find any medical reason to.

He had his first sexual relations in his senior year. Towards the end of his senior year in high school, he became a little bit less outgoing than usual, but maintained several excellent friendships. Family and

friends said that he was becoming a bit more "mature", and he started to read philosophy texts and particularly texts on the philosophy of religion, something his father was also interested in.

He attended the University of North Carolina and decided to major in philosophy, with an eye toward going to Duke Divinity School (just down the road from the University of North Carolina). He did reasonably well in college, but not as well as he did in high school. His friends thought he isolated himself with his philosophy and religion texts more than they would prefer, and he started attending religious services with a man who said he was a "Zen" master who was teaching him to "channel" spirits for a fee. He would spend long hours, occasionally in his room meditating, or sometimes "channeling" spirits. He continued to get reasonable grades, now B's and C's but in his sophomore and then junior year, he began making comments that his professors did not have the "insight" that he did and were not able to feel the "presence" of god, so were not capable of judging his writings. He still had several friends, still would date, but insisted that any woman that he dated read and agree with his "thesis" on the nature of god, and acknowledge the likelihood that he was potentially anointed by god to bring his word to "the people". He did acknowledge that others could be anointed, as well. He was still likeable and friendly, did his school work, helped his friends when they needed a favor, played trumpet in the school band, and still looked forward to going to Duke Divinity School, where he felt that he would finally be "understood" and not have to deal with the "secular materialists" attending the University of North Carolina. Indeed he exercised regularly, had good hygiene, was "clean-cut" just a little more quiet than some, except about religious issues, about which he had strong opinions. His only "vice" (per Joe) was that he smoked cigarettes, a habit he picked up his Sophomore year in school. He said it helped him to relax and focus.

During one particular "channeling" session, while his parents were visiting him at his apartment in Chapel Hill, his Dad pointed out that "Christ" did not say that one should try to contact the "devils children," by channeling, but rather that "We should pray for peace and love to Jesus himself. He told Joe that he should not "try to contact" the devil, in order to fight him, but rather let his prayers strengthen those walking "in the spirit with G-d" and in this way defeat the devil in his community of "loving Christians."

When his father said this, Joe became quite angry and in fact said that he could feel the very presence of the "devil" around his father. Since Joe had never said anything like this before, and indeed since this seemed very "out of character" according to his father, they asked Joe whether he would be willing to see a doctor. Over the last month, on the telephone, his parents thought they saw the beginnings of a bit of "personality change" and for the first time were slightly concerned, and did not think his increased interest in philosophy and religion was a sign of his "maturity" anymore. Joe laughed at his parents, and apologized to his father, saying that it is sometimes "hard" to know the "devils ways." But to "humor" his parents, Joe suggested he see a specialist, a neurologist, to prove to his parents that there was nothing at all wrong with him.

Joe saw the neurologist with his parents and a medical history was taken.

It turns out that Joe's mother's father had been hospitalized at the State Hospital "Dorothea Dix" with several "nervous breakdowns" in the 1950's and ultimately in the late 50's killed himself with a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head. Joe's mother was quite upset at the time, but with the love of her family, her church, and G-d, she said she had "made" peace with the terrible circumstances of her father's life, and to all accounts, she had been a very loving and caring wife and mother, and an upstanding member of her

community. The patient's mother also had a male cousin on her father's side of the family, who was diagnosed with "schizophrenia" and is still alive and is currently being treated with medications for it and apparently doing well.

Joe's vital signs were completely normal. It was revealed that Joe smoked cigarettes, approximately 1 pack per day for the last two years. The neurologist gathered much of the history already recounted above (about Joe's increasing interest in religion and his slightly unusual preferences for religious activities that one would not expect given his cultural background.)

On neurological exam, he found a few "soft" signs but nothing specific. On mental status exam, Joe was almost entirely appropriate. His thought process was tight (logical), his thought content was thought to be "normal," except perhaps for slight religious preoccupation. But living in this part of North Carolina and going to a "liberal" University like UNC, the neurologist did not think his thoughts were very unusual. His speech was of regular rate and rhythm with normal prosody. When the neurologist asked Joe whether he heard "voices" that others could not hear, Joe chuckled a little and said, "nothing but the sweet voice of god."

The neurologist asked Joe to elaborate a bit more, and when Joe just smiled, he asked him whether he hears the actual voice of god, or whether it is more like a thought. Joe said it was more like a thought. The neurologist watched Joe throughout the interview, and never saw him "attending to internal cues" (the subtle eye and head and muscle movements that can be seen when individuals have auditory hallucinations). Joe denied visual hallucinations. Judgment and Insight were rated no better than fair. He scored a 30/30 on his mini-mental status exam. Affect was very slightly "flat" (just a little less emotional variation than one would anticipate in a situation like this exam.)

Given the concerns of the parents, the neurologist commenced a very thorough "work-up", though at the time of the exam he could detect nothing wrong, and indeed believed that Joe was simply exploring "alternative religion", as he has seen many young men and women do. MRI of brain was read as "normal", EEG was normal, blood chemistries and white count were normal, sexually transmitted disease screens were normal, both from lumbar puncture and blood. Lumbar puncture was normal for protein and glucose. No evidence of inflammatory disease in blood or from lumbar puncture. Infectious disease screens including Lyme and Rocky Mountain spotted fever were negative. He was ruled out for porphyrias with 24 hour urines and various adrenal tumors with 24 hour urines, he was ruled out for various endocrine disorders including thyroid problems, ruled out for leukodystrophies, PANDAS syndromes, and ruled out for vitamin deficiency. He was ruled out for heavy metal toxicity or exposure to organophosphates. He was ruled out for Wilson's Disease and Multiple Myeloma and Sarcoid, and Lupus, and urine and blood tox screens were completely negative.

In short, the neurologist was, if anything, too thorough, because Joe insisted that he had learned in his philosophy classes, that an illness is only real if there is a specific lab test that documents that it is real, or a lesion that a pathologist can find, despite the neurologists attempt to explain why this idea is wrong. Joe knew that his parents were concerned about "mental illness" given that they had heard it "runs in the blood," but Joe had read the "World" blog. He explained to his parents that mental illness is "Fake" and a "Superstition". Indeed, Joe had put on his own religious website a story recommending that no one give money to the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, a charity supporting those with mental illness in America, because mental illness is in fact "fake" and so it

is a waste of money to support such "charities". Indeed he quoted the article mentioning the British mental health charity "Rethink", because Joe, like the editors of the World, believes that people make decisions based on their "values" and not "mindless chemicals." Joe apparently was unaware that values could be of some minimal importance, as well, to those who volunteer at charitable organizations and give money to charities. Joe, thinks that a person's values are actually "the devils or gods values".

Because of Joe's comment about the reality of "illnesses," the neurologist received permission from the Universities research board and from Joe and his family to collect a few extra tubes of blood and send them to Dr. Ming Tsuang at the University of California, as part of a research protocol where Joe will be followed over time.

Joe is declared completely healthy by the neurologist approximately 1 week later. All the tests came back normal, much to the relief of Joe's parents. Two days later, on a Saturday morning, Joe decided to go to the Durham YMCA at 1:00 PM in order to "work out." That morning had started like any other Saturday morning. Joe had awakened at 8:00 AM and had a leisurely breakfast of eggs and toast and took a shower. He did his morning "meditation", by himself in his room, but this time stayed meditating for 3 hours when usually it takes him only 30 minutes. When he emerged from his room, he had an odd smile on his face and said to his roommate,

"I have discovered the secret to truth. I am the light and the way. The devil must be destroyed, in all his forms."

His roommate, being rather perceptive, found the whole encounter very strange. To begin with, Joe had never used language like that for as long as he had known him. In addition, his roommate thought to himself,

"If anyone had really discovered the secret to 'truth' he ought to be pretty excited about it, and Joe just didn't seem that excited. Furthermore if he is the 'light and the way' and about to wage war with the devil, why is he going to the YMCA?"

It all seemed quite illogical to Joe's roommate, until he remembered the definition of "psychosis", that he had learned in undergraduate psychology class.

Psychosis -- A mental distortion causing gross distortion or disorganization of a person's mental capacity, affective response, and capacity to recognize reality.....

Stedman's Medical Dictionary

Affective – Pertaining to emotion, feeling, sensibility.....

Stedman's Medical Dictionary

And then Joe's roommate thought,

"He has been a little odd the last few weeks, I wonder if he has become 'psychotic'? He seems to have a gross distortion of his capacity to recognize reality. What makes him think that he is the 'light and the way' for everyone? In addition, he seems to have a 'gross' distortion of his 'affective' (emotional) response. Maybe Joe *is* psychotic.

Then Joe went to the YMCA and announced audibly, but not loudly, that he feels the sin "about the place".

"There is no charity. Where is the charity?"

So, a patron at the YMCA named Harry, seeing that Joes' pack of cigarettes was empty, offered Joe a cigarette as follows: And Joes

story at the YMCA begins.

Let's say Joe is in a "mental state" in which he is actively psychotic but never did anything intentionally (like abuse drugs) to create this state. Joe is hallucinating and fully believes and sees that Harry has horns and is attacking him with a knife, but actually Harry has no horns and is just offering him a cigarette. He hits Harry over the head with a chair to "defend" himself.

"So let me imagine some details that would be relevant:"
Professor Deutsch

OK.

"(F)irst of all, it wasn't just a hallucination in the sense of seeing and hearing things that weren't happening. Some of the things (horns) are so implausible that one would immediately assume one was having a hallucination, unless the hallucinations were combined with a hardware-induced feeling that they are authentic. So I'll assume they were."

Professor Deutsch

OK. As I said in my example, he is psychotic. I agree that the psychosis ([strong] feeling that they are authentic) is hardware-induced.

Then, let me assume, he ran out of the pub (can I change this to the "YMCA"?, MG) screaming that the horned, demonic CIA agents were trying to kill him.

Although I guess it is possible that he would run out of the YMCA screaming, most patients with these psychotic illnesses (fake or otherwise), would not do that. In fact their emotions are often not "congruent" with their thoughts and often seem quite subdued given what they are saying, so in the same way that Joe does not seem particularly excited about finding out he is the "light and the way", he likely would not run screaming into a crowd that there are horned demonic people at the YMCA. But OK, let's assume he does run out of the YMCA screaming.

"The bystanders called the police, who located him nearby and asked him to accompany them in order to investigate the attack in the pub. He accused them of being horned, demonic CIA agents out to kill him, but they overpowered and restrained him before he could attack them. Now he is sitting in a cell, powerless, and various people whom, on the face of it, he has reason to trust, have been telling him that he has been hallucinating, and he just accuses them all of being horned, demonic CIA agents out to kill him."

"OK, now, could the vividness (and hardware-enhanced sense of authenticity) of the hallucination possibly explain this behaviour? No. Not by itself. Because, for instance, once he is helpless in the cell, and they have not killed him, then the theory that they are engaged in a murderous attack on him is refuted. He must change it to something else that explains both his old and his new experiences – for instance, he could decide that now he has been captured they are planning an anal probe, and only afterwards will they kill him."

Professor Deutsch

I really don't think that Joe would think that his theory was "refuted". You and I and most of the readers of the World, usually try to sequentially make sense of the various things that happen to us, to try to create a unified "story" to explain things. Others don't and most people with schizophrenia would not admit to being wrong about a delusion while still delusional.

"The theory that they are engaged in a murderous attack on him is refuted. He *must* (emphasis mine) change it to something else that explains both his old and his new experiences...."

People with illnesses like this (like early schizophrenia), have a

"thought disorder". Much about their thinking and behavior is "disorganized". In the history of psychiatry, there were those who believed that if "reality" could be clearly demonstrated to someone with schizophrenia, that is if their delusions could be manifestly shown to be false, the individual would gain back contact with reality. A forceful demonstration of what is real might force patients to integrate old and new experiences, according to this theory.

If one tried to force Joe to understand a correct version of a series of events, perhaps Joe would think, "I thought it was the case that Harry was trying to hurt me, but I now know that he was not". It was thought that if enough "new experiences" were presented to the psychotic patient and enough of his old delusions were strongly challenged, this would treat schizophrenia. So (in the past), if a patient said he was an all powerful god or Jesus, technicians would hold the person down, in an attempt to show the patient that he was not all powerful etc.

The problem is the best of our theories sometimes are just wrong. Patients did not get better when confronted with the inaccuracy of their delusions. Nor did they link up old and new experiences to create a logically unified story, to explain the passage of events. Indeed this failure is a key "hardware failure" in someone with schizophrenia. When reality was forced upon patients who thought they were god, their thoughts, if anything, became more fragmented and illogical. The patients got worse.

It is very disconcerting to speak to someone with "disorganized" ideas; that is, ideas that do not link past, present, and expected future experiences into a logical whole. This is one of the hallmarks of schizophrenia. And you can see this "disorganization" in behavior as well. Those working in this field have all had patients who nearly died from starvation because they insisted the food was poisoned. No amount of explanation, reassurance, eating their food in front of them (I've tried them all) convinces anyone. Although I am not familiar with this case, it is said that Kurt Godel, arguably the finest logician who ever lived, died of starvation because he thought his food was poisoned! Kurt Godel was very familiar with logic, but (if the stories about him are true), even a man with perhaps the finest logical mind that ever lived, could not think his way out of his paranoid delusional system about food. He could not apparently incorporate new experiences (the people around me are eating the same food and not dying) with his old sensibilities (the food is poisoned, it will kill me) and so he died. Some people just can't incorporate new and old experiences to create a "logical" explanation of things.

When the brain malfunctions in this way; even (perhaps) the most logical man who ever lived, could not think his way out of his malfunctioning brain. Nowadays, medications work very well for this condition and people consistently change their mind about whether the food is poisoned, and they demonstrate their changed beliefs by saying the food is not poisoned and by eating it and smiling.

By the way, if someone is on the border of being floridly psychotic and believes the food is poisoned, the way to appeal to him is *not* to use logic, per se. Forcing him to confront his inability to create composite and organized logical theories of experience from past and now present circumstances, precisely challenges the patients weakness, and tends to make him less trusting. And less trust leads to greater disorganization of thought. The best approach is to play a game, like ping-pong, for example, with the patient and talk about the football game on television or current events. Patients want to feel your kindness, your concern, and they want to have fun. Your consistency and desire to help builds trusting relationships and is the single best way of confronting paranoia. Arguing or even reasoning, even if the (young) clinicians intentions are very good,

almost never works.

Sometimes a person can learn to trust even when he can't learn to think. Think of a baby clinging to his mother. He trusts her, but certainly can't say why. An excellent psychiatric nurse knows that trust is more important, and will just have food around the nursing station and sometimes the patient will, just for a moment, *suspend (his faulty) reasoning,* and act on pure faith in you, the clinician. Then he may take a bite of the cookie, or more importantly, take the medicine that will enable him to keep taking bites of cookie...because his paranoia will likely decrease.

Back to Joe who has been taken by the police to jail.

"The theory that they are engaged in a murderous attack on him is refuted. He must change it to something else that explains his old and his new experiences" (because Joe is alive in the jail cell).
Professor Deutsch

Well no, he must not. People with schizophrenic illnesses are often quite illogical, particularly when they have to attach new experiences to old, and then construct a composite new interpretation or theory that encompasses data from the past and present. Those with schizophrenia are notoriously bad at this, that's why their thinking is "disorganized". They do not put ideas together correctly. When this is coupled with paranoia, the patient has a serious problem.

But OK. Let's go with your version, anyway. Let's assume that in this particular case, Joe is able to come to the conclusion that he was wrong, the police were not actually going to kill him immediately but instead...

"for instance, he could decide that now he has been captured they are planning an anal probe, and only afterwards will they kill him."
Professor Deutsch

"In either case, or in any other case, the explanation that he tentatively adopts cannot possibly be coded for in a defective gene or poisonous chemical. It is too complex for that. It can only have come from his own creative thought."

If a British citizen is on a bus, the citizen may have a literally infinite number of possibilities that he can decide upon. He can decide to sit down, stand up, move his hands about his head in swirling motions, twiddle his toes, or stand on his head and twiddle his toes, while making snide remarks about a ladies pumps. Yes indeed, much of what he does on the bus is a product of his "creative thought". But if the bus had a bad "chemical" on it, like a functioning bomb, for example, that the average citizen can't reasonably know about, he is going to experience certain negative consequences from that bomb. "Defective genes" and "poisonous chemicals" are the bombs that cause schizophrenia.

Actually, the phenomenon of genes creating a predisposition, that the person then acts upon, is a well-described phenomenon called "active gene-environment correlation. Indeed I have discussed this phenomenon before at some length.

(I wrote most of this before Professor Deutsch's later comments) Perhaps in believing that the mentally ill "choose" their mental illness ("behavior" to Professor Deutsch), Professor Deutsch instead means that individuals' genes increase risk for certain types of feelings, and then individuals "choose" how to handle these feelings, or place themselves in an environment which helps with that choice (so called "active" gene-environment correlation). For example, most individuals with schizophrenia, experience a degree of paranoia, likely heavily influenced by genetic factors. However

the specific events or ideas which frighten those with schizophrenia, do in fact vary between people. Those with past experiences with the American government or who continually read the politics section of an American newspaper may become convinced that the CIA has implanted a transmitter in their ear, and demand to have it surgically removed. In effect, they hear a voice that they believe is absolutely real, often even rapidly turn their head to hear the "voice" more clearly, but seem to confabulate a scenario, in response to the voice that they hear. But those who grew up in the Soviet Union or China, for example would more likely devise conspiracy theories related to the KGB, or Mao, and have transmitters placed by other agencies. There are obviously an infinite number of ways of being paranoid. The confabulation, based on their underlying paranoia, however, seems to derive from themes from their own past or present, as interpreted through their paranoia, and indeed they will seem to be attracted to a wide variety of "conspiracy" theories and read about them. In this sense, we perceive* them to "choose" the themes that they build around their paranoid illness. Joe, who has a religious background chooses religious themes.

But the patient absolutely believes the delusions are real and DOES NOT perceive them to be his choices. Telling someone with schizophrenia that he did not really hear voices speaking to him, (or that the CIA has not planted a bug in his ear) will cause him to believe that YOU are crazy, just as if I spoke to one of the readers of the "World" and then told him that he did not "really" hear my voice. (Activation of parts of the brain interpreting "sound" are identical in those who hear my speech and in those who hallucinate voices, so from the perspective of the individual in either case, both "voices" are absolutely real).

In short, we may perceive that the individual chooses the themes to build around his underlying paranoia, but the individual does not perceive he had any hand in his perceptions. And let there be no doubt: Though the individuals environment can provide the themes that the person incorporates into his paranoid delusions, the genetic and chemical bomb, nonetheless blows up and ruins the persons life. Their whole world becomes structured around paranoid themes whether it is the CIA for an American with schizophrenia, or the KGB for a Russian with schizophrenia.

"Why has his creative thought settled on one particular explanation as being the best, out of the infinity of explanations that would cover the experiences he has had? The story hasn't told us, but my moral opinion of him depends crucially on this."

David Deutsch

Admittedly, the story has evolved, after you made this comment. But I am describing someone with an early schizophrenic illness, which should now be apparent

If British citizens can list an infinite number of reasons to explain their consistent choices to ride a bus on a given day, but they have no idea that the bus will be bombed and have no part in planning it, do their "creative thoughts" or "choices" cause the mangling of their bodies?

It is an ethical lapse or logical error to believe that "creative thoughts" or "choices" of people on doomed British busses, lead to the mangling of their bodies. Does your "moral opinion" of their mangled bodies really much depend on what they were thinking when they got on the bus? It is an equally egregious ethical lapse or logical error, to believe that the infinitely "creative thoughts" of those with schizophrenia, lead to the correct interpretation of an act that they have no sense that they committed. How can your moral opinion of their behavior depend upon their creative interpretation of an event that they saw and heard happen (and continue to imagine happening) in a completely differently way than you did? And if you explain it to them your way, your very use of logic can cause them to misinterpret even more. To help someone with

schizophrenia, one first changes their feelings of paranoia. Their thoughts then follow. That is usually the most ethical and effective approach. Analyzing their thoughts, initially, will provide little information about their ultimate capacity for moral reasoning or understanding. Joe deserves to not be paranoid, so that he can use his "creativity" in his own interests and the interests of others, not to act upon a reality that he completely misinterprets.

"At the other extreme, imagine that he is a fine, upstanding fellow with no relevant immoral ideas or habits, and that this sudden and unpredictable brain defect is not only causing hallucinations, it is affecting the transcription of his short- to longer-term memory. He can no longer recall the attack in the pub, but only waking up half a minute ago, imprisoned by demons. He is constantly in a state of being overwhelmed by this new and bizarre situation, and is therefore quite rightly devoting his attention, first, to analysing the possibility that it really is as it seems to be. By the time he gets round to considering other possible explanations, he has forgotten, and starts again at the beginning."

David Deutsch

I can agree with you about this scenario, but if it does occur, and I can perhaps think of one or two brain malfunctions that could almost cause this, it is so vanishingly rare that it is not worthwhile (in my opinion) to discuss it further, but if you wish I will and try to formulate a hypothetical lesion that could cause this. In a sense schizophrenia is like this (a little bit) because though the person remembers, they don't integrate (well) their past and present experiences to create an overall narrative of the experiences of their life, or at any rate they don't create a narrative that makes sense to anyone else so it is almost like each disorganized thought is like "new" without logical connection to previous thoughts.

The common scenario in schizophrenia is one in which the patient remembers just fine. When friends and family come to talk with Joe about his "mental state", he gets angry and accuses some of them of being imposters. Indeed the more people try to reason with him the angrier and more paranoid he gets. He now overtly claims to be Jesus the Christ, and claims to be conducting miracles over the planet...Indeed he claims to have caused the destruction of the Soviet Union and threatens to destroy an unnamed country, if they don't turn from the "wages of sin". A prison nurse who has a little experience with patients with schizophrenia is the only one who can talk to him a bit and cause him to calm down, precisely because she plays backgammon with him and does not challenge his delusions. He trusts her a little but no one else.

His friends try to get him to see that given his mental state at the time, it was understandable for him to hit Harry, but now he does not have to believe that Harry was in league with the devil.....but Joe says he understands "perfectly well" what is going on, but his explanation has nothing to do with anyone else's. Joe's efforts at understanding more about his mental condition involve reading and rereading the bible, until he finally writes a ten page tract that he says now supercedes the bible, and poor Harry is the devil's first child. When others suggest to him that he might be mentally ill, and give him literature to read, he says that as god he can rewrite all the rules. He agrees that he has completely chosen to rewrite the bible, but believes that it is his responsibility as the second coming of "Christ" to do exactly that.

"It doesn't follow from the proposition that they are demons trying to harm him, that he should not listen to their explanations. On the contrary, once he is helpless and in their power, he should listen to them."

David Deutsch

Multiple psychiatric patients are completely locked up and are

completely convinced that they are all powerful gods.....We've demonstrated (decades ago and no doubt inhumanely) that holding them down against the bed doesn't even change the patients view of his power. Indeed he is more likely to cling to the view that he is *more powerful* if you hold him down. One can see minor versions of this when frightened children (or adults) begin bragging about themselves precisely when they feel the most intimidated. But when the cognitive filter is gone that allows a person to check fantasy against reality, then the narcissistic fantasy (of being god) becomes absolutely real. Indeed to those with schizophrenia, the entire world revolves around them, often literally because they think they are the center of the universe, god himself.

This level of "rationality"...(the demons are in control of me so perhaps I should listen to them to learn their weaknesses....etc., then I can plan an escape) woefully misunderstands those with these types of psychotic illnesses. They precisely cannot build these kinds of mental models. In a sense the more you intimidate them, the stronger their grandiose delusion. If the demons think they can control him, then he will believe that he is god! No, it doesn't make sense from your or my perspective. But it is a property of thought disorganization. The effectiveness of the glue that allows someone to put his thoughts together and build logical argument and logical behavior, depends crucially on a person feeling trusting towards people and feeling calm. When trust and calm are gone, thoughts do not logically link the past and present and future, in the mind of someone with schizophrenia. And what seems like dark fantasy to us emerges as quiet real to someone with schizophrenia.

His family and friends certainly agree that he does not understand that he continues to have false perceptions and misunderstand reality.

Let us imagine that several months from now, Joe somehow ended up on anti-psychotic medicines (I will discuss how later), and has an excellent response to these medicines. In fact, he now fully understands how wrong it was to hurt Harry and apologizes to him profusely. He makes amends to everyone he hurt and insulted. But he does say that he simply did not understand what was going on at the YMCA. After about 3 weeks on medicine at the prison, his clue to his false beliefs came when there were two other people on the psychiatric ward of the prison, all claiming to be Jesus, and he just started to wonder how he could be Jesus, too, and eventually started to laugh a week or so later about 3 Jesus's on the psychiatric ward. But he is adamant that he did not understand what happened at the YMCA until he was on medication, and it was reexplained to him. After his release from prison he hears over and over again from other patients, and then checks the literature and finds that there are thousands upon thousands of patients with schizophrenia many of whom, on medication, said they simply did not understand what they were doing when they were psychotic, because they had fixed and false ideas that colored all of their other perceptions.

Professor Deutsch, is it possible that Joe really did not understand, despite his best efforts to understand, that he had a psychotic mental state that lead him to misperceive the intentions of others and see inaccurately the events as they occurred at the YMCA? Is it possible that he continued to not understand what happened at the YMCA until he took medication? He began understanding only when he was on anti-psychotic medications for several weeks. Is it possible that Joe is telling the truth about continuing to not understand what happened at the YMCA until he got on anti-psychotic medication, and then others, whom he now trusted,

explained the sequence of events at the YMCA and he believed

them?

by Michael Golding on Mon, 07/25/2005 - 05:37 | [reply](#)

The 'previous question'

This passage

Do you think it is possible for someone like Joe to continue to *not understand* an explanation given to him concerning why it was wrong to hit Harry, despite Joe's best efforts? In other words, do you think it is possible for someone like Joe to hallucinate so vividly and to be so paranoid and delusional, that he believes [...]

consists of two questions. The second one claims to be the first one stated in other words. But it is not. The first one asks whether a certain state of affairs (Joe continues not to understand) is possible. The second asks whether that state of affairs could be caused through a particular mechanism (vividness, paranoid, delusional).

If the answer to the second question is yes, then the answer to the first must be too, because if a state of affairs can be caused by a certain mechanism, then that state of affairs can happen. But if the answer to the first question is yes, then nothing follows about the second, for it is possible for a person not to understand things that are explained to him, however carefully, and yet for this not to be due to the stated mechanism of vivid hallucinations, paranoia and delusions.

Hence the second question is not the first question stated in other words.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Wed, 07/27/2005 - 02:55 | [reply](#)

But Joe is psychotic

But David, he previously said that Joe is psychotic *as well* as having hallucinations. So when he says "someone like Joe", he means someone psychotic. And someone psychotic is defined by the dictionary as someone with "a mental distortion causing gross distortion or disorganization of a person's mental capacity, affective response, and capacity to recognize reality". So the answer to his question "could someone like Joe fail to understand that what he did was wrong" must be yes, by definition.

by a reader on Thu, 07/28/2005 - 11:53 | [reply](#)

But Joe is psychotic

Thank you so much for helping to express this idea. I agree with you.

I am wondering (now) whether someone like Joe, given the additional information I have presented and in addition despite all reasonable attempts to use verbal persuasion to convince him to change his mind; I am wondering whether Joe could still fail to understand that what he did was wrong (i.e. maintain a psychotic perspective about the incident at the YMCA)?

Thanks.

by Michael Golding on Thu, 07/28/2005 - 15:01 | [reply](#)

But Joe is psychotic

Sorry, but now *I* don't get it (I wrote the comment two above

this one). Since the answer must be yes by definition, how can you be wondering what it is?

by a reader on Thu, 07/28/2005 - 15:39 | [reply](#)

Reply to Kolya

I first posted this on my [blog](#), but I wasn't sure if Kolya would see it there and thought it might be of interest to others:

Dear Kolya,

I really appreciate your comments although I think so far, I tentatively disagree with some of what you've said.

Debilitating behavioural syndromes such as schizophrenia, manic depression and eating disorders are real. But it's highly tendentious to call them illnesses, because the prevailing theories about their causes, their consequences and their remedies are all morally very controversial. By calling these syndromes "illnesses" we gloss over that controversy and hand over authority to adjudicate on these moral issues to a "priesthood" of psychiatrists who lack any special moral insights for dealing with them. While there exist some wise and humane psychiatrists and therapists, as an objective body of transmissible knowledge, psychiatry is, as Szasz rightly says, just like alchemy.

I think refusing to call mental problems(or controversies) "illness" has already led to a serious problem - moralists who heap blame, shame, and guilt on those who genuinely need medical or some type of help. At least when they're diagnosed with an illness, people with these difficulties can be treated as deserving of help and with some optimism about living better lives.

I'm not convinced that doctors and scientists aren't doing a better job than "moralists" have done so far. Sure they've made and will continue to make mistakes, but at least they're trying to find ways to test their theories and correct them.

Good moral knowledge could help with this, but I don't think it's enough. The record for helping such people outside of the medical community hasn't been very good.

I know people who seem to have been substantially helped by antidepressants and therapy. I also know of people who actually seemed to be hurt by it. I think this could be a problem with fitting the best solution to the patient. In some cases, substantial life changes (moving, divorce, etc) seemed to bring about a lot of improvement.

It's hard to say whether it was the person who was particularly sensitive to the environment, the environment/interactions being particularly bad for him, or whether there was some brain difficulty. Sometimes change was suggested by a therapist and sometimes it wasn't. I wouldn't say this is a lack of good knowledge about it, just a particular difficulty or mistake with finding the best way to help the particular person. It could have been that for a person in a seemingly similar situation, drugs and therapy would have helped. I think knowledge about how to find the best way to help will improve.

However, it would be ridiculous to suggest that just because the prevailing psychiatric theories are wrong, serious mental disorders don't exist. They exist all right; it's just that they are not illnesses in any useful sense of the word. Having said that, we cannot entirely de-couple the management of these problems from the medical profession, because prescription-only medication has a legitimate role to play in the management of mental disorders. Moreover, as

some behavioural disturbances are caused by genuine illnesses such as thyroid malfunction, brain tumours and Alzheimer's, it makes sense for doctors to be involved in the evaluation of certain kinds of mental/behavioural disorders.

Kolya | 07.17.05 - 8:28 am |

I think mental disorders do share some important characteristics with "medical illnesses" in that they're an "impairment to normal functioning". Personally, I think "healthy" would be a better term - as in "impairment to healthy functioning" (being different from "normal" might not actually be an impairment to health).

This doesn't mean a person can't manage to function well in spite of illness - physical or mental - at times. It doesn't mean there won't be mistakes made about what it means to actually be "impaired", what it means to be "normal" or "healthy" mentally, and whether a particular person is "healthy" and "normal".

If there are problems with the system for avoiding and correcting those mistakes, then those problems can and should be addressed and improved. I've been really impressed with the bits of medical history I've read so far. Yes, there have been plenty of big mistakes, but there have been some amazing improvements and breakthroughs.

Cheers,
Becky

PS - I think Mr. Golding's explanation about how Joe's evaluation played out is how it could be "well done" and still not perfect. Not all evaluations are as carefully done. I do agree that there can be some harmful consequences to some individuals at times because not all professionals are good at their profession. This seems like an issue of getting more professionals to be good at their job.

by [beckyam](#) on Thu, 07/28/2005 - 16:58 | [reply](#)

Psychotic Joe

In the past (at the YMCA), Joe had a psychotic interpretation of the event. Now he is in jail. People have tried to persuade him. New events have occurred. Joe has thought further about the event given his interpretation of what others said. Several new events were related in the story above. Despite the best efforts of others to persuade him, is it reasonable to assume that someone, like Joe, can be persuaded using words alone, to **not** have a psychotic view of the events, even though he had a **psychotic view** in the past? Can you, in general, change the delusional views of someone like Joe by reasoning with him (Most psychiatrists would say that Joe was experiencing a relatively severe case of a first psychotic break, and his illness will likely progress to schizophrenia.) Is someone like Joe likely capable of **understanding** the true situation that happened at the YMCA, if others use words to persuade him, but not medications?

Thanks. Hope that clarifies.

by Michael Golding on Thu, 07/28/2005 - 18:06 | [reply](#)

Psychotic Joe

By the way, in case it is not obvious, medications "persuade" by changing feelings, which then allow the individual to change thoughts.....actually a bit more complicated than that, since attentional factors and multiple other mechanisms seem to be involved.

by MIchael Golding on Thu, 07/28/2005 - 22:40 | [reply](#)

Someone like Joe

Is someone like Joe likely to be capable of
understanding the true situation that happened at the
YMCA, if others use words to persuade him, but not
medications?

By definition, no.

But perhaps you mean: might someone like Joe (i.e. someone psychotic by the above definition) be capable of ceasing to be psychotic through some process not involving drugs? Unfortunately I don't know, because the answer depends on something no one knows at present, namely the mechanism by which a person becomes psychotic. But I think I could give a halfway useful answer if I knew the answer to this question: on the occasions when someone has been mistakenly diagnosed as (already) psychotic, how is that mistake typically discovered?

by [David Deutsch](#) on Fri, 07/29/2005 - 21:38 | [reply](#)

Re: Reply to Kolya

Becky wrote:

I think mental disorders do share some important characteristics with "medical illnesses" in that they're an "impairment to normal functioning". Personally, I think "healthy" would be a better term - as in "impairment to healthy functioning" (being different from "normal" might not actually be an impairment to health).

Can you not think of other conditions that also 'share some important characteristics with "medical illnesses" in that they're an impairment to healthy functioning', but which it would be morally wrong and practically harmful to think of as illnesses?

If so, what is the significant difference between *those* things and 'mental illnesses'?

by [David Deutsch](#) on Sat, 07/30/2005 - 18:13 | [reply](#)

Mental Illness vs. Impairments to health

Good question.

I'm having trouble thinking of a specific example such as you suggest.

I can see where my description falls short, but I've gone around several different ways of describing it and see no way of looking at it that doesn't become a confusing jumble.

Thinking of poor Joe. It seems "obvious" that he's got a mental impairment and needs help. This is partly based on my thinking there are no demons (or Jesus or anything "supernatural") and yet I don't propose curing all religious people of an "illness" (that doesn't sound like a bad idea on the surface, but I expect there are some huge complications and moral problems with that).

Along this vein, what if the girls of Salem had all been treated? The story goes that some girls started acting very strangely and lacking any explanation for a physical cause, their neighbors and relatives went on to conclude that it was satan at work. The descriptions of their behavior sound rather scary and make me wonder whether there wasn't some exposure to toxic chemicals. Why did all their

neighbors and friends assume it was the work of witchcraft vs. some as-yet-undiscovered ailment? Would they have refrained from burning people at the stake? It seems like there's a fair chance they would have agreed with Joe about some of his delusions! It seems that in the case of the girls, they likely needed medical treatment. In the case of the neighbors, they needed better ideas. Better ideas could have eliminated a lot of needless deaths and helped the girls, so would better medical knowledge and even the expectation that physical ailments might explain their behavior (even if the specific cause never get discovered).

OTOH, what if Joe's exact problem is distinguishing his own fantasy from his own concept of reality? He generally doesn't think he's Jesus or that demons make themselves visible, but is in such a state that what are normally imaginings get confused with reality.

The only difference that I can see between Joe and the people of Salem a long time ago might be that Joe eventually thinks that he'd been wrong. Perhaps some of the people of Salem came to think so too later..

Would it have been harmful to think of all the people in Salem as being mentally ill vs. murderers? Possibly. Maybe treating them as responsible and culpable would deter others from drawing hasty conclusions about things based on flimsy evidence.

Becky

by [beckyam](#) on Fri, 08/05/2005 - 17:33 | [reply](#)

Some impairments to healthy functioning

Some conditions of the brain which in my opinion are, under typical circumstances, impairments to healthy functioning, but which it would be morally wrong and practically harmful to think of as illnesses are (in no particular order):

- Having a devout religious belief according to which the highest achievement in one's life would be to become a suicide bomber and kill as many Americans or Jews as possible.
- Hating school.
- Believing that one has paranormal abilities and that scientists are ignoring the evidence of this because they are too set in their ways.
- Same, but with believing that one has been abducted by aliens.
- Believing that one's spiritual leader is in communication with aliens.
- Believing that gay people are an abomination.
- Believing conspiracy theories.
- Believing that alternative medicine can cure cancer.
- Being sad at the loss of a loved one.
- Being sad because one has frequent headaches.
- Being sad because believes that one's one's face is unattractive.
- Believing that one is fat.
- Believing that Blair and/or Bush lied about WMD.
- Believing that a fertilised human ovum is, morally, a person.
- Believing that the essence of morality is to sacrifice oneself for

others.

OK, I think that covers more or less everybody. :)

by [David Deutsch](#) on Fri, 08/05/2005 - 21:21 | [reply](#)

"girls of Salem"

There is no comparison between the "girls of Salem" and Joe.

Those with experience using structured diagnostic instruments (like the SCID), easily and reliably distinguish between those with schizophrenia and those with unusual religious beliefs, as long as the person doing the examination is familiar with the dialect and idioms of the person being questioned.

Religious people routinely tell us they speak with G-d and or the devil, or even that they can speak to serpents, their dog or whatever. They tell us that a deity caused a tree to fall on their house as well, usually to punish them. They have different belief systems than I, but they do not have schizophrenia unless they have a number of other characteristics.

Those with schizophrenia utilize a unique logical pattern as they reason. This pattern is relatively easily discernable in their thinking, if a trained clinician listens to them for a minute or two, let alone throughout an hour interview. I spoke about this pattern a little bit when I was responding to a comment made by Professor Deutsch.

It is scientifically inaccurate to claim that schizophrenia can not be (easily) distinguished from religious belief and hysterical reactions.

Moral guidance over time may have helped "the Salem girls," but will do nothing to change the delusional beliefs of those with schizophrenia, as has been documented by thousands of studies and case reports.

Thanks.

by [Michael Golding](#) on Sat, 08/06/2005 - 04:17 | [reply](#)

Re: Some Impairments to Healthy Functioning

Professor Deutsch,

Do you think the bodily/brain states, associated with the beliefs you named above, are phenomena that have moral and scientific implications, equivalent to the moral and scientific implications of someone with the bodily/brain states associated with bipolar illness? Type II diabetes?

by [Michael Golding](#) on Sat, 08/06/2005 - 04:36 | [reply](#)

Re: Some Impairments to Healthy Functioning

Do you think the bodily/brain states, associated with the beliefs you named above, are phenomena that have moral and scientific implications, equivalent to the moral and scientific implications of someone with the bodily/brain states associated with bipolar illness? Type II diabetes?

The mental states on that list, and the mental states associated with bipolar illness and type II diabetes, are all different in some ways and alike in others. They all have in common that they impair healthy functioning. Virtually no one would want to call them *all* illnesses, and hence the list as a whole demonstrates that "impairing healthy functioning" is not a sufficient criterion for being

a disease.

They also have in common that it is rare for moral guidance alone to restore healthy functioning. They also have in common that if, as a result of being in one of these states, the sufferer hurts an innocent person, then their moral responsibility depends not on the state itself but on the choices that they took before and during the event. None of them are illnesses, but many can be caused by illnesses, and they vary greatly in how harmful a mistake regarding them as illnesses is likely to be. They also have in common that it is immoral to do anything to the sufferers against their will other than in self-defence.

On the occasions when someone has been mistakenly diagnosed as psychotic, how is that mistake typically discovered?

by [David Deutsch](#) on Sat, 08/06/2005 - 11:13 | [reply](#)

Genes Affect Behavior

Genes Affect Behavior.

1. Neuro-surgical stimulation of the brain at various places causes individuals to behave in particular ways and report particular types of psychological experience. A person's thoughts, feelings, and behavior are therefore at least partially dependant on the changing neurophysiological output of the brain. Genes have been shown to influence the physiological output of every organ in the body. Is it not odd that genes can influence the output of literally every organ in the body, but cannot influence the output (thoughts, feelings, and behavior) of the BRAIN?

2. Mammalian exploratory behavior/investigation of novel environments (NOVELTY SEEKING) is known to be heavily influenced by DOPAMINE transmission (particularly in limbic areas). Rodents genetically engineered to transmit less dopamine explore their environment less. Those rodents genetically engineered to transmit more dopamine explore more. A non-novelty seeking genetically engineered rodent can be converted into a novelty seeking rodent by giving drugs enhancing dopamine transmission (e.g. L-dopa) and the reverse can occur to novelty seeking rodents by giving dopamine blockers.

Between 40-60% (depending upon study) of the variability in HUMAN NOVELTY SEEKING is explained by genetic factors. The gene D4DR in humans, codes for different types of DOPAMINE 4 RECEPTORS in the brain. Differences in the single gene D4DR, explain approximately one-quarter of the genetic component of the variance in novelty seeking in humans.

The Cloninger scale is used to measure "novelty seeking" in humans. It has been validated repeatedly using common sense notions of behaviors associated with "novelty seeking". Therefore a specific genetic alteration in the human genome causes a specific change in the shape of a dopamine receptor in the brain (D4), and this receptor difference in turn changes the average way in which humans fill out a questionnaire measuring novelty seeking.

These genetic studies have been confirmed several times in humans with (to my knowledge) only one study not confirming the results (a small Finnish study). This D4DR gene explains about 25% of the heritable human variance in what is termed "novelty seeking". Mammalian studies have also conclusively demonstrated that genetic changes similarly alter brain receptors, which in turn change novelty seeking in animals, by affecting dopamine neurotransmission.

Would it not be odd if the genetic mechanism in animals that

increases novelty seeking via known brain mechanisms, does so in all mammals studied: But only when the gene involved seems to cause virtually identical changes in the human brain, also associated with increases in novelty seeking, do we say the gene is not really involved?

3. Would it not be odd if Darwinian evolution created genes that change virtually every bodily function to help promote survival of the organism, but the psychological functions in humans arguably more important to fitness and reproduction than virtually any other function (when to feel happy or sad, ability to intuitively model the mind and intentions of others, when to focus on avoiding harm, when to be sexually interested or disinterested), these functions critically important to genetic reproduction, are not at all causally linked to genes?

4. Five generations of a Dutch family have been found in which remarkably violent and hypersexual males are all related through their mothers. Not one affected male has an affected son, but (unaffected) females in the family have sons that exhibited these unusual behaviors, suggesting an "X-linked" disorder like color-blindness.

Indeed, the aberrant gene in the affected males was found on their X chromosome. It was found to have a mutation that prevents monoamine oxidase A from being produced in the brain. Monoamine Oxidase is an enzyme that is targeted by various drugs, particularly anti-depressants. It breaks down key signaling chemicals in the brain (serotonin, dopamine, norepinephrine). Men committing arson, rape, attempted homicide, etc. in this Dutch family, all were found to have the genetic mutation; those without a criminal history did not have the mutation.

Some doubted that a single and subtle genetic mutation could cause such widespread behavioral change in a human and suggested that perhaps other factors accounted for the violence, and not the absent monoamine oxidase. So animals were genetically engineered to be identical to other animals, except that the engineered animals were designed to have the same small mutation in the gene that the human family has – the mutation that prevents production of Monoamine Oxidase A. Remarkably, in differing only in Monoamine Oxidase A production, the deficient animals repeatedly attacked and repeatedly tried to kill otherwise identical animals not deficient in the enzyme. They also were far more sexually aggressive when paired with females. In other words the animals, like the humans with the monoamine deficiency, showed the same increased propensity to violence and sexually aggressive behavior.

Neuroscientists have manipulated monoamine levels in healthy, non-depressed humans. Carefully controlled studies demonstrate that with special dietary interventions, for example utilizing the tryptophan deficiency paradigm, lowering serotonergic neurotransmission dramatically alters mood states. For example, we can change healthy, happy people into depressed and irritable people just by changing neurotransmission, and then reverse this effect with various medications and dietary interventions. Controlled studies have also demonstrated that we can alter anger and sexual drive by changing monoamine neurotransmission.

So there is abundant evidence (in humans) that altering monoamine neurotransmission (via neurochemical and dietary interventions) affects mood state, irritability, and sexuality. It should not be surprising, therefore, that when a genetic mutation (like in the disturbed males in the Dutch family) also alters the same monoamine neurotransmission, behavioral effects occur just as they do with dietary interventions, and just as they do in animals

with the identical mutation causing monoamine alterations.

Would it not be odd if animals genetically engineered to lack a particular monoamine enzyme become more aggressive and sexual due to changed monoamine levels, humans experiencing interventions changing monoamine concentrations become more aggressive and sexual; but humans with an identical genetic mutation as animals, causing an identical change in monoamine levels, associated also with increases in violence and sexual aggression: Would it not be odd if these monoamine changes, just because they were caused by a gene, have nothing to do with the subsequent behavioral effects?

5. In the absence of specific known mechanisms connecting gene products to particular outputs from the brain, how would genetically based mental illnesses exhibit their polygenetic characteristics to investigators? Obsessive Compulsive disorder, Schizophrenia, Bipolar illness, and to some extent Major Depression all have (1) high monozygotic:dizygotic ratios, (2) low sibling risk, (3) high first-degree relative risk (4) Predictable (but non-specific) pathophysiology of a relevant organ (brain) and (5) Cause pain and suffering

- a. These are exactly the results that are mathematically predicted for illnesses with polygenetic origins in which the specific pathophysiology has not been discovered.
- b. These are exactly the results found in polygenetic illnesses of multiple organs in the body, in which more exact genetic mechanisms have been ascertained.
- c. There are no cases that have been discovered in which illnesses which were consistently found to have the above 5 characteristics were found not to be genetic in origin.
- d. Obsessive Compulsive disorder, Schizophrenia, Bipolar illness, and Major Depression all have the above 5 characteristics.
- e. Would it not be odd if Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Schizophrenia, Major Depression, and Bipolar syndrome, amongst the thousands of genetically based illnesses which share the above 5 characteristics: Would it not be odd if these illnesses were the only illnesses of thousands (with the five characteristics) that turn out not to be genetically based?

6. Malfunctioning genes can cause malfunctioning in literally every organ in the body. Would it not be odd if the brain were the only organ in the body that is not subject to effects from malfunctioning genes? What types of symptoms would a brain that is malfunctioning (due to malfunctioning genes) exhibit, except changed behaviors and changed thoughts and feelings, otherwise known as mental illnesses caused by neurological dysfunction?

by Michael Golding on Tue, 09/20/2005 - 00:50 | [reply](#)

Can the Editors Admit when he is Wrong?

"He states that mental illness is like Type 2 diabetes and other illnesses for which we do not know the exact cause. Type 2 diabetes results when a person's body does not make enough insulin. As such there is an objective chemical marker for Type 2 diabetes -- lack of insulin."

In type 2 diabetes, insulin levels are often elevated. The cause(s) of type 2 diabetes are not known. And type 2 diabetes is defined by a committee of experts (just as mental illnesses are), and the definition changes regularly.

Can the editor admit when he is wrong?

by a reader on Wed, 09/21/2005 - 15:38 | [reply](#)

Re: Can the Editors Admit when he is Wrong?

Sure. Could you give us a link to the wrong statement, and we'll admit it's wrong right away.

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 09/21/2005 - 16:04 | [reply](#)

Re: Genes Affect Behavior

There is no shadow of a doubt in my mind that genes affect behaviour. So we're agreed on that point.

Now, on the occasions when someone has been mistakenly diagnosed as psychotic, how is that mistake typically discovered?

by [David Deutsch](#) on Wed, 09/21/2005 - 16:25 | [reply](#)

A Link to the Wrong Statement

Not exactly sure what you mean by asking me to provide "a link to the wrong statement." Are you asking me to provide a link (in this response) to the quoted (wrong) statement? If so, the incorrect statement, which the editor wrote, is in this very blog, under Science and Superstition, under Re: Serious Mental Illness is Hereditary, 2nd paragraph.

I don't know how to put computerized links in responses.

But perhaps you are asking for a link to information that is correct about type 2 diabetes? Any Google search, quoting some type of credible source, will provide information about diabetes. It is a syndrome with multiple (mostly unknown) causes, and its definition is decided by a committee of experts, just like mental illness. It tends not to cause organ damage for years, just like mental illness.

The issue is not whether we know exactly what causes something (although it is very nice to know) but rather whether the definitions PREDICT a progressive pathophysiology, damage to organs, and pain and suffering. Illnesses, like mental illness and diabetes, cause damage to organs and pain and suffering.

For mental illnesses like depression, bipolar illness, and schizophrenia, definitions are very predictive of progressive organ damage, as they are for type 2 diabetes. The issue is whether the definitions used and subsequent findings from various types of examination are reliable and predictive.

In addition, bipolar illness and schizophrenia happen to be far more genetically based illnesses, therefore caused by internal bodily factors, than type 2 diabetes, if a patient is in his or her 20's. In other words environmental and cultural variables predict far more the development of diabetes, than bipolar illness or schizophrenia (if the patient is in his or her 20's).

Editor:

"He states that mental illness is like Type 2 diabetes...for which we do not know the exact cause. Type 2 diabetes results when a person's body does not make enough insulin. As such there is an objective chemical marker for Type 2 diabetes -- lack of insulin"

If an editor of "[The World](#)" wishes to learn about diabetes, before explaining it to me, he or she may wish to read a little bit about his subject.

From Medline Plus Encyclopedia

"Diabetes affects up to 6% of the population in the U.S. Type 2

diabetes accounts for 90% of all cases.

A main component of type 2 diabetes is "insulin resistance". This means that the insulin produced by your pancreas cannot connect with fat and muscle cells to let glucose inside and produce energy. This causes hyperglycemia (high blood glucose).

To compensate, the pancreas produces more insulin. The cells sense this flood of insulin and become even more resistant, resulting in a vicious cycle of high glucose levels and often high insulin levels."

Or an editor can read this...

From a University Web site.

[http://64.233.161.104/search?](http://64.233.161.104/search?q=cache:PQr41Ld0F5IJ:darwin.nmsu.edu/~molbio/diabetes/disease.html+elevated+insulin+type+2+diabetes&hl=en)

[q=cache:PQr41Ld0F5IJ:darwin.nmsu.edu/~molbio/diabetes/disease.html+elevated+insulin+type+2+diabetes&hl=en](http://64.233.161.104/search?q=cache:PQr41Ld0F5IJ:darwin.nmsu.edu/~molbio/diabetes/disease.html+elevated+insulin+type+2+diabetes&hl=en)

Type II diabetes is associated with obesity and with aging. It is a lifestyle-dependent disease, and has a strong genetic component (concordance in twins is 80-90%). The problem seems not so much in insulin production, but that when the insulin reaches its target cells, it doesn't work correctly. Most Type II diabetes patients initially have high insulin levels along with high blood sugar. However, since sugar signals the pancreas to release insulin, Type II diabetics eventually become resistant to that signal and the endocrine-pancreas soon will not make enough insulin. These people end up managing the disease with insulin and they need much higher doses because they are resistant to it."

"Science and Superstition"....Indeed.

I will (briefly) explain how to distinguish schizophrenia from other psychotic states and non-psychotic illnesses in my next post.

Michael Golding

by a reader on Thu, 09/22/2005 - 01:23 | [reply](#)

Type II diabetes

Mr Golding is correct when he writes that doctors test for diabetes by measuring the **level of sugar** in the blood of patients not by measuring insulin.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Thu, 09/22/2005 - 02:39 | [reply](#)

Miss the Point (again)

You miss the point (again), Mr. Forrester, as has been pointed out to you by 3 doctors and multiple posts.

Decreased insulin does not CAUSE diabetes and neither does an elevated fasting blood sugar, although both can sometimes be useful to measure. Definitions of type 2 diabetes are created by a committee of people as are definitions of mental illness. The definitions are evaluated based on whether they are reliable and WHAT THEY PREDICT.

If asking someone whether he has a dry mouth and urinates frequently and if asking him about his eating habits, predicted the consequences of diabetes (e.g damage to kidneys, brains, and eyes, etc) with no additional information from a blood sugar, then we would solely ask questions, in order to diagnose type 2 diabetes. We would not check a blood sugar. It is not that type 2 diabetes is "objective" and major depression is "subjective." We have blood tests for major depression, as well. These blood tests just don't predict outcomes as well as clinical interviews (at this point).

The issue is reliability of a finding (whether interview question or

blood test) and its ability to predict damage to the body and future pain and suffering. We have not discovered THE MAJOR CAUSES of type 2 diabetes or major depression, so the underlying pathophysiological disorders are not known for either. But the presence of Major Depression, for example, is at least as important as the presence of diabetes in predicting morbidity and mortality after a heart attack, according to many studies in which they have been compared. And both certainly cause pain and suffering.

So major depression is an illness and so is type 2 diabetes, because both are reliably diagnosed, both predict damage to organs, and both cause pain and suffering.

NB: Lynching or homophobia or advertising fast food are not illnesses. But BODILY REACTIONS to these cultural factors can be (e.g. infection in response to the start of lynching, major depression in response to exposure to persistent homophobia, and developing diabetes if someone consistently eats too much in response to advertising.)

Unfortunately, neither you nor Professor Deutsch have been able to understand these straightforward concepts, and I am not sure why. So you label schizophrenia, and bipolar illness and major depression "fake" but other syndromes, like type 2 diabetes, real.

Science and Superstition. Indeed.

by Michael Golding on Thu, 09/22/2005 - 04:55 | [reply](#)

Re: miss the point

I believe your position is the following:

Serious mental illnesses are, like all illnesses, physiological phenomena that cause suffering. We know this from evidence such as: (1) Like diabetes and other illnesses, they have detectable biochemical and biophysical effects, which can be measured in life and at autopsy. (2) They are heritable. The mathematics of their heritability leaves no room for rational doubt that variant genes are a cause of mental illnesses in the same sense as they are a cause of diabetes. Yes, the environment and the patients' own choices also affect the incidence and course of mental illnesses, but that is no counter-argument because the same is even more true of (type 2) diabetes. (3) In some cases both the gene responsible for a mental illness and its mode of action have been discovered. (4) In some cases the signs and symptoms of a mental illness have been created artificially by inducing chemical changes in volunteers. (5) The signs and symptoms of most mental illnesses can be alleviated, often dramatically, by treatment with drugs. This has been established beyond doubt in clinical trials using the same double-blind methodology as any other tests in the science of pharmacology.

Mental illnesses cause characteristic behaviours which are used, along with biochemical and biophysical tests, in diagnosis, but again, the same is true of many non-mental illnesses, and it is not the case that modern medicine *defines* mental illnesses as behaviours. So in short, none of the alleged differences between the two kinds of illnesses exist in reality. Therefore, classifying mental illnesses as 'fake illnesses' is logically unjustifiable. But worse, it stigmatises the sufferers as fakers, malingerers or criminals, etc. It also stigmatises the professionals in the field of mental health, who are saving and repairing lives every day. Furthermore, it actively harms the sufferers by seeking to deny them the treatment that would help them, by blaming them for 'choosing' to be ill, and by persuading legislators and others to believe that scientific research into the physical mechanisms of mental illnesses is worthless

because those conditions are not physical in origin.

Is that an accurate statement of your position (to the extent that a couple of short paragraphs can be accurate and complete)?

by [David Deutsch](#) on Sat, 09/24/2005 - 00:53 | [reply](#)

History of Mental illness

Is it possible that biology can change so quickly that even when they control for things like people going to the doctor more and other cultural changes, depression could increase such that people born since 1945 are 10 times more likely to suffer from depression as those born before?

I believe other mental illnesses have also increased to surprising degrees. Is this consistent with the idea of mental illness as a disease, or as mental illness as heritable? If so, could you explain?

This is not a rhetorical question.

by a reader on Sat, 09/24/2005 - 06:42 | [reply](#)

Hysteria has declined too

Hysteria has declined sharply in a very short time in India:
http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=pubmed&dopt=Abstract&list_uids=1544018

Secret government gene therapy experiments? Or what?

by a reader on Mon, 09/26/2005 - 00:15 | [reply](#)

Diabetes: A "Fake" Disease Invented by the Communists?

"It is perhaps not generally appreciated that in the United States diabetes, or at least the recognition of the disease, has increased about 300 percent over the last fifteen years. It is the second leading cause of blindness, and the third cause of death. In 1950 there were 1.2 million diabetics in the United States; the estimation now is that there are over 10 million, yet the population has increased by only 50 percent."
Harris Coulter, Ph.D., April 16, 1997. Testimony House of Representatives.

How did the genes evolve so fast??

by Michael Golding on Mon, 09/26/2005 - 03:29 | [reply](#)

I like a bit of both.

Genomes encode proteomes that include such things as dopamine and serotonin receptors, enzymes that synthesize dopamine and serotonin from their amino acid precursors, enzymes which breakdown dopamine and serotonin etcetera.

The large number of genes involved in neuronal function makes the human brain a large mutational target.

If the brain is the organ of behaviour (and I believe it is) it follows that genetic mutations can influence behaviour.

It follows that there could, at least in principle, be a number of clinically recognised behavioural diseases that result from genetic polymorphisms (differences).

Furthermore, as genes are the units of hereditary, it follows that

these diseases of behaviour would be heritable. That is to say they would run in families.

As the brain is such a large potential target for genetic mutation, different mutations may be of greater or lesser import. There could therefore exist a spectrum of behavioural disease that is clinically continuous with what we regard as normal. By analogy there is a spectrum of glucose tolerance (how effectively the body deals with glucose) in the population that is created by polymorphisms in the enzymes that are involved in metabolism. Not everybody with an impaired glucose tolerance test would satisfy the criteria for diabetes mellitus just as not everybody with bizarre or eccentric behaviour would be satisfy the criteria for a mental disease.

This doesn't necessarily mean that environmental factors are unimportant (either in diabetes or mental illness). It is possible that genetic factors might confer a susceptibility to both diabetes and/or mental illness but environmental factors might be necessary for the expression of the disease.

Our need to create order in a complex world begets one of the worst errors of human thinking: dichotomy, or our tendency to reduce a truly intricate and multivariate set of shadings into two diametrically opposed alternatives (Claude Levi-Strauss and the French structuralists have based an entire theory of human nature on this premise- I believe they are a bit over-extended in their arguments. Over-extension of good arguments is another common, and woeful, error in human thinking).

So many fatuous arguments stem from silly dichotomies. Nature or nurture is one of the most pervasive of our age. What's wrong with a bit of both?

Kieren

by Kieren on Fri, 10/21/2005 - 21:41 | [reply](#)

Very Well Said and Thank You

Michael

by M Golding on Tue, 10/25/2005 - 01:57 | [reply](#)

Re: I like a bit of both

If the brain is the organ of behaviour (and I believe it is) it follows that genetic mutations can influence behaviour.

This much is true. Babies have certain ideas about causality from a very early age as determined by observing that they look surprised if certain unexpected events happen.

It follows that there could, at least in principle, be a number of clinically recognised behavioural diseases that result from genetic polymorphisms (differences).

Doesn't follow even slightly. People can criticise behaviour and theories including behaviour and theories that happen to have a biological origin. For example, whatever our genetic theory of physics might happen to be we have refuted it in favour of general relativity and quantum physics. There also seems to be a common bias against markets which may be a result of genetically programmed ideas of fairness, butg these ideas can be refuted as illustrated by the work of pro-free-market economists like Hayek. As a result we can't explain differences of opinion or behaviour by referring to genes. Rather we have to say something like: people may inherit theories or behavioural propensities encoded in their

genes but if there exists a good criticism of the behaviour or theory concerned then we have to explain its persistence by the person either not coming across that criticism or rejecting it for some other reason. For example, if a person has a genetically caused tumour that secretes adrenaline and the tumour makes him feel jumpy we can't explain him treating other people badly as a result of his jumpiness unless nobody has explained to him why he shouldn't treat people badly or by him coming up with some rationale as to why he should treat people badly, e.g. - everyone else is his moral or intellectual inferior and so they deserve to be treated badly.

A disease may cause bad enough brain damage to stop a person from thinking but these cases do not resemble most mental illnesses in any important respect. For example, washing your hands repeatedly does not resemble not thinking about washing your hands. Rather a person might interpret anxiety in such a way that she associates handwashing with making it go away. For example, if she had some disease in childhood she caught as a result of not washing her hands after going to the toilet she might have started to feel anxious as a child when she didn't wash her hands after going to the toilet and the anxiety might go away when she washed her hands and this ritual might bleed into other parts of her life. For example, she might notice that pavements tend to be dirty and start worrying about whether she might catch diseases by not washing her hands after going outside. Note this is not the same as not thinking it is the same as having a silly idea.

Furthermore, as genes are the units of hereditary, it follows that these diseases of behaviour would be heritable. That is to say they would run in families.

Starting out with bad ideas or behaviours might run in families as a result of genes. Continuing to hold those bad ideas or behaviours must be explained by not learning better ideas through ignorance or rationalisation of bad ideas or behaviour as explained above.

Alan Forrester

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sat, 08/25/2007 - 23:31 | [reply](#)

Is it Possible to Reject Your Hypothesis?

Alan,

Do you think pain is real? When pain serves no useful function, is this chronic pain then an illness?

Most (but not all) mental illnesses are types of pain. Indeed if you superimpose MRI/SPECT scans of brains of people in pain and people suffering from depression, it is virtually impossible to tell the difference. I can forward you the pictures if you like....see if you can see a difference.

Note that pain has no "lesion" that defines it, yet most people think it is quite real. We recognize that people are in pain by their descriptions of it and their behaviors, just as we recognize mental illnesses by the same means.

Is there any experiment possible, even in principle, that would refute the notion that types of OCD and depression are caused by a person's own thoughts/parenting/culture?

Is there any experiment possible, even in principle, that would refute the notion that types of chronic pain are caused by a person's own thoughts/parenting/culture?

by a reader on Mon, 10/01/2007 - 19:23 | [reply](#)

Incorrect Word

In the paragraphs above, the question should read,

Is there any experiment possible, even in principle, that *could* refute the notion that types of OCD and depression are caused by a person's thoughts/parenting/culture?

by a reader on Mon, 10/01/2007 - 21:43 | [reply](#)

so mental illness equals find

so mental illness equals finding your life painful?

by a reader on Mon, 10/01/2007 - 22:58 | [reply](#)

Mental Illness

No. Most mental illness is a type of chronic pain. One can intellectually know that one's life is going well and still be depressed and hurting; just as one can intellectually know that the physical functioning of one's body is good and still be in terrible pain.

by a reader on Mon, 10/01/2007 - 23:16 | [reply](#)

Intellectually

Your comment is interesting to me because it might reveal a misunderstanding we have. Certainly it's true that having an intellectual theory about one's life often fails to defeat depression. But why did you bring that up? Absolutely nobody thinks that intellectual theories easily conquer all.

I'm concerned you may think my position that mental illness may be idea based implies either that intellectual ideas have something to do with it, or that one could simply choose to have other ideas and be cured. Neither of those is the case.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 10/03/2007 - 06:12 | [reply](#)

Can it Be Shown to be False?

The point is straightforward.

Is there any experiment possible that could show that for certain types of major depression and OCD, thought/parenting/culture is not the explanation?

Readers should note that when we discuss measurable phenomena, no research is relevant (no genuine scientific inquiry is possible) by a person who thinks that no evidence that he might find could show that his ideas are wrong.

- "1. I think X explains measurable phenomena Y. (Or, "I think thought causes pain, depression, OCD, autism, heart disease, cancer etc.)
2. No evidence (even in principle) can show that I am wrong.
3. Therefore X explains Y"

Yes, such reasoning is tautological and probably solipsistic. Yes, it has much more to do with superstition than science.

by a reader on Thu, 10/04/2007 - 00:09 | [reply](#)

Scientism Watch – Fishy Feelings 2

A couple of years ago we commented on a purportedly **scientific** (but actually scientific¹) study that claimed to have found “conclusive evidence of pain perception in fish”.

Now, a similarly scientific **study** has come to the opposite conclusion about worms, lobsters, crabs, insects and spiders: they feel no pain.

Nothing inconsistent between the two conclusions. Fish aren't on that list.

But interestingly, the authors of the second study explicitly rejected as worthless the entire body of evidence cited by the authors of the first study. In summary:

The scientists [in the first study] found sites in the heads of rainbow trout that responded to damaging stimuli.

They also found the fish showed marked reactions when exposed to harmful substances

But Prof. Farstad, of the second study, said:

"It seems to be only reflex curling when [worms are] put on the hook ... They might sense something, but it is not painful and does not compromise their well-being."

[...]

Farstad said most invertebrates, including lobsters and crabs boiled alive, do not feel pain because, unlike mammals, they do not have a big brain to read the signals.

They do have a small brain, however, which **reacts centrally to stimuli** – for instance, all the legs cooperate to move the crab away when it encounters harmful substances, or towards a crab of the **opposite sex**.

Of course neither group displayed any scientific evidence for using the criteria that they were using. How could they? That is not a scientific issue. Evidently both sets of researchers in effect brought their conclusions with them to the study: the first happened to be false, the second true. But if they were going to do that, why didn't

they just look in front of them at their computer screens, and notice that their computer meets all of the first study's criteria for feeling pain, and all the second study's criteria for not feeling it. And then, shouldn't these researchers have responded with some trace of intelligence – never mind feeling – to that stimulus?

¹ *Scientism*: The purported use of scientific methods to resolve non-scientific (i.e. philosophical) issues.

Wed, 02/16/2005 - 18:18 | [permalink](#)

Request for clarification

You say on the one hand that this is not a scientific issue, but on the other, that the conclusions of the two studies were incorrect and correct respectively.

If this issue - of the extent to which various types of animal can be said to feel pain - is *not* scientific, then shouldn't we say that neither study is right? That's the view I take, personally.

Natural selection has equipped all sufficiently advanced animal life with some kind of 'damage alarm' systems, which detect damage and modify the animal's behaviour in ways likely to avoid or minimize further harm. I think we have to base our ethical judgements about what constitutes humane treatment purely on a 'third-person' understanding of animals' central nervous systems and behavioural repertoires. That information is, of course, inadequate to answer the moral questions, but I think it's better to admit this outright than to pretend (as some of these articles seem to do) that 'if we only knew what the animals were really feeling then the ethics would become clear'.

by Neil Fitzgerald on Wed, 02/23/2005 - 15:05 | [reply](#)

Re: Request for clarification

Neither study provides any evidence, or any valid argument, for its conclusion. That is a separate issue from whether the conclusion is true or false.

Unfortunately if we were to "base our ethical judgements about what constitutes humane treatment purely on a 'third-person' understanding of animals' central nervous systems and behavioural repertoires", there would have to be draconian laws about the humane treatment of computers.

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 02/23/2005 - 15:24 | [reply](#)

Re: Request for clarification

I think you've misunderstood. All I'm saying is that I don't believe there is a 'fact of the matter' about whether (e.g.) fish feel pain - the statement is too vague. It is unverifiable and unfalsifiable, and

hence unscientific.

However, I think you're being a wee bit stingy if you really don't think fish have more sophisticated damage alarm/avoidance systems than computers. Isn't it equally if not more appropriate to liken a computer's (more correctly, its operating system's) damage avoidance mechanisms to a fish's immune system as to a fish's pain-behaviour? What this shows, among other things, is that the analogy is too distant to be of much use.

by Neil Fitzgerald on Wed, 02/23/2005 - 16:57 | [reply](#)

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Conspiracy Theories In The Mainstream 2

Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) says that the fake CBS memos were planted by Karl Rove to discredit Dan Rather and divert attention from President Bush's "draft dodging" – says **LGF**. And they have the transcript and the audio.

Congressman Hinchey says that it is very important for such charges to be made.

If you haven't read our series on **conspiracy theories**, please do so!

Mon, 02/21/2005 - 01:21 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

Children's Crusade

The BBC asked young people from various countries to say **how they would do things differently** to "tackle the environmental problems we are creating today" and change the world. All eight answers that the BBC saw fit to publish had a common theme: government control. Institute even more **propaganda campaigns** in schools and elsewhere; take up ever more of the population's time and effort in religious rituals such as 'recycling' their garbage or avoiding their cars; rein in production; ban trade; and generally **smash capitalism**:

The problem with free trade is that there is nothing in it for the environment – the bottom line is entirely monetary...

I think this a job for the government – it shouldn't let free market run wild.

One of the young people, who despite being only 14 is under the impression that she can **feel the change in temperature due to global warming**, said:

More people have to try to save the environment – but not a lot of people know about it.

This, despite the fact that virtually everyone her age (and most older people too) would already reply to the question exactly as she does. One of the most impressive achievements of the existing environmental 'education' campaign is to have caused this universal, ritual denial of its own tremendous success, and even its own existence.

The young people's objection to the free market is extremely common, but it is nonsense. Money is a means for people to express their preferences, which they arrive at for a combination of reasons of their own choosing. They are free not to buy a product if they think it is sub-standard or manufactured in an unsafe or harmful or immoral way. So it doesn't make much sense to say that the bottom line is money. Money is just a tool for expressing and criticising values.

Aparna Bhasin advocated:

Population control is also something we should look into -

it will make everything else much easier to tackle.

In real life, population control policies, like those practiced by China, are code for **brutal repression** that includes infanticide and forced abortions. So in real life, governmental population control is a terrible evil. It is not a solution to environmental problems. By contrast, in free countries, there is no government population control and no population problem either.

None of the quoted respondents managed to identify the single biggest environmental problem in the world today – socialism. The free market allows people to make choices among different policies according to their best judgement about the issue in question. In a socialist society state functionaries control part of the economy and impose their own favoured policies while someone else is forced to bear the whole cost, no matter what effect those policies have. Thus socialism stifles the criticism that would help to create the knowledge necessary to improve the environment. As a result governments consistently **abuse** the **environment** though **corruption** and **ignorance**. So to protect the environment we must argue against government interference in the economy.

Sat, 02/26/2005 - 14:24 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Your Socialist Governments are Ruining the World

The problem is not free trade. The problem is not capitalism. The problem is rampant personal consumption with government socialism saying that no one needs to take direct responsibility for cleaning up their own left over mess. The dirty dishes are literally left in the sink waiting for the next government program to make the dirty dishes disappear. Each individual needs to wash their own dishes at the point of consumption. The role of government is not to be chief cook and bottle washer and diaper changer nor is it a proper role of government to take out the trash.

Never trust any government official that calls paper or plastic disposables an environmental choice. Recycling laws which are promoted as public panaceas are a sure sign of creeping socialism. Environmental pollution and degradation has nothing to do with free trade or capitalism and everything to do with individuals generating mountains of trash that someone else other than the consumer, read government program, is supposed to take to the landfill out of sight and down wind.

Turn that into a slogan.

by a reader on Sun, 02/27/2005 - 02:20 | [reply](#)

Go out and buy a dishwasher.

Personal consumption is a good thing, self-denial is bad. Any issue would lie with what is consumed, and if any harm is done, not with consumption per se.

You're right about one thing, the government does want to change

our **diapers**.

But where are these mountains of trash?

by **Tom Robinson** on Sun, 02/27/2005 - 18:57 | [reply](#)

Environment and wealth

What the leftist environmental protection advocates fail to recognise is that environmental protection is itself a product of the wealth generating power of free trade. It is a highly expensive luxury which relies on vast sums of money being poured into it and offers very little economic return. Left to its own devices environmental protection makes people poorer and this cost must be offset by a corresponding increase in wealth generation. No wonder that those that shout the loudest about it tend to live in affluent societies. Odd, however, that they tend not to spot this.

by **Leigh** on Thu, 03/03/2005 - 18:13 | [reply](#)

I'm not sure you neocons/libe

I'm not sure you neocons/libertarians/whatever you call yourselves actually know what socialism means. You use it as a catch-all term for any situation whatsoever in which some kind of authority (whether elected or not, whether buying public services or not, whether redistributing wealth or not) collects taxes and then Does Stuff with the money. (Often leading to the barf-inducingly hilarious claim that the United States is itself a socialist nation).

Anyway, if one insists on using the word socialism in this way, then I claim that socialism is *necessary* in order to prevent environmental problems getting out of control. *What alternative is there?*

The answer forces itself upon us: If the freedom of private individuals and corporations to spend 100% of their money in whatever way they wish (subject to law (i.e. without causing direct harm to others, unless they freely choose to be harmed)), then the only way for us (in the Western world) to stop contributing to an impending environmental catastrophe is for individuals and corporations to (a) adequately educate themselves about the nature of the catastrophe, and figure out what changes in their own daily lives would have any bearing on it and (b) have the moral scruples to make those changes, even if it means forgoing many of the conveniences that have long been taken for granted, and even others are refusing to change (and possibly enjoying competitive advantages as a direct result).

If you really think private individuals/corporations behave like that (and it looks as if you really do: "*They are free not to buy a product if they think it is ... manufactured in an unsafe or harmful or immoral way.*") then you're blinded by an ideological delusion nearly as huge as the communist belief that people will work hard out of brotherly love for humanity, even if they personally receive no reward. (In both cases, the ideology claims that peoples'

consciences will make them choose X even if their personal interests prefer Y).

(Of course, the usual "Protective Belt" that right-wingers construct against environmental issues is simply to claim that there isn't really a problem. I'm glad to see that, at least in this instance, you haven't taken that route.)

What governments (together with their committees of advisors) have over private individuals/corporations, that makes them better equipped to handle environmental issues, are the following:

(1) They're able to bring about changes on scales sufficiently large to have a real impact (unlike an individual thinking to themselves e.g. "I only have one car, what difference does it make whether it has a catalytic converter?")

(2) Environmental issues tend to involve widely separated causes and effects, such that the people causing the problem may have no awareness of the problem they're causing, and those on the receiving end may have no idea where it's coming from, and even if they did, it would be wholly outside of their power to change things. Example: The widespread use of antibiotics in agriculture leading to antibiotic resistant 'superbugs', causing humans to die from infections that in the past would have been treatable. The following have the power to curtail the use of antibiotics: (a) Farmers (b) Government. Who is better informed? Who has the smaller conflict of interest? Who is more likely to resolve the issue in a such a way as to achieve greater benefit for society as a whole?

OK, rant over.

by Neil Fitzgerald on Thu, 03/17/2005 - 04:34 | [reply](#)

Good, Evil And Howard Dean

"This is a struggle of good and evil. And we're the good." (Via LGF.)

No, that was not President Bush contrasting the West with the world's terrorists and tyrants. It was Howard Dean, the new Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, contrasting the left with the right in America.

Yet you can be sure that no one will call Dean Manichaeian, or equate him with the rulers of Iran in torrents of frantic sidetracking such as **this**. The sophistry that equates right with wrong and then sides eagerly with wrong is ever available and ever attractive, it seems, to those who prefer the glamour of dissent to the effort of engagement with real problems.

Mon, 02/28/2005 - 00:04 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

www.techcentralstation.com

<http://www.techcentralstation.com/022805A.html>

by a reader on Mon, 02/28/2005 - 12:01 | [reply](#)

Steven Den Beste Has Posted

Fans of his will want to look [here](#).

How did we know? Macintosh users may want to look [here](#).

Wed, 03/02/2005 - 02:08 | [permalink](#)

Alternatively, Macintosh (and

Alternatively, Macintosh (and Windows) users could have subscribed to Den Beste's site using his RSS feed.

<http://denbeste.nu/rss.xml>

-Dan

<http://www.danielstrimpel.com>

by a reader on Wed, 03/02/2005 - 02:35 | [reply](#)

Re: Alternatively...

No, they couldn't. His RSS feed has not been updated.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Wed, 03/02/2005 - 02:44 | [reply](#)

I'm sure that Iraqi women

are grateful for the opportunity to live under sharia.

by a reader on Sat, 03/05/2005 - 01:53 | [reply](#)

Discrimination As Anti-Discrimination

We recently wrote about two cases of **secular-religious insanity in education**, in which the meanings of 'secular' and 'religious' had been interchanged in the debate on school curricula.

Now we report a similar reversal concerning discrimination and non-discrimination against minorities. This has nothing to do with the paradoxes of 'positive discrimination' which, whatever you may think of its merits, at least says what it is. The following two cases involve a moral reversal, and a betrayal of ostensible values, as profound as those at the conclusion of George Orwell's **Animal Farm**.

The first is a new EU **report on anti-Muslim discrimination**, which uses as one of its measures of discrimination whether people 'associate the word "Islam" with ... "oppression of women"'. In other words, anyone who *opposes* the discrimination against women in Islamic cultures counts as biased, and only those who condone this discrimination so deeply that they do not even associate the two concepts in their minds, are certified as free from bias!

The second is a **new plan proposed by the Commission for Racial Equality** forcibly to separate black boys from their classmates and give them a different education. Given the **history** of the fight for racial equality in education, and given who is proposing this wicked and racist plan, the irony is almost palpable.

Yet more evidence that the world is insane.

Mon, 03/07/2005 - 18:39 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Political Correctness Fiddles While The World Burns

Norway's government has taken action to force a change in **IKEA's furniture-assembly instructions**. The offending instructions consist of diagrams that show only male figures or figures whose sex is unclear, and this has excited many who are obsessed with political correctness. IKEA's defence:

Verdens Gang quoted an IKEA spokeswoman as saying: "We have to take account of cultural factors. In Muslim countries it's problematic to use women in instruction manuals."...

In the game of political correctness, this is an ace, and would normally win the trick. But on this occasion the Norwegian government has a trump:

"This isn't good enough," Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik was quoted on Thursday as telling the daily Verdens Gang. "It's important to promote attitudes for sexual equality, not least in Muslim nations."

We think that it is ridiculous – and yes, under these circumstances perhaps also immoral – to remove images of females from furniture instructions for fear of offending religious prudes. It is a form of immorality that should, in civilised countries in peacetime, be legal. But we are, in principle, open to a related argument that the Norwegian government *should* be making, namely that there's a war on and certain civil liberties – perhaps even the cherished freedom to publish sexist furniture manuals in order to curry favour with bigots – may need to be curtailed until it is won.

We do find this argument moderately persuasive in the case of the freedom to wear headscarves to state schools in France. But frankly, we are fairly sure that IKEA furniture instructions are going to be a very small part of any strategy to change Islamist attitudes toward women. Hence, the Norwegian government is wasting its time and effort by making all this fuss about furniture instructions when they could be doing something more effective, like perhaps prosecuting **Islamist terrorists** who live in their midst.

For the manuals, why not use stick figures that are dressed up in burqas?

by [invadesoda](#) on Sat, 03/12/2005 - 04:49 | [reply](#)

Can good economics be ridiculous?

I don't understand why it's ridiculous or immoral for a seller to remove images of women from their product instructions. Isn't it good for them to use their best market driven strategies, based upon their unique demographics and so forth, to make their business successful? They shouldn't offend their customer base should they? Until this publicity no one minded only male figures in the instructions and some people would mind the women in the figures, so why not do it the way all the customers can handle?

It seems reasonable to me that IKEA's best strategy, considering cost of making product instructions, and the markets they are in, and the attitudes of their customers about men vs women, and so forth could very well be for them to do the instructions the way they have.

by a reader on Sun, 03/13/2005 - 05:50 | [reply](#)

female chimps with sticks

I don't care if the diagrams are politically correct or not. This is one case where the end justifies the means. If I can assemble it with my female chimp brain thanks to clear instructions I am happy. Mouthing swedish and banging two sticks together in chimp glee.

by a reader on Sun, 03/13/2005 - 15:20 | [reply](#)

Freedoms long established

Freedoms long established should not be changed for light and transient causes. I agree with the World that libertarians tend to be too dogmatic, and don't understand that sometimes certain freedoms have to be compromised to protect freedom in general. But the fact that the World is open to the suggestion that publishing "sexist" manuals ought be outlawed in this time of "war" seems to be pushing the issue over the edge of any reasonable balance. I find the World posts usually quite good and insightful, but a number of objections can be raised to the reasoning followed in the above article:

1. The whole argument is implicitly based on the curious assumption that pictures of men, but no women, making furniture is not only sexist but promotes the subjugation of women. Now, IKEA does not need to defend their choice of pictures. And I would warn against **where this can lead to**. Freedom of expression precisely means defending the right of people to say things you find wholly objectionable. But if we were to get into this anyway, the World has got it completely backwards. More than 90% of IKEA furniture, I

would guess, is in fact put together by men and not by women. Like it or not, despite decades of propaganda, feminism is something that most women find ridiculous, because it's a **fantasy ideology** (based on the wish for men and women to be the same) which is opposed to the idea of men and women simply doing what they want but rather wants men and women to conform to some kind of forced role-equality. Of course the individualist type of feminism is precisely the opposite and is a good thing, as it stands for freedom of choice and equal rights and respect for men and women. But a fact of reality is, when the IKEA is delivered most women prefer to cook the dinner while the men put together the thing, and most men prefer it that way too. So the manuals as they are are much more realistic than a manual that would depict women putting together the stuff.

2. Ironically I believe the World is completely missing an important point here. I would hypothesize that this issue is not about Islam at all, but is about the West. That is, my guess is that the depiction of males in IKEA's manuals has very little to do with trying to please the Muslim market, but rather has to do with pleasing the Western market. I suspect this is simply an opportunistic claim made by IKEA in an appeal to politically correct Westerners, which backfired. Contrary to the World, as far as I understand it IKEA did not "remove" any female images from their instructions. The fact is that it has always been customary in the West to depict males in these types of instruction booklets. This was done long before there was a significant market in the Muslim world for these products and long before there were any appreciable numbers of Muslims in the West. And so it was, and still is, done not for the benefit of Arab Muslims but for the benefit of the cultural ideas of Westerners - as many in the West also believe putting furniture together is a man's job. I haven't checked the stats but I would guess even now the Muslim market for IKEA is less than 10% of their sales. So if the demand of the Western market was for pictures of females, they would depict women in their manuals. IKEA does not admit they depict men to please Westerners, because such would be seen as sexist and wrong. Their hope was that by shifting the argument to a non-western minority group they would appeal to the politically correct idea that the west is bad and the non-west is good. But of course IKEA miscalculated. A few years ago this would have worked, but things have changed a bit since 9/11 and the feminist political correctness has won from the non-western political correctness.

3. To be sure, in many cases Islamic treatment of women is disrespectful and should be fought against, but surely depicting men rather than women as putting furniture together can hardly be interpreted as disrespectful of women by any stretch of the imagination. Quite the opposite is the case. Putting furniture together is not a particularly fun job, so I'm sure women all over the world will be quite happy if the idea is promoted that their husbands keep doing that job rather than themselves. Men doing hard work for women is not wicked but galant, on par with men giving flowers to their wives, and that's quite the opposite of such evils as Muslim men hitting their wives. And showing books with women putting the stuff together while in reality mostly men are

doing that work, is an insult to men. Now if IKEA were publishing pictures of men hitting women, that would be a different thing (why doesn't the World speak out for a ban on all books and movies which depict **real** violence against women?).

4.It's bad enough that there are people who would want a national identification obligation, erosions of the rule of law and other police state measures all in the name of the war on drugs and terrorism. But despite the fact that those are all bad measures which will do nothing to help the war on terror or crime, at least they are attempts which are supposed to be aimed at the criminals and terrorists. But making laws to force people to depict women doing certain jobs is not even aimed at catching criminals against women. It's based on the far weaker hypothesis that promoting false equality is going to prevent crimes against women. But crimes against women have nothing to do with one's views on whether or not men and women are **equal** (i.e. equally interested in the job of putting furniture together), but rather it has to do with one's views of whether or not men and women have **equal rights**, which is something entirely different.

5.The whole idea of a war creating unusual circumstances for freedom is completeley misused here. War circumstances would apply if there were a real war, the kind with tanks and whatnot, going on in Norway. And it would mean things like that for practical purposes you can't have a court case every time a soldier wants to shoot the enemy. It does not mean abolishing freedom of speech, and certainly not cases of freedom of speech which don't promote violence, oppression or defend the actions of terrorists.

6.If any idea of freedom is to remain, then surely it would be the freedom to publish pictures of men in a manual. If you accept that this maybe should be forbidden because there may be some connection between this and supporting Islamic maltreatment or terrorism or other evils, then the door is wide open to just about any suppression of freedom. And that doesn't even require a terrorist problem. One might even argue that any politically incorrect book should be forbidden even in peace time, on the grounds that some man might rape a woman because he thinks women are inferior because he sees a man driving a truck or whatever.

7.If freedom is about anything, then it surely means that people don't have any positive obligations to do altruistic good to the world. Just as people should not be forced to pay for socialist policies helping the poor, so too companies should not be forced to publish politically correct manuals which supposedly would help the emancipation of women (but if fact would do no such thing). The business of business is simply to sell, business is not a vehicle for government cultural propaganda.

8.It is the perfect right of Ikea or any other company to sell their product to anybody (except if we're talking about selling arms to terrorists or whatever). If in Christian countries that means taking the sex scenes out of a movie, then we don't go about forbidding that on the grounds that they are thereby supporting the supression

of sexual freedom by Christians. We don't forbid selling washing soap in the west by commercials with women cleaning on the grounds that that's sexist. In the same way we should not be forbidding pictures of men (because that sells better than pictures of women for certain products) on the grounds that that's sexist.

9. What's next? Forbidding TV-series where the nurses are women? Forbidding books where the firemen are men? Forbidding 90% of all human activities or censoring 90% of all the internet on the grounds that one can always make up some indirect connection between some picture or word and some act of violence somewhere?

10. Treating a picture of a man as on the same level as advocating suppression of women in a Mosque sermon is an example of **moral equivalence**. And if even our most ordinary and simple freedoms are to be abandoned on the most flimsy politically correct superstition, then why do we even fight the Moslim terrorists? Why not simply take over their culture, which is based on the very idea that governments are there to insure that everybody lives wholesome and decent and politically correct lives? We should not give up the fight of freedom versus oppression and replace it by a fight between two different versions of politically correct oppression ("it is immoral for women to put together furniture" versus "it is immoral for women **not** to put together furniture").

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Sun, 03/13/2005 - 15:23 | [reply](#)

Market-Driven Strategies

Isn't it good for them to use their best market driven strategies, based upon their unique demographics and so forth, to make their business successful? They shouldn't offend their customer base should they?

One cannot tell from economic theory alone whether they should offend some of their customers or not. That is a matter of morality as well as economics.

The fallacy in the above analysis by a reader is that both the policy he advocates (pandering to the bigots) and the one we advocate (defying them) are equally 'market-based'. For a market transaction requires a willing buyer and a willing seller at a given price. Whether the seller will be willing depends, among other things, on the seller's opinion of the morality of the transaction. Hence, one can decide what one's best 'market-based' strategy is only *after* one has decided issues of right and wrong. One cannot infer that something is right just because someone, with some moral values, would consider it right.

by **Editor** on Sun, 03/13/2005 - 17:23 | [reply](#)

I'm surprised and disturbed (

I'm surprised and disturbed (and offended) that everyone accepts

at face value the assertion that the well-established international symbol of a Stick Figure on the instructions in question is a picture of a "man". The Stick Figure is an abstraction and represents all humans; I deeply resent these underhanded efforts to claim it for "men" only.

Seeing as how the Stick Figure is by design intentionally drawn so as to lack genitalia of either or any type (just as it is drawn to leave its race and body type and (dis)ability-level vague), I can't help but wonder why/how people are coming to this conclusion. Could it be, perhaps, because the Stick Figures in question are depicted *putting together furniture*, which is traditionally considered a "man's" task? For shame, for shame. I cannot think of anything more sexist than to look at Ikea's instruction booklets and decide that its Stick Figures are all "men". *The people lodging these complaints obviously haven't risen above gender stereotypes themselves.* The irony!

by Blixa on Sun, 03/13/2005 - 17:54 | [reply](#)

Morality?

"Whether the seller will be willing depends, among other things, on the seller's opinion of the morality of the transaction. Hence, one can decide what one's best 'market-based' strategy is only after one has decided issues of right and wrong."

Absurdity reaches new heights. The IKEA example is a pointed one in that it points out how easily humans are drawn into debate. A debate about assembly instructions containing figures and diagrams seems absurd in light of the comment about morality preceding 'market-based' strategy.

Considering the sale of bomb making materials to foreign countries would be an example of serious moral questions preceding 'market-based' strategy. The styling of IKEA bookcase assembly instructions are not on the same moral level. Bombing and bookcase building are not usually moral equivalents. Absurd as the minutiae of the IKEA example is, the debate has moral worth in that it helps to challenge our reasoning about what is moral and what is market-based. It is not easily sorted however into what moral questions of right or wrong we might first ask, nor would it seem to be a decision which should be left to the public sphere.

I ask where lies the public harm and where lies the public good?

by a reader on Sun, 03/13/2005 - 19:46 | [reply](#)

We Do Not Endorse The Norwegian Government's Intervention

We apologise for not having made it clear in the article that we oppose the Norwegian Government's intervention in this matter.

by [Editor](#) on Sun, 03/13/2005 - 20:10 | [reply](#)

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Two Hands, One Mouth

“Two hands, one mouth” is an old Libertarian slogan (by the way, can anyone tell us its origin?) that rebuts the myth that immigrants are an economic burden on the societies that they join. It makes the point that human beings in general are a positive resource, creating more wealth than they consume.

Of course politics can change that. An invading army can destroy the territories that it conquers. **Some nations** are beginning to think that hostile civilians can too. And governments, by instituting welfare-state or other socialist policies, can prevent immigrants from creating wealth and from lifting themselves out of the condition of being alienated parasites.

There was no need for West Germany to spend **1.5 trillion dollars** on subsidising and ‘reconstructing’ East Germany after Reunification, thereby severely damaging its own economy and storing up political trouble for the future. On the contrary, the East Germans, after decades of communist repression, were an untapped resource both for themselves and for the world, whose liberation should have enriched both parts of the country and everyone else as well.

Now we see, via **Solomon**, that the South Koreans are making the same tragic mistake in regard to their own northern compatriots:

The South has been laboring to keep the North afloat for fear of the extreme costs of integrating the North should it collapse.

Meanwhile, the regime they are keeping afloat holds millions in starvation and tyranny, and threatens the world with weapons of mass destruction.

The North Korea crisis is complex and dangerous enough already, without being worsened by tacky economic myths. The South Koreans – and the world – should not be thinking “but how would we support 22 million indigent spongers?” They should be thinking “22 million additional South Koreans! OK, most of them don't know much yet, but they can learn, and most would eagerly work hard for a month in return for a mere colour television. What a boon to the world!”

Values matter

Jews are entitled to automatic citizenship in Israel, but non-Jews are not, and it's essentially impossible for some groups of people to get residency permits in Israel. This is the right policy, because any other policy would undermine the Jewish character of the state. Even a policy which allowed open immigration for non-hostile people would tend to undermine Israel's mission, because there is a tremendous economic incentive to move to Israel which does not carry with it Zionist tendencies.

Similarly, the constitutional orders of America and England depend on having citizens with certain values apart from economic values. There is a large economic incentive to move to America -- but this does not necessarily carry with it a desire to become American. This would be no less true if state subsidies were eliminated.

I'm not sure what the right answer to the problem of immigration is, but I don't think it's at all clear that open immigration is the right policy.

by **Woty** on Wed, 03/16/2005 - 15:40 | [reply](#)

Two hands, one mouth

The observation was made by the economist John Stuart Mill, and quoted here by Henry George in *Progress and Poverty* -- which, if you haven't read it, or haven't read it lately, I highly recommend to anyone of libertarian bent!

Manifestly the question whether increase of population necessarily tends to reduce wages and cause want, is simply the question whether it tends to reduce the amount of wealth that can be produced by a given amount of labor.

This is what the current doctrine holds. The accepted theory is, that the more that is required from nature the less generously does she respond, so that doubling the application of labor will not double the product; and hence, increase of population must tend to reduce wages and deepen poverty, or, in the phrase of Malthus, must result in vice and misery. To quote the language of John Stuart Mill:

[begin Mill quote]: Nature, not the injustice of society, is the cause of the penalty attached to over-population. An unjust distribution of wealth does not aggravate the evil, but, at most, causes it to be somewhat earlier felt. It is in vain to say that all mouths which the increase of mankind calls into existence bring with them hands. The new mouths require as much food as the old ones, and the hands do not produce as much. If all instruments of production were held in joint property by the whole people, and the produce divided with perfect equality among them, and if in a society thus constituted, industry were as energetic and the produce as ample as at the present time, there would be enough to make all the existing population extremely comfortable; but when that population had

doubled itself, as, with existing habits of the people, under such an

encouragement, it undoubtedly would in little more than twenty years, what would then be their condition? Unless the arts of production were in the same time improved in an almost unexampled degree, the inferior soils which must be resorted to, and the more laborious and scantily remunerative cultivation which must be employed on the superior soils, to procure food for so much larger a population, would, by an insuperable necessity, render every individual in the community poorer than before. If the population continued to increase at the same rate, a time would soon arrive when no one would have more than mere necessities, and, soon after, a time when no one would have a sufficiency of those, and the further increase of population would be arrested by death."

All this I deny. I assert that the very reverse of these propositions is true. I assert that in any given state of civilization a greater number of people can collectively be better provided for than a smaller. I assert that the injustice of society, not the niggardliness of nature, is the cause of the want and misery which the current theory attributes to overpopulation. I assert that the new mouths which an increasing population calls into existence require no more food than the old ones, while the hands they bring with them can in the natural order of things produce more. I assert that, other things being equal, the greater the population, the greater the comfort which an equitable distribution of wealth would give to each individual. I assert that in a state of equality the natural increase of population would constantly tend to make every individual richer instead of poorer.

source: <http://www.henrygeorge.org/pandp.rtf>

by [lvtfan](#) on Mon, 10/16/2006 - 21:38 | [reply](#)

Re: Two Hands, One Mouth

The observation was made by the economist John Stuart Mill, and quoted here by Henry George in Progress and Poverty

Thank you!

But it looks as though Mill was quoting it only in order to deny it. Might there have been an earlier source of the idea?

by [Editor](#) on Mon, 10/16/2006 - 21:53 | [reply](#)

Re: Two Hands, One Mouth

more people -> more specialization -> more effective work, per person

or, suppose you can eat for \$1000 per year (you can eat for less). even illegal immigrants make quite a bit more than that.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 10/16/2006 - 22:29 | [reply](#)

Capital Investment

Modern capitalist doctrine assumes that in the short-term, but not the long term, wages will fall if there are sudden population increases. The reason real wage suppression does not occur in the long term is that people save and invest a proportion of their income and therefore the stock of capital grows, increasing the productivity of each worker. This offsets decreases in per capita productivity when increases in population temporarily cause more people to have to produce with the same amount of capital equipment.

The rate of growth of the stock of capital depends (holding other factors constant) on both the efficiency and the amount of money investment. Population growth increases the amount of investment. Knowledge growth increases the efficiency of each dollar invested. The amount of knowledge has likely been exponentially increasing, precisely because larger numbers of interconnected populations are freely exchanging ideas.

Ideas, unlike packaged breakfast bars, are not used up after they are traded. They are not consumed, but in fact become (probably exponentially) more powerful in terms of their capacity to generate wealth, the more they are exchanged. Rational exchange increases the truth value of each idea, and each increasingly correct idea is shared amongst all, increasing everyone's "human capital" and therefore efficiency in production.

The bet of most economists is that knowledge growth and consequent productivity growth will continue to increase faster than the population, so per capita real wages will continue to rise.

Rapid population growth can overwhelm economies and sometimes decrease real wages in the short-term, but not in the long-term.

by a reader on Wed, 10/18/2006 - 21:55 | [reply](#)

Not Quite Specialization

Population growth may increase specialization, but in doing that it also increases transaction cost. Given a stock of knowledge, there is an efficient amount of specialization such that dividing the production process more finely increases the net cost of production, not decreases it.

If there is a given probability that any given intelligent and rational person will come up with a good idea in a given time period, the larger the population the greater the rate that good ideas will be generated per time and refined by exchange with others throughout the population. Poor ideas will be quickly exposed.

Since it is relatively costless to exchange ideas given the internet and other technologies, the real reason population growth leads to increasing wages is not because of increased specialization, but rather because of the increased rate of knowledge growth and

criticism permitted by more people generating, sharing, and criticizing ideas.

Indeed it is possible that technology growth will allow people to be more able to individually produce the goods they want and need. So it is at least conceivable that knowledge growth, fueled by the creativity of large populations in free societies, will lead to more self-sufficiency and less specialization in production.

by a reader on Wed, 10/18/2006 - 22:37 | [reply](#)

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EU Turkeys Promise To Be Impartial About Christmas

EU officials are starting a tax funded **£5.5 million** campaign to "inform" people about the proposed EU Constitution. EU officials promise that it will not be used to promote a yes vote.

There are two possibilities:

- These EU officials are lying; or
- They genuinely think that a vast, unaccountable bureaucracy is capable of dispassionately informing people about a proposal that would greatly increase, and permanently entrench, its power.

Neither possibility bodes well, should these turkeys succeed the referenda happen to yield the affirmative outcome that these paragons of impartiality may or may not want.

Mon, 03/21/2005 - 01:49 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Peanuts

I can't support such foolish propaganda from the EU officials. I also must remark that 5.5 million euros is small pocket change in comparison to the amounts spent by the U.S. officials on administrative propaganda.

A spade is a spade. Propaganda is propaganda.

by a reader on Mon, 03/21/2005 - 16:00 | [reply](#)

Turkey?

I'm confused. I thought Turkey wasn't even in the EU yet.

by a reader on Mon, 03/21/2005 - 17:00 | [reply](#)

Turkey?

I think the initial reference was to the slang: a person considered inept or undesirable. Or, maybe you were joking - it's so hard to tell nowadays.

by [Michael Bacon](#) on Mon, 03/21/2005 - 21:42 | [reply](#)

Turkey?

Yes, it was a joke, sorry. It really is hard to tell nowadays.

by a reader on Tue, 03/22/2005 - 22:11 | [reply](#)

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The Poverty Of Leftism: Arguments From The Sewers

Readers may be appalled to learn that child poverty in rich countries has actually **risen** during the last decade.

We, on the other hand, are indifferent to – nay, quietly satisfied with – this development.

That is because poverty has changed. In the 19th and early 20th centuries a substantial proportion of the population lived in conditions that were uncomfortable, painful, degrading and terrifying. Child mortality was high for various reasons such as bad sanitation, malnutrition, and so on. Leftists wanted to do something about this using government power. Their argument prevailed. Sewer systems were built by the government, and did indeed improve sanitation.

Subsequently, people became less poor and child mortality declined. This was only partly due to the presence of sewers. Nutrition, working and living conditions, clothing, literacy and so on were all improved primarily by improving technology for which market forces were almost entirely responsible.

Nevertheless, Leftists were flushed with success.

They managed to make a case for more and more state intervention in the economy over the following century or more, deriving their argument from the sewers. Unfortunately, the state never really had another success on the scale they had achieved with the sewage system, while on the other hand they caused many collective disasters. For example, the welfare state herded poor people into tower blocks containing hundreds of flats that were so **badly designed** that they rapidly became uninhabitable. Criminals could easily cover the single entrance or lurk in the elevators and so used a tower block's design against its inhabitants. As economists like **Hayek** pointed out, the state was chronically prone to wasting vast resources on such mistakes because it is relatively unaccountable compared to institutions on the market.

Leftists were not daunted by the total crashing failure of their world view, and the fact that their entire *raison d'etre* had disappeared along with the poverty that they had bemoaned. They simply redefined the word poverty. They set up a tradition of redefining it in such a way that it would last for ever.

Hence the definition of child poverty given in the UNICEF **report**:

Hence the definition of child poverty used in this report and widely accepted by policy-makers in many OECD countries: a child is to be considered poor if the income available to that child, assuming a fair distribution of resources within the family and making allowances for family size and composition, is less than half the median income available to a child growing up in that society.

This new definition of poverty has no moral significance. It has nothing to do with relieving suffering, only with justifying continued Leftism. It is arbitrary and ridiculous. It is economic nonsense: according to it, if Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, and a dozen other billionaires and their entire companies, were to move to Belgium, child poverty in Belgium would by definition shoot up drastically, even though every last person in the country would be better off as a result. That is, in effect, what has happened to cause the scare headline with which we began.

Underlying these flaws in the prevailing definition of poverty is the inescapable fact that there is no way to make people systematically better off simply by shuffling money around by force. The creativity of individuals tempered by the criticism of the market can produce ideas and inventions that will make the world a better place. UNICEF's beloved socialist bureaucracy, spiteful levelling and pointless bean counting cannot do this and should, at most, confine itself to the sewers from whence it came.

Sun, 03/27/2005 - 04:25 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Average and median

It's clear from the second paragraph on that UNICEF web site you link to that UNICEF does not know the difference between an average and a median. This does not bode well for - well, anything, really.

by a reader on Sun, 03/27/2005 - 05:57 | [reply](#)

The End of Poverty

All formulaic poverty indicators based on relative incomes are terminally flawed.

I propose instead a basic refinement to the present formulas: the Swarzenagger Dumbness Equation. The SDE states that in theory as well as in widely observed practice Sustainable Poverty will always equal Total Adult Dumbness divided by Population ($SP = TAD/P$).

Difficult as the TAD variable is to measure in the laboratory of world affairs, the SDE dumbness equation is a lasting indicator of true poverty since it is obvious causally that no peoples can long succeed if their adults are creatively impoverished. Societal

dumbness unfortunately is a self-sustaining principle until it is no

longer viable.

Hence, to ultimately end poverty in free societies, remove all formulaic poverty indicators and replace them with praxis: the infinite variable of applied Human Creativity Factor (HCF) which fortunately is very simple math.

Overall mental wealth is not only infinitely powerful. It is always also reducible to the power of one. Fostering mental wealth is equivalent to ending poverty, one person at a time.

Practical economics. Practical math.

Few economists and no political hacks need apply.

by a reader on Sun, 03/27/2005 - 14:10 | [reply](#)

Averages

Bryan Caplan recently offered some **good examples** of how deceptive averages can be.

Gil

by **Gil** on Mon, 03/28/2005 - 07:50 | [reply](#)

Median

umm since they say poverty is less than half of median, if Bill Gates moves somewhere it doesn't change anything. Bring whole companies and ... well might go up a little but not much.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 04/01/2005 - 06:18 | [reply](#)

Relative Poverty

...and if they incinerated the assets of the rich, then poverty (in the contemporary Leftist definition) would be slashed. One frequently gets the impression that such a measure would not be entirely unwelcome to egalitarians....

by Paul on Tue, 04/01/2008 - 17:37 | [reply](#)

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Conspiracy Theories – 5: Paranoia As Faith

[For the first four instalments of this series, see [here](#).]

The Soviet dictator Josef Stalin was notorious for his all-encompassing paranoia. And yet, as Alexander Solzhenitsyn pointed out in his novel **The First Circle**, even Stalin was not *entirely* lacking in the capacity to trust:

Distrust of people was the dominating characteristic of Joseph Djugashvili [Stalin]; it was his only philosophy of life. He had not trusted his own mother; neither had he trusted God, before whom as a young man he had bowed down in His temple. He had not trusted his fellow Party members, especially those with the gift of eloquence. He had not trusted his comrades in exile. He did not trust the peasants to sow their grain or harvest their wheat unless he forced them to do it and watched over them. He did not trust the workers to work unless he laid down their production targets. He did not trust the intellectuals to help the cause rather than to harm it. He did not trust the soldiers and the generals to fight without penal battalions and field security squads. He had never trusted his relatives, his wives or his mistresses. He had not even trusted his children. And how right he had been!

In all his long, suspicion-ridden life he had only trusted one man. That man had shown the whole world that he knew his own mind, knew whom it was expedient to like and whom to hate; and he had always known when to turn round and offer the hand of friendship to those who had been his enemies.

This man, whom Stalin had trusted, was Adolf Hitler.

And so, when Hitler suddenly invaded the Soviet Union, betraying Stalin's trust and their **non-aggression treaty** (including all the nasty little **secret clauses** under which they had plotted jointly to enslave Eastern Europe), Stalin

blindly and fanatically *refused to believe* Hitler was going to attack and even after the Nazi assault began still

refused to believe that Hitler had ordered the offensive.

[**Harrison E. Salisbury**, emphases in original.]

Stalin also refused to believe his own spies, such as the astonishing **Richard Sorge**, who had sent specific and timely warnings of Hitler's plans, complete with smoking-gun evidence in the form of photographs of diplomatic telegrams.

Stalin nevertheless preferred to believe Hitler.

Stalin's island of gullibility in his ocean of paranoia is not exceptional – in fact, it is the rule. For instance, conspiracy theorists today prefer to believe that the likes of Saddam and Osama and Arafat tell the truth while Blair and Bush and Sharon lie. For, despite Solzhenitsyn's understandable mockery, what Stalin trusted uncritically was not Hitler, it was his own explanation (or rather, his own conspiracy-theoretic non-explanation) of what makes the world tick. Hitler was a natural beneficiary though, because he shared the same explanation. And it was Stalin's blind faith in this false world view, his inability to modify it in response to new information, that betrayed him. That is why it is not really very surprising that a person for whose “only philosophy of life” was distrust, came to lay himself wide open to the biggest betrayal of all time.

Paranoids, cynics and conspiracy theorists think of themselves as the most sceptical, the least gullible of the human race, and hence also as the most secure against disappointment. “If you're a pessimist,” the saying goes, “at least you'll never be disappointed”. But that could hardly be more false. Just look at the world of disappointment that Hitler let himself in for when he deduced, from the depths of his cynicism, that Britain was all talk and would never fight. Just look how heartbroken all the cynics and pessimists on today's political scene are whenever things go well in Iraq or Afghanistan.

In reality, such people are not the least gullible in the world but the most. For their approach to understanding the complex and frightening world of human affairs is not characterised by the countless possible explanations that they have vowed to reject, but by the single conspiracy-theoretic mode of explanation that they have vowed to believe regardless of all evidence or experience or argument to the contrary. This is not scepticism in the rational sense of the word, it is faith. They have chosen to put blind faith in their conspiracy theories. But the world punishes blind faith. Tyrants in general tend to be paranoid, yet nevertheless, they nearly always end up disappointed as well. Stalin was relatively lucky in his disappointment: most of them die of it.

Part 6

Fri, 04/01/2005 - 14:14 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

ideology vs. conspiracy

I agree with this post. But I wonder what the relationship between conspiracy theory and ideology is. As written [here](#), any theory can be turned into an ideology, and any ideology can be turned into a

theory. Like conspiracy theories, a major selling point of ideologies is their apparent simplicity in making sense of complex phenomena. You have declared a war on conspiracy theories. Does this mean a war on ideology in general? Or does ideology have a legitimate place in the world of ideas that isn't going away?

by [Dan Strimpel](#) on Fri, 04/01/2005 - 17:58 | [reply](#)

Conspiracy of Ideology

Excellent.

Strimpel's question also is of note.

Ideology contains within it a fertile medium for growing bad ideas. The fertile medium is the ground of fixed unquestioned first principles. The seeds of conspiracy theory sprout in the manure of these dogmas.

by a reader on Sun, 04/03/2005 - 14:23 | [reply](#)

Conspiracies are elementary-- Tabloid BS--Paradise

It is elementary... Conspiracy Theories are just a quick way to make people question a particular person or party. If someone wants to find fault with a particular person or party to turn others against them, they think of ways they are trying to harm everyone... That is how most gossip starts in high school, elementary school, work places etc.... Democrats want to find fault with the Republicans... It is that simple.. But think about it, if Clinton had been elected, I am sure we, Republicans could somehow blame Clinton for the 911 attacks... perhaps linked to Monica Lewinsky too! Perhaps Hilary and Monica were having an affair and had to cover it up... Believe me.. If we tried hard enough.. we COULD link them somehow.. It is all Tabloid BS to me..

by [gadarInbabe](#) on Sat, 08/20/2005 - 22:55 | [reply](#)

wow, YOU are CRAZY!

do you understand that it is the MAINSTREAM that are the victims of a "conspiracy theory", not those you accuse?

the MAINSTREAM believe that:

- osama bin laden did 9-11
- he did so because "he didn't like our way of life"
- iraq was involved somehow
- nineteen hijackers fooled our trillion dollar defenses
- the buildings collapsed because jets hit them
- etc etc etc

all because Time magazine, the New York Times, CNN, ABC, NBC, CBS, FOX etc told them so and never told them anything different!

THAT is a CONSPIRACY THEORY. And the people who cling

fervently to that theory are CONSPIRACY THEORISTS. That means most people. As in "**most people have been duped by the theory that bin Laden did it**".

It is only the minority who have done a little bit of their own research and realize the lies of the official media and government and see how they've scurried to cover up as much as possible who are NOT beholden to a fixed view of what happened. It is we who think for ourselves.

GWB's grandfather Prescott Bush substantially funded Hitler from 1924-1941. Karl Rove's grandfather was a Nazi engineer. Arnold Schwarzenegger's dad was an Austrian SS man. It is probably not a good idea for conservatives like you to start bringing up the Nazis in order to buttress your arguments.

by a reader on Sat, 12/03/2005 - 18:18 | [reply](#)

Put your theory on the table

I'd like the previous poster to explain to me what actually happened on the day of 9 / 11. Not a million reasons for why the widely believed theory is a conspiracy but what actually happened.

In particular I'd like to know about the passengers on all four flights, where are they now or how did they die? I'd also like to know about the 19 hijackers, did they exist and were they on the planes, did they in fact hijack it? I'd also like to know how their training was paid for and why they made suicide videos in Afghanistan explaining their reasons for the attack. If you can manage all that you can round it off with why Al Qaeda has now accepted responsibility for the attack.

You could also go for who was behind the attack on the USS Cole and the East Africa embassy bombings if you're feeling really bold.

by RK on Thu, 06/29/2006 - 13:41 | [reply](#)

Vote Labour!

None of us has ever voted Labour before. Until very recently, we would have considered our doing so at the forthcoming election to be as unlikely as that we might endorse spoon-bending, or claim to have been abducted by extraterrestrials. Moreover, we remain desperately opposed to core Labour themes such as greater European integration, higher taxes, the destruction of valuable traditions (most recently, the abolition of the double-jeopardy rule), and ever-increasing bureaucratic intervention in every aspect of British life.

Yet despite all that, we want to do everything we can to return Tony Blair to office at the forthcoming election. In most constituencies, this will entail voting Labour, so that is what we urge our British readers to do.

The reason is, of course, the war. Faced with that challenge, Tony Blair spectacularly found his moral compass. Michael Howard shamefully lost his – and the Conservative Party stands willingly behind him. And of course the Liberal Democrats' stance was, and remains, utterly despicable.

There might be an argument for protest-voting for a fringe party, such as perhaps the UK Independence Party. But such a protest would be meaningless under the present circumstances, where there are overwhelmingly important foreign-policy and defence issues. One small comfort is that we shall get a separate chance to vote against Blair on the issues of the Euro and the European Constitution.

So, more precisely, our advice is: *vote for Blair's foreign and defence policies*. If your local Labour candidate is a Blair loyalist, the choice is easy: vote for him or her. (You can easily discover such information on the web.) If the Labour candidate is a Saddam supporter and the Conservative candidate approves of Blair's handling of the war, the choice is more complicated: you might then want to vote Conservative, because you would not want to have voted for an MP who, when Blair retires, will support an idiotarian socialist for Prime Minister. Also, where applicable, it is important to vote tactically to keep the Liberal Democrats from making any gains: more than anything else, large gains by them

will be interpreted as a vote for the legitimacy of Saddam's regime

and the world's remaining fear regimes.

Sat, 04/09/2005 - 13:42 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Once again...

the editors of "**The World**" sacrifice all of their values to the god of war.

by a reader on Sun, 04/10/2005 - 00:40 | [reply](#)

Re: Once again...

We shall sing our answer:

(Tune [here](#).)

When this lousy war is over
We'll go back to normalcy:
No more voting for New Labour,
Oh how happy we shall be!
Every nation will start learning
How to trade instead of kill;
We won't tell your guilty secret:
They were freed against your will.

When this lousy war is over
We will blog of cows and trees.
No more threats to chop our heads off,
No more fear societies.
You'll be welcome then to join us,
But you'll hang your head in shame:
All the world was freed from tyrants
But it wasn't in your name.

(Original lyrics [here](#).)

by [Editor](#) on Sun, 04/10/2005 - 14:45 | [reply](#)

Should be:

As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free;

While God is marching on.

Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!

Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! While God is marching on.

by a reader on Sun, 04/10/2005 - 21:07 | [reply](#)

Kickass song, Editor. - El

Kickass song, Editor.

- Elliot

misalignment of truth compass

Quoting the 'permalink'

"The reason is, of course, the war. Faced with that challenge, Tony Blair spectacularly found his moral compass. Michael Howard shamefully lost his.."

The coalition invaded Iraq in March 2003. Michael Howard became leader of the Conservative party in November 2003- a full seven months after the invasion. In March 2003, of course, Iain Duncan Smith was the head of the Conservative Party. Mr Duncan Smith, a former army Major, was fully behind Blair's proposed invasion of Iraq. This is a quote from his 2002 response to Blair's statement on Iraq;

'The only question remaining is whether he has the motive to strike against Britain - I believe it is fair to assume he would.' -Iain Duncan Smith.

Therefore, in response to the above claim of Howard losing his 'moral compass' when faced with 'that challenge' I refute it on two grounds: 1) Howard was not leader of the opposition then and 2) Duncan Smith, who was, did not oppose the invasion.

For the above stated reason, among others, the permalink statement is rhetorical nonsense.

Kieren.

Re: misalignment of truth compass

The moral challenge was not faced only by party leaders. Nor did it end with the invasion of Iraq. Nor has Michael Howard's loss of moral compass ever manifested itself (as the Liberal Democrats' has throughout) as explicit opposition to the liberation of Iraq: on the contrary, he continues to support the liberation and British military involvement in Iraq. (Britain can be proud that it is the only democracy in the world in which both the government and the main opposition party are in favour of such actions – though not *too* proud, since most of the population are opposed.)

We have described some of the forms it has taken [here](#) and [here](#). Howard has lost no opportunity to jump onto the populist and conspiracy-theoretic **Blair lied** bandwagon, in order to gain credit with the anti-liberation constituency who want to believe anything that will undermine the liberation policy. Howard was once a prominent member of the Atlanticist faction of the Conservative Party. He has now gone so far in the opposite direction as to have become the first Conservative leader for many decades (since

Eden?) to be persona non grata at the White House. It is not

because of any policy differences that Bush's people have decided that they can't be bothered with Howard any more. It is his cynical, bombastic posturing about the war, which is the external sign that despite his powerful intellect and enormous knowledge and experience, there is no one at home there, morally.

by **Editor** on Tue, 04/12/2005 - 20:33 | [reply](#)

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Not A Great Man

The phenomenon of the mass media praising the recently deceased Pope as an exemplar or demigod is almost as inappropriate as the equivalent frenzy that followed the death of Princess Diana. Yes, the Pope was an opponent of communism – though not in fact an especially significant one. Yes, he deserves credit for taking a stand against antisemitism within his Church – though he did not hesitate to elevate several notorious antisemites to sainthood, and utterly failed to bear witness when President Assad, in his presence, resurrected ancient antisemitic blood libels and hailed the Pope as a fellow enemy of The Jews. Perhaps his most praiseworthy attribute (which is notably under-recognised, even in the current festival of appreciation for him), was his firm defence of the proposition that morality is not arbitrary or relative but objective – though even this great and rare virtue is offset by the embarrassing fact that his actual grasp of right and wrong over many issues of current controversy was ludicrously shaky compared with, say, the average person in an American street.

For as **Christopher Hitchens** points out, Pope John-Paul II opposed contraception that would have saved millions from AIDS, the Iraq war that liberated millions from tyranny, and stem cell research that would advance medical science and save lives, and was likewise a dogmatic and implacable opponent of much that would improve the human condition as well as his own Church. Many people with more deference than sense will continue to claim that he was a moral giant for some time to come, and that is a large part of the Catholic Church's problem. Millions of people follow its advice uncritically because they regard it as a supernaturally certified moral authority. This has given the Catholic Church enormous power but little capacity to improve, and almost none of the checks and balances that could offset the tendency of that power to corrupt.

Sat, 04/16/2005 - 17:47 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

On the other hand

In order to be a pope, a person must obviously be very devoutly catholic. If you want to end the discussion before it even begins by saying "catholicism is bad, therefore the pope is bad", then theres nothing more to say. On the other hand, I think its more interesting to analyse how good this pope was *given that he had to be a

devout catholic*. In other words, how successful was he at balancing secular criticism of church doctrines (not allowing female priests, extreme pro-life views, etc.) while staying true to traditional catholic ideals (which, as pope, he is absolutely required to do). To say simply "the pope ought to be secular" is both unhelpful and uninteresting.

Also, I think the pope's main positive contribution to the world, rather than his philosophical position of moral objectivity, is the "strong spiritual medicine" he is able to dole out to people living in unimaginable poverty and squalor. Such people need a simplistic ideology that makes them feel that it is worthwhile to struggle on, particularly if they live in a failed state which shows no concern for their welfare. The Catholic church, led by the pope, is able to step in to dole out this spritual medicine (as well as often doling out actual medicine where other aid groups cannot), giving people a basic hope and also dissuading them from violence. John Paul seems to have been good at this.

<http://www.danielstrimpel.com>

by **Daniel** on Sat, 04/16/2005 - 19:30 | [reply](#)

The Iraq war liberated millions from tyranny

in the same sense that World War Two liberated millions from communism. And World War One made the world safe for democracy.

by a reader on Sat, 04/16/2005 - 23:44 | [reply](#)

Condoms

*For as **Christopher Hitchens** points out, Pope John-Paul II opposed contraception that would have saved millions from AIDS,*

This endlessly repeated claim is utter nonsense. JP II espoused the classic catholic view that sex should be limited within marriage and that contraception should not be used. Now I personally think this is silly advice, but following this advice most definitely does not cause AIDS. In fact following it is a very good way of **preventing** AIDS. Since if you only sleep with the same partner within marriage you are very unlikely to contract AIDS, even if you don't use condoms, which would be logical anyway whatever your religion during at least some period of time if you want to have babies, which most married couples do in fact want. The only way to construe the Pope's position on sex and condoms to cause millions of AIDS deaths is to say that that will happen if people follow only one part of his advice (no condoms) but not the other (no sex outside or marriage). But that's just as absurd as saying that if someone advises getting drunk every saturday evening and advises against driving cars at any time that he's causing millions of deaths on the grounds that if people do indeed get drunk but don't refrain from

driving when they're drunk they're relatively likely to have deadly

accidents.

Now if anybody can come up with a quotation from the pope where he says that if people sin against the no-sex-outside-of-marriage rule then they should **still** be sure to commit their adultery without condoms, then it's a different story.

In the above linked article Hitchens also says:

By the time the church apologizes for saying that condoms are worse than AIDS,

OK, if it's true that the church ever said that condoms are worse than AIDS, I agree that's very bad. But I don't believe it and let him give his source for that statement.

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Sun, 04/17/2005 - 00:40 | [reply](#)

Re: Condoms

Henry Sturman:

Correct me if I'm wrong here but it seems to me that there's a flaw in that defence of the Pope. It's not the case that the Pope is merely giving advice on how to have sex, so that people who choose to obey half of it and not the other half have only themselves to blame. He is giving advice (or, as devout Catholics see it, commands) to governments on what laws to pass, and to electors on what laws to vote for. That means he is ordering people to interfere by force in the sexual behaviour of others. Some of those others die as a result. OK, they could avoid dying if they too obeyed the Pope's commands in full, but surely that is not a defence, is it?

by [David Deutsch](#) on Sun, 04/17/2005 - 11:35 | [reply](#)

Pope guilty

If the Pope said to get drunk every saturday night, he would indeed be guilty of many car accidents, no matter how opposed he was to cars at all. Pretending that advising mass drinking will not mean drunk driving, or pretending advising no condom won't mean unprotected sex, is such blatant willful blindness that he is quite culpable anyway.

take a population of unmarried people who he's told to be abstinent, and who have all reconciled this advice with their lives, and most are not abstinent. now have him say no condoms, and have half of them listen. he is totally guilty. advice has consequences, quite apart from the entire set of his intentions.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sun, 04/17/2005 - 21:54 | [reply](#)

Not a great man

"Many people with more deference than sense will continue to claim that he was a moral giant for some time to come..."

While the president of the U.S. says that attending the pope's funeral was a highlight of his administration so far; an incongruous comment perhaps from a non-catholic, despite good seats.

He must have based that on something, the Pope's opposition to condoms, or the Pope's opposition to the war in Iraq?

Or, deference, it was probably deference.

by a reader on Mon, 04/18/2005 - 03:34 | [reply](#)

Re: The Iraq war liberated millions from tyranny

A reader thinks that

The Iraq war liberated millions from tyranny in the same sense that World War Two liberated millions from communism. And World War One made the world safe for democracy.

To readers who think it didn't matter who won World War 1, we recommend these articles by [Gary Sheffield](#) and [John J. Reilly](#).

To readers who think that it did not matter whether Iraq was liberated (or doubt that it was) we recommend Ali's [thoughts](#) on the second anniversary of the liberation.

Readers who think it did not matter who won World War 2, should ask themselves why a Soviet state controlling Eastern Europe was a worse outcome than a Nazi state in control of the whole of Europe. Moreover, if the Allies had stood up to Hitler earlier, neither of those would have been a likely outcome. World War 2 really is a bad case to cite if one wants to argue *against* a willingness to go to war to preserve freedom.

by [Editor](#) on Mon, 04/18/2005 - 05:58 | [reply](#)

re: "would have saved million

re: "would have saved millions from AIDS", it seems appropriate to remind that AIDS is diagnosed differently in Africa than elsewhere and as a result not everyone who we count as having "died of AIDS" in Africa may have done so as a result of having unprotected sex.

I'll grant that probably doesn't substantially alter the larger point you/Hitchens are trying to make though. As Elliott says, unprotected sex (and whatever ill effects it causes) was a foreseeable result of his advice.

re: "opposed the Iraq war", are we really certain that he did? I

know, I know, the News has repeatedly told me that he Strenuously Opposed Bush's Iraq War, but in reality I never saw clear evidence that he (as opposed to "The Vatican") issued anything other than the boilerplate (and vague) fence-straddling peace-rhetoric you'd expect of a Pope, on that subject. If I'm wrong lemme know.

Speaking of things you'd expect of a Pope, that hints at the larger issue here. I echo the first commenter above: many of the complaints lodged here are inevitable *given that he was a Pope*. It is unreasonable to have expected him to adopt positions that a Pope could never feasibly adopt. It would be much more interesting to analyze how he did in his role *given that he was a Pope* than to make the broad banal observation that *The Pope* was not a secular humanist liberal.

by Blixa on Mon, 04/18/2005 - 21:42 | [reply](#)

Re: Re: The Iraq war liberated millions from tyranny

To the editor that thinks the results of WWI were good. Was the introduction of communism into Russia good? Was the "democratization" of Germany and the subsequent election of Hitler good?

To the editor that thinks Iraq has been liberated I refer you to these links <http://riverbendblog.blogspot.com/> <http://www.sistani.org/> <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,7374-1537512,00.html>

The editor and readers who think the results of WWII were good should ask themselves why Communist regimes in Europe and Asia were better than a Nazi and fascist regimes controlling Europe and a Japanese regime controlling Asia. BTW, didn't Britain and France declare war in defence of Poland? Was Poland liberated after the war? Did the Polish fighters return home and live out their remaining years in peace, freedom and prosperity? The allies expelled the Nazis from Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Libya and Egypt. Did they become free and prosperous nations? Of course, allies liberated France. And France became, and remains to this day, our staunchest ally.

by a reader on Tue, 04/19/2005 - 06:45 | [reply](#)

Re: condoms

David Deutsch responded to my previous post:

Correct me if I'm wrong here but it seems to me that there's a flaw in that defence of the Pope. It's not the case that the Pope is merely giving advice on how to have sex, so that people who choose to obey half of it and not the other half have only themselves to blame. He is giving advice (or, as devout Catholics see it, commands) to governments on what laws to pass, and to electors on what laws to vote for. That means he is ordering people to interfere by force in the sexual behaviour of others. Some of those others die as a result. OK, they could avoid dying if they too obeyed the Pope's commands in full, but surely that is not a

defence, is it?

You are right if the Pope has been doing things such as advising nations to enact laws to forbid the sale of condoms. I am not aware though that he did that, but would be interested in a source. Certainly if that were the case, and if it were the case that there are countries that actually implemented that advice (which to my knowledge is not so), then I agree the Pope would be responsible for AIDS deaths. I would maintain though that my critique would still be correct within the context in which it was given. The above world article and the Hitchens article do not mention the Pope's advice concerning law. They mention only that he opposes contraception, which I took to mean advises people against using them.

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Tue, 04/19/2005 - 09:13 | [reply](#)

Elliot, Wouldn't your crit

Elliot,

Wouldn't your criticism of the Pope make it difficult for anyone to offer any advice with more than one part? And if advice must be very simple, won't we pass up opportunities for useful change?

SUVs may make their owners safer, but their popularity is likely to make all other road users less safe because they have greater mass and so cannot stop quickly and hit harder. If we cannot give advice like, "Buy an SUV, but drive carefully," I suppose we will have to support a static mix of vehicles or further safety regulations.

by romr on Tue, 04/19/2005 - 17:54 | [reply](#)

laws

Following Henry's post above, I would imagine that the only "laws" David could possibly be speaking about are "laws" such as: Whether to distribute condoms to people for free (or at a subsidized cost), or: Whether to allow the UN or similar outside agency to do so. When and where the answer is "no", and that answer is plausibly informed by Catholic doctrine, I gather this is what David would refer to as the Pope "ordering people to interfere by force in the sexual behaviour of others".

I'm struck by how weak that criticism really is, if that's all it amounts to. (If that's not all it amounts to, let me know.) Is Failing To Buy Someone A Condom (or Not Allowing Outsiders To Bring Someone A Condom) *really* the same as "interfering by force in their sexual behavior"? One could certainly criticize this position, but there's a lot less to the criticism than meets the eye.

Especially since this insidious Papal Anti-Condom Effect we all deplore so much, if/where it's operative, can really **only** be

operative at the state/distribution/subsidy level anyway. Sometimes

it seems as if we are meant to believe that the Effect also operates at the *individual choice* level, but I find that highly dubious to begin with. It stretches the imagination to envision a Catholic Third Worlder who is on the verge of committing the sin of *fornication* that is condemned by the Pope, and yet decides that when sinning in this manner he mustn't use a condom because, why, the Pope said it was a sin. At the very least, if moralistic anti-condom sentiment *does* influence any people in this (bizarre) way I would imagine it would have to be part of a larger and more complex, deeply-rooted social taboo/pattern against condom use, and is *not* dictated solely by the word of one guy in the Vatican, a notion which seems ridiculously simplistic and caricaturesque.

by Blixa on Tue, 04/19/2005 - 18:59 | [reply](#)

The Catholic Church teaches a

The Catholic Church teaches abstinence and celibacy to its followers (the majority of which are from the developing world) and argues, rightly, that if these were practiced the AIDS pandemic would not exist. But abstinence and celibacy are not the human condition. By promulgating an extreme and unrealistic ideology, as well as the utter falsehood that HIV particles can pass through latex condoms, the Catholic Church must have contributed to the AIDS pandemic. It is almost not worth arguing with anyone so obtuse as to not agree with this.

Kieren

by a reader on Tue, 04/19/2005 - 21:20 | [reply](#)

multi part advice

giving multi part advice where one part is very bad without the rest, *is* difficult. you must be extra careful.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 04/20/2005 - 05:14 | [reply](#)

The Pope and the Iraq War

Blixa,

I think that [these links](#) make the Pope's anti-Iraq-war position pretty clear.

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Wed, 04/20/2005 - 16:09 | [reply](#)

Indeed. Thanks,

Indeed. Thanks,

by Blixa on Wed, 04/20/2005 - 18:01 | [reply](#)

Re: The Pope and the Iraq War

Gil and Blixa:

That article in The Independent says "John Paul has said there is no legal or moral justification for military action". For what it's worth, I recently saw a Catholic pro-war blogger categorically deny that the Pope ever said this. I'm afraid I can't locate the link now, but I think he was saying that the press simply made it up, and that in fact the Pope always confined himself to generalised statements that did not specifically take a position on whether Iraq should be liberated. If you search for that phrase, you'll see countless references to it, but no actual quotes.

Having said that, I have to say that your first reference is quite hard to interpret as not taking a position.

I guess, with sufficient faith, one could do it, though.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Wed, 04/20/2005 - 20:11 | [reply](#)

Re: The Catholic Church teaches a

By promulgating an extreme and unrealistic ideology, as well as the utter falsehood that HIV particles can pass through latex condoms, the Catholic Church must have contributed to the AIDS pandemic.

It is in fact true that HIV particles can pass through latex condoms (when they break). The **failure rate of condoms** is between 1 and 10%.

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Wed, 04/20/2005 - 20:55 | [reply](#)

"Legal or Moral Justification"

According to [this](#), it was actually top Vatican officials, and not the Pope himself, who said that a preventive US-led attack would have no legal or moral justification.

I guess it depends on whether or not you believe that top Vatican officials' speak for the Pope or not. I don't think he contradicted this particular sentiment.

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Thu, 04/21/2005 - 15:44 | [reply](#)

Hmm. Now I'm confused again.

Hmm. Now I'm confused again. Whatever the source of the "no justification" sentiment, in any event, Gil's first link alone had already convinced me that I stood corrected. "NO TO WAR", in a speech given by the Pope himself, and referencing Iraq specifically

and almost exclusively, seemed pretty unequivocal. :) Although I admit that the more I turn over and over the phrasing of the passage in question the more it seems to crumble away to nothingness in my hands. I think it's enough to say that even if it was, as I had heard, lesser officials who had the largest role in crafting the Vatican Iraq war position, the Pope did nothing significant to dispel the idea that they spoke for him as well.

by Blixa on Thu, 04/21/2005 - 21:37 | [reply](#)

re: Pope and Iraq War, it is

re: Pope and Iraq War, it is plain and simple to me: the Vatican is headed by the Pope. Of course, like any other political entity there are different people responsible for making the announcements etc. than the Pope himself, but if there is an official statement made by the Vatican regarding *any* issue, it is natural to assume it reflects Pope's personal stance. If it was otherwise he had to make that clear, just like any other head of state/political part/etc has to.

re: Pope and Aids, the more important issue is that he could greatly boost the prevention efforts by speaking in favour of condoms. The fact that he did not, and that numerous examples to the exact opposite are attached to the his and the Vatican's stance regarding AIDS is a liability.

I don't think that one should talk about the Pope given that he was "the Pope," so as to justify what he did and said or not. Well, what is a "Pope" anyway? What does a Pope have to do, being a "Pope"? That is the crux of the debate here, and hopefully the answers to these questions change during the time and converge to a more humanistic limit.

--Babak

by a reader on Sat, 04/23/2005 - 03:03 | [reply](#)

static

The Pope commands a large amount of power and you don't like how that one used it. You wish that he had done Y instead of X. But the Pope's authority is all "moral". So, question: If the Pope had indeed done Y would he still have had the same power necessary to achieve the results you imagine Y having achieved if done by someone with that power?

To assume so is a static analysis that is surely incorrect. This is why it "makes sense" to evaluate how a Pope did given that he was a Pope. It is all well and good to fantasize about there either being no Pope or the Pope being some other kind of office. But reality is reality.

p.s. I still can't for the life of me envision this bizarre Third-world fornicator who when fornicating against the command of the Pope decided not to use a condom based on the pivotal say-so of the Pope. I am not convinced that any such people exist, in fact, let

alone millions of them.

by Blixa on Sun, 04/24/2005 - 17:53 | [reply](#)

3rd world fornicator

blixa,

imagine poor town in africa. there is some kind of official or chief, who makes various policies. public opinion is against both sex outside marriage and against condoms, and the pope is partly to thank for this. so the guy makes public policies against condoms. thus they are harder to get. banned sex is also harder to get. so anyway, many people want sex and get it anyway, but many of them find condoms too inconvenient to get under these circumstances, and don't. (this inconvenience includes lack of education about why to wear them, etc, so the person may not realise he should seek them out, as well as them actually being difficult to physically get). thus both of the Pope's views, together, cause more sex without condoms.

btw another arg:

take condoms away from half of ppl. take sex away from half of people. but don't make them all the same people. more unprotected sex. the point is if the Pope's policies don't have 100% success rate, and they don't always both succeed or both fail with a single person... (this **is** realistic, in that there would be some people who still have access to condoms but don't want sex, and others who want sex but no easy condom access)

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 04/25/2005 - 04:15 | [reply](#)

3rd world fornicator

He might not be choosing. He might not be obeying the Pope. He might not know what he's risking because it's against the law for teachers to tell him. His parents might not know either, or might not tell him because they are Catholic. Or he might not have parents. He might not be Catholic. He might be dirt poor and the government has driven up the price of condoms and harasses people who try to give them out free. And uses government money to fund campaigns telling lies about condoms and AIDS (lies prepared and spread and endorsed by the Catholic Church):
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/panorama/3180236.stm>

Philippines: police regard condoms as evidence of prostitution. Also confiscate them. Also beat up people who have them:
<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2004/05/03/philip8522.htm>

We're not just talking about high-flown theological theories by some academic theologian in Rome. This is a massive world wide political campaign with real effects on people.

Good answers

Good answers, both. They have helped me to envision in more detail how the condom-effect could be operating in practice.

I note that you've both basically conceded my point however (that whatever the effect is, it's probably not operating on what I called the "individual choice" level). Maybe it was just a boring/obvious point... but I felt it worth making because quite often people who raise this problem do seem to be talking about, or think they're talking about, some millions of marginal 3rd world fornicators who decide not to use condoms while fornicating cuz the Pope says condoms are sin.

My next question perhaps is whether there is some subtle bigotry working here. For example why does the Pope get all of the ire about this, rather than perhaps Elliot's hypothetical "African chief", or the Phillipine authorities? Is it that we can't expect any better of such people? The response might be (probably will be) "um what are you talking about? there's enough ire to go around, it's just that this thread was about the Pope", though, and if so then nevermind.

by Blix on Mon, 04/25/2005 - 18:53 | [reply](#)

the ire

Well, the ire must be mostly about the Pope, when we, here in Canada, or England, or anywhere but that poor village in Africa with the little evil "African chief", talk about the issue. The people in that village, or in that African country must and I bet indeed do make their ire about that and many more such "African chiefs". I mean, it is not just this thread being about the Pope, but that from this distance, and from a more world-wide angle, the issue **is** the Pope and other such international public figures. And only when you are in that village, the issue is (first and foremost) the "African chief".

--Babak

by a reader on Thu, 04/28/2005 - 16:55 | [reply](#)

Moral Responsibility

Blix wrote:

So, question: If the Pope had indeed done Y would he still have had the same power necessary to achieve the results you imagine Y having achieved if done by someone with that power?

To assume so is a static analysis that is surely incorrect.

Just to make sure I understand: What you are saying is that if the

Pope had done Y instead of X, which I would have liked, the Papacy would have been different from what we know it is today. In particular, the Pope might not have had the same power, or the same kind of power, he has today. So, I must make my analysis of the Pope's statements conform to the "fact" that he is the "Pope" and as such will not do anything that changes the Papacy.

I grant that you are right in thinking that analysis is static. But it seems to me that your argument against static analyses (the way I understand it) is an overkill: "The Pope will not change," you seem to me to be saying, "so you must abandon all analyses that make demands to that effect." Looks to me like a vicious circle blocking any hope for and *any* analysis, static or dynamic, directed at change.

Can't the Pope change the Papacy at all, and still enjoy the same order of power, though perhaps different in sort?

--Babak

by a reader on Thu, 04/28/2005 - 17:24 | [reply](#)

Re: ire, I don't think I a

Re: ire,

I don't think I agree. why is it valid for you to criticize the Pope (a faraway guy in the Vatican, in Europe) but not to criticize the African chief (a faraway guy in a village, in Africa)? why "only" when you are in the village can you criticize the village chief? Doesn't this mean you have to be a Vatican resident, or at least a *Catholic*, to criticize the Pope?

Perhaps you simply mean it's *easier* to point at/single out the Pope because he's a Worldwide Figure, whereas it's *hard* to speak to/criticize all those African chiefs. Well yeah. Pointing at the Pope alone *is* the easier/shortcut way of lodging these complaints.

Re: X,

i think you've misunderstood me. it's not that doing X will "change the Papacy", about which I care not. it's that if he does X he himself risks ceasing to be the Pope! Then some other guy gets in there (more "reactionary") and now where does that leave you and your criticisms?

Another possibility is that he loses a good chunk of the "moral authority" that gives the Pope his magical sinister worldwide voodoo powers. you (as I recall) lament that people don't use condoms cuz the Pope says not to, and they listen to the Pope. (Yes we all worked out that it's a more complicated mechanism than that, i'm just trying to be quick). you want the Pope to say "use condoms". But *if he does this* will those same people even listen to him? if not, then the benefit you imagine (people starting to use condoms a lot) simply isn't there. Just because people obey the Pope on Not Using Condoms doesn't necessarily mean they'd obey him on Using Them. These people (more to the point - states, and "African chiefs")

aren't a bunch of automatons who are given instructions and carry them out. They're humans and have natural human motives.

It would be very natural and typical for a lot of pious/religious people to hear a Pope saying "use condoms" and start to think of him as less "holy", and adjust their attitude to his statements accordingly. This mental model of 3rd World Catholics as automatons carrying out instructions, whatever they are, is rather lazy.

by Blixa on Wed, 05/04/2005 - 18:01 | [reply](#)

re: ire and X

re: ire,

Well, I did not mean to take the *distance* as a measure of whom to make the ire about. It's the international *weight*, or power if you will, that crosses over that distance, which is the measure. The african chief does not command any moral authority, in your own words, on the people in Europe or Americas, but the Pope does. And as it turns out, this is an international issue, since it is rather important what the people in such faraway countries as in Europe or Americas think about the issue as well as those in the village, at least because the people in the poor african village need their financial help.

re: X and Y,

Of course nobody (even me!) expects the Pope to come out one day and say "use condoms!" out of the blue. If he is going to say so, he must believe in its use and benefits in the first place, and if a Pope sees that light, he sure must have a lot of supportive argument for his new resolution, which he will also give. This moral baggage, if you will, is such that it does not, so directly as you seem to suggest, lead to a decline of his moral authority. I've seen a lot of such reversals in religious rulings of the religious references, in Islam for instance, (just specifying my experience, nothing special about Islam here) and the new ruling always is accepted, with a little adjustment, by the followers. It's complex but by no means impossible.

I do not expect the villagers to follow mindlessly the statements of their Pope, but surely that will ease the way greatly.

In brief, what I care about is the new paradigm that will result from such a ruling; I'm sure the Vatican knows how to take care of their moral authority. I do not expect this to be done overnight either, but it's important to voice criticism (on the right basis, of course). It may take decades, or centuries as it did for Galilleo, for the Vatican to change, but that's another story.

--Babak

by a reader on Sat, 05/07/2005 - 19:27 | [reply](#)

The Vatican, IVF, and stem cell research

It is going to **campaign to have them banned**:

The Roman Catholic church is liable to launch a global offensive against infertility treatment following its victory in an Italian referendum last week, a leading expert said on Sunday.

[...]

"Since this is obviously one of the key issues for the new Pope, he will try to say the same thing in other countries where the Catholic Church has influence," he told Reuters ahead of the start of a European fertility meeting.

"When the Vatican throws its weight and political influence, infertility (treatment) is one of the things that could be sacrificed."

[...]

Sunde believes fertility treatment is just the start. The real showdown will be over embryonic stem cells - master cells that have the potential to form into any other cell type or tissue and which have the potential to cure a range of diseases.

"What we are heading toward is the battle around stem cells. The issue is the moral status of the early embryo. That is what it is all about," he added.

by **Editor** on Mon, 06/20/2005 - 19:43 | [reply](#)

France Graduates From Weasel To Enemy

Having lost the lucrative Saddam contract, France continues to grub about among the world's dwindling supply of fear regimes looking for customers for its weapons. Now the French Prime Minister has said that if China invades Taiwan under the new law it has passed 'authorising' this, France would consider that **only right and proper**:

French prime minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin has said Paris will continue to push for the lifting of the European Union's arms embargo on China.

Mr Raffarin was speaking at the start of a three-day visit to China.

He also said France had no objection to China's anti-secession law, authorising the use of force against Taiwan should it move to declare independence.

That is appalling enough as it stands, but as always with France, attributing their immoral international stance solely to venality and cynicism is giving them far too much credit. For there is rank, undisguised malevolence there as well. As their President Chirac **remarked** recently:

A "no" vote to the European Constitution would weaken the EU and benefit the United States, warned French President Jacques Chirac, Thursday.

That the core objective of French policy is to harm the United States has always been implicit. Now it is becoming increasingly explicit. Many Americans dismiss French policymakers as pathetic buffoons. This may be a mistake. They are not stupid, and they can do a great deal of harm.

Update: **InstaPundit** remarks, in this connection:

You know, we should have just bribed Chirac et al. It's clearly the way these things are done.

But in reality they would not have accepted such a bribe. So what InstaPundit intends as a stinging criticism of Chirac and of France is

really a free pass for the malevolence we spoke of. How do the

French get these free passes, again and again?

Thu, 04/21/2005 - 16:30 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

You know, we should have just

You know, we should have just bribed Chirac et al. It's clearly the way these things are done.

But in reality they would not have accepted such a bribe.

Well, it looks like Chirac may in fact have **accepted bribes** in the oil for food program, which may be linked to his position regarding the Iraq war.

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Sun, 04/24/2005 - 08:47 | [reply](#)

Re: You know, we should have just

Well, it looks like Chirac may in fact have accepted bribes in the oil for food program

Yes, but our point is that he would not have accepted a bribe to do the right thing.

So his acceptance of that money was not so much corruption as accepting the natural benefits of a policy that he would have carried out anyway.

by [Editor](#) on Sun, 04/24/2005 - 09:04 | [reply](#)

Legitimacy

Maybe Instapundit gives France a pass because it is easier to imagine elites have deceived a democracy than that so many free people knowingly support evil. Others who don't like Bush's policies do the same thing.

Because France is a democracy, it enjoys some presumed moral authority and then makes use of any more legitimacy it can find lying around. Now that France is an enemy, the US cannot afford to grant undeserved legitimacy to false principles for the sake of political expediency because France will exploit it in ways that dictatorships could not. This happened with the principle that the UN should decide which wars to fight.

It may be useful to placate China right now and Taiwan's DPP may be difficult, but I don't think Colin Powell should have said these things:

<http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/FJ30Ad03.html>

by [romr](#) on Mon, 04/25/2005 - 16:15 | [reply](#)

A pass

Maybe even we gave them a pass, with the title of this post. Have they *graduated* to the status of enemy of the USA? The authors of this book think they already were: **Our Oldest Enemy : A History of America's Disastrous Relationship with France.**

by **Editor** on Mon, 04/25/2005 - 16:32 | [reply](#)

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Environmentalism Is Tyranny

The world is in danger. A terrible threat to our wellbeing is generating a vast surplus of hot, fetid air which, if unchecked, will poison every aspect of our lives. Yes, that's right, the environmentalists are sounding off again. They are **suing** the US government for causing global warming.

They are **always suing** somebody about something.

In fact global warming is the scientific equivalent of **the boy who cried wolf**. However, for the sake of argument let's suppose that global warming was real and that the US government was not doing anything about it. How would environmentalists suing the government contribute to solving the problem? Such a lawsuit would take up a lot of time and money that could surely be put to better use. Instead the environmentalists would be better advised to do research into economically viable technologies to replace the ones that they say are causing global warming. This would automatically persuade people to abandon the technologies that ostensibly cause global warming without coercive government interference – and they could use the profits to fund advertisements to persuade people voluntarily to adopt further aspects of the lifestyle the environmentalists favour. Why are they not doing this? Why are enthusiasts for global warming, and practically every other 'environmentalist' issue, more interested in having the government's ear to push a statist political agenda than they are in solving the real problems that they claim exist?

Because of the 'public good problem'? A few free riders can spoil the value of a public resource for everyone? Nonsense. First of all, public good problems are in reality fairly rare phenomena, if they **exist at all**. Second, global warming, and many other 'environmental' issues, simply do not take the form of worrying about a few free riders spoiling things for everyone. They take the form of everyone, except a few campaigners with their heads full of hot air, simply not wanting to comply with some vast, ruinously expensive and intrusive madcap project. Yet somehow, because these campaigners have seized onto a weakness in contemporary politically-correct public morality, they get a free ride and aren't laughed out of public life. (Ironic, isn't it?)

By pursuing this agenda they have already generated mountains of

wasted paper and reams of pointless regulations that impede economic growth. Environmentalists pose a special type of global threat to human wellbeing that has no counterpart in nature.

Thu, 04/28/2005 - 07:45 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

effete nonsense

There is no sense, other than perhaps a completely trivial one, in which environmentalism is tyranny. This 'permalink' could be the most fatuous to date.

Kieren

by a reader on Thu, 04/28/2005 - 12:39 | [reply](#)

No problem?

I agree there is no good evidence for man made global warming. Plus if it were true there would still be the issue whether warming is good or bad. But to say that legal action would not be the way to solve the problem if it were real is nonsense. We do not live in never-neverland where any problem can and will be solved easily and quickly with no pain. We live in the real world where solving problems is costly and we have limited resources. If my neighbor has a loud stereo which he refuses to turn off then I'll want to sue him. There's no good in saying I should just invest my own money to come up with a better technical solution. So too with environmental property infringements. Where they do exist, the rule of law is needed to solve conflicts, as it is for any other conflict between people. The fact that at some future date, after someone invests enough money another option will be economically viable is besides the point. In that connection it is obvious that right now oil is the most economically efficient option and that at this time it is not very profitable to invest in other options, for if it were otherwise fossil fuel would not be used and more research would be done on alternatives.

Hence for the time being either we allow oil and then oil will be used or we take legal or political action and oil use will decline. I agree there is no justification to curb oil use, but until we move to the garden of eden or until man has been modified into the perfect collective being with only common goals there is no such thing as a common preference where we can eat our cake and have it too and any belief in that is based on faith rather than reason.

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Fri, 04/29/2005 - 08:44 | [reply](#)

Here's another issue: if glob

Here's another issue: if global warming were dangerous, but not man-made, would that be OK? Many environmentalists act like the

answer to this is yes. Hopefully their attitude to an impending

meteor strike would be different.

>We live in the real world where solving problems is costly and we have limited resources.

Yeah, and the problem of using nuclear power (a solved technological problem) has now become a political problem (how to debunk environmentalism). I'm not sure what resources will have to be consumed to solve the latter. Patience is one, for sure.

by a reader on Fri, 04/29/2005 - 18:00 | [reply](#)

Environmentalists

The problem is that "Environmentalists" as a defined subspecies do not exist. Environmentalist is a catch all phrase, and often includes even an finer epithet like "Crazy Environmentalist". To say "Environmentalists" is like saying "Libertarians", although no one knows the number of each. For all I know there may be only one true Libertarian.

Your point is apparently about pesky persons who espouse environmental causes as if they are absolute truth. As most of us know, true believers in anything will use all means at their disposal including the pesky lawsuit. Research would make more sense, but who will fund it? Also who will fund counter-research, the "Anti-Environmentalists"? Get my drift?

If this is a complaint about the environment and those pesky people who inhabit it and think they are the arbiters of truth, more power to you. However its likely more a rant about another "ism" personalized to an "ist".

Do something. Fund a research project. Environmentalists, whomever they are how vast their numbers might be, seem to pose a special type of global threat to human wellbeing that has no counterpart in nature. That is a theory in need of further reseach.

Sounds like a worthy project to me.

by a reader on Sat, 04/30/2005 - 14:18 | [reply](#)

Re: Here's another issue: if glob

Yeah, and the problem of using nuclear power (a solved technological problem) has now become a political problem (how to debunk environmentalism). I'm not sure what resources will have to be consumed to solve the latter. Patience is one, for sure.

Everything is about economics, not about technology. Sure, the technological problem of using nuclear power has been solved. But at this time nuclear power is not useful because it is **twice as expensive as power generation via fossil fuel.**

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Sat, 04/30/2005 - 16:28 | [reply](#)

Envirotyranny

single parent spends extra pennies on organic food because she wants what's best for her child and all her nicest friends do the same. (they also say things like "now, jon, be calm at the table or you know what happens, you'll have to eat in the other room.")

nobody quite knows why we must eat organic except that it's something to do with extra fresh natural wholesomeness. it's also to do with preventing local farmers being ripped off by giant supermarkets and, errr, stopping heartless global food corporations from profiting by adding nasty cancer chemicals to our regular food.

but more spent on baby food means less budget for toys and trips to the seaside.

the irony is that children don't usually want expensive food, and happiness is good for the environment.

by a reader on Sat, 04/30/2005 - 22:42 | [reply](#)

Re: Here's another issue: if glob

The issue of economics can't be separated from that of politics, especially tyrannical politics.

We don't know what the 'real' cost of nuclear power is because the political situation caused by environmentalist movement means that nuclear power has to be generated thousands of times more safely than any other form of power. Also, only very politically involved businesspeople can even dream of entering the nuclear industry, because their entire job is dealing with the government on the one hand and the environmentalism-obsessed public on the other.

And we don't know what the real cost of oil is because most of the oil production industry is run for the sole purpose of keeping certain tyrants in power, which is undoubtedly very far from the way it would be run if there were no tyranny involved.

by a reader on Sun, 05/01/2005 - 16:06 | [reply](#)

Yes, "tyranny" was rhetorical

Yes, "tyranny" was rhetorical hyperbole. Rather, Environmentalism is an Ideology (I am tempted to just call it a Christian heresy), which when and where influential could lead to something-like-tyranny in certain spheres of life (though I very much doubt the likelihood of it leading to tyranny proper).

As of now the most "tyrannical" thing that Environmentalism seems to have imposed on the average person is that we are typically all now conscripted, without pay, to sort our garbage by raw-material type before the people we pay to take it away, will agree to do so. Personally I dislike and resent this task very much (and the widespread acceptance of it as being our duty), almost to a

pathological extent, but if that's the worst "tyranny"
Environmentalism will generate I will be very happy :)

Henry is right that it's not clear whether GW is occurring, or if it is whether it is bad. He forgot to add that even if it is occurring, and bad, it's not clear that any feasible human action could stop it. (This is true whether or not human action "caused" it, which is - or should be - irrelevant.) Or at least, if it's happening+bad it's not clear whether the costs of attempting to "stop" GW by limiting greenhouses gases outweigh the costs of some other method of coping with the problem (settling Antarctica, making Mars habitable, building Battlestar Galactica, etc.)

The point that legal action could be appropriate is well taken. Emphasis on "could be". That doesn't mean it is. **The World** asked "How would environmentalists suing the government contribute to solving the problem?" That's a specific question which requires an answer, and the fact that *in principle* it is theoretically appropriate to use the law to solve such problems doesn't mean that the law is the *best* way to solve *this particular* problem.

The linked article gives a fascinating window into what the suers think they are accomplishing: "Any court that rules that global warming is a problem that needs to be addressed, just that headline, would be huge for the people trying to do something about global warming," said Pat Parenteau, a professor at Vermont Law School's Environmental Law Centre.

In other words they are trying to get a court ("any" court, but presumably the San Francisco court they are using was not chosen randomly) to declare "that global warming is a problem that needs to be addressed". They would be happy if this made it into a "headline".

In short, it's a PR stunt, designed to further and buttress their ideology. What they hope to achieve is what all ideologues hope to achieve, inducing people to believe in their ideology. (In particular they presumably want to bring about and maintain the conditions under which an ever-growing number of mainstream journalists write sentences like "Given that most mainstream scientists believe that greenhouse gases from industry and autos cause global warming", such as appears in the article, in passing.) To this end they would like, understandably, to get a court (an Authority) to Rule their ideology correct.

This aim doesn't exactly meet the conditions that Henry envisioned and outlined for how legal action is useful/necessary in solving a collective problem. Henry talks about "solving problems". This lawsuit is not about that. It's about winning converts and establishing orthodoxy. Not the same thing.

by blix on Mon, 05/02/2005 - 19:37 | [reply](#)

A noble ideology

Environmentalism (concern for the environment, and the

anthropogenic impact upon it) and environment science are honest intellectual activities and I cannot understand why 'the World' finds them so contentious. Whether I'm concerned about my local nature reserve (under threat from the planned extension of a golf course), or the much wider issue of climate change, it makes me an environmentalist.

Having climbed down from the original (and churlish) mis-equation of environmentalism with tyranny, (this correlation, after all, is evident nonsense) "blixia" lays the much more measured charge of it being an ideology. He/She is right (the ambiguous name makes it hard for me to use gender-specific pronouns). It is an ideology (defined as a set of beliefs) that makes me, without shame, want to preserve biodiversity on this planet. Unfortunately its become a word a bit like 'sin' or 'reductionism' (you only use it if you're against it). Blixia's ideology might consider biodiversity to be unimportant (preferring, perhaps, net-dollar gain as the singular measure of human success) and this he/she is free to embrace.

There are environmental issues that need to be addressed. Few intelligent people are ignorant enough to deny this. The way to address such problems is through empirical science and debate among informed people. "Anti-environmentalism" plays no part in informing this debate, being, like anti-globalism, an extreme and reactionary ideology.

Kieren

by Kieren on Sun, 05/29/2005 - 01:55 | [reply](#)

Support Tony Blair!

Leftist Oliver Kamm is **supporting Tony Blair by voting Conservative** for the first time in his life.

Those of **us** who can are **supporting Tony Blair by voting Labour** for the first time in our lives.

UPDATE: Due to the historic nature of this event we thought it appropriate to present the following evidence of our intention.





(Click the images for larger photos.)

Tue, 05/03/2005 - 14:24 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

I was also intending to vote

I was also intending to vote Labour to show support for Blair's handling of the war. But I thought it best to check first that the candidate wasn't a stopper, so I wrote to him saying that the war was a fundamental issue for me and that I thought Blair deserved immense credit for his whole approach over it. I went on to ask the candidate, if had he been in Parliament at the time, would he have voted for war and if so did he still support it.

That was last week. Having heard nothing I wrote again. When nothing happened again I wrote to the regional office. They said they would forward my note, but I still didn't get a reply. I've written again this evening, but don't hold out much hope of a response.

The polls open in about 8 hours. Who do I vote for?

by Christopher Price on Wed, 05/04/2005 - 23:00 | [reply](#)

How to decide

There are several web sites devoted to analysing MPs' voting records and other attributes. [Here's](#) one where you can look up your own MP. For those who don't know who their candidates are, you can find out [here](#), for instance. If the candidate you want to know about is not the outgoing MP, you can almost certainly still ascertain their opinions on key issues by searching the web.

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 05/04/2005 - 23:20 | [reply](#)

Editor - It would be fine if

Editor - It would be fine if he had been an MP before but he hasn't.

And being called Dave Jones he is not the easiest person to google. At the moment Im thinking despite Blair I cant vote for him coz he is such coward. I mean what sort of a candidate wont tell his electors his views on the biggest issue going?

by Christopher Price on Thu, 05/05/2005 - 00:01 | [reply](#)

What does it mean?

Now that it's over, can someone who understands british politics explain what happened? I keep hearing that it's a victory and a defeat for Blair, etc.

Gil

by **Gil** on Fri, 05/06/2005 - 16:06 | [reply](#)

Re: What does it mean?

The best thing one can say about it is that it could have been a lot worse.

But it was a bad night. In the words of **Oliver Kamm**:

The election overall has been a bad one for liberalism in its broadest sense. In individual constituencies, there is much more to regret than to welcome.

[...]

Overall, I am afraid there is no escaping the conclusion that Tony Blair irrevocably damaged his political standing by committing troops to the Iraq war; had the war not taken place, we can reasonably assume that he would have enjoyed a substantial - and given its unprecedented character in Labour politics - triumphant third election victory. Many, probably almost all, Labour supporters would regard this as an indictment of the PM. I regard it as a measure of the man's political stature.

Indeed.

by **Editor** on Fri, 05/06/2005 - 16:41 | [reply](#)

Election Consolations

“May the Lord spare us from things that could have been worse”, says a gloomy old truism. The outcome of the election could have been worse. Mr Blair remains in office with an increased majority in his own constituency, despite being challenged by a smorgasbord of calumniators and conspiracy theorists. Only one constituency in England and five in Northern Ireland elected **apologists** for **political terror** – in both cases, an increase of only one; the remaining 640 constituencies elected democratic politicians. The disgraceful Liberal Democrats ended up with only about 60 seats, a disappointingly small (to them) increase of only 11. That is the best we can muster by way of consolation.

It is a painful fact that vast numbers of British people did indeed want to punish Mr Blair for doing the right thing in Iraq, and that they do believe vile conspiracy theories, both about him and more generally too. It is also painful that moral relativism, cynicism, racism, antisemitism and even outright **violence** have played a greater role in this election campaign than at any time in recent history. The people of Bethnal Green, in particular, have no excuse for electing George Galloway, who would serve the country far better in jail than in Parliament. Some people, like the Liberal Democrats, are anti-war because they have no moral compass at all, merely a wish that the world should be a warm and fuzzy place. George Galloway has a moral compass that points directly towards evil.

Perhaps the most consoling outcome of the election is Michael Howard's announcement that he will stand down as leader of the Conservative Party. Nothing in his tenure as leader became him more than the leaving of it. For this quick decision, and for the fine, gracious and insightful **speech** in which he announced it, he has regained no small measure of respect from us. If he succeeds, as he says he intends to, in reforming the Party's system for choosing leaders before he goes, he may yet leave a legacy of which he could be proud. For this may, in due course, allow a leader from the untainted, younger ranks of the party to be elected and restore it to its former stature. Perhaps someone like Michael Gove, the excellent Times columnist who was just elected MP for Surrey Heath. As an example of his quality, look **here**. You heard it here first, folks...

Update: The BBC link above for Michael Howard's speech leads to a

page which blocks users outside the UK from viewing the clip. Their video server does not itself enforce this restriction: [here](#).

Sat, 05/07/2005 - 10:18 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Consolation: Take Heart, We Will Save You

Anyone who is engaged in proper democratic politics can succeed in the world today. Take heart. You will be saved. A blueprint for salvation is contained within the applied tensions of American religion, judicious secrecy, and the fine art of war and peace.

<http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeVII/Secrecy.htm>

Read on.

by a reader on Sun, 05/08/2005 - 20:14 | [reply](#)

Off topic but I thought I might

Off topic but I thought I might point out that the last decent journalist has [left the Guardian](#).

by theGob on Tue, 05/10/2005 - 12:40 | [reply](#)

Galloway

Can you explain why Galloway is evil? No links please.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 05/10/2005 - 22:41 | [reply](#)

Galloway

Elliot,

Galloway was emphatically opposed to the invasion of Iraq in the most morally inverted of terms, and he was kicked out of the Labour Party after evidence suggesting that he was taking bribes from Saddam was published.

by a reader on Wed, 05/11/2005 - 15:18 | [reply](#)

Galloway

Elliot,

If you still have any doubts, take a look at what Galloway has been [saying](#) on Arab television.

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Wed, 08/03/2005 - 05:41 | [reply](#)

I didn't express any doubts.

I didn't express any doubts.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 08/03/2005 - 17:16 | [reply](#)

Doubts

I know.

I was just outraged by his statements and was trying to find a relevant place to post about them.

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 08/03/2005 - 18:12 | [reply](#)

ok cool, i read your link and

ok cool, i read your link and yeah he hella sucks. just didn't want anyone to think I doubted he sucked :)

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 08/03/2005 - 21:30 | [reply](#)

Trade Justice For What?

Some anti-capitalists held a protest called "**Wake Up to Trade Justice**".

Organisers want to see an end to trade rules which, they say, force farmers in developing countries to compete with cheaper international imports.

So the organisers of "Wake Up to Trade Justice" want people in poor countries to get less food for their money? Perhaps they haven't bothered to think through their position and realise its implications.

Virtually any choice taken by anyone will hurt some people and benefit others. It is impossible to add up, or even to know, what all these costs and benefits are. What we can do is favour institutions under which ideas can be tried out and mistakes corrected rather than entrenched. In this respect free trade clearly wins over "fair trade". Under free trade, people choose the product they think gives the best value. So people who don't produce good products that others value have to change their behaviour. Thus, free trade has a mechanism to eliminate bad products.

In this case, free trade will make African farmers who aren't very good at farming move into jobs they are better at, because the African people actually eating the food don't want what they are selling. Forcing them to buy it anyway is entrenching indefinitely the poverty of all concerned. That is not justice.

Update: Broken link now replaced by a different one. Thanks to a reader for pointing this out in a comment.

Fri, 05/13/2005 - 22:59 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Subsidies?

You're sure this isn't in reference to first world farm subsidies that make it difficult for many third countries to develop a competitive agricultural economy?

(I tried clicking the link, but it appeared to be broken.)

by a reader on Sun, 05/15/2005 - 12:54 | [reply](#)

Re: Subsidies?

Thanks for pointing out the broken link.

If it were a reference to the injustice and harm done by first world farm subsidies, we would indeed be endorsing their protest. Unfortunately it is not. In the words of the organisers (see the new link), "the aim is to challenge the free trade myth and put forward alternatives":

The myth, perpetuated by the rich and powerful states that free trade and privatisation is the only answer to global poverty. Governments and key decision-makers across the world have swallowed this myth. Poor countries everywhere are being forced to open their markets to foreign companies and cheap, often subsidised imports; to stop helping vulnerable producers and to privatise essential services. The results are devastating. The myth needs to be exploded once and for all.

by [Editor](#) on Sun, 05/15/2005 - 13:57 | [reply](#)

Dynamic Institutions and Free Trade

"What we can do is favour institutions under which ideas can be tried out and mistakes corrected rather than entrenched."

Certainly this is correct. I point out this phrase because usually hidden from economic discussion is the essential fact that we live within political entities which define 'the marketplace' and markets through the lens of their familiar institutions. The very meanings of free trade are driven by our diverse institutional views, the ideas of corporation, the ideas of stock and markets, the ideas of banking and currency, the ideas of labor. All of these are institutionalized ideas, often embodied in names we recognize, Wall Street, WTO, World Bank, various Departments of Commerce and Bureaus of the Treasury. Other institutional ideas which function in various markets of the world are less well known but no less influential in promoting or diminishing the wellbeing and wealth of their citizens. Many of these institutions fall under the rubric of what these citizens also call free trade.

Most of us agree we should be attempting to live in a world ruled by reason. In order to do this well, we need to constantly examine our institutions and how they serve or do not serve us.

Free trade is not chaotic or whimsical freedom. For that matter, free trade is not unregulated trade.

Free trade in the highest sense is what we make it through the application of good ideas in an organized and reasoned way to serve the public good (Theory of Institution). Market mechanisms are recognized as well as how they may be institutionally encouraged in the public interest across the broad and changing marketplace(s) of the state(s), the nation(s) and the world.

Economic institutions, like all institutions reflecting the nobility of

human endeavor are not temples of blind worship, or at least should not be. They need to function primarily as places of intelligent discussion and application, constantly reasoned and changeable reflections of our best ideas with constant trial and refinement of these ideas in the world market(s). Without regular rebuilding to recognize the viability of human ideas and change, like all temples of the ancient gods, the Temple of Free Trade will soon fall into ruins.

"What we can do is favour institutions under which ideas can be tried out and mistakes corrected rather than entrenched." At our peril, do not forget this.

by a reader on Sun, 05/15/2005 - 14:30 | [reply](#)

Sanctuary

Sanctuary by Bill Whittle.

Read it. We don't think you'll regret it.

Thu, 05/19/2005 - 11:08 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

Uniforms

So the un-uniformed Kurds and marsh Arabs that rebelled against Saddam, if they were tortured, just got what they had coming to them?

by a reader on Fri, 05/20/2005 - 04:27 | [reply](#)

Re: Uniforms

Did those rebels abuse the sanctuary of Saddam's notorious **reluctance to harm innocents**? Did they fire from the midst of civilians or holy sites because they knew that Saddam's soldiers would not fire back? Did they set traps for those soldiers that relied for their effectiveness on the humanity and self-restraint of those soldiers?

If so, then ... the answer would still be no. No one has torture 'coming to them'. But the argument that Whittle makes about uniforms and the like would then begin - just begin - to apply to them.

by [Editor](#) on Fri, 05/20/2005 - 09:39 | [reply](#)

Uniforms

Did the lack of uniforms protect the residents of Dresden?

by a reader on Fri, 05/20/2005 - 11:47 | [reply](#)

or for that matter...

did taking refuge in their churches and hospitals protect them?

by a reader on Fri, 05/20/2005 - 12:25 | [reply](#)

Dresden (was Re: Uniforms)

A reader writes:

Did the lack of uniforms protect the residents of Dresden?

The British bombed **Dresden** during World War II because it had a railhead and an armaments factory. During World War II the RAF judged that they couldn't do bombing raids during the day because it would cost them too many pilots and planes. And they couldn't do precision bombing during the night. So they flattened Dresden to destroy the Nazi armed forces, killing many of Dresden's residents was an accidental byproduct of that decision.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Fri, 05/20/2005 - 12:36 | [reply](#)

Re: Dresden

A few weeks before the end of World War Two, Winston Churchill drafted a memorandum to the British Chiefs of Staff:

'It seems to me that the moment has come when the question of bombing of German cities **simply for the sake of increasing the terror**, though under other pretexts, should be reviewed ... The destruction of Dresden remains a serious query against the conduct of Allied bombing.'

by a reader on Fri, 05/20/2005 - 23:58 | [reply](#)

Some sarcasm

Oh I understand now. The British were wrong to bomb Dresden. Therefore the Iraqi insurgents are right to bomb Baghdad.

Or is it:

The Iraqi insurgents are no worse than the British were in World War 2. Therefore the Americans fighting them are like those who were fighting the British in that war. They were Nazis. Hence Bush=Hitler. Yes, that must be it.

(A different reader)

by a reader on Sat, 05/21/2005 - 00:44 | [reply](#)

Re: Dresden

Some **context** for that much-quoted Churchill memorandum.

by [Editor](#) on Sat, 05/21/2005 - 01:57 | [reply](#)

Re: Sarcasm

No you don't get it. The principle of sanctuary has been obsolete since at least the start of the 20th century. The bombing of Dresden is just a classic example of this.

To claim that the torturers were motivated by a sense of indignity at the violation of sanctury is laughable.They were probably motivated by the same thing Uday was - The sheer joy of playing god with a defenseless victim.

by a reader on Mon, 05/23/2005 - 15:02 | [reply](#)

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No Magic

Stem cell researchers in South Korea say they have managed to **create** stem cells with the same DNA as sick donors. Some pessimists have claimed that this isn't possible. If someone has found a way to do it anyway, we are not surprised. Human beings are unique among animals in our capacity for critical and imaginative thought. However, we are made of cells that are not spectacularly dissimilar to those of other mammals. Some mechanism that we don't yet understand arranges these cells in a pattern that instantiates thoughts and feelings and so on. For any disease you can think of, one day doctors will understand the human body well enough to be able to cure it. We find these reflections not only robustly plausible, but far more cheering than the idea that the key to immortality is a sufficiently determined refusal to think critically about magical ghosts called 'the soul' and 'God'.

Fri, 05/20/2005 - 09:40 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

No Excuses

There is nothing in **this** report of mistreatment of prisoners by US soldiers in Afghanistan that would make a reasonable person doubt its authenticity or a decent person deny its seriousness.

It is a story of casual cruelty, torture and murder, unmitigated by the heat of battle, force majeure, 'ticking-bomb' necessity, or even good intentions.

The United States authorities will now prosecute the perpetrators of those crimes. We are confident that they will also discover, and do whatever is necessary to rectify, the negligence or institutional failings at a higher level which, it seems likely, were a necessary condition for those crimes to be committed.

None of this has any bearing on the justice of the liberation of Afghanistan, nor of Iraq. Those wars and any future wars of that sort will turn closed societies where casual cruelty and insitutional flaws are allowed to remain entrenched, into open societies that try continuously to root out such problems. But more: the overall war is a war of necessity – a **come-as-you-are war**. The United States did not ask to be attacked, nor did the West choose the logic of what has been or will be necessary to allow its uniquely benevolent and peaceful civilisation to survive. Nor, therefore, can the fear of further such incidents affect any future decision by the United States or its allies to take military action. To consider those two issues as even remotely connected would in the first instance be an insult and betrayal of the liberated. But more importantly it would also be a betrayal of those for whose longer-term protection such action would, if it were justified, be **essential**.

Fri, 05/20/2005 - 22:18 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

A bit strong?

I agree with the sentiment, but not the literal assertion of the strong position that it's wrong "To consider those two issues as even remotely connected."

I think it's right to consider those costs that we can reasonably expect when deciding whether an action is justified.

Again, I agree that these costs are unlikely to be dispositive, when

weighed against the enormous potential benefits of these actions.

But, I think it weakens the case to state it too strongly.

Gil

by **Gil** on Mon, 05/23/2005 - 18:27 | [reply](#)

The NY Times a reliable source?

Pardon me while I barf my dinner. I wouldn't believe anything the NY Times reports without verification from two other independent sources. As far as deaths go of detainees you realize that over five per cent of the prisoners next by the US in WWII died?

by TJ Jackson on Tue, 06/28/2005 - 03:27 | [reply](#)

Democracy, Luxembourg Style

There are hopeful signs that both the Dutch and French people will vote No in the forthcoming referendums on the proposed EU Constitution.

The Eurocrats' attitude will be **'so what?'**

Jean-Claude Juncker, the prime minister of Luxembourg and holder of the rotating EU presidency, told Le Soir newspaper in Belgium that he would act swiftly on Sunday night if France voted No.

He would appear with the head of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Barroso, and demand that all 25 EU nations complete the process of ratifying the constitution, in referendums or parliamentary votes.

Got that? The prime minister of Luxembourg will *demand* that the 25 parliaments and/or electorates of European nations vote Yes – including the ones that have just voted No. If they don't – then he'll ... he'll ...

"If it's a Yes, we will say 'on we go', and if it's a No we will say 'we continue'," he said.

In reality, if it's a No, **we'll** say 'off you go', and if it's a Yes, we'll say 'off we go'.

Thu, 05/26/2005 - 16:24 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Non!

The French people have emphatically rejected the proposed European Constitution. In doing so, they have killed the great project of European political union.

Hurray for them!

The French voted *non* for all the wrong reasons. Nevertheless, this is a moment to be charitable towards them, as **New Sisyphus** has been in a very interesting commentary:

The French, so the story goes, reject what they see as an Anglo-Saxon liberal power-grab in the guise of a greater Europe, while, ironically, the Dutch and the British see in it a rise of a socialist super-state with very little accountability.

Perhaps. There is no doubt that there is some truth to that line of analysis.

[...]

And, yet, at the same time we detect something deeper, something more fundamental. A great nation has been asked to vote itself out of existence, to subsume its identity in a larger mix.

We know not what the ultimate destiny of the French shall be, but it shall not be this, of that we are certain. France is eternal, great and glorious; it shall not whimper and walk off the world stage mixed with Belgians.

Indeed. And along the same lines we note, more pragmatically, that the very fact that different European nations are rejecting the Constitution for diametrically opposite reasons is a strong indication that the Political Union project is not only dead, but will also prove impossible to resurrect in any other form.

Sun, 05/29/2005 - 23:49 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

"Mixed with Belgians"

Very nice turn of phrase.

BTW, in addition to what you say in that post, I think it's notable

that although the French people's Non is being ascribed to their ideological disdain for free markets, the reason why that long-standing disdain has come to a head right now, is to do with the cumulative failure of Franco-German social and economic policy, which has led to chronic high unemployment in those countries (among other ills).

And was it not ever thus that when socialists enact policies that result in economic failure, for many decades before they see the light, they regard this as manifest proof of the inefficiency and inhumanity of free markets; leading to a redoubling of their faith in socialism?

So what has really scupper the Euro federalist project -- even though this is not yet as widely recognised as it was in the case of the Soviet Union -- has been the real world refutation of it's ideology.

by KW on Mon, 05/30/2005 - 15:26 | [reply](#)

Fine Print

The EU Constitution consists of over 400 pages of fine print. Could it be that "the people" smell a rat? While the power of the majority crowd may be sometimes suspect, on matters of plain old common sense "the people" have spoken for their many reasons in their many tongues.

by a reader on Thu, 06/02/2005 - 14:14 | [reply](#)

2003 And All That

In **1066 and All That**, their classic spoof of British history (or rather, of history *lessons*), W.C.Sellar and R.J.Yeatman list the main objective of the Peasants' Revolt as having been:

- a) To obtain a free pardon for having revolted.

They also remark that, having succeeded in that objective, they were all executed anyway.

In today's surrealistic political scene, unintentional self-parody among the Left and among opponents of the war is commonplace and there is no scope for talents of the kind possessed by Sellar and Yeatman. Therefore it is not surprising to find that many take for granted not only that the (**real**, secret) objective of the war is to **steal oil**, but that if a war must be fought, its principal objective *should* be:

- a) That none of our soldiers should ever violate the rules of war.

This has the same logic as Sellar and Yeatman's joke: it is an objective that can only be realistically achieved by surrendering in advance; and it is an objective perfectly compatible with all being executed anyway. Even Bill Whittle, in the fine **essay** we referred to recently, seems to be analysing the morality of the war in terms of which side adheres more closely to the rules of war. By that standard, the Coalition comes out overwhelmingly ahead. But that neither diminishes the crimes that Coalition soldiers do commit, nor is it a valid argument that the Coalition side is in the right.

We make **no excuses** for cruelty, nor do we condone violence that is not justified by self-defence. But we do not confuse the issue of enforcing the law among soldiers with that of what the objective of, or justification for, fighting **is**.

Sat, 06/04/2005 - 13:13 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

objective of, or justification for

The link provided, while filled with the self-righteous indignation I've come to expect from "the world" does not seem to be consistent with "the World's" view point. If the (implied) objective is Saddam, then that objective has been met, in which case coalition forces

could withdraw.

by a reader on Sat, 06/04/2005 - 19:57 | [reply](#)

Really?

I don't think **The World** is committed to the position that that link contains an exhaustive list of objectives and justifications for the fighting. Just some powerful ones that easily fit in a short blog post.

The reader claims that it isn't consistent with **The World's** viewpoint, but since he seems to know what that is, he probably knows that it *is* consistent. It's just not the complete story. And, there's no reason that it should have to be. This is a blog, not a book.

One minor quibble, though: I'd probably change "self-defence" to "defence" (I'd actually change it to "defense", but that's a different matter) since I assume that **The World** condones violence to defend others as well.

Gil

by **Gil** on Sun, 06/05/2005 - 00:38 | [reply](#)

Self-Defense

As far as moral justification, defense of others *is* self-defense – by the others.

/AmE [shudder]

by **Editor** on Sun, 06/05/2005 - 00:58 | [reply](#)

Re: Really?

I stand corrected. **The World** has consistently advocated war under various pretexts. I guess that is **The World** ultimate position - to advocate war.

Let's see, There was "Saddam has weapons of mass destruction!" "He doesn't? Well, it doesn't matter anyway". There was "Saddam has ties to al Qaeda!" "He doesn't? Well, it doesn't matter anyway" There was "Saddam is a brutal ruler!" "We are too? Well, it doesn't matter anyway"

Then there is the Popperianism which somehow infallibly justifies the war. When this fails to convince, **The World** switches to another ideology, the Sharansky doctrine.

by a reader on Sun, 06/05/2005 - 16:20 | [reply](#)

Re: Really?

A reader wrote:

I stand corrected. **The World** has consistently advocated

war under various pretexts. I guess that is **The World** ultimate position - to advocate war.

I advocate peace. Unfortunately there are lots of tyrants and terrorists and if we don't kill or imprison them they'll kill lots of people and generally disturb the peace. So we need to fight a war to get rid of them, then we can have peace.

by **Alan Forrester** on Mon, 06/06/2005 - 02:35 | [reply](#)

war

Well *I* advocate war. Death, blood, gore, pain, all that. And it's not as if we're killing Americans. (Peace later is ok with me.)

We don't know if there are WMDs or not. We do know there used to be, and that Saddam failed to show that they were gone. How are we supposed to feel safe and secure that he doesn't have any if he did have them and then he wouldn't say what he did with them?

Our rulers aren't brutal like Saddam. For example, they let people like you call them brutal, and fail to kill you.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 06/07/2005 - 03:01 | [reply](#)

Don't Ask, Don't Discriminate

The US Army has **dismissed** Sergeant Robert Stout for admitting that he is gay. We agree with **Andrew Sullivan** that this policy is unfairly discriminatory, and is especially ironic at a time of shortage of good soldiers.

But that is putting it too mildly. The "don't ask, don't tell" policy is a cruel and stupid outrage. If the US military fires a soldier because he admits that he's gay, they are effectively handing a free casualty to the enemy. And more: for every gay soldier that the Army fires, several more won't bother applying.

Even that is not the worst of it. This policy is a declaration that we are not fighting a war, we are playing a game. A game of rituals and taboos and arbitrary rules. But the only relevant rules for conduct in the armed forces in wartime are those connected to the performance of military operations. The US Army are worried that gay soldiers might fall in love and refuse to fight. Nonsense. The **IDF** and the **British armed forces** both have gay soldiers, and we have yet to see a report that any of them have become ineffective at fighting because they are in love. Men and **women** work together in those armies too, and in the US forces (including gay soldiers who 'don't tell'). Good soldiers of any sexual orientation are not stupid animals who follow their hormones regardless of morality or consequences. They are thinking beings who are capable of sticking to the hard and dangerous business of fighting to preserve freedom, under all sorts of pressures. We need them to do that, and to honour them for doing so. Shame on the authors and supporters of this immoral policy.

Update:

Please take note, US armed forces, **this** is how it should be done.

Wed, 06/08/2005 - 14:25 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Nothing new

During the civil war General Sherman asked that, and General Grant agreed to, dismiss all Jews from the Union army.

by a reader on Fri, 06/10/2005 - 00:40 | [reply](#)

Re: Nothing New

A reader wrote:

During the civil war General Sherman asked that, and General Grant agreed to, dismiss all Jews from the Union army.

As far as I can tell, this idea **comes from** the pen of Thomas J. Di Lorenzo, who is apparently quoting another historian:

Sherman himself certainly did not believe that "each man is as good as another." For example, in 1862 Sherman was bothered that "the country" was "swarming with dishonest Jews" (see Michael Fellman, Citizen Sherman, p. 153). He got his close friend, General Grant, to expel all Jews from his army. As Fellman writes, "On December 17, 1862, Grant . . . , like a medieval monarch . . . expelled 'The Jews, as a class,' from his department."

In fact, Grant issued an **order** , General Order No.11, saying that:

The Jews, as a class violating every regulation of trade established by the Treasury Department and also department orders, are hereby expelled from the department [the "Department of the Tennessee," an administrative district of the Union Army of occupation composed of Kentucky, Tennessee and Mississippi] within twenty-four hours from the receipt of this order.

In other words, Grant's order said that the Jews were to be expelled from his department. Lincoln got General Halleck to order Grant to revoke this order and he did. Grant has the good grace to be **embarrassed** about it:

During the Presidential campaign in 1868, Wolf had a two hour meeting with Grant and specifically asked him about the charges of anti-Semitism. "I know General Grant and his motives," he wrote at the time, "and assert unhesitatingly that he never intended to insult any honorable Jew, that he never thought of their religion... the order never harmed anyone, not even in thought... He is fully aware of the noble deeds performed by thousands of Jewish privates, and hundreds of Jewish officers during the late war."

The Union army **had Jewish officers**.

The reader might also reflect that any historian who makes the charge that Grant ordered all Jews expelled from the entire army and contradicts this claim in the next sentence, as Di Lorenzo did, has not shown good judgement. In general, Di Lorenzo is an incompetent historian who makes **many errors** of fact and interpretation. I recommend **Battle Cry of Freedom** by James M. McPherson to anyone who wants to understand the American Civil War.

Real reason

Running the risk of being branded a **conspiracy theorist** for attributing hidden motives, I submit that the real reason the army wants to ban gays has nothing to do with worries about falling in love. It simply has to do with many heterosexual men feeling uncomfortable in a 'man's world' around homosexuals. In other words, it's a simple case of homophobia (and in this light the 'don't ask, don't tell' policy suddenly makes sense). But no one likes to admit the problem lies with themselves, certainly not if such admission would also be politically incorrect, and so the problem is claimed to lie in the other party (just as Nazis would rather claim the jews poison the water and ruin the economy then admit they are simply jealous of their success).

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Fri, 06/10/2005 - 10:56 | [reply](#)

source please

"During the civil war General Sherman asked that, and General Grant agreed to, dismiss all Jews from the Union army."

Could you give a source?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 06/10/2005 - 19:59 | [reply](#)

Re: Real reason

Hidden motives are common. In our analysis of conspiracy theories, we give five attributes of (irrational) conspiracy theories. Your theory only has at most one and a half of them and is neither irrational nor a conspiracy theory.

by **Editor** on Fri, 06/10/2005 - 20:11 | [reply](#)

Exactly why does a queer have

Exactly why does a queer have the right to serve? I can think of a number of things that disqualify someone from serving. I mean if you allow queers why would you descriminate a pedophile, rapist, felon, etc. The bottom line is unit effeciveness isn't what concerns the gay lobby. And as far as the effectiveness of woman and men serving together just ask any Navy personnel who has had to do extra duty because a last minute pregancy left a ship short handed how he feels.

This is so bogus. The people who push this clap trap haven't served and wouldn't if they could.

by TJ Jackson on Tue, 06/28/2005 - 03:23 | [reply](#)

erm...

This is so bogus. The people who push this clap trap haven't served and wouldn't if they could.

If this was true, then it would be a non-issue. If the only people who think queers should serve were unwilling to serve under any circumstances, then there would be no queers trying to enlist.

by **Woty** on Tue, 07/12/2005 - 17:59 | [reply](#)

Impending Holocaust Watch

According to the latest opinion polls, the **most likely winner** of the forthcoming Iranian Presidential election is former President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

"regarded as a pragmatist ... has raised the possibility of improved relations with the United States"

says the press. None of the mainstream reports of this, so far, has mentioned Rafsanjani's pragmatic opinion about the Jews of Israel. Namely, that they should be **exterminated by a nuclear attack**.

If one day, he said, the world of Islam comes to possess the weapons currently in Israel's possession [meaning nuclear weapons] – on that day this method of global arrogance would come to a dead end. This, he said, is because the use of a nuclear bomb in Israel will leave nothing on the ground, whereas it will only damage the world of Islam.

Not important enough to mention.

Wed, 06/15/2005 - 00:16 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

grrrr

Damned MSM. It *is* important. God, in the US you could be in trouble if you inhaled pot in college or said something nasty about Mexicans 20 years ago. We can't have racists in office, after all, nor drug users.

But I guess being genocidal must be different from being a racist.

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 06/15/2005 - 01:13 | [reply](#)

Ganji, the leading Iranian dissident facing death in prison

Many Iranian dissidents have called for a boycott of the elections. Some of those calling are now on hunger strikes and facing death. One of them is Naser Zarafshan, the lawyer of the victims of the

chain killings of dissidents back in the ninties.

Another is Akbar Ganji. The leading Iranian dissident who has been in prison for the past six years. He was released for a week a short time ago, where he gave interviews asking for a boycott of the elections. He also asked for an end to the position of the Leader of revolution and the formation of a true democracy. He has returned again to prison by himself and is now on hunger strike.

In prison he has written two important manifestos elaborating on his demand for a secular democratic republic and promoting nonviolent resistance.

You can read his second manifesto in English here:

www.freeganji.blogspot.com

(The translation is still continuing for later sections)

Please support Akbar Ganji, Naser Zarafshan and other dissidents. Spread the news. Ask public officials to take a stance.

by Freedom Lover on Wed, 06/15/2005 - 03:51 | [reply](#)

Devil's Advocate

Is it clear that Rafsanjani was advocating the *use* of nuclear weapons, rather than suggesting that the *threat* of such a use would be sufficient to end the arrogance he criticized?

Maybe something was lost in the translation, but I think that I can read it either way.

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 06/15/2005 - 17:43 | [reply](#)

Re: Devil's Advocate

The "arrogance" in question centres on the presence of Jews in Israel. He says:

Jews should wait for a day when this "extraneous matter" would be removed from the region and the world of Islam, and those who have gathered together in Israel would one day be dispersed again.

To achieve this, he advocates, at the very least, threatening nuclear genocide, and is in fact threatening it. Evidently he would prefer the Jews to leave under this threat – because as he says, Muslims would be "harmed" too if it were carried out – but in reality he and everyone else knows that the Jews are not leaving. And the logic of a threat is that if it is not obeyed, it will be carried out.

Yes, his remarks can be interpreted either as advocating a genocidal attack or the threat of such an attack (and this is no doubt deliberate), but either way, the fact that the probable next

President of Iran advocates even the *threat* of nuclear genocide as a

means of ending the presence of Jews in Israel *is news*. The fact that it is not being reported is itself an event of major significance. What is going on?

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 06/15/2005 - 18:19 | [reply](#)

I agree that it is news and s

I agree that it is news and should be brought up as much as possible, especially to put pressure on the Iranian regime and to delegitimze the elections and its results.

As far as the nuclear issue is concerned, again I agree that there is a real threat. However rafsanjani becoming president or not wouldn't affect that matter at all. President in the power structure of Iran is just a title out there for show. The real power is elsewhere, especially when it comes to the nuclear issue. Rafsanjani is a major element of that real power, president or not.

by AIS on Thu, 06/16/2005 - 00:25 | [reply](#)

Re: I agree that it is news

Good point, AIS. Thanks.

by [Editor](#) on Thu, 06/16/2005 - 00:44 | [reply](#)

Shape of things to come

Dear friends,

I am writing here to let you know in advance how things are most probably going to play out after this Friday (election day in Iran). The past city council elections and parliament elections in Iran were boycotted by most of the people. This came after the huge participation in 1997 and afterwards in support of the reform. This time, after all that has happened since 9/11, the regime in Iran could no longer endure another boycott, another blow of this magnitude to its legitimacy. At the beginning the usual obvious hardliners were nominated and were about to win again, like the past two elections when ordinary people simply didn't participate. But their candidates were considered by the heads of mafia power to be too direct and uncanny to be able to handle the present difficult situation. Rafsanjani has entered the race first and foremost to have the official position once more to go on with the new strategies of buying legitimacy in the international arena. His second and perhaps more important reason has been to stir up the election atmosphere, discredit the too obvious hardliners and bring people into voting booths. But given his infamous reputation they needed still more tactics to reach this aim. So the reformist candidate was barred and then re-accepted by the leader's decree and has ever since been giving a bit more radical mottos. This combination was meant to bring more people to vote, believing they will hinder Rafsanjani or the hardliners from becoming president. So

if the people do show up in considerable numbers and the

reformists win, the regime will have its desired turnout to show as its popular backup. The reformists themselves would be mere proxies for the likes of Rafsanjani. If not, Rafsanjani himself will do the job. In any case they are sure the hatred of hardliners and the sheer despair of the people will bring enough voters to the booths to neutralize a complete boycott. Unfortunately the polls seem to show they are right. About 50 to 55% will probably vote on Friday because of this game of good cop/bad cop that has been staged. After the elections, they are going to resume talks with the United States and most probably recognize the Peace Plan, and so indirectly the State of Israel, to send a nice face to a world that is already looking for excuses to start the bargaining. At the same time, they will pursue their nuclear ambitions. In short, we will have an entire oligarchy of Yasser Arafats, actually more canny and deceitful than him, smiling to the rest of the world and steps away from Nukes.

Whatever may come of this, please remember that there were many men and women who called for a boycott, some from within prisons, and who put their lives at stake to prevent this from happening, that the main student body supported the boycott with all its risks, that there are many who will go with the boycott nevertheless on Friday, and that we saw almost no international support this time when it was so desperately needed.

Anyway, as one of the people, and in behalf of those clueless men and women who are going to vote on Friday for the continual of their servitude, let me say in advance and for all it's worth, how sorry I am about this and all that will come of it.

by AIS on Fri, 06/17/2005 - 03:14 | [reply](#)

:-)

You're awesome, AIS. I'd pray for you if I wasn't an atheist.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 06/17/2005 - 03:46 | [reply](#)

Thanks a lot.(I didn't expect

Thanks a lot.(I didn't expect this :)

But seriously, when you grow up under their boots, you get to know them a bit.

by AIS on Fri, 06/17/2005 - 07:22 | [reply](#)

Well, it seems people didn't

Well, it seems people didn't fall for this good cop/bad cop anymore to the great surprise of many (including myself). The regime is the big loser of these "elections" , with huge internal strife and calls of fraud from the governmental observers themselves. They lost a big

chance to buy legitimacy and continue to deceive this time around.

by AIS on Sat, 06/25/2005 - 00:51 | [reply](#)

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Not Democracy

The British Foreign Office is yearning to be allowed direct and open contact with **Hamas and Hezbollah**. Their excuse:

The British Government is considering a Middle East policy switch that would mean direct and open contact for the first time with the militant groups Hamas and Hezbollah, which are expected to make significant electoral gains in the West Bank and Gaza and in Lebanon...

But the Foreign Office feels it would be hypocritical to encourage democracy but refuse to accept the outcome, even if it means working with groups it finds distasteful.

"Distasteful", indeed!

Hamas and Hezbollah are not democratic parties. They are gangs of terrorists who also participate in elections when it suits them tactically. They systematically intimidate and murder people and should be disqualified from anything that seriously aspires to be democratic. Hamas **murdered** a woman for holding hands in public with her fiance. Hezbollah has a 25,000 strong **army** in Lebanon, where they run a TV station that **incites terrorism**. They also run an **international terror network**. If you can't go out in public and criticise a group without fear of reprisals, then they are not fit to participate in elections. Hamas and Hezbollah are as politically illegitimate as the Nazis were, regardless of their hollow electoral victories.

Sun, 06/19/2005 - 02:35 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

What's Worse Than Banning Intolerant Speech?

Via **LGF** we learn that the Australian State of Victoria's new Racial and Religious Tolerance Act has just been used to prosecute two pastors for

suggesting that the Koran promotes violence and terrorism

The Court ordered them to publish a retraction, and to undertake never to say the like again.

They say they will not comply. Hence, they will go to prison.

When a terrorist is next convicted in Victoria, and claims that his actions were justified by the Koran, will he be convicted under that same Act? And after serving his sentence, will he remain in prison for contempt of court until he agrees to attribute his crime to some other motive?

Wed, 06/22/2005 - 04:04 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Torah?

Not to be provocative but rather, logical. What if two Christian ministers or two Muslim clerics claim that the Torah promotes violence and zionism? Will they have to serve hard time? Do specific passages have to be quoted or would this be Torah bashing in general?

by a reader on Thu, 06/23/2005 - 17:04 | [reply](#)

Re: Torah?

If such a case were ever brought, then the claim that the Torah promotes violence would presumably be considered prohibited in the State of Victoria. But the claim that the Torah promotes Zionism would not, because, to a reasonable person, **Zionism** is not a term of abuse. In particular, it is not terrorism.

by **Editor** on Thu, 06/23/2005 - 17:50 | [reply](#)

Zionism

Unfortunately, reasonable persons seem to be in the minority these

days, and the Zionism=Racism (and related to terrorism and unjust occupation) meme is widespread.

Gil

by **Gil** on Thu, 06/23/2005 - 18:32 | [reply](#)

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Calill And The Carbolic Smoke Ball Company, Redux

There are many frivolous lawsuits brought nowadays. **This** is not one of them:

A Kentucky woman who thought she won \$100,000 in a radio station giveaway is suing for breach of contract after learning that her prize was actually a Nestle's 100 Grand candy bar. According to the below June 22 Circuit Court complaint, Norreasha Gill, 28, claims that she was listening to Lexington's WLTO-FM on the evening of May 25 when host DJ Slick announced that he would award "100 Grand" to the tenth caller. When Gill, the pregnant mother of three children, was that tenth caller, the radio host told her she could pick up her prize the following day at WLTO's studio. She subsequently learned that the contest was a "joke"

WLTO-FM's lawyers will undoubtedly be studying the classic and elegant case of **Calill v. Carbolic Smoke Ball Company**:

We are dealing with an express promise to pay £100 in certain events. Read the advertisement how you will, and twist it about as you will, here is a distinct promise expressed in language which is perfectly unmistakable - "£100 reward will be paid by the Carbolic Smoke Ball Company to any person who contracts the influenza after having used the ball three times daily for two weeks according to the printed directions supplied with each ball."

We must first consider whether this was intended to be a promise at all, or whether it was a mere puff which meant nothing. Was it a mere puff? My answer to that question is No, and I base my answer upon this passage: "£1000 is deposited with the Alliance Bank, shewing our sincerity in the matter." Now, for what was that money deposited or that statement made except to negative the suggestion that this was a mere puff and meant nothing at all? The deposit is called in aid by the advertiser as proof of his sincerity in the matter - that is, the sincerity of his promise to pay this £100 in the event which he has specified. I say this for the purpose of giving point to the observation that we are not inferring a promise; there is

the promise, as plain as words can make it.

Read the whole thing. The parallels are eerie and, if the facts are as reported, WLTO doesn't have a leg to stand on.

However, the plaintiff is asking for *punitive damages*. And that is frivolous and unjust. She should get her hundred grand plus costs and not a penny more. If she wins punitive damages, it will be an injustice almost as great as if she lost the case altogether. The whole idea of punishment where there has been no crime should be anathema to any civilised society.

Thu, 06/23/2005 - 20:55 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Wow Editor!

Thanks for homing in on the important issues and ignoring the trivial stuff like the Real ID Act or the supreme court's decisions on medical marijuana and imminent domain.

However, it could be **The World** doesn't focus on these issues because the data might contradict their theories. i.e. that democracy, far from being a way to get rid of bad ideas, is an excellent way of assuring that bad ideas are institutionalised.

by a reader on Sat, 06/25/2005 - 03:48 | [reply](#)

Democracy is bad...?

Compared with what? Casting runes?

by [David Deutsch](#) on Sat, 06/25/2005 - 03:59 | [reply](#)

Focus

I guess that, being in the UK, **The World's** editors are a bit removed from the Real ID Act and recent US Supreme Court decisions, and so it's understandable that they don't focus on it as much as americans might.

I suspect that they would oppose them, but they would also be aware that these developments have sparked considerable public interest in these issues and are likely to cause many people to support reforms. Democracy isn't perfect or swift to come to the best conclusions, but it seems better than alternative systems of organizing institutions that wield power.

Even the National Review, a pretty extreme conservative magazine, has come out **against** the medical marijuana decision. So, I think that better ideas *can* spread, and democracy can lead to the correction of mistakes, eventually.

The World is doing its part to help spread good ideas so as to help democracy along toward progressing.

What are *you* doing?

What alternative are you proposing?

Gil

by **Gil** on Sat, 06/25/2005 - 06:28 | [reply](#)

Re: Wow Editor!

The principle of avoiding punishment where there has been no crime conflicts directly with both ID cards and the war on marijuana. So the post was actually quite relevant to your examples.

(Don't know what imminent domain is and wikipedia's offline for now)

by **Tom Robinson** on Mon, 06/27/2005 - 22:36 | [reply](#)

Eminent Domain

Tom, try "eminent domain", or anything about the recent Kelo decision.

[Here](#) is a pretty good op-ed article about it.

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 06/29/2005 - 05:01 | [reply](#)

Re: Democracy is bad...?

Collective ownership of a monopoly (in this case a monopoly on the use of force) is good? Compared with what? Collective ownership of the entire economy? It seems to me the world's entire view of democracy revolves around Popper's flawed views on the matter. The views of previous and subsequent thinkers have been largely ignored. e.g.: An economist has calculated that the odds of an individual being in an accident going to vote are greater than the odds of that individual having an effect on the outcome of the election. Did Popper think that individuals must act in conflict with their own self interest for bad ideas/policies to be corrected?

These are types of question that the World will not confront because it conflicts with the World's pre-existing world view.

by a reader on Thu, 06/30/2005 - 02:22 | [reply](#)

re: Focus

Oh come on! The editor(s) can cite some obscure Kentucky ruling, but "are a bit removed from the Real ID Act and recent US Supreme Court decisions"?

by a reader on Thu, 06/30/2005 - 02:29 | [reply](#)

Re: Democracy is bad...?

The problem with not specifying an alternative system for comparison, when one claims that democracy is bad because it has property X, is that one is then blinded to possibilities such as:

- All institutions for human interaction have property X.
- In all institutions for human interaction, there is a tradeoff between property X and property Y, and you dislike Y even more than X. (Here I am thinking partly of the no-go theorems of decision theory such as Arrow's theorem, which it's well worth looking up on Google.)
- As above, but substituting 'all institutions that have yet been proposed' for 'all institutions'.
- Although institutions without the property X or worse are possible, they cannot function in the absence of evolved knowledge that does not yet exist in people's minds. Thus, to give an analogy, merely enacting a copy of the US Constitution for Iraq today would not, in reality, secure the rights and freedoms described therein. Similarly, on the supposition that there exists a better system than, say, US democracy, merely abandoning democracy and declaring that the better system is now in effect would not actually cause the better system to come into effect. X would still be there, and worse.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Thu, 06/30/2005 - 06:28 | [reply](#)

Democracy is bad...

especially when compared to capitalism, i.e. the market.

by a reader on Fri, 07/01/2005 - 18:48 | [reply](#)

The Dark Logic Of Moral Equivalence

The Anglican Consultative Council, whose President is the Archbishop of Canterbury, has voted to recommend that its member churches **divest** from businesses that support Israeli "occupation" of the territories. As **Melanie Philips** said, they did this in response to a report "full of the most inflammatory lies, libels and distortions about Israel".

In an attempt to ward off accusations of bias, they also recommended that churches divest from businesses that support Palestinian violence against innocent Israelis. With this attempt at formal 'even-handedness' the Council betrays its moral bankruptcy and ignorance of the situation in Israel and Palestine as much as with anything else in the report. Palestinian terrorist groups try to attack Israelis and fantasise about destroying Israel. So the Israelis run military operations to stop terrorism and take security measures to prevent murderers from coming into Israel.

The Council are trying to be neutral between Palestinian terrorists on the one hand and Israel on the other. Their **press release** illustrates the **dark logic** of this moral equivalence. In it they do not mention terrorism. Nor do they mention that the Palestinian terrorist groups want to destroy Israel. Nor that their ideologies are based explicitly on wild antisemitic conspiracy theories, and that all the institutions of their society relentlessly transmit these to their children. Nor do they mention that Palestinian terrorist groups regularly **murder Palestinians** for "collaborating" with Israel, i.e. - for warning Israelis who are in danger of being murdered. However, they do manage to squeeze in a reference to "the draconian conditions of the continuing occupation under which so many Palestinians live." The Council's problem is that if they wish to remain neutral then they can't mention the agenda or the crimes of Palestinian terrorists. If they did, then they would have to admit that the terrorists are evil and the Israelis are defending themselves from this evil. So they can only mention the Israeli government's security measures while carefully refraining from putting them into context. And so their 'even-handedness' leads directly to their one-sided condemnation of Israel. The Church of England has sold its soul for the sake of appearing neutral.

Well said.

JL

by JL on Thu, 06/30/2005 - 22:54 | [reply](#)

title

moral equivalence better title than moral relativism. cheers

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 07/01/2005 - 14:51 | [reply](#)

Title

"Moral equivalence better title than moral relativism".

Yeah, I agree...the post being about both, of course, but with equivalence compounding the crime.

by [Carlotta](#) on Mon, 07/04/2005 - 04:00 | [reply](#)

More on the same topic...

Along the same lines,

[have a look at this article](#)

And our [comments on one of the letters](#) about it.

ZionistGuys at [Zionism On The Web](#)

by [ZionistGuys](#) on Fri, 08/26/2005 - 12:19 | [reply](#)

Not Just Bystanders

Milton Friedman once wrote that businesses only have a responsibility to **increase their profits**. For interactions within the laws of a free society, this formula is an excellent approximation to the truth. But when a business is involved with the government of a fear society, not everything it might do to increase its profits is morally permissible.

Microsoft has decided to **block** Chinese bloggers who try to use words like "freedom", "democracy", "demonstration", "human rights" and "Taiwan independence". Contrary to **A Reasonable Man**, we think Microsoft is behaving wrongly here. Microsoft has no duty to prevent the Chinese government from oppressing its citizens, but it should not collaborate with such attempts by acting as an enforcer. This is the difference a man between watching a thug beat somebody up because he is too weak or poorly armed or frightened to intervene, and the same man intentionally blocking the victim's escape route, or offering the thug a heavier lead pipe.

As in the case of international aid which gets appropriated by the very governments that have caused the victims' poverty, a totalitarian oppressor can always arrange matters so that if one wants to help at all, one must collaborate with him and entrench his power. In the extreme case, terrorists do the same when they take hostages. At the other extreme, *any* trade (and some would say any government) creates an element of this moral dilemma, and there is room for disagreement about where a bystander becomes a collaborator. (The interesting movie **The Accused** also explores this issue.) We think that in this case Microsoft could and should have said no to imposing these restrictions, which are so odious to the culture in which it thrives and on which it relies. It said yes, and crossed the line.

Tue, 07/05/2005 - 10:29 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

I think your analogy is a bit

I think your analogy is a bit off the mark. It's more like offering the victim a stick to fight back a little bit rather than offering him nothing until the government allows you to supply him with a machine gun.

Speaking of guns, should gun stores refuse to sell anything because

they're not allowed to sell everything? What about network television and radio in America? Are they morally obligated to stop broadcasting until all FCC censorship ends?

Was it immoral to open a bookstore in Nazi Germany? What if you could offer a lot of great books to people who would otherwise have no access them? You couldn't offer every book, but is this the same as giving a Nazi a larger pipe to beat your neighbor harder?

Is Microsoft operating in China a net good, or net bad for freedom? Will more ideas of freedom be spread through these blogs (even given the censorship) or less?

Perhaps euphemisms will arise to replace these banned words and phrases. Or maybe you can just purposefully misspell stuff. At any rate, banning ideas seems a lot harder to enforce than banning porn.

by Wile E on Tue, 07/05/2005 - 14:57 | [reply](#)

Analogies

Obviously, I agree with Wile E.

To continue the other part of the analogy...it's not at all like blocking the victim's escape route. It's like building him a new narrow escape route. Obviously it would be better to be able to offer a wider one; but if the government would find and eliminate such a wide escape route, the narrow one is much better than the only realistic alternative: none at all.

The World seems to have ignored, or missed, the point of my post and the issue in Wile E's most important question: "Is Microsoft operating in China a net good or a net bad for freedom?" Likewise for Google and Yahoo.

Other good questions:

What is the alternative, and why is it better?

Who, besides irrational outsiders, is Microsoft hurting?

Gil (A Reasonable Man)

by **Gil** on Tue, 07/05/2005 - 16:48 | [reply](#)

Deferential

Your argument assumes the infallibility of the Chinese Government when it declares that they would find and close any escapes they want to, and denies any ill consequences they might suffer from doing so.

When people act deferentially about thugs, and avoid doing things the thugs disapprove of, then thugs needn't go through the trouble

of exercising their power, and displaying to the world their tactics.

This does aid them, and it constitutes abandoning the victims.

Suggesting that there are workarounds available is unpersuasive. If it's so easy to trick the Chinese government, why doesn't Microsoft do it instead of leaving it up to the censored bloggers?

Is Microsoft operating in China a net good or a net bad for freedom?

I deny that is the choice to be made here. And let me remind you that if the Chinese Government thought Microsoft was harmful then Microsoft would be thrown out entirely.

BTW, for what it's worth, I agree **The World's** analogy is flawed. But I don't see analogies as the main issue here.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 07/05/2005 - 22:31 | [reply](#)

Elliot, I'm confused. Ar

Elliot, I'm confused.

Are you suggesting that Microsoft not operate in China, or operate there, but either openly or covertly defy the restrictions that the Chinese government has mandated?

by Wile E on Wed, 07/06/2005 - 00:33 | [reply](#)

Fallibility and Deference

I'm not assuming that the Chinese government is infallible. But I am assuming that they're competent to test whether Microsoft is complying with simple restrictive measures.

I agree that it's possible to cooperate with thugs to an extent that would be immoral, but I think this is not even close to an example of that.

The restrictions are very minor, and the Chinese government has been practicing sophisticated information suppression long before Microsoft showed up there. Microsoft is giving the people a new tool to share ideas and information, with a few silly, minor, limitations. Getting kicked out for violating the laws would be bad for the chinese people, and bad for Microsoft.

I think that the Internet represents a dilemma for the Chinese government. The productivity gains that it offers are too great to pass up. But it's also going to allow the citizens the ability to understand what they're being denied and to organize opposition.

I suspect that the leaders know that their days are numbered and are just trying to postpone the inevitable.

It seems clear to me that Microsoft's contributions in China are helping the people, and accelerating their liberation. This is exactly the sort of peaceful evolution due to the spread of ideas that we

should be cheering on, not sniping at.

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 07/06/2005 - 01:21 | [reply](#)

Re: Fallibility and Deference

Wile E,

I wasn't suggesting a course of action. I would advise you to look more to what I say instead of guessing what I may be trying to imply. If I wanted to say more, I would.

Gil,

Do you think there would be no side effects to the Chinese Government enforcing their censorship themselves?

The restrictions are not minor, and that isn't the point. Doing what they want to avoid getting thrown out is appeasement. The threat to kick Microsoft out isn't going anywhere, and there is nothing to stop the Chinese from asking for more.

That said, appeasement is sometimes tactically justified, and the Chinese Government may be incompetent at deciding what to ask for. So I might be tempted to support this action. But then I read quotes from the linked article like this:

Microsoft said the company abided by the laws, regulations and norms of each country in which it operates.

It is harmful to explicitly legitimise bad governments. And unnecessary.

I rather doubt the Chinese leaders "know that their days are numbered". That would amount to them believing their own ideals mistaken and unworkable.

I'm not sniping, I'm arguing. There is good here, but there are also parts worthy of criticism.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 07/06/2005 - 05:09 | [reply](#)

Alternatives

Every company doing business in every country has to either comply with stupid, harmful regulations, or risk being forcibly forbidden from engaging in its business. This would be bad for the company, and bad for the customers of its goods and services.

It is not always appeasement to comply with these laws. It's a judgment call, and compliance is often better than the available alternatives.

Microsoft isn't electrocuting people, or transmitting their information

to a death squad. They're just generating a popup window that notifies the users that they can't use certain words or phrases in post titles. People can easily get their messages across using different expressions.

The whole point of my original post is that it isn't useful to criticize companies for not accomplishing perfection, when that's not a realistic possibility. What makes sense is to judge whether they are making good choices among actual alternatives. It's not better to forgo the good because it doesn't achieve perfection. Often, perfection is not an option. It's folly to let this imagined perfection become the enemy of the good.

It's helpful to know that there are aspects of a situation that are bad. But, before choosing to pursue another option, you must consider whether that option is actually better.

You didn't answer Wile E's questions, but you felt comfortable saying that Microsoft is in the wrong. That doesn't make any sense to me. It can only be wrong if there is something else to do that's better. Since you don't seem to know what that might be, how you can be confident that what Microsoft is doing is wrong?

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 07/06/2005 - 06:00 | [reply](#)

What Law?

You say that Microsoft has to comply with Chinese laws. But as MSN itself has printed there is **no law** in China forbidding the use of the words in question:

The MSN Spaces code of conduct forbids the posting of content that "violates any local and national laws".

But while China's ruling Communist Party deals harshly with political dissenters, there is no Chinese law that bars the mere use of words such as democracy.

by **Alan Forrester** on Wed, 07/06/2005 - 13:22 | [reply](#)

Re: Alternatives

Gil,

My primary point was just that I thought certain arguments given on the subject were poor.

I think Microsoft has the wrong view of the matter, and to some extent the wrong values. Thus it makes sense for me to say Microsoft is doing things wrong -- at the very least Microsoft is expressing the wrong attitude to the press. (But if they do that, it seems a very good bet their actions could use some improvements too.)

I don't need to know how to improve Microsoft to say this.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 07/06/2005 - 16:12 | [reply](#)

No Law

Alan,

That's interesting. I suspect that, regardless of whether there is an explicit law involved, there were specifications that Microsoft had to meet to be permitted to provide the service. I highly doubt that Microsoft decided to forbid these words and expressions on their own. But, if it turns out that this is indeed what happened, I'll be happy to change my position.

None of us knows all of the details, which I think also argues against claims that Microsoft is acting wrongly.

I'm not saying that Microsoft is acting perfectly, just that the claims I've seen that they are acting immorally have been unsupported by valid arguments.

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 07/06/2005 - 16:33 | [reply](#)

Microsoft PR

Elliot,

I'm happy to agree with you that Microsoft has a lot of work to do to improve their public messages and perceptions.

I *do* think that much of the negative perception is overblown, but I agree that they could and should do a better job of communicating their messages.

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 07/06/2005 - 16:38 | [reply](#)

You are confusing yourselves

You, libertarians just hate to admit that within your ideas there is no practical bulletproof fence against oppression and coercion. And although you talk about coercion and freedom very much, the case with Microsoft exhibits your contradictions. Even if Microsoft were genuinely and actively helping Chinese government to oppress people half of you would disagree on whether Microsoft should be banned from cooperating with China or not. Half of you would always argue that Chinese government is responsible for oppression, not Microsoft.

On the other hand, asking Microsoft managers to be more "moral"

or to promote more freedom is just as ridiculous.

There is no solution to this problem within libertarian infrastructure.

I suspect even, that once a group of people has been given full "libertarian" freedom to organise their society as they want on a secluded island they will most likely end up with stronger people oppressing weaker people in a direct or indirect manner, asserting constantly and unequivocally that coercion is really bad. However, all non-libertarian folk will be immediately accused of being "tyrants" and "oppressors".

Your will never agree that nearly everything is good only up to a point.

by a reader on Mon, 07/18/2005 - 13:31 | [reply](#)

Who is confused?

Aren't you judging Libertarianism by a different standard to everything else? Under democracy, fascism, cannibalism, or whatever else you personally might favor to Libertarianism, people are going to disagree about what the law should say. So why is that an argument against Libertarianism specifically? Libertarian infrastructure will resolve the disagreement one way or another, depending on the flavor of Libertarianism. So will democracy, depending on the flavor of democracy. So what?

You claim everything [meaning Libertarianism] is only good up to a point. But that's only relevant if you know of something that's better than Libertarianism. What?

by a reader on Mon, 07/18/2005 - 14:07 | [reply](#)

Something better than libertarianism

The American political tradition is better than libertarianism.

by **Woty** on Mon, 07/18/2005 - 15:16 | [reply](#)

Who is confused?

No, the problem is not that libertarians are in disagreement about everything. On the contrary, pluralism is a good feature of libertarianism. Your disagreement in this particular case just exhibits a contradiction in libertarianism. But you ignored the contradiction that I described. You prefer to argue about "sideway" point. The contradiction between theory and practice. In theory, libertarians favor freedom and despise coercion. But libertarianism fails to provide a reasonable and practical mean to achieve this. If Microsoft were genuinely oppressing Chinese people as paid for by Chinese government you would still argue that it is the Chinese government that pays for such service and is therefore responsible for oppression, not Microsoft.

If tobacco companies trick people into smoking which gives no

benefits to mankind whatsoever you would still argue that it is a free choice of every individual to smoke or not to smoke and that by putting pressure on tobacco companies would necessarily lead to coercion of just about every business on the planet.

And another interesting point you make: if I am not a libertarian you tell me off straight away. It is a second nature to any libertarian - to think that others are necessarily in favor of "fascism, cannibalism, or whatever".

by a reader on Tue, 07/19/2005 - 11:36 | [reply](#)

Re: Something better than Libertarianism

The American political tradition is better than libertarianism.

To me, these are apples and oranges. The American political tradition is a specific tradition, actually implemented in the institutions of a society and actually functioning. Libertarianism is not an institution nor a specification of institutions but a property which, many people hope, the institutions of some future society may have.

Some - perhaps most - of them deny this. They think they have a blueprint for such institutions. For instance, some of them think that all that is needed is to repeal certain laws and pass others. So they are utopians, but I want to distinguish their utopianism (which, like all utopianism, is irrational) from their Libertarianism.

I entirely agree that the American political tradition is better than any institutions that might be set up today (say, at gunpoint) with the intention that they be Libertarian. On the other hand, I also think that one day the American political tradition itself will evolve into a better state, and that this state will have very Libertarian properties. (Though as some commenters above have pointed out, different people who call themselves Libertarians have conflicting ideas about what those properties are, in detail.) So *that* 'Libertarianism' will be better than today's 'American political tradition'.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Tue, 07/19/2005 - 13:19 | [reply](#)

The Difference

We are saddened and angered by the **terrorist attacks** that took place this morning in London. At the same time, the leaders of the G8 were meeting in Gleneagles to discuss how to try to solve some of the world's problems. The leaders at the G8 summit disagree profoundly with each another about how best to do this. However, they are good people and good people resolve their differences through discussion. Evil people, like the terrorists and the world's various fear regimes, lash out violently and hurt and kill people instead of thinking seriously about how to solve problems.

There can be no doubt that if today's terrorists had had it in their power to murder and maim and bereave ten times as many people, they would have done so with relish. If such people get hold of weapons of mass destruction they will destroy entire cities without hesitation. The West must not hesitate to take action against countries like Iran to prevent them from developing such weapons. If they do, the Iranian government and their ilk will not hold a summit when they disagree with civilised countries: they will threaten or commit mass murder to get their way.

Thu, 07/07/2005 - 14:24 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Glad to see all is well...

...with the folks at **The World**.

by [Solomon](#) on Thu, 07/07/2005 - 19:57 | [reply](#)

Re: Glad to see all is well...

Thanks, Solomon.

by [Editor](#) on Thu, 07/07/2005 - 20:15 | [reply](#)

Re: The Difference

Our thoughts are with you in Britain.

by Michael Golding on Fri, 07/08/2005 - 10:45 | [reply](#)

Iran war should do just nicely

Let's give 'em hell.

by Warmonger on Mon, 07/11/2005 - 06:46 | [reply](#)

Re: Iran war should do just nicely

To whom should we give hell and to what end? And what would it do nicely?

by [Editor](#) on Mon, 07/11/2005 - 08:13 | [reply](#)

Wishing you well

I was stunned. I still am. Glad you are well, and yes, I concur with your views. Pacifism, or otherwise failing to understand the sheer hatred of these terrorists and their capacity for destruction , is a prescription for disaster.

Atheist though I am, God bless Great Britain.

by [Charles Dahl](#) on Fri, 07/15/2005 - 08:05 | [reply](#)

Happy to see that you are all

Happy to see that you are all unharmed in the terrible bombings in London.

by AIS on Sat, 07/16/2005 - 00:57 | [reply](#)

Just wanted

to say I'm glad y'all are ok. I wish the hundreds of people injured and the dead were too :(

Becky Moon

by [beckyam](#) on Fri, 07/22/2005 - 15:08 | [reply](#)

Two Karls

Karl Popper was a great philosopher who **solved** the problem of induction and who shed light on many philosophical problems related to freedom. Popper showed that people learn through critical thought and discussion, not by building their views on non-existent secure foundations. Karl Marx was an intellectual lightweight whose utter misunderstanding of economics, his **antisemitism** and his worship of violence combined to form a poisonous brew that inspired all the terrible tyrants of the twentieth century from **Hitler** to Stalin.

Nevertheless, when BBC Radio 4 held a **poll** about who is the greatest philosopher, Marx was at number 1 and Popper was at number 10.

Why do so many people celebrate Marx? Marx was only one in a long line of philosophers who advocated socialism - the idea that people should collectively own property. But people cannot collectively own property. A given piece of property can only be put to a finite number of non-conflicting uses, and people are fallible, which is why they disagree. When people practise capitalism they decide how property will be used through agreements to which they subscribe voluntarily. Socialists and other opponents of capitalism license one particular group to use violence, or the threat thereof, to steal property from another. Favouring one group through violence prevents critical discussion of different ways to use property, which is anti-rational. Popper argued that we should have an open society in which people are free to criticise and work for the alteration of current institutions through reason and persuasion. Marx's **contribution** to this debate was to say that logic was a creation of the bourgeoisie and so logic is an evil tool of oppression. The workers, Marx said, had a different logic. When Marx had thrown logic out of the window he could say anything he liked and so was free to argue for socialism. Many of Marx's intellectual descendants have used Marx's argument against bourgeois logic to say their opponents are bourgeois and therefore necessarily wrong, without bothering to address their arguments. Thus Marx provided socialists with a way to cut short debates that they would have lost if they had stuck to rational discussion. That is why so many socialists love Marx: he gave them an excuse for their intellectual and moral irresponsibility. If our readers want an example of the sort of confusion that Marx's philosophy helped to encourage, we urge them to listen to the **discussion** on the programme that

announced the results.

People can only really use Marx's philosophy to entrench error. However, we can **use** Popper's insights on knowledge and the open society to puncture the pretensions of dogmatic philosophers, illiberal governments and tyrants, and to understand the nature of knowledge and freedom. Karl Popper and Karl Marx have the same first name, but there the similarity ends. .

Fri, 07/15/2005 - 14:23 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

A brave Popperian on hunger strike in Iranian jails

So true!

A bit OT:

Things are very heated up in Iran right now. One of the most important events of these times is being completely ignored by the MSM:

Akbar Ganji, the Iranian dissident, who is a staunch Popperian BTW, is on hunger strike for the past 35 days demanding his unconditional freedom. In the meantime he has been writing extremely bold and interesting letters and manifestos from inside the prison that are smuggled out.

President Bush has personally demanded for his immediate release. Unfortunately major news outlets are completely silent on this issue, with the exception of New York Sun that has been running articles and editorials about it.

As was posted before, you can read Ganji's letters and manifestos in English here: www.freeganji.blogspot.com

by AIS on Sat, 07/16/2005 - 01:03 | [reply](#)

Voting anomalies

It is sad of course that Marx ended on #1 and Popper on #10. However, polls like this don't really mean that much. I don't mean that in the sense that you shouldn't take the responses of average people seriously. I mean it more literally: that the results don't actually convey very relevant information about the views of the people polled. For example, say you have 10 philosophers to vote on and 9 of them are rational and 1 is irrational. And say 72% of people vote for a rational philosopher and 28% for an irrational philosopher. Then the irrational philosopher will still end up at #1, even though only a minority prefer an irrational philosopher. The reason being that the other 9 'split' the rational vote, with each one receiving 8%. So too, from this BBC poll one can't draw any conclusion regarding the relevant question whether most people prefer Marx or Popper. This can only be seen using a **Condorcet** voting system. If all these same people had been asked: looking only at two philosophers, Marx and Popper, who do you prefer? Then there is no way to know from the results we actually have who would win. It's possible Popper would have beat Marx.

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Sat, 07/16/2005 - 04:27 | [reply](#)

I just wanted to add a little

I just wanted to add a little bit of context to explain why my comment was somewhat relevant to this post:

Islamism , especially in its form in Iran owes a lot to communism. The revolution in 1979 was a half breed communist-islamist one and the basic elements of the ruling ideology have many marxist elements, the hatred of the capitalist, "imperialist" West embodied in the United States being an important example. The hostage taking was partly the result of islamist and marxist groups competing for anti-imperialistic legitimacy. The interrogation and torture techniques of the Islamic Republic are directly inherited from Stalinism....

Now a new stand point, that of the open society is gradually dominating the discourse of the young and educated generation inside Iran, with people like Ganji leading the new way. The events surrounding Ganji's life and death battle is also the clash of the two world views.

by AIS on Sat, 07/16/2005 - 04:39 | [reply](#)

Thanks for the link

Good to see that someone turned up on my Popper/Bartley/classical liberalism site from the link in your piece! And thanks for the information from Iran, I will post that on to my home blog, Catallaxy.

<http://badanalysis.com/catallaxy/>

by **Rafe Champion** on Sat, 07/16/2005 - 14:09 | [reply](#)

I Disagree

Shoddy arguing. I expect better from **The World**. Two examples:

That is why so many socialists love Marx: he gave them an excuse for their intellectual and moral irresponsibility.

I believe that socialists, on the whole, are genuinely persuaded and mean well. Extraordinary claims like their desire for excuses (and thus their implicit admission that they are bad) require extraordinary arguments, which were omitted.

People can only really use Marx's philosophy to entrench error.

This is false. Marx's philosophy can be used for lots of things.

It is misleading. If my friend is a socialist hope is not lost. If my friend remains a socialist for decades, hope is still not lost. I should not assume his views are entrenched. If I do, and treat him worse

as a consequence, or fail to tell him my arguments in the normal

way, then I am doing him a disservice, and helping *cause* this supposed entrenchment. I must avoid thinking of him as damaged, and I must avoid being frustrated by perceived entrenchment when I talk with him. Instead, I must take him seriously as a thinking person.

In our history, there have been effects other than "entrenching error" that have come about from putting Marx's ideas into practice. One effect has been to test some of Marx's ideas (they aren't all testable). Further, the effects of people thinking about Marx's philosophy have included thinking. And the effects of people discussing it have included discussion. All this thinking and discussion was not to entrench error or anything of the sort, by and large it was people doing their best to figure out good ideas.

I want to further add that the defense of capitalism above is incomplete. And I think the ways it is incomplete will jump out at most Marxists, so this is an important oversight. One way it is incomplete is it says capitalism means consensual use of property, but it doesn't address the case of me wanting to use my neighbors' property. It is not obvious that all cases of me wanting to use my neighbors' property are bad. It also fails to address the common complaint of people born into bad situations they do not want.

Finally, statements like "Karl Marx was an intellectual lightweight whose utter misunderstanding" are ad hominem and will do nothing but entrench your point of view. Right?

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 07/16/2005 - 15:45 | [reply](#)

Re: Voting anomalies

Henry,

While you have a technical point, I'd point out that most famous philosophers are crap, and the people who will be most aware of that are probably Popper supporters, so I would expect his votes to be least fractured.

EDIT: BTW, even if they are wrong that most philosophers are crap, I still think Popper supporters are most likely to believe it's true, so the voting phenomenon will still happen.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 07/16/2005 - 15:49 | [reply](#)

Re: Voting Anomalies

Henry -

If Marx had won with 1% of the vote and all the others had received

just under 1%, then your point would hold. But Marx winning 27.93% of the vote is appalling in itself, and would be almost as appalling if he had come third rather than first, and even if every one of the 72.07% who did not rank him first, ranked him last.

So this outrage is not an artefact of voting anomalies.

by **David Deutsch** on Sat, 07/16/2005 - 19:16 | [reply](#)

Appalling

Eh, it's not the end of the world. People have heard of him. Voting for him doesn't mean they're bad people. Most weren't voting seriously. That's ok, it wasn't a serious poll.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 07/16/2005 - 19:26 | [reply](#)

Re: voting Anomalies

David -

Yes, you're right. I worded my point too strongly. The poll does indeed convey relevant information, namely the appalling fact that 28% of people rank Marx first. I should have said only that there is a small consolation due to a *possible* voting anomaly: it is still possible that most people would have ranked Popper above Marx.

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Sat, 07/16/2005 - 20:46 | [reply](#)

Re: Voting Anomalies

Agreed.

by **David Deutsch** on Sat, 07/16/2005 - 21:09 | [reply](#)

Re: I disagree

Finally, statements like "Karl Marx was an intellectual lightweight whose utter misunderstanding" are ad hominem and will do nothing but entrench your point of view. Right?

No. In that sense, the whole contest, and every vote cast, was "ad hominem". Our comment was apt in this context. Many people, even those who have strongly opposed Marx, even Popper himself, have succumbed to the misguided aura of respectability that has surrounded Marx and treated him as though he were a philosopher. Our comment was not an argument. It was a reminder that the Emperor has no clothes.

Update: Think of it as being addressed to Popper, not to Ken

Livingstone.

by **Editor** on Sun, 07/17/2005 - 15:17 | [reply](#)

No Clothes

Deciding people you disagree with don't have clothes is not the way to make progress.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 07/17/2005 - 17:14 | [reply](#)

Fame is the name of the poll game

"Nevertheless, when BBC Radio 4 held a poll about who is the greatest philosopher, Marx was at number 1 and Popper was at number 10."

We might ask, "What is the greatest soft drink?" to a similar audience. Likely Coke would be at number 1 and another as yet unnamed soft drink would be at number 10. Would that poll result be equally unmeaningful?

As to polls, ask a silly question, get a silly answer.

by a reader on Mon, 07/18/2005 - 01:04 | [reply](#)

Re: I Disagree

In many respects socialism is an emotionally appealing ideology. People see poor people going without and naturally think that if only rich people would give their money to the poor everything would be fine and dandy. So when somebody argues against this idea, some socialists are not inclined to accept that argument because they find it emotionally upsetting and what they would really like is an excuse not to listen to it at all. Marx provided them with an excuse. The socialists who accept this excuse are not bad people, but they are intellectually and morally irresponsible even if they have good motives.

by **Alan Forrester** on Tue, 07/19/2005 - 01:38 | [reply](#)

Two Marxes

Thus Marx provided socialists with a way to cut short debates that they would have lost if they had stuck to rational discussion. That is why so many socialists love Marx: he gave them an excuse for their intellectual and moral irresponsibility.

Thus **The World** provided libertarians with a way to cut short debates that they would have lost if they had stuck to rational discussion. That is why so many libertarians love to call Marx

socialist: it gave them an excuse for their intellectual and moral

irresponsibility.

There are 2 Marxes: one as a political engineer (a rather bad one, as almost any other great philosopher though) and one as a great philosopher. What you mentioned here is only his stupid political agenda, nothing more. However, his philosophical ideas are entrenched into many peoples minds: "verification by practice", dialectics, materialistic view etc.. You prefer not to even mention them for public. Otherwise you will have to do a long discussion instead of very short one. In fact, you don't even have a discussion of Marx's heritage. All you have here is a political slogan.

Most of the posts here are like political slogans and become every day less and less intellectually appealing for me. Sorry

by a reader on Wed, 07/20/2005 - 11:41 | [reply](#)

Political Slogans

Most of the posts here are like political slogans and become every day less and less intellectually appealing for me.

Out of curiosity, which blogs do you like better?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 07/20/2005 - 17:18 | [reply](#)

Re: Political Slogans

Out of curiosity, which blogs do you like better?

There are plenty of them nowadays. Some consist of short notes saying mostly something like "You know this guy - Marx. I don't like him" and some have real discussions (while very few can have really comprehensive analysis - but hey, that is just a weblog!).

I have found interesting material here, for example on conspiracy theories or history of Israel. But as I keep reading your posts they move towards the first type of blogs.

Marx is definitely not no. 1, but neither is Karl Popper, whether you like it or not. Defining no 1 in philosophy is kind of stupid anyway. Then why bother discussing who should be in top-10 and who shouldn't?

by a reader on Wed, 07/20/2005 - 18:43 | [reply](#)

They aren't my posts. Who

They aren't my posts.

Who is better than Popper?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 07/20/2005 - 20:00 | [reply](#)

Who is better than Popper?

I am surprised you are still pursuing this question! How can you define? The only thing you can do is to ask "who sells better?" or "who is the most popular?".

Just because Popper suits better to libertarianism as a political movement doesn't mean he is bestest of the bestest. Not long ago people were asked "who is better than Mao" or "who is better philosopher than Lenin". We've seen this all and don't want to go this way again.

Philosophy is more for thought than for charts.

by a reader on Thu, 07/21/2005 - 11:00 | [reply](#)

Thought

What sort of thought never reaches any conclusions about whether one set of ideas is truer than another?

by **Editor** on Thu, 07/21/2005 - 11:04 | [reply](#)

Thought

Philosophy is not a "set of ideas" and neither as a "falsifiable theory". You confuse philosophy with something else, for example politics, or perhaps chemistry. Philosophical system is a system view of the world. Philosophical systems don't get rejected when a new evidence emerges that can falsify one theory and favor another.

Marx saw society as an extension of family and build his economical system on this basis. You cannot say straight away whether he was right or wrong in his thoughts. When it comes to practical implementation of his political agenda only then one can ask "whether one set of ideas is truer than another".

by a reader on Thu, 07/21/2005 - 13:43 | [reply](#)

Re: Thought

A reader wrote:

Philosophy is not a "set of ideas" and neither as a "falsifiable theory". You confuse philosophy with something else, for example politics, or perhaps chemistry. Philosophical system is a system view of the world. Philosophical systems don't get rejected when a new evidence emerges that can falsify one theory and favor another.

We can refute philosophical ideas by argument. For example, a

solipsist might say that the world doesn't really exist and that he made it all up. However, if he is right then vast portions of his own mind are entirely outside his control. He cannot win the National Lottery, fly by flapping his arms and so on. And there are many things about this supposed dream world that nobody understands like dream quantum gravity. So all the solipsist has done is label the vast, complex and only partly understood structure of the real world as a dream. This adds nothing to any explanation of how the real world works and so we can reject it.

Marx saw society as an extension of family and build his economical system on this basis. You cannot say straight away whether he was right or wrong in his thoughts. When it comes to practical implementation of his political agenda only then one can ask "whether one set of ideas is truer than another".

Nope. We refuted some of Marx's ideas above. Economists like **F. A. Hayek** and **Ludwig von Mises** refuted others.

by **Alan Forrester** on Sat, 08/13/2005 - 01:57 | [reply](#)

We

Who does "we" refer to at the end?

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 08/13/2005 - 02:13 | [reply](#)

And Who Shall Guard The Guardians?

On Thursday 7 July, Islamist terrorists **murdered** over 50 Britons in a suicide bombing attack. The Metropolitan Police regard this as a terrible crime and are working to hunt down the people responsible.

However, the Metropolitan Police and the Association of Chief Police Officers are **funding** an Islamic academic called Tariq Ramadan to speak to the Middle Path conference in London on July 24 to the tune of £9000. So what will Mr Ramadan say?

Asked by one Italian magazine if the killing of civilians was morally right, he replied: "In Palestine, Iraq, Chechnya, there is a situation of oppression, repression and dictatorship. It is legitimate for Muslims to resist fascism that kills the innocent." Asked if car bombings were justified against US forces in Iraq, he answered: "Iraq was colonised by the Americans. Resistance against the army is just."

The Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Ian Blair said:

"Clearly this man has views about the struggle in Palestine and the struggles in Iraq which I find very difficult or offensive.

"(But) unless we hear these voices we are going to be in trouble..."

Sir Ian, and the other Mr Blair, do not seem to understand what they are doing. Mr Ramadan, who is barred from the United States for security reasons, is inciting violence against innocent people in Iraq, in Chechnya and in Israel. Incitement to violence is a criminal offence so Mr Ramadan is a criminal. Has he given convincing assurances he will not repeat those opinions again? If not, the Metropolitan Police and the Association of Chief Police Officers are knowingly sponsoring him to commit a crime, and have therefore also committed a crime.

But they think that they are going to be "in trouble" unless they commit it. What sort of trouble?

Update: A correspondent writes "He's not just inciting violence. He's inciting war." Indeed.

Inciting war

That is exactly what Mr. Bush did with his WMD claims in Iraq.

by a reader on Sun, 07/17/2005 - 17:21 | [reply](#)

Re: Inciting War

That can't be right. We have tremendous respect for the British armed forces, but we are sure that if Mr Bush had incited war against Britain, we would have lost by now.

by [Editor](#) on Sun, 07/17/2005 - 17:40 | [reply](#)

And by saying so you admit

And by saying so you admit that only inciting war against Britain is a crime?

by a reader on Mon, 07/18/2005 - 13:09 | [reply](#)

Re: And by saying so you admit

A reader wrote:

And by saying so you admit that only inciting war against Britain is a crime?

Inciting war against a free country is wrong. Saying that we will go to war with a tyrant or a terrorist organisation unless they surrender unconditionally is not.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Tue, 07/19/2005 - 01:14 | [reply](#)

Clarification

Inciting war against a free country is wrong. Saying that we will go to war with a tyrant or a terrorist organisation unless they surrender unconditionally is not.

I know Alan does not mean it is unconditionally the right decision to start a war no matter how bad a tactical move it is, however some readers may not, so it's worth pointing out.

Whether to go to war with, say, North Korea, is not an easy decision. It may be better for us to do it, or it may not, and honestly I don't have the information necessary to decide, because a lot of it is confidential. The principle Alan is referring to is simply that wars of defense (either our own defense, or the defense of innocent citizens of another country who want our help) are legitimate while wars of aggression (for instance, trying to impose one's will on a free democracy that poses no threat) are an entirely different matter.

Similarly, lending my tools to my neighbor is legitimate on principle,

but may not always be a good idea (for example, if he is careless).

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 07/19/2005 - 02:03 | [reply](#)

What about..

inciting war against a nation that commits torture or inciting war against a democratic nation that supports tyrannies in other countries? Is that OK?

by a reader on Tue, 07/19/2005 - 18:14 | [reply](#)

countries

Country A has some bad policies, and some bad people, but its traditions try to correct these errors.

Country B has some bad policies, and some bad people, and has a tradition of trying to entrench badness and prevent improvements.

Would you agree countries A and B are totally different?

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 07/19/2005 - 18:26 | [reply](#)

Define:

Define: Traditions, as in culture (good?); a tradition, as in history of action (bad?)

"its traditions try to correct these errors."

by a reader on Wed, 07/20/2005 - 04:04 | [reply](#)

It's "exactly what Mr. Bush did"

Cox & Forkum's **observation**.

by **Editor** on Wed, 07/20/2005 - 08:52 | [reply](#)

Trouble

The World asks:

What sort of trouble?

in response to Sir Blair's comment:

(But) unless we hear these voices we are going to be in trouble...

I think Blair means that it is **useful to know what the ideas are**

of evil people. If we better understand them, then we can better protect ourselves from them. That's one of the reasons freedom of speech for evil people is important as well that for good people, though of course it's certainly debateable whether this freedom of speech should be extended to inciting violence.

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Sat, 07/23/2005 - 05:23 | [reply](#)

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The Future Of Elian Gonzalez

Fidel Castro **says he is honoured** to be Elian Gonzalez's friend. It is therefore safe to conclude that the Cuban authorities have been straining every sinew to ensure that Elian's experience of life in Cuba is the best possible one, and that he misses no nuance of the case for communism in general and for Castro's rule in particular.

Nevertheless, it won't stick. Elian is eleven now. We predict that despite all that effort, before another eleven years have passed, he will no longer be a communist. You heard it here first, folks.

What makes us think so? Communism, despite seeing itself as rational and humanistic, despite believing in science and in progress, just isn't convincing to people who live it. All the 24/7 output of the relentless Eastern European communist propaganda machines, running in an almost hermetically sealed environment for 40 years, were unable to lodge the idea in the minds of the victims. The moment the guns were no longer pointed at them, the Poles and the Hungarians and Czechs and all the other captive nations just shrugged off the memories of the Young Pioneers and all the values by which they had been living, in many cases all their lives, as if they had been a passing daydream. Even in Soviet Russia, after 70 years, the ideology hardly fared any better. Likewise, once Castro dies, no Cubans will remember for long what they ever saw in him.

Communism, though it resembles religions in some ways, is very unlike them in this one.

Sat, 07/23/2005 - 18:27 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Communism as a dream

The "ideal" is never remembered once it becomes reality.

by a reader on Sat, 07/23/2005 - 22:41 | [reply](#)

I'm Not So Sure

I hope, for his sake, that you're right about Elian Gonzalez.

But, unfortunately, it's just not universally true that people who've

experienced communism never long for its return. It's all too common for people to crave the security of authority over the uncertainty of individual liberty and responsibility. It's also common for people to identify with the authority rather than its victims.

This is an ideological battle that needs to be re-fought constantly, or many will slip back into the horror.

Gil

by **Gil** on Sun, 07/24/2005 - 00:17 | [reply](#)

"It's all too common for peop

"It's all too common for people to crave the security of authority over the uncertainty of individual liberty and responsibility."

Funny. That's what is done in **The World** all the time. All hail Bush! :)

by a reader on Sat, 09/17/2005 - 14:46 | [reply](#)

Re: All Hail Bush

Funny. That's what is done in **The World** all the time. All hail Bush! :)

It's good to know that you read **The World** all the time. But has this given you the impression that we defer to the authority of Bush? For instance, that if he were to revert to his pre-9/11 foreign policy stance we would endorse that?

by **Editor** on Sat, 09/17/2005 - 15:07 | [reply](#)

The Pope Meant It

This is a very bad sign about Pope Benedict.

As Thomas Friedman and many others have pointed out, criticism of Israel is not the same as antisemitism, but systematically singling out Israel for disproportionate condemnation most certainly is. And that is especially so in regard to Israel's anti-terrorism and security policies, which are a moral beacon and an example to all other nations, in a lowering and cynical world.

The Pope should wake up and see that light.

Thu, 07/28/2005 - 23:05 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Conspiracy Theories – 6: Theories That Are Merely False

When Yasser Arafat died, the world's conspiracy theorists predictably went into a frenzy of accusing Israel of having poisoned him.

This was not a conspiracy theory.

Although it fits well into the conspiracy-theoretic world view because it shares some of the attributes of conspiracy theories, it lacks a key attribute by which we recognise conspiracy theories as irrational and as false. As we have **said in the first post** in this series, a conspiracy theory is:

- an explanation of observed events in current affairs and history (✓) ... which
- alleges that those events were planned and caused in secret by powerful (or allegedly powerful) conspirators (✓), who thereby...
- benefit at the expense of others (✓, sort of), and who therefore...
- lie, and suppress evidence, about their secret actions (✓), and...
- lie about the motives for their public actions (✗).

For the Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to have had Arafat poisoned, he would not have needed to lie about his motives, only his actions. Sharon and his government had said many times that Arafat was a mass murderer and actively engaged in terrorism, so their publicly announced and defended policy of targeting such people **would in principle apply**. It was only out of expediency that they had decided not to kill him. This means that the operation, had it existed, would have required no **dupes**: the active cooperation of only a few senior officers, politicians, undercover agents, and possibly a military scientist or two would have been needed, and *all of them could have been informed of the operation's real nature and its real purpose*. Hence there would have been no need for the impossible task of **promoting dupes to conspirators**, which is an archetypal flaw of conspiracy theories.

Lest any readers misunderstand our example here, we must stress that it is not even remotely plausible that Sharon had Arafat killed. But that is because of the specific political, military and moral

circumstances, and not, as in the case of conspiracy theories,

because the idea is irrational in its form.

Fri, 07/29/2005 - 10:59 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Yellow Cake

"an explanation of observed events in current affairs and history (✓)
... which
alleges that those events were planned and caused in secret by
powerful (or allegedly powerful) conspirators (✓), who thereby...
benefit at the expense of others (✓, sort of), and who therefore...
lie, and suppress evidence, about their secret actions (✓), and...
lie about the motives for their public actions (✗)."

Conspiracy theory:

I understand. Its like yellow cake and outing of Valerie Plame.
Sometimes it really is Karl Rove and a plan of the influential to
distort reality. Sometimes it is only a conspiracy theory about
yellow cake and Saddam Hussein. On the surface both meet the
criteria. The proof is in the pudding (or cake as it were).

by a reader on Fri, 07/29/2005 - 13:57 | [reply](#)

Re: Yellow Cake

Neither the theory that Saddam's regime sought to purchase
uranium from Niger, nor the theory that Karl Rove sought to
discredit Joe Wilson by drawing attention to his wife's involvement
in having him sent on his mission to Niger, is a conspiracy theory.
Furthermore, both theories are highly **plausible**.

by [Editor](#) on Sat, 07/30/2005 - 13:02 | [reply](#)

Conspiracy like Cake batter

So it would appear that both are highly plausible conspiracies
convoluted and tangled together as each may be by the ingredient
mix of truths and fictions. See above. It will be very hard to
completely separate conspirators/players and their roles in this
because of the juiciness of the yellow cake story and how it serves
to connect the figments of recent history. The lessons in this are
many. That's my theory and I am sticking to it until proved
otherwise.

by a reader on Sat, 07/30/2005 - 18:08 | [reply](#)

Simple minds take exception to conspiracies

A dictionary definition of a conspiracy theory is: A theory that
explains an event or set of circumstances as the result of a secret
plot by usually powerful conspirators.

There is no mention of a requirement of dupes being involved.
There doesn't have to be any dupes working on behalf of the
conspirators.

You say in part 2, "That is one reason why, in practice, conspiracy theories are always false." Always false? Have you ever heard of price fixing? Corn syrup, milk, gasoline, all of these products have been price fixed in regions around the country. So there are groups of people who meet in secret and decide the price of products. Those are conspiracies! And they involve greedy capitalists! Those events really happened whether you want to believe them or not. I'll give you the fact that lots of the theories are out in left field and very unbelievable, but to bury your head in the sand and say no one conspires is just naive. Simple minded people just cannot contemplate how to put a conspiracy together so, in their minds, none exist.

And the government is never involved in secret projects on unsuspecting people, oh no, never. Ever heard of the Tuskegee Syphilis study, the CIA LSD study, or Project MKULTRA? These were secret plots by powerful conspirators. Or do you claim all of the subjects were just volunteers with full knowledge of what was to happen to them? If those people did not know the plot, then those projects fit the description of a conspiracy theory.

by a reader on Thu, 10/11/2007 - 21:47 | [reply](#)

Re: Simple minds take exception to conspiracies

It seems that all the examples you have given are things that you disapprove of, but there is nothing in your dictionary's definition that requires that. According to it, anything done by two or more powerful people that has some effect and is not done live on television is a conspiracy. In fact, being powerful is not stated as a necessary condition, so any claim that two or more people have done anything at all, that has had any effect at all, counts as a conspiracy theory according to your definition.

Also, none of your examples are conspiracy theories by our definition. Therefore, pointing out the former has no bearing on whether the latter are ever true. It does not address our argument.

by [Editor](#) on Mon, 10/15/2007 - 04:00 | [reply](#)

A Photo-Fisking

Here's a "rare but effective" **photo-fisking** by Michael J. Totten (via **InstaPundit**).

Will Juan Cole respond with the same grace as **Molly Ivins**? Don't count on it.

Tue, 08/02/2005 - 16:52 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

The Power of anti-fantasies

Apparently the BBC has even been able to produce **a film which proves that all our terrorist nightmares are no more than a fantasy**. And there's more. That fantasy is created by ... a **conspiracy** between neoconservatives and the islam.

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Wed, 08/03/2005 - 05:47 | [reply](#)

President Bush Takes 'Intelligent Design' Seriously

President Bush is the latest person to have been fooled by the disingenuous pseudo-scientific **claptrap** called '**Intelligent Design Theory**'. This purports to provide a scientific critique of the prevailing theory that the complex adaptations in living things came about through **Darwinian evolution**, i.e. through many rounds of random genetic variation and natural selection. Instead, it proposes that they were intelligently designed. The President has called for schoolchildren to be "**exposed**" to this "alternative".

It is sad that the President has an embarrassingly deficient grasp of science. But, let's face it, **so do most people** (see the Appendix and weep). Even though the vast majority of the population, including President Bush, are subjected to a dozen years of daily science lessons as children, including evolution lessons, very few of them could tell you what Darwin's theory of evolution is, let alone why it is preferable to any given crackpot alternative. There is no reason to assume that an Intelligent Design lesson would be any more effective than an algebra lesson or a French lesson.

So the issue is symbolic rather than practical, both for schoolchildren and for the President. Fortunately, like most people, the President does not work in a laboratory. His flawed understanding of scientific method makes little difference to anything important.

Fortunately too, unlike his political opponents, he does know the difference between **war** and other types of struggle. And between right and wrong. And between **liberty and tyranny**. And between **the West and its enemies**.

Thu, 08/04/2005 - 13:59 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

Arrogance, ignorance, and stu

Arrogance, ignorance, and stupidity are evident in this little rant. Glad to see you have such a vast grasp of the universe that you "know" the truth. Can you show us your Noble Prize (for fiction)?

by a reader on Thu, 08/04/2005 - 22:25 | [reply](#)

Re: Arrogance, ignorance, and stu

"are evident"

Are you absolutely sure you "know" that?

by [Editor](#) on Thu, 08/04/2005 - 22:56 | [reply](#)

Learning about ID theory

Indeed, it's not a good idea to expose children to bad science or pseudoscience as a serious alternative to real science (though I favor freedom of education, and so do think **schools should be allowed to teach it**). However, I do think a discussion of Intelligent Design should be part of any course teaching evolution - not as a way of weakening the belief in evolution, but as a way of strengthening it. Thus, the critique by ID and others of evolution should be discussed so that it can be shown how the critique fails. Indeed, standing up to experiment and criticism is how scientific theories become firmly established. And understanding how the critique of a theory fails helps one understand that theory.

ID-type arguments against evolution were there from the beginning, in the 19th century (e.g. how can evolution explain complex things such as an eye?), and actually were quite sensible in the beginning, but evolution has succeeded quite well in countering those arguments.

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Fri, 08/05/2005 - 05:58 | [reply](#)

Hello stu

Nobel prize, not Noble prize. You don't have to believe me. You can look it up.

by a reader on Sat, 08/06/2005 - 14:29 | [reply](#)

Re: Learning about ID theory

Agreed on all counts. And a further reason for explaining Intelligent Design Theory *to those who want to listen* would be that the fact that it is taken seriously by so many people is an important fact about current affairs.

But we should perhaps add that ID theory, as currently promoted, is more than just the venerable (and reasonably respectable) Argument From Design. It also includes, among other things, a slew of silly misrepresentations of perfectly ordinary disputes within evolution theory, as 'flaws' in the theory.

by [Editor](#) on Sat, 08/06/2005 - 15:49 | [reply](#)

ID arguments

Henry Sturman,

You make some reasonable points. However, the driving thesis of

ID, that there are gaps in the modern theory of Darwinism, is one that the modern theory openly addresses. If you quickly examine public school earth sciences textbooks, you will find - over and over again - cautionary phrases used: such as "evidence suggests", "findings so far indicate", "astronomers believe". Scientists are not ramming their "gospel" down the throats of innocent kiddies. They acknowledge they do not have the key to the absolute answer - but their driving thesis is that we need to keep looking. Then, of course, there is the problem that ID predicts nothing, explains nothing, illuminates nothing - except the enduring and profound mystery of faith - which is why it belongs in philosophy/religion classes, not science.

by Jody Tresidder on Tue, 08/09/2005 - 13:47 | [reply](#)

Intelligent Falling

This is quite funny. Have you seen it?
www.theonion.com/news/index.php?issue=4133&n=2

by AIS on Sun, 08/21/2005 - 21:04 | [reply](#)

INTELLIGENT DESIGNERS AND UNIFORM FIELDS

..Please bear with me..I always have much to say..

String theorists and mathematicians allude to the required extra dimensions as either too small to perceive or too large, and explore manifold theories and other constructs to model infinitesimal point notions. The information continuum and dimension stares me in the face each morning when I wake to the faces of my family and when I stare at myself in a mirror. The information dimension is certainly not invisible.

If one looks at a tree and believes as I do, that the philosophy of the tree is simply antigravity then the inevitable question arises: why is the tree a fractal geometric shape and not uniform and predictable like the gravitational field we imagine? Can a small part of the reason be that the model of the gravitational field is itself flawed in some respect?

The lure of physical realities being perfectly described by uniform equations and power laws is attractive but, much like the failure of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides to continue to perform effectively on factory farms as advertised, modeling reality and generalizing with uniform power laws representing uniform fields leads us inevitably to uncertainty and even breakdowns in the ability of a model to predict. Uncertainty is in part our lack of profound or integrated reflection and knowledge of a subject; uncertainty is itself introduced with physical models that gloss over "imperfection" in favor of ease of calculation without considering all of the facts associated with the subject. Scientific determinism and mechanism applied to life is friendlier, understandable and gracious

up until the un-thought of cataclysm or discontinuity occurs.

Discontinuity is at the essence of life form in this universe.

The mathematical methods of calculus were tools invented to extrapolate our imagination and ideology of uniform fields and geometry that we could see and touch to an imaginary, infinitesimal level. To project perfectly formed fields and surfaces onto our perfectly formed mathematical ideology we had to introduce infinity and imagine what sequential and reproducible pattern any given surface would follow should we progressively approximate it with slices approaching infinitely thin widths; an extension of Archimedes' method and brilliance. But with real life and real materials the slices describing the surface in fact do not follow our ideal model once they reach a certain scale but rather tend to follow a fractional progression or irregular and perhaps random sequence towards the infinitesimal yet, all the while, following the average shape we imagined at our narrow bandwidth of thinking and measurement and, of course, within our means of manufacturing. A real surface and shape is everywhere discontinuous and nowhere near as ideal as we like to think as we approach the infinitesimal where our models break down. In fact, many applied scientific methods use empiricism to model what happens after the discontinuity occurs in many descriptive models of physical phenomenon.

Even the most deeply entrenched quantum entities such as the charge of an electron are approximations and ideology. Cite the observation of fractional charges in 1998:

<http://nobelprize.org/physics/laureates/1998/press.html>

Perhaps this is yet another clue to the requirement for a more robust and integrated mathematical treatment or cataclysmic improvement in our model of reality and physical fields. There were many earlier clues such as the quandary of the equivalence principle and then perhaps again when we realized that there had to be a thing called dark matter to account for strange velocity anomalies observed in galactic structures. Grounded on earth perhaps puts us at the trunk of the afore-imagined fractal gravitational field and reveals to us the strange equivalence of feathers falling as quickly as lead weights that somehow goes against our intuitions.

My personal belief is that every decision, idea and action is both flawed yet reflective of the perfection and beauty that can be observed both in nature and fostered over time in the communication and creative exchange with others (the scientific method). The notion of an intelligent designer is both foreign and unnatural that rubs against a sense of personal freedom even though this sense can be hedonistic and ideal in itself. This is probably the same feeling that many who are grounded in the stability of the objective scientific method or other such pattern of describing or controlling environment would have when considering the paradigm constructs and physical laws or controls as fleeting. Yet there is a universal line of balance where personal hedonism is balanced by realities of personal tragedies that eventually happen to everyone. In this respect the notion and interjection of an

intelligent designer is possibly less frightening than accepting the disquietude and inevitable entropy resulting of free will of all things in the universe. Intelligent Design is a concept that extends the safety and comfortable protection of determinism and continues to gloss over the imperfection introduced by the free will of all things combined in the universe (the universal pull of entropy).

Determinism is ultimately balanced by free will in cataclysmic explosions where new emergences can replace and consume old. Determinism and perfect symmetry are broken by creation, are shattered by supernova and other life and death cycles of creation, are continuously expanding in depth, and are confounded by the connection we have to everything else each with purpose to survive the miraculous and perfect journey through life.

by **Peter J Slack** on Mon, 10/10/2005 - 03:09 | [reply](#)

To Link Once To A Holocaust-Denying Web Site May Be Regarded As A Misfortune. To Do It Twice Looks Like Carelessness

Most decent people writing on the internet take care not to link to hate sites, such as those promoting antisemitism or Holocaust denial, if they can possibly help it. When they do have to link to them, for instance in order to illustrate a point about the hate-promoting ideologies themselves, they accompany the link with a warning of the evil that lies at the other end.

Adhering to such a policy is important for several reasons, one of which is that one does not want to become a source of publicity for hate sites, either directly or by increasing their score in search engines. Another is that one has a responsibility to readers, a proportion of whom must be young, or newly interested in the field in which one is writing, not to seem to endorse false claims such as Holocaust denial, antisemitism, and the associated **conspiracy theories**.

Wretchard of Belmont Club has not been adhering to such a policy. As we noted [here](#), he recently linked to a major Holocaust-denying site, without comment. **Today** he has linked to an extreme antisemitic site (National Journal), again without comment.

On the first occasion, the passage that he quoted contained nothing directly hateful: it was merely a rather strained interpretation of George Orwell's writings, which compared Western media today with totalitarian ones, and also happened to contain the mistaken opinion that the Allied bombing campaign in World War 2 was genocidal. But one does not have to look far to see the role that such ideas play on that site, and the rest of the essay from which the quote is taken contains explicit Holocaust denial. On this occasion, again, the page that Wretchard links to contains explicit antisemitism and Holocaust denial, and the main content of the page is a deranged attempt to deny that anywhere near six million Jews could have been murdered, apparently on the basis of a misprint in a copy of the Daily Mail in 2003. Again, the passage that he quotes contains none of the hateful material.

We have seen no trace in Wretchard's own writings of any ideology of hate. Quite the contrary, he seems to be a passionate supporter of Western values. But his policy (or carelessness?) in this regard is

not right. We urge him to be more careful about the sites he

chooses to link to in future.

Sat, 08/06/2005 - 14:57 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

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The New Rosa Parks

Cindy Sheehan has been causing a bit of a stir by following President Bush around trying to ask him why he killed her son. Her late son was a Marine who was in fact killed by the enemy. She seems to have **changed her story** about the President since she met him last year. But anyway, now a holy man, the Reverend Lennox Yearwood (leader of "the Hip Hop Caucus, an activist group") has called her the "**Rosa Parks of the anti-war movement**". We agree. Just like **Rosa Parks**, Cindy would do a lot of good if she tried her very best to get on a bus, sit down quietly in the seat of her choice, and ride it all the way home.

Update: Solomonia has two good posts which anyone interested in the Cindy Sheehan phenomenon ought to read: **Not a Saint** and **A Judenhass Horse**.

Fri, 08/12/2005 - 01:23 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

How many children has the editor lost in the Iraq war?

by a reader on Fri, 08/12/2005 - 13:25 | [reply](#)

Don't "Son" Us

It is not the case that the victim of a catastrophe has the right to immunity from criticism when they express a public opinion about its nature, cause, or proposed remedy.

As Christopher Hitchens said, **don't "son" us**. See also the **chickenhawk argument**.

by **Editor** on Fri, 08/12/2005 - 15:29 | [reply](#)

How many parents has the editor lost in the Iraq war?

I guess you can count grandparents, aunts, and uncles. But not cousins or ants.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 08/12/2005 - 20:02 | [reply](#)

It is a simple question, Editor. How many?

by a reader on Sat, 08/13/2005 - 00:31 | [reply](#)

Another simple question:

Why do you ask?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 08/13/2005 - 01:13 | [reply](#)

Re:Another simple question:

Because I want to know what price the editor has paid in support of his agenda. I believe at heart he is a socialist, and like most socialists he wants **other** people to pay the price.

by a reader on Sat, 08/13/2005 - 15:02 | [reply](#)

Criticism of public opinions

It is not the case that the victim of a catastrophe has the right to immunity from criticism when they express a public opinion about its nature, cause, or proposed remedy.

I agree, but making fun of someone (even as gently as was done here) isn't necessary for criticism, and it's not very persuasive. At best, it's encouraging to people who already agree with the criticisms -- unless it comes across as insensitive (which it does to me in this case). I disagree with her claim that Bush has killed her son. It's wrong for her to do so, and it's wrong for people to encourage her to do so. I'm sorry her son is dead.

Becky

by **beckyam** on Sun, 08/14/2005 - 19:13 | [reply](#)

Re: Criticism of public opinions

We have exercised restraint in our comments in deference to Cindy Sheehan's loss and that of her family and out of respect for her late son Spc. Casey Sheehan. If you disagree that we have, please read Solomonia's posts, themselves appropriately restrained, that we refer to in our update above.

by **Editor** on Mon, 08/15/2005 - 00:42 | [reply](#)

Public figures and criticism

Nobody is seeking out grieving parents of fallen soldiers to criticize them.

Sheehan opened herself to criticism when she made herself into a public figure. She has spent the last year speaking at anti-war meetings often with very questionable (anti-Semitic and pro-terrorism) associates.

She stepped into the public square and appears to have spent the last year trying to grab the limelight. Now, she has it.

by a reader on Mon, 08/15/2005 - 01:37 | [reply](#)

Re: Sheehan

Her web site (Crawford Peace House) states:

"Israelis deserve to carry on the activities of daily living without fear of being blown to bits." Is this an example of anti-zionism?

by a reader on Mon, 08/15/2005 - 03:04 | [reply](#)

"Chickenhawk" Argument

The following is a quote from the NY Times on the web dated February 28, 2003:

"Mr. Wolfowitz, the deputy defense secretary, opened a two-front war of words on Capitol Hill, calling the recent estimate by Gen. Eric K. Shinseki of the Army that several hundred thousand troops would be needed in postwar Iraq, 'wildly off the mark.'"

The other "front" was his gross underestimation of the cost of the war.

I fully agree with the Editor's view that failure to have served in the military in no way should limit a persons right or obligation to speak out on important issues of war and peace -- particularly if one is in a position of leadership. However, those who have the responsibility for developing war strategies and fighting plans (particularly if they have no military experience or training) also have a duty to listen especially closely to those who have such training and experience.

Although, as noted in previous posts, I question some aspects of the strategy adopted to combat Islamic extremists and the terrorism that they spawn (e.g. focusing on Iraq to the exclusion of other potential targets, and perhaps, as a result, actually contributing to unnecessary setbacks and losses), I have no hesitation in ultimately supporting this "war," because it must be waged in defense of fundamental values and human progress. Nevertheless, the above quote reflects, at least from my perspective, the often tragic way our effort in Iraq has been implemented. The war in Iraq, despite progress on some fronts, is in many important respects floundering and the outcome remains uncertain. Gen. Shinseki was canned, at least part, because he spoke out about what history appears to be showing was really

needed.

Those who haven't served or who have no real military training or experience (and Wolfowitz was not alone in this regard in the Administration), certainly have the right and the obligation to speak out, but they also have an obligation to listen carefully (despite ideological and political proclivities) to those who by experience and training are most capable of helping to develop the best possible strategy and tactics. Brave men and women's lives are at stake, as well as much, much more.

by [Michael Bacon](#) on Mon, 08/15/2005 - 14:50 | [reply](#)

Re: "Chickenhawk" Argument

they also have an obligation to listen carefully (despite ideological and political proclivities) to those who by experience and training are most capable of helping to develop the best possible strategy and tactics

Indeed.

In what way does the experience and training of a high-ranking military officer qualify him or her to judge issues like "if we delay for two years to undertake a crash programme to recruit and train hundreds of thousands more troops, will Saddam use the time to stockpile more chemical and biological weapons and missiles to use against them when they attack?" Or "is such a recruitment programme politically practicable?" Or "how far can we deplete our strategic reserve before the North Koreans are tempted to resume military adventurism?" Or "to what extent would the deployment of a large occupation force inhibit the evolution of the Iraqi political culture?"

Would the answers to such questions have been relevant, at the time, to the Administration's Iraq policy?

Are the answers relevant today, to judging how successful or unsuccessful that policy has been so far?

What sorts of experience and training best qualify a person to answer such questions accurately?

Were there any high-ranking officers with experience and training similar to that of Gen. Shinseki who endorsed the Administration's policies? If so, would adopting Gen. Shinseki's policy have been evidence that the Administration had not listened carefully to those officers?

by [Editor](#) on Mon, 08/15/2005 - 15:47 | [reply](#)

Re: "Chickenhawk" Argument

The training and experience provided to high ranking officers in the modern US military, because of its scope and sophistication, might

well be helpful, but I can't see that it would necessarily provide any

particular insights into answering the more strategic and policy oriented questions you list in your first full paragraph.

The answers to your questions would, I agree, be very relevant, at the time, to the development of a successful and timely Iraq policy. Of course, asking these and other important questions, and getting the answers right, is the hard part, and I do not in any way mean to make light of the difficulty.

I don't think the answers are relevant to the question of the success or lack of success of the policy today. To answer that we must look to the facts and circumstances as we find them today, and how we think the facts and circumstances will play out going forward.

A sound moral and ethical compass, domestic political acumen and experience in international political, economic and cultural affairs (perhaps with that helpful dose of training of the kind provided to high-ranking officers in today's military), would be the best overall experience.

Rarely, of course, can all of this be found in one individual, or even in a handful. Every Administration is served by a cadre of people, both in and out of government, who provide these types of experiences and knowledge. Certainly, this Administration went through an extensive consultation exercise, including consulting with a number of high ranking military officers.

I am far less certain how many high ranking military officers wholeheartedly supported the effort with fewer troops (a question regarding which they had particular knowledge and experience), even if it meant some delay in launching the war -- I think your reference to "two years" is greatly exaggerated (to make a good point no doubt), but that discussion is more complicated.

I believe that there is a good deal of evidence to support a reasonable view that a very substantial number of high ranking military officers (active and retired) and others, supported the war effort, but strongly recommended (from the start of the war, and regularly thereafter - since the need for higher troop levels has been apparent to many objective observers at least from the end of the first round of fighting) that additional troops be provided.

Having ignored and continuing to ignore that advice does not mean that the Administration didn't and doesn't listen carefully to those it chooses to seriously consult, including high ranking military officers. It could, however, mean that we have much greater difficulty and sacrifice many more lives than necessary -- without achieving our goals. The jury is, I believe, still out on this question.

Let me reiterate something I said in a post some time ago. I am not arguing for cutting and running in Iraq. If anything, this is an argument for more troops, primarily because the cost of failure now could be catastrophic. Nevertheless, I see nothing to be gained by failing to look at things clearly (clearly, of course, in my opinion), warts and all.

Shinseki was not canned

Gen. Shinseki was canned, at least part, because he spoke out about what history appears to be showing was really needed.

By the way, factcheck.org says this is a pure **myth**, propagated by John Kerry among others.

by **Editor** on Tue, 08/16/2005 - 12:31 | [reply](#)

Factcheck

Your are correct.

Factcheck says: "It is true that Shinseki told the Senate Armed Services Committee on Feb. 25, 2003 that 'something on the order of several hundred thousand soldiers' would be required for an occupation of Iraq. It is also true that Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz called that estimate 'wildly off the mark' in testimony to the House Budget Committee on Feb. 27, 2003. And it is true that the general retired several months later on June 11, 2003. But the administration didn't force General Shinseki to retire. In fact, The Washington Times reported Shinseki's plans to retire nearly a year before his Feb. 25, 2003 testimony."

I obviously didn't check MY facts on this specific point, and I regret the mistake. I believe that the Factcheck item does, however, reconfirm that the advice was given to the Administration, and Wolfowitz's response to that advice.

The main issue today is whether in fact we need more troops to secure Iraq, and whether without such troops there is a material risk of failure.

Thanks for the correction.

by **Michael Bacon** on Tue, 08/16/2005 - 13:19 | [reply](#)

Re: Factcheck

Indeed that is the main issue. But in regard to the side issue: doesn't that mean that there is now less evidence than you thought there was, that the Administration did not listen carefully to a proper range of qualified people?

by **Editor** on Tue, 08/16/2005 - 15:57 | [reply](#)

Yes

Yes. While it does not speak directly to the question of whether they listened carefully, it is relevant to answering that question. Whether or not they listened carefully, it's direct evidence that they did not in this case (and perhaps therefore don't in most all cases) take revenge in the form of trying to fire someone whose private advice

and public remarks makes policy goals more difficult to achieve politically -- even if they believe that the advice and public remarks were "wildly off the mark."

by [Michael Bacon](#) on Tue, 08/16/2005 - 20:34 | [reply](#)

Restraint

We have exercised restraint in our comments in deference to Cindy Sheehan's loss and that of her family and out of respect for her late son Spc. Casey Sheehan. If you disagree that we have, please read Solomonia's posts, themselves appropriately restrained, that we refer to in our update above.

I don't know if I have said this before here, but I really appreciate this site and the effort that goes into the articles. I'm definitely not a fan of what Cindy's been saying, and my problem with the statement had little to do with Cindy's having lost a son. It's a general distaste for people being poked fun at. Compared to what she's saying about President Bush, though, it seems relatively minor.

Becky

by [beckyam](#) on Wed, 08/17/2005 - 04:21 | [reply](#)

Bought into it

The most insightful thing I can say about this story is that first of all it is a story where there is almost no story to tell. Of all the things going on in the world, if I stood along a back country road in the middle of Nowhere Texas, who would take notice? In sum, this is all it is, a lady standing on the side of a back country road.

As they say in the real estate business, Location, Location, Location. It seems to be true of the News too. Crawford Texas sells newspapers and little else.

by a reader on Wed, 08/17/2005 - 15:02 | [reply](#)

Trust

Gordon Brown has said that if Robin Cook had not died he would have **made him his deputy** when he became party leader (and presumably Prime Minister). His reason would have been to restore "trust."

Whose trust does he want to cultivate? Robin Cook was a socialist who felt he had **"sold his soul"** by joining up to New Labour. Presumably New Labour's superficial prattle about a Third Way between capitalism and socialism put off Cook who preferred more overtly socialist nonsense.

Cook also famously opposed the liberation of Iraq. So Brown wants to cultivate the trust of socialists who oppose deposing evil dictators who fund terrorism. The leader of a nation should argue for the policies he thinks are right and to pursue them as successfully as he can. After France fell in 1940, some members of Churchill's Cabinet wanted to accept a "peace offer" from Hitler. If Churchill had tried to win his colleagues' "trust" by pandering to this nonsense, he would have been guilty of a shameful abrogation of his responsibilities. Instead he gave them a speech that persuaded them not to surrender. Mr Brown has shamefully pandered to the worst elements in the Labour Party, hard core socialists and antiwar noisemakers.

Another potential leader has also shown that he can't be trusted. Potential Conservative Party leader Malcom Rifkind **said**:

"I believe it [the Iraq war] was a **wrong war**, at the wrong time, for the wrong reasons. The war was an extremely foolish and unnecessary one. The consequence has been to create a political vacuum in Iraq itself.

"Terrorists are operating within Iraq in a way we didn't have in the past, so the war has certainly assisted international terrorism in Iraq. If you destroy an existing regime - however evil it may be - you create a political vacuum..."

That is **nonsense**.

"If a prime minister has led his country to war on a false basis then he should bear the full responsibility. He should have resigned. If I had led the party at the time

that would be the policy I would have pursued.”

That too is a bizarre remark. When a Prime Minister makes decisions about war and peace he must do so on the basis of the best information available. If that information turns out to be wrong he should only resign if this problem is a result of wrongdoing or incompetence on his part. There is no reason to think that was true in regard to the information on Iraqi weapons stockpiles, and all the other reasons for deposing Saddam turned out to have been underestimated.

Nor has Mr Rifkind explained how we can prevent terrorists from attacking Britain without removing tyrants who sponsor terrorism, like **Saddam**. Sometimes we may be able to do this without a war by sponsoring a resistance movement or through economic sanctions. But Saddam's Iraq was a Stalinist police state and economic sanctions did not harm Saddam's regime and had proved ineffective. Mr Rifkind and Mr Brown are opportunists who cannot be trusted to lead Britain in a time of war.

Wed, 08/17/2005 - 17:24 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

France fell in 1940

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Thu, 08/18/2005 - 12:47 | [reply](#)

Re: France fell in 1940

Indeed it did. How that typo got through is a deep mystery! But it's corrected now. Thanks.

by [Editor](#) on Thu, 08/18/2005 - 12:53 | [reply](#)

"who sponsor terrorism, like

"who sponsor terrorism, like Saddam". Modern islamic terrorism is a complex problem. Removing Saddam doesn't help at all.

Al-Qaeda and other terrorist organisations are sponsored by many people through "havala" system. People in islamic states are not happy with their governments and they sponsor terrorism against West in order to deprive their governments of foreign support. Many people in Saudi Arabia believe that Saudi regime is sponsored by America and they feel moral necessity to fight against America.

Where is Saddam Hussein in this system?

On the other hand, helping Iraqis to set up government by Americans is considered by many arabs as installing a western government and therefore contributes to terrorism support quite a lot.

So, it turns out that "liberation of Iraq" has an opposite effect to

what you described in your heroic pro-war slogans.

by a reader on Thu, 08/18/2005 - 14:24 | [reply](#)

First of all, I hope it doesn't

First of all, I hope it doesn't need pointing out that the fact (which I'll not dispute) that the "havala" system is used by "many people" to support terrorism does not, in and of itself, refute the fact that Saddam Hussein was an evil dictator who supported terrorism, as **The World** stated. The two facts are not mutually exclusive. (Unless the claim is that 100% of all terrorism is supported by non-dictator laypeople through the "havala" system, a claim which would be absurd on its face.)

Further points:

If people in "Islamic states" are "not happy with their governments" perhaps they ought take it up with their governments. The chain of reasoning which asserts that plotting to murder randomly chosen Westerners will somehow improve their own governments is tenuous at best; in any event, the effort is immoral and must be resisted.

Based on a reader's comment re:Iraq it is worth pondering just what he thinks makes people in Islamic states unhappy with their governments. For example, one might think that an evil dictator government (such as Saddam Hussein's) would have made people in that Islamic state unhappy, yet according to a reader when we ended that government (we are not, by the way, "helping Iraqis to set up government by Americans", but *by Iraqis*), we just contributed to terrorist support. Is a reader saying that people in Islamic states like and want evil dictators to govern them, and get mad when they are ousted? Seems like it. Now don't get me wrong; there are certainly people who fit the description "prefers evil dictators". But their preferences are immoral, they should not be heeded, and it is particularly insulting for a reader to insinuate that they necessarily speak for all Muslims (or Arabs - it's not clear which set of people a reader thinks he is talking about BTW; he switches freely).

Finally, a reader contradicts himself. In paragraph 2 we are led to believe that the cause of terrorism is people in various Islamic states not being happy with their respective governments. By paragraph 4, the ouster of Hussein in Iraq has made "many arabs" mad, thus contributing to terrorist support. "Many Arabs"? Why would "Arabs" as such care what happens in Iraq unless they are Iraqi themselves? Remember, the reason (supposedly) terrorists become terrorists is because they are unhappy with "their" government. Why would "Arabs", not from Iraq, become terrorists (as is currently happening) on account of whatever is or isn't going on in Iraq? What's it to them? This phenomenon is inexplicable if a reader's theory of "good-government-wanting terrorists" is correct.

Could it be because improvement of "their" government, as such, is

not quite at the top of their agenda, and something else is?

by blixia on Thu, 08/18/2005 - 22:48 | [reply](#)

your hope is all you have

You are definitely right, that existence of havala system is not 100% mutually-exclusive. On the other hand, getting of tyrans doesn't help with getting rid of terrorists. And the reason for that believe is the existence of such systems as havala and world-wide muslim support of terrorism against western civilization whatever irrational reasons stand behind the terrorism.

So, instead of finding a contradiction in my reasoning you are trying to find contradictions in terrorist ideology. You are not even wrong - there are plenty. In fact, every reason to kill one person for the sake of others is a contradiction. And obviously, I don't hold this contradiction as my personal view. Neither do I support terrorists or tyrans like Saddam. You are fighting with a shadow, don't you?

"The chain of reasoning which asserts that plotting to murder randomly chosen Westerners will somehow improve their own governments is tenuous at best". Who argues about that? Me - not. Extremists-muslims - yes, they vote for that view with their both hands, however tenuous it is. Large number of arab peoples in Saudi Arabia - yes. They vote for that view with their money (sent through "havala" system to Al-Qaeda).

The same irrational view is used by many to recruit suicide bombers, to resist new Iraqi government initiatives, to reject any constitution rendering it as "imposed on us by americans" etc.

The fact that such extremists don't speak for all muslims is irrelevant. It is absolutely pointless to do logical reasoning about what all arabs want or don't want since there is no system in existence to reveal their wishes. There are no elections and therefore, no exit-polls and no such thing as "public opinion". If there is no way to express a wish, there will be no wish. If question is never asked, people don't bother to know the answer.

Later in the text you say that arabs in other countries shouldn't bother what is happening in Iraq. Or have I misunderstood you? These are your words:

"Why would "Arabs" as such care what happens in Iraq unless they are Iraqi themselves?"

Are you really serious about it?

This is the main generating power of global terrorism. British-bred muslims go to a bus in Tavistok Square and blow themselves up for the sake of Iraqi people (or as they think so). But somehow, you make a conclusion that they shouldn't do it. But they DO IT!

Your 100% correct logical construction is based on the assumption that all people are reasonable and rational. You are not even wrong.

You are simply billions of light years away from this planet.

Yes, it does seem illogical that people start with fury about their government and end up with fury about western civilization. But it only seems so. In reality it is a matter of radicalisation on whatever issue is available at the moment. Today they are not happy with saudi prince, tomorrow they are unhappy with american administration in Iraq and it seems perfectly reasonable to them.

by a reader on Mon, 08/22/2005 - 17:11 | [reply](#)

Then What Should Be Done with Illogical People?

If destroying a murderous dictator like Saddam and trying to give the Iraqi people a say in their own political affairs helps terrorists, and hurts Iraqi's: What should have been done to hurt terrorists and help Iraqi's? What should be done now?

Attack Israel?

by another reader on Mon, 08/22/2005 - 18:45 | [reply](#)

shhh

I wouldn't recommend suggesting attacking Israel to illogical people.... ;-)

I wouldn't even mention Israel, if you want to continue talking about anything else.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 08/22/2005 - 22:55 | [reply](#)

deal with reality, not with your logical constructions

The trouble with libertarians is always about their idealistic view of the world. Instead of dealing with whatever happens in reality, you just assume that all "logical" people would understand your word and therefore, the problem is solved. When someone points out that there are not-quite logical people all over the place (and in fact, every person is illogical about at least one thing), libertarians just say - or, in that case it doesn't matter, we'll just do ... whatever .

Simple example, an evil person is jailed or executed, but his son loved his father and should be expected to act absolutely illogically in future. But we still have to deal with such cases reasonably.

And we should also expect that many iraqi people while being oppressed by Saddam would prefer to stay under his rule just to be spared of war. And whoever brings the war against Saddam would be considered as trully evil. Is it so difficult to understand? Do these people have to be condemned forever as "illogical creatures"?

And is it so tremendously difficult to realise that many young arabs

are going butts about it? That many older people would sponsor and support these youngsters?

Saddam Hussein regime is toppled, 100 000 iraqis are dead, thousands of new radical youngsters have joined jihad against West.

If hundreds of thousands iraqis have been killed while Saddam was in power are these 100 000 humans deaths of any help now?

Does irrationally motivated global terrorism suffer from any losses here? Hardly.

by a reader on Tue, 08/23/2005 - 10:49 | [reply](#)

"On the other hand, getting o

"On the other hand, getting of tyrans doesn't help with getting rid of terrorists."

If the tyrant is supporting and/or sheltering terrorists, then it does help.

"The fact that such extremists don't speak for all muslims is irrelevant. It is absolutely pointless to do logical reasoning about what all arabs want or don't want since there is no system in existence to reveal their wishes. There are no elections and therefore, no exit-polls and no such thing as "public opinion"."

That is what we are attempting to change, in Iraq. An effort which you (I think it was you) called counterproductive. So, what, then?

"["Why would "Arabs" as such care what happens in Iraq unless they are Iraqi themselves?"] Are you really serious about it?"

Not exactly. I was extrapolating from your characterization of the motive for terrorism: "People in islamic states are not happy with their governments and they sponsor terrorism against West in order to deprive their governments of foreign support." I was trying to illustrate that this doesn't work as a motive for non-Iraqi Arabs who support terrorism in Iraq. If "not happy with their governments" is the motive for terrorism then no outsider Arabs should be bothering with sponsoring terrorism in Iraq, because after all, what does that have to do with *their* government?

Yet (as you say, correctly) outsiders DO sponsor terrorism in Iraq. Why? Your characterization fails to explain. Some key component must be missing.

"This is the main generating power of global terrorism."

Indeed. Which is why your earlier characterization ("they are unhappy with their governments and want to deprive them on Western support") made no sense to me. It failed to take into account the pan-Arab-nationalist sentiment which is, in fact, the (or at least, a) main generating power, as you say.

"Your 100% correct logical construction is based on the assumtpion

that all people are reasonable and rational. You are not even wrong. You are simply billions of light years away from this planet."

Wrong. I do not "assume", or believe, that "all people are reasonable and rational". I was simply being rhetorical so as to show the absurdity of your earlier claim. Get it now? Thanks for the response,

by blixax on Wed, 08/24/2005 - 04:24 | [reply](#)

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Human Beings Are People, Not Wildlife

In Niger, millions of people are starving:

"For Niger's nomads, the situation is desperate. To these people, losing your animals is like losing your life savings. Without their animals, they have no means of survival," said Natasha Kofoworola Quist, Oxfam's Regional Director for West Africa.

That is a bona fide emergency. But Oxfam has a **sinister** take on the problem:

"Twelve centuries of nomadic culture are threatened with extinction if these people do not get long-term help to rebuild their livelihoods," she added.

Niger's nomads are so poor that if a family loses a single animal they might die. Because they are nomads, they can't do simple things like store food or set up irrigation systems to save their cattle when it is very hot, which happens a lot in Niger. And they have been living and dying like this for twelve centuries! Haven't they suffered enough yet? Why should it be their role in life to satisfy the voyeuristic needs of Westerners who consider it of paramount importance that someone (other than their too valuable selves) be made to act out spasms of quaint desperation for ever and ever?

Of course the charitable folk are as keen as any game warden to save the lives of the half-people in their human game reserve. But heaven forfend that the inmates ever acquire the means to escape. So they want to tailor their 'help' in such a way that it saves the inmates' lives but leaves their cruel, foul predicament – delicately referred to as 'their unique nomadic culture' – unchanged and unchangeable.

We have a better idea. There's this new fangled thing called *agriculture*. Instead of tuning their policies to make people limp from crisis to crisis in appalling poverty just so that the relationship of benefactor and grateful supplicant can continue, let charities give money instead, and with it, access to knowledge that would allow the nomads out the wilderness. If their unique culture should fail to survive this challenge, then good riddance. Let it go to the hell from whence it came.

:)

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 08/20/2005 - 03:00 | [reply](#)

Guns, Germs, and Steel

While a useful comment, and true to some extent, there are considered fallacies to your argument.

Niger, long before it was Niger was supporting a small population of nomadic peoples with no help or charity from anyone else. There might have been occasional dry seasons, natural fluctuations in the viability of the land to support humans (and mammals and life in general), but this is the reason why nomadic cultures pick up their belongings and move. Such peoples survive and in their own way by their own means thrive.

The insertion of western civilization, agriculture, charity, technology, or whatever, is not necessary for human life to thrive in a place. Insertion is usually balanced at some near point by desertion. What is not near to us is not dear to us. What is near to us is dear to us, and only then we survive and thrive. Most of all, to be left alone to one's own creative devices and ingenuity is the prime need and what makes us human and adaptable. Mass starvation and famine would not be happening now, true, without all this prior interference.

Who needs or truly cares about Niger? Only the peoples that live upon the land.

Our feeble comments and platitudinal solutions are not needed, and often are especially short sighted and muddle minded. We have no stake in Niger and no business being there. Most people could not place it on a map of the globe within 100 km or have not one sense of its sustaining terrain. In terms of long term viability of humans in the region known as Niger, also, most of us have not a clue. Birth control in the polluted community wells is probably the only obvious humane long term solution other than a return to the natural cycles of birth, subsistence and death. But who would support such obvious interference, despite the multitude of less obvious but more dire interventions. I would choose the natural cycles of birth, subsistence and death over anything we do-gooders and social philosophers are proposing as an interference in region. It is likely more moral in the long run.

Perhaps full scholarships to Oxford for any Nigerian student showing academic promise on the condition that they return to their ravaged region would save more than a few lives in the long run. But that (education and real opportunity for self-determination) is another experimental question in itself. Nomadic peoples have formed nomadic cultures because it worked for them and the lands for at

least 100,000 years. If it no longer works (for them) it is because something we do has changed the order of things.

by a reader on Sat, 08/20/2005 - 15:50 | [reply](#)

It hasn't worked for them eve

It hasn't worked for them ever. Natural lives are not nice lives. They are brutal, short, hard, pain-filled, ugly, and unhappy. It's hard for us to imagine how horrible they are, because we know something completely different. We know what life can be like. We know something many orders of magnitude better than the people of Niger do. And now that they've heard of civilisation, they want it too. They do not want to return to their traditional painful existence that did not get better for thousands and thousands of years. We can help them to have something better, that they would prefer. And it'd be cheap for us to help (if only we helped in the right way), and it'd make the whole world (including us) richer.

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sat, 08/20/2005 - 19:16 | [reply](#)

Cheap Help

The last sentence is verifiably true.

However, "they" is a wrong assumption. Just ask "them" and listen carefully to each person's answer. I dare you then to assume who "they" are and what "they" want ever again.

by a reader on Sun, 08/21/2005 - 01:55 | [reply](#)

What they want

One virtue of our suggestion (giving them only money and access to knowledge, without regard for the effect on their culture) is that it doesn't involve the giver, or anyone else apart from each individual recipient, deciding how they should live their lives.

However, it is uncontroversial that they would use the money and knowledge to change their way of life if they were free to do so. That is the whole point of Oxfam's having a policy of preventing them from doing so.

by [Editor](#) on Sun, 08/21/2005 - 02:19 | [reply](#)

"Niger, long before it was Ni

"Niger, long before it was Niger was supporting a small population of nomadic peoples with no help or charity from anyone else."

Is it just me or is "supporting" a hugely misleading term here? Suppose that for all of this long blissful free-of-Western-influence time, the life expectancy was 23 and infant death rate at 50%. Yet,

some fraction of people *did* survive to reproduce, generation after generation, and so, "the land was 'supporting' nomadic culture". Well BFD. That's good enough for those people, is it? "Supporting" is a trivial condition that means nothing more than "humans didn't die out completely there".

"The insertion of western civilization, agriculture, charity, technology, or whatever, is not necessary for human life to thrive in a place."

Sure helps.

"Insertion is usually balanced at some near point by desertion. What is not near to us is not dear to us. What is near to us is dear to us, and only then we survive and thrive."

Why then is a faraway group of peoples' 'native nomadic culture' so dear to Westerners half a world away?

"Who needs or truly cares about Niger? Only the peoples that live upon the land."

Says who? Speak for yourself. They are humans, I care about them. Moreover, Niger has certain natural resources which supply the rest of the world.

"Our feeble comments and platitudinal solutions are not needed"

Indeed.

"We have no stake in Niger and no business being there."

On the contrary, we have every 'stake' in Niger and "we" (if by "we" you refer to People From The West) have business dealings with people in Niger, specifically with regard to its natural resources. Do *you* know where Niger is, and about it?

"In terms of long term viability of humans in the region known as Niger, also, most of us have not a clue."

Agriculture would give us a more solid footing for, at least, making predictions in the "long term viability" department, methinks.

"I would choose the natural cycles of birth, subsistence and death over anything we do-gooders and social philosophers are proposing as an interference in region. It is likely more moral in the long run."

No 'teach a man to fish..' for you, is it. Course not, that would be "interference".

"If it no longer works (for them) it is because something we do has changed the order of things."

All the more reason...

p.s. What Elliot said

by blixax on Mon, 08/22/2005 - 03:05 | [reply](#)

Words not Deeds, or Words and Deeds

I have no doubt that you and several others "care" and so do I. So far caring has not been enough and various muddleheaded approaches for years have certainly not improved the lot of nomads in Niger much less the lot of peoples in sub-saharan Africa in general. Granted each situation and group is a different one, within Uganda, Zimbabwe, and so on, and for all the various tribes and peoples within.

The jury is out. We are alot closer on this than you might think. The point is that money and access to education and resources are key, rather than more lectures and back and forths on what should be done. I try to offer both and one person is only one drop in the bucket. Many persons are better.

We all must do much better. By "we" I mean everyone who has the interest to see real change, not just the next famine amelioration. And even with more attention and understanding of the real situations it will all be for naught if the affected peoples themselves, nomadic or not, do not have a direct hand in it.

by a reader on Mon, 08/22/2005 - 15:39 | [reply](#)

Oxfam Mauritania

Perhaps this is an example of a shared agricultural and educational resource.

http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/where_we_work/mauritania/seedfair_learning.htm

by a reader on Mon, 08/22/2005 - 21:29 | [reply](#)

Oxfam Mauritania

It's about Oxfam *seed vouchers*. You're kidding, right? If not, go take your salary in seed vouchers and then get back to us about how educational it was.

by a reader on Mon, 08/22/2005 - 21:49 | [reply](#)

When I was farming

Seed vouchers were fine. Vouchers are a medium like money is a medium too. You can plant the seeds you want and grow crops and last I checked that was bonafide agriculture.

by a reader on Mon, 08/22/2005 - 23:43 | [reply](#)

Vouchers

If vouchers really are a medium like money, why does Oxfam give them vouchers and not money?

by [Editor](#) on Tue, 08/23/2005 - 01:35 | [reply](#)

Vouchers Do Not Equal Money

Harder to use seeds (so to speak) to buy prostitutes.

by a reader on Tue, 08/23/2005 - 02:14 | [reply](#)

You can't call a simple life bad.

Niger...

I have to say that people with a natural existence do not live bad lives or horrid lives for an eternity - they live simple lives, which is only different from a life in the west.

How can a way of life survive for thousands of years without happiness? Think about it - mothers tell their children about thier history, fathers come home at night after work, it is the same in all families and societies.

I know nothing of the niger people, but I do know of the indonesians - and those with simple lives are happy and fine, although they all want some of what they see on western television. Unless they are desperately poor, I liken this to a romantic view of westerners concerning faraway places.

Of course, the difference is that westerners can all afford to go, while most others in other countries cannot - however in this response, I am concerned here with the general quality of their lives.

My experience makes me agree with the view that only that which has been grown by ones oneself, or achieved alone has any value to that person or society - there are countless examples of given benefit in all countries that has been squandered, because of the careless way it has been introduced.

However, before a huge donation in aid, or a large education program, constantly there has been no slow buildup, or considered planning, or any opportunity of choice - personal power.

What seems as a novelty is often used and thrown away, no matter how expensive.

Naive it is to say that people in Africa would not desire money and objects from the west when they see them.

However, it is also naive to believe that a simple life without western commodities is worthless and brutal, when no experience of that life has been gained.

Bobby.

by Bobby Brown on Tue, 08/23/2005 - 11:17 | [reply](#)

Surviving Without Happiness

Bobby Brown wrote:

I have to say that people with a natural existence do not

live bad lives or horrid lives for an eternity - they live simple lives, which is only different from a life in the west.

How can a way of life survive for thousands of years without happiness? Think about it - mothers tell their children about their history, fathers come home at night after work, it is the same in all families and societies.

Any way of life can survive very easily without happiness as long as people don't know anything better. That, in fact, is how people survived throughout most of human history. As the World pointed out above these people are typically one farm animal away from death. Do you imagine that they don't worry about that? Here's another question for you to chew over. A nomad group must sometimes pass near a town or through it. Sometimes people in that nomad group must want to go to the town, or to stay there and not have to worry as much about food. So why don't they?

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Mon, 09/05/2005 - 13:20 | [reply](#)

Using this name instead of Bo

Using this name instead of Bobby Brown.

In response to your last question, humanity as it can be would probably not allow these nomads to settle in their village. In any poor country, large groups of people that haven't managed to get themselves money, no matter what harsh circumstances, would always be driven away by people that have homes - because there is hardly anything to share. Good hearted citizens in any society routinely turn their heads to human problems that are too great for them to solve.

The wealthy do not share either - if they gave to one, they would have to give to many. Anyway it's not their fault - it's how the country is run that's the problem, and they can't give openly, but through channels, charities (that I believe like so many people are corrupt as hell). We should understand that if they romantically open their doors, they would lose all of their privilege for some very temporary aid to admittedly quite a lot of people.

Neither would open their doors for essentially the same reason - personal loss - which means that my mention of the rich in a poor society is actually irrelevant.

I understand the situation my friend. I get you, I do, and I am a realist, but then again, I can't emphasize enough that happiness and love are essential to human existence... to the individual and to the whole, to society.

Societies which do not have love and happiness collapse. An evil society breaks down. It will destroy itself. Smaller societies I do not know about, but briefly, the Romans destroyed themselves through

laziness, expansion and too much power. The Nazis destroyed

themselves by madness, and again a desire for too much power.

Nomadic existence - a life which never tried to become large, never gathered in a way which was meant to subjugate other people. They are poor, they have nothing - how long have they lasted? 1200 years. The Roman army lasted from 31 BC - 1453. At this point, only three hundred years longer. The Roman empire was much larger than these Nomads - perhaps because the Nomads are smaller, they should have lasted a tiny amount of time compared to the Roman empire. Left alone, they would certainly survive much longer, although considering the effects of globalisation, this is unlikely.

Why did the Roman empire get larger and larger and larger? Why was it an unstoppable force - because it wanted fulfill itself in culture and and enrich itself with other races. At the beginning, if they were evil, it was only in the opinion that a cause of death is evil. But for a long time, when the Roman Empire was concerned with learning and knowledge and expansion, it was a vital growing thing. When it's emphasis shifted to control and power, and entertainment such as the arenas, then it was evil, destroyed itself, collapsed. Nazi Germany - in itself a very short lived society, and a mad rush for power. Any such thing is invariably CRUSHED OR FALLS APART INSTANTLY. This is the exact opposite of Nomadic existence that I have read about here, something that grew gradually from the people, something that was always there.

With the Nomadic existence - there must be something strong and vital inside it which is comparable with the beginnings and marvelous parts of the Roman empire. Their way of life must reside in their strength of movement. How do you think they keep going, while they are traveling, while they have so much hardship and pain? They love each other, and they find happiness within themselves, their families and their people - and their way of life. On their travels they must find things, and have a proud wandering tradition. They must know various African communities incredibly well, and have knowledge of the land and of the birds and the animals.

African history was once considered as a verbal recording, inside the minds of humans only. It is likely that most Nomads think of their history in the same way. It is likely that they are very proud of their knowledge of themselves and their existence.

The universe grows my friend, it doesn't rot and still manage to continue on its course of life. It grows.

These people must be sustained. They must be happy.

OF COURSE, as human begins they must desire freedom that some people have in this sad sad world and some people do not.... Certainly, like most people in the developing world, the Nomads self perception is corrupted by the west. Certainly, many would not like to be nomads anymore, and would like to have a car, and a home.

However, The concept that there are societies of people that do not

have happiness - This is wrong. Happiness is a natural emotion felt by human beings in the mind or in the soul. There are some sad people that have never known it, but never an entire society.

Looking at it this way - survival without happiness, actually cannot in fact be easy. A life like that would be very hard, it wouldn't be life at all. The society would attack each other constantly, would steal each other's animals. Would have no care. Nomads would not be a type of 'people', but individual scavengers, who hurt others, and steal constantly, from towns and offer no support to each other - an unhappy evil society. If that is what these people are, having lasted for 1200 years in this way, then my whole argument here is wrong.

Thanks, Daniel.

by DanielH on Wed, 10/19/2005 - 17:41 | [reply](#)

Life Expectancy

Daniel,
Do you think it would make them happier to live 70 years, rather than 30 years?

If everyone had their options explained to them, do you think you would rather have your children grow up with them, and live to 30 or so? Or do you think the parents of nomads would choose to have their children grow up in the United States and/or England? What do you honestly think?

More people do seem to want to immigrate to the United States from "third world" countries than the reverse....The proportions are remarkably different. I literally have never met someone who asked to live a nomadic life once it was explained to him just the diseases he would likely encounter and how long he would likely live.

Life expectancy isn't everything, but it does tell you about the relative ability of a person to meet his basic needs, something that is arguably very important to his own perception of whether he is happy (especially if a person living in a low life expectancy region knows about alternatives, so he can actively compare himself to those who are doing better from this perspective.)

Just curious.

Michael

by M Golding on Wed, 10/19/2005 - 20:23 | [reply](#)

Tut tut.

No, we're wildlife. If you can't handle that there are a number of religions available to you.

by Bill on Thu, 06/01/2006 - 11:55 | [reply](#)

Religions

Bill:

we're wildlife. If you can't handle that there are a number of religions available to you

The idea that morality in general (or in this case, drawing a moral distinction between humans and other animals) is tantamount to religion, is a concession that many atheists make to the religious. But it is a mistake, no more coherent than it would be to concede that epistemology or metaphysics, or for that matter physics, is tantamount to religion.

You may enjoy thinking of yourself as wildlife, but I myself am a **mineral**, and I challenge you to find the flaw my argument to that effect. It is the same as the flaw in yours.

by **David Deutsch** on Thu, 06/01/2006 - 12:19 | [reply](#)

Already with the straw man ar

Already with the straw man arguments!

People are nothing 'special', by any detached/objective view. The distinction we make is a subjective one (which is why we invent God to make it for us).

Not being a narcissist, I don't particularly 'enjoy' thinking of myself as anything.

I find no flaw in your mineral argument, though I find a flaw in it being called 'satire'.

by Bill on Thu, 06/01/2006 - 16:51 | [reply](#)

Re: Already with the straw man

You say people are wildlife, and you say you find no flaw in an argument that people are minerals. Well, which is it? Are people wildlife or mineral life?

-- Elliot Temple

My Blog

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 06/02/2006 - 06:56 | [reply](#)

People are people

And mineral. And wildlife.

If you can't see that, I really can't help you.

by Bill on Fri, 06/02/2006 - 10:27 | [reply](#)

Re: People are people

When you previously claimed people are wildlife, what did you

mean?

-- Elliot Temple

My Blog

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 06/02/2006 - 16:12 | [reply](#)

People are wildlife

People are members of a primate species we designate H. sapiens. They are not some special non-animal category of beings.

The trouble with most of those who mock environmentalism is that they don't understand this. They think that humans have somehow transcended nature and the laws of physics.

by **Yoni** on Sun, 09/10/2006 - 11:24 | [reply](#)

Re: People are wildlife

People are not a "special non-animal category of things" in the same sense as animals are not a special non-atom category of things. That is to say, in the reductionist (or essentialist) sense.

However, animals have emergent properties that are not captured by describing them as atoms. The theory of evolution, for instance, is not needed to explain why the sun is hot, but it is needed to explain why giraffes have long necks - even though those necks consist entirely of atoms.

Likewise humans have emergent properties that are not captured by describing them as animals. The most prominent of these are human consciousness and human knowledge creation. But the one that is relevant to our discussion here is the moral values of humans. One can explain the behaviour of animals without ever referring to a distinction between right and wrong, or between what ought to be and what is. That is not so for humans.

by **Editor** on Sun, 09/10/2006 - 12:06 | [reply](#)

Re: Humans have transcended the laws of physics?

By 'transcended', do you mean violated?

If so, could you give an example of where something we have said implies that a law of physics has been violated (and state that law)?

If you mean something else by 'transcended', what makes you think that laws of physics cannot be 'transcended' in your sense?

by **Editor** on Sun, 09/10/2006 - 12:12 | [reply](#)

Funny Because They're True?

At Ynet, **The Golem** learns of the special training that allowed Israeli soldiers to stay superhumanly composed during the evacuation of Gaza under the most extreme verbal abuse.

Cox & Forkum have finally come up with a design for a World Trade Center replacement that would satisfy the Left.

And **LGF** recalls Bob Hope and claims that some things don't change.

Wed, 08/24/2005 - 00:28 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

'Pallywood' And Other Things You Ought To Know About

Solomon interviews Boston University History Professor Richard Landes about his new media watchdog project. The content is eye-opening.

Tue, 08/30/2005 - 14:30 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Worth Reading even if not Eye-Opening

Cognitive Egocentrism is everywhere, everywhere behind the eyes like a glaucoma in reverse. Think about it. You have to already have your eyes open and clear of fog to see beyond it.

Then we write, and write and read, the so called journalists and the medium of all our news that is fit to print. What news is that and is it yours? Why do you read what you read? Do you read it?

Where did old-fashioned journalism go, the writing that got to the heart of the story, if it ever blossomed in the first place? Such writing is not accidental, it takes time, but who will publish it today? Writing the story is only the last 10 percent of telling the story. Who will pay for the other 90 percent? If it is searched, written, and fortunately published, will we even carefully read the story if it is readily accessible?

Here's one, one of those stories, in the form of a blog interview. It may be accidental that its even about the news.

A worthwhile read.

by a reader on Sat, 09/03/2005 - 18:47 | [reply](#)

Can The United States Survive This Catastrophe?

So the narrative has settled down to the following:

President Bush and his friends **need slaves** in order to remain rich. The **slaves** are the unemployed [sic], the poor, illegal immigrants, and black people. President Bush and his friends have herded these people into environmentally vulnerable areas like New Orleans because they would rather they died. Then they caused hurricanes by **not adopting the Kyoto Protocol**. They also prevented the city and state governments from evacuating the unemployed, poor, and non-whites from New Orleans as the hurricane approached, and later prevented the survivors from being rescued, in part by **sending the National Guard overseas to an immoral and illegal war**, which itself is being fought in order to enrich President Bush and his friends. When they were finally sent in, it was to **murder** the black people. No wait, actually the war is being fought at the behest of Israel via a **Jewish cabal** who **seized power** through an illegal election and other sinister machinations, but don't get us started on that.

That a substantial constituency in the United States and throughout the world embraces or sympathises with this idiotic conspiracy-theoretic fantasy is a global catastrophe. We hope that the United States, and the world, can survive it.

Sun, 09/04/2005 - 14:28 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Catastrophe

As you know, the United States will certainly survive this catastrophe and we will be stronger as we learn to handle situations like this more effectively in the future. What else can we do?

The story that is not being told, however, except on Fox news, is interesting.

Many survivors of the hurricane could not be evacuated into hundreds of waiting boats that arrived immediately after the storm to help with evacuation efforts. Thousands of fellow Americans, wishing to risk their own lives to help the victims just as the storm ended, had their boats indefinitely detained outside the disaster area, because it was not deemed safe to be in open water around

the city. The boats could not enter the ports because (get

this)snipers were shooting at the passing rescue vessels in the harbors! "Citizens" of New Orleans stole a generator from a hospital, and the hospital, too, was taking incoming sniper fire. Helicopters that tried to evacuate citizens from rooftops were attacked from citizens on the ground. It was not safe for days for buses to enter parts of the city to evacuate refugees in need, not because of high water, but because of carjackings!

Obviously the vast majority of the citizens of New Orleans were brave and decent, even as they suffered horribly. But I can't imagine that if a tragedy of similar scope had happened in South Dakota or North Carolina, that rescue workers and fellow citizens would have been attacked with such zeal.

One of the lessons that does need to be learned is that in certain areas of the United States, when disaster strikes, the military and national guard need to be called in first to secure the area. And aid agencies, no matter how well intentioned or needed, must wait until the areas are secured. As it happened, the aid agencies arrived first but had to wait days, because no one imagined that such thuggery and lawlessness would break out in America after a tragedy, when Americans usually band together in times of crisis.

But the fact of the matter is that in cities like New Orleans, different sorts of disaster plans need to be in place. The national guard and military should be called in first, even if this too would lead to criticism.

"You're treating us like criminals, not victims," would be heard.

Only after an area is secured can aid agencies legitimately do their jobs. At this time it is no one's fault because we did not know, but next time we should hold our government responsible. There was insufficient law enforcement, because no one imagined that certain Americans would behave so horribly during a tragedy.

Unfortunately, it is not only in the Middle East that people shoot at those trying to rescue them. It pains me greatly to say that tribalism is alive and well in (a few areas of) the United States, as well.

by a reader on Sun, 09/04/2005 - 16:16 | [reply](#)

Re: Catastrophe

Indeed. But is it tribalism? Is it not the conspiracy-theoretic world view that made people contemptuous of cooperation and provided the sanction for their trying to kill and hurt and blame their way out of a problem instead? It is the prevalence of this world view, not the hurricane, that is the catastrophe we were referring to.

by [Editor](#) on Sun, 09/04/2005 - 17:51 | [reply](#)

Problems

It's hard to know for sure, but I suspect that only a very small

percentage of the american people actually believe anything close to the theories you describe. A larger percentage like to spew stupid things to signal to their cohorts that they are bona fide members of their groups.

I see no evidence that those who were shooting at rescuers were motivated by anything like these theories. What was motivating them is, indeed, a problem. But, I suspect it's a different one.

But, we shouldn't forget that governments failed spectacularly in their fundamental responsibilities of maintaining law and order and facilitating people helping each other. Not through malice; but through incompetence, stupidity, corruption, institutional bickering and rigidity.

Giving these people more resources, responsibility, and power would be a terrible failure to learn from this tragedy.

Gil

by **Gil** on Sun, 09/04/2005 - 19:21 | [reply](#)

Incompetence

Instead of overanalyzing conspiracy theory and the city of New Orleans, why not forthrightly call it incompetence, confusion, and short sightedness and leave it at that. There's plenty of that to go around at all levels from the individual citizen on up but get on with it, stop carping, clean it up, and straighten out the disaster waiting to happen so it doesn't happen in the same way again. The United States doesn't need defenders so much as workers who pitch in and Americans fortunately have that trait in abundance no matter where they come from. Pitch in or move on.

by a reader on Sun, 09/04/2005 - 22:32 | [reply](#)

What Incompetence?

Does anyone know how to run a better law enforcement agency or disaster recovery agency than the ones that exist? If so, why don't they? Show me the cases of people being stopped.

OK I know if you want to form a private police force the laws will get in your way, and this does restrict the growth of certain knowledge. But there are two points to keep in mind: A) That knowledge you want, in fact, does not presently exist B) No other country is more competent

Further, no one has suggested simple, reasonable, *attainable* improvements on our current government *and* persuaded a significant amount of people they aren't terrible ideas. Why is that, if our government is so incompetent?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 09/05/2005 - 04:26 | [reply](#)

Competence

Elliot, you make a blanket statement that no other country is more competent. What makes you so sure of that? That certainly is a claim that should not be accepted without good reasons.

-- Mikko Särelä

by Mikko Särelä on Mon, 09/05/2005 - 06:31 | [reply](#)

other countries

Well, all I really need is this weaker statement: I haven't seen someone even **claim** another government is more competent, let alone make a serious argument that one is. It just seems to be: big disaster implies big failure. That doesn't follow.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 09/05/2005 - 07:18 | [reply](#)

USA

Besides, if someone said "Look here, if only the US was more like France, then it would have responded to the disaster far better. the French have an age-old tradition of charity and rescue. however, the arrogant Americans rejected it because they prefer dead civilians to adopting anything more from the French than French Fries" I would be right to laugh without bothering to look anything up.

I can imagine a few countries where I wouldn't outright **laugh**. But c'mon, the burden of **a little evidence** is on the people criticising the most successful country ever.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 09/05/2005 - 07:27 | [reply](#)

Re: Problems

Perhaps it is true that few Americans believe such theories while many feel it necessary to claim to believe them in order to signal membership of their groups. If so, it implies that many groups require lip service to be paid to such theories, which is surely worrying in itself.

Be that as it may, [Condoleezza Rice](#) has found it necessary to publicly deny one of those theories:

"I don't believe for a minute anybody allowed people to suffer because they are African-Americans. I just don't believe it for a minute"

Competence

Elliot, the people in charge of the rescue operations were hired to do that job. I can point out as a customer that a certain corporation has failed in delivering something it's customers needed/wanted even if I don't know how to make the better thing. In the market, you can often tell that they failed by them taking a fall.

With government thing, you don't have that creative destruction showing that the organization failed.

I, nor anyone else, do not have to be an expert, or have practical experience in the subject to be able to criticize what was done. Nor is the question of the government rescue being competent/incompetent a question of whether there's anybody out there who would have done a better job - but a question of whether objectively with the resources they have been given, could they reasonably have done a better job.

To start with some criticism: Why did they not evacuate hospitals before the storm hit? The likelihood of a disaster was high enough to have warranted such actions. Nor did they evacuate prisons, or probably many other places where people could not have moved out on their own. (Sorry for not providing links, I've mostly read Finnish newspapers and don't have time to dig English references - believe me if you like, or don't, or dig up the references, your choice).

Another thing: Why did they not know that the land had went down at some points in the city at least a meter, in some places more (this affected the flood walls' capability to operate)? Such a thing just would not happen in Finland and it isn't that costly to do.

How come there were no police within the congress center keeping peace? Nobody was there to prevent violent gangs from taking over - a simple thing that could have changed many peoples lives.

Now, if your criticism is directed toward those who just want to bash America, I have no problem. But to claim that the crisis operation went well that it did not fail or that incompetence was no part of it failing, you are reaching too far. You are making claims far bigger than your shoes.

The problem the rescue organization were trying to solve was huge, of catastrophic magnitude. In order to learn, one must look at what was done see the successes where they were and the failures where they were. The purpose of this is not bashing people, but learning. As the likelihood of another great storm appearing in the same area within a month was 42% last I checked - the people doing these things really need to learn to do better. A lot better.

I did not provide references to my claims of incidents happened, because I've mostly read them from Finnish newspapers myself and can't be bothered to search for similar stories in English. I have

better things to do, such as doing research on crisis management and communication systems for medical emergency recovery. Doing that, as it will be part of my Ph.D. and hopefully something I will be working on in San Diego next year, is a little bit more important to me at the moment than looking for the references in this case.

I would like to finish this by saying that the task of managing such a widespread disaster and emergency is hard. It is a lot harder than most people estimate - most people have no idea how many things we take for granted that really are not there when you get into a disaster zone. Or for that matter how hard it is to coordinate groups of people from different organizations with different equipment and communications devices. And to do all this in an extremely hostile environment.

by Mikko Särelä on Tue, 09/06/2005 - 11:04 | [reply](#)

Re: Competence

Mikko,

You want to ask questions like, *Why did they not evacuate hospitals before the storm hit?*

That line of argument does not work. You could use the same style of argument about any subject where the government **did not** fail. People use it about Iraq all the time: Why was the old Iraqi army disbanded not used for security? Why not more troops? Can't any idiot see we needed more troops, and if only we brought them the war would be more successful?

We could question WWII submarine countermeasures policy similarly, regardless of what it actually was. We lost boats, didn't we?

I don't know why they didn't evacuate the hospitals. But neither do you. The correct line of argument would be an explanation of what the government did and why it functioned that way, coupled with implementable ways it could have done better. Tell me the **reason** they **intentionally chose** not to evacuate the hospitals.

You act like what to do was obvious and any reasonable person would have done better, but you have yet to explain what force prevented anyone reasonable from getting the job.

You say the organisations in the area need to get better. I say: They will get better at dealing with this. That's what they do. All by themselves.

Now, if your criticism is directed toward those who just want to bash America, I have no problem. But to claim that the crisis operation went well that it did not fail or that incompetence was no part of it failing, you are reaching too far.

I didn't say it went well, but I have no policy changes I'm suggesting, and my attitude towards the government is mildly friendly. I am annoyed with government haters of all varieties, and

also anyone complaining without a clear purpose. (People who live in the area are excused and may complain. As can their friends who live elsewhere.) It takes knowledge to do things well. Either put up or shut up. (Create the knowledge in usable form yourself, or pay for it to be created.)

And even if you do create knowledge now, you didn't create it in usable form prior to the disaster. There's no getting around that.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 09/06/2005 - 12:20 | [reply](#)

Competence

I could continue my line by saying that it is my understanding that in e.g. Finland evacuation of hospitals, etc. are part of evacuation procedures already in place and that they have been for a long time. It is a well known fact in the disaster recovery profession that you need to make yourself a process and a plan for evacuating those people who cannot do it themselves.

It seems that such plans for New Orleans did not exist. Or that they were not used. Which ever the case, this is something that a) several organizations working around the globe know, b) was not used in this case, and c) goes directly against what you said before: namely that nobody else could have done a better job.

And no, I did not create the knowledge in a form that was usable within New Orleans area, nor did many other people. Me, I was not interested in creating it in such form, because to any sensible person it is clear that you need a plan for evacuating those who cannot do it. It never dawned to me that this might be a thing that people expressedly paid for doing emergency management never contemplated (or if they did, they nevertheless did not act on).

We only have 24 hours a day to do things and that ultimately means that one needs to choose priorities in what to pursue and what not to. That is why people hire other people to do things for them. They can dedicate themselves to doing the job and let you dedicate yourself to doing something else; something that your time is better spent in.

Now for the reasons why any capable person wouldn't have gotten the job? Are you asking about why not get the job from current organizations, or why not be capable of putting up their own?

For the first, the answer is not so simple, but public choice theory might give you a few hints to why. For the second, I wonder why the insurance companies have not started this by themselves - they would certainly have the economic incentives to do such things. Why it hasn't, is indeed an interesting question.

ps. your example of Iraq army actually punctuates my point, if I have understood the situation correctly. I've read that the armed forces had actually planned to use the Iraq army for stabilizing the

area, but that the government appointed representative for Iraq disbanded the Iraq army without consulting the armed forces.

by Mikko Särelä on Tue, 09/06/2005 - 13:45 | [reply](#)

Priorities

Frank J [agrees with me.](#)

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 09/08/2005 - 16:01 | [reply](#)

Tribes

Another **nice, long essay** by Bill Whittle. This time he's a bit – cross.

Mon, 09/05/2005 - 23:46 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Not only a bit - cross

Also a little bit - of a blathering idiot. But that may be his mouth talking; all the sheepdogs I have ever known have been all action and no talk. Plus they are usually a tribe of one and they wear no particular color.

If he is one of those sheepdogs and not a sheep in sheepdog clothing he belongs in the hundred mile rim of catastrophe along with all those other sheepdogs doing something.

by a reader on Wed, 09/07/2005 - 01:46 | [reply](#)

Re: Not only a bit - cross

We do not always agree with everything that Whittle says, but could you cite one of the blatherings that you consider especially idiotic?

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 09/07/2005 - 02:13 | [reply](#)

"Pinkos"

I agree wholeheartedly with the use of the phrase "blathering idiot" to succinctly describe Mr. Whittle.

I have not the patience for a full post-mortem of his hateful, psychotic rant, but shall merely present a couple of focused criticisms for now:

(1) His Pink/Grey dichotomy is ridiculous. Firstly, Pinkness and Greyness, as he defines them, have Absolutely Nothing Whatsoever To Do With Each Other - it's like categorising people into the Beethoven-lovers 'versus' the Southern-hemisphere-dwellers. For instance, why on earth should permissiveness (a 'Pink' attribute) run counter to, say, respect for science (a 'Grey' attribute)?

(2) Something I find particularly repugnant here is the latent

homophobia:

The Pink Tribe is all about feeling good: feeling good about yourself! Sexually, emotionally, artistically... without regard to... natural law

I shall be most unimpressed if 'the world', which purports to be socially liberal (at least in respect of this particular issue) now tries to make excuses for him.

(3) I know I said two before, but I can't resist poking fun at Whittle's "Clinton Pink, Bush Grey" verdict. I mean, which of those two believes in 'intelligent design'? I'd give a long list of other examples of how Clinton is more in touch with reality than Bush, but ID is the only instance where 'the world' is itself sufficiently in touch with reality to see that I'd be right.

by Neil Fitzgerald on Wed, 09/07/2005 - 05:16 | [reply](#)

Re "Pinkos"

Could you explain how this passage

That has nothing to do with me being white. If the blacks and Hispanics and Jews and gays that I work with and associate with were there with me, it would have been that much better. That's because the people I associate with – my Tribe – consists not of blacks and whites and gays and Hispanics and Asians, but of individuals who do not rape, murder, or steal.

is consistent with the essay being an expression of homophobia? Is it also secretly an expression of hatred of all the other groups that he says are in his 'Tribe'?

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 09/07/2005 - 12:12 | [reply](#)

Just because the psycho is in

Just because the psycho is inconsistent doesn't mean he's good.

It's tempting to say 'the psycho doth protest too much'. I mean honestly, when in your life have you ever seen someone make the rhetorical gesture of insisting on their own lack of prejudice 'at gunpoint'. If it really happened that someone demanded acknowledgement of their unracism at gunpoint, would you be more or less inclined to think the person was harbouring objectionable views? Actually, though, I don't have enough evidence to honestly call him a racist, but my point (2) remains.

I didn't make that quote up by myself.

Whether or not you're prepared to call it latently homophobic (I certainly am) you can't deny that it runs counter to the ethos of

your own website (perhaps even more so if I were to take out those

...'s and quote the whole passage).

by Neil Fitzgerald on Wed, 09/07/2005 - 14:03 | [reply](#)

Clarification

(Sorry about the double post, by the way!)

What runs counter to the ethos of 'the world' is not the *definition* of pinkness but the fact that Whittle is associating it, on the one hand, with the mentality of all the people who looted, raped and murdered in New Orleans, and on the other, with 'nongreyness' (this is where my point (1) comes into play - so I suppose (1) and (2) are two aspects of the same point, at the end of the day). Since greyness seems to be nothing other than a mixture of practicality, intelligence and scientific-mindedness, Whittle's opposition of greyness to pinkness implicitly makes the claim that anyone in favour of artistic and sexual freedom must be lacking those qualities.

(An unrelated point follows.)

I can see that what Whittle is really trying to contrast, with his Pink and Grey routine, is 'denial of reality' vs 'acceptance of reality', though why these qualities should be regarded as marking out disjoint 'tribes' (when in fact, people usually accept some realities but deny others), and why permissiveness should equal denial of reality, are both beyond me. And he holds up the neocons in the White House as paragons of the latter (rofl). OK, well why are they refusing to acknowledge global warming, then, and putting it all down to a Giant Left-Wing Conspiracy?

Oh, I forgot, you guys it's all a big conspiracy too.

by Neil Fitzgerald on Wed, 09/07/2005 - 14:33 | [reply](#)

post 1

Hmm, first Whittle is a homophobe.

Now **The World** is run by double-post-a-phobes.

Might this constitute a *pattern* of imagining bigotry?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 09/07/2005 - 21:45 | [reply](#)

post 2

i sure hope I'm right that u r imagining the double-post-a-phobe thing.....

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 09/07/2005 - 21:46 | [reply](#)

All your usual acumen on disp

All your usual acumen on display I see. Good work, Elli.

by Neil Fitzgerald on Wed, 09/07/2005 - 23:25 | [reply](#)

The World and Bill Whittle

As we said, **The World's** political views are not the same as Bill Whittle's. However, we do not believe that everyone who disagrees with us in any way is an idiot or a psychopath.

Nor do we tend to attribute events to 'big conspiracies'. In fact we have a bit of a **thing about conspiracy theories**. We don't think they're true. (Or are we just 'protesting too much', to cover up our latent conspiracism?)

By the way, where is the evidence that President Bush believes in 'Intelligent Design'? We see only evidence that he has been fooled into thinking it's a serious theory because, like most people, he has a deficient grasp of the nature of science. And where is the evidence that 'the neo-cons in the White House ... are refusing to acknowledge global warming'? Certainly they are reluctant to waste trillions of dollars on a largely religious ritual whose effect on the climate would be barely perceptible at most. But, as far as we can see, their **policies and statements about their policies** take the existence of climate change for granted.

by **Editor** on Thu, 09/08/2005 - 00:05 | [reply](#)

replies galore

-Okay, so Whittle's Pink/Grey "dichotomy" is neither sharply-defined nor all-encompassing. But are you honestly claiming you didn't understand the categorization and had major disputes w/ how he categorized folks?

-"Permissiveness", properly defined, might be considered to run counter to respect for science if for example the scientific method, as applied to human nature by examining history, would reveal that humans behave in wicked ways (and are more unhappy) absent moral and legal codes, and in lesser but still harmful ways when perverse incentives/moral hazards are present. As I think it would.

-I don't see the "homophobia" at all. That passage could be read (and was probably intended) as simply a condemnation of (heterosexual) "free love". The fact that you saw the phrase "feeling good about yourself... Sexually" and thought Whittle must have been talking about homosexuality is... odd.

-Bush is certainly (at least in his public/political persona) more receptive to "Intelligent Design" (though as **The World** points out, there's no evidence he actually 'believes in' it per se) than Clinton. You're saying that this makes Bush more "Pink" than Clinton? Are you using Whittle's definition of Grey vs. Pink, or one of your own

invention? I don't read Whittle's essay as setting up "Grey" as "reality-based" (including materialistic) and "Pink" as "not reality-based" as such, which seems to be what you have in mind. I think we can stipulate that Bush's worldview is more informed by faith than Clinton's. If you think this fact makes Bush more "Pink" (qua Whittle) than Clinton then you didn't read Whittle's piece closely.

-So Whittle might be a racist (albeit you "don't have enough evidence to honestly call him" one) because you look askance upon the fashion in which he, anticipating the charges of racism that his piece would engender from such as yourself, states that he is not? Heh.

Finally, a substantive point:

"Whittle's opposition of greyness to pinkness implicitly makes the claim that anyone in favour of artistic and sexual freedom must be lacking those qualities."

Or at least, doesn't have those qualities in the combination and amount that is characteristic of those who are "Grey". Sure. You seem not to know this: Whittle's "Tribe" setup is a *grouping*, not a "definition" per se. He is observing patterns among people and that many people generally fall into one category or the other. So it's not a "definition" in the sense of "Since you're Pink, ergo X". It's more like, "X, Y, and Z are true of you... these are Pink tendencies... so you lean 'Pink'". You can argue that this pattern doesn't exist and that Whittle is wrong to think that it does, or you can argue that Whittle is wrong in some or most of the categorizations he has put forward, but you haven't done either (except to say that Bush can't be "Pink" because he supposedly believes in "Intelligent Design", which is a non sequitur).

"I can see that what Whittle is really trying to contrast, with his Pink and Grey routine, is 'denial of reality' vs 'acceptance of reality', though why these qualities should be regarded as marking out disjoint 'tribes' (when in fact, people usually accept some realities but deny others), and why permissiveness should equal denial of reality, are both beyond me."

They're fuzzy groupings, generalizations. Yes, some people really have a problem with extracting generalized groupings from observations, though I don't understand why.

"And he holds up the neocons in the White House as paragons of the latter (rofl)."

What's a "neocon" exactly, and which people in the White House are them? Remember, you don't like fuzzy, general categorizations... :-)

" OK, well why are they refusing to acknowledge global warming, then, and putting it all down to a Giant Left-Wing Conspiracy?"

Who "refuses to acknowledge" global warming? Global warming (lowercase), if it means anything, = the world getting warmer (on average - how that average is to be taken, must be defined BTW)

according to measured temperatures. Has Bush or someone else refused to acknowledge the existence, or accuracy, of the temperature record from circa 1850-2000, and the mathematical fact that it evinces a warming trend (assuming of course that it does)?

Perhaps you mean to refer to "Global Warming" here, i.e. the hypothesis that (1) the earth's temperature will get significantly warmer in *the future* due to a particular, easy to understand heat-trapping effect people have identified and termed "the greenhouse effect" and the hypothesis that this "greenhouse effect" will dominate all other effects present in the oceano-atmospheric system (as well as fluctuations in the sun's energy output), (2) this warming will be bad (for us) in general, and (3) we can reverse it significantly by altering our behavior in some realistic way (and in a way whose benefits outweigh the costs).

Problem is, it's still untrue to claim that Bush "refuses to acknowledge" this hypothesis. I'm quite certain he acknowledges that the hypothesis exists (as do I). That's not the point. I guess what you are really "accusing" Bush of is being unwilling to stake our economy on the hypothesis, in toto, being correct. Well yeah. I am too.

It's just a hypothesis after all, buttressed (perhaps - I'm not even sure one can honestly say it's buttressed) by some (who knows how accurate or complete) computer modelling. Also, ALL of (1), (2), and (3) have to be true for the action you presumably desire to be worthwhile. I'm not even sure that (1) is true, myself. It looks as if **The World** is (understandably) stuck on (3). Either way, this all is a hypothesis which is only as strong as its weakest link. So why would we alter our entire domestic policy and hamstring our economy based on a hypothesis with so little evidence behind it? Is that "acknowledging reality", or its opposite? Is "But still, let's just sign Kyoto anyway, or at least string along the process/talks, because we need to get along, besides, we can fix the details later" (Clinton's evident stance) based on reality, or its opposite? Ok, I know your answer to that. As you know mine - and Bush's.

by blixa on Thu, 09/08/2005 - 04:13 | [reply](#)

Re: replies galore

Re homosexuality, I think he means this passage: "do their own thing without regard to ... natural law". Homophobes consider homosexuality unnatural, right?

by a reader on Fri, 09/09/2005 - 00:34 | [reply](#)

Oh, I see

Good point. Another example: Race bigots consider race-mixing unhealthy. I say "Don't be unhealthy." Therefore I must be a race-bigot!

That was fun :-)

by blixax on Fri, 09/09/2005 - 21:50 | [reply](#)

Blixax, master of logic, and y

Blixax, master of logic, and yet a race bigot. What an unlikely combination! :-/

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 09/09/2005 - 22:30 | [reply](#)

Code Words

One of these days **The World** might do a post on code words, those words in conjunction that have an implicit meaning for the doctrinally informed. Some examples for consideration?:

Natural Law
Climate Change
Neo-Con
Intelligent Design

On the other hand, this could post might seem to border on the edge of Conspiracy Theory. To clarify, I wonder if these words are born into the world of political discussion fully formed, or are they someone's intentional invention. Add code words of your choice and the daffy definitions that might go with them. It could be fun!

by a reader on Sat, 09/10/2005 - 01:52 | [reply](#)

Sorry it took me a while to r

Sorry it took me a while to return, but in truth I was rather ashamed of my unwarranted outburst at Elliot Temple. However, I see that blixax has written a thorough reply, deserving of consideration.

- "Permissiveness", properly defined, might be considered to run counter to respect for science if for example the scientific method, as applied to human nature by examining history, would reveal that humans behave in wicked ways (and are more unhappy) absent moral and legal codes, and in lesser but still harmful ways when perverse incentives/moral hazards are present. As I think it would.

Well, I guess that's possible, but when a polemicist like Whittle writes a diatribe like that, it can surely be taken for granted that his targets are *not* just some tiny, defenceless, powerless groups/ideologies, but rather, ones that hold some sway and are worth the effort of attacking. And to the best of my knowledge, there is no significant groundswell of public opinion in favour of a total absence of moral or legal codes. However, there *is* a

significant battle of ideas going on in American right now around

such issues as gay marriage and whether gays should be allowed into the priesthood and so on (perhaps there are others, but my ignorance of US politics prevents me from reeling off a list). The 'live' issue of abortion rights also springs to mind. Therefore, the most reasonable conclusion I can draw is that Whittle was indirectly referencing the 'permissive' sides of *those* debates. Perhaps I'm wrong, but at least you can see the logic in my madness.

-I don't see the "homophobia" at all. That passage could be read (and was probably intended) as simply a condemnation of (heterosexual) "free love". The fact that you saw the phrase "feeling good about yourself... Sexually" and thought Whittle must have been talking about homosexuality is... odd.

OK well one of the main reasons for the association I made was that in this country (the UK) the colour pink just *is* associated with homosexuality for some reason (gay men in particular). Perhaps I was wrong in leaping to the conclusion that it's the same in America. As for Whittle's phrase "feeling good about yourself... Sexually", well let's do some of that free association Whittle recommends: Brainstorm some possible reasons why a person might not feel good about themselves sexually. I'd be surprised if 'because they're homosexual (and happen to live in one of the less tolerant parts of our society)' wasn't one of the first ideas that came into your head.

But fair enough, maybe I was seeing a bit more than he really implied. However, even if that's true, my point about permissiveness being opposed to the desirable attributes of greyness remains...

So it's not a "definition" in the sense of "Since you're Pink, ergo X". It's more like, "X, Y, and Z are true of you... these are Pink tendencies... so you lean 'Pink'"

Ah. You're right, I hadn't fully grasped that point.

You can argue that this pattern doesn't exist

That's precisely what I would argue. I have anecdotal evidence: I spent a few years in academia, going to conferences and meeting various people (mathematicians). A substantial majority of those I conversed with leaned to the liberal sides of the various 'moral issues' I mentioned above, and Whittle would thereby be inclined to call them 'Pinks'. At the same time, I judged that these people had far greater understanding and respect for science than the general public, and moreover a much greater willingness and ability to base their political opinions on reasoned argument, and even science when possible. This qualifies them as 'Greys'. I tentatively predict that this tendency towards simultaneous Pink and Grey is to be found throughout the world's scientific community, which therefore stands as so massive a counterexample to Whittle's 'pattern' as to make it useless. I suspect David Deutsch, with his much wider experience of academia, will be able to corroborate this.

If you think this fact makes Bush more "Pink" (qua

Whittle) than Clinton then you didn't read Whittle's piece closely.

I beg to differ.

(a) Pinkness, as best I can tell, incorporates the attribute of believing something irrational because it makes you feel good. ID is irrational. But it makes the religious right feel good.

(b) Greyness seems to incorporate the attribute of respect for the best scientific theories, even to the extent that they may contradict hopes we hold dear. Clinton, by rejecting ID, exhibits greater respect for science than Bush.

-So Whittle might be a racist (albeit you "don't have enough evidence to honestly call him" one) because you look askance upon the fashion in which he, anticipating the charges of racism that his piece would engender from such as yourself, states that he is not? Heh.

Are you honestly unfamiliar with the phenomenon of the phrase "Now I'm no racist, but" prefixing a racial attack (not that it necessarily does here)?

What's a "neocon" exactly, and which people in the White House are them? Remember, you don't like fuzzy, general categorizations... :-)

Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, for instance.

Perhaps you mean to refer to "Global Warming" here, i.e. the hypothesis that (1) the earth's temperature will get significantly warmer in *the future* due to a particular, easy to understand heat-trapping effect people have identified and termed "the greenhouse effect" and the hypothesis that this "greenhouse effect" will dominate all other effects present in the oceano-atmospheric system (as well as fluctuations in the sun's energy output), (2) this warming will be bad (for us) in general, and (3) we can reverse it significantly by altering our behavior in some realistic way (and in a way whose benefits outweigh the costs).

Yes. I mean (1), (2) and (3). Overwhelmingly, the leading scientists in the field accept (1) and (2) and the first half of (3). As proof, I point to [Naomi Oreske's paper](#).) The cost-benefit thing, admittedly, falls outside their area of expertise. However, a point is reached where the severity of (2) makes it perverse, to say the least, that we're already doing the best we can cost-benefit-wise.

I shall make no defense of Kyoto, as I don't know enough about it. But some market-based system of "carbon-trading" seems an obvious and relatively painless catalyst for the necessary research into greener energy.

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Amnesty International Versus Freedom

Sometimes the government proposes bad ideas for fighting terrorism, like **identity cards**. The police would be able to harass people to produce their cards, which would cost somewhere between £93 and £300 each. Even if the cards had worked in pilot studies, and they have not, criminals and terrorists would be essentially **unimpeded** by them. In a speech on 2 September **Charles Clarke**, the Home Secretary, said we already carry lots of ID with us, so why not one more card? But if the market already produces lots of ID why do we need this ruinously expensive and useless bureaucratic monstrosity from the government? We suspect that Mr Clarke wants to introduce the card for a reason he announced in his 2 September speech:

“Big Brother society is already here and my job is to control it.”

Obviously Mr Clarke does not understand the difference between people voluntarily carrying useful ID and the government forcing people to carry ID. Nor does he understand what Big Brother states, i.e. – tyrannies – are. So we need organisations who keep an eye on the government's attempts to encroach upon civil liberties.

Amnesty International is ostensibly such an organisation. However, they have argued that the House of Commons ought not to pass legislation to allow the government to expel people who **incite terrorism**. They write:

- the absolute prohibition of torture or other ill-treatment, and the principle inherent to such prohibition according to which a person should never be sent anywhere where she or he risk being subjected to torture or other ill-treatment -- the principle known as non-refoulement;
- the right to seek and enjoy asylum, including the right of all persons who seek international protection to have their asylum claim individually and fully considered in fair and satisfactory procedures consistent with international human rights and refugee law and standards. Any intention to exclude someone from refugee status should be considered in the context of regular refugee status determination procedures, and should be subject to

fundamental principles of procedural fairness, including the right to appeal against the decision to exclude, and to remain in the UK while that appeal is being considered;

- the rights to freedom of expression and association;

We are in the middle of a war against people who intend to destroy freedom by committing mass murder. People who advocate this are among our enemies in this war. The British government should not allow these people to recruit and raise money in Britain. Nor should the British government, in general, deport these people to any free country. Freedom of expression does not entitle people to incite, train, finance or recruit combatants for war against citizens of free countries. Freedom of association does not require the government to allow people to come together to support such a war. The new anti-terror legislation does not contravene human rights.

Thu, 09/08/2005 - 12:53 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Don't get your idea

Let me be clear. Do you really say that Amnesty International deliberately supports terrorists?

I think that in this case they simply support civil society principles indiscriminately.

And that is what law should be all about - it should set out rules for everybody.

If a person can be proven to incite hatred - why can't he or she be prosecuted in UK?

If the fault cannot be proven - who has the right to define fate of the person?

Hey! What about civil liberty?!

Why do you oppose "government's attempts to encroach upon civil liberties" selectively?

And about "war on terror". I don't understand why spreading terrorists across the world is better than prosecuting them where they are?

by a reader on Thu, 09/08/2005 - 15:37 | [reply](#)

Big Brother

"Big Brother society is already here and my job is to control it."

Thanks for the best laugh of the day. It's a tough job but someone has to do it.

Oxymoron joke, thoroughly enjoyed!

by a reader on Thu, 09/08/2005 - 15:51 | [reply](#)

Re: Don't get your idea

I think that in this case they simply support civil society principles indiscriminately.

And that is what law should be all about - it should set out rules for everybody.

If a person can be proven to incite hatred - why can't he or she be prosecuted in UK?

If the fault cannot be proven - who has the right to define fate of the person?

Under that principle, wouldn't all warfare be murder?

by [Editor](#) on Thu, 09/08/2005 - 16:03 | [reply](#)

Re: wouldn't all warfare be murder?

I am not sure what you mean exactly. Modern terrorism is almost always murder and therefore, terrorists, their leaders and those who incite terrorism should be tried and prosecuted.

Why sending them to Egypt, Jordan or Lebanon is better than prosecuting?

On the other hand if you cannot prove anything and therefore cannot prosecute people in one way, why do you resort to prosecution in another way? What right do you have to do so? Just because you call somebody a terrorist doesn't mean he is terrorist.

I saw some of those "people in question" on TV and they say quite unambiguously that they endorse violence against civilians, for example, in Israel. If they cannot be brought to justice then the law must be changed in order to accomodate such crime and to be able to punish them. In that way UK law would say clearly what moral values it stands for.

What you advocate here for, as it seems to me now, is to just "fight some bad guys for good reasons" without hesitation. Does end justify means?

By sending these "terror preachers" back home you admit that you are simply helpless.

by a reader on Thu, 09/08/2005 - 17:52 | [reply](#)

Re: wouldn't all warfare be murder?

When soldiers go on a mission to kill enemy soldiers, they do not put them on trial first. Thus they are deciding their fate without first proving that they are guilty of a crime. Under the principles of a civil society, pursued indiscriminately as you advocate, that is murder, is it not?

by [Editor](#) on Thu, 09/08/2005 - 18:10 | [reply](#)

Re: soldiers go on a mission to kill enemy soldiers

Oh, great! Soldiers also kill many civilians that are considered as unavoidable casualties in a war. I suggest also killing their families and friends - in present circumstances (i.e. GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR) their lives can be sacrificed without pity.

No, seriously. If you consider yourself as such a soldier why don't we go and kill terror preachers right where they are? What is this about? Playing around with deportation, right to abode etc. - what a petty issue it is!

In case of such an emergency like global war on terror - what petty issue is ID cards introduction.

You oppose one initiative on the grounds of civil liberties and support another on the grounds of war on terror. Be consistent.

by a reader on Fri, 09/09/2005 - 09:49 | [reply](#)

Re: soldiers go on a mission to kill enemy soldiers

Is it murder or not?

by [Editor](#) on Fri, 09/09/2005 - 10:44 | [reply](#)

Of course it is murder

.. and people should feel sorry for committing it even if it is unavoidable. And every effort should be put to avoid murder.

If such murder is unavoidable during a war then the war should be avoided, but soldiers cannot be prosecuted for killing enemy. If the war is unavoidable then, again, it is a different story.

But whatever you call it but terror is not a war, although it might be unavoidable in many cases. And the presence of terrorists doesn't mean that you can prosecute people randomly in such a tricky way. However, if their fault can be proven under civil society law than the war retorics wouldn't be necessary here at all.

by a reader on Fri, 09/09/2005 - 14:58 | [reply](#)

Re: Of course it is murder

Is it your opinion that civil society law ought to designate certain unavoidable things as serious crimes?

If all war is murder, and every effort should be made to avoid murder, should all war be made illegal?

by [Editor](#) on Fri, 09/09/2005 - 15:36 | [reply](#)

losing time and logic

You have gone too far from the main point. In my view, the main

point was - why do you protect civil liberties only selectively? And why a person whose fault cannot be proven needs to be sent away?

Comparing terror preachers with an enemy soldier who cannot be stopped except if killed - such comparison is overstretched, to say the least.

Home office (or whoever) have had years to try and stop these people and nevertheless have managed to do nothing. These people could have been stopped in a peaceful manner many time before the bombs went off in London and before the planes crashed into WTC. After all, noone can tell if these terror preachers have had any direct connection to the bombing. I have no information about whether they recruited, assisted or guided the terrorists. All we have is their speach. But their speach, even if very harmful to society, is not an order. You can compare these things only in figurative sense. But you go far beyond that line. You tell that they actually do give orders.

Is it logical enough?

by a reader on Mon, 09/12/2005 - 15:28 | [reply](#)

Re: Of course it is murder

You have **said** categorically that all war is murder and that every effort should be made to avoid murder. It seems to follow from those two propositions that all war should be illegal. Do you believe that it should?

by **Editor** on Mon, 09/12/2005 - 16:27 | [reply](#)

RE: war, murder and civil liberty

I think both parties to this discussion have a point and are mistaken in parts of their reasoning: not all war is murder, so not all war should be made illegal. Wars have two sides, but there is usually no moral symmetry based on which the legality of the war should be ultimately judged. But it is true that **The World's** argument for deportation is selective in regards to civil liberties. I believe a better move than the deportation law is to define the "incitement to terror" as a form of assistance in murder and prosecute the inciters within the UK. This will also produce a far more desirable outcome. By deporting the preachers of terror, one would effectively leave them free to do harm in other places and in other forms, and worse, one would help radicalize the societies that have given rise to the existing terrorist ideas in places like Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iran, etc. Whereas a successful prosecution in the UK is capable of ending that trail of incitement forever.

by Bob on Tue, 09/13/2005 - 04:46 | [reply](#)

A fair trial

Is it the position of **The World** that when we are deemed to be at

war with some group, someone who is accused of supporting that group does not have a right to a fair trial and the presumption of innocence?

by GS on Tue, 09/13/2005 - 14:15 | [reply](#)

Re: A fair trial

That depends what you mean by 'supporting'. For example, enemy fighters cannot be assigned such rights without in effect banning warfare. And sometimes (depending on the nature of the war) nor can people who are giving the orders, planning the operations, spying, manufacturing or transporting munitions, and recruiting, training or inciting people to do any of those things. Under some circumstances, any or all such people are, in fact, enemy fighters. Another example is innocent bystanders. They must never be targeted, but nor do they have an unconditional right not to be harmed unless first put on trial (where they would in any case be acquitted).

Is it your (GS's) position that enemy fighters have a right not to be forcibly expelled from a given territory unless they are found guilty of a crime in a fair trial under the presumption of innocence? If not, why not?

by [Editor](#) on Tue, 09/13/2005 - 15:51 | [reply](#)

enemy fighters

It is only you who called them "enemy fighters". There is no real war between "terror preachers" and UK. Therefore, they are entitled to all civil rights as everybody else in this country. Arguing whether all wars are illegal or not is a separate totally unrelated topic. You denied these people fair trial on the basis that you called them "enemy fighters". Nothing else!

On the other hand, bringing them to justice under possible "incitement of terror" would have much better effect on society and would help enormously in the course of "war on terror". That sort of fighting is much much more acceptable way.

What amazes me is that UK legal system feels much more comfortable when prosecuting people on the grounds of unslighting religious feelings (which are expressed towards non-existent God) rather than on the grounds of humanity (which is expressed towards quite real entities - us). And this is where the real problem lies.

by a reader on Wed, 09/14/2005 - 10:42 | [reply](#)

Re: enemy fighters

Should all war be illegal or not?

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 09/14/2005 - 10:47 | [reply](#)

Re: A fair trial

If I understand you right you think that people suspected of supporting terrorists may or may not "be assigned such rights (to the presumption of innocence etc)... depending on the nature of the war"

What aspects of the nature of the war are you thinking of here?

I would suggest that, in a conventional war between large armies it is not practical to try every soldier, and if they are fighting in uniform it is hardly necessary.

However this war is more dissimilar to a conventional war than it is similar.

The British government has easily enough resources to try every single person suspected of supporting terrorists and allow a jury of their peers to decide on their guilt. This would, I suspect, lead to fewer false conviction and give everyone greater faith in the system. Why should they not do so?

Also if during a war it is acceptable to curtail the rights of those who may be supporting terrorists would the world support the internment of all Muslims? Or there deportation? If not why not?

Lastly if you think that some level of proof is required before you deport, imprison, or intern someone accused of supporting terrorists but not the level of proof required by a jury trial, what level of proof do you think is acceptable?

by GS on Wed, 09/14/2005 - 13:59 | [reply](#)

Re: enemy fighters

>Should all war be illegal?

I don't have an answer to this question, but maybe it would be helpful to the discussion if **The World** suggested a working definition of "war". I suggest their definition would have to exclude violent street gangs, international mafia organizations (or maybe not?) and violent G8 summit protesters and encompass conventional warfare and the war on terror/global jihad.

by GS on Wed, 09/14/2005 - 14:24 | [reply](#)

Should all war be illegal?

You are still trying to catch me on this question no matter how relevant it is. My point was that this question is absolutely irrelevant here because we don't talk about real war here at all.

But if you insist on your question, I should answer that in ideal world where only moral principles should govern people all real wars should be illegal (or rather, not morally justifiable). But in today's world laws govern people and states and the laws are not equal to moral principles. Also, many country leaders do not behave rationally regarding human rights, WMD etc. and therefore a real war could be legal and justified. The thing is, whenever it is

physically possible any evil man should be brought to fair trial (like Saddam is going to be) and so should be the "terror preachers".

Therefore, Amnesty International is not against freedom but for freedom. Quite contrary to what you stated.

by a reader on Wed, 09/14/2005 - 16:42 | [reply](#)

Well?

Well? What is it about the nature of this war which makes it inappropriate to give suspected enemy a fair trial? We have plenty of spare resources to do it with.

by GS on Fri, 09/16/2005 - 13:56 | [reply](#)

nature of war

that the guy is shooting at you, and it's far easier to shoot him than to capture him.

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 09/16/2005 - 14:52 | [reply](#)

nature of war

So if the person is not shooting you, as in the cases we were discussing, you should give them a fair trial according to your answer.

by GS on Fri, 09/16/2005 - 15:59 | [reply](#)

capture

our soldiers already have a policy of accepting surrender and of capturing prisoners, when it is safe to do so. we don't shoot people who aren't a danger.

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 09/16/2005 - 16:03 | [reply](#)

capture

I'm sorry Elliot but I don't think you have been following the discussion. The question is whether people arrested in Britain, who are alleged to have supported terrorists should be given a fair trial with the presumption of innocence etc. I do not accept that that situation is analogous to a battlefield one where resources are scarce and split second decisions must be made. We have all the

resources of a modern state at our disposal and a few dozen, or at

most a few hundred alleged enemy. Why not give them a fair trial?

by GS on Fri, 09/16/2005 - 16:12 | [reply](#)

I thought you were discussing

I thought you were discussing war (which has been asked about repeatedly in this thread), but I see now it was just a confusing choice of metaphor.

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 09/16/2005 - 16:25 | [reply](#)

War metaphor

I agree it is a confusing choice of metaphor, however the accuracy of the metaphor is the basis of [The World's](#) whole argument.

by GS on Fri, 09/16/2005 - 16:37 | [reply](#)

I dunno about the basis of th

I dunno about the basis of their whole argument, but perhaps we can hope for a follow World post explaining it in more detail.

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 09/16/2005 - 16:52 | [reply](#)

A working definition of war

Organised political violence using lethal force.

by [Editor](#) on Fri, 09/16/2005 - 19:14 | [reply](#)

ok i think i get what ppl are

ok i think i get what ppl are saying now. some questions:

to [The World](#):

1) what are the benefits of deportation? to save space/money that it'd cost to jail them?

2) is the reason not to give trials one of cost?

to GS:

how much money and effort are we required to spend being nice to our enemies, would you say? is it limited?

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 09/16/2005 - 20:13 | [reply](#)

The question

The question is whether people arrested in Britain, who are alleged to have supported terrorists should be given a fair trial with the presumption of innocence etc.

Isn't it more whether they should *always* be given a fair trial etc. regardless of how much harm that might do to the war effort, or just *usually*?

For example, if the evidence to convict a person of being a member of a terrorist network would reveal sources of intelligence and therefore cannot be presented to a court, but evidence can be presented for a court to order him deported, except that the person has a well-founded fear of persecution in his home country, then under peacetime rules he would walk free. Wartime could justify either detaining him without trial as an enemy combatant or deporting him summarily to his home country.

by **Editor** on Fri, 09/16/2005 - 20:18 | [reply](#)

So, we have intelligence reports

... against terror preachers and revealing the sources would jeopardise the whole country safety? Don't be ridiculous.

I thought that these people's fault is quite clear without any hidden information. The problem was only with legislation. We afraid to tell that inciting violence is bad, but we are not afraid of spoiling our fair trial system. Applause!

by **Yuryr** on Mon, 09/19/2005 - 11:10 | [reply](#)

Re: The question

>For example, if the evidence to convict a person of being
>a member of a terrorist network would reveal sources of
>intelligence

Surely the same could be said for alleged members of drug gangs, or mafia organisations, can they also be locked up without trial?

This also links back to your definition of war which, while I accept it, rather begs the question what is special about political violence? If the violence is organised, lethal and political we can use a whole set of new rules, while if it is organised, lethal and for money, or for control or turf, we cannot.

by GS on Mon, 09/19/2005 - 12:46 | [reply](#)

money and effort

>how much money and effort are we required to spend being
>nice to our enemies, would you say? is it limited?
>-- Elliot Temple

I would say that the amount of money and effort we are required to spend giving fair trials to those accused of being our enemies is not unlimited, but is quite large in a rich society. I would not belittle it by calling it 'being nice to our enemies'.

by GS on Mon, 09/19/2005 - 14:12 | [reply](#)

The cost

So (round figures) the cost of the Moussaoui trial has been about \$10 million. There are 100,000 jihadists in the world. So under your system, they could win the war just by all giving themselves up. The cost of their trials alone would be a trillion dollars. If that doesn't bankrupt America overnight, North Korea could declare war, and have its armed forces of 7 million commit some war crimes and then surrender.

by a reader on Fri, 03/17/2006 - 02:18 | [reply](#)

...Then Only Criminals Will Have Guns

Following a recent spate of shootings in North-West London, local people say they have had enough, and have marched with police through the streets of the Borough of Brent, **demanding** an end to gun crime in the area.

It is not clear whether London's criminals were impressed by the march. Time will tell. The police are rather despondent, though:

Brent's borough commander, Chief Supt Andy Bamber, said the availability of firearms in the borough was "absolutely horrifying".

"People can easily get a firearm and the age group of those getting involved is coming down," he said.

It's not even remotely true that 'people can easily get a firearm'. Thanks to Britain's stringent gun-control laws, it is only criminals who can easily get them.

Sat, 09/10/2005 - 19:02 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Question

What are the penalties for holding an illegal handgun or rifle? What are the penalties for using a firearm in a crime? What are the penalties for smuggling firearms?

by a reader on Sun, 09/11/2005 - 02:15 | [reply](#)

Penalty

The **penalty** for owning a gun is five years in jail and an 'unlimited' fine.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Wed, 09/14/2005 - 02:26 | [reply](#)

Re: ...Then Only Criminals Will Have Guns

No. Police and army has guns too. Sometime it is not enough - true. But what you suggest instead?

- 1) all teenagers should have guns (from their parents wardrobes)
- 2) all looters should have guns (from nearby gun shop)

- 3) all burglars
- 4) all former prisoners
- 5) some psychologically unstable people (who have not yet been qualified as "dangerous" by GPs)
- 6) all people who at least once in a lifetime might feel jealousy or rage or whatever.
- 7) some drunk people
- 8) people who are annoyed by neighbours, passers by, bad drivers or whatever causes hatred between people.

A teenager shooting classmates in a school, a city white collar worker shooting colleagues being over-exhausted at work, a looter in New Orleans who could easily break into a gun shop shooting rescue workers - these examples seems not enough for you, guys? Are you going to bear arms or arm bears? How do you tell the difference?

by a reader on Wed, 09/14/2005 - 10:55 | [reply](#)

Re: ...Then Only Criminals Will Have Guns

No. Police and army has guns too.

They have guns, and so do certain specially privileged civilians. However, contrary to what Chief Supt Bamber inadvertently said, none of those people can get them easily. Only criminals can.

Your point might be better made if you removed all the criminals from your list. Why, for instance, did you include burglars, since we know from Chief Supt Bamber that they can already get guns easily?

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 09/14/2005 - 11:19 | [reply](#)

burglars

knowing that every family can have gun legally quite possibly would provoke every single burglar and thief have guns charged and ready and start shooting to any living soul they meet on their way.

On the other hand many burglars (even if they can easily get a gun) prefer not to have it at all because their sentence would be much higher if found in possession of a gun.

There is no perfect solution in this imperfect world. But once again you exhibit double standards.

On one hand you advocate for giving guns to everybody so that everybody can defend himself/herself. On the other hand, you don't agree that if every country can have weapons of mass destruction than there will be less wars and more protection. Why don't we want Iran to have nuclear weapon?

Because we are not sure that Iranian government would act rationally. The same goes here - I don't believe that all people with guns would act rationally.

If somebody is targeting you as a possible victim and is armed than the fact that you have a gun doesn't play much role. Killers

and burglars who own their living this way would spend more money

to get a better gun and put more efforts in training themselves than any of us. The only choice we have is to set up a body of professionals who can protect others. And that is what police and army are.

Many criminals have guns - true. But you would allow armed criminals to multiply enourmously whereas you would still have your own single gun. I am not sure if this would be a better world to live in.

by a reader on Wed, 09/14/2005 - 11:43 | [reply](#)

knowing that every family can

knowing that every family can have gun legally quite possibly would provoke every single buglar and thief have guns charged and ready and start shooting to any living soul they meet on their way.

Or maybe most thieves don't like gun fights, or murder, and wouldn't rob anyone they thought might be home and have a gun.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 09/14/2005 - 17:41 | [reply](#)

I Have

A big dog and a shotgun loaded with rock salt. Stops those burglars everytime.

by a reader on Wed, 09/14/2005 - 20:16 | [reply](#)

Buglers

I don't see why buglers shouldn't have guns. They need them in case someone tries to steal their bugle.

by [R](#) on Thu, 09/15/2005 - 00:38 | [reply](#)

Oh

you mean burglars... Nevermind.

by [R](#) on Thu, 09/15/2005 - 00:41 | [reply](#)

Burglars

Thanks for correction... Many people would suggest putting an alarm into house, a dog, a baseball bate or whatever. And many people would find it useful to deter burglars this way. But in any case burglars exist and will exist, they will break into houses, kill or harm people or just leave if anybody is inside. There is no ideal solution. In some places people have just hired guards to look after several houses at once - it works quite well.

But how would you deter you teenage son from finding a gun in

your house in order to settle score with his classmates? Or a husband from killing his wife after finding out that she was having an affair.

Putting aside this hypothetical arguments, I don't see how American society has become safer and less criminal without gun control. As I pointed out before, shooting classmates or colleagues doesn't quite support your argument. Number of prisoners in USA divided by total population is also quite a blow.

by a reader on Thu, 09/15/2005 - 10:16 | [reply](#)

Personally, I do not think it

Personally, I do not think it relevant what effect the Firearms Acts have on the rate of crime. Criminals are responsible for crime. People in general are not.

If you support any law whatsoever that makes it harder for a person to get a gun and use it to defend themselves, then you are, I believe, saying that sometimes a woman must submit to being raped, or beaten up, or killed, in order that other people are safer in general. I don't; I believe in a right to self defence.

In point of fact, gun laws make the country far more dangerous - not that it makes any difference to the moral aspect of the question. The fact that people are not allowed to be armed is what makes armed spree killings possible. This situation particularly promotes the kind of schoolyard murders and killings of wives by husbands that you were talking about. I could easily kill my fiancée with my bare hands if I wanted to. I don't, obviously! But if I did, she would have the right to defend herself. Or so I believe, anyway.

Incidentally, when the original poster said that only criminals could get guns easily, did they mean this as true by definition viz. if you get a handgun without a firearms certificate you're breaking the law, or just practically the case if you're not a career criminal? I don't think it is hard in practice. It's certainly easy to break the gun laws and come up with some sort of illegal weapon yourself. I don't think they can be that hard to buy either. I mean, they will sell some revolvers to any adult in France. [Here](#), for example.

by a reader on Thu, 09/15/2005 - 11:47 | [reply](#)

Re: Criminals are responsible for crime.

The problem is that more people would become criminals and more criminals would use guns.

In general, people un mass don't necessarily act sensibly or rationally. Just like not all countries are expected to be rational about WMD. Some are and some aren't. And that is what bothers me.

You are wrong about using statistical data. In some cases you have

to disregard statistics when your personal situation can easily be isolated from others. For example, if you want to stop living and demand a right to do so. Even if statistics can point out that more people would leave this world this numbers would be irrelevant. By killing your self you don't put anyone else in danger, although some indirect influence is always present.

In case of gun controls, the situation is totally different. The fact that you posses a gun makes quite a big difference on safety of others. Your failure to hold on to it puts other innocent people around in danger. And many people can be expected to be quite careless at times.

If you argue that being killed by neighbour is better than being killed by a burglar than I must say that there is no clear line between would-be-criminal and an innocent person. The moment an innocent person crosses the line (deliberatly, professionaly or by mistake) he/she has become criminal. By letting people have guns you just "produce" more criminals.

Do you have any facts to confirm that there are less burglars in USA or that they are less violent, or there are less victims?

by a reader on Thu, 09/15/2005 - 13:07 | [reply](#)

There are quite a few people

There are quite a few people posting as "a reader" here. I can hardly complain, as this includes me (at 11:47), but it might be confusing things.

Anyway, I have something to ask the person that posted at 13:07.

Do you think that if guns were more readily available, more people would become criminals? Meaning: burglars, robbers, rapists, murderers? I think that's what you were saying. If so, why? I personally think the opposite, as do quite a lot of people, as you can see by the fact that such people seem to rule the blogosphere.

In any case, if it were true, why would this mean that a person should not be allowed to use a gun to defend themself from a rapist, robber, bugle-playing maniac etc?

by a reader on Thu, 09/15/2005 - 13:44 | [reply](#)

I am the reader 13:07

"Do you think that if guns were more readily available, more people would become criminals?"

In order to give any answer to this question we need to summon statistical data which I suggested to do in the first place and which you oppose saying that this is irrelevant because personal protection is what matters.

I argue that if you are more likely to be shot than you are in more

danger and less protected. Again you disagree.
What is your answer to that?

As for purely ideological discussion that libertarians always tend to prefer, than of course personal freedom and protection is above all values (or at least above common values). But I would argue again that in case of gun control your personal freedom to have a gun oppresses me in the same way as any pyrotechnical experiments in the private property of my neighbour would threaten my life. The fact that my dead neighbour would be responsible for damage to my property is a little consolation to me.

by Yuryr on Thu, 09/15/2005 - 15:06 | [reply](#)

Intentions are real and they matter

I could kill my fiancee with my bare hands if I wanted to

Yeah, but not wanting to is the same as not being able to.

It's certainly easy to break the gun laws

Most members of the public would not find it easy. They respect the law generally, and would fear accusations of criminality. Only hardened criminals could find it easy.

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Thu, 09/15/2005 - 19:08 | [reply](#)

Statistical Data and Intentions

Yuryr, let's get some statistical data. I'm all for it. It wouldn't change my mind either way personally, because I see the question as a moral issue - people have a right to defend themselves against attack - but if it means something to you, let's do it.

The only problem is what to take as good evidence. I suggest trying to find out what the effect of tightenings and liberalizations of gun laws in different countries is on the trends in the rates of the various types of crime there. You have to look at a derivative so that you can see what actually happens as a result of the gun law changes. It's no good saying (for example) "America is dangerous", or "Switzerland is safe". Lots of people get stabbed in America, for example, but not many in Switzerland.

Tom Robinson, I'm not entirely sure that only hardened criminals would break the gun laws. I have, I'm sure. They're pretty difficult to obey, in fact, if you're interested in shooting. Am I a hardened criminal? Maybe, but I don't feel like one! I really just wanted to know what the original poster actually meant by "it is only criminals who can easily get them."

by a reader on Fri, 09/16/2005 - 08:51 | [reply](#)

'Easy'

We meant, as Tom Robinson said, that most members of the public

would not find it easy. Not only for the reasons he gave, but also because they do not have the relevant knowledge and contacts. The fact that they become criminals *by definition* is also relevant, and was a secondary meaning.

by **Editor** on Fri, 09/16/2005 - 09:52 | [reply](#)

Statistical Data and Intentions

Murders with firearms (per capita):

http://www.nationmaster.com/graph-T/crime/crime_mur_wit_fir_cap

Murders (per capita):

http://www.nationmaster.com/graph-T/crime/crime_mur_cap

In both tables USA is preceded only by African and developing countries in other regions.

Another link (rather simplistic summary):

http://www.learnenglish.org.uk/magazine/magazine_home_disarmament.html

As we were talking about burglaries the text in the link above says: *Guns don't protect you. Statistics show that you are more likely to be shot if you have a gun in the house. And the person who gets shot is more likely to be the householder than the intruder.*

As for personal morale principles, that I expected to be valued above all by libertarians, lets just reflect on what you are saying. Putting other innocent people in danger is not a moral issue to you, but your own protection is important (even if it doesn't actually make you more protected as statistics shows). Perhaps, we are not sharing the same moral values with you.

But why are you always putting moral first? Correct me if I am wrong. We are talking about legislative and political issues. They don't coincide with moral principles and moral principles are not clear. What we can do in reality is to modify laws in order to be closer to what we see as moral. Besides laws are what should be best for society, not a single person. I know that putting society needs before individual freedom is not moral. But laws are for society and about society and always will be whether libertarians like it or not.

Of course, it is usually the case that if laws disregard private property and personal freedom etc. than the whole society deteriorates. But that is a different topic.

If you are looking for a law that governs your personal life or the life of your family than you use moral principles. When you talk about society (which is not equal to a family) you talk about conventional laws (not moral ones). Using New York map for navigating through London is a little bit awkward to say the least.

by **Yuryr** on Fri, 09/16/2005 - 12:31 | [reply](#)

Maybe the USA has higher gun

Maybe the USA has higher gun crime than everywhere but Africa

because it imported a bunch of Africans who do it's gun crime for it.

by a racist on Fri, 09/16/2005 - 14:54 | [reply](#)

Yuryr, I don't think the murd

Yuryr, I don't think the murder rates in any one year in a country really say much. Surely what's wanted is to find out what tends to happen to these rates (or, better, to a more rounded measure of public safety, since a lot of murder victims are criminals, and a lot of crime doesn't result in murder) in a country, after more restrictive gun laws are brought in, and what tends to happen when less restrictive ones are introduced?

I believe that the rate of crime probably generally falls when gun laws are liberalized. This seems to be the case in the US states that have recently allowed concealed carry compared with those that haven't. I don't seem to have time to find evidence, though, sorry! That said, I re-iterate that I believe that the right of a person to defend themself from crime, and to be prepared for it by owning a gun and carrying it in ordinary public places is absolute. You and I are probably not going to agree on this issue any time soon, I feel...

"A racist", I doubt very much what you say (or at least imply), although it is certainly conceivable. But if your implication were true, would it make any difference to the gun law question?

Incidentally, Editor, is it just me, or is it impossible to select (with the mouse) most of the text on **The World**? Maybe this is deliberate? I ask because it meant I couldn't cut Yuryr's urls above - not easily, at least. You might also want to know that your submission verifier earlier asked me to divide two by an empty string. Maybe David Deutsch can do that, but I can't!

Also, thank you for an interesting and unique blog.

by a reader on Fri, 09/16/2005 - 15:49 | [reply](#)

You doubt the prevalence of (

You doubt the prevalence of (gun) crimes by black people?

<http://www.racismeantiblanc.bizland.com/005/06-02.htm>

<http://www.ourcivilisation.com/usa/racewar.htm>

<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/crimoff.htm>

<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/glance/race.htm>

This matters to the theory that the reason the US has more gun crime than the UK is lax gun laws.

by a reader on Fri, 09/16/2005 - 16:21 | [reply](#)

Cutting remarks

We do nothing to inhibit selecting and copying content. I have just

checked using (in alphabetical order) Camino, Firefox, iCab, OmniWeb, Opera, Safari, and Shiira and see no problem, so it seems likely that it is something specific to your browser or its configuration.

The occasional impossible arithmetic challenge is, of course, a deliberate ploy to encourage readers to register.

by **Editor** on Fri, 09/16/2005 - 22:15 | [reply](#)

A reader 9/14 11:43 calls it

A reader 9/14 11:43 calls it a "double standard" that **The World** doesn't want to ban guns for everyone yet at the same time doesn't "want Iran to have nuclear weapon". Do I really need to point out that this is a silly comparison? Wanting guns to be legal for law-abiding citizens as a matter of general law is not the same as wanting some given psychopath to have a gun. I might add that **The World** never advocated for "giving guns to everybody" but for not banning guns for everybody. There is a difference.

Does a reader really not understand the difference between the general and the particular?

Even the oh-so-gun-plagued U.S. disallows, for example, convicted felons from getting guns. If Iran is not the equivalent on the international scale, what country is?

A reader writes:

"I don't beleive that all people with guns would act rationally."

And neither do I. But this is not a good reason to ban guns altogether. (I do not believe "all people" with baseball bats would act rationally....)

Then a reader declares, out of clear blue,

"If somebody is targetting you as a possible victim and is armed than the fact that you have a gun doesn't play much role."

That's a calculation you've made for yourself, and that's your right. Others have made a different calculation, that a gun would prove useful for self defense in certain situations, and that's their right (in the U.S.).

"But you would allow armed criminals to multiply enourmously whereas you would still have your own single gun"

Armed criminals obtain firearms independently of whether laws exists banning them. This is part of the reason we call them criminals.

And the hypothetical of the multiplied number of armed criminals attacking a solitary citizen who only has a single gun is a total non sequitur. "Criminals" do not all belong to a giant organization together through which they team-up, in ever-increasing numbers (in proportion to their total), to attack a target they have all

decided upon somehow. Even if the reader is right that the group "Armed Criminals" multiplies (by 2, say) due to no gun laws, this does not mean that any given robbery attempt will involve twice as many criminals. That would be a very silly model of criminal behavior to believe in (which I doubt a reader actually does). Certainly, it is true that if one is attacked by a hundred armed men, being armed will probably not help. But so what? If one is attacked by Godzilla a gun won't help either. That's not the sort of situation anyone envisions a gun being useful in the first place.

Because it won't defend against a hundred armed men, there's no use getting a gun that might defend against one or two? That's just idiotic. And you don't really believe that logic either, I hope.

by blixax on Sat, 09/17/2005 - 16:46 | [reply](#)

Of course it is exaggregation

Yes, indeed, I don't think that the whole world conspires against unarmed myself. It is just a simplification. This was a similar to pacifistic reasoning that the more advanced weapons you use the more advanced weapons your enemies use and the balance of force remains but the danger increases. Of course, this logic is not flawless. And countries need to protect themselves and it works. The increased danger of possessing more advanced weapons (like intra-army casualties) are outbalanced by increased protection against a clearly identifiable enemy with clear intentions.

There is one important difference between countries and people. Every country has a system of looking after its weapons. It is never flawless but the system exists and has its purpose.

People don't have such system. Who is going to protect me from your children shooting randomly or by mistake? Don't start again about children throwing knives randomly or trying to strangle everybody with bare hands - it is not the same at all. People can drop a gun on a street or left in a train like they drop thousands of their purses or mobile phones.

There is a systematic way of dealing with criminals and that is called police. You said that you should have a right to protect yourself. Sure. You also have right to protect yourself in many ways. You can demand better policing or higher conviction terms, hire a guard on temporary or permanent basis, or whatever - the possibilities are endless. Nobody tells that police is useless and it has lost its grip on criminals. And But you chose the way which puts other people in danger. Neither system is flawless, neither protects you in 100% of cases. There is no even a particular threat for your at the moment. But you choose the system which puts other people in danger.

I don't mind you giving the right to, for instance, cure yourself with whatever drug you prefer. You have a right to protect yourself against diseases as well. And many people would die additionally as a result of no-prescription medical system. And this terrible statistics wouldn't put me off. Simply because it doesn't put other

people in danger. And the drugs are easier to isolate from children, although not 100% foolproof.

But you simply ignore this important difference between drugs and guns.

If it is difficult to find clear statistics than on the moral grounds it is wrong to put other people in danger for your own safety.

by [Yuryr](#) on Mon, 09/19/2005 - 10:55 | [reply](#)

"There is one important diffe

"There is one important difference between countries and people. Every country has a system of looking after its weapons. It is never flawless but the system exists and has its purpose."

There are many important differences between countries and people but I don't think that's one of them. I could just as easily say truthfully that Every person has a system of looking after his weapons, it is never flawless but the system exists and has its purpose.

"People don't have such system. Who is going to protect me from your children shooting randomly or by mistake?"

One, you are. I assume that in your everyday life if you saw someone, whether child or not, wielding a gun erratically you would stay away. Two, my children are, since I have instilled in them morality and responsibility. Three, I am, since I keep my gun(s) under lock and key and so forth (this is all hypothetical). Four, the police are; if they're around, they will surely take countermeasures.

Of course, that system isn't flawless, but lack of flawlessness doesn't seem to bother you when it comes to countries bearing nukes, so why should it bother you when it comes to individuals bearing puny firearms?

"People can drop a gun on a street or left in a train like they drop thousands of their purses or mobile phones."

That is an odd thing to say. In my experience, people are quite attached to valuable objects and are reluctant to part with them. How many firearms have you found or observed left on a street or train?

"You also have right to protect yourself in many ways. You can demand better policing or higher conviction terms, hire a guard on temporary or permanent basis, or whatever - the possibilities are endless."

Indeed, and they include arming oneself.

"Nobody tells that police is useless and it has lost its grip on criminals. And But you chose the way which puts other people in danger."

False. The typical citizen arming himself does not, overall (i.e.

looking at both sides, not just one side of the equation), put other people in danger and you haven't established that it does.

"But you simply ignore this important difference between drugs and guns."

I don't think the comparison is important or even interesting. For what it's worth, the policy 'let people treat themselves w/whatever drug they want' would too involve a danger to 'others'. If people can try whatever drug they want, say Dangerous Experimental Drug X (DEX), that leads to a budding industry for DEX, which means it can be found in drugstores, which means it's in lots of peoples' bathroom cabinets (or left on, uh, trains, as the case may be), which increases the likelihood that Little Johnny will find it and gulp it down....

"If it is difficult to find clear statistics"

...you nevertheless seem to feel free to invent conclusions such as "letting a typical citizen be armed puts other people in danger" out of thin air.

"If it is difficult to find clear statistics than on the moral grounds it is wrong to put other people in danger for your own safety."

Yet it is perfectly appropriate to put other people in danger if they pose a threat to my safety. If people do not threaten my safety then they are in no danger from my (hypothetical) firearm, and the same is true of 99% of firearms owners.

This system isn't "flawless", of course, but remember: that's okay with you.

Or is it Not Okay with you for the one special case of firearms, for some pathological reason?

by blixia on Mon, 09/19/2005 - 20:50 | [reply](#)

Affirming Life

Sometimes surrender is wise. This is not one of those times.

New Orleans should be rebuilt, as before but stronger and better.

So should the World Trade Center towers.

Wise or not, surrender to evil is 'bad for the soul'. That is to say, it is harmful in many traceable and untraceable ways over and above the loss of the immediate thing being surrendered. The same is true of despair or resignation in the face of challenges from nature.

Correspondingly, defiance of evil, and of natural challenges, is good. It affirms life, and has unforeseeable benefits.

Tue, 09/13/2005 - 00:45 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

No Question

This is one of those questions that is irrelevant. Not build New Orleans? C'mon.

The only questions are around how New Orleans can best be rebuilt. These are good and useful questions. How would you rebuild New Orleans better, safer, stronger? Now we are talking in the rhetoric of The Six Million Dollar Man.

I would rather not have New Orleans destroyed again by the next powerful hurricane. Even more, I see no reason for New Orleans to ever again be flooded with ten or more feet of water because of an unviable levee design. Biloxi and Gulfport will be rebuilt too, and above sea level as they are now.

by a reader on Tue, 09/13/2005 - 03:33 | [reply](#)

It's Not So Obvious

First of all, surrendering to evil (and thus encouraging more of it) is **very** different from not rebuilding something that was destroyed by nature. Sometimes, rebuilding it is just repeating a mistake.

I think it's politically inevitable that New Orleans will be rebuilt, but that doesn't mean rebuilding it is the right thing to do.

I have no objection to people who would like to rebuild New Orleans

contributing to such a project because they judge the benefits to exceed the costs, and they are willing to bear the costs (including the costs of protecting against repetition of this tragedy and private insurance against such events).

I have a strong objection to government subsidies that force unwilling people to contribute to this.

There are many people who perpetually rebuild their homes in unsafe areas because the government subsidizes their risky behavior.

That is theft. I don't think that **The World** should support such things.

Perhaps it's the case that the benefits of rebuilding New Orleans justify the costs. However, we'll never know unless those who want it done bear all of the costs of doing it.

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 09/13/2005 - 06:05 | [reply](#)

Let the market decide?

Walter Block **makes the point** that the market rather than government should decide whether New Orleans should be rebuilt:

Private enterprise alone should determine if the Big Easy is worth saving or not. Problems of "transactions costs" will be far easier to overcome than challenges presented by an inept and economically irrational government. Possibly a Donald Trump type might try to buy up all the buildings at a fraction of their previous value, and save his new investment by levee building and water pumping. He wouldn't need to get 100% sales. A lesser amount, say, 90%, might do, and he would only make his initial purchases subject to reaching this level. That is, he might first purchase options to buy.

But I'm not sure this is relevant given the fact our society is organised so that government is very much involved in the infrastructure and it's not realistic to expect we can privatise a whole city at this point in time.

But I would guess it's probably efficient to rebuild in any case even from a purely economical standpoint. Because I think once the water is pumped out, we'll see most of the city is still there, so it would be quite a waste to write it all off. Repairing the city will surely cost less than building a completely new city elsewhere. And indeed, when you add to that the emotional component of not wanting to lose such a historic place, plus that it's good for the soul, the decision shouldn't be too hard.

Here in Holland in 1953 we had almost exactly the same thing happen. Also a flooding of a huge area, because a storm broke the dikes - something which had been predicted by experts for years but they didn't do anything about it. But it was all rebuilt and they made super strong dikes that are expected to break only about

once every 10000 years.

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Wed, 09/14/2005 - 00:32 | [reply](#)

Good for whose soul?

Are you claiming to know what is good for the souls of the 500,000+ former residents of New Orleans? Are the people who choose to leave and never return somehow moral cowards?

Perhaps they should be forced back to rebuild the city to fulfill your vision of what is good for them.

by a reader on Wed, 09/14/2005 - 13:18 | [reply](#)

Why are cities built?

New Orleans will be rebuilt. The Mississippi Delta is a fabulous place with many economic assets. As for real estate, Location, Location, Location. Below water tho is not Location, unless you are a shrimp or a clam.

New Orleans will be rebuilt. Rebuild it right, on the same premise that the original city was founded, above water.

by a reader on Wed, 09/14/2005 - 16:04 | [reply](#)

Re: Good for whose soul?

Perhaps they should be forced back to rebuild the city to fulfill your vision of what is good for them.

We disagree. Do you think we should be forced to agree, in order to fulfil your vision of what is good for us?

by **Editor** on Wed, 09/14/2005 - 16:23 | [reply](#)

Re: Let the market decide?

Isn't this a bit of a category error? If I were to write an article extolling the virtues of the Macintosh operating system over Windows, and urging people to switch to the former, would you reply that it would be better to let the market decide?

The point is, preferences are changeable. Preferences are causally prior to market forces. Preferences are a legitimate subject for debate and for creative thought. And there is no way of 'letting the market decide' what one's preferences should be.

by **David Deutsch** on Thu, 09/15/2005 - 02:46 | [reply](#)

Who Should Pay?

David,

It's perfectly legitimate for anyone to express their preferences. But, it's also the case that it's usually illegitimate to force others, who disagree, to pay for those preferences

There may well be great reasons why people should prefer to rebuild New Orleans. The best way to decide whether this is decided by reason and argument rather than force is to refrain from coercively forcing some to subsidize the expressed preferences of others, and to let those others express their preferences by choosing to pay for what they say is worth the costs.

The market doesn't determine what makes sense. But, it can help to determine whether there is actually sufficient economic demand for something to justify its costs.

Gil

by **Gil** on Thu, 09/15/2005 - 04:45 | [reply](#)

Macintoshes

To complete the analogy.

You may or may not be right about the superiority of the Macintosh's operating system.

But you would certainly be wrong to advocate the spending of taxpayer money to support the adoption of Macintoshes vs. PCs.

Likewise, I think you would be wrong to support taxpayer subsidized assumption of the costs of rebuilding New Orleans that people wouldn't voluntarily assume.

It's possible that rebuilding New Orleans is well worth it. But, separating people who make choices from the costs of those choices is to encourage mistakes. I think we should avoid the fatal conceit that we already know the right answer.

Gil

by **Gil** on Thu, 09/15/2005 - 04:55 | [reply](#)

Re: Let the market decide

David wrote:

Isn't this a bit of a category error? [...]

Yes, I agree with your point. There are really two separate questions involved:

1. Should these decisions be left to the government or the market?
2. What is the best decision?

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Thu, 09/15/2005 - 12:45 | [reply](#)

Neither

This is not an either/or question. It is more a question of complex market forces and geography, also economics, also politics, greed and goodness, rational vision, also foolish dreams.

There is a market for swampland. There is a government which is not always by and for the people. All the King's Men is an excellent read right about now. Yet New Orleans shall be rebuilt and maybe well.

Perhaps the problem is more succinctly stated, who will pay and is the risk worth the risk of return?

by a reader on Thu, 09/15/2005 - 21:30 | [reply](#)

Pallywood, The Movie

Pallywood. Have you watched it yet? It's fun.

Mon, 09/19/2005 - 23:18 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Ignorance

All sides in politics continually attribute their opponents' real or alleged errors to such factors as stupidity, corruption, misguided loyalty, naivety, prejudice, sentimentality and sheer malevolence.

It is possible, though, that simple *factual ignorance* is in reality a more significant cause of political error – at least, in the West – than any of those. We have previously **conjectured** that many opponents of the liberation of Iraq are literally unaware of the case in favour. We do not mean unaware of the merits of the case, but simply unaware of its content.

Now we read of a revealing **incident** in which the new Foreign Minister of France has displayed astounding ignorance of the basic events of the Second World War:

during the visit of French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy to the new Holocaust museum in Jerusalem's Yad Vashem on September 8, he asked – while perusing maps of European sites where Jewish communities had been destroyed – whether British Jews were not also murdered. Needless to say, Douste-Blazy's question was met by his hosts with amazement. "But Monsieur le minister," *Le Canard* quoted the ensuing conversation, "England was never conquered by the Nazis during World War II."

The minister apparently was not content with this answer, which, according to the magazine, was given by the museum curator, and persisted, asking: "Yes, but were there no Jews who were deported from England?"

How can a person who is *that* unaware of the role played by Britain in the war be qualified to meditate and pontificate on the perfidiousness of the Anglo-Saxon character (which is, after all, fifty percent of a French Foreign Minister's job), or to make nuanced estimates of **how shitty the Jews are** (which is most of the remaining fifty percent)?

There is something very positive about ignorance, though. Perhaps we are allowing hope to triumph over good sense here, but the more of the bad opinions in the world are due to factual ignorance rather than any of the other causes above, the more the world is actually better than it looks. How one might go about remedying

this ignorance, though, is less clear. Anything that succeeds at that should also succeed at diminishing our own ignorance. Our best shot so far has been to start a blog...

Update: As a matter of fact, some British Jews **were deported** – from the Channel Islands, the only part of Britain to be invaded by the Germans.

Tue, 09/20/2005 - 14:44 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Factual Ignorance?

I think its thinking ignorance. The facts are available, or their close approximation, if anyone is willing to look, check, and think. Thinking ignorance is the bane of the western world, and the rest of the world for that matter too. Like factual ignorance it is correctible if the owner of the ignorance is willing.

by a reader on Thu, 09/22/2005 - 14:09 | [reply](#)

Ignorance

One of my favorite examples of ignorance underpinning bad policy is the idea that the Great Depression was caused by "the failure of unfettered free markets". Invite your friends to list the nations that had anything remotely resembling free markets in the 1920s and 1930s.

by [Rafe](#) on Wed, 09/28/2005 - 10:21 | [reply](#)

The German Electorate Refused?

At last week's general election in Germany, the two main candidates for Chancellor were Angela Merkel of the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and Gerhard Schröder of the Social Democrats (SPD). Merkel is **relatively pro-free market** and she **supported** the liberation of Iraq. Schröder is a socialist who opposed the liberation.

So in this election the Germans were choosing whether to continue on the path of appeasement and socialism, or to move in the direction of freedom, capitalism and opposition to tyranny. The result was a tiny (1%) swing from the SPD to the CDU/CSU, resulting in a slight majority for the latter, plus a somewhat larger swing away from both of them towards fringe parties. Under a rational electoral system (the British or American electoral system known as First Past the Post), that would have been an end of the matter. Merkel would now be Chancellor implementing her party's programme, and all the other parties would be holding endless post-mortems, struggling to improve their ideas so that next time, they can be the ones who persuade more electors than anyone else that they had the best policies for the future.

Unfortunately nothing of the sort has happened, nor can it happen – because of Germany's proportional representation (PR) electoral system. PR allows parties with a small share of the vote to get seats easily. This provides an incentive for parties to split into ever smaller parties, which then take seats in the legislature making it almost certain that every government will be a coalition government. By contrast, First Past the Post tends to **amplify differences** in the number of seats parties get, compared with their share of the vote, and so tends to give rise to parliaments in which one party has a clear majority.

As a result of the German election, no party will be able to implement the policies that it thinks are right. Consequently, nobody will be able to assign responsibility for the effects of the policies that do get passed. For instance if Merkel becomes Chancellor in a 'grand coalition' with the SPD, the anti-capitalist and anti-American tendency in Germany will blame her for everything that goes wrong and give the SPD credit for everything that goes right. So, ironically, she and her party might do better if she does not become Chancellor. Schröder is arguing that he should remain Chancellor because the two geographical divisions of the CDU/CSU

should be regarded as separate parties, making the SPD the largest party after all. He also says that 'the electorate has refused to give a mandate' to either party. Nonsense. Quite possibly not a single elector took that view. It was a pure artefact of the electoral system.

Yet on such sophistry, the fate of a nation could hang. Another possibility is that Schröder will cling to power by forming a coalition with the far-left PDS – something that he pledged not to do, but the system may not leave him able to fulfil that promise. In that case the outcome of the small electoral swing in which the ruling party is overtaken by the opposition will be that the latter is frozen out of government altogether; and meanwhile the loony-left ideas of the fourth-largest party pervade the character of the next government, for its leader will have the power to remove the Chancellor the moment he displeases him. All in the name of greater representativeness. Such is the perversity of PR.

Sat, 09/24/2005 - 12:47 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Not like this!

When we **urged** the rebuilding of New Orleans, **we didn't mean this!** A hideous plan to pour 250 billion dollars of Federal tax money – over \$50,000 per citizen of Louisiana – down a bottomless pit. We were urging a spontaneous act of defiance of nature and an affirmation of human creativity. This would be the opposite: an orgy of misappropriation and misuse of the creativity of others.

Update: Here are some remarkable phenomena under way in Biloxi, Mississippi, driven by the free market and human creativity. Opportunities are being exploited and structural changes in land use are under way, such as poor people moving away from waterfront areas and rich people replacing them. There are, no doubt, many reasons for the sharp *increase* in many property prices since the hurricane, and not all of them are good. But many are, and overall the picture seems to be that those in the best position to know believe that the city will not only recover, but be considerably more valuable in the future than it was in the past.

Tue, 09/27/2005 - 20:14 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

You should have been clearer.

You should have been clearer. Now look what you've gotten us into.

by **R** on Tue, 09/27/2005 - 22:46 | [reply](#)

Oh

but that's the American way.

by a reader on Tue, 09/27/2005 - 22:49 | [reply](#)

You Should Have Known Better

It's one thing to urge people to be strong, and to pursue great things. But, it's quite another to encourage those who view these things as the province of governments who measure national greatness by how much of other people's money they commit to projects.

If you meant limited governmental response and great private

responses, you should have said so. I know you are somewhat libertarian, but I take your messages like the prior one, and the encouragement of space exploration (for example) as appeals to use the government to provide more of these "public goods".

It never turns out as nicely as it sounds in speeches.

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 09/28/2005 - 05:42 | [reply](#)

Is libertarianism

only about declaring ideals not necessarily being practical?

My impression is that libertarians always talk about right/wrong things to do in terms of coercion, personal freedom rather than working/not working things in a real society.

And when something doesn't work in reality - they wash their hands. For instance environmental concern cannot be entrusted to individuals and environment is, by definition our common limited irreversible resource, then libertarians just deny existence of such problem. Simply because environmental efforts cannot possibly be fitted into libertarianism. And this is where they loose connection with reality as it is. They say that rivers and forests should all be made private and then their owner would care about pollution. But in reality, whether we like it or not, shrinking rainforests are not private and neither USA nor UK have any control over their property status. And we cannot even see how soon they are going to become private. Perhaps even never.

But libertarians can keep denying that less oxygen is produced and more carbon dioxide is emitted. They resort to statistical and political tricks, to pointless discussions about what counted and how often and in what way we should look at the figures. I have no idea whether global warming is hapenning or not, but if it is - libertarian model has nothing to offer here at all simply because environmental concern doesn't fit into its idealistic model.

The best way to allocate limited resources is not to entrust everything to private property and to markets but to arrange pluralistic usage of it. If private property acts toward competition - it works, if it acts against pluralism (in case of monopoly) - it doesn't work.

The problem is not whether to pay taxes or not, whether to spend public money on re-building or not. The question is how to set up a proper truly pluralistic system of public money usage.

by **Yuryr** on Wed, 09/28/2005 - 11:32 | [reply](#)

"Somewhat" libertarian? Is t

"Somewhat" libertarian? Is this implicitly saying they are less pure libertarians (and so am I?) than you are?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 09/28/2005 - 16:36 | [reply](#)

Somewhat

As the **Our Politics** section in the sidebar says: 'we have a lot in common with Libertarians ... except'

by **Editor** on Wed, 09/28/2005 - 16:50 | [reply](#)

The except clause begins: "Ex

The except clause begins: "Except that we are not barking mad" (and continues along similar lines)

Do people really believe being barking mad *increases* libertarian purity?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 09/28/2005 - 17:18 | [reply](#)

No

The "barking mad" items were along the lines of opposing all military actions, or pushing the button to immediately invoke anarchy.

That's irrelevant to what I was talking about.

I think advocating large increases in government non-defense spending goes against a much more conventional libertarian position that **The World** generally seems to endorse.

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 09/28/2005 - 22:30 | [reply](#)

Gil, My comments about 'ba

Gil,

My comments about 'barking mad' were because the Editor seemed to concede he was not fully libertarian based on the stuff he linked. I think we can both agree *those* positions do not make the World less libertarian.

As for what you were talking about, I take that as: "yes, I was questioning the libertarian purity of **The World**". Glad to get that straightened out.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 09/28/2005 - 23:57 | [reply](#)

Mostly Private

"limited government response and great private response..."

Given the World's previous comments, I interpreted the previous article on the rebuilding of New Orleans to mean that government should be somewhat involved, but not that public money should be thrown away, as appears to be happening.

The existence of the City of New Orleans as a whole, benefits most Americans, given its unique cultural and historical significance. Probably most of us would be willing to donate money to its reconstruction, and likely have. But one person's donation benefits, to a small extent, another person because the non-donor gets the pleasure of seeing the city restored without having to pay for it. These "positive externalities" from charitable giving will tend to lead to inappropriately small voluntary contributions towards reconstruction of a site of national importance, after a natural disaster.

Spending a little government money is therefore appropriate, even if the money is obtained by taxation. Not all government programs are equally awful. But the rebuilding effort does seem to be headed in the wrong direction, whether one is a libertarian or not.

And public officials in New Orleans and Louisiana are not known for being frugal.

by Michael Golding on Thu, 09/29/2005 - 01:19 | [reply](#)

Purity

I guess my problem is with what seems to be an attempt to dismiss a criticism of what is completely unlibertarian by characterizing it as a complaint of a lack of libertarian purity.

It has nothing to do with purity. Endorsing a massive federal program to rebuild the area is not even a little libertarian. There isn't even an emanation of a penumbra of libertarianism in that position.

Fortunately, **The World** seems to recognize what a disaster such a project would be.

Gil

by **Gil** on Thu, 09/29/2005 - 02:57 | [reply](#)

Therefore Appropriate

Michael Golding,

I'll grant that there are cases where there are "underfunded" public goods such that economic efficiency would be enhanced with respect to those projects by government funding.

However, I do not grant that it's clear that rebuilding New Orleans

in any particular way constitutes such a case, nor that even when we find such a case it's obvious that government funding is "therefore appropriate."

When you take people's money you take away some of their choices and autonomy. These projects, collectively, will prevent some people from buying a house, or a business, or training for a new career, or investing in their health, or saving better for their future, or taking a dream vacation, etc. Our models may say that these things have less economic value, but I think we should be very careful about ignoring the moral component when we decide what's best for everyone.

And, in addition to the inevitable waste and fraud of government projects, there are the many unintended, often unseen, negative consequences of interfering with people's private choices. For example, the expectation of free federal disaster insurance will encourage people to behave less responsibly, and it will discourage others from helping them with private resources.

In general, I think that it's better to rely on our ability to persuade others that projects are worthwhile, and on their ability to recognize and act on these truths, than on political decisions (with their perverse incentives) to decide how our life's work should be spent. I think that this disaster is a fine example that these private contributions often greatly exceed the predictions of our economic models.

There may be some theoretically worthy projects that will go undone, but I prefer that greatly over proceeding in a cycle of escalating, suffocating, collectivism.

Gil

by **Gil** on Thu, 09/29/2005 - 04:28 | [reply](#)

My view is: The World's *act

My view is: **The World's** *actual* position is (an interpretation of) libertarian(ism). This does not surprise me at all. You seem too eager to declare them unlibertarian, when I think you ought to know them better than that.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 09/29/2005 - 05:05 | [reply](#)

Private Contributions Not Enough

"I'll grant that there are cases where there are underfunded public goods such that economic efficiency would be enhanced with respect to those projects by government funding."

"I think this disaster is a fine example that these private

contributions often greatly exceed the predictions of our economic models."

Gil

Private contributions alone, without some government expenditure on infrastructure, would be woefully inadequate, and New Orleans would not be rebuilt. That would be a shame.

Polls suggest that most Americans do want the non-flood-prone areas to be rebuilt, probably suggesting that most people would be willing to vote to contribute if they knew that their neighbor was contributing as well, provided that the government exercised a modicum of fiscal responsibility. Given that there is political support for government intervention and given that there is theoretical justification for some government investment, particularly in infrastructure; some areas of New Orleans should be rebuilt. But the primary source of funding should be individual private investors.

I truly doubt, however, that most Americans would support spending 250 billion (!) dollars on rebuilding, including 8 million for alligator farms.

That is a shame.

Michael Golding

by a reader on Fri, 09/30/2005 - 01:56 | [reply](#)

That Is A Shame

Well, that is exactly the nature of government projects. They always waste some people's money and buy the political/financial support of others. Either you think it's "appropriate" or you think it's "a shame". I don't see how you can view it as both. You can pretend that if only the right people were involved, then everything would be rosy; but pretending is all you'd be doing.

And, I strongly disagree with the implication that political support, and a plausible argument that a state interest exists, automatically justifies state action.

Democracy is the least-bad way to organize limited, coercive political power. It's not a magic ingredient that turns moral crimes into civic virtue.

In many areas of the U.S. there would be political support for outlawing homosexual activity. There are also arguments that can be made that there is a state interest in enforcing such restrictions (public health, local standards of decency, etc.) This only goes to show that there are many areas of life that should be beyond the reach of political institutions (with or without public support).

Gang rape isn't justified because the majority of participants favor it. Likewise for grand theft.

Gil

by **Gil** on Fri, 09/30/2005 - 05:57 | [reply](#)

Who is More Coercive?

"Either you think it's appropriate (to spend public money on rebuilding New Orleans) or you think it's a shame"

Gil

This perspective is a little too "black and white" for me, Gil. It is possible to favor some government spending without favoring spending \$250 billion. And the government has occasionally implemented a few projects that cost less than 250 billion dollars, so government spending less than this amount is certainly possible (Right?).

"Democracy is the least bad way to organize limited coercive power"

Gil

Perhaps I did not make myself clear. When a majority votes for government provision of a public good, if one prohibits the majority from realizing its wishes, this is coercive, as well.

For example, virtually all of us vote for defense spending because the cost of excluding someone who won't pay for the benefits of defense is prohibitively expensive. It would be quite costly to design defensive systems that direct incoming attacking missiles only to the homes of those who did not voluntarily support the military!

The point is not that "democracy rule" is ideal (it isn't, as many as 49% can be coerced in a vote), but rather that economic efficiency, supported by a vote of the majority *decreases* coercion, as well. Though some are coerced by taxation into paying for defense when they presumably never believe we will be attacked; failure to tax, coerces *the majority* into accepting an inadequately prepared military.

It is not logical to say that the majority should simply voluntarily contribute. What marginal benefit, in protecting myself, do I receive by voluntarily contributing an extra dollar to the military? Essentially none. The military is equally powerful whether I contribute an extra dollar or not. Unfortunately the situation is symmetrical for everyone in society, so the military will be inefficiently underfunded without government intervention to coordinate collections. Therefore, taxation to improve the military of a free nation, *decreases coercion* for the majority who favor it, just as it increases coercion for the minority who don't. This is a classic economic problem when transaction costs are high in the production, measurement, and distribution of a good.

Similarly with New Orleans, we can not exclude those who fail to pay for its reconstruction, from enjoying the benefits of the city. And despite its problems, on display for the whole world after the hurricane; its history, unique charm, wonderful Jazz, extraordinary cuisine and even Bourbon street, are valuable assets to most

Americans; as would likely be expressed in their democratic

preferences given polling data.

But what marginal benefit does an individual citizen receive in contributing an extra dollar to the reconstruction of New Orleans? Essentially none. New Orleans will have the same infrastructure whether I contribute an extra dollar or not, and the situation is symmetrical for all Americans, so infrastructure in New Orleans will not be adequately funded given the incentives of individuals, even if many are quite generous.

But the majority of Americans may very well be interested in contributing 100 dollars to rebuild New Orleans, in the form of new taxes, because they know that the combined total of everyone's contribution, coordinated by taxation, will begin to rebuild the city. This commitment to progress then encourages private investment, which often follows infrastructure reconstruction. Failure to allow citizens in the majority to coordinate their economic efforts via a government action for which they are willing to pay, is coercive (and wrong) as well.

But there is surely a difference between government spending 250 billion dollars and 25 billion dollars. And yes, it would be better if most of the work were contracted out by government agencies to private firms using fair bidding practices. And yes, there is bound to be waste and fraud, in any government project.

But reconstructing New Orleans, sends a signal to ourselves and to the world, that we will not back down in the face of natural disaster. In not succumbing to nature's wrath, we also force ourselves to learn from tragedy, yet still overcome it, and this is ennobling for our country.

Michael Golding

by a reader on Fri, 09/30/2005 - 23:37 | [reply](#)

Reality TV

Evolution. Donald Trump and Martha Stewart jointly recruit apprentices to rebuild New Orleans. What a combination! What a concept! Everybody wins.

Too bad we have to wait until next season.

by a reader on Sat, 10/01/2005 - 02:20 | [reply](#)

Coercion

Michael Golding wrote:

Failure to allow citizens in the majority to coordinate their economic efforts via a government action for which they are willing to pay, is coercive (and wrong) as well.

This is nonsense.

No coercion is necessary for willing contributors to coordinate their

economic activities, and nobody is interested in coercing them out of such activities. They can even set up a fund such that the activity is only triggered (and their contributions committed) when enough money has been contributed to pursue the project. If they insist on doing this extremely inefficiently, I suspect that the government would be willing to perform this voluntarily-supported project.

No, these people you speak of don't want the government to perform this because the government is so good at this work. They want the government to do it *so that they can coerce unwilling people to contribute*.

To accuse those who merely want to avoid this coercion of the crime they are threatened with is a gross moral inversion.

Gil

by **Gil** on Sat, 10/01/2005 - 18:53 | [reply](#)

No coercion is necessary for willing contributors to coordinate

This is to assume that so-called 'public good problems' (or problems of externalities, or free rider problems), or at least versions of them that can apparently be solved by government but not by contracts and other voluntary cooperation, are an artefact of idealised ways of describing an economy and never arise in real life. That is what I happen to believe too, but it is surely not obvious.

by **David Deutsch** on Sat, 10/01/2005 - 19:41 | [reply](#)

Failure to allow citizens in

Failure to allow citizens in the majority to coordinate their economic efforts via a government action for which they are willing to pay, is coercive (and wrong) as well.

Not nonsense! But I think mistaken. Let me point out two things:

In what sense are the citizens in question "willing to pay" for the government action they favor? They don't take on a higher tax rate for it. Those unwilling to pay, pay just as much (per person)!

What, precisely, do you believe a government is? Why do they need a *government* to coordinate their aid? Us libertarians think the difference between a government and a private organisation is the government takes taxes, effectively at gunpoint, even from those who don't want to pay for something. We don't see how that is a necessary part of coordinating aid.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 10/01/2005 - 21:49 | [reply](#)

Theory L

"an artefact of idealised ways of describing an economy..."

How interesting. Unless I misunderstood, that quote fits very well what i would describe as the concept of Libertarianism. As a conceptual artefact it does not exist in real life. As a philosophical theory (Theory L) it does certainly exist but only in the minds of its theoretical practitioners.

Useful theory, yes; practical in direct action to effect hurricane repairs and revitalization of a city, no.

Government in public good, imperfect yes; practical in a messy way, yes, but it depends on the actual world responsiveness and involvement of people in the polis (market place of debate) as to whether the public good is actually served. Without some government, we are all members of some crazy economic tribe dealing in the mediums of yams, wild pigs, and real estate (otherwise known as the totally free market). Yelp loudly if you are bitten by the wild pigs. Catch as many as you can. Buy beachfront property with the proceeds.

I would rather that your wild pigs don't mess with mine. Debate your reasons in the polis as to how your wealth accumulation will also serve the public good, trade a few pigs feet to maintain your access to the common wealth that feeds us all. Call it Liberalism or Democratic Socialism if you wish but carry no illusions about either. Wild pigs exist and feed on the same land that drives markets. Call the land New Orleans, or Pittypat Parish. It makes no difference what you call it, but make sure it stays above water for all our sakes, and I will too. Wild pigs, and yams for that matter, don't do well at sea.

Debate your theories and share the wealth that serves the public good, willingly if you believe, or dragging your feet if you don't. That's practical government in a practical free market and you'll never do away with either in a free world. Theory L, or C or M never fed anyone. Neither did it starve us either. Well debated in the polis, however it might help us organize some ideas and dreams into reality. That's where the public good comes in. For the good of us all, keep your government (and mine) on a short leash, but keep it.

Long Live New Orleans, may it Rise.

by a reader on Sun, 10/02/2005 - 18:37 | [reply](#)

Market Economics

Market Economics assumes, at a minimum that everyone knows who owns what, and transaction costs are low (actually assumes much much more...but these assumptions will do for the point of this example). If everyone knows who owns what, then everyone trades for mutual benefit. This is "unanimous rule", an ideal situation, according to libertarians and most with a conservative

economic bent. I will, for the sake of argument, agree that

unanimous rule (pure market economics) is ideal (for now) since this is really the libertarian assumption. As doctors say, "Above all else, do no harm." Or, as the the philosophers say, "the principle of non-maleficence takes precedence over the principle of beneficence." And the Economists (used to say) Pareto Optimality.

Economists are a bit smarter than the philosophers and doctors, because they have actually tried to model these situations...lot's of messy details.

If people in the majority wish to gang-rape a woman, they can't, according to market economics, because the woman owns her own body (has a property right to her body) and she did not come up with an amount of money that she would like to receive in order to permit the gang rape to proceed(it likely would be close to infinite, if there were a chance of death.)

Note that the principle of unanimous rule would be violated if she were not paid what she wanted and the rape proceeded without her receiving anything. So raping violates libertarian (unanimous rule) principles, as well as a host of other principles!

In the real world, however, we do not know who owns many or even most goods. That's often (but not always) why we fight with each other and have governments! Property rights have not yet been defined.

We often don't know who owns what. But, if transaction costs are low or zero; we still can make progress in our thinking using unanimous rule (libertarian) principles.

Let's take the case of our national defense. We really don't know whether the country as a whole has or does not have, a right to "national defense". Property rights have not been assigned to this entity.

Assume transaction costs are zero. So, we can take an open vote, and we assume that everyone HONESTLY casts their ballot for or against national defense. I emphasize honestly, because there is a real world actual cost associated with the *search* for peoples honest position.

So we take an open and honest vote and 40% vote against national defense and 60% vote for it. The majority certainly could ask all the people who voted against it, how much would it cost to get you to change your vote? In other words, we could say, "How much does it really bother you to be taxed 'X' amount, and get national defense in return" (remember, we're going for unanimous rule).

The problem is that those in the minority have a strong incentive to lie (a transaction cost) so they would get much too much money in a vote bribing scheme, because they wouldn't reveal how much it actually bothers them to pay the tax. They would exaggerate. But remember, transaction costs are zero so in this hypothetical situation, people won't lie. Surely the most we would have to pay any of those opposed to being taxed for national defense, would be the cost of the proposed individual tax increase on everyone. But

for some, who somewhat oppose substantially increased defense spending, we could get them to change their vote for less. They are unwilling to pay the full amount of the tax, but they want some national defense. So if we pay them a portion of what their increase in taxes is, they will change their vote. So, a free market **could** handle national defense issues, if transaction costs were zero. In a frictionless world, we could create a unanimous rule, libertarian solution.

But wait! Why is it that the majority has to pay the minority to get them to change their vote? Isn't it just as logical to ask the minority to pay the majority to change their vote, to maintain unanimous (libertarian) rule. Perhaps societies OWN the right to national defense, so if the minority wants to compromise that, this minority should pay off the majority. As long as either side is completely bought off, unanimous rule is preserved, but libertarian unanimous rule principles don't tell us which side is correct. And as long as transaction cost is zero, libertarian principles are neutral in regards to who should pay whom.

Is this surprising? After all, we started with the assumption that we did not know who owns what. This is why libertarians always favor a "strong judiciary," so they can have determined for them "who owns what". But libertarian (market) principles are **neutral** with respect to the initial division of property rights, including a possible right to a national defense.

But how should judges (government) decide when groups of people disagree. Should the majority pay the minority, or should the minority pay the majority. Actually, quite a lot of work by free market, transaction cost economists, has gone into thinking about this issue.

Some say the questions involve morality. But others, for example the "Law and Economics people" answer the question based on efficiency.

Should we pay polluters not to pollute, or should polluters pay us for using the air? Well, it depends on who owns the air. In the real world, there are transaction costs associated with organizing markets to pay polluters not to pollute, and there are transaction costs associated with organizing markets for polluters to pay citizens for their pollution. And there are huge transaction costs associated with getting people to be honest and setting up markets...so huge in fact, that we use government taxation or regulation to deal with pollution, and not the free market, and we also produce ideology (for example, religion and culture to try to increase honesty)

The Law and Economics people (for example circuit Judge Posner and I think Nobel Laureate Douglas North) say that judges should make decisions about who owns disputed property based on who can utilize and exchange the property with the least transaction costs. Actually they believe that societies will naturally evolve in time to assign property rights to individuals who can transact with the property the most cheaply. So societies will evolve toward more

and more free exchange of goods and ideas (decreased friction in the economic system). According to Posner, it is a judges job, and the governments job in general, to help along the natural course of history. As far as I can tell, arranging initial ownership of property rights to goods to minimize cost of exchange, is as far as one can take free market economic ideas without also talking about "demand" curves and peoples "preferences".

Now, back to New Orleans. The majority of Americans (according to polls) favor its reconstruction. A minority do not. Who owns the joy of New Orleans, the wonderful Jazz that comes together in the city, the varied dining from a hundred different restaurants, the walk down Bourbon street with all of its sights and sounds (at least before I get married)...etc? Who owns the rights to all this conglomeration of different competing businesses, creating the unique ambience of the city?

Yes, it is one of those real world situations to which we don't know the answer. In other words, market economics is neutral about the question of who owns the ambience of the city (unless we invoke a transaction cost perspective). If the government were not involved, I would be willing to give say 100 dollars, but not for infrastructure, rather to help the needy. If, however, I know that the overwhelming majority of Americans are willing to give, say 300 dollars to rebuild the city, and that others in fact will actually give that money (say because they are taxed), I am now willing to give 300 dollars myself via taxation. Why am I willing to give more, now (just because others are taxed as I am taxed.)? Because if the vast majority of EVERYONE gives towards rebuilding New Orleans, the basic infrastructure of New Orleans will reappear, and millions of Americans, including me, may enjoy the city again. Giving to New Orleans is a "public good" because most Americans want it there as a whole(well, not quite *there*, but rebuilt somewhat away from the lowest parts of the area.)

The majority of us want to get together and are willing to pay for its partial reconstruction, provided we can guarantee that others (who also favor it) will pay, also.

How should a libertarian think about this? Let's assume transaction costs are zero, and let's assume 2/3rd's of Americans want to spend 300 dollars to reconstruct the city. Let's further assume a completed New Orleans has absolutely no value at all, to the other 1/3rd who vote against its reconstruction. If everyone is honest about his preferences (cost of ascertaining a persons true belief is zero) and the cost of market transactions are zero, then each of us in the majority, can use our government to combine our money (300 dollars a piece) confident that all others who actually favor this will pay this amount, too. So Gil and others like him pay nothing (and they are permanently excluded from New Orleans for life), but they pay no taxes. Unanimous rule.

But we can't do this, because the cost of people lying about their preferences is too high. The majority, who actually believes that the city should be constructed, should from a self-interested perspective, vote against the city, confident that each ones

marginal contribution will do nothing to change the total amount given. So most in the majority will defect to the minority, no money will be generated, and the city will not be built, despite the willingness of the majority to pool money and build the city. So noone votes for New Orleans. So the city does not get rebuilt.

Why can't people organize their own money? Because the transaction cost associated with 200 million people each contributing 300 dollars is too high. Why? Because of the cost of contracting, but primarily because each person would have an incentive to lie about whether he wants to give, just as each has an incentive to lie about how much he favors national defense in a purely voluntary system. Each contribution of his neighbor benefits the individual, without the individual having to pay for it. So no one pays for it, and we will get no New Orleans and no National Defense.

So sometimes we settle things by majority vote with enforced taxes on everyone, when it is too expensive to create markets for certain types of goods. If Gil wants to stop the majority from organizing its money this way via the government, he must admit that he is being coercive, because I am fully willing to admit that my position coerces him.

And it is still a different discussion whether Gil and his friends in the minority should be willing to pay the majority to stop building New Orleans (if such markets for this type of exchange could exist). Again, Libertarian (free-market) principles are **neutral** on this disagreement, as well, unless one adopts the Judge Posner point of view.

Like many "real-world" problems, libertarian unanimous rule principles are helpful in deciding what should be done in New Orleans, or at least understanding who the winners and losers are. But when markets break down, as I have illustrated with the problem of the reconstruction of New Orleans, it is likely that someone will be coerced and we can only hope that this coercion can be kept to a minimum. We are very far from an ideal world.

And Gil and I would certainly agree that the current use of government funds is egregious, but this certainly does not imply that government should not be involved in the reconstruction of New Orleans, at all.

Michael Golding

by Michael Golding on Mon, 10/03/2005 - 01:46 | [reply](#)

Re: Failure to allow citizens in

"What, precisely, do you believe a government is?"

If it's a good government it's an organization that takes as much resources as it needs from its citizens to help its citizens in ways that volunteerism currently won't help with well enough.

"Why do they need a **government** to coordinate their aid?"

See above.

"Us libertarians think the difference between a government and a private organisation is the government takes taxes, effectively at gunpoint, even from those who don't want to pay for something. We don't see how that is a necessary part of coordinating aid."

As people shouldn't want to murder, they should want to pay taxes, therefore taxes are only coercive for people who are in the wrong, because taxes are the best system so far to cover the shortfalls of volunteerism.

I'm all for a completely voluntary system as soon as someone thinks of one that will prevent too many people from starving, etc.

Bob

by a reader on Mon, 10/03/2005 - 04:56 | [reply](#)

Bob, If it's a good govern

Bob,

If it's a good government it's an organization that takes as much resources as it needs from its citizens to help its citizens in ways that volunteerism currently won't help with well enough.

So a good government takes as much as *it judges that it needs*, even when some citizens say that's too much. Correct?

And it does this *when it judges* that if it doesn't force something to happen, the thing won't happen. Correct?

And it will do this *when it judges* that the thing should happen, and is worth taking taxes for, even when some citizens say it isn't and don't want it. Correct?

And it will do all this even if it is unable to win arguments for its position against the best rival views (for example, mine. It never has to argue its position with me, or even try to, before taking my money). Correct?

In short, your position seems to be it's a good government *if it's right*. If it isn't mistaken. That position is a bit pointless. Everyone thinks they are correct.

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 10/04/2005 - 02:37 | [reply](#)

Public Goods

If I produce automobiles and pollute the air, and the citizens own the air, but I don't have to pay them even though I am polluting, then I will tend to inefficiently OVERPRODUCE cars, because I won't take into account the spillover cost of polluting the air. So we have

an argument for government coercion of polluters (for example taxing them) to prevent them from stealing property (the air).

On the other hand, if I administer a live vaccine that jumps from person to person and causes immunity in many, not just the patient who received the vaccine from me; in administering the live vaccine, people other than the recipient benefit, but don't have to pay. So I don't capture the full benefits of what I produce when I vaccinate. So I will tend to inefficiently UNDERPRODUCE vaccine because I don't take into account the spillover benefit of administering live vaccines to those who don't get the shot, but nonetheless become infected by a live virus vaccine, and so get immunity.

(By this argument, the descendants of Albert Einstein, and possibly David Deutsch and his friends, should be far more wealthy, according to free market principles, than Bill Gates. But the free rider argument [we all benefit from brilliant people but don't pay them] does possibly explain why we are willing to fund public universities. But it also explains why people don't think and learn as much as would be socially optimal)

I'm not paid by those who benefit from my work (giving live-vaccine shots) -- so I won't work hard enough, if I am a purely self-interested individual. Voluntary cooperation won't solve the problem because there is too much incentive for a given individual to "shirk". After all, if everyone gets vaccinated, it is likely the "free rider" will catch the vaccine virus, from everyone else. But this is everyone's reasoning! So few people get the shot. Voluntary cooperation won't work.

So there is an argument for citizens to (voluntarily) vote to have everyone "coerced" by the government to pay taxes, and then use the tax money to subsidize live vaccine administration to get me to work harder, to get the efficient amount of vaccine administered.

We voluntarily coerce ourselves by mandating that if one person pays, so must the other! And theoretically, in certain situations, it is logical for 100% of the population to (voluntarily) vote to be coerced! And the government which gets 100% of the vote (unanimous rule) to force everyone to be taxed, should be considered to be operating perfectly!

Unanimous rule is unanimous rule...a perfect libertarian situation. A voluntary group of rational but selfish individuals, simply cannot create this optimum outcome without government assistance, because by many definitions, only the government has a monopoly on the use of force.

And those who would stop them (maybe like Gil?), would be willing on principle, to coerce 100% of the population, to force these individuals not to cooperate through their government. Now that is hatred of taxation! And reflects a complete misunderstanding of the free market principles that libertarians supposedly hold so dear.

Which is more important, hatred of taxation (ideology) or

unanimous rule (principle and morality)?

Now, libertarians would properly say (as Gil did) that not only does one have to show that the market has not worked, leading to public goods and externalities, but rather that government intervention will efficiently solve these market "spill-over" effects, often a dubious proposition.

But, in both of the above cases, arguments can be made for government intervention to (financially) support administering innocuous vaccines which benefit whole sections of the population, and arguments can be made for government intervention to tax and therefore inhibit the production of cars, if this production pollutes the air.

Now, back to New Orleans. Let's say my neighbor gives a dollar to reconstruct New Orleans. Since I like New Orleans, too, my neighbor has benefited me by his contribution, but I have had to pay nothing. So I am getting something for free, a partially reconstructed New Orleans, and I have had to pay nothing.

Just like the person who gets free vaccine because he "catches it" from the person who paid the doctor, I get New Orleans reconstructed for free, without having to pay the donor. I am a "free rider", though I would have been willing to purchase an improved New Orleans, if my neighbor hadn't bought it for me and if we both had to contribute, together. I get something from the labor of someone else, and don't have to pay him. So he (the donor) won't work as hard (just like me, he will now become a "free-rider") In other words the donor will not donate as much and neither will I, though we both would VOTE to give more than we would give if no taxation were involved. We both would vote to give more, if we knew all our neighbors would have to give that amount, too. So voluntary cooperation won't work as well, we need to work through our government to cooperate, so we take a vote, or at least a poll.

So without government intervention, an inefficiently low amount of aid will flow into New Orleans, given the preferences of the citizenry, without government assistance in coordinating dollars, because of the "free rider" problem. We can't exclude those who don't contribute from enjoying New Orleans. So, just like with the live vaccines and with defense spending, you can't exclude people from enjoying the benefits of New Orleans, you can't exclude people from enjoying the benefits of a powerful defense, and you can't exclude people from enjoying the benefits of a live vaccine administration. In these cases, there is an argument for citizens to vote to impose taxes on themselves. Defense, live vaccinations, and possibly the reconstruction of a wonderful city after a hurricane, are examples of public goods in which, arguably, the government should be involved.

Unfortunately, when we voted (or sort of did through polls), there was not 100% agreement to coerce ourselves through taxation to help New Orleans. But the majority still would like to be coerced through taxation. And those who stop us, **are** coercing us, since

we want to use our government to solve our "free-rider" problem, a classic argument for the use of the government. And that brings me back to the discussion in my previous post.(Please see that)

So what is the appropriate role of government? I think this is too complicated a question. But three major roles are:

1. Define and enforce property rights to goods (which includes developing defense and police forces since otherwise other countries and fellow citizens can take stuff from us)
2. Help solve "public good" problems, for example, possibly the reconstruction of infrastructure in New Orleans and
3. Help solve "externality" problems, like pollution.

Actually, if you think about it, roles 2 and 3 are subsets of role 1.

I would also add that Governments should decrease transaction costs....but that opens up a big can of worms!

Have a nice day.

Michael Golding

by Michael Golding on Tue, 10/04/2005 - 02:43 | [reply](#)

Coercion, Again

Michael Golding,

If two people are each willing to pay 1/3 the cost of a pony to share, but a third person is unwilling to pay that amount, then you might say that the two (who voted, or were polled, etc.), who want the pony on the condition that all three are forced to pay, should hire a thug to use force to extract the 1/3 cost from all three. After all, then they'd have a pony, and ponies are good, and the majority is willing to tax themselves to have the pony, and we're not sure who owns the joy of having a shared pony...

You might say that one could view it (as I do) as the two people coercing the third, or one could view objecting to this mechanism (as you seem to) as the third person coercing the first two.

I'm really surprised that someone who is obviously as bright as you are cannot see that these two instances of "coercion" are incredibly different. And, that the second instance of "coercion" is not considered as such at all by those who believe that people should have self-ownership.

I don't think the morality changes if we multiply the numbers by hundreds of millions.

Gil

by **Gil** on Thu, 10/06/2005 - 05:35 | [reply](#)

Not Correct Analogy

I apologize Gil. I obviously have not been clear. I may have been

using technobabble.

With your permission, perhaps I can try again.

I will get back to the pony in a minute.

Imagine that each of 100 people has 100 dollars that he can anonymously place in an envelope and place in a container. Everyone pools their money together and no one knows who gives what to the total, but each can give 100 dollars or any portion of 100 dollars.

The rules of the game are as follows. 10% of the TOTAL contribution of all 100 people is added to the total by an anonymous source. So if all 100 people give 100 dollars, that would make \$10000.00 and the anonymous source then adds 10% of the total or 1000 dollars. So if everyone gives 100 dollars, there is now \$11,000 in the container, once the 10% is added.

Now, the total is divided by all 100 people, so \$11,000 divided by 100 people is \$110 dollars per person. Everyone is happy and makes 10 dollars, since each has \$110 dollars, and started with \$100.

But let's allow some people to be selfish. So if no one knows who contributes what, one person might think, "Hmm, if I don't donate my 100 dollars then the total of everyone else will be \$9,900 plus 10% equals \$10,890. If that is divided by 100 people, everyone will receive (\$10,890 divided by 100 which is) \$108.90, not quite as much as 110 dollars, but close. But since I never donated the 100 dollars, I will have 100 dollars plus \$108.90 which is \$208.90, and that total is greater than 110 dollars, the amount I would have received had I contributed. I think I won't contribute and more than double my money."

Clearly if someone is selfish, he gets the benefit of everyone pooling their money (the extra 10% plus a portion of everyone else's contribution), but none of the cost (the contribution of 100 dollars). But of course the situation is symmetrical for everyone, so if everyone is selfish, no one contributes \$100 dollars and the benefit (the extra 10% added to the total) is lost to EVERYONE.

So in this "game", the voluntary cooperation of people (if all are self-interested), will not lead to the optimal outcome. No one will contribute much of anything (or less will be contributed), and so the benefit of the extra 10% is lost to everyone. Voluntary cooperation will not lead to the optimal outcome. By the way, in economics, the people who don't contribute but expect the benefits anyway, are called "free riders".

But let's say there is a smart person in the group who says, "You know, we could get an extra 10% if we had some way of guaranteeing that everyone will pay, or excluding the people who don't contribute from enjoying the benefit."

But let's say there is no way of "excluding" the people who don't

contribute from the benefit.

A smart person might continue, "if we hire a 'police-man', say for 10 dollars and he makes sure (able to use coercion) that everyone pays their 100 dollars, then at the end of the night we will have \$10,000 plus 10% is \$11,000, minus 10 dollars for the policeman, leaves \$10,990 dollars. This, divided by 100 leaves \$109.90, not quite the \$110 dollars and 10 dollar profit, but still a profit of \$9.90.

So the smart person asks everyone whether he would like to take a vote to decide what to do. Should everyone voluntarily cooperate without the policeman, and pool his contributions, or should the group hire a policeman and pool the money that way?

One can see that if this were a real world scenario, it is very likely that 100% of people in the group would agree **TO VOTE TO BE COERCED**. That is, 100% would vote to hire a policeman, provided the policeman did his job.

Of course the problem is always the "who polices the policeman?" situation. Could not the policeman abscond with everyone's money? Obviously we need "checks and balances", to try to hold policemen accountable, too, and these checks and balances will never be perfect.

By the way, the outcome of hiring a policeman could be considered an entirely libertarian outcome. (Why?) Because 100% of everyone votes for the outcome. Everyone agrees to be coerced, provided that his neighbor is equally coerced, to create an outcome that 100% of everyone favors. It is using coercion to allow free citizens the option of **unanimous rule**, the essence of libertarianism. So paradoxically, in this hypothetical example, libertarians NEED A COERCIVE force (like the government) to realize their highest ideals.

Back to the Pony. Let's imagine that it is a "pony of defense" that enables our 100 villagers to protect their farmlands from theft, when ridden by a police officer. After much debate, all 100% of the villagers agree that it would be worth 100 dollars for each to pool their money and buy the needed one pony of defense, ridden by a policeman, per year. They come to this rational conclusion, because after arguing back and forth for a while, they all believe that their best theory (they all read "The Fabric...!") argues that more than 110 dollars is stolen from each farm every year, so it is worth pooling their money to buy the Pony.

Gil, do you see the analogy to the situation previously described when people were pooling their money? If everyone decides "voluntarily" to pool their money, the fact that there is a policeman on a Pony, protects everyone's farm from attack by marauding evil-doers. So should a selfish individual contribute? If one person does not contribute, and if everyone else does, everyone still has a pony and a policeman protecting everyone's farm, but a given individual who does not contribute, has the pony and the policeman and gets to keep his 100 dollars. (Well, because one 100 dollars contribution is missing, perhaps the policeman and pony take a day or two off per year). Since the situation is symmetrical for everyone, self-

interested individuals do not contribute and "free ride" on everyone else's contributions. So everyone loses. But if the group hires the policeman not only to protect their property, but also to collect taxes (err...collect the contributions), if everyone shares the theory that more than 110 dollars will be stolen per farm unless each contributes 100 dollars, there will be a vote in which 100% of everyone (unanimous rule) prevails. A perfect libertarian solution (unanimous rule) requires the coercion of a government (err...voluntarily hired policeman).

Now, enter the real world. a. Policemen steal, too, and they have guns! Obviously, in deciding to vote for the policeman, the townspeople will need to take into account their best theories about the amount that a policeman might steal.

But another problem is: What if there is 1 person in the group who does not agree with the "best theory" of the other 99. In fact his theory is that "defense ponies" attract "evil-doers" and that if a pony and policeman are hired, the town will surely lose \$1,000,000, the entirety of the town.

So when the vote is taken, 99 say hire the "defense pony and policeman" and 1 says don't hire the defense pony and policeman.

So what's a good unanimous rule libertarian to do? There are several options. The 99 could agree to hire the defense-pony by themselves, and ignore the 1 person who disagrees, and at least don't ask him to pay 100 dollars, even if he thinks he's going to lose his entire \$10,000 farm if the others get the pony.

But if the 99 know before-hand that someone who votes against the defense-pony, won't have to pay for it, (even if this hypothetical selfish person secretly wants a defense pony), an actual selfish person amongst the 99 could say, "I ought to pretend to not want the defense-pony."

Then when the vote is taken, 98 will vote for the defense pony, and the person who does not want the defense pony will vote against, as will the selfish man who wants the defense pony but would like others to pay for it for him.

But the situation is symmetrical for everyone, so if you can opt out of paying by voting against, all selfish people will vote against, and pretend to have the same viewpoint as the person who actually believes the "defense-pony" will be bad for the village. So if the majority in a vote does not have the ability to coerce the minority in a vote to also pay, all selfish people will lie, to get their neighbor who votes for something to pay instead. (Their neighbor being the one who "foolishly" is honest, votes for what he actually thinks and ends up being the only one contributing to the global good of the community by contributing to the "defense pony.") So, people wisely agree that in the case of "defense-ponys", they will not allow the minority to prevent them from increasing their efficiency.

Note that in my first example, where 100 people pool their \$100 to get an extra 10% on the total collected, if a person can "opt out" of contributing by voting against, yet he still gets 1/100th of the total,

a selfish person will "opt out" and vote against pooling money. But this is true for all selfish people in the group. So virtually everyone will vote against pooling their money, and the group forfeits its extra 10%! If a minority can prevent the majority from pooling its money, the minority is coercing the majority into forfeiting its extra 10%, and this is wrong.

So one of the reasons that there is no "opt-out" clauses in votes on defense, for example, is that it would prevent *the majority* from coercing itself into a contribution that each and every person in the majority wants.

Yes the majority coerces the minority in a democratic vote. But if there is a "good" that is produced (like defense or the reconstruction of New Orleans) in which, regardless of someones contribution, everyone gets to enjoy the benefits: If the minority can "opt out" of paying taxes, then a group of individuals pursuing their "rational self-interest," who actually want Defense or New Orleans reconstructed, will also "opt-out" and vote against it, even if they want it. Why? Because if everyone else votes for it, they won't have to pay taxes because they "opted-out" and they still get New Orleans reconstructed or proper defense, with no contribution. Since this situation is symmetrical for everyone, *allowing the minority to "opt-out" of paying taxes, coerces the majority into not being able to coerce itself, into an outcome that each one in the majority wants.*

This is why we do not allow a minority to "opt-out" of paying taxes when they disagree with the majority. Obviously, part of the reason is because (as Gil suggests), the majority wants to take money from the minority, but part of the reason is to allow efficient collective action of the majority, in the production of a good from which others cannot be easily excluded (like national defense or the reconstruction of New Orleans.)

by Michael Golding on Fri, 10/07/2005 - 03:52 | [reply](#)

Re: Therefore Appropriate

Way up above, Gil wrote, "Our models may say that these things have less economic value..." But aren't most innovations the result of letting people play with resources? Beyond completely original ideas, money can buy time to think about relationships, for example, which may in turn reduce the cost of violence in society. Don't we generally want people to have control of their resources so they can make use of their local knowledge including their knowledge of what is needed to help themselves learn? Doesn't knowledge have a large economic effect?

Without coercion some valuable projects would not get done. However, in Michael's scheme 49 percent may not think the goal in question has as much value as other possibilities. Of those who wish to contribute, some will find themselves voting to spend more than they would want because only one amount can be chosen for everyone. For them, the excess is money they would otherwise have better uses for but need to contribute to get the project to go

through.

In Gil's scheme, if no one pays unless everyone puts up their money, nobody may lose resources they can see a better use for. Can we know for any ordinary project how the sums would work out?

by romr on Fri, 10/07/2005 - 12:53 | [reply](#)

The Point

Michael,

You say:

If a minority can prevent a majority from pooling its money, the minority is coercing the majority into forfeiting its extra 10%, and this is wrong.

This is where we are in complete disagreement.

If you have a scheme (e.g. a plantation system) that will produce a profit, but only if some people (e.g. slaves) involuntarily contribute to it *then you do not have a right to that project, even if you sincerely believe that the project makes the unwilling better off*. I think that people have a right to their own lives and to the fruits of their labor.

If a minority prevents the majority from imposing that scheme on them or on others, they are *not* coercing the majority, they are protecting individual rights. And, that is *not* wrong.

Now, given our current state, I agree that national defense and law enforcement may be areas that are so vital for the exercise of other liberties, and the consequences of inadequate funding are so great, that they may justify involuntary collection. But, this is a rare exception, and I hope that we can be creative enough to finance these services voluntarily soon.

Other projects, worthy as they may seem, just don't rise to the level of such justification.

And, I will even agree that there may be non-defense projects such that they would provide *every single person* with more value (in his own opinion) than he could get by using the funds himself; and that creative supporters of these projects would not be able to raise funds voluntarily.

However, I think that a rule that forbids involuntary financing of non-defense projects is better (more moral and more efficient) than one that permits it. In the real world, this power will not be limited to cases where efficiency is increased. The power will be abused by politicians and special interests who see opportunities to use other people's money to further their own interest. Then there will be a race to see who can get more loot for themselves. See [this great article](#).

By the way, a tremendous amount of money was raised voluntarily

to help the victims of Hurricane Katrina. Even though rationally-self-interested people could have kept their money and have seen almost as much good done. No, people (like me) decided that the right thing to do with their money was to contribute it to a cause that they judged to be more valuable than any other plans that they had for the money (even though they could get away with refraining). If it is your theory that, unless forced, people will not contribute much money to causes that they can be convinced are worthy (and the benefits are not limited to contributors), then your theory is obviously false.

So, I think that the vast majority of worthy projects would get done without involuntary funding. This will often require creativity (educational/promotional campaigns, telethons, sponsorships, matching contributions, contributions uncommitted until the funding goal is reached, etc.)

Again, some "worthy" projects might go undone, but I'm confident that the moral (and economic) consequences of my rule are better those of yours.

Gil

by **Gil** on Fri, 10/07/2005 - 16:12 | [reply](#)

Re: Therefore Appropriate

romr,

I agree that the value of private use (with local knowledge) of funds is likely to greatly exceed estimates of central planners. I just don't think that anybody can make good estimates of these uses for particular cases, and that's a good reason to be cautious before we decide to socialize costs.

But, though the economic arguments against this socialization are strong, I think the moral ones are even stronger.

Gil

by **Gil** on Fri, 10/07/2005 - 16:31 | [reply](#)

Laws are Public Goods

Gil,

I respect your desire to protect the minority in many instances. I share that desire with you. By the way, I liked the article you referenced. But I still think there is a subtle point that we are not communicating clearly on.

Let us define a public good as a good that many people want, but that everyone can enjoy, regardless of who pays for it (A national defense and a reconstructed New Orleans, are two examples). This definition will have to do for now, but more precise definitions involve relative divisibility of goods and transaction costs.

But please consider that your position could be considered to be

even stronger than wanting to just protect the minority. Your position also prevents the potentially unanimous ability of people to voluntarily contract with each other to produce a public good, if the contracts (in everyone's interest) have to be enforced by a police officer to make everyone feel comfortable and wish to voluntarily contribute. Your position is really against *collective action*, if there is even a possibility that someone *might* oppose the community arrangements, even if no one actually does. Let me explain.

Think of the decision described in my previous post with the community buying the "defense pony". Or think of everyone wanting to pool their money so that 10% is added to the total contributed, and then redistributed to everyone, whether an individual contributes or not. Everyone's individual (self-interested) incentive is not to contribute since everyone will get his share of the divided pooled money, without having to contribute to begin with. So without enforcement, this collective pooling arrangement won't take place and the community loses the extra 10% it could have had. Little money is pooled. 10% of a small amount is a small amount. Notice, however, that every single person in this group would want to contribute, provided that a police officer enforced everyone else's giving. But, if anyone had the option of "opting-out" of the payment scheme, and just getting the rewards when the sum is divided, the arrangement would not occur, because few would voluntarily give to begin with, since their money would have to be divided amongst those who did not give.

So your position, Gil, is not only that the minority should always be protected, but also what follows if a policeman can not be hired to enforce agreements. Even if there is a *possibility* that someone might disagree with a group, you logically favor not allowing an actual unanimous group of people to form, if the formation requires a policeman to guarantee each person's honest contribution. And so an interesting "counterfactual" situation is created. The fact that someone *might not* have to contribute because there is no police enforcement (and everyone becomes aware of it), means that everyone else *will not* contribute (much.) And so this violates the rights of even a unanimous group to organize and pursue collective projects in the construction of public goods. This atomistic perspective about how to benefit humanity may be morally justifiable in certain situations, but sacrificing every single person's actual beliefs on the altar of protecting a hypothetical minority individual's beliefs, is morally problematic at times.

Furthermore, allowing a minority to "opt-out" of paying for the provision of a "public good" encourages lying. If the group cannot hire a policeman (utilize a government) to enforce its own agreed upon laws, this encourages everyone to disobey the law, when it suits them, and even to lie about whether they support a law. Consider a situation where some people favor spending a certain amount of money on a good that they cannot prohibit others from enjoying as well (a public good), even if the others don't pay. And suppose that a few do not favor spending money on this public

good, because even though they cannot be excluded from using it,

they simply have no interest in using it.

If the minority, who actually does not favor the production of the "public good" can always "opt out" of paying, then virtually everyone in the majority *will pretend* to agree with the minority, even if they actually don't: And so everyone will "opt-out" In other words, the majority will lie about how much money they wish to spend to support a public good, in order to put the costs on others, when there is no enforcement. Think again about the situation where everyone wants to pool their money so that 10% is added to the total contributed, and then redistributed to everyone, whether an individual contributes or not. Everyone's individual (self-interested) incentive is not to contribute since everyone will get his share of the divided pooled money, without having to contribute to begin with. If a vote is taken that is not enforceable by a policeman, everyone will pretend to not be in favor, and vote against the measure, even though everyone (or a majority) actually wants the measure to pass. So not allowing individuals to utilize policemen (a government) to enforce rules on everyone, encourages everyone to lie to each other about their actual views, and so desperately hurts knowledge creation about the opinions of people, needed for the evolution of society.

But Gil your position has even worse implications than preventing unanimous groups of individuals from reaching their highest ideals and encouraging people to lie. I have acknowledged that minorities are injured when a majority takes something from them. This is undoubtedly true. But you really should acknowledge that the majority is also injured if they are not allowed to utilize their government (hire a policeman), to coordinate their activities.

Because one of the fundamental "public goods" in a society is its laws! Should the minority in a 100-person community be able to "opt-out" of laws stopping stealing? Just like in the situation where everyone who pools their money gets 10% extra divided amongst everyone else, laws against stealing may add more than 10% to the bottom line of every single business. Should someone in the minority be able to opt-out of this law? Should he be able to say, "I don't have very much. I would like the right to steal just 1/100th of the property of everyone else? It is morally wrong to stop me from taking 1/100th of everyone's property. A minority of us simply want to steal. Stop forcing us to abide by your crazy ideas about not stealing. Read the arguments of Gil."

How is this person in the minority, stealing say 1% from everyone else, different than a previously discussed hypothetical person in the minority? In that case everyone wanted to pool their money and then a guaranteed 10% is immediately added to the total, contributed from an outside source, and then redistributed to everyone. So everyone gains 10% only if everyone gives, just like everyone gains hypothetically 10% if everyone gives their consent to laws against everyone stealing 1% (or more) of others' property. That is, everyone gains 10% if all the laws are enforced by a policeman (a government). But the group who wants to pool their money needed a policeman to coordinate their activities and prevent "free-riders," too, just as many communities need a

policeman to stop stealing.

Gil was opposed to the policeman in the case of the people who want to pool their money. He felt that someone in the minority should feel free to opt-out of the arrangements and should not be "coerced" by the majority into participating and pooling money. But I have argued that if one person can opt-out, with no consequence, then every self-interested person will opt-out. And the whole community loses the 10%. The same is true for stealing. If any person in the "minority" can decide to opt-out, of an arrangement to stop stealing, so there is no consequence to those who steal, then virtually every purely self-interested person will steal (just as virtually everyone will not contribute to the collective pooled money, if there is no policeman enforcing a "law" guaranteeing the pooling of money).

So I say to you Gil. Why is it OK for a community to sometimes pass a law against stealing, even if its enforcement hurts a minority of individuals who do not favor it; but not OK to sometimes pass a law supporting a public good, even if it also hurts a minority of individuals who do not favor it?

Gil, what is the difference between the community that wants to pool its money for profit, and the community that wants to prevent the loss of money, for profit?

Democratic rule, in deciding what should be produced, causes individuals to call too many things "public goods," because as Gil suggests, it allows one group of individuals to force another group of individuals to subsidize its production. If we all eat out and are not friends, and we agree to divide up the check according to the average cost per individual, selfish people will all order too much, because such individuals put the cost of their eating on their neighbor. But the situation is symmetrical for everyone, so if we are selfish, we all order too much. Although sometimes difficult to tell, one needs to look carefully at the good itself, to decide whether it really is the case that others cannot be excluded from using it, if they do not pay. Is it really a "public good" so that my contribution to it benefits my neighbor, but I cannot collect from my neighbor. In addition, one also has to decide that the inevitable governmental waist associated with coordinating production of the public good (the cost of the policeman) justifies the benefits from its production.

But the absence of democratic rule causes too few things to be funded as "public goods," because it prevents majorities from coordinating their activities in the provision of goods that may be economically or morally important to produce, but from which those who do not contribute can not be excluded.

Both arguments are morally and economically correct. To acknowledge one without the other makes little rational sense.

by Michael Golding on Sat, 10/08/2005 - 22:22 | [reply](#)

Your position also prevents t

Your position also prevents the potentially unanimous ability of people to voluntarily contract with each other to produce a public good, if the contracts (in everyone's interest) have to be enforced by a police officer to make everyone feel comfortable and wish to voluntarily contribute.

Policy A: something everyone wants, but some people only want if Policy B also happens to make them feel comfortable

Policy B: a police man that some people strongly oppose

you call this unanimous support. i call it anything but. with no policy B, many people don't want it. but many people don't want policy B.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 10/09/2005 - 00:16 | [reply](#)

To Gil and Elliot

Gil,

You confuse two very different kinds of economic goods, despite my (apparently unsuccessful) attempts to explain the difference. There are goods in which people can be excluded from benefiting (standard economic goods), and goods in which people cannot be excluded from benefiting (or in which the cost is very high to create exclusivity). Goods in which people cannot be excluded from the benefits, I have (simplistically) defined as "public goods", as more precise definitions require discussions of transaction costs and divisibility of goods.

I can easily exclude someone from using my horse by not inviting the person over to my pasture. We cannot exclude people, for example, from visiting the city of New Orleans, or enjoying the benefits of citizens who do not steal. Both of the latter could arguably be considered "Public Goods". I am certainly not saying that the majority should be able to vote to make someone else pay for my horse, because horses are not "public goods." Citizens can restrict the access of others to their horses! I also don't think most sane people would vote to make someone work for someone else for free (slavery). I don't know how you could construe anything I have said to favor these propositions. A person's labor is a standard economic good. Labor can be given to one person (for a price) or *excluded* from that person and given to someone else (for a price). So where a person works or how much he makes or whether he chooses to contribute to my horse, are in general not subject to a vote of the majority! Or at least they shouldn't be. A person has a right to his own decisions about these subjects. Yes, I completely agree with you Gil. Such a vote to make someone work for someone else for free or to make someone buy someone else a horse would almost always be wrong. We have been in agreement about this from the very beginning.

We are (or at least I have) been trying to discuss the production of

PUBLIC GOODS: Goods in which people cannot be excluded from enjoying the benefits. These goods pose many more interesting ethical and economic challenges.

Elliot,

Actually my initial example was an example of complete unanimous rule, in a given group, where everybody favored both "A" and "B", in your terms. Someone from outside of the group, not subject to the policeman, not asked to contribute money, and not involved in any voting might try to coerce the group as follows,

"I say this group is not allowed to hire a policeman (use the government) to pool money to produce their "public good", because it would require a vote and a policeman to enforce the vote, and we can't have policemen enforcing what might not be unanimous voting (even if the vote later turns out to be unanimous and even if people voluntarily decide to live in the community). Your group can't have the policeman because it is theoretically possible for someone in your group to vote against the proposition, and then majority rule would hurt that minority member. We ought to protect that potential minority member, even if the 'public good' is therefore not produced." And if the speaker forces what ultimately would have turned out to be a unanimous group of people, to give up their money-collecting policeman then, as argued repeatedly in other posts, this group of unanimous individuals will not be able to fully cooperate in pooling their money. Their "public good" will not be produced despite unanimous support.

I then added a second part of the argument, which I acknowledged no longer involved unanimous rule. I allowed someone who will be subject to the arrangements to object to the policy and the policeman. For example, people could object to a law against stealing, promulgated by the group: And if the majority forces the minority in this group to not steal, the people who want to steal are then penalized for their minority viewpoint, namely they are penalized because they no longer are permitted to steal.

And I asked, why is it OK for a community to pass a law against stealing, even if its enforcement hurts a minority of individuals who do not favor it, but not OK to pass a law supporting a public good, even if it also hurts a minority of individuals who do not favor it?

And what is the difference between the community that wants to pool its money for profit, and the community that wants to prevent the loss of money (by for example stopping stealing) for profit?

Indeed, the LAW itself is the quintessential public good, if it is JUST LAW! One can (almost) define a "just law" as one that inexpensively promotes the production of a "public good". Laws against stealing, for example, promote the public good "efficient trade." And the implications of the law, "don't steal or you go to jail" will likely be supported by a majority of individuals in society. The enforcement of this law is a "public" good, as I have defined the term, because one cannot *exclude* anyone from benefiting from the absence of stealing, unless you exclude everyone from benefiting from the law. Universal application of a law is the hallmark of a law, even if the

minority objects.

If there is a law against stealing, everyone (no exclusions) has the right to set up a business without fear of people stealing, even though some (in the minority) might not want to set up a business and would prefer instead to make their living by stealing.

Why can't one exclude someone in the minority from the benefits and costs of the law banning stealing, and so allow him to steal and be stolen from? Why does the law have to be universal and affect the minority who do not favor the law? Because if anyone in the minority is allowed to "opt-out" of a majority vote in which stealing is determined to be against the law, and if such a person is permitted to steal, then every selfish person in the majority also has an incentive to "opt-out", as well. Why should I vote to restrict myself from stealing when others will be permitted to steal from me? So everyone opts out, and there are no enforced laws.

If one cannot enforce a just law (the consequence of which is, almost by definition, the production of a public good!), even if a minority of individuals do not favor it, then one might as well have *no laws* and simply allow people to choose to do whatever they want (anarchy).

This is as close to a "reductio ad absurdum" as can be done, in showing that the majority ought to be able to support the production of universally taxed "public goods"; because if we cannot produce public goods (in which an objecting minority cannot "opt out"), we cannot have law. And if we cannot have law, we cannot have society. Three cheers for public goods.

Thanks.

by [Michael Golding](#) on Sun, 10/09/2005 - 18:03 | [reply](#)

...if we cannot produce public goods

Michael:

You have commented on this thread. The comments benefit some readers. You have no way of preventing anyone from enjoying those benefits. (We could charge to view the site, but even then, we could not prevent the subscribers from passing on the benefit to their friends who had not subscribed.) So those comments satisfy your criterion for being public goods. Correct?

by [David Deutsch](#) on Sun, 10/09/2005 - 18:35 | [reply](#)

Public Goods

Michael,

I didn't misunderstand you. I just disagree with you.

Everything I argued applies to public goods (sorry if the plantation/slave examples threw you). You want to finance public goods by forcing unwilling people to contribute.

I reject the idea that if you have a scheme such that you don't know how to exclude me from benefitting, then you automatically have a moral claim against me to contribute to your scheme.

I agree that if people do not contribute to such schemes in proportion to their benefits, then these goods will be "under produced". I say "too bad". I choose liberty over economic efficiency in such cases.

I am not at all against allowing any group to collectively finance a project, and to enforce contractual commitments. I merely insist that participation in such "agreements" be voluntary. Don't you think it's reasonable that everyone in the agreement actually agrees?

A law against stealing is an invalid example because it's merely the protection of rights. Violating such a law would entail the kind of coercion that I object to.

Gil

by **Gil** on Sun, 10/09/2005 - 20:05 | [reply](#)

FWIW, unlike Gil, I make no c

FWIW, unlike Gil, I make no choice for liberty over economic efficiency; I don't think they are in conflict.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 10/09/2005 - 21:05 | [reply](#)

Possibly yes, Possibly no

I do think knowledge creation is a public good.

But I like exchanging ideas with you, and you like exchanging ideas with me (I think -- otherwise you wouldn't), so we are more likely doing this because we are having some fun, and not particularly because we are benefitting other people. But I guess it's possible that we could benefit somebody.

But for our exchange to be a public GOOD, our exchange would have to benefit somebody else, who would benefit from our wisdom and possibly (if we are very lucky), benefit from our knowledge creation, without paying us.

Indeed, such an individual should have to pay us, in a perfect world with perfect markets, except in the real world, the costs of measurement of the quality of our good and the costs of collection of our money, are likely very much higher than the value of the knowledge we create in this exchange!

No Professor Deutsch. I don't think we're gonna get any money.

The costs of measurement of the quality of our good (our ideas)

and the costs of capturing the benefit we produce are obviously very much higher than any benefit our mutual exchange brings to anyone else, especially if the government were to become involved!

You, on the other hand, are pretty smart. And if you bring us viable quantum computers or a new conception of quantum gravity, one can be sure that you will not capture the economic benefit of the knowledge you create for the world. And neither did Einstein or his descendants. (If you wanted to make money, you should have gone into business: You could have captured the economic value of the goods you create. Knowledge is not a cleanly packaged good like breakfast cereal)

As I've said, if the market worked properly, the descendants of Einstein should be far more wealthy than Bill Gates.

Yes, knowledge is a public good, and capitalist economies will certainly tend to underproduce it, as will all other economies. Other economies will usually do even worse. Have you looked around at all the people who don't do a lot of thinking, even though they live in Oxford? Have you ever wondered why?

I do favor public subsidies of (particularly) higher education.

by M Golding on Sun, 10/09/2005 - 22:49 | [reply](#)

Re: Possibly yes, Possibly no

Do you think anyone is reading this exchange other than you and I?

by [David Deutsch](#) on Sun, 10/09/2005 - 22:57 | [reply](#)

Just Law = Rights

"A law against stealing is an invalid example because it's merely the protection of rights. Violating such a law would entail the kind of coercion that I object to."

Gil all just laws (rights, if you will) are public goods. If you do not favor applying them to the minority who disagree with your conception of "rights", then you are in favor of no law and no rights. To be in favor of "rights" is to be in favor of forcing the minority (or majority) to support your conception of rights, even if the minority (or majority) disagrees. To be in favor of universal rights is to be in favor of universal laws defending those rights. These universal rights are otherwise known as public goods; since no one can be excluded from having them and they are *a good* or just *plain good* for everyone.

So you want to call public goods, "rights"? Economists used to say (before conceptions of transaction costs) that a public good is a good in which everyone has a non-exclusive "property right". So yes the language of "rights" and the language of "public goods" are often used interchangeably.

So you are (of course) in favor of coercion, you just want to call it

universally applying "rights", even if someone, (a minority, a majority, but someone) disagrees with your conceptions of rights. I happen to agree that there are "public goods" (rights), but I recognize that sometimes we need to use coercion to defend them...sometimes taxes and sometimes the police and sometimes the military. You do as well, you just want to call it something different.

by M Golding on Sun, 10/09/2005 - 23:57 | [reply](#)

Don't Know

In between checking out the football scores, perhaps a few.

So you are motivated by altruism?

by M Golding on Mon, 10/10/2005 - 00:56 | [reply](#)

I can testify that I read Dav

I can testify that I read David's posts, and enjoyed them, and did not pay for them. I similarly benefitted from MG's posts.

This doesn't mean David was motivated by altruism. I think the point is more that he **wasn't** motivated by altruism, did not use force, and created a public good anyway.

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 10/10/2005 - 02:48 | [reply](#)

Death and Taxes

Economists are very good at explaining why people don't cooperate in altruistic ways, but not why they do.

I long for a society governed by cooperation and morality, too.

But until then....we still need taxes, at least to help with the infrastructure of New Orleans!

I like Davids (and Gils and your) posts, too.

But why don't you think any of David's motivation is altruism?

by M Golding on Mon, 10/10/2005 - 06:46 | [reply](#)

Economics, Cooperation and other problems

Michael Golding wrote:

"A law against stealing is an invalid example because it's merely the protection of rights. Violating such a law would entail the kind of coercion that I object to."

Gil all just laws (rights, if you will) are public goods. If

you do not favor applying them to the minority who disagree with your conception of "rights", then you are in favor of no law and no rights. To be in favor of "rights" is to be in favor of forcing the minority (or majority) to support your conception of rights, even if the minority (or majority) disagrees.

People need access to the things we term property in order to pursue their own ideas. I think what Gil might want is something like this: we should have a legal system under which when Jim is the legal owner of a commodity Jack cannot take it away from him unless Jim has voluntarily made some agreement that stipulates he should allow Jack to take it away. For example, if Jim defaults on a mortgage he has agreed to pay to Jim in a contract, then Jack may take the house away.

Now suppose Jim doesn't leave and tries to stay. Then he is violating an agreement he made voluntarily with Jack. Their situations are in fact asymmetric, Jim is in fact violating his contract; Jack is, in fact, not violating that contract. Both of them made the contract voluntarily. A law stipulating that people should respect contracts they make voluntarily at the time even if they later regret those contracts doesn't imply that people have unequal rights. Rather people have equal rights and end up with different outcomes because they take different actions.

Economists are very good at explaining why people don't cooperate in altruistic ways, but not why they do.

I think you probably haven't been reading the right economists. Or maybe not the right philosophers. Some people support altruistic policies because they like to think they are being generous and doing good by backing such policies. None of this is incompatible with economics, which does not comment on motives but just assumes that people have motives for what they do. See economists like Hayek and Ludwig von Mises for instance.

As for needing taxes to reconstruct New Orleans. Every year charities get lots of voluntary donations to give African villages waterpumps or whatever. These charities work in places a lot worse than New Orleans and some do a good job. I am not suggesting that charities should reconstruct New Orleans. For one thing there is a profit to be made by reconstructing New Orleans so I don't imagine much charity will be needed. But I am suggesting that there is no particular reason why it can't be done voluntarily.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Tue, 10/11/2005 - 02:08 | [reply](#)

Who Owns What

Obviously Alan, if everyone agrees on who owns what, there is not a problem. We all trade for mutual benefit. If we all agree about the same universal rights, there is very little to discuss. I would think that goes without saying, but thank you for clarifying that.

But issues in the real world sometimes involve the following: One

person thinks someone is stealing, and another person thinks he owns the very thing he is accused of stealing.

Some people are claiming that everyone in society "owns" a part of a debt that they must pay to society for providing a package of goods to everyone. Others claim that they own no such debt and asking them to pay amounts to stealing!

Those who believe that defense is a "public good" (like me) would argue that in choosing to live in this country, we are choosing to have delivered to us a basket of goods, but also choosing to pay for them (taxes). We are choosing to have a basket of goods produced for us by this country, including, for example, national defense, police protection, and I would add (but Gil apparently would not), infrastructure in cities.

So if we are choosing to live in a country, we are choosing a basket of goods. We choose the country that, to the best of our knowledge, provides the best basket of goods for the least money. We know we can't get those goods for free. We have to pay for them. And the currency is taxes -- the price of citizenship. Gil (apparently) thinks, however, that when he decided to live here, he didn't know he would have to pay for infrastructure in cities, or at least not for infrastructure in cities destroyed by hurricanes. So asking him to pay now (he feels) is stealing. But I thought it was made pretty clear to me that if hurricanes destroyed our cities, the government (via taxes) would help reconstruct the infrastructure. It seemed clear to me when I decided to live here that that was part of every citizens contract, even though Gil wants to weazle out of it now. Even if Gil didn't know, he should have. If he looks back at virtually all the historical precedents, the US government always seems to help out in building infrastructure. The majority won't let Gil get out of his citizenship contract with the country just because the going gets tough.

So who is right? Gil or me.

I would say that countries which tend to provide "infrastructure in cities" in exchange for tax revenue will be more powerful and secure than countries that do not. I think Gil would disagree with me on this point, although I am not sure. Those who do not believe that providing infrastructure in cities is a public good, and also believe that the provision of such services via taxation ruins the entire country, are (of course) in this country free to move to another country that does not supply city-infrastructure, as part of its basket of "public goods" in exchange for taxes.

Or Gil could argue with the majority that thinks that "city infrastructure" should be part of the basket of public goods for citizens, as he is effectively doing. He could try to convince us that government often makes a mess of things in providing infrastructure and he could ask us to look at all the waist that is happening in New Orleans, *right now*.

He could say that if we considered changing our minds, and made it such that city infrastructure is not part of the public good package offered to American citizens in exchange for tax revenue, America

would be even greater.

And he might even be right, but I don't think so. But he can try to change our (the majorities) minds. And who knows, if he does, then more people will consider his position accurate. And then perhaps the majority will believe that paying taxes for city infrastructure is stealing. And at that point perhaps it will be. But not now.

Anyway, what Gil considers an act of stealing, I think of as the provision of a public good. So Alan, as you can see, Gil and I don't agree about who owns what. Gil thinks I'm violating the contract I "signed" when I agreed to be an American citizen and pay taxes for a basket of goods, because Gil doesn't think "city-infrastructure" was one of the items. But I think it was. Some Americans agree with me and some Americans agree with him. I think the polls suggest more agree with me.

One way of solving Gil's and my disagreement is by seeing what a vote of the people conclude (I think I would win).

But another way to solve the problem would be to leave it up to "Law and Economics" Judges (like Posner). Does it lower transaction cost more for "infrastructure in cities" to be owned by the city, or by individuals? I think I know the answer to that question, that's why I want tax revenues to support city infrastructure development. But I certainly could be persuaded otherwise if someone could show me some corporate models of city ownership (or other private models) which still protect freedoms and are cheaper, and still provide credible city infrastructure. I hope there could be evidence that could convince Gil, too.

The majority could certainly be wrong.

But with all due respect, Alan, there has not been carefully constructed mathematical/evolutionary models of how true altruism comes into being (like the anonymous donation of blood vs. say repeat dealings helping to define property rights, which has been well modeled). Such a model of true altruism would require fully incorporating the evolution of "preferences" as endogenous variables in the economic model (so supply and demand curves could not be derived independently).

Some of us have been working on such models, because we believe that ultimately they would go a long way in explaining the evolution of such seemingly disparate phenomena as "common preferences", certain types of mental illness, bipolar illness, brain waves, business cycles, and ultimately "culture" and "institutions", the holy grails in property right theory economics.

Think about the concept of businesses trying to avoid too much variance in money flows (potentially destructive to a business) vs. someone with coronary heart disease trying to avoid too much variance in blood pressure (potentially destructive to a heart vessel).

Now imagine the evolution of memes causing complementary

preferences in interacting people, and how that might decrease such variance, in both circumstances. Such complementary preferences promote altruism, and smooth (and healthy) human exchange, without a government having to coordinate it. And we know that some of the memes we share can sometimes overrule our "selfish" genes.

Under what circumstances would such (complementary) memes evolve? Have they evolved in humans? When would it be optimal for there to be increased variance in money flows....would such conditions promote "search" for increasingly optimal outcomes?

I'm afraid there is much to learn about the evolution of altruism and its place in economic models. And reasonable mathematical models for these phenomena have not been fully developed yet, although people are trying.

Thanks!

by M Golding on Tue, 10/11/2005 - 06:20 | [reply](#)

Public Goods And Government

At issue is whether public good problems justify government. We are faced with the following issue: There are many possible public goods to produce. Which ones should be produced, and which not?

I suggest the proper way to approach this question is exactly the same way we approach the question: which goods should be produced, and which not? The critical thing is not to create the perfect plan for what to produce and then implement it exactly as written; it is that errors (there **will** be errors) in what is produced be corrected. The best way to achieve this is for every individual to use his own knowledge of his own situation to produce what he thinks he ought to, and to change what he produces when he is confronted with a problem. This overall approach accesses vast knowledge that would not be available to a group of planners deciding what goods should be produced in the entire US.

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 10/12/2005 - 00:10 | [reply](#)

OK

I think I agree with that, if I understand you correctly. Even if something is a "public good" there is no reason for "planners" (at a distance) to organize most projects. Local contractors may be more familiar with the lay of the land and one can organize competitive bidding so that (hopefully) there is a chance that the most efficient (best) economic ideas are used, if corruption can be kept to a minimum. And only those who want to be involved in a project will bid.

Elliot, given your ideas, should there be any tax collection? Should tax dollars ever be used to produce something, like a national defense or infrastructure in a city? Should taxes ever support roads or a police force, to the extent that these goods are produced by

individuals using the "deductive" procedures you outline above?

Thanks.

Michael

by M Golding on Wed, 10/12/2005 - 01:12 | [reply](#)

Presently, taxes are the only

Presently, taxes are the only way certain things happen at all. So, for valuable things that we are unable to have otherwise, I support taxes. A good example of that is our military. Private armies present numerous problems that have nothing to do with a military being a public good. The problems include not wanting our best weapons to fall into the wrong hands, and avoiding rival armies fighting over what should happen. I don't consider these problems insurmountable, but so far no one has created an effective, valuable, private, modern army.

Building cities (also a public good) is nothing like this. We know how to build cities (within our borders) without government funding. OK, not every last part of a city -- I'll be happy to let the government help with the laws and police. But we don't need government to build houses, malls, grocery stores ... in fact, most stuff lost in New Orleans was created by private enterprise in the first place.

I was in a bookstore today (Borders). I read their books for two and a half hours, then left, without paying a dime. They had nice chairs for me to sit in. We do not need government funding to have a new (public-good-producing) Borders in New Orleans.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 10/12/2005 - 02:54 | [reply](#)

Ideas

Here is an interview: <http://www.reason.com/0112/fe.rb.post.shtml>

Romer claims that the careful allocation of resources is essential to promote the development of knowledge and that this is a very important economic goal.

If this is the case, a system that constantly pools resources against the better judgement of large numbers of people will sacrifice many large and small opportunities. The size of this cost cannot be estimated very well (I suppose) but the importance of the lost value apparently will be cumulatively great.

I don't see, therefore, how we can estimate that a given (ordinary) project will actually yield economic advantage for those who support it or for anyone else. The advantage may be modeled but the disadvantage cannot be, so it is impossible to know whether it is a public good or a shared mistake. If the relative values can't be argued one way or the other, then why sacrifice a methodological

rule that is normally so successful?

This reasoning seems especially relevant to a project like rebuilding New Orleans, which is not being promoted for economic reasons but for the social value of the gesture and for aesthetic reasons.

By the way, with these sorts of arguments I become fuzzy about what should be considered a moral issue and what should be considered an economic one. Anyone, please feel free to help me.

by romr on Wed, 10/12/2005 - 03:07 | [reply](#)

moral issue vs economic issue

Moral issues are about how to live, or what choices to make, or what is a good life strategy, or what are good ways to treat people.

Economic issues are about money, trade, business, wealth, the economy.

Sometimes these overlap. But is it particularly important to decide which label is best?

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 10/12/2005 - 03:33 | [reply](#)

moral vs economic

Some of the comments here have opposed moral and economic considerations and others have come close to equating them, so I was curious about what I was missing. I don't think everyone is using these words the same way.

by romr on Wed, 10/12/2005 - 04:25 | [reply](#)

Re: moral vs economic

Surely for present purposes, "the social value of the gesture" and "moral reasons" and "aesthetic reasons" are all special cases of economic reasons. The situation is that many people would like various building projects to take place, and are willing to forgo a certain class of other goods in return. Whether this takes the form of a religious person wanting a church to be rebuilt, or a jazz lover wanting to see culture revived, or some blogger wanting to 'defy nature', or a hotelier wanting to accommodate tourists at the waterfront because they will pay more in rent than the hotel costs to build, these are all preferences and they are all part of the economics of the situation. For one class of possible building projects, what people are willing to forgo to have them happen is worth less than what it would cost. To meet those preferences is to destroy net wealth, cause net harm. Where the balance is the other way round, the project would create wealth and do net good. It is up to various sorts of entrepreneur to guess which is which, and to create ways of exploiting these preferences in such a way as to

prevent the first kind of project from happening and to cause the second kind to happen.

by **David Deutsch** on Wed, 10/12/2005 - 04:58 | [reply](#)

Borders and Taxes

Although executives and owners at Barnes and Nobles and Borders are more than capable of being altruistic, it is likely that their set-up ultimately encourages people to buy, even though not every person does every time he goes into the store. Barnes and Nobles and Borders make probabilistic estimates, implicitly or explicitly, about the likelihood of somebody buying given comfortable surroundings in which people can browse. In short, from an economic perspective, I don't think your browsing or reading without purchasing something is really an example of the store producing a public good. Their behavior in allowing you to browse is calculated to optimize profit. But if you become happy, and treat your friends more nicely after visiting the store, which gets passed on, that could arguably be an example of a public good being created by the store's ambience, the profit from which the bookstore or you will likely not be collecting.

David and Elliot: Do you favor using tax money to fund anything other than a police force in New Orleans? Should tax money be used to finance new roads destroyed by flooding or get rid of water, for example.

Michael

by M Golding on Wed, 10/12/2005 - 18:40 | [reply](#)

Let us define a public good a

Let us define a public good as a good that many people want, but that everyone can enjoy, regardless of who pays for it

Borders provides a public good. The Borders-armchair-policy is something many people want, and everyone can enjoy, regardless of who pays for the cost of the policy.

I'm sure providing a public good in this way **is** profitable for Borders (overall). It is for grocery stores too. And countless other cases.

Other public goods are provided for other reasons, such as someone feels strongly about an issue and enjoys providing it.

My point is public goods are provided all the time, without government. What makes something hard to provide isn't being a public good. There must be some **other** quality that makes the hard cases (like having a military) unlike the Borders case.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 10/12/2005 - 22:20 | [reply](#)

Re: Borders and Taxes

Barnes and Nobles and Borders make probabilistic estimates of somebody buying given comfortable surroundings in which people can browse ... I don't think your browsing or reading without purchasing something is really an example of the store producing a public good.

You might as well say that governments don't really maintain public goods because they're only concerned with winning votes.

In addition to benefiting the public, what's wrong with making a profit? Is my job bogus because the salary exceeds my mortgage and other expenses? What if I like my job exceedingly, or work for a good charity?

Consider friendship, which involves a kind of emotional balance sheet. If I feel good about my friend and he does about me does that mean we're both wrong and it's not really a friendship?

The 'profit motive' is condemned everywhere but in reality profit is only one of a hierarchy of motives for the individual starting an enterprise.

This is recognised by consumers who rave about companies that innovate, care about their services and try to improve the world.

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Thu, 10/13/2005 - 00:39 | [reply](#)

Re: moral vs economic

David Deutsch wrote:

It is up to various sorts of entrepreneur to guess which is which, and to create ways of exploiting these preferences in such a way as to prevent the first kind of project from happening and to cause the second kind to happen.

These guesses involve capital which may be lost so they are risky.

This shouldn't be surprising: as well as accessing more knowledge, private reconstruction involves creating new knowledge, which entails risk.

Angry economist explained [recently](#) why bureaucrats are bad at taking risks.

Realistically I think that rebuilding New Orleans must intimately involve the federal and state governments, if only to bypass much existing regulation.

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Thu, 10/13/2005 - 01:01 | [reply](#)

Yes, my thinking was a mess.

Yes, my thinking was a mess. Thanks for your criticism. It was, at

least, a private good.

by romr on Fri, 10/14/2005 - 21:27 | [reply](#)

Public Goods

Elliot,

If I trade an apple for an orange with you, I think most people familiar with the term would not say we were creating public goods, except if we added a number of other details.

If you trade your time at Borders for a comfortable seat and some reading material, public goods are also not being created by that transaction. A customer's time in the store is valuable, and Borders is competing for it by providing comfortable chairs. Perhaps if you learn something at Borders and benefit someone else when you go home or create other 3rd party uncompensated effects, one could then argue that Borders is creating public goods! Trading your time for a comfortable chair should make everyone happy, that is the nature of trade for mutual benefit.

A nice ambience within a store is not a public good because people are more likely to spend time there, but a beautiful storefront might be, because then everyone is effected, whether they go into the store or not. A store's external appearance is (of course) often subjected to "zoning" regulations, precisely because of the public good implications of attractive or unattractive store fronts.

For an interesting non-technical discussion of what a public good is, consider reading the below. It's a fun article because he shows how several goods, like the famous lighthouse of Samuelson, is not necessarily a classic "public good", but in fact can be considered a "private good", in many cases.

For lighthouses to become "private" not "public goods" required a good bit of ingenuity and creativity, but apparently shipping companies and lighthouse owners have risen to the challenge!

The author also talks about how local initiatives (like zoning regulations that are coercively applied to 100% of those who CHOOSE to live in such communities), can privatize goods thought to have public good implications (like quality neighborhood public schools), without the need for federal or even state government intervention.

<http://66.102.7.104/search?q=cache:Gx5qDmFwfu4J:www.dartmouth.edu/~wfischel/Papers>

Thanks.

Michael

by M Golding on Sun, 10/16/2005 - 05:49 | [reply](#)

Re: Re: Borders and Taxes

Tom,

"...what's wrong with making a profit....?"

Did I say there was something wrong with that?

Michael

by M Golding on Sun, 10/16/2005 - 05:53 | [reply](#)

Re: Ideas

ROMR,

The article you cite is indeed written by a well-respected and thoughtful economist. Let's quote the article.

"There are some kinds of ideas where, once those ideas are uncovered, you'd like to make them as broadly available as possible, so everybody in the world can put them to good use. There we find it efficient to give those ideas away for free and encourage everybody to use them. IF YOU'RE GOING TO BE GIVING THINGS AWAY FOR FREE, YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO FIND SOME SYSTEM TO FINANCE THEM, AND THAT'S WHERE GOVERNMENT SUPPORT TYPICALLY COMES IN. (caps mine, MG)

In the next century we're going to be moving back and forth, experimenting with where to draw the line between institutions of science and institutions of the market. People used to assign different types of problems to each institution. "Basic research" got government support; for "applied product development," we'd rely on the market. Over time, people have recognized that that's a pretty artificial distinction. What's becoming more clear is that it's actually the combined energies of those two sets of institutions, often working on the same problem, that lead to the best outcomes."

ROMR, the economist is explicitly advocating using government imposed taxation, something inherently coercive to those who don't want to pay, to pool the collective resources of citizens to support the research of scientists, in collaboration with private industry.

In other words, he favors government support of the production of the public good called "knowledge", something I have also advocated in this blog on this very topic.

So from a libertarian perspective, in advocating government coercion in pooling resources (taxing certain citizens who don't want to pay scientists), how is he not advocating "pool(ing) resource(s)" to produce the public good called "knowledge"?

by M Golding on Sun, 10/16/2005 - 15:38 | [reply](#)

Michael, I was using your

Michael,

I was using your (old) definition of a public good. Would you please provide your new one?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 10/16/2005 - 16:48 | [reply](#)

Same Definition

Just need to think about probabilities.

by M Golding on Sun, 10/16/2005 - 17:28 | [reply](#)

I don't follow

Let us define a public good as a good that many people want, but that everyone can enjoy, regardless of who pays for it

As I understand this, it doesn't say something can't be a public good if it is a mutually beneficial trade. It only says a public good is a good that many people want and benefits everyone regardless of which people pay for it.

Many people, including me, want Borders. The benefits of Borders are available to me regardless of which people pay for them. So as far as I can tell it qualifies.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 10/16/2005 - 18:33 | [reply](#)

RE Borders and Taxes

"The benefits of Borders are available to me regardless of which people pay for them....."

The fact that businesses exist, in general, is arguably a public good. But your sitting in Borders store is likely not a public good, even if you buy nothing.

If I invest 50 dollars (for example, give to person John, \$50) and I have a 50% chance of getting \$110 back from John, and I do not get my money back, I have not necessarily created a public good by investing, though John got 50 dollars, and I got nothing.

Borders is investing in YOU Elliot, when you walk into the store. The store may or may not get a return on their investment in you on any given visit. They are allowing you to "test drive" their materials. You are providing for them, however, the EXPECTATION that on average, for example over time, they will make more money than they spend in providing a chair and reading materials to you and others in the public.

A chance of customers spending money, is in fact money to a business with a large enough volume of customers. A 50% chance of getting 100 dollars is worth something to most businesses so

they will spend some money to get that money. And I bet it's worth

something to you, too, Elliot. You can prove this to yourself.

Ask yourself whether you would be willing to pay a certain amount of money to have a 50% chance of getting 100 dollars. Most people would be willing to spend something (usually less than 50 dollars) to buy that deal. Again, most people would be willing to pay SOMETHING to buy a "chance", even if it is not a guarantee of money, but a "chance" for money.

Because people will spend money to buy a "chance", a chance at winning money is worth something to the people who will spend for it. I bet Elliot, that you would be willing to spend 30 dollars for a 50% chance of winning \$100, if the money were paid to you immediately and with no other risks and if the transaction were legal. So then YOU would buy a "chance", too and think it had value. If this is true, then I have convinced you that "chances" have monetary value, even if you don't get money every single time.

Borders is paying you money, Elliot, by giving you a comfortable chair and reading materials. And yes, you ARE paying for it, because you are offering them a "chance" that you will buy something. And remember, chances are valuable, so the owners of Borders are willing to spend money (provide seating) to buy the valuable "chance" that you are giving them when you walk into the store.

If you think this is "fishy": Remember, (I surmised that) you were willing to say that a "chance" is worth money. So perhaps the owners of Borders, if they are as smart as you, are willing to think that "chances" are worth something, too. Perhaps "chances" are even worth more than the cost of providing comfortable armchairs and reading materials!

But in being paid with nice seating and reading materials, you are not providing them with a guarantee that their investment will pay off. Just because Border's owners do not get a payoff on every visit, does not mean that they are providing a public good for you, any more than I am providing public goods by investing 50 dollars with John, which is the metaphorical equivalent of giving him a chair and reading materials.

Borders invests in you, because of their expectation that on average they will make more money from you and people like you, by keeping you in the store and causing you to spend your relaxation time in the store. After all, even though you didn't buy last time, you might just get the itch to buy next time, because of your good feelings and because of the time that you are spending with them. Have you ever bought something from Borders?

If Borders were to know that you would never buy anything at any of their stores, and furthermore if they knew that excluding you would not cost them (much) of the spending of others who could be upset because you were excluded, and furthermore if Borders still allowed you and others like you to come into the store and sit down comfortably and read; then yes, Borders would be providing a public good.

"The benefits of Borders are available to me regardless of which

people pays for them..."

Not quite. Virtually all customers pay Borders for their comfortable seating with the valuable "chances" that they sell to Borders when they enter the store, and which Borders redeems when some of the "chances" actually generate money.

Now, is it possible for "free riders" to exist at Borders? Are there people who always fool the owners? The owners would exclude them if they could, but they hang out at Borders and never pay? Perhaps they also don't bathe so other customers are discouraged from going into the store, or at the least these "free riders" always take up the most comfortable armchair, even though customers with a higher chance of buying would like to use it. Sure. These are "free-riders".

But likely there are very few of them, because bookselling is a competitive business and Borders would not provide the comfortable arrangements they do, unless most customers have a reasonable "chance" of buying during the many visits in which they go into these lovely stores. (I go, as well, Elliot. I buy things, but not every time. They get me with their "two-cheese" sandwich...very good.)

Why do markets sometimes provide public goods, without government intervention?

Two usual reasons are given.

1. Altruism/the rewards of spreading "truth"/self-replicating memes that "fight" against self-interested behavior. In short, cultural factors can make (more likely) the provision of public goods, without need of government intervention.

2. Some goods are provided by individuals who have natural monopolies over the production of the good. If I own the only practical source of water for irrigation to 10 farms owned by others, yet there is some runoff that benefits a public forest, I doubt that I can expect the government to pay me for the runoff!

If I make continuing profit (economic not accountants profit, Tom) because of my monopoly position, without expectation of future competition because of unique geographical factors and known technology, then losses from my uncompensated water "run-off" may not make my profitability negative.

I will provide the public good even when I can't capture the full benefit of what I produce because I am not challenged by competitors -- who theoretically would lower my profit to near zero -- which could then make the water "run-off" a devastating uncompensated business expense, if my competitors did not also have to pay for run-off. So I provide water to the forest for no compensation (a public good) because I can make an economic profit because of my monopoly position vis-a-vis the water supply. So I make more money than I spend to provide the water, so I can lose money to "runoff" and still be profitable.

So cultural effects (e.g. altruism) and forms of monopoly (including

zoning requirements) allow the private production of "public goods".

Indeed, this is (sort of) the argument made by the (unfortunately) often overlooked economist Joseph Schumpeter. Schumpeter believed that monopolies or monopolistic competition was optimal, rather than pure "no economic profit" solutions being optimal, because he believed that the public good "innovation" would be more likely to occur in companies making economic profit.

Michael

by M Golding on Sun, 10/16/2005 - 21:46 | [reply](#)

Unlike

You don't have to write so much, I already know these things in detail.

As I understand it, you think some cases, such as the rebuilding of New Orleans, are *unlike* the Borders case. Profitability is not what makes them unlike because New Orleans is potentially profitable (if built well enough). Please outline what the relevant differences are.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sun, 10/16/2005 - 23:09 | [reply](#)

Public Goods

At Borders, you are giving the owners a "chance" that you will buy something and in exchange they are giving you a comfortable chair. Simple trade. No "third party" effects. No public goods produced. No externalities. Your action in "sitting down" benefits no one else in the store.

With New Orleans, when you give a dollar to New Orleans, I too am happier. You created a third-party effect. You traded with an organization in New Orleans, and as a consequence of your generosity, you benefitted me, because I also don't like to see people suffer. But I didn't pay you for the happiness you created for me because you are giving away happiness to everyone in society for free. If I am selfish and I can get something for free, why should I pay (as much) for it? So my natural rate of altruistic giving will decrease, because you already gave money.

This is true for everyone, so noone gives the optimal amount of altruistic donation (given their preferences). Donations to New Orleans create third party benefits. Going to Borders does not.

Giving for defense spending creates 3rd party effects like giving to New Orleans. When you give money (voluntarily) to the defense department, you make me happy because I don't have to pay (as much) for the airplanes that protect me. Your donation to the defense department creates benefits to everyone in society. But

why should I pay (as much) for something that you are willing to

give me, for free? But this is true for everyone. So even if we all have the same desire for defense spending, we all voluntarily give too little, unless we can all levy taxes on each other -- which we in fact do -- to pay for defense and yes, now for New Orleans.

Third party spillover effects -- Defense and New Orleans.
Direct bilateral trade -- Sitting at Borders

Defense and New Orleans reconstruction -- potential public goods.
Sitting at Borders -- private good.

Michael

by M Golding on Mon, 10/17/2005 - 01:29 | [reply](#)

Third Party Effects

Buying books from Borders increases the chance that Borders will still be open next year. This benefits people who want to visit that Borders next year. Therefore, buying from Borders has third party benefits. Therefore, "has third party effects or benefits" is not a difference between funding New Orleans and buying from Borders.

What say you?

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 10/17/2005 - 02:59 | [reply](#)

Providing Public Goods + Democracy != Good Government Coercion

Michael,

Perhaps you already know this, but just to be clear, my disagreement is with your apparent theory that providing any public good justifies financing via coercive taxation. Or, maybe you think that this somehow, magically, becomes true in cases where a majority agrees. I think that these theories are false.

Economic efficiency doesn't trump morality.

I think drug prohibition is immoral. Even if I accepted the premise that it improved the overall public welfare (which I don't), and was faced with the fact that a majority approves of it. I think it violates the proper sphere of autonomy of individuals.

Likewise with taxing people to fund (most) public goods.

I happen to think that, given political realities, adopting my rules regarding funding public goods would actually lead to greater overall public welfare than adopting yours. But, that's not my primary concern.

My primary concern is treating individual people morally. And that, for the most part, does not permit coercing them for the good of the majority (or even their own).

Gil

by **Gil** on Mon, 10/17/2005 - 06:16 | [reply](#)

Borders and Taxes and Stealing (again)

Elliot,

What do economists mean when they say that a good is produced in a "competitive market"?

Gil,

I understand (and actually share) your beliefs more than the average citizen, I think. In most arguments, I am the one having to defend "the market" against those supporting far greater government involvement.

However, I do recognize that as a citizen of this country, I owe (and believe you owe) money to my fellow Americans for the benefits of citizenship. The issue of the morality of "stealing" therefore depends upon who owns what. If you don't pay taxes to support goods that Americans have lawfully (and hopefully reasonably) determined to be "public goods" best supplied by the government, I think you are stealing from me and your fellow Americans. (I am assuming of course that you are an American, but the argument would apply if you held a different citizenship).

You, on the other hand, believe that Americans have no right to the provision of certain "public goods" by the government, even if this is the most efficient way of providing them. Therefore if money is collected from you in the form of taxation to support Public Goods, Americans are stealing from you and you believe this is wrong.

So the issue is not the morality of stealing. We both agree that it is wrong to steal. The issue is how do you reasonably decide what to do when 2 different people disagree about who owns what. That is a much more subtle and interesting question, and is truly what we have been arguing about. And yes, the argument involves questions of morality.

by M Golding on Mon, 10/17/2005 - 14:28 | [reply](#)

Accuracy in Media

"My difficulty is with your apparent theory that provides any public good justifies financing via coercive taxation."

Gil

I don't think I've ever said that. But I've certainly pointed out situations in which that statement is not true.

Michael

by M Golding on Mon, 10/17/2005 - 14:46 | [reply](#)

benefits of citizenship

However, I do recognize that as a citizen of this country, I owe (and believe you owe) money to my fellow Americans for the benefits of citizenship.

Michael,

I put it to you that the average free benefits a person gets for being part of American society are exactly the same size as the average benefits he gives away to others without being paid. My reason is there is no force creating free benefit but us humans, so the total amounts created and received should be the same. So I don't see why I should owe anything.

What do economists mean when they say that a good is produced in a "competitive market"?

Do you mean a perfectly competitive market? I wasn't aware "competitive market" had an exact meaning.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 10/17/2005 - 18:14 | [reply](#)

Competitive market

Ok.

You are right, "competitive market" does not have an exact meaning. But economists routinely say that a market for a good is relatively "competitive." What does that mean (approximately) even if there is no exact definition?

Michael

by M Golding on Tue, 10/18/2005 - 03:33 | [reply](#)

Who Owns What

Michael,

So, is it your theory that I don't own what I have earned via voluntary trade; but rather my fellow citizens own whatever portion of it they choose to take (if they can gang up on me via elections and use it to provide public goods)? And is it your further theory that I have agreed to this by accepting my citizenship?

I suppose I have, in the same sense that a child who chooses to go to school has agreed to risk being beaten up by bullies. It's a fact of life. In that sense, he doesn't really have a right to control his bodily integrity because he's agreed that being somewhere that people regularly abuse him is better than his alternatives.

Do you recognize any rights at all that our current system violates, or do you think that rights are defined by the current system, or

that they just happen to coincide perfectly?

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 10/18/2005 - 03:52 | [reply](#)

competitive market

It means, roughly that there is, in one area, a variety of people/groups either producing and selling the good, or with the means to begin if they wanted, that way there is competition by sellers and potential sellers over the price. We also need a variety of buyers -- who either do buy the good or would consider it.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 10/18/2005 - 04:08 | [reply](#)

Well Stated

Well stated, given the imprecision of the question!

So if the bookselling industry is relatively competitive, there are a lot of *substitutes* for given booksellers and buyers. So this industry would not seem to create too many "public good" problems.

When there is monopolistic or oligopolistic buying and selling patterns in an industry and this pattern is expected to persist over time, these economic circumstances may create "public good" problems.

Michael

by M Golding on Tue, 10/18/2005 - 17:33 | [reply](#)

So if rebuilding New Orleans

So if rebuilding New Orleans was sufficiently competitive -- for instance, there were plenty of different construction companies that wanted to build the buildings -- would government intervention be unnecessary?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 10/18/2005 - 19:28 | [reply](#)

Public Goods, Again

There are two issues.

1. The fact that one person gives to New Orleans likely diminishes the amount that another person gives. As stated before, my preferences for charitable giving to New Orleans are satisfied by

those who give, and so I give less. If I can get something for free,

why should I have to pay for it? This situation is symmetrical for everyone, so everyone gives less.

How is this situation similar to a monopoly creating a public good problem? There is a relationship, but people don't usually phrase things as you do, Elliot, so your interesting question requires a different type of response.

Let's say 1000 hurricanes hit our 1000 most important cities simultaneously (G-d forbid), only one of which is New Orleans. Let us further suppose that the tragedy in each city is comparable in the minds of the citizens of the country. Each tragedy is a "substitute" for the other. In other words, no one city is considered any more important than the another (just like there are many substitutes for bookstores). Let us further suppose that the country is composed of 100,000 people only, so that no group of people's contribution substantially increases the happiness of someone else who also gives, because the tragedy in each city is so enormous overall. So no amount of charitable giving is ever completely adequate (preferences for charitable giving, like preferences for goods, are infinite and no group's contribution changes the value of giving, like no one group's purchase of a particular book changes the overall price of other books)

In other words, let us suppose that the "market" for hurricane relief is "competitive". So there is no New Orleans style "monopoly on tragedy". Then charitable giving for hurricane relief would not be a "public good", as buying and selling books is not a public good.

In the absence of these assumptions, charitable giving for hurricane relief is arguably a "public good".

2. Other "public goods" in New Orleans include things like roads. It is inefficient to have 1000 roads in the same town, constructed by 1000 different firms, connecting the same two buildings. So certain roads are often most efficiently built by monopolies, whether government or private. But monopolies (government and private) can then have a degree of control of prices (taxes and tolls). Therefore long-term monopolies maintain economic (not accountants) profit...i.e. charge a price greater than the average total cost of production and maintenance of the road.

Though users of the single road would like to share ownership of the road, the cost of them organizing is too high. So a "road-owner" can jump in the void and buy the space connecting two important buildings in a city, and perhaps can buy a column of land dividing an entire city in two. (And someone with views like Gil would, I think, stop -- coerce -- the citizens group that wants to share ownership of the road from hiring their government as their agent. He would stop the group from hiring their government to purchase the road so that all own a part of it.)

A pure libertarian would say that buying a stretch of land dividing a city in two is OK, because this is simply a profit maximizing solution for the entrepreneur even if he gains the ability to charge monopoly rents to everyone who wishes to cross. That is, to the pure libertarian, it's completely OK even if the road owner is able to

charge 10 times more than the full cost of production of the road and his time. If you give the road owner \$10.00 for access to the road and he gives you \$1.00 worth of road crossing time (in terms of the cost of maintenance of the road), this is somehow not stealing \$9.00 from the public, according to a pure libertarian.

Indeed someone like Gil might even say that taxing the road owner even \$1.00 is, remarkably enough, stealing from him! Gil would say that it is stealing because the road was created with the "owners" hands. I, on the other hand, would say that the road owner owns the road up to the Average Total Cost of the roads construction (including the opportunity cost of the owners time), but not more.

The paradox of a purely libertarian perspective is that if one owns the ability to coerce someone else, for example, if one owns a single road dividing a city in two and you charge everyone to cross, and if citizens use their government to fight back, then (and only then) does power, in the interests of self-defense, become wrong.

by M Golding on Thu, 10/20/2005 - 00:42 | [reply](#)

Right to Profit

Thanks for clarifying your position, Michael.

You think that profit is stolen.

You think that if someone is creative enough to supply goods and services at a lower cost (to himself) than the value to his customers (an amount greater than or equal to the price that they willingly pay), then he is stealing that profit from his customers; that they have a right to the entire benefit of his creativity, and he only has a right to recoup his costs (including his time).

I suspect you're willing to let people keep some of the profit (because you must realize how little wealth would be created otherwise), but you think that, rightfully, we are practically slaves of the collective and have no individual right to the fruits of our creativity that others willingly offer us.

No wonder you have no problem with taxation. You don't think people actually own anything they've accumulated, because rightfully they would only break even in all of their endeavors.

Very...um...interesting.

Gil

by **Gil** on Thu, 10/20/2005 - 06:16 | [reply](#)

Not Quite!

Gil,

You're not reading carefully. I described the ability of a public citizen to purchase not a private good, but a "public good" (like a line cutting a city in half). Such purchases, though very profitable

for the individual, do not lead to wealth creation, but rather the opposite.

The ability of an individual private citizen to permanently make profit because of institutional arrangements, not innovation, is the ability of a private individual to purchase a "public good." Such an individual is not really purchasing a good (imagine purchasing an inch-big line cutting a city in half) but rather is purchasing the law itself!

If someone holds a gun to your head, and therefore makes profit, this is not creating wealth because it is *decreasing peoples choices*.

If someone owns a public good, like a square border around every single persons house in a city, and charges whatever rent he wishes for each person to cross the line, that person is powerful indeed. For he could charge any given person in the city for the ability to cross the line even to purchase food. And if the governments only role were to enforce the owners rights to the square borders; that is to enforce property rights to the inch thick lines surrounding each house like a grid, then when a private citizen owns a public good, he is metaphorically and often literally demarcating private property itself. Purchasing public goods is therefore equivalent to buying the ability to define law itself, because it is *law* that demarkates the extent of private property.

(Why shouldn't a person have to offer 50 years of service to the kind man who owns an inch-wide piece of property surrounding his house. Yes the grid owner is permanently making profit on his property, but what's wrong with that!) After all, the owner of the house himself is just wanting to trade for mutual benefit. He wants food so has to pay the full cost of that food, including the cost of crossing other peoples property, as determined by the property "owner". The cost of crossing the line could be 3 million dollars (and remember, the government should have no say in prices for goods, public or otherwise. And perhaps 3 million dollars is 50 years of work for most people to pay off.) A private citizen who owns "public goods," for example a line around each persons house, effectively owns the law and then is ultimately able to effectively enslave an entire city. And all this, apparently OK to the libertarian, because the government only acts as a police officer, enforcing private "property rights" to the grid (the public good) around everyones house. Please.

I beg to differ, if the government does not own many "public goods", it is selling the law to private citizens, and the ability to therefore coerce everyone. When private citizens own public goods, yes they make profit, but in the same way that gun slingers make profit: By "holding-up" people, they *decrease peoples choices*. This does not lead to wealth creation (though it creates profit) but rather leads to wealth destruction.

Owning public goods is owning the law. (Gil, please distinguish between buying public goods and private goods.) When private citizens own the law, it is neither fair nor equitable nor efficient.

Such arrangements lead to (long-term) profit for a few, with no need to innovate, and at the expense of everyone else.

Gil if you don't think something is a public good, like a road for example, because there are helicopter substitutes, argue that. But I think you can see that allowing private citizens to own all public goods is counterproductive. And no, before you respond (!), I have not said that making profit is bad or that the government should own all public goods!)

Take care.

Michael

by M Golding on Thu, 10/20/2005 - 11:45 | [reply](#)

Public Goods without Government

M Golding said:

The fact that businesses exist, in general, is arguably a public good.

Since businesses, in general, were not created by the government (through taxation), this proves Elliot Temple's statment that:

...public goods are provided all the time, without government.

If this point is already agreed upon, excuse me; I skipped some of the lengthier comments by M Golding.

by Bob on Fri, 10/21/2005 - 08:07 | [reply](#)

Public Goods

Individuals do produce public goods.

"Businesses", however, would not function well at all without government provision of the defense of property, and equally importantly, government facilitation of exchange, both public goods.

Michael

by M Golding on Fri, 10/21/2005 - 14:51 | [reply](#)

Re: Public goods

defense of property, and equally importantly, government facilitation of exchange, both public goods.

In fact they are not public goods by your definition, because it is very easy for governments to refuse to defend a particular person's property or enforce a particular person's contracts. In fact governments worldwide do this all the time.

by a reader on Fri, 10/21/2005 - 15:00 | [reply](#)

And....

Governments, like private enterprises that metaphorically or physically own the public spaces around peoples property, are capable of strangulating business transaction and therefore hurting the public good.

The interaction (transaction) between people is in fact the primary public good, easily interfered with by governments and businessmen with power over public spaces and extreme libertarian philosophies!

Michael

by M Golding on Wed, 10/26/2005 - 18:00 | [reply](#)

If I own a strip of land thro

If I own a strip of land through the middle of New York, and put into place a crazy policy of charging millions of dollars as a toll to cross ... yes it will be a disaster. However, I will destroy the value of my own land in the process. I won't want to charge absurd tolls; I'd rather charge moderate ones that people want to pay.

Further, the people who built on opposite sides of my land knew they were taking a risk. Or, alternatively, the people who cheaply sold me the various parts of the strip of land ... well apparently they are idiots, and the people who built on opposite sides of a strip of idiots were taking a risk...

If government owns a strip of land through the middle of New York, and puts into place some kind of crazy policy, it will also be a disaster.

Government is known for making crazy policy mistakes more than private individuals are, because government is less accountable, and various other reasons.

We both want reliable, sane policy for the strip of land through the middle of New York. I think keeping government far away will best achieve this.

You may say you only want government to intervene in an emergency ... after the idiots sell me the strip and I put into place a stupid policy. But how is government to judge this is taking place? Maybe I've just set up a toll road that is ... well pretty much ideal ... but people are complaining anyway. How is government supposed to decide who's right? Economists disagree all the time. And what will the law say, exactly? It needs to be clear to me, in advance, which purchases and policies will break it.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 10/28/2005 - 11:16 | [reply](#)

Libertarianism and Slavery

A line across New York produces nothing and only increases transaction costs. The cost for crossing an arbitrary line across New York City should be zero. The line is a "public good."

If the governments only role is to protect property (what some libertarians seem to say), and not to protect transaction, the consequences are interesting, to say the least.

Elliot, let's say someone owns an inch thick piece of property extending arbitrarily high into the air that completely surrounds your house or neighborhood. Further, assume that the governments only role is to protect property, not promote transaction.

Since someone owns the inch thick property around your house, he can charge an arbitrary sum of money to have you permitted to cross it, perhaps far more money than you have. And he can ask the police to prevent you from crossing because the government must defend property.

So the owner of the property can have you starve to death by not permitting you to leave or food to enter. Your choices are then to commit suicide or to (voluntarily?) sign a contract specifying that in exchange for being able to cross the boundary, all of the products of your labor and the number of hours you work, and everything that you consume, for the rest of your life, will be determined by the owner of the property surrounding your house. Then and only then, will he permit you to cross the line and eat what he determines you should eat, as defined in the contract. This is otherwise known as slavery.

So if Libertarianism means that a government must defend property, but not human interaction/transaction and efficiency, then that Libertarianism supports slavery. So when Gil says, on moral grounds, that he supports the defense of property over efficiency, if one takes him too seriously, Gil would support slavery. A simple property line around a neighborhood enslaves everyone within. (I'm quite sure Gil doesn't support slavery, but it is interesting to think through the steps about how we got here).

So the government and private citizens must support public goods, the most important of which is transaction and interaction between people. In different arguments, when "natural" monopolies are discussed, if the monopoly is expected to last indefinitely, many argue for government intervention, precisely to prevent this limitation on transaction (Note that a natural monopoly is precisely an entity that reduces transaction between people, just like the owner of the "monopoly" line surrounding someones house!)

Gil apparently argues that it is morally wrong to interfere with property rights, even at the expense of efficiency. So the government presumably should not prevent someone from purchasing a line around a house. Worse, from the perspective of a purist Libertarian, interfering with a contract between the owner of the line and the occupants of the house amounts to stealing from the monopolist who owns the line. I, in contrast, argue that it is stealing from the owner of the house, for a monopolist to own a

"public good" like a line around a house!

It is possible to defend the free market, if one relaxes ones libertarian assumptions and agrees that it is the governments and private citizens role to own and defend public goods so that everyone can use them. The most important of these public goods are public spaces promoting transaction and interaction between people.

And yes, these arguments can be very precisely formulated. In a simple way, the law and economics people have mathematically and philisophically argued that judges and governments should favor those laws and definitions of property that maximally promote free human interaction and exchange (i.e. decrease transaction cost). Lines across New York City or around your house do not qualify!

I personally am not a "law and economics" type because I do not accept that the "preferences" modeled by economists or the "arguments" discussed by Popperians should be treated as exogenous variables in models.

Nonetheless, law and economics professors have created a very "rational" approach to economic models that some at the "World" might be interested in learning about. And unlike the simplistic libetarian arguments (just defending property over efficiency), the law and economics people can show that their models increase human freedom.

So unlike Libertarians, who start out defending property to promote freedom but ultimately must logically defend slavery, an approach that emphasizes minimizing transaction costs as a primary economic goal; promotes property, efficiency, and freedom.

To understand this perspective better, The Nobel Economist Douglas North is fun to read (e.g. "Structure and Change in Economic History"). Judge Posner also has written some interesting books, using this type of philosophy. The "Law and Economics" worldview is remarkably consistent with Popperian epistemology and so (one would think) would be referenced frequently when economic issues are discussed in this forum.

Libertarian epistimology is not really consistent with a Popperian world-view, because of its emphasis on property, even at the expense of human interaction and exchange. Indeed, Popper was certainly not in favor of slavery, and libertarians logically are, but don't admit it.

by M Golding on Sun, 10/30/2005 - 02:17 | [reply](#)

My understanding is in the wo

My understanding is in the world today, people are careful about buying property that isn't connected to a reliable system of roads/airports/seas/whatever for transportation. In other words, people won't buy land with a circle around it without also buying or having rights to pass through the circle.

Do you think people shouldn't have to pay anything for the right to

egress over someone else's property? even if that other property owner doesn't want to give it up?

ok i can imagine a law about having right-of-way, for free, in some situations being reasonable. that need not involve taking away anyone's property though!

basically, i don't see that the nightmare scenario would ever happen, and I do see you attacking property rights needlessly.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 10/31/2005 - 02:33 | [reply](#)

The "Right of Way"

"Ok. I can imagine a law about having a right-of-way for free."
Elliot

Congrats. You've just discovered what a public good is. It is a "right-of-way" to exchange goods and ideas. Facilitation of exchange does not destroy property. Indeed there would be no property without it!

Do not sell across all margins the rights to the roads around our houses or the free speech that emanates from our mouths. The control of exchange is the control of our lives. If you sell the public good, you traffic in slavery.

Would not Popper wish that you exchange so that you find what you know best? Property without knowledge is like science without theory. So it is our ideas, forged in exchange, that tells us what we have and own.

So if you'd like to find a rational economic policy, reduce the costs of exchange -- free the costs of exchange if you can -- and not only will we all be more wealthy, but we will all be a bit more free.

And if you must be of a practical mindset, REDUCE TRANSACTION COSTS.

by M Golding on Mon, 10/31/2005 - 04:40 | [reply](#)

The "Right of Way" "Ok. I

The "Right of Way"

*"Ok. I can imagine a law about having a right-of-way for free."
Elliot*

Congrats. You've just discovered what a public good is.

Are you saying if I have right-of-way to walk across a trail on someone's property to get from my house to the highway that is a public good...?

I don't see how this fits with your earlier definition either.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 10/31/2005 - 07:15 | [reply](#)

Transaction Cost

"I don't see how this fits with your earlier definition, either" (of a public good)

Let's say Joe has been carefully buying from different people, tracts of land that are adjacent to a neighborhood in the shape of a cul-de-sac, with one road leading out (the "mouth" of the cul-de-sac).

The final transaction occurs when Joe buys from Harry the road at the mouth of the cul-de-sac. If this were a pure libertarian world, Joe now essentially owns everyone within, and can turn them into his property as described above, by preventing them from leaving and starving them.

Let's say one of the new slave's relatives (say Ellen, on the outside of this cul-de-sac), attempts to buy the mouth of the cul-de-sac (from Joe) to free her relative. If the transaction goes through, then Joe and the relative have made a transaction, but the benefits of the transaction are then distributed across all the residents of the cul-de-sac. But the costs of the transaction are concentrated on Ellen. (So Ellen would have to be very altruistic to purchase back the road at the cul-de-sac mouth...which is the public good)

Seen in reverse, when Joe buys the mouth of the cul-de-sac, he imposes costs from this transaction on every single person in the cul-de-sac, by denying them food and thus forcing them into slavery. When this transaction is reversed, everyone benefits, but does not have to pay, for their freedom. The reverse of a Pigouvian externality, is a Pigouvian public good.

"Are you saying that if I have right-of-way to walk across a trail on someones property to get from my house to the highway that is a public good..?"

Elliot

Not at all. How would a "law and economics" Judge answer the question of whether you should be able to cross someones property to get to a highway?

First of all, he would acknowledge that a law allowing people to cross each others property does in fact decrease certain transaction costs. In fact individuals will be able to get to the highway faster and these savings should be counted.

But, the law and economics judge would also ask what effect arbitrary crossing of property has on the land-owners ability to transact with his property. Indeed, property that can be crossed by anyone will not have the same value in trade. This expected decrease in value across everyones property would be calculated. In most situations, the decrease in transaction costs associated with

getting to the highway more quickly, will be easily offset by the decrease in value of property in which trespass is permitted, so the law and economics judge should decide against your ability to cross peoples property. Since the same property is there, but the overall value of property falls with a law allowing arbitrary trespass, laws allowing trespass usually increase net transaction costs. So arbitrary crossing of property should not be allowed, according to this model.

Now, what about the mouth of the cul-de-sac described above? How would a law and economics judge approach that problem?

1. A single monopolist could be permitted to own the mouth of the cul-de-sac. In other words, we could allow a private company to own the "public good" called the "mouth of the cul-de-sac." But to prevent the owner from starving the residents within and making them slaves, or at least charging more than the cost of maintaining the road, this monopolist could be regulated. So if a monopolist owns a public good and it is expected that his monopoly will last indefinitely, he should expect regulation. Perhaps individuals could be charged tolls equal to the expected fair market cost of maintaining the cul-de-sac mouth.

2. Or, the community covenant could say that 200 dollars per month is owed to the community managers by anyone who decides to build a house or live there. Community managers could be elected by the community. Decisions about "public goods", like who should maintain road access out of the community, could then be resolved by majority vote. Each person voluntarily agrees to be coerced when he is in the majority, in exchange for the ability to coerce the minority when he is in the majority. A vote could be taken and money could be allocated to pay a local child or worker to maintain road access out of the community.

In model 1, a private firm owns the "public good", and the people pay the regulated monopolist to administer the property. In model 2, the people own the public good and appoint their own representatives to administer it.

A law and economics judge, looking at both scenarios would need to decide whether it is cheaper to socialize ownership of the cul-de-sac mouth leading out of the community through a community covenant, or is it cheaper to allow a monopolist to control the public good (access out of the community), regulate him, but allow him to charge each resident as he passes through.

Which scenario is cheaper and better can be subject to empirical inquiry, however imperfect econometricians tools are. Which alternative keeps transaction cost the lowest? Both alternatives are frequently used.

Michael

by a reader on Tue, 11/01/2005 - 01:24 | [reply](#)

Big Difference

Michael,

I'm afraid you've been mischaracterizing my position.

I don't hold property rights as absolute. I approve of allowing violations of property rights in emergency situations provided reasonable compensation is made (e.g. starving hikers breaking into an empty cabin for food and to call for help).

But there's a huge difference between making this concession and supporting the regular, institutionalized, violation of property rights as a matter of course, because the representatives of a majority think a particular public good is worthy of coerced payment. For example, I don't approve of preventing a young couple in Montana from allocating their assets in pursuit of their own values, because Michael Golding and many others like jazz and the nostalgia of what New Orleans was like.

See the difference?

By the way, if roads were privatized, every piece of property would surely be sold with an easement so that nobody could be prevented from having access to and from his property. And if it happened without such an easement, the law would recognize the right anyway (and possibly force reasonable compensation).

Also, anybody who tried to profit in this way would surely fail. People profit (in free markets) by providing customers with things that they want and are happy to pay for (considering their alternatives, etc.). They depend on reputation for future success. If they took advantage of unfortunate people in a way similar to what you describe, then the general public would be sure to punish them economically (boycotts, bad publicity, etc.)

These nightmare scenarios go nowhere toward justifying the policies you seem to support.

It's a bit like arguing that nobody should be allowed to be rich because an evil rich person might offer poor people \$1 million to cut their feet off.

It's just not a real problem. And the possibility certainly doesn't justify the "cure".

And even if one doesn't recognize the morality of property rights and is only interested in economic efficiency, I think that a proper analysis would conclude that our present political institutions are not likely to limit their actions to funding those projects that actually increased efficiency, and that allowing them to try makes us worse off overall.

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 11/01/2005 - 06:16 | [reply](#)

I think that a proper analysis

I think that a proper analysis would conclude that our present

political institutions are not likely to limit their actions to funding those projects that actually increased efficiency, and that allowing them to try makes us worse off overall.

I think we can do even better. We don't need a proper analysis. Government can't decide to limit its actions only to efficient ones -- even if it wanted to -- because it cannot know for sure which actions are efficient. No one knows that. That's why there is risk involved in investing in companies.

When I make a risky investment and it's bad, I suffer. When government does, I suffer, you suffer ... all the tax payers suffer. Government shouldn't be in the business of trying to decide what actions are economically efficient. Period.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 11/01/2005 - 06:45 | [reply](#)

The Whole Discussion is about "Easements"!

Gil,

The issue is not Michael Golding's nostalgia. You and I would have had no discussion if we were talking about a persons desire to take someone elses property and use it for his own purposes. But some Libertarians fundamentally misunderstand economics. Property has no value without interaction and transaction (the fundamental public goods). Governments and all of our roles should be to promote voluntary interaction and transaction. Promoting voluntary interaction is virtually the only way to promotes property. For example, property is worthless without the fundamental public good called knowledge (something that exists between people otherwise noone would know what he is trading). Elliot calls public goods "rights of way" and you call public goods "easements." I don't care about the words. Knowledge quite literally gives someone "a right of way" and an "easement" to other knowledge. It is a "public good".

I have been trying to talk about the fundamentally complex way in which "easements" affect society and in particular, what are the barriers to functioning "easements" in societies? Who owns them? Who cares for them? And in particular, what should be done when someone (especially a libertarian talking about "freedom") erects a barrier on an "easement".

You blithely (and simplistically) say that of course there are "easements," but without even a smile on your face! The problem in the real world is that "easements" can be very expensive to maintain and people actually have to decide how to maintain them for use, so that libertarians don't build on them and (in my view) steal from people.

It is nonsense to say that people only make profit by satisfying the needs and wants of others. They also make profit by owning "easements" or "rights of way" or "public goods" (all the same thing) and erecting barriers which they charge people to cross.

Owning a line around peoples house is a metaphor that shows that profit can be made by erecting barriers to trade, and it is the governments primary (perhaps only) responsibility to facilitate trade, to facilitate exchange.

Libertarians want defense of property. But property is worthless without exchange (as the example of the line around the house shows).

Shall I provide an example of erecting a barrier over an easement (a partial line around a house)?

Gil, do you think that a neighborhood under construction should be able to ask citizens who wish to move there to contribute a certain amount each month to a community fund? The pooled money would then be used for "community projects" (like taking care of the easement/roads that connect the community to those outside the community).

Should individuals be allowed to decide that the community should decide, say by majority vote, certain issues that affect the community? Such individuals in the community would agree to be coerced when in the minority, and agree to coerce others on certain issues when in the majority.

For example, the color of peoples houses is arguably an "easement," to use your words. If someone paints his house "pink" (an eyesore to most), this color inhibits the ability of other homeowners to "connect" with someone who may wish to buy their property, because others may not wish to move into a neighborhood with a bright pink house. So the pink color erects a barrier to transaction for others in the neighborhood. So the person painting his house pink is effectively building on what you would call an "easement" (do you see that?). A good that connects people to their trading partners is an "easement" (or "public good" or "right of way") But to the person painting his house pink, he may think it adds to the value of the house or at least his enjoyment of it.

Worse, he could hate the color pink but he could say to others, "If you would like me to paint over it a different color, that hurts me profoundly. I would like 1000 dollars from all of you in the neighborhood" (up to the value of their property lost because of the pink house.)

And so he could charge (make profit by) threatening to ruin the property value of everyone elses house. Such an individual is absolutely NOT making profit by producing what people want. Indeed he is making profit by producing specifically what people *DO NOT WANT.* So Gil, do you see how people can make profit other than by satisfying other peoples needs and wants?

Should a majority vote of the community be able to decide whether someone should be able to build on their collective "easement", especially if majority rule on these types of issues was agreed upon before someone lived in the community? Would the majority be stealing from the minority by preventing pink houses? If the person violated the covenant and painted his house pink, would he be

stealing from the community? What do you honestly think?

Such discussions happen *all the time* in real neighborhoods, in real cities, and in real nations. (In our neighborhood, the fight every year is over spending community money to place religious crosses on the "easement" identifying my community during Christmas. Some of us want them there and some of us don't. How do we decide using Libertarian principles?

Michael

by M Golding on Tue, 11/01/2005 - 18:14 | [reply](#)

Government Analysis

"Governments shouldn't be in the business of trying to decide what is economically efficient."

Elliot

Interesting.

Bob and Harry move next door to each other at about the same time. Bob opens a restaurant. Harry opens a mail-order business. Bob takes Harry to court saying that the length of his grass keeps customers away. His business is an eyesore to customers.

Harry counters that his grass is not that tall and it is not good business to mow the grass all the time because it wastes time (it's not efficient).

Who should win? How do you decide?

Michael

by M Golding on Tue, 11/01/2005 - 23:15 | [reply](#)

Contracts

Michael,

I do approve of voluntary (in which all participants have given prior, informed, consent) agreements being honored.

However, I strongly deny that I have entered into such a voluntary "Social Contract" in which I have agreed to go along with anything the government chooses to do to me (or others).

You may wish to pretend otherwise, but pretending is all it is.

If you support forcing unwilling people to help fund lots of public goods, you are *not* merely enforcing voluntary agreements. You're doing something very different.

You may think it's worth it, but I think you're mistaken.

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 11/02/2005 - 08:11 | [reply](#)

But What About the Specifics?

Gil,

I share your opinion that government is often overintrusive.

But Gil, what do you think about the below situations.

1. Should a community be able to have people sign an agreement when they move in, saying that on issues of landscaping, color of houses, additions to houses, and/or possibly defense of the neighborhood, and other issues in which one person's decision affects the property value of others in the neighborhood; then the majority can decide whether it is OK, as long as the decisions are constitutional and do not violate state or federal law?

Money for defense of the neighborhood (e.g. a nightly police car making rounds) would come from community dues...as we had in my neighborhood when I was growing up, though there were people who voted against paying for the extra police presence!

2. So should the community described in my post yesterday be able to stop someone from painting his house pink? Is the person stealing from the community if his house gets painted pink anyway? Or is the community stealing from him by not letting him paint his house pink? What do you honestly think?

3. Should I be able to legally not pay my taxes in support of defense because others (who want defense) should be able to pool their money? Why can't people voluntarily pool their money and give to the military? Only those who want to give should give (right?) Otherwise it's stealing from those who don't want to give. If defense is not important then people won't give and if it is they will. Right?

(Maybe a young family wants to realize its dreams in Oregon. If this family doesn't give, it doesn't destroy our national defense. How can we possibly justify coercing them. And people are very generous. I have no doubt that billions would be raised VOLUNTARILY, if people were asked to defend their country with their donations.)

Thanks,
Michael

by M Golding on Wed, 11/02/2005 - 15:56 | [reply](#)

Specifics

1. Yes, such an agreement seems valid and 2) I think a party to the agreement can be held to its terms.

3. I personally would like to move to voluntary funding of defense as quickly as possible because the same principles apply as to other

public goods and I think our culture will be able to raise such funds

voluntarily with some creativity.

However, I recognize funding defense to be an exception at the present time (because the risks to all other liberties are so high) that I accept coercive funding temporarily until we can evolve towards voluntary funding in a safe manner.

I don't see any other public goods (e.g. rebuilding New Orleans, space programs, research funding, public "education", etc.) rising to a level that justifies this type of exception.

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 11/02/2005 - 18:20 | [reply](#)

Fair Enough

You're certainly mostly consistent!

So we've established that at times it is reasonable for a majority to coerce a minority to defend a public good (like hiring a police car to defend property) if all have (non-coercively) signed on to a set of community rules allowing that to take place.

The next logical question would be,

1. Under what set of circumstances is it "rational" for a majority (or anyone in the community) to vote for hiring a patrolling police car and how much should the community be willing to spend? Let's assume that all crimes in the neighborhood are property crimes (e.g. theft) and no one is injured or frightened by intruders. (Assume this for simplicity)

2. "Because the risks to all other liberties are so high", the majority should be able to coerce the minority and make them pay for defense, too. (Gil, is this your argument for why everyone should have to pay for defense of the country?)

If so, why should the majority be able to coerce the minority (even right now)? If the majority wants defense, because it believes "the risks to all other liberties are so high", why can't the majority still contribute and just reduce the size of the military a little bit? Or perhaps everyone in the majority can contribute a little more to make up the difference lost because the minority does not contribute. After all, the cause is so important, surely those who recognize the value of defense would be willing to give a little more to defend their principles.

3. "Because the risks to all other liberties are so high"
Defending which liberties justifies coercing people?

Thanks,
Michael

by M Golding on Thu, 11/03/2005 - 01:30 | [reply](#)

Justifying Coercing People

Michael,

1) I suppose it would be rational to choose to increase spending on protection so long as the expected benefit of the marginal increase exceeds the marginal costs by more than the rate of return of alternative available investments. This is not always an easy call (lots of secondary costs and benefits), but I would think that a single patrol car would be a good investment.

2 and 3) I'm not saying that high risks/benefits justify entrenched, institutionalized coercion. I do think that extreme emergency situations where there isn't time or opportunity to get agreement can make it reasonable to coerce people if you're willing to offer compensating benefits (enough that a reasonable person would be indifferent between the offense + compensation vs. no offense).

I don't favor permanent coerced defense funding. But, I'm afraid that turning off current funding immediately and hoping for sufficient contributions might be irresponsibly dangerous (leading to mass innocent deaths).

Here's an interesting article with some ideas for funding public goods (like defense). I think that these and other ideas would be sufficient to voluntarily raise enough to fund a reasonable defensive force (and I do think that much of current defense spending is wasted).

Gil

by **Gil** on Thu, 11/03/2005 - 04:04 | [reply](#)

Taking Children Seriously (TCS)

Off Topic:

Just to try to avoid confusion (for lurkers as much as anyone), the use of the word "coercion" and "non-coercion" in this thread has nothing to do with the TCS use of the word. I bring this up because TCS and **The World** are by the same people, and because TCS is sometimes (misleadingly) called "non-coercive parenting", and also because I know some TCSers must be reading this thread (like myself) and initially think "hey wait, that *is* coercion" before realising the use of 'coercion' here is completely different.

BTW, back on topic, as far as libertarian-coercion (ie, the libertarian meaning, as in this thread), it looks to me a bit like a euphemism for saying force. I think it'd be clearer to write "we've all agreed to force a minority, if they agreed (non-forcefully) to do the thing". also this is silly. you can't force people who consent.

BTW if everyone truly consented to all the laws of a community, you wouldn't need police roaming the streets.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 11/03/2005 - 15:52 | [reply](#)

OK

Gil

I. Concerning the community that has a move-in requirement of

- an amount of money/month for a few public goods (like easements) and
- the community that has the police car, and
- in this same community you personally notice that the majority (and often close to everyone) is making rational calculations about such things as police cars by trying to make sure that the
- "expected benefit of the marginal increase exceeds the marginal cost by more than the expected rate of return of other investments" when they vote

Concerning such a community described above, you say it should be legal for individuals to run such a community but

A. would you seriously consider living in such a community if members are continuing to use the "rational" calculations you specify? If you would not wish to live in this community, what changes would you want made to handle issues like bright pink houses and the need for police vehicles?

II. I still don't understand why the IRS cannot print out a summary of defense needs, what the individual and others (approximately) gave last year, and ask for voluntary contributions to defense.

B. Specifically, why do you think there would be any decrease *at all* in the net amount of money given to the military, given the stakes you mention, even if voluntary contributions for defense were initiated this very next tax season?

Thanks.

Michael

by M Golding on Thu, 11/03/2005 - 17:24 | [reply](#)

Considerations

1) Yes, I would consider living in such a community (in fact, I do). The considerations include understanding the extent of the possible restrictions and fees, and deciding whether I think that it adds more value than it costs in my choices. Also, it helps to have the option of leaving to a less restrictive community. This type of competition will tend to help the evolution of good rules.

2) I have never denied that there are factors which will tend to reduce voluntary contributions to public goods.

While I'm personally confident that enough funds can be raised voluntarily in the U.S. for an effective defensive force, there is still a degree of uncertainty about how long it will take to evolve the proper norms and mechanisms for such funding.

It's this uncertainty that leads me to accept a gradual, rather than

immediate, transition towards voluntary funding of defense.

An adequate defense is something that we, literally, cannot live without. There's a huge difference between victory and defeat. This is not so for other public goods. Those that are perceived as most valuable will receive substantial contributions, of course.

Gil

by **Gil** on Thu, 11/03/2005 - 17:54 | [reply](#)

Defense

At this point reading through 100 posts I am willing to concede Gil his own country, water and air rights and easements, and his own government to go with it. The jury is out as to whether this government will be needed. I would like to see the plans for the Defense budget and the building which it rents tho before I immigrate.

by a reader on Fri, 11/04/2005 - 00:05 | [reply](#)

Specific Factors

1. We have agreed that we should be able to have, and you (and I) might in fact live in, a community that has individuals sign an agreement when they move in specifying

a. that on issues of landscaping, colors of houses, additions to houses, defense of the neighborhood and other issues in which one person's decision affects the property value of others in the neighborhood, then the majority can decide whether it is OK,

provided that

b. we have free choice to leave the community and given that our decision to stay or leave would partially depend on the extent to which most of our fellow citizens utilize marginal cost and revenue estimates when they vote.

c. As our successful community grows, it becomes complicated, as you have pointed out, to make marginal cost and revenue estimates on every issue discussed. Would it be OK, if the majority then starts to consider that information matters. Specifically, the relative presence or lack of INFORMATION that some people have ABOUT marginal cost and marginal revenue issues, in fact affects the way people vote. So information itself becomes a "public good," because peoples intelligent or unintelligent voting itself affects the overall property values of the community.

So appropriate voting procedures could themselves become subject to a vote, given the original wording of the covenant allowing the community to decide to vote on issues affecting communal values of property. Improving voting rules improves the value of community property.

And so lets say the people overwhelmingly vote to pay "experts,"

out of their community dues, to study certain issues, because each person does not have time to learn all the information needed to make an informed choice (because they are doing other jobs and not doing econometric analyses.)

And the people also vote to divide the community into 60 equal square parts (like a grid superimposed on the community), and each subcommunity in each little block gets to vote for a number of representative experts, proportional to the population, so that each persons vote from each subcommunity continues to count the same as every other persons vote from other subcommunities.

The "experts" job (say an average of 3 per subcommunity) is then to calculate as best they can, the effect on property values in the subcommunity (using marginal cost and revenue decisions), of any decision by a homeowner which affects property values of other homeowners in the subcommunity. If there is not unanimity of the 3 experts, then they vote.

A. Gil, should it be OK for a community to try to organize itself this way? Then every single person does not have to be an expert on every single issue that affects the appearance or property of the community as a whole. And as long as the "experts" can be voted out of their job as experts, if they are not optimizing the property values of the subcommunity, would that be OK? The experts might be considered "portfolio" managers for the appearance of the community.

The community is then effectively divided, so that most property problems are handled on a local level by the experts who do econometric analysis, unless the decisions of individual subcommunity homeowners affect the community as a whole. If a decision of one homeowner is thought to affect the property values of those outside the subcommunity, as well, then the experts from all the subcommunities gather, and vote on the issue. In addition, the community is giving itself the opportunity to adjust to the different collective preferences of subgroups and learn what types of decisions in each subcommunity in fact maximize the value of property and individual happiness (people will leave one subcommunity and join another if it is better for them and their property).

Should this arrangement be legal?

2. Back to the real world.

B. In your view, which specific "factors" prevent individuals from adequately coordinating their economic activity to voluntarily support the US military, say by utilizing a voluntary checkoff on their IRS tax form? Which factors prevent this from being done this very next tax season?

by M Golding on Fri, 11/04/2005 - 03:48 | [reply](#)

Factors

Michael,

A. Such an agreement should be legal provided that the imposed rules and fees do not go beyond the original mandate that was unanimously agreed upon (without unanimous approval).

The limits of the agreement should be clear and understood. It shouldn't be a "living" document. It shouldn't begin to allow restrictions on what drugs people may consume, whether or not they may own guns, how much they may/must pay neighbor kids to mow their lawns, or force them to pay for projects unlike those originally agreed to (no matter how large a non-unanimous majority would like to fund them with forced fees), etc.

B. I accept the problems that you describe with respect to funding public goods (free-riders, etc.). I'm sure that many people would contribute less for collective defense than they would if their own defense depended on their own payment.

The major factor that I think is needed is *time* for social norms to change so that defense is considered a worthy cause to contribute to, and such contributions are expected, rather than an entitlement "paid by the government".

I'm confident that given the time and opportunity, this will happen and people will recognize a responsibility to support collective defense and will act accordingly. Also, time will help more creative funding solutions to be applied and to be discovered.

Gil

by **Gil** on Fri, 11/04/2005 - 06:41 | [reply](#)

So Were You Overstating the Case?

Gil,

Neither you nor I believe the government should finance many public goods, although I'm virtually certain you favor government intervention less frequently than I do.

For example, you don't believe that the government should help with hurricane relief in New Orleans, other than to provide police protection for property. But in the short-term you have acknowledged that

"I accept the problems you describe with respect to funding public goods (free riders, etc.)"

So when someone describes a public good problem to you, is the best response really, "No coercion is necessary for willing contributors to coordinate their economic activities"?

Indeed if you acknowledge the possibility of "free riders" in the short term preventing efficient pooling of money to buy a public good like collective defense, then the "no coercion is necessary...." comment is overstating things a bit, isn't it?

Michael

by M Golding on Sun, 11/06/2005 - 19:13 | [reply](#)

Overstating

Well, the quotation is true. It might not always be the case that the degree of coordination is to your satisfaction, and it may be less than if all externalities were internalized; but it is non-zero. Public goods *do* get voluntary funding (even despite inhibition by government policies); all the time.

I'm sure you agree that it's a good thing that we (usually) protect people from having their lives and efforts commandeered by others for the purposes of those others. The narrow project of running a plantation efficiently might have been enhanced by slave labor, but the wider project of advancing human flourishing was not.

The *real* question is: When, if ever, is using force rather than reason morally (or, if you prefer, economically) justified by the situation?

My argument that the answer is "Extremely rarely, if ever", and that it's a huge mistake to institutionalize this power to make it relatively easy for bureaucracies to employ. History (and **public choice theory**) show us that this policy leads to problems that often outweigh the intended benefits.

If not in each case, then certainly in the aggregate.

Gil

by **Gil** on Sun, 11/06/2005 - 21:33 | [reply](#)

Efficient Coordination?

I see!

So when you discuss public goods that you would like financed through the government (like defense), and you say "No coercion is necessary for willing contributors to coordinate.....,"

what you really meant to say is that when it comes to financing public goods, "No coercion is necessary for willing contributors to **INEFFICIENTLY** coordinate their economic activities."(!)

I'm glad we both agree that when it comes to public goods, willing contributors **do not** necessarily coordinate their economic activities efficiently. If saying that (in certain circumstances) "willing contributors cannot efficiently coordinate their economic activities" means the same as "willing contributors coordinate their economic activities....", well OK then!

By the way, independent of the immorality of slavery, your example of plantations being economically efficient, is laughable. If slavery had been economically efficient, slaves would have been used in just about the same way as free individuals (with maybe a few more hours of work per day). Slaves would have been congressmen, presidents, business owners, etc.

A slave would make far more money for the slave-owner as a

business man than as a slave (if he were willing to be a slave and a businessman -- a big if). So a perspective that only analyzes transaction cost to decide who should own what, clearly comes down on the side of people owning themselves, because when they own themselves, their intellectual and physical resources can be used in many very productive ways. When people own themselves, they use themselves more efficiently.

Slaveowners have to waste enormous resources trying to keep slaves stupid and in chains so that they can't escape. In addition, they have to wastefully damage their bodies and minds to keep them from organizing against the tyranny that oppresses them.

A law and economics judge, independent of ethical considerations, would easily come down on the side of people owning themselves, because when they do, their bodies and minds produce more. So the "Law and Economics" perspective does give you a surprising number of "correct" answers to ethical questions, while just employing seemingly empirically-based analysis.

Obviously, even if a person's resources were more efficiently utilized as a slave, and not a free person, it still would be very wrong to enslave him. But it is nonetheless surprising how ethically "on target" decisions are, when legal decisionmakers try to find those definitions of property that minimize transaction costs. There is a bizarre near-confluence of ethical and economic decision making when this occurs. The "positive" and the "normative" inch closer together.

Michael

by M Golding on Mon, 11/07/2005 - 01:56 | [reply](#)

Inefficiency

Inefficiently coordinating resources to support public goods is the only way it can be done. If you think it's done efficiently through government (or would be if we could only get the right people into the right positions), then you're delusional (I'll leave it to you to contemplate whether such delusions arise from disease or not).

I suspect that in the vast majority of cases using government force and bureaucracy as the coordination mechanism is much more inefficient than through the creative efforts of private people voluntarily contributing their own time and resources.

Government force is a very poor attempt at a solution to public goods funding; both morally and practically. As you say, it is interesting how often these things align.

Gil

by Gil on Mon, 11/07/2005 - 04:27 | [reply](#)

Slavery

By the way, my intuition about the economics of slavery matches

yours. However, I've seen reports of serious studies that have come to the opposite conclusion.

In any case, my point was merely that the perception of an efficiency gain for a narrow project by those with political power via violating individual rights (and we must both agree that slavery had *that*) is not a sufficient condition to go ahead and do it.

Often the judgments will be wrong, and even when they're right...they'll still be wrong. :-)

Gil

by **Gil** on Mon, 11/07/2005 - 04:52 | [reply](#)

Michael, You're absolutely

Michael,

You're absolutely right about the inefficiency of slavery, and the point that if it wasn't they'd have been businessmen is great.

As to public goods ... I agree there are situations where coordinating efficiently is difficult. it takes knowledge to identify these cases. and it takes more knowledge to come up with an efficient solution. where i differ from you is that I deny government has any advantages in identifying these cases, or in solving them efficiently. I noticed your post didn't mention this issue.

also, following your take on slavery ... i am highly suspicious of any claims that government forcing people is particularly efficient. more inefficient than slavery? of course. the only way something will get done? sometimes. but the most efficient way to do something? no way. when government solutions seem to work well, it's probably b/c government used it's large scale organisational talent (which while flawed certainly exists), or something else it has knowledge about how to do.

i'd also like to acknowledge that I believe your position in the argument makes more sense than Gil's. I think if one concedes the things that Gil concedes, then you'd be (mostly) right.

however, I don't think Gil's extraordinary commitment to freedom should be seen as a flaw. he could easily make this argument to you, that i'd agree with: you (Michael) are too quick to accept unfree solutions to problems, and ought to be more skeptical of such methods.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 11/07/2005 - 10:01 | [reply](#)

Freedom

I think many of us want to find the most efficient ways for certain

public goods to be produced, as long as benefits actually exceed costs in the production of the good.

If it is the government that is producing the good, its activities are often remarkably inefficient and wasteful, due to governments lack of accountability.

But if citizens pay the least when, for example, road ownership is socialized and supported by taxes, then so be it. But if it is on average cheaper for roads to be owned by a monopoly that charges tolls and is regulated by the government, I am fine with that, as well. And if it is still cheaper to set up creative rules for companies to compete for contracts and routes, while roads are supported by tolls and with little government regulation, that would be even better. Regardless, we should perform cost-benefit analysis on as many government projects as possible to project what we think will happen and then carefully document our errors.

As stated in a different thread, Murray Weidenbaum, as head of the presidents council on economic advisors under Reagan, tried to get this type of analysis performed routinely on proposed government projects. He proposed using the office of management and budget for these efforts. As one can imagine, his endeavors may not have been too well received by many government bureaucrats, whether of the liberal or conservative persuasion. Projects often cost more than those proposing them are willing to admit! Professor Weidenbaum did not stay too long in Washington.

Defending arbitrary definitions of property (like someone owning a line around someone elses house and multiple variations) does not necessarily promote freedom and often hinders freedom and efficiency. As I have shown, defense of property arrangements that in the long term inhibit transaction, in fact decrease peoples freedom. Indeed in extreme cases, defense of such property arrangements actually promotes slavery.

Policies that in the long term lower transaction cost, on the other hand, are more likely to promote rational definitions of property in the future. More importantly, decreased transaction cost allows increases in rational exchange between people. And it is this facilitated free exchange that ultimately generates wealth, knowledge, and most importantly, freedom.

by M Golding on Wed, 11/09/2005 - 01:06 | [reply](#)

While government is presently

While government is presently the most efficient way to do some things ... and in some cases the only known way I see no in-principle reason to expect this to remain so forever. The special feature of government, that differentiates it from just a private company providing something, is that it uses force against its subjects. I don't mean to declare government illegitimate, but this fact remains. I believe this fact gives government no theoretical advantages in economic matters, where the critical thing is knowledge. Thus, I believe one day we won't need "government"

(force initiation) to provide our services. in other words, i see no qualities of government to be necessary parts of solving economic problems.

Also, and I'm sure you'll agree with this, if people wish to pay more for a less-efficient non-government option, that is perfectly OK. what people value matters, and it's legitimate to value things other than efficiency.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 11/09/2005 - 02:34 | [reply](#)

Novel Idea!

1. Some of us appreciate government because it combats the forcefulness of others. When noone is violent (uses guns or builds fences on easements), then government will not be needed. This might take a while!

2. It's not less efficient, per se. If people want something (call it good A) and place a premium on something else (i.e. goods not produced by the government...good B), then when people purchase A + B, they are purchasing more than good A alone, and therefore may be willing to pay more.

3. But your point is still very interesting to me and #2 is a quibble. I have never thought of the situation where people might be willing to pay more for something, to not have the government produce it!

So I'll use your assumptions. Let's say it is, in general, more "efficient" (in your sense) to socialize ownership of the roads and have them financed through taxation rather than through private ownership and tolls.

So just socializing the whole road building activity and collecting taxes is financially cheaper than having the government have to deal with the "barriers" that private road owners could place on "easements", by privately owning roads. I don't know that this assumption is true, but let's say it is.

Elliot, should a majority be able to ...well...coerce(?!)..... the minority into paying more for the roads, because the majority does not want the (coercive!) government involved?

by M Golding on Wed, 11/09/2005 - 03:31 | [reply](#)

I say if you can't persuade p

I say if you can't persuade people your project is a good idea, they shouldn't bear the cost of it. However, I don't advocate making taxes optional today; I know that system would be horribly abused. What I do advocate is moving (gradually) towards the first thing, so that people prosper, or not, on their own merits and choices, and

not on other people's decisions. It's bad if I lose money over

someone else's foolish road project; your analysis seems to leave out that we don't know, in advance, if a project is actually efficient or not. Which is the primary reason paying for it should be voluntary.

About government preventing forcefulness ... I like being safe as much as the next guy, but I don't know how much this is government's doing. In many countries, one is not safe from the government or the military (if they are separate). What makes us safe from our military can't be laws that the military isn't allowed to take over. And it isn't private gun ownership. And it's not checks and balances in government decision making -- those can't do much about bullets. It must be traditions of peaceful society, and knowledge of how to live peacefully. I know government is presently an integral part of that tradition, but I don't think it deserves all the credit.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 11/09/2005 - 04:33 | [reply](#)

A wise anarcho-capitalist kno

A wise anarcho-capitalist knows that anarcho-capitalism is a *more* sophisticated way of life than our present one, not a simpler one. It will emerge from it only by evolution and piecemeal conjectures and refutations. Not by abolishing taxes at a stroke. The latter would simply revert us to an earlier state, and would not constitute progress at all. How can one expect improvement without thought?

by a different reader on Wed, 11/09/2005 - 04:34 | [reply](#)

Not sure I understand

Elliot,

If it's cheaper to socialize ownership of roads and collect taxes, but a majority of the people would rather pay more and have them privately provided and pay tolls, should the majority rule?

Michael

by M Golding on Wed, 11/09/2005 - 04:42 | [reply](#)

There are multiple questions

There are multiple questions there.

Today, we use a system of voting for government projects, and a system of voluntary trade for private projects. So if a government road gets voted for, it should be built. (It's not quite that simple.) If we're talking about a voluntary road, it should only be built by people who voluntarily build it.

In general, I would prefer that only people who believe the road is a

good idea, and wish to build it, pay for it.

None of my analysis depends on whether the road is, in fact, efficient. We have to have policies that can be implemented without being sure about who's right or what policies are right. If we knew what was best, we wouldn't need ways of making decisions.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 11/09/2005 - 06:08 | [reply](#)

I Still Do Not Understand

So (right now) if it happens to be cheaper to socialize ownership of roads and collect taxes, but a majority wants to begin the process of moving toward less government involvement in a few spheres of our lives, and if the majority votes to pay more and have roads privately financed by tolls:

Should the majority rule?

Michael

by M Golding on Wed, 11/09/2005 - 11:59 | [reply](#)

Why Rule?

Why is it a question of ruling?

If some people (majority, minority, or individual) want to build private roads and finance them voluntarily (tolls, advertising, etc.) why is it a question of them ruling? Why is it anyone else's business, and by what right should they stop them?

They don't need to rule. They just need to be unmolested.

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 11/09/2005 - 17:50 | [reply](#)

The problem with your questio

The problem with your question is it still seems to involve some central authority making decisions (us). I don't want to rule. I don't want to decide who should rule. Popper said "Who should rule?" is a bad question, and should be replaced with, "how can we remove bad rulers and bad policies?"

anyway, here is what I think should happen:

If the majority (in congress, or in state government, or wherever that controls a government budget) vote to cut funding for government roads, then government road funding should be cut. meanwhile, building private toll roads should be legal. (already is, as far as I know)

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 11/09/2005 - 18:11 | [reply](#)

OK

"If the majority....vote to cut funding for government roads, then government road funding should be cut."

Elliot

Thanks.

If the majority wants, can the government that represents it vote to sell the government roads to willing private entrepreneurs?

Michael

by M Golding on Wed, 11/09/2005 - 20:01 | [reply](#)

yes, government selling its r

yes, government selling its roads is OK with me. while they're at it, i hope they sell the postal service ;-)

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 11/09/2005 - 20:48 | [reply](#)

Majority Sells the Roads!

Elliot,

The minority complains and says it was coerced by the majority. The minority says that road use is now more expensive, just as the majority and minority both predicted.

Because on average everyone in the minority (and majority) has less money, the minority says its opportunities are relatively decreased, a little of their freedom has been taken from them by the ruthless majority decision.

Elliot, do you think the majority coerced the minority by forcing them to pay more for traveling the roads?

Michael

by M Golding on Wed, 11/09/2005 - 21:07 | [reply](#)

I don't know exactly what you

I don't know exactly what you mean by "coerced", could you rephrase with a different word?

Doesn't your objection apply equally well to all voting? A policy of [something] is put in place, then the minority that opposed this policy complains that the [something] hurts them.

Also, traveling on a given road is optional! You may say I'm splitting

hairs because roads are so useful. But I generally take the view that great things to buy from other people are a *bonus*, not my natural right. Thus if, for example, a grocery store raises its prices, I don't say they are "taking my freedom", because I don't think they owed me anything. They were *giving* me extra freedom, now they aren't, that's all.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 11/09/2005 - 22:37 | [reply](#)

Freedom vs. Coercion

If someone owns something, or a right to do or not do something, and then that something is involuntarily taken away from them, then that is coercion because it is using power, rather than voluntary exchange, to effect change.

You said,
"Yes, government selling roads is OK with me", though the minority did not want the roads sold.

By "OK", I assumed you thought it was reasonable (perhaps right) for the majority to authorize the government to sell the roads. You have told this blog in many different ways that you value freedom and voluntary exchange, so I was wondering why you thought it was OK to coerce the minority into giving up their public roads?

Michael

by M Golding on Wed, 11/09/2005 - 23:32 | [reply](#)

I don't own government roads.

I don't own government roads. I have a right to use them. I am perfectly aware that their are processes by which my access to the roads may be changed even if I vote against the change. I know the government could impose a curfew, and not let me use the roads at certain times. I know the government could impose a holiday and a parade, and again take away my road use. I know the government could, if it got the votes, tear down a road and replace it with a post office.

so while i have some right to the road, I know that right is limited, and I don't consider a government policy of selling the roads to violate it anymore than a parade does. as long as the profits for the sale go into the government budget, it's like getting a refund (since taxes built the road)

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 11/09/2005 - 23:48 | [reply](#)

OK

So do you believe that the minority was not coerced when the majority voted to authorize the government to sell the roads to private citizens?

Michael

by M Golding on Thu, 11/10/2005 - 02:38 | [reply](#)

not coerced by your definitio

not coerced by your definition. yeah.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 11/10/2005 - 09:18 | [reply](#)

Coercion

Was the minority coerced by your definition and if so what it it?

Michael

by M Golding on Thu, 11/10/2005 - 15:29 | [reply](#)

My definition isn't relevant

My definition isn't relevant (It's the www.takingchildrenseriously.com one if you're interested), i was just emphasizing that I was answering according to the way you defined coercion above, not according to some definition of my own.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 11/10/2005 - 18:29 | [reply](#)

Coercion

Do you think the minority was coerced according to the taking children seriously definition? (I want to know whether YOU think the policy that you said was OK is coercive, not whether I should think it is coercive by my own definition)

Michael

by M Golding on Thu, 11/10/2005 - 20:13 | [reply](#)

why do you want to know that?

why do you want to know that? couldn't you just ask me questions that don't use the word coercive?

-- Elliot Temple

The Logic

I am very curious about how you reconcile a few things that you have said and I need a little more information about how you view things to accurately ask you the correct questions.

"Coercion" has several very precise meanings in mathematical models of economic theory and in game theory. I gave a vague "English" description of one of those meanings. The TCS-type definition has also been mathematically modeled (in a way...if you want more details, ask if you are not familiar).

But since you previously gave responses to posts that used the word, you must have had your own understanding of what that word means. I'm asking you to use THAT understanding (your understanding) of the way the word was used to now respond to a question about whether the minority was coerced.

Was the minority coerced by the majority when the majority voted to authorize their government to sell the roads to private entrepreneurs?

The logic of my questioning would have become apparent in the very next post if you were willing to answer the question.

The word "coercion" has been used repeatedly in this thread and you have commented on multiple posts that have specifically used the word "coercion."

Obviously, not using a word that was key to multiple of your previous responses, changes the present discussion to something else, and therefore does not allow examination of the consistency of the relevant arguments that you have previously made in these threads. Others (especially me) previously have used the word "coercion", and you responded to the threads. So there is an entire line of relevant past discussion that is eliminated when you negate the logic of our previous interaction, by refusing to use a key word that was part of the interaction...Is that your intent?

You participated in a discussion that used the word. Now you don't want to use the word. I guess that means you don't want the discussion, either?

I was enjoying this discussion with you. If you must use a different word for "coercion" then use the less precise "freedom decreased by the actions of another or others," every time you see the word "coercion" in our previous discussion. But please make sure that your previous responses to my posts, now with the relevant substitution made, still are accurate, because I don't want to have to re-argue over 100 posts to get back to this point (and I'm not sure that I would be willing).

I will assume that if you elect to continue this discussion that your

previous responses *would not* change if the relevant substitution were made.

If the above paragraph is true, then the new question would be, "Were the freedoms of the minority decreased across relevant margins when the majority authorized their government to sell the roads to private entrepreneurs?"

by M Golding on Fri, 11/11/2005 - 03:06 | [reply](#)

According to my understanding

According to my understanding of how people usually use the word "coercion", and the way I thought they did in the discussion above ... the minority who didn't want the roads sold was not coerced.

I also deny its freedom was decreased.

Sorry about all this. I didn't mean it to be a big deal. I just wanted to express my lack of familiarity with standard use of "coercion".

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 11/11/2005 - 06:15 | [reply](#)

No Problem

No problem at all. Sorry I overreacted.

Will respond a little later!!

Michael

by M Golding on Fri, 11/11/2005 - 18:18 | [reply](#)

Ok

So the roads in this community are quickly sold off (but unfortunately without a lot of planning) and those who wanted a tax-refund from those purchasing the roads and those who wanted to intermittently use the roads, but pay taxes, can no longer use the roads unless they pay a toll. And the absence of planning for this decision shows.

Road owners quickly try to "encircle" each other, to nearly monopolize transit in and out of the city. No one can achieve a complete monopoly because of air travel, however. But road-owners quickly encircle the airport, as well (in order to maximize profit, a critical part of capitalism) Furthermore new construction begins taking place in order to try to create a new "beltline," outside the current outer beltline encircling the city in order to be the one who controls transit in and out of the city. This new construction owner sues in court the owner of the previous outer beltline to guarantee that appropriate "easements" are put in place to ensure access to his road from inside the city.

The previous owner of the beltline counter-sues claiming that he

offered one easement (because he is "generous") but there can not be other easements leading across the 25 miles of his encircling road because of the tremendous cost of construction, but if the new owner wants to pay him for the construction plus a "fee" to take into account his industriousness and cleverness for owning the existing beltline around the city (with one door in and out of the city), that would be fine. He claims that "making profit" is simply part of the American way and the extra 150 million per month is what his insightfulness is worth.

Besides, this owner opines, it is very costly to have to build around an existing loop too many access points out to other roads because it slows traffic and "my customers" demand a fast road. He says, "your easement to your property is my cost to most of my customers". The one building the outer beltline, outside the previous outer-beltline, retorts that the previous owner of the outermost beltline is simply trying to prevent competition for routes around the city, and into and out of it, and it is only "right and proper" to allow competition by allowing him to build roads over and through the other owners property.

Lawsuits break out all over the place. (Incidentally, this is one of the common criticisms of a libertarian model). If other branches of government are not involved in helping to define property, particularly the "easements" which are so difficult to correctly define, the courts will become flooded with cases.

Libertarians like to speak about decreasing government power, but the many who disagree with libertarians believe that decreasing the input of, for example the Senate and the House, and the Executive in the American form of government (because these bodies quintessentially are involved with defining property), throws all the weight of the government behind an even more unrepresentative group: The police, military, and unelected judiciary. Libertarians (inadvertantly) therefore could be argued to support INCREASES in government monopolization of power.

At any rate, it turns out that privatizing the roads, increases the cost of using the roads far more than either the minority or the majority, on average, predicted. Instead of 60% in favor of privatizing the roads, a year after implementation, now 80% are opposed. Even 70% of the "road owners" are now in favor of a government buy-back plus interest, because the cost of litigation over easements, and the chronic litigation of citizens groups has become prohibitive.

A. Should the majority (one year later) now be able to buy back (all) the roads that were previously sold?

The lone "hold-outs" amongst the road-owners, who still like privatization, seem to be the property owners who have better encircled parts of the city and seem to profit because they own what others consider "easements", though the property owners deny they own "easements" and claim they have provided "fair access-- just at a profit."

B. If the government buys back the roads, is it coercing (decreasing

the freedom of) the 20% of the overall population that still wants the roads private?

The 20%, however, argue that the population has not given the situation enough time and the very existence of such profit (for some) creates markets for new alternatives and new problem solving. They point to the newly emerging portable helicopter-market, and the long-range battery powered "jump-vehicles" being pioneered to escape the gridlock of the encircling roads.

They believe even in situations where private property owners control easements, this still encourages the development of brand new markets to bypass the problems of "barriers" on easements, even if such barriers seem permanent.

Elliot, what is the correct answer to questions A and B, given your analysis of the situation described?

by M Golding on Mon, 11/14/2005 - 18:32 | [reply](#)

The society you describe has

The society you describe has *less* knowledge than our present one. Thus has nothing to do with progressing *beyond* government.

Why did the people want to sell the roads before there was an understanding of how to make such a sale not be a disaster?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 11/14/2005 - 20:38 | [reply](#)

Yes, Less Knowledge

Yes, they may very well have less knowledge. And they certainly made a mistake. They completely miscalculated.

But in a situation like the above, in which it is reasonably known that the decision of this majority was disastrous, and a new majority wants to undo the problems, does the majority coerce the minority if the government wants to buy back the roads?

Michael

by M Golding on Mon, 11/14/2005 - 21:32 | [reply](#)

My question to you: Massiv

My question to you:

Massive things go wrong. How should we fix it?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 11/15/2005 - 03:20 | [reply](#)

The Above Question

I would have no trouble with the above question,

Yes, the majority should vote to undo the damage and try to learn from the mistake.

Do you think the majority should do that and do you think their action decreases the freedom of the minority (there really is a specific reason why I keep asking these questions, Elliot!)

Sorry to be a pain.

Michael

by M Golding on Tue, 11/15/2005 - 11:08 | [reply](#)

There is no criterion for whe

There is no criterion for when it's OK for the government to take property from peaceful citizens. (It needs to be argued case by case.)

What to do depends on a million details of the society (including the arguments put forward on both sides). The solution requires creativity. By people who live there and know what needs to be done.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 11/15/2005 - 20:18 | [reply](#)

Unfortunately, Life Involves Coercion

"There is no criterion for when it is OK for the government to take property from peaceful citizens"

Elliot

A margin of property is nothing other than a restricted right to use something in a particular way. There may be infinite uses for that margin of property, but its use is nonetheless always somewhat restricted.

Therefore,

1. In saying that it is OK for the government to sell off public roads, you are saying that it is OK for the government to usurp a peaceful private citizens limited right to use public roads; a property right that a peaceful private citizen shares with others who use the road. This taking of the rights to use roads is coercive. If you don't think that rights to public roads is a type of property right shared by citizens (right now), imagine trying to get to work today, without being able to gain access to a road. If the government prevented

you from accessing the roads, you'd angrily say your (property)

rights to use the roads were restricted!

2. If you say that the majority should not be able to take back public ownership of roads after a disaster occurs in which private ownership of roads leads to multiple impediments built on easements, then you are implicitly saying that it is OK for private citizens to involuntarily take property from others. (Building on an easement, almost by definition, takes property from someone else by restricting them from using *their property* the way they want.) So preventing majority rule from taking back private ownership of roads is also coercive.

3. If you say that after the roads are sold off by the government and private citizens build multiple impediments on easements, the majority should be able to coercively buy back the roads from the private citizens in the minority, then you are sanctioning a different form of coercion.

Moving towards libertarianism (even using majority rule to do so) is coercive, because it takes from the minority their current property right to shared property, without their consent. It forces the minority to adopt a system that they may correctly believe deprives everyone of property, because of the cost of obtaining and maintaining libertarian (unanimous rule) politico/economic systems.

But failing to move toward libertarianism coerces those in the minority, who do not want to contribute to the shared costs of a good like a road. And maintaining a libertarian status quo, may allow private citizens to (inefficiently) take property from others by, for example, building private roads on easements (as described above), when the cost of legal squabbling amongst private owners for key parts of the roads (the easements) is greater than the benefits.

"There is no criterion for when it is OK for the government to take property from peaceful citizens."
Elliot

This statement is illogical Elliot, because in many situations the status quo is coercive, and changing the status quo, even in favor of a libertarian idea, is also coercive and leads to coercion. No matter what is done, property is "taken".

In general, moving towards libertarianism is coercive because most people will not vote for it. They will not vote for it for many reasons; but a main reason is the prohibitive transaction costs of arriving at and maintaining unanimous-rule systems (libertarian systems).

A coerced unanimous rule system could be defined as a libertarian society that a person must live in (or perhaps a system in which all societies are based on unanimous rule systems, so a given person, or even a majority of people, have no choice but to live in such a society.) A coerced unanimous rule libertarian society would be a society in which all decisions are made by unanimous rule, except the decision to make all decisions by unanimous rule.

In forced (coerced) libertarian unanimous-rule systems, the

inefficiency of needing unanimous rule for decision making takes property from everyone (and is therefore coercive), especially if the overwhelming majority can think of a (coercive, majority rule) way to not lose as much property to unanimous-rule inefficiency. We would then have a perfectly unanimous-rule libertarian society, but not wanted by virtually anyone, because it inefficiently takes property from everyone, because of the cost of obtaining unanimous rule on all decisions.

So if even unanimous rule societies are quite coercive to virtually everyone (probably more so than majority rule systems), then can government or citizens do anything to improve things?

The point is that in the real world, people will win and lose, property will be taken and given, and a simplistic model of mutual exchange for mutual benefit (unanimous-rule-libertarianism) is so expensive to try to implement, that virtually no one will ever vote for it! So people vote for coercion. They vote for majority rule systems, not unanimous rule systems. Unanimous rule systems (libertarianisms) are so expensive to implement because of the transaction cost of obtaining honest unanimous consent.

So trying to force people to vote against their desire for a form of majority-rule-coercion and towards the more expensive unanimous-rule-libertarianism, is itself coercive. But forcing unanimous rule libertarianism on people is, however, in some ways even more coercive than majority-rule decision making, because forcing libertarian unanimous-rule decisions on virtually everyone (who is not a libertarian), coerces virtually everyone to behave as they don't want, not just the minority.

Note. I am not a pessimist. But I do recognize that even though we attempt to limit coercion, we cannot completely eliminate it, if we are to move forward. So we should consider moving forward, even if it involves (a little) coercion if we use our "best theories" to guide progress towards less coercion.

So I do favor limited experiments in privatizing road systems, for example, to see which ideas work best. But I have no illusions that this course of action is anything other than coercive to the minority, who may not agree with the majority's plans. And helping to pay for New Orleans *is coercive* to the minority. But, I think that the government failing to act in a national disaster with such huge public good implications as New Orleans, is even more coercive.

Michael (Happily the realist, but with idealistic hopes).

by M Golding on Mon, 12/12/2005 - 19:48 | [reply](#)

Therefore, 1. In saying th

Therefore,

1. In saying that it is OK for the government to sell off public roads, you are saying that it is OK for the government to usurp a peaceful private citizens limited right to use public roads;

One of the ways the right to the road is limited is that citizens are

aware the road may not be available in the future. For example, it could be replaced with a post office. Or sold. There is nothing unpeaceful about either of those.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 12/21/2005 - 17:29 | [reply](#)

Too strong a claim!

Hi... just stumbled across this post. I don't think you can make this claim without some phenomenally strong evidence. A less "so not obvious that it's wrong" argument might be that public good scenarios necessitate governance more rarely than presumed.

One strong example: an epidemic is going to kill 1% of the population, give or take. A huge investment in R+D, say 2% of society's effort/GDP in the next year, will be required to develop an effective vaccine in time. Members of society can expect to be much better off paying for the vaccine (on average; count also the harm from losing friends and relatives). Also, the antibodies in the vaccine can be easily copied by many biologists, once it is in use (ie it is non-excludable).

In practice, the odds of getting that much from voluntary contributions, even with very organised campaigns, are extremely low. Rational self interest models, including those with fancy contracts (such as pledges to pay for the vaccine, if it's developed), don't get above a small fraction of the optimal amount. Of course rational self interest models are pessimistic, but the task is gargantuan.

To depend on getting the vaccine, you'll either need patents (which are a drastic governmental intervention, and don't even dream about markets pricing vaccines well) or public research or some in-between hybrid.

Governments often fail in these situations too but libertarian organisational scenarios are starting from a long way behind.

by **Peter Eckersley** on Thu, 01/05/2006 - 06:20 | [reply](#)

Re: Too strong a claim!

The reason we would use government intervention for the vaccine case is not that it's a public good, it's just that our government is the only organisation we have that's big enough to organise and execute such a large project. If the vaccine was impossible to duplicate and thus easily excludable, we'd still want the government to make it, and private companies would still have a HUGE task raising 2% of GDP in capital.

To claim public good problems are silly, we do not need evidence. No number of examples or observations will ever prove we're right about all cases. What we need is to argue that governments have

no special knowledge that makes them better at solving problems. By special I mean knowledge that only governments are capable of having. Either that or we need to argue that using force doesn't solve problems. Which is true because you have to have knowledge of which solution to force on everyone, so the critical thing, whether using force or not, is knowledge.

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 01/05/2006 - 13:27 | [reply](#)

Government Forcing Libertarianism--Coercive When Citizens Object

One of the ways the right to the road is limited is that citizens are aware the road might not be available in the future, for example it could be replaced by a post-office...

Elliot

Saying that a person has shared rights to roads in a majority rule system is not saying he has complete rights. Voting for government provision of roads is not telling the government exactly where the location of all roads should be.

Yes, a given road could be replaced by a post-office. But if the government were to eliminate ALL roads when a majority of citizens had voted for at least some roads, citizens certainly would feel coerced by the government! So if the government is a democratic one, it can't completely fail to provide roads, if the majority votes for the provision of roads for most people.

So if the government privatizes roads, despite some private citizens voting against this, these private citizens in the minority are being coerced -- especially if they lose nearly all, or all of their access to roads (say because of private owners of roads who build barriers on easements). Even if barriers on easements could be ultimately eliminated by lawsuits, the cost of trying to force unanimous rule conditions (via judicial rulings) in the private market for roads, could be quite expensive and therefore coercive to those who have to pay for going to court (such citizens involuntarily lose money by the decision to privatize, because they have to pay their lawyers). Before the government privatized roads, they did not have to pay lawyers. Now they do, so they feel coerced into losing their money.

Indeed, those voting against privatizing roads may precisely believe that privatization is a bad idea because of the cost of going to court to fight the inevitable self-interest of entrepreneurs who have incentives to build on easements. The cost of fighting against barriers on easements, could be argued to be greater than the cost savings from competition by companies providing road service.

If people do not favor a libertarian free market solution to the provision of roads or other public goods, and the government forces one on them, people will legitimately feel coerced.

People do not vote for unanimous rule libertarian systems in the

provision of certain goods, because the cost of obtaining unanimous rule in many situations is too great. So they vote for democracy. Citizens vote to allow the decisions of the majority to control the provision of certain goods (like roads). They, in effect, decide to allow themselves to be coerced (democratically) when they are in the minority, so they do not have to experience even greater coercion. What is the greater coercion? Citizens feel coerced when they lose too much of their money to the costs of arriving at a unanimous rule (market or Libertarian) solution.

Elliot, when a minority objects to honoring a majority ruling that favors exclusively libertarian unanimous rulings, it is coercive to go against the minority. And therefore, the majority contradicts its own anti-coercive principles by honoring its own decision! So it is coercive to impose Libertarianism on any group of people who do not want it. It is coercive to not honor the will of the minority -- which is that the roads should not be privatized.

So yes Elliot, you have favored coercion in what you said, and you should admit that. You simply can't avoid it in the real world!

Michael

by [Michael Golding](#) on Sun, 01/15/2006 - 06:55 | [reply](#)

"especially if they lose near

"especially if they lose nearly all, or all of their access to roads"

Why would people vote to sell off many govt roads before someone works out a proposal so that it won't be a complete and utter disaster?

If people do vote for a disastrous policy, you may as well make it the policy of burning down everyone's house, or making taxes 150% of income.

-- Elliot Temple

[Now Blogging Again](#)

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 01/16/2006 - 02:34 | [reply](#)

Bad Decisions

Communities make bad decisions democratically all the time.

1. The question remains, is it coercive for a majority to impose a libertarian (unanimous rule) solution on a minority group who do not want it? The minority favors, for example, democratically electing a group of people and having them oversee the construction of a few goods, like roads in a neighborhood.

One might want to answer making two separate sets of assumptions....

a. The minority predicts correctly that the unanimous rule (market)

solution is in net, more expensive to implement because the cost of arriving at unanimous rule conditions is so high. For example, court costs end up being very high. So before implementing the project, the minority tries and fails to convince the majority. If the majority imposes a libertarian unanimous rule solution on the minority, so the roads are privatized, was the minority coerced? Note that most, in net, lose money.

b. The minority is wrong that the unanimous rule (market) solution costs too much to implement. For example, the few examples of individual entrepreneurs constructing barriers on easements are easily and quickly taken care of by courts, and the new private road system in net decreases the costs of roads and generates better roads.

I am curious about your opinion.

FYI I would answer like this.

In both cases, the minority is coerced. But sometimes in a democracy, those voting for something are actually trying to get other people to pay for something they want. If it happens to be the case that the market solution in net costs less, then it may very well be the case that the minority is advocating taking money from others to build roads and trying to use their vote to accomplish this (so the minority does not have to spend the money itself on the roads). Then the minority is trying to coerce the majority to pay for what it wants. So in this case, net coercion is decreased if the libertarian solution is implemented. One should impose the libertarian solution on a minority of individuals who don't want it, because the reason they don't want the libertarian solution is that it prevents them from coercing (and stealing from) others.

On the other hand, if the minority is right, and if the court costs and restrictions on trade become onerous in a libertarian system, with roads becoming private, so that virtually everyone (involuntarily) loses money, I would say that the minority was certainly coerced by the imposition of a libertarian solution. The majority did not guess properly, so arguably it coerced itself.

2. Elliot, if the majority favors implementation of a libertarian, market oriented solution that increases efficiency, do you think the majority has the moral right to force implementation of its policies?

3. Elliot, if the majority favors implementation of a libertarian, market oriented solution that decreases efficiency (and so involuntarily causes the minority to lose property), do you think the majority has the moral right to force implementation of its policies?

by [Michael Golding](#) on Mon, 01/16/2006 - 15:34 | [reply](#)

Re: Bad Decisions

You have proposed that what is coercive depends on which answer was, in fact, best. In other words, mistakes are coercive. We can never be sure which is best (not even after the fact, and certainly not before, and certainly not in cases where there is a serious

debate on), so it follows that mistakes will be made, and people will be coerced. As long as you equate mistakes with coercion, its unavoidable.

(This is glossing over the issue that sometimes the right choice -- the best one we could make at the time -- is not ideal, but can't be rightly called a mistake, but would still qualify as coercion by your use.)

If you want to know if selling public roads is forceful: no more than taxes, or building public roads. None of those things are inevitable.

In asking about what the majority has a moral right to do, I believe you are asking about who should rule and whether they are justified in forcing people to go along with it and hurting people. The answers are that rule is bad and we have traditions and laws about what our rulers can do. Rule being bad doesn't mean it should be disposed of tomorrow, but it does mean we have valid criticisms of it and know the future will be different. Given rule is bad, asking about ideal rights of rulers seems nonsensical.

FYI I am unaware of a connection between libertarianism and unanimous rule. Libertarians generally want to be left alone, not engage in complex joint decision making processes.

-- Elliot Temple
Now Blogging Again

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 01/16/2006 - 19:40 | [reply](#)

I See Now

FYI I am unaware of a connection between libertarianism and unanimous rule.....
Elliot

No wonder my questions have not made sense to you. Classically, pure market/libertarian economics is a unanimous rule system(!), where mutual trading is permitted for mutual benefit as long as everyone knows who owns what. All winners are charged and all losers are compensated. For example, if all losers are not compensated from a market interaction, there is a breakdown of unanimous rule and this is called an "externality".

No wonder you don't see the irony in asking whether a majority can impose a libertarian (unanimous rule) solution on a minority!

Virtually the entire 140 post discussion has been a discussion of the relative merits of unanimous rule ("free-market"/libertarian economics) vs. democracy rule, but phrased using the language of "public goods" and externalities -- which can now be thought of as coercive violations of unanimous rule.

The question has been, is it ever rational for someone to agree to voluntarily be coerced (e.g. live in a democracy)? My answer has been "yes". When it is too expensive to produce a good using unanimous rule (libertarian/market principles), sometimes people

will prefer a democratic solution, even though the minority is nonetheless coerced in the decision. So sometimes people will prefer a democratic solution when the market (unanimous rule) is too expensive to implement.

The example good which I utilized for illustration was a "road". Many have argued (correctly or incorrectly) that the costs of generating approximate unanimous rule in the production of this good is so high that democratic bodies should control its production, instead. So people vote for the government to own the road, not individuals.

On the other hand, most people allow an approximately unanimous rule solution to prevail in the production and sale of lettuce, for example, because it is believed that unanimous rule is not too expensive in this market (when everyone know who owns what).

So now do you see why the question, "Is it moral for a majority to impose a libertarian unanimous rule solution" is relevant? If people believe libertarianism (unanimous rule) takes too much of their time and therefore income, do you see that forcing unanimous rule (libertarianism) is wrong, if people correctly believe that rule by democracy in certain situations is more efficient?

So there is a deep underlying reason why democratic rule, in certain situations, can be preferable to unanimous rule.

That is the point. Democracy can work at least partially, even when the production of a good is too expensive utilizing a unanimous rule (libertarian) framework. So unanimous rule libertarianism can be coercive because people lose money arriving at approximate unanimity, and democracy can be coercive because the minority lose. So most of the time people prefer the market (approximate unanimous rule), but sometimes they prefer democratic decision-making.

Saying that "rule is bad" says nothing. If "rule", even "unanimous rule" is "bad", then what alternative do we have?

By the way, you are correct that people can make decisions that are quite correct, but lead to bad outcomes. But why is that relevant to the point about..."should the majority be able to impose a unanimous rule (market) decision making process on a minority who do not wish to participate (because the minority rationally knows that unanimous rule production of roads, for example, is inefficient?)

by [Michael Golding](#) on Tue, 01/17/2006 - 01:36 | [reply](#)

libertarianism

libertarians only want all actors in a transaction to agree to it, not everyone. thus a road owner can sell it, and the only people who get to say anything are the seller and buyer. if a road owner wants to destroy his road, he can do that all by himself, and everyone else can go to hell. Note: libertarians are generally pretty rigid about

what can be property. For example not people or the right to send

radio waves across a property.

Using courts for all disagreements would be stupid. That system has far less knowledge than our current one. Making changes is perfectly reasonable, but throwing out almost everything at once isn't.

-- Elliot Temple
Now Blogging Again

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 01/17/2006 - 02:35 | [reply](#)

All Actors in a Transaction

All actors whose property is being impacted by a transaction...yes..... If anyones property rights to something is (particularly negatively) impacted, then he or she must be compensated, for the transaction to be OK. So if we assume that we know who owns what, then this is the equivalent of a unanimous rule market-based decision. And the point is that there are some transactions, for example the transactions associated with integrating virtually everyone's property with roads, that are so expensive that people will not want to pay the perceived costs of a free market solution. People may believe that too many barriers will be placed on easements necessitating court involvement. So they vote against libertarian unanimous rule solutions and for democratic solutions (the government builds many roads).

And the question remains, is it wrong to impose an inefficient unanimous rule libertarian solution on those who favor using the democratic process to build roads? The point is that democratic rule may have a logical place in the production of certain type of goods given our current state of knowledge.

It is all well and good to say "rule is bad", but this is meaningless absent alternative means of solving the problems that will come up at a city council meeting tomorrow morning. How should a city councilman reading this pay for the construction of roads, if (hypothetically) he knows that privatizing road construction will cost more than government production of roads? Should he vote to privatize, nonetheless? These are practical questions that are addressed everyday by people in government. Needless to say, saying "rule is bad", does not help.

And yes Elliot, if somebody steals somebodies property, we do use courts. These can not be eliminated right now even if "rule is bad". If we can anticipate that tremendous litigation will arise because of the incentives that people have, for example to build barriers on easements, then yes we can anticipate that courts will be consulted. And the cost of enforcing unanimous rule libertarianism will be expensive. (high transaction costs)

If you haven't noticed, we do not have a system (yet) in which we can eliminate courts. When you say that "rule is bad", do you want to eliminate courts or courts and governments? If rule is bad, even unanimous rule in a libertarian sense, what alternative is there?

Perhaps you mean that all "rule" is bad, but we have no alternative and some types of "rule" are "less bad" than others?

In which case, is it less bad to produce a good through the private market than through a democratically elected government, even if people prefer the government to produce it because they rationally believe its cheaper?

And where did I say we should "throw everything out" at once?

by [Michael Golding](#) on Tue, 01/17/2006 - 04:00 | [reply](#)

libertarianism

If the cost of enforcing our rules goes up, I see two primary possibilities:

1) the rules are more intrusive. for example one child in ten becomes the king's slave. that's hard to enforce because it gives people such strong incentives to cheat.

2) the society in question has less knowledge about how to live peacefully, so more disputes come up

The problem with libertarianism certainly isn't the first of those. You seem to be imagining that people will more often try to cheat each other and go to court if more things are privately owned.

This is strange prima facie because it would be illegal to do that in both cases.

But more importantly the primary force stopping people cheating each other right now is that people don't want to. Why, in a libertarian society, would people want more to adopt a life of crime? This is what I mean about you were throwing things out *in your hypothetical libertarian society*. Today we have certain knowledge of how to interact peacefully, but your examples of problems for libertarianism are about a society *without* that knowledge we have now.

-- Elliot Temple

[Now Blogging Again](#)

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 01/18/2006 - 11:07 | [reply](#)

Not All Goods.

The point is that in the production, not of most goods, but of certain goods, the transaction cost associated with a free market (unanimous rule) solution may be very high. If so, court costs often go up to settle these problems. The production of a country's military is one such good, the production of roads is arguably another.

Obviously common decency is the prime force decreasing transaction cost in society. Although a good point that courts are by no means the most important deterrent to stealing, we are talking

about *relative* increases and decreases in transaction costs with different forms of organization.

Why will virtually noone vote for a libertarian (unanimous rule/market) solution in the production of all goods? Answer: Possibly ignorance or vested interests. But also, because in the production of certain goods (e.g. roads and the military), people would rather lose some property to the coercion of a democracy, rather than lose even more property to the greater coercion of unanimous rule/market production of goods. The transaction costs are simply too high to privately produce a national military and arguably a road system.

In both cases, some people easily benefit at other peoples expense (a transaction cost), violating unanimous rule market assumptions. So the transaction costs of settling these problems by negotiation or through the courts is deemed too high by citizens. So citizens choose a somewhat coercive democratic solution over an even more coercive libertarian solution.

That's one of the reasons free people still utilize democracies!

by [Michael Golding](#) on Wed, 01/18/2006 - 14:40 | [reply](#)

military

FYI if military is an issue, we're talking about a no-government anarcho-capitalist society. About half of libertarians believe in a minimalist government that does military and a few other things.

Here's my theory: if something is good, there's a possible way to get it without forcing anyone that works better than using force.

Here's my theory of how to change our society:

A) figure out good ways to get things without government

B) suggest them, argue for them, people see it works better, vote for it (or for leaders who advocate it), and government power gets reduced a bit and replaced with something better

-- Elliot Temple

[Now Blogging Again](#)

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 01/18/2006 - 20:57 | [reply](#)

Stop Being Forceful!

Here's my theory of how to change our society:

B) suggest them (good ways to get things without government), argue for them, vote for it (or for leaders who advocate it).....

Elliot

So let's say you think the government is taking your money and property involuntarily and you suggest and have a vote on your

idea that you believe will lead to less coercion (force in taking

property). But what if a substantial minority (as it turns out) correctly believes that the government's forceful collection of money to fund something is actually good, because it believes the free market solution (for example production of roads or the military) is inefficient and so takes even more of everyone's property than governmental production.

Although you are not aware of it, the minority, in this case, actually has more knowledge than you. (Believe it or not, you could be wrong!) The majority would change its mind if it truly understood the minority position, but the majority is simply mistaken when the vote is taken.

If you honor the majority opinion, you are certainly utilizing force against the minority, because your solution takes their property. (Remember, you and the majority hypothetically have less knowledge than the minority which understands that the government is in net more efficient in producing a hypothetical good)

You are fallible, Elliot, and you simply may not understand the reasoning of the minority. So sometimes you will be wrong about an improvement you suggest and the majority may agree with you. If we follow your suggestion, you Elliot, will then use force on the minority by taking their property.

If we don't follow your suggestion to take away government production of a good, then we are left with the coercive elements of the government producing a good (majority coercing minority.) Either way Elliot, you are advocating the use of force. The private market can be forceful if inefficient, and the government can be forceful if inefficient. Inefficiency takes people's property either way.

Wouldn't your argument be more logical if you were looking for the solution that did not take away as much of people's money, whether or not the government or the private market produces a hypothetical good. As has been pointed out repeatedly, government production of the military (and arguably roads) increases, not decreases our freedom, by protecting our property. Unless your hatred is really of the government, why must the government not be involved given our state of knowledge, if the government increases our freedom?

So by advocating eliminating government in the production of a good, you may be effectively advocating the increased use of force against people's property. The issue is not whether we must find solutions that eliminate government, but rather whether it is more efficient (or at least whether people would prefer) to have the government or the private market produce a good. If less of people's property is involuntarily taken when the government produces the good, why must you be such a tyrant, and impose the free market on everyone, though people prefer democratic production? Wouldn't your argument make more sense if you said the following

"Here's my theory of how to change society:

A. Figure out good ways to get things without government (and I would add 'or with government')

B. Suggest them, argue for them, people see it (sic) works better, vote for it, or for leaders who advocate it, and government power gets reduced (and I would add 'or government production strengthens economic well-being and therefore frees citizens from loss of property), and (the old system) is replace with something better.

Isn't my formulation more complete, unless you simply have an ideological hatred of government, independent of whether it helps or hinders the freedom of its citizens?

by a reader on Thu, 01/19/2006 - 02:01 | [reply](#)

Not Vietnam

In 1968, the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese army attacked various cities in South Vietnam during the religious holiday of **Tet**. The Americans did not just repel the offensive, they completely destroyed the Viet Cong. However, for various reasons the Press reported the Tet Offensive as a defeat for America. This was a significant factor in destroying public support for America's defence of South Vietnam.

In Iraq, the Americans are doing a very good job of **defeating terrorists** and **training** the Iraqis to do likewise. The Press are once again distorting the news to give the impression that the terrorists are winning in Iraq. They prominently report suicide bombers **killing Iraqis**. But most reporters have not reported counterterrorist operations, preferring to peddle sensationalised, anti-war **doomsaying** instead. A recent poll has indicated that **more than half** of Americans think the Bush administration is losing the battle against the terrorists in Iraq. If America snatches defeat from the jaws of victory in Iraq, the Press will bear some of the blame. Responsible reporters and bloggers must do all they can to counter this tide of pessimism or the Iraqis might pay a terrible price.

Mon, 10/03/2005 - 22:08 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Gen. William E. Odom referred to Iraq

as a "strategic disaster". Is he also "distorting the news"? Or is the press "distorting the news" by reporting on the views of a general?

by a reader on Tue, 10/04/2005 - 02:11 | [reply](#)

Ex-General Odom's Opinion, and the Press's

Do you believe that there is any position on any issue that is not held by some officer, or retired officer, somewhere?

Hardly. And yet not all such opinions are given equal prominence, or endorsement, by the press.

We'll see your retired Lt. General who believes America is being

defeated in Iraq and raise you a serving Ambassador who believed in November 1940 that the Nazis had already won the Second World War, and that **democracy was finished in England and maybe in America too**. And a **retired king** who agreed with him. And for that matter an ex-Defence Minister who believes **the Earth has been visited by extraterrestrials** and that governments, including his own, have been concealing this.

By singling out Odom as if this proved something, you make our point.

by **Editor** on Tue, 10/04/2005 - 03:14 | [reply](#)

It is a market force

and nothing else. I hope you are not promoting an idea of global mass-media conspiracy against american forces in Iraq? We can see similar phenomena just about everywhere. Press is always eager to report bad news and doesn't care about general overview of the readers. No, actually, I am wrong about this. The press does care about our overview in the way "the worse the better". The more things people fear the better. Bad news better sell and only free market economy is responsible for that because you cannot simply force journalists to write what you want. I am not in favor of introducing censorship or nationalising mass-media. I just think that some sort of mechanism has to be invented in order to promote people awareness about positive progress around the world. What we have now is that people en mass are not used to good news, they are not into scientific discoveries, solving political problems etc.. All they want to hear is that there is a problem, but they never follow up developments until the issue is resolved (neither do journalists). People would follow up an investigation of a murder, rape or terrorist attack - this is where it all ends. We prefer to hear statistics on how many women die from breast cancer but any survivor or a successful treatment don't make good news. That's why people are scared of anything hapenning to them and when it suddenly happens just don't to deal with it. They rather turn into hipohondriac, pacifists and so on. This is a very serious social issue.

by **Yuryr** on Tue, 10/04/2005 - 09:26 | [reply](#)

The Soviets could have won

in Afghanistan. I guess their press was "distorting the news" and that is why they lost.

by a reader on Tue, 10/04/2005 - 13:07 | [reply](#)

Re: it is a market force

Yuryr: Rest assured that we are not promoting an idea of global mass-media conspiracy against American forces in Iraq. We have **spoken out** against that conspiracy theory as well as **conspiracy**

theories in general.

However, the 'mainstream media' *are* campaigning energetically against the war. We agree with you that this is a spontaneous, not a coordinated, phenomenon. It does not require a conspiracy for an error to be serious, widespread and persistent, especially in certain subcultures, of which the 'mainstream media' unfortunately constitute an example.

by **Editor** on Tue, 10/04/2005 - 14:10 | [reply](#)

Re: The Soviets could have won

No, it is very unusual for bias in the losing party's media to contribute significantly to the loss of a war. Clearly the Vietnam War is unusual in this regard.

by **Editor** on Tue, 10/04/2005 - 14:17 | [reply](#)

Fit to Print, Fit to be Tied

We the people want our wars won now. Give us what we want, right now, or else give us what we want later, don't want to hear. Good to Bad to Worse.(Law of Inverse Positive Journalism)

Responsible reporting?

People, this is the "news" business. Are our "news" memories that short?

Yesteryear's Front Page Headlines Spoofed:

War Won in Record Time (Washington Post) Iraq Free At Last (New York Times) Unprecedented Arab Unity - Jubilation in the Streets (Baltimore Sun) Saddam Toppled, Hung in Effigy (New York Daily News) Soldiers Throw Candy and Go Home (L.A. Times)

That was before reality set in. The printer's ink dried, the headlines cried, and the presses slowly ossified as "the war news" dragged on.

by a reader on Wed, 10/05/2005 - 05:01 | [reply](#)

Iraq And Vietnam

Editor said " . . it is very unusual for bias in the losing party's media to contribute significantly to the loss of a war. Clearly the Vietnam War is unusual in this regard."

I disagree. In many important ways, Vietnam and Iraq are far from analogous -- particularly from the crucial military standpoint (e.g. there was very real and continuing support for Vietnam from China and the Soviet Union constituting a deep rear area; and popular support (while not as strong as those opposing the Vietnam war supposed, still formidable, coming as it did at the tail end of

decades of opposition to the French colonialists)). Iraq isn't another

Vietnam, and that's why, in my view, there is a far superior chance of being successful in Iraq. If the US puts the same level of effort and resources (and sacrifices) into Iraq as it did into Vietnam for over a decade, we stand a good chance of leaving with a stable, relatively democratic government in perhaps the most strategically important region in the world. Did the media play a role in Vietnam, undoubtedly, but it was for the reasons stated above (and for other similar fundamental military, political and historical reasons) that Vietnam ended as it did. Would the outcome have been different if the US had continued (for how long?) to prosecute the war with greater vigor -- who knows -- I certainly don't. While the question can be debated without end, the use of the Vietnam analogy is, in my view, neither correct, nor helpful in the case of Iraq.

by **Michael Bacon** on Wed, 10/05/2005 - 16:13 | [reply](#)

Spooferd?

Spooferd means you made them up, right?

by **Editor** on Thu, 10/06/2005 - 00:20 | [reply](#)

Correct

Spooferd as a fairly accurate approximation of the headlines of the times. Now they would read differently.

by a reader on Thu, 10/06/2005 - 04:31 | [reply](#)

Re: Correct

Here is the archive of the New York Times. It is searchable by date. Presumably the period that you consider to be 'before reality set in' is the period immediately after the fall of the Saddam regime? (Coalition forces invaded Iraq on 20 March 2003. Baghdad was captured on 9 April, which was also the day that Saddam's statue was pulled down live on television. President Bush declared major military operations to be complete on 1 May.)

To illustrate your point, could you please link us to a few New York Times headlines at about that time that have the same triumphalist tone as the ones you have made up?

by **Editor** on Thu, 10/06/2005 - 11:29 | [reply](#)

Certainly

Give me a moment. Remember the New York Times is not representative of the "mainstream media" but just one of many news sources. Remember also that people who write the stories do not write the headlines for the stories. Remember also that separate from that there are editorial boards. Please note that the press is in the business of selling newspapers. Good news gets one day of coverage. Bad or worse news can be covered again and again. People read bad news stories and dwell on them, the press

gives us what we "want". The press headlines tend to start with Good/or Bad, but the stories, especially the stories about war tend to go from triumphant to mediocre to not good at all, time inverse to positive journalism. Give 'em what they want. A line from a 10,000 Maniacs song.

Vietnam and Iraq are totally different wars. Human nature is not different and neither is the news process as to what sells papers. Both Vietnam and Iraq as war stories, separate from any on the ground reality, are subject to the phenomenon of time inverse positive journalism.

Responsible reporting is done by individual reporters. What gets published, what makes the front page generally has little to do with responsible in depth reporting, but rather with what is "news", the new, and the corresponding knee jerk human response to it.

by a reader on Thu, 10/06/2005 - 17:58 | [reply](#)

April 10, 2003 NYT

The first 5 of 120 Results

A NATION AT WAR: ARAB-AMERICANS; Iraqis in the U.S. Celebrate Hussein's Seeming Downfall ... make a new Iraq." In a ... enthusiastic about the war to topple Mr. Hussein. ... for them the war is personal. All seemed ...

April 10, 2003 - By DANNY HAKIM (NYT) - A NATION AT WAR: THE PLAN; Speed and Flexibility

... southern cities of Iraq that had never been anticipated ... , that the war is not over yet. ... officials are concerned Iraq may try to destroy...

April 10, 2003 - By MICHAEL R. GORDON (NYT) - International - An Analysis - A NATION AT WAR: COMBAT; U.S. FORCES TAKE CONTROL IN BAGHDAD; BUSH ELATED; SOME RESISTANCE REMAINS

April 10, 2003 - By PATRICK E. TYLER (NYT) - International - A NATION AT WAR: TUMULT; Cheers, Tears and Looting in Capital's Streets

... advocates of a war to topple Mr. Hussein had ... the headquarters of Iraq's National Olympic Committee, ... feared places in Iraq. "Touch me ...

April 10, 2003 - By JOHN F. BURNS (NYT) - International - A NATION AT WAR: NEWS ANALYSIS; A High Point in 2 Decades of U.S. Might

... . The Iraqi war itself, American alliances with Triumph in Iraq, if the whole nation ... the first gulf war, was incomplete; the

...

It is appropriate to stop there and not clutter space.

by a reader on Thu, 10/06/2005 - 18:36 | [reply](#)

Nothing Less Than Complete Victory

President Bush addressed the National Endowment for Democracy yesterday. The White House called it a 'historic' speech, which is an exaggeration. But it was an important speech, taking the argument forwards (for instance by referring for the first time explicitly to the enemy's ideology), defining the nature of the war and current US policy. As often happens, it was under-reported and the summaries in the media were not very good. It's worth reading the [speech](#) itself.

Fri, 10/07/2005 - 20:30 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Even if it means

nothing less than genocide.

by a reader on Sat, 10/08/2005 - 20:27 | [reply](#)

Genocide?

By whom?

by M Golding on Mon, 10/10/2005 - 16:01 | [reply](#)

Last Chance To Avoid Nuclear War?

The **Sunday Telegraph's editorial** today summarises the situation: Iran is in the process of building an arsenal of nuclear weapons. With the assistance of North Korea and Russia, it has just acquired long-range missiles capable of striking Europe (to complement those it already has, which are capable of striking any of its neighbours, and Israel). The Telegraph says that the last chance of avoiding war is for the Security Council to impose 'a more aggressive inspections regime'. But experience with the Security Council before, during and since the liberation of Iraq suggests that it will take no such action. In other words, it will squander the Telegraph's 'last chance' – which, in any case, would be unlikely to work against a totalitarian regime determined, and adept, at concealment.

What sort of war will we get? It is unlikely that the mullahs are planning a first strike, even against Israel (though, since both their ideology and some of their own public statements rationalise and purport to justify a Second Holocaust, it would be criminally irresponsible to discount that possibility). Nor are they likely to be planning any invasions under cover of their nuclear umbrella: all their neighbours are now US allies, and any such invasion would fail humiliatingly. They see these weapons as both a symbol and a deterrent. A symbol of something that isn't true (that their state and its ideology are thriving), and a deterrent against something that could never happen *except* possibly under the provocation of this very policy.

So they are living in cloud-cuckoo land. The war is most likely to come at the moment when reality finally encroaches on this fantasy world. Perhaps when the Iranian people finally rise up to free themselves. At that point, the mullahs and their Revolutionary Guards and all the incumbents of the present evil regime will have nothing left to lose and are likely to try any desperate kill-or-cure gamble. Or rather, what they will see as a gamble: in fact, like the 'gamble' of Argentina's President Galtieri in invading the Falkland Islands, it will certainly fail, and seal their own fate. But Galtieri's fantasy, like the mullahs', blinded him to that inevitability. How much death and destruction will they wreak before that inevitable outcome?

As to war in general there is also positive news. According to [this report](#) the number of armed conflicts in the world has declined by more than 40% since the early 90s.

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Tue, 10/18/2005 - 13:33 | [reply](#)

So What Should We Do?

Seems like a tough problem. Should we go after their nukes?
Should we (secretly) ask Israel to do it?

(I'm serious about the question. Your premises seem reasonable, but when reality encroaches on fantasy, as it invariably will, perhaps a second holocaust is possible. I have not heard any good answers to the Iranian problem)

by a reader on Wed, 10/19/2005 - 21:31 | [reply](#)

The Problem

Nuclear capability across a number of countries appears inevitable. I would think its more a question of a race of democratic principles and cultural/political evolution versus fundamentalism/fanaticism. Countries which have evolved citizen participation and a broad base of rights and education would appear less likely to engage in nuclear brinkmanship and foolishness. The history of technology has shown that technology is neutral and sooner or later available to all. The primary alternative to foolishness and fanatical despotism is reason, so is it a race to reason?

by a reader on Thu, 10/20/2005 - 15:05 | [reply](#)

Preemptive Strike

Does anyone have a reasonable theory for or against attempting to bomb nuclear weapon sites in Iran?

by a reader on Thu, 10/20/2005 - 15:22 | [reply](#)

Re: So What Should We Do?

If Iran doesn't back down it seems quite likely [Israel will bomb](#) their nuclear facilities. I don't think Israel is likely to fall for the argument given [here](#) that Iran is already a democracy and that their having nuclear bombs is justified as a defense against Israel and other countries. And as after the 1981 Osirak strike, it will probably take an ungrateful Europe at least 10 years to thank Israel for taking away the threat.

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Fri, 10/21/2005 - 00:10 | [reply](#)

MAD

MAD (mutually assured destruction) has so far rendered nuclear weapons entirely unuseable whenever both conflicting parties were nuclear capable.

Suicidal religious extremism trumps the MAD deterrent though, that's the scary thing about countries like Iran having nukes. Strike them first, ask questions later, I say.

by Bob W on Sat, 10/22/2005 - 06:56 | [reply](#)

Don't make more ladens

Striking will only encourage more youngsters to become Ladens.

by a reader on Sun, 10/23/2005 - 21:10 | [reply](#)

Politics and Principles – 1: Politics Without Principles

Moral principles and theories play an important part in politics. As an example, consider the antitrust case in which the US government recently forced Samsung to cough up \$330 million for **'price fixing'**.

How did Samsung come to owe Uncle Sam a third of a billion dollars?

Samsung's top competitor, Seoul-based Hynix, agreed earlier this year to plead guilty to price fixing and pay a \$185 million fine. Last September, rival Infineon Technologies AG of Germany agreed to a \$160 million fine. Another competitor, Micron Technology Inc. of Boise, Idaho, has been cooperating with prosecutors and was not expected to face charges.

The government accused the companies of conspiring in e-mails, telephone calls and face-to-face meetings to fix prices of memory chips between April 1999 and June 2002.

So employees of Samsung and other companies met to discuss similar decisions they all faced about the prices of commodities that they sell. There is a name for this sort of behaviour: it is called "business". Antitrust law prohibits people from making decisions that might (according to someone's gut feeling) lead to them have a large share of the market in a commodity. It also prohibits companies from raising or dropping their prices too much. The government's thugs in suits said that Samsung and the others were raising prices "unfairly" because of their combined large market share.

However, every company in the world can raise prices unfairly by this definition, since every company offers some good or services that other companies do not. No one in the world sells Macintosh computers except Apple, and so they often cost a little more than other computers. Therefore, under this theory, Apple Computer owes the difference to the Government. In the Samsung case some memory chip companies got together to make a deal with one another about prices. The government has a gut feeling that consumers suffered, compared with what would have happened if

there had been no such deal. But in the real world the government

doesn't know what would have happened. Samsung might have put money into research for a new and better generation of memory chips as a result of their increased funds, to the benefit of all humankind. No computer company was forced to buy these memory chips, they could have made their own – and sold them, for that matter. They chose instead to buy the chips because they preferred doing so to that and to every other option.

Antitrust law is little more than an excuse to shake down rich companies. In reality, no employee of a company can tell whether any given action he might take will lead to his company having “too large a share” of the market. Nor can he tell in advance whether the government will deem him to be guilty of “price fixing” for making a particular business deal. So antitrust law violates the principle of the rule of law.

Antitrust law also prohibits businessmen from speaking and associating to coordinate certain peaceful activities and so it curtails freedom of speech and association. Since the government uses antitrust law to punish businessmen for trading under certain terms it also violates the principle of freedom of trade.

Political principles can help politicians to select or reject policies. Principles can suggest analogies, which make particular policies tenable or untenable. In accordance with the principles we've referred to, we conclude that antitrust law unjustly criminalises people for innocuous business activities.

This might also suggest an analogy between drug laws and antitrust laws, since they violate all of the same principles. Anyone who favours antitrust laws but not drug laws, or vice versa, ought to consider this.

Mon, 10/24/2005 - 11:43 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

What government knows

But in the real world the government doesn't know what would have happened.

That's right. If they did know, why bother with antitrust laws? Why shouldn't the government just buy shares in those companies that benefit from the price fixing, and distribute the profits to those consumers who were harmed?

Because they don't know, is the answer. All they know is how to take.

by a reader on Mon, 10/24/2005 - 12:06 | [reply](#)

Anti-trust Law

The writer seems to forget the entire history of antitrust legislation in the United States. Robber baron is not a term lightly used, now company as 'person' as shield from free market dealing to subvert free market principles. Remember law does not not mean

conviction, that takes a court case with evidence supporting violation of the law.

As to drug companies, it is true that the FDA has stymied competition, but that is a whole other subject. More than that the FDA has ruined as well as favored companies that have developed pharmaceuticals. That works against a free market.

I say abide by antitrust law and an honest competitive company has nothing to fear. There are names for the sort of illegal behavior which brought Samsung to court. Price fixing is not an example of a free market principle.

by a reader on Mon, 10/24/2005 - 15:28 | [reply](#)

be careful

offtopic, but ...

All the principles we have mentioned lead us to conclude that

I object to this sentence fragment. It isn't the case that *principles lead people* to conclusions. Principles don't lead to conclusions innately either. It should say that you interpret the principles as support for your conclusion.

Also, how often do all the principles someone chooses to mention *not* support his conclusion? This is a fairly silly thing to say.

-- Elliot Temple

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

Editor's reply: Thanks for the comment. The text has been changed.

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 10/24/2005 - 18:25 | [reply](#)

Excellent

Great Post.

Here's an excerpt from a [nice little poem](#):

"Now, let me state the present rules,"
The lawyer then went on,
"These very simple guidelines
You can rely upon"

"You're gouging on your prices if
You charge more than the rest.
But it's unfair competition
If you think you can charge less."

"A second point that we would make
To help avoid confusion:

Don't try to charge the same amount:

That would be collusion!"

Gil

by **Gil** on Mon, 10/24/2005 - 18:39 | [reply](#)

Re: Anti-trust Law

The writer seems to forget the entire history of antitrust legislation in the United States.

No, we haven't forgotten it. We're objecting to it.

Robber baron is not a term lightly used

That's true. Since there were already laws against robbery, and since the rich people in question enjoyed no aristocratic privileges in law, the term may well have been carefully chosen to bring the opprobrium due to robbers and aristocrats down upon people who were neither. That socialist economic theory justifies this is not a good argument.

by **Editor** on Mon, 10/24/2005 - 18:50 | [reply](#)

Good Robber Barons

As part of a balanced argument I will note that Andrew Carnegie, the Vanderbilts, the Rockefellers were all painted with the broad brush of "robber baron". No matter how ruthless they were portrayed in the business sense they also are vindicated by history. They gave back to the communities that served them and which helped make them wealthy men. One could argue that we can thank our lucky stars for such robber barons. Not all robber barons would seem to deserve the same posthumous praise, but certainly Carnegie and a few others do.

Can the same be said for Samsung? Does Samsung give back to the world by cornering the market and how might a vertical monopoly or limited chip competition serve this purpose? Only time will tell, but the public good is not likely to be served by the gentlemen's agreement which limits competition, practice of price-fixing, call it what you will. This is not a social argument. It is a practical one. When should the free market be limited by corporate collusion?

Three corporate "persons-as-entity" decide together to fix the price of the key components of their products, disregarding the illegality of the practice. In a market where the competition is already limited by scale of production to a very few competitors, how will this "here's my price, what's yours?" serve the public good? Does Samsung make this argument, fixing prices across key competitors will serve the principles of free market economies and free trade?

Until we have a better answer, I'll take Mr. Andrew Carnegie, noble robber baron, self made man, philanthropist extraordinaire any day

over corporate "person-as-entity" Sam Sung and his world-wide

chip buddies.

by a reader on Mon, 10/24/2005 - 20:23 | [reply](#)

Which robber-barons are "good"?

I gather from the previous comment that the "good" robber barons are those not guilty of the heinous crime of making a profit while Jewish Japanese.

by a reader on Mon, 10/24/2005 - 21:13 | [reply](#)

Ethnic Robber Barons?

Is Sam Sung or Hy Nix or Infi Neon or Mike Chron Jewish or Japanese? Or North American, perhaps by place of business? No. Last I checked companies do not have ethnicity, tho they do choose their business markets and who they hire and who would object to that, nor does ethnicity have anything to do with the argument as far as I know. (Personally I prefer Son Ni (sony) and Ap Pul (apple), but that's another story.)

Price-fixing, company as legal 'person' and how price collusion serves the free market, free trade is the subject.

by a reader on Tue, 10/25/2005 - 15:14 | [reply](#)

In a free society, people don

In a free society, people don't have to answer to you how their action serves you, or serves society, or whatever, before they can do it.

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 10/25/2005 - 15:26 | [reply](#)

True

Before they can do it, is the operative phrase.

Let me give an example however of the effect of after. Let's say there is an island. There are three builders on the island, all capable builders. I want to choose a builder in this free island society to build my house. Its a free society so I can choose.

However, the three builders own all the trees on the island and the rest of the island is sand. The three builders converse among themselves and agree that the price of lumber is a pesky variable. The agree that the price of lumber should be 40 conch shells per square foot.

The conversation has just changed the free market choice for building my house. The three builders are no longer in competition for my business. No matter that on other islands lumber is between

2 and 6 conch shells per foot, if I have no wooden boat to row there.

Price-fixing limits the free market. Here it is only a much larger scale, more conch shells apparently.

by a reader on Tue, 10/25/2005 - 17:07 | [reply](#)

Anti trust is pro competition

When powerful companies seek to stifle competition by means not related to improving the value of their product or service, they are being anti-capitalistic and this is bad isn't it? It diminishes other companies' ability to provide better products or services to consumers with the effect being detrimental to society.

In a free society, people do have to answer to you how their action hurts you or hurts society.

by Bob W on Tue, 10/25/2005 - 17:25 | [reply](#)

If I must answer to you to li

If I must answer to you to live my life, associating freely with those I wish, then I'm clearly not free.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 10/25/2005 - 19:19 | [reply](#)

Of course you are not free to

Of course you are not free to violate my rights, to hurt me in certain ways and to hurt society in certain ways, without the involved party's consent. You think it should be different?

by Bob W on Wed, 10/26/2005 - 02:08 | [reply](#)

Offering to sell things at a

Offering to sell things at a price you don't want to buy them at, is not doing something to you, anymore than not selling anything at all is.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 10/26/2005 - 04:35 | [reply](#)

Conspiring to control a marke

Conspiring to control a market at the expense of free competition is doing something to me. It's hindering the most important engine of my society: The competition of ideas. You don't think this hurts me?

by Bob W on Wed, 10/26/2005 - 05:16 | [reply](#)

What about if I'm a preacher,

What about if I'm a preacher, and preach high prices for patio furniture? And i'm successful, and convince all patio furniture companies to raise their prices. do you see any critical difference between that and me being a business man who persuades other businesses to raise prices?

i won't say this isn't unfortunate for you. i will say i should be free to do it.

one problem with a law against raising prices, is it can't tell which price raisings are good or bad ideas. there is no mechanical rule for this. and we can't just leave it up to someone's judgement either. a law against price raising that Elliot deems bad ... would be a horrible law.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 10/26/2005 - 05:42 | [reply](#)

Persuading companies to raise

Persuading companies to raise their prices isn't necessarily anti-competitive. Conspiring with companies to fix prices for the purpose of driving companies with better products out of business is anti-competitive. **The World** says there should be no such thing as anti-trust laws. It sure seems this would often hurt competition and the promotion of better ideas rather than help it. We can't think of a perfect way to stop this so we shouldn't do it at all?

by Bob W on Wed, 10/26/2005 - 06:00 | [reply](#)

How is "conspiring with" othe

How is "conspiring with" other companies different from persuading those companies to follow a certain strategy? What kind of magical rites do the heads of companies engage in when they gather to "conspire with each other"?

by AIS on Wed, 10/26/2005 - 07:47 | [reply](#)

A Comment

When workers get together to form a voluntary organisation in an attempt to raise the price they can charge for their services on the free market, leftists call this organisation a trade union and they praise it.

When employers get together to form a voluntary organisation in an attempt to raise the price they can charge for their services on the free market, leftists call this a cartel and they condemn it.

Banning trade unions and cartels would simply be the same as

banning a certain sort of idea, namely that people sometimes can and should act together to secure higher prices for the services they provide. And of course, nobody is safe from antitrust law in principle, including trades unions.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Wed, 10/26/2005 - 15:15 | [reply](#)

oversimplification

Alan, your comparison of cartels (and I'm assuming trusts as well, from the context) to unions misses the point. We leftists don't criticize trusts or cartels because they are working together. We criticize them for doing so at the expense of the public good. It is, on one level, a matter of power. A single worker has essentially zero leverage in the marketplace; corporations, in comparison, have practically unlimited resources and influence. Unions are fighting on a very basic level for a decent wage. Corporations are fighting for their survival as well, sure, but though people may be unemployed, if the economy is healthy, the death of a corporation is not a problem --in fact it is a natural part of the *why we embrace market economy*: efficiency and survival of the fittest.

You will likely be quick to counter that unions are also pro-inefficiency, and you would be correct. You might even go out on a limb (or at least, it's a limb to me, it might not be a limb to you) and say that unions hurt society as a whole. I don't deny that a union might (and probably has in the past) try and secure their welfare at the expense of others. BUT. The difference between unions and cartels is that unions secure basic rights for human beings. Without unions (or any form of power based in organization) among workers, the working class would be screwed beyond your wildest dreams. (...and often is, make no mistake about it.) Without 'unions' among businesses, on the other hand, the marketplace functions smoothly, which tends to be in the best interest of society.

Let me take a shot at oversimplifying things instead: If group (A) has five people out of a hundred that have all the power, and group (B) has a hundred people who share power equally, the latter group with is probably going to have a higher survival rate. It may get less done, but you're not going to end up with 95% of the group in abject poverty.

by leftist on Thu, 10/27/2005 - 00:36 | [reply](#)

there is a difference between

there is a difference between A) what is good to do (both unions and cartels can be crappy decisions) B) what should be illegal (there is no way to make a law against only crappy decisions, and a law against all agreements of any kind regarding prices of goods would be absurd. having courts decide who made bad decisions is a horrible idea. people need to be able to know if something is legal

or not, without knowing if it's the ideal action which they can't be

expected to always know)

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 10/27/2005 - 01:35 | [reply](#)

the other thing is we need to

the other thing is we need to acknowledge our view of which cartels are good may change in time, and we shouldn't just make laws to enforce the current fad. error correction is critical.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 10/27/2005 - 01:37 | [reply](#)

It's not conspiring we should

It's not conspiring we should oppose, it's conspiring or any other action that is anti-competitive and significantly hampers the competition of ideas and prevents economic access to the best ideas. These actions are the enemies of a free society. They should be illegal. If the laws punishing such actions are bad they can be changed.

by Bob W on Thu, 10/27/2005 - 14:41 | [reply](#)

What should the law be change

What should the law be changed to say, precisely?

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 10/27/2005 - 19:04 | [reply](#)

It Depends

If it is likely that the markets for the goods produced by the companies will, in the reasonable long-term, become competitive, then it doesn't make too much sense to use the law to regulate these markets.

When collusion occurs that raises prices, other companies will see the elevated prices and be even more likely to enter the market to get a piece of the action. In short, collusion creates the incentives that destroy it. This ultimately may benefit the public.

On the other hand, in a market not prone to long-term competition, such collusion amounts to restricting trade and should probably be regulated. The law should prevent price-fixing just as we regulate the prices of goods produced by "natural" monopolies.

Obviously, the difference between a "long-term" effect and a "short-

term" effect is somewhat subjective.

Michael

by M Golding on Thu, 10/27/2005 - 23:35 | [reply](#)

"somewhat subjective" laws ma

"somewhat subjective" laws make a mess, because people won't know if an action breaks them or not.

so what law do you recommend?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 10/28/2005 - 00:09 | [reply](#)

You're Right

I think in general I would not regulate prices for most goods, even if collusion could be demonstrated. The market usually takes care of this kind of thing, especially if it is a market where technology is being produced and research changes things rapidly. So although I do not know the case discussed well, I could agree with the conclusions of the editors.

Firms should be presumed innocent unless a particular good, like a road, has a priori been determined to have substantial public good implications and then the law should reflect that.

If a good is later determined to have substantial public good implications (by courts and the political process), then the firms should not be penalized for previously colluding, but then should not be allowed to do so and should be potentially subjected to regulation.

For example if there are two firms producing the only particular type of an antibiotic and they are colluding in determining prices, one would expect strong incentives for other firms to create competing antibiotics and thus break the cartel within a year or two. If the government became involved, its own inefficiency and the cost of regulation may very well be greater than the public good benefit of breaking the cartel.

On the other hand, if an epidemic then grips a nation before other antibiotics are developed, the antibiotic then becomes much more of a "public good." In such cases colluding firms should not be punished, but should be subject to regulation if they do not voluntarily take into account the public good implications of their production of antibiotics. Yes the government will predictably cause waste in regulating these firms. But monopoly pricing for antibiotics may harm the public good more than the inevitable waste associated with government spending on needed regulation. During

an epidemic, one cannot wait a year for competing firms to produce

alternative antibiotics.

I do think price fixing restricts trade and is in general bad, but in most cases, government intervention is worse unless there are substantial public good implications associated with the production of a good. The production of certain goods are properly regulated by the government (for example, the production of roads and other paths connecting businesses and homes.)

by M Golding on Fri, 10/28/2005 - 01:17 | [reply](#)

Competitors will join a field

Competitors will join a field/industry if they believe there is profit to be had, for example because the present companies are all charging more than necessary, or have angered the public by how they set prices. Sometimes the competitors will be wrong, and will discover the profit margins were not huge and bloated and it's difficult to do better. In such cases, the new competitor may fail, or may just do OK. Basically, if a private person judges there is a problem with the price, he can do something about it; but if he's wrong, he pays the consequences.

Government also has to make a judgment about when price fixing exists, when profit margins are too high for the risk involved, etc.. It is no better able to do this than a private individual. So, either a private individual will intervene (so government need not), or if none do, then if the government does intervene, we must say the government is **disagreeing** with a wide variety of experts. Further, if the government is wrong the cost of the mistake is paid by the tax payers; the lack of incentives and consequences in the right places hurts error correction.

We'll never know if the government was wrong, because we can't compare to what would have happened if it did nothing; when a private individual creates a rival company, we **do** find out if he was right or not, by his success or failure; so government intervention precludes learning who was right, and thus the government policy, even if it's frequently wrong, will never be corrected.

Another point is if a rival company intervenes by creating lower price goods, society benefits because now there are low priced goods available. If government intervenes it has options like:

- 1) destroy some companies; now nothing is available
- 2) start deciding what prices companies should charge, despite having no better knowledge of proper prices than anyone else has
- 3) tell companies to lower their prices an amount the government guesses might make sense, then don't let them raise them again until they have some excuse, like the cost of a natural resource goes up
- 4) stick the CEO in jail and put in a new one whom the government believes will play nice

None of these options are very impressive.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 10/28/2005 - 11:02 | [reply](#)

Other than

the U.N. Oil for Food Program, can you name some examples in Antitrust legislation where the four government options described above have been impractically applied?

(Given that the Oil for Food Program was not Antitrust or U.S. applied but rather a practical example of codified worldwide pro business/pro dictator collusion for political and personal gain.)

by a reader on Fri, 10/28/2005 - 15:36 | [reply](#)

I meant to illustrate it isn'

I meant to illustrate it isn't simple to think of a useful way for government to interfere. I could find an example, but we'd both agree government makes mistakes sometimes, so there is no point. How about you think of one alternative (has been done, or not) way for government to intervene that doesn't suck?

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 10/28/2005 - 15:49 | [reply](#)

The government breaking up th

The government breaking up the telephone monopoly of ATT seems to have caused an explosion of telephone company options for Americans across the board.

by a reader on Fri, 10/28/2005 - 19:17 | [reply](#)

You misunderstand. I want yo

You misunderstand. I want you to tell me a reasonable law we could have. It must say in what circumstances it takes effect, and the specific consequences that will happen. It cannot say "if there is a (telephone) company that seems too big, break it up in some manner, so options seem better" because laws cannot be vague in that way. You must detail how a company should be broken up, how we know it's too big, etc

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 10/28/2005 - 21:03 | [reply](#)

Antitrust

My main problem with antitrust law is the claim that a monopoly

can exist where there is no legal barrier to entering a market. A good example of this was the recent Microsoft case, where the government ignored the legal right of others to enter the market and compete with Microsoft, and virtually ignored the realities of the fluid technology market and its history, to reach the dubious conclusion that anyone other than Microsoft's less effective competitors were injured. Perhaps it is somewhat easier to develop a rationale for a degree of regulation where the situation (often first created by government action -- but not always), has resulted in a genuine (natural or unnatural) monopoly. For example, where there is only one set of railroad tracks and no more can or will be constructed anytime soon (or ever) for a variety of other reasons. Perhaps regulation could take the form of bidding out the use of the tracks from time to time, or perhaps something else even more or less desirable. In any event, it seems to me that these types situations are few and far between. The history of antitrust law shows that these laws almost always draw the government into a role of supervising markets and prescribing outcomes through consent decrees, rather than protecting free markets, free competition, and individual rights.

by **Michael Bacon** on Fri, 10/28/2005 - 21:22 | [reply](#)

The law that broke up the tel

The law that broke up the telephone monopoly was the reasonable law. It takes effect in similar circumstances for similar reasons, and is arbitrated in similar ways.

by a reader on Fri, 10/28/2005 - 22:50 | [reply](#)

Ahem - Bell was in effect a state-enforced monopoly.

The law that "broke up the telephone monopoly" was simply the law that loosened the Federal regulatory framework which had, in effect, excluded competitors from the telephone market.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingsbury_Commitment

by a reader on Fri, 10/28/2005 - 23:08 | [reply](#)

Re: Ahem...

According the link you provided, the Kingsbury Commitment was a law to regulate AT&T, which was considered a natural monopoly.

The government initiated an **antitrust lawsuit** against AT&T in 1974. The settlement of this lawsuit broke AT&T up in 1984. This quickly lead to increased long-distance service competition, which caused a drop in long distance rates which continues to this day.

by a reader on Sat, 10/29/2005 - 04:24 | [reply](#)

AT&T;

Here is some history of how regulation hindered AT&T's

competition.

Gil

by **Gil** on Sat, 10/29/2005 - 05:40 | [reply](#)

Is it possible?

Is it possible that regulation is bad for competition whereas antitrust law is by default a safeguard against overregulation? Does regulation tend to institutionalize controls and tend to become its own monopoly, albeit a government one, whereas law is simply law, where the court decides the merit of charges? Regulation is not needed where companies operate freely within the general rule of law where corporate innocence is presumed until proven otherwise.

Court requires an extensive body of evidence presented by plaintiffs to show that a law has been violated. Regulation is ongoing, precludes free market compliance, and requires only a regulatory body outside the role of court, usually but not always governmental. Regulation is intrusive and assumes universal noncompliance. Courts on the other hand require a search for the truth.

by a reader on Sun, 10/30/2005 - 18:49 | [reply](#)

Re: Competitors Will Join a Field

One policy option is to force government to do a cost-benefit analysis prior to intervening, say in an antitrust case. This could be accomplished out of an Office of Management and Budget, and supervised by the head of a Presidents Council of Economic Advisors.

Obviously there is much room for bias but econometricians do this kind of analysis regularly. But forcing some type of numerical accountability would be a good first step in providing information to the public, even though many would argue about the numbers.

By the way, there were attempts to implement this policy during the Reagan administration when Murray Weidenbaum was the head of the Presidents Council on Economic Advisors, but suffice to say Dr. Weidenbaum did not last too long in that post.

An honest broker/academic economist would likely experience enormous pressure.

Michael

by M Golding on Mon, 10/31/2005 - 00:59 | [reply](#)

Robbers, Barons, Billionaires & Politics

The following paper is amusing and loosely related to the argument.
http://econ161.berkeley.edu/Econ_Articles/carnegie/DeLong_Moscow_paper2.html

by a reader on Tue, 11/01/2005 - 01:48 | [reply](#)

Patents

"No computer company was forced to buy these memory chips, they could have made their own – and sold them, for that matter."

This is probably not true, although I suppose it might be in this case. Generally speaking, intellectual property legislation (particularly patents) raises barriers which prevent most people from entering any high-tech market with the same efficiency as the incumbents, who literally act as monopolists.

I have heard it argued that in these matters, governments are simply ensuring that the monopolies they have granted (for the greater good, of course...) do not get abused.

What is **The World's** position on patents and other intellectual property legislation?

by a reader on Wed, 12/27/2006 - 00:50 | [reply](#)

Vive Canada Libre!

There are signs that Québec may be prepared to **release Canada** from its long and cruel servitude. We look forward to the day when those hateful signs of occupation (we mean the bilingual ones, of course) are consigned to the dustbin of history. Then, as Québec pursues its **natural destiny elsewhere**, Canada too will be able to resume its **rightful place** among nations.

Fri, 11/04/2005 - 14:10 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Rationale?

Apart from the nationalistic sentiments, and vague reasonings such as the English-ness of the progress in the 21st century, what else do you have to back up your cheerful tone?

By the way, I think the 20th century started off with proclamations that "because of the industrious nature of German spirit and their superiority in organizing economic activity it's Germans who are going to lead the way in the 20th century." Is there some reason to believe the "nationlaistic" similarity in language with your linked book is only superficial?

by Bob S on Fri, 11/04/2005 - 17:55 | [reply](#)

Rightful place?

I'm wondering what 'rightful place' means. If you mean a nation with a single language, I'm not sure that's the qualifier for a rightful place. If you mean a nation that has no disputes between factions, other than political ones, I still don't know if that fits as 'rightful'.

Borders are odd things, that mix of geography, history, and culture. As language is just one attribute of culture, that alone does not create a border. Perhaps the answer is the myth of the great big melting pot that absorbs all identifiers and creates a new myth of one national identity. An alternative vision of national identity is where the histories and cultures become unified under a form of government which values all this and yet does not stagnate into some sentimental hash. That unification catalyst would seem to be dynamic democracy.

With Canada we'll see. Not all that appears as conflict is separation.

It may or may not change borders, but the in the halls of debate we'll find what 'rightful place' will be.

by a reader on Sat, 11/05/2005 - 15:38 | [reply](#)

Rationale

If it were true that progress is best made by industriousness and regimentation, the prophecy about Germany would have been accurate. But it was wide of the mark because, in fact, progress is best made by "traits common to America and other English-speaking nations—a particularly strong and independent civil society; openness and receptivity to the world, its people, and ideas; and a dynamic economy", and so on.

There is nothing nationalistic in our post or in the Anglosphere book. Any other societies that incorporate those attributes can make the same progress.

by [Editor](#) on Sun, 11/06/2005 - 05:04 | [reply](#)

Addition

Apparently that would include India? Jamaica? Liberia?

by a reader on Mon, 11/07/2005 - 02:03 | [reply](#)

Re: Addition

Is it apparent that their societies incorporate the attributes in question?

by [Editor](#) on Mon, 11/07/2005 - 02:16 | [reply](#)

Re: Addition

Not to me it isn't, or not fully. India might, Jamaica might to some degree, Liberia has a noble but spotty history.

I think if we take language out of it, or consider language as a co-related but not necessarily key indicator of the traits, it is more likely that we are on the right track. Karl Popper was certainly on the right track with "The Open Society and its Enemies", and language was never considered one of the key factors to an open society. A familiarity with so-called "classical civilization" values, brought up to date and constantly examined within the society would seem to be an overarching theme, but to always remember, societies do change when there are catalysts to openness. I think of Vaclav Havel and those around him as one example of this. Vibrant challenges, clear thinking, and willingness to question authoritarian regimes and structures with an intent of positive change and courage to do so are much higher on my list than some notion of an "Anglosphere".

by a reader on Mon, 11/07/2005 - 14:58 | [reply](#)

Language

The main problem with not speaking English is there's no one to talk to.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 11/07/2005 - 22:03 | [reply](#)

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Political Role Of Psychiatry

The Daily Telegraph reports allegations that the European Commission has discovered a new mental illness which, to its relief, is rare among its employees: **honesty**. Portuguese diplomat Jose Sequeira says that when the European Commission mistakenly suspected that he was about to blow the whistle on a fraud scandal they got psychiatrists to declare him mentally ill:

He was put on permanent sick leave after tests found he suffered "verbal hyper-productivity" and a "lack of conceptual content" in his speech.

From this description we wonder how it could have been possible to tell the difference between Mr Sequeira and the rest of the European Commission's staff. Nevertheless, the psychiatrists managed to do so, and duly delivered the verdict that would destroy Mr Sequeira and protect the Commission from his verbal hyper-productivity. Unfortunately for them, four independent psychiatrists disagreed:

To prove that he was of sound mind Mr Sequeira underwent psychiatric tests at four different hospitals, seen by the Sunday Telegraph, all of which found nothing wrong with him. Their findings were declared inadmissible by the commission as it would accept testimony from only its own accredited medical list.

If one group of psychiatrists can interpret diagnostic criteria for mental illness to fit Mr Sequeira and oblige their employer, and if another group of psychiatrists can form the diametrically opposite opinion and deny that he is mentally ill at all, what are the implications for their profession's even more powerful, and much less scrutinised, everyday role? There, the clients might, for instance, be troubled parents, and the victim their troublesome offspring. And there may well be no major newspaper and expensive lawyers willing to spring to the victim's defence.

If the allegations of Mr Sequeira and other Commission employees in similar positions are borne out, what lessons will the psychiatric profession draw? Will they make scapegoats of the psychiatrists concerned? Or will they realise that those psychiatrists were performing nothing other than their normal social function, and that the fault is systemic? Will they conclude that their subjective, purely

behavioural, **criteria** for making diagnoses against the will of patients and at the behest of interested parties who dislike the patients' behaviour are not only an invitation to abuse, but unscientific too?

Mon, 11/14/2005 - 13:15 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Nailed this one

Unfortunately the pseudoscience of psychiatric diagnosis is used all the time to justify the reasons why someone does or says something that doesn't go along with the zeitgeist. The most deviant example of this was in Stalin's Russia, but it has other political uses as well across the world.

Psychiatry may have its place, but if so it is only in medicine, not in politics or the social sphere.

by a reader on Mon, 11/14/2005 - 15:00 | [reply](#)

Silly World

In virtually any malpractice trial, one physician gets up and says that one diagnosis was correct and one course of action was correct, and another physician often gets up and says the opposite. When politics and money are involved, its pretty easy to find one or two docs ready to testify to anything.

But I guess that means there is no science in medicine, at all?

Oh but wait. Climatologist totally disagree about the implications of "global warming". And politics is involved. No science in climatology, either?

And those physicists, believing in billions of universes and disagreeing with others who believe Copenhagen interpretations...my goodness, no science in physics, either? Imagine if each physicist testified in court, he would disagree. And if in such an important situation as a courtroom, physicists would disagree about something as major as whether there are billions of "parallel" universes or not, physics should not be taught at all? Stop all funding for universities that support physics research? Don't we need to get back to the "facts" for a change?

We can all agree on those.

by M Golding on Mon, 11/14/2005 - 15:17 | [reply](#)

Michael, The post didn't s

Michael,

The post didn't say there's no such thing as psychiatric science. It said political psychiatry is very bad. You ought to support that.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 11/15/2005 - 10:05 | [reply](#)

OK

"Subjective, purely behavioral criteria"?

Michael

The editors could no more make an accurate diagnosis of schizophrenia using standardized video recordings of patients than they could look in a microscope at spun urine and make a diagnosis of glomerulonephritis. One needs criteria plus standardized observational skills and a general knowledge of medicine.

With those, a diagnosis can be made and quite accurate predictions can be made about future illnesses, death, etc. Obviously, psychiatrists or any professional, whether climatologist or physicist, should not allow his skills to be abused to promote political ends, independant of the due diligence, scientific expertise, and humility of his profession.

Michael

by M Golding on Tue, 11/15/2005 - 11:22 | [reply](#)

Re: Nailed this one

A reader wrote:

Psychiatry may have its place, but if so it is only in medicine, not in politics or the social sphere.

Agreeing with psychiatrist **Thomas Szasz** I would say psychiatry has no place in medicine either. Since medicine deals with biological disorders, which can typically be seen under the microscope, and psychiatry deals with people's problems in living, these are two wholly different things. A psychiatrist is simply someone who tries to help people by talking to them about their problems, and is thus comparable to a friend, priest, parent, etc. Only when people's behaviour can be linked to a brain disease visible under the microscope, i.e. Alzheimer's, can we speak of a medical issue. There are no such things as mental diseases except in the metaphorical sense, just as we are talking metaphorically when we speak of a sick economy or a sick organisation. I have never come across a definition of "mental disease" which is scientifically meaningful.

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Tue, 11/15/2005 - 12:30 | [reply](#)

Interesting

Mr. Sturman

1. What causes type 2 diabetes? Can the cause be seen under a microscope or by any other known test?

2. When does someone have coronary artery disease?

3. When does someone have elevated cholesterol?

Since I do not believe you will be able to come up with "objective" criteria for any of this, does that mean that cardiology and endocrinology are unscientific and meaningless, just reflective of problems in living (eating badly and not exercising?)

Michael Golding

by M Golding on Tue, 11/15/2005 - 15:58 | [reply](#)

"Subjective, purely behavioral criteria"

"Subjective, purely behavioral criteria"

that's not science. that is what most of them do. that doesn't deny there can be science in the field.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 11/16/2005 - 03:29 | [reply](#)

Come Now

As even Virchow understood, when a person dies, he is no longer diseased. Rocks do not have disease. People do. Physicians *Use* diagnostic criteria in the context of a live person to make a diagnosis. A particular behavior, or even sequence of behaviors, says virtually nothing about psychiatric diagnosis, since diagnoses are made in context of the overall symptoms of the person, physical and mental. Similarly, a blood sugar measurement, or even a series of blood sugar measurements, tells you nothing about whether a person has diabetes, outside of the overall context of what is going on with the person (what if he is on a steroid, for example...then the blood sugar may well be elevated, with no underlying diabetes, and the behaviors may be paranoid and bizarre, with no underlying psychiatric illness. Unless you understand steroids, you can't make diagnoses based on definitions of diabetes or definitions of mental illness. One needs the whole picture of the person to reliably make diagnoses and accurately predict things of importance to people.)

That's why it's a little anti-scientific for the World editors to keep pointing to diagnostic criteria that are meaningless without medical context.

On what basis do you think that major psychiatric diagnoses, made by average psychiatrists in America, are any less predictive of physical damage to bodies and psychological pain and suffering than a diagnosis of type II diabetes made by an average endocrinologist?

On what basis do you think that a particular diagnosis of elevated

cholesterol is any more predictive of adverse life-events than a major psychiatric diagnosis?

Do you just assume this? Isn't it important to get the science accurate, even when making a political point?

Michael

by M Golding on Wed, 11/16/2005 - 05:36 | [reply](#)

Michael, How do you (even

Michael,

How do you (even in theory) tell the difference between someone who is mentally ill and someone who is, in your view, wrong about how to live a lot?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 11/16/2005 - 06:13 | [reply](#)

The difference between color and cats?

Most of my psychiatric patients are usually much braver and stronger than the average person. Usually (but not always) they have endured circumstances that would have crushed most others (or me) but the human spirit is remarkable. Their courage and humor makes them stronger people than most.

Your question is like asking, "How do you tell the difference between someone who has been a military leader during wartime, seen battle, and someone who is wrong about how to live a lot?"

It's an odd question. For most, being a military leader during battle steels them against future circumstances, and makes them better people. Others can lose their human spirit.

People who suffer adversity (like those with major mental illness, those with cancer, or those enduring war) can decide to retreat, learn to hate, or they can learn to live with their mental illness or adversity (as most do), and use these difficulties to be more generous and wonderful people. Most of the mentally ill, like individuals surviving cancer, grow from their experience.

What is the difference between someone with an illness who retreats and becomes bitter, and someone who uses their illness to experience spiritual, intellectual, and emotional growth?

I don't think anyone really knows the complete answer to why adversity causes some people with illness to use their experience to become better people, yet for others illness ruins their lives. I think it is "character". I know that very few of us could (literally) survive what many of my mentally ill patients endure, let alone survive their illness and still be friendly and generous and kind.

Try to imagine, Elliot, being forced awake and not being permitted

to sleep (at all) for 3 days (let alone the 15 days my patients regularly endure). You might want to actually try it, just for 3 days. I have. Most of us get remarkably irritable even after 1 night of no sleep. Now imagine training yourself to be kind under those circumstances (it is usually much worse for the mentally ill because a variety of other circumstances are happening).

How to explain good character? I don't know, but I know it when I see it. It is present more frequently in my patient population than the general population, but perhaps that's just because my patients have on average experienced more adversity, in which noble human traits can develop.

Michael

by M Golding on Wed, 11/16/2005 - 12:14 | [reply](#)

The Psychiatric Role of Politics

Politics and psychiatry make very strange bedfellows. There is little doubt in my mind that some politicians are very crazy in the head, just not in the ways that fit easily with psychiatric diagnoses, or any standard medical diagnoses for that matter.

The problem in a nutshell seems to be that for some, politics and political rhetoric and political dogma of numerous flavors substitute for reality, and even for the testing of what the ideas of reality and truth actually might be.

Politics, and the political realm, both, unfortunately often inadvertently reward crazy, or crazed crackpot ideas. The "patient", political officeholder, representative ideologue gets blessed by more of what is sought, reflected and played back to them in the political arena, to elevate their personal perception of importance.

Some people relish a delusion or bedlam asylum, with adrenalin rushes and depressive cycles portrayed as somehow "feeling ideologically more alive". Political pundits in such worlds can be like medium psychiatrists, offering analyses A, B, C and so on upon what are essentially grand flights of fancy.

Maybe we need better indices of political health rather than more application of diagnostic mental health labels. Maybe we are better off with psychiatry out of politics.

by a reader on Wed, 11/16/2005 - 17:18 | [reply](#)

Michael, You seem to only

Michael,

You seem to only be imagining people who are, in fact, ill.

Imagine a dyslexic person, a person who believes in reading the letters of words out of order, a person who hears voices, a person who hears God's voice, a schizophrenic, a person who believes he should pretend to be schizophrenic, an obsessive/compulsive

person who hates messes, a person who just really really hates messes, a person who loves messes and thinks God hates cleanliness, 500 different varieties of "anti-social" children (200 of whom oppose school on principle), 500 children who believe school is good (200 of whom believe it's right to be a teacher's pet), someone who believes so strongly in sympathy he feels physically pained when he sees children at school who don't want to be there, 500 mothers so concerned for their children they go to war with Canada (500 of whom don't listen to their children who'd prefer not to have a war), 500 varieties of terrorist (200 of whom follow Islam), and 500 varieties of Creationist (200 of whom think they are pirates).

How can you tell which people are ill?

What precisely does being ill, or not, mean? What is the difference for Terrorist #47 if you declare him ill or not?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 11/16/2005 - 18:26 | [reply](#)

OK

I will answer you Elliot, but please help me prepare my answer by thinking through this question. I do have my own version of an answer to the "what is an illness" question.

What makes a cholesterol level "high"? Is it a problem with living?

Whatever criteria you use to answer that question is (philosophically speaking) the exact answer to the question, when is someone mentally ill?

The question is, what makes a medical condition abnormal? Those studying and trying to define elevated cholesterol levels have the same philosophical problems as those studying schizophrenia.

There are many definitions of illness. But I bet that if you were to come up with a set of (philosophical) criteria that would enable you to say that a cholesterol level should be considered "high," *whatever* criteria that is, it is very likely that I could see that perspective and believe that is also a reasonable criteria to define when someone is mentally ill.

Thanks.
Michael

by M Golding on Wed, 11/16/2005 - 21:13 | [reply](#)

re: ok

I may have been unclear. I mostly want to know how you tell which people are which, not what an illness is.

Diagnosing cholesterol levels involves ... well i imagine a bloodtest

or something. The psychiatric diagnoses i'm skeptical of don't use a physical test like that, so they are different.

the other issue about cholesterol is: how much is too much? the answer is roughly: more than the patient wants to have.

As a secondary question, certain supposed mental illnesses have criteria like "argues with adults often". People then note the patient meets 5 criteria, and declare he has an illness, with consequences beyond the criteria themselves. So for illnesses like that, I want to know precisely what being ill means, and what that has to do with the behavioral diagnostic criteria. If you don't want to defend any illnesses like that, that's fine.

PS Please continue to ask questions about my questions, if at all unsure what I want to know. No point writing a long explanation only to be asked a slightly different question.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 11/16/2005 - 23:21 | [reply](#)

Illness

An illness is

A. A condition leading to damage of the body (especially if untreated).

AND

B. Associated with pain and/or suffering. Some would say associated with pain and/or suffering or loss of reproductive function. (The "reproductive functioning" aspect is usually added when people want to include animals and plants in the conception.)

AND

C. Not sustained by circumstances external to the person. Some would say an illness is not **solely** sustained by circumstances external to the person.

So as you can see by the above conception, **all illnesses are both mental and physical.** So when you ask me to identify what is a mental illness, I give you the above definition. But if you would like an exhaustive list that may be over-inclusive, please read the unabridged version of Harrison's Principles of Internal Medicine.

If you wish to know whether I believe a particular named condition is an illness, please ask and I will give you my best guess.

All of the major psychiatric illnesses, elevated cholesterol in many circumstances, and most of the illnesses recognized in medicine, meet the above criteria. Most political and economic hardships and prejudices do not. There have been multiple other attempts to formulate conceptions of "illness".

Elliot, you might try to formulate a conception of illness yourself.

It's harder than you might think, especially if you are trying to exclude the major psychiatric illnesses. Because when you try to exclude major psychiatric illnesses using philosophical principles, your conception then excludes a whole lot of other illnesses, as well!

Michael

by M Golding on Wed, 11/16/2005 - 23:27 | [reply](#)

Application of the criteria A, B and C

Do the following conditions meet the criteria A, B and C?:

- An intention to become a professional boxer.
- An intention to donate a kidney to save the life of a loved one.
- An intention to rescue a wounded fellow-soldier under fire.
- An intention to cross Antarctica on foot.
- An intention to become a suicide bomber.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Wed, 11/16/2005 - 23:59 | [reply](#)

illness

I don't want to formulate "what an illness is", I want to discuss certain conditions, and what should be done about them, and also how to diagnose them. To help me understand where you're coming from, can you tell me if you approve of ODD in the way it's presented at this link?

ODD

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 11/17/2005 - 00:34 | [reply](#)

Long-Hair Illness

Concerning Cholesterol:

"How much is too much? The answer is roughly, more than the person wants to have."

Elliot

Ahh Elliot, so if a person thinks his hair is too long, "hair-longness is an illness?" Don't you think your conception is too broad?

"Diagnosing cholesterol levels involves...well I imagine a blood test or something.

The psychiatric diagnoses I am skeptical about don't use a physical test like that. So they are different."

Elliot

Really. Why? The information people tell us and what they do is

usually far more predictive than a lab test or a physical exam finding. (Information gathered from what people say and how they say it, as well as what they look like and do, is usually far more reliable) This is something that we have to teach medical students and interns repeatedly, because they keep their head in the laboratory values and under their stethoscope. A person with minor laboratory abnormalities but who looks grossly "toxic", *IS TOXIC*. If you treat the lab values, the patient often dies. Someone with much more significant laboratory abnormalities but who does not look "toxic", usually *IS FINE*.

As a scientific matter, you simply are mostly incorrect. What people tell us and what we see is usually a far more reliable indicator of what is wrong with people than lab values. Virtually any physician trying to help a patient (if given a choice), would much rather speak to him than examine him or draw labs. This assertion is both a considered opinion from informal discussion with colleagues, but has also been studied in terms of the relative ability of discussion and observation (say vs. biopsy and laboratory test), to determine what is wrong with someone. More information is almost always gathered from speaking and observation than from lab tests and biopsies. Curiously, how did you learn otherwise?

Physicians gather *information,* whether it is what people look like, what they say, what a lab value is, or what a physical exam finding is. We judge each component on its reliability and whether it helps us predict things we want to know (also whether it helps us *understand* the condition).

On what basis do you believe that psychiatric diagnoses, made by psychiatrists, are not reliable or do not predict things well? Have you seen the data?

Do you think "5 criteria", or a cholesterol level above 300, or a blood sugar greater than 190 make psychiatric diagnoses, a diagnosis of elevated cholesterol, or a diagnosis of diabetes? If criteria do not meet the conceptions in my post given above, or similar criteria, most physicians will not consider someone "ill".

If you wish to know my opinion about specific diagnoses, please feel free to ask.

You are also asking me how I make psychiatric diagnoses. How do I distinguish normal from not normal? The question is the same to me as asking me how I determine that someone is sick vs. well, since in my view all illnesses are both mental and physical. I truly don't mean to be flip, but you would need to read Harrisons Principles of Internal medicine while working in a clinic with physicians or nurse practitioners or PA's who would teach you how to distinguish illnesses from health and would also teach you about the shades of gray.

In philisophical terms, I have given my conception of illness (above). Health (normalcy) is the opposite of that.

Michael

I don't think so

No
No
No
and
No!

All fail on criteria C. However, the conditions that are *sustained* by circumstances not emanating from the environment...the physiology of having only one kidney, for example, could be an illness (although usually is not provided that the one kidney stays very healthy)

Boxing and giving kidneys are not sustaining the illness. Once the punch is delivered, if the nose instantaneously healed, there would be no illness! It is the body that is maintaining the injury, therefore the condition that is sustained is the echymosis (from the bodies inflammatory response), not the punch. Therefore the echymosis is the illness, not the punch.

Prof. Deutsch, do you have a conception of "illness" that you would like to offer?

Michael

by M Golding on Thu, 11/17/2005 - 01:11 | [reply](#)

ODD

ODD, to my taste, is too "specific" to meet the criteria above.

Impulsiveness, in certain environmental contexts, however may meet the criteria above that I have listed for illnesses. And it is the impulsiveness which is usually evaluated when such diagnoses are given.

As the standard story goes, those heterozygous for genes causing sickle cell anemia may have certain reproductive advantages in Africa where individuals are exposed to the parasite that causes malaria. However in America, where the malaria parasite is quite rare indeed, the same genetic configuration could predispose to slight (particularly reproductive) disadvantages. So the conditions of ones environment affects whether an individual with a given condition will have an illness (meet the criteria I list above.)

So impulsiveness could lead to organ damage (the internal physiology of this may not be relevant unless someone wants to know) when individuals live in a modern, relatively non-violent environment. So aspects of extreme impulsiveness could in fact be an illness, in modern day America, but may have been an evolutionary advantage when our ancestors evolved in Africa (and they lived just into their teens in an environment that was harsh and brutal).

The same is true with diabetes. Genes which promote fat deposition

were likely, in certain environments, to be selected for. Currently, with plenty of food, such derangements (and they are now derangements) damage our organs and make us unhappy. The derangements are mostly sustained by our bodies, so excess impulsiveness and excess abdominal fat deposition, possibly contributing to type 2 diabetes, are now illnesses.

Michael

by M Golding on Thu, 11/17/2005 - 01:47 | [reply](#)

an intention to be a boxer is

an intention to be a boxer is a condition that will cause bodily harm if it continues

it is also a condition associated with pain and/or suffering

it is also something that can be based on internal, not external, factors (internal motivation). one could maintain such an intention on the moon, alone, and practice with a punching bag, or even without one.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 11/17/2005 - 02:16 | [reply](#)

Re: I don't think so

Nothing substantive can hang on a definition. Definitions can make it easy or hard to express certain ideas, or, at worst, cause confusion. So I do not favour any particular definition of "illness", and am willing to use any consistent terminology, provided that it really is only a definition, and not a means of smuggling in a substantive theory in the guise of a definition. For instance, I would be suspicious if someone insisted on defining a trade deficit as an 'illness' of the economy. For they would really be saying that the existence of a trade deficit justified some action by someone, such as the government, to 'cure' it. And if that were true, I would expect that to be arguable with or without that terminology.

In regard to criteria B and C, is it the *condition*, or the *damage*, or *both* that are required to be 'associated with pain and/or suffering' and 'not sustained by circumstances external to the person', in order to meet the respective criteria?

by [David Deutsch](#) on Thu, 11/17/2005 - 02:25 | [reply](#)

Sequeira Syndrome

"He was put on permanent sick leave after tests found he suffered "verbal hyper-productivity" and a "lack of conceptual content" in his speech."

A definition becomes a diagnosis of (mental) illness.

(Sequeira Syndrome, characterized by verbal hyper-productivity and a lack of conceptual content in speech.)

Treatment, remove the patient from all spheres of political influence.

A panel of psychiatrists will decide when and if the patient has regained the necessary capacity to resume speaking and conceptual thinking. (If ever, since Sequeira Syndrome once diagnosed is apparently a 'permanent' condition.)

See the problem?

We should all become very afraid. (Or am I just Paranoid?)

by a reader on Thu, 11/17/2005 - 03:42 | [reply](#)

hair length

Here **is a blood test** for cholesterol. i wasn't recommending a test to determine how much is too much, just how much is there.

if he thinks his hair is too long, then his hair length is a problem. i'm not sure what you hope to gain by deciding if it's an "illness" or not.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 11/17/2005 - 04:25 | [reply](#)

Blood Draws?

Elliot

1. How much is too much cholesterol? You said, "more than the person wants to have"

So is "too much" cholesterol an illness, by your standards? How is it a more real illness (if you think it is an illness) than the psychiatric illness bipolar illness?

2. How does showing me a site about collecting blood for cholesterol measurements say anything about the reliability of cholesterol measurements (they are reliable but...). What is the point of showing me the site? I can measure hair length with a ruler but what does that mean?

You said, "Diagnosing cholesterol levels involves well i imagine a blood test or something. The psychiatric diagnoses I'm skeptical of don't use a physical test like that, so they are different."

Blue is a different color than red. But what is the relevance of the difference to this discussion? We are talking about whether or not speaking to someone and observing him is somehow a less valid way of making diagnosis than measuring blood tests. I think (?) you are saying that you are "skeptical" of psychiatric diagnosis, as opposed to diagnoses made by blood tests (is that true, otherwise

what does "skeptical" mean in this context?).

How does it help your argument to point me to a site that tells about drawing blood? If speaking to someone and observing him allows a physician to make more accurate predictions than drawing blood, why is that knowledge any less powerful? What does that have to do with how to draw blood?

You began the discussion by saying you are "skeptical" of psychiatric diagnosis. Presumably you are skeptical for a reason. Why do you think blood tests help doctors more than talking to patients and observing them, in making diagnoses? Both blood tests and observing people and talking with them make diagnoses. If you don't think that blood tests are more valid than speaking to someone or observing them in many situations, then what was the point of saying that you are "skeptical" of psychiatric diagnoses? Forgive me, but again, how does it help in the slightest to point to a site about drawing blood? Noone is disputing that blood can be drawn, Elliot!

3.

a. An intention to be a boxer is a condition that will cause bodily harm if it continues (OK)

b. It is also a condition associated with pain and suffering (Don't quite agree. An intention to be a boxer is overall not associated with pain and suffering. Overall, I think the boxer is usually happy to be a boxer and chooses it, given that he fully understands the risks involved)

c. It is also something that can be based on internal, not external factors...

[No, I don't agree with this at all. Damage to the body (from the intention to box) is sustained by internal factors. I should have been more clear in specifically saying in part 3 of a working definition of illness that "damage is sustained" by factors internal to the person.

It is the damage to the body that is sustained by internal factors Witness Muhammed Ali. He is no longer boxing. Yet he is still injured. The injury is sustained in the body, independant of the environment. So the environment (the boxing) is not the illness, the damage to brains and bones is.]

So no, boxing does not meet the criteria given above for illnesses.

But a profound susceptibility to the measles virus would be an illness because

1. It is a condition that predictably causes harm to the body
2. It predictably causes pain and suffering
3. The damage caused by the susceptibility interacting with the virus, is sustained by the body, at least for a relevant period of time if not indefinitely, by the bodies own (patho)physiological properties.

Intention to Box -- not an illness

Susceptibility to Measles -- an illness

Michael

by M Golding on Thu, 11/17/2005 - 06:12 | [reply](#)

Not paranoid, just confused

To the "Sequeira Syndrome Reader"

Many (?most) diagnoses in medicine are definitions. How do we define elevated cholesterol or type 2 diabetes? (Hint..definitions)

What damage to organs does Sequeira syndrome cause?

What is the genetic transmission of this illness?

What parts of the brain are damaged by this illness?

Are descriptions of the new "illness" better accounted for by other concepts?

What other illnesses are co-morbid with it?

Don't think these questions have been answered? Don't worry.

Michael

by M Golding on Thu, 11/17/2005 - 06:22 | [reply](#)

I still don't see what you ho

I still don't see what you hope to gain by classifying things as illnesses or not.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 11/17/2005 - 08:00 | [reply](#)

If you don't wish to know....

"How can you tell which people are ill?"

Elliot

by M Golding on Thu, 11/17/2005 - 12:14 | [reply](#)

Hokey-dokey then,

Will somebody, fellow sequestered sequeirians, please tell me which ones of the European Union political management suffer from the dreaded scourge of (mental)illness and to what degree?

Hint. Answering the above is probably irrelevant.

For none, all, or a only a fewm, partially, it apparently makes little difference for the price of euros.

Mental health diagnosis debates in the political realm are obviously

just so much political maneuvering. **The World** provides an excellent example.

If it was a real illness diagnosis process it wouldn't make the news, oh perhaps the popular science page, small column. After all, little is duller or more ill advised than the practice of public psychiatry. Political theater on the other hand, that makes the news all the time.

by a reader on Thu, 11/17/2005 - 22:44 | [reply](#)

Confusing!

Michael,

It seems to me you shift your way of reasoning when it comes to Susceptibility to Measles. I can replace Susceptibility to Measles with Intention to Box in your reasoning and I don't see a change in the truth value of the statements. What is wrong with:

"But *a strong intention to box* would be an illness because

1. It is a condition that predictably causes harm to the body
2. It predictably causes pain and suffering
3. The damage caused by *the intention to box leading to interaction with punches*, is sustained by the body, at least for a relevant period of time if not indefinitely, by the bodies own (patho)physiological properties"?

Having thus challenged your definition, I have to say I think what we would wish to do with our definition, or better to say theory, of illness is far more important than the definition/theory itself. It seems to me that is the most important aspect of the story told by **The World**. That is, what do we want to do if we accept that Intention to Box, or Susceptibility to Measles, is or is not an illness.

by Babak on Sun, 11/20/2005 - 04:41 | [reply](#)

I see your point

I see your point and will respond more fully later. But I still don't agree that intention to box meets the criteria.

Briefly I would agree that a remarkably strong propensity to risk taking behavior could be an illness, but a propensity to box is not. Subtle but important difference.

For strong propensity to risk taking behavior to be an illness, one would have to demonstrate, for example, a strong genetic propensity to develop this condition.

Intention to box is not an internally based condition like propensity to develop measles, since "intention to box" is so culturally dependant, whereas propensity to develop measles is not.

Marked propensity to risk taking behavior could be an illness if appropriate and detailed studies demonstrated its important contribution, obviously given cultural context, to organ damage and

if this damage causing ability is developed because of internal factors (like genetic propensity to extreme risk-taking behavior)

Similarly an elevated cholesterol level could be considered "elevated" or not elevated because it would predict different outcomes given cultural context (like how much exercise people do on average).

Or a propensity to develop measles could be considered an illness depending on the prevalence of the measles virus.

by M Golding on Mon, 11/21/2005 - 20:21 | [reply](#)

When a psychiatric diagnosis

When a psychiatric diagnosis is mistaken, how is this mistake typically discovered?

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 11/21/2005 - 21:33 | [reply](#)

Genetics and the Mind

Michael,

What kind of studies are there that could determine a "genetic propensity to extreme risk taking behavior"?

In case of say eye color, or measles there is a theory that explains how the features could be derived from the genes. A theory that can be tested with evidence including statistical results.

But in the case of behavior do we have such a theory in the first place? I doubt it if mere statistical results prove anything in this respect. maybe a high risk-taking tendency, or any other "abnormal" tendency, in an individual has arisen from a very personal experience in the person's life that would seem trivial in another person's view, given his background and experiences. How can you tell?

by AIS on Fri, 11/25/2005 - 06:47 | [reply](#)

Same Way

One determines genetic propensity for psychiatric illnesses the same way one determines a genetic tendency for type 2 diabetes, hypertension, or other illnesses defined by people, for which we do not know the cause.

We use identical twin studies, studies of fraternal twins, observational studies, accidents of nature and the environment, etc. (e.g. fraternal twins thought to be identical twins raised together and apart, etc.) to determine genetic and environmental

contributions. From this information we can determine the

approximate genetic propensity for type 2 diabetes, idiopathic hypertension, and bipolar illness.

Michael

By the way, I have grouped in my definition of "illness" (for simplicity) two slightly different concepts.

The distinction does not change the substance of the argument, but the repeated (interesting) questions you are asking require that I be a little more specific.

Tendency to develop an illness such that the "average environment" would make things more difficult for the person and more likely cause organ damage and pain and suffering is technically called a "developmental disability" (Propensity to illness, caused internally, is really criterion 1 above) .

Examples of developmental disabilities would be Aspergers syndrome. We all would have "Aspergers" if we were living in an alien culture on a different planet where we had not naturally evolved the ability to interpret an alien's social cues. But the state Asperger's itself is not considered an illness because there is no necessary organ damage if the environment perfectly cooperates with the person with Aspergers.

The development of the brain is different in those with Asperger's, but the brain does not deteriorate absent adverse interaction with the environment. Asperger's is comorbid with genuine "illnesses" because the environment rarely cooperates so well, so those with Aspergers often do develop illnesses.

For congenital deafness, some would consider it a developmental disability (but not an illness), and most would consider deafness neither an illness nor a developmental disability. It's not an illness because most people would consider the "damage" to the brain/ear to not be "damage" at all, since the organs for hearing are not needed.

In some peoples view, the ability to hear denies the so-called "normally hearing" individuals, natural access to a deaf culture that is richer than their own hearing culture!

In other words most (particularly in the deaf community) do not consider anything "wrong" at all when someone has congenital deafness. The deaf community often thinks its culture is as rich or richer than anyone elses, so 1. there is no pain and suffering 2. no damage to a "needed" organ, and 3. with the appropriate community, no increased risk of damage to needed organs of the body. Hence, no illness or disability is associated with congenital deafness, from this perspective.

To the extent that a congenitally deaf person had to live in an "average" community that hears (without peers and without accomodations), then deafness would probably become a "developmental disability" but not an "illness" until an organ is

damaged and the damage is maintained from within the body and is

associated with pain and suffering. Then the organ damage (itself) would be the illness.

Propensity to measles, propensity to bipolar illness, most congenitally low IQ's , propensity to diabetes, etc., are technically considered "developmental disabilities" since the organs are not damaged (particularly in childhood) until the "average" environment interacts with the disability. In a developmental disability, physiological development is considered different in a way that can potentially damage organs, but the condition itself does not damage organs, absent environmental reaction.

Most people don't use "developmental disability" language much any more and lump everything together as illnesses, but I thought it might be helpful to make these distinctions given the discussion.

If someone lost an arm, after it healed, it technically would not be considered an "illness", either. It would not be a developmental disability either, but rather (if it interfered with functioning), it would be considered just a plain "disability". The damage to the arm did not come from an internal source.

Propensity to "box", is a cultural phenomenon, but propensity to extreme risk taking behavior could have a strong genetic propensity, although it is not a recognized developmental disability at this time. Notice that in some environments, a given genetic propensity may be a developmental disability, but not in other environments, where the same genetic state may confer advantages.

The propensity to develop diabetes may be a disadvantage in this culture, but an advantage in cultures in which food is scarce. People argue whether attention deficit is an illness or a developmental disability. It seems to have properties of both. And in some environments (e.g. where intense activity and exploration are useful) less frontal lobe mediated "attention" (i.e. "attention deficit") may be beneficial.

Like attention deficit disorder, sickle cell trait could (arguably) have both characteristics. It could confer very modest disadvantages in terms of oxygen carrying capacity, so possibly could cause a propensity to ischemic organ damage, especially in a culture of marathon runners. But in certain environments (e.g. where there is endemic malaria) it could be an advantage because of protection against the parasite causing malaria. So sickle cell trait could be a developmental disability and possibly cause an (ischemic) illness in a culture of marathon runners, but an advantage in an environment filled with endemic malaria-causing parasites.

Attention deficit disorder (relative, particularly right-sided, frontal lobe deficits) could similarly lead to damage to the brain from stress when such children must sit in class for prolonged periods of time. (Our educational systems are notoriously unsympathetic to those with attention deficit disorder!)

On the other hand, in environments where intense activity and

exploration are needed, a relative "attention deficit" could be an advantage. So both attention deficit and sickle-cell trait are potentially developmental disabilities, can lead to organ damage that is sustained from within, or can be potentially beneficial.

Thanks

by M Golding on Mon, 11/28/2005 - 18:26 | [reply](#)

Real Illness

"Nothing substantive can hang on a definition so I do not favor any particular definition of illness."

David Deutsch

This comment is quite confusing to me, and perhaps you would be willing to help clear up the confusion!

You have said that mental illnesses are "superstitions". You have attacked a charity that is trying to help those stricken with these illness (Rethink) by saying that the charity promotes "worthless superstitions."

(Why are you trying to hurt charities? I don't think that if this became more public, you would be helping Rethink's fundraising!)

You have said that mental illnesses are "fictional" and "nonsense" and that this mental illness "nonsense" is an "abrogation of intellectual and moral standards."

After using the word "illness" repeatedly in your condemnations of mental "illness", now you say that you do not "favor any particular definition of 'illness'!"(sic). So what does the word "illness" mean when you use it, since you certainly use it frequently? And why are you unwilling to give us your definition of how you are using the term? This is confusing.

Since you specifically call mental illness "fictional" and "fake", must you not have a conception of what a "real" illness is?

by M Golding on Mon, 11/28/2005 - 19:53 | [reply](#)

Twin Studies

How do twin studies, or any of the other studies, control for environmental factors? Even all subjects being raised by the same parents in the same house wouldn't come very close.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 11/28/2005 - 20:25 | [reply](#)

As I've Said Before

"In the absence of specific known mechanisms connecting gene

products to particular outputs from the brain, how would genetically based mental illnesses exhibit their polygenetic characteristics to investigators?

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Schizophrenia, and Bipolar Illness all have 1. High monozygotic:dizygotic ratios. 2. Low Sibling risk 3. High first-degree relative risk 4. Predictable but non-specific pathophysiology of a relevant organ (e.g. brain) 5. Cause pain and suffering

A. These results are exactly the results that are mathematically predicted for illnesses with polygenetic origins in which the specific pathophysiology has not been discovered.

B. These are exactly the results found in polygenetic illnesses of multiple organs in the body, in which more exact genetic mechanisms have been ascertained.

C. There are no cases that have been discovered in which illnesses which were consistently found to have the above 5 characteristics were found not to be genetic in origin.

D. Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Schizophrenia, Bipolar Disorder, and Major Depression all have the above 5 characteristics.

E. Would it not be odd if these illnesses were the only illnesses of thousands (with the above characteristics) that turn out not to be genetically based?"

The mathematics of polygenetic diseases leaves no reasonable doubt that these illnesses are genetically based.

Michael

by M Golding on Mon, 11/28/2005 - 22:36 | [reply](#)

Michael, If the math fits

Michael,

If the math fits perfectly with the theory genes are involved, that in no way differentiates between the following two possibilities:

A) genes cause mental illness

B) genes cause other things that aren't mental illnesses. for example, one might cause an infant to smile less, which causes the parents to treat him differently, etc etc I am not advocating the infant smiling explanation. That is just one example of an infinity of explanations in this class. I'm simply pointing out the math in no way indicates A over B.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 11/29/2005 - 03:39 | [reply](#)

Math Fits

Elliot,

I don't see the difference between A) and B). I take it that "etc etc" is simply a more attenuated explanatory string that results in, for example, obsessive compulsive disorder? Or, did the failure to smile result in a completely different outcome?

by **Michael Bacon** on Mon, 12/05/2005 - 02:12 | [reply](#)

Difference

The difference between (A) and (B) is what the genes code for. In one case, they code for a mental illness. In another, they code for not-smiling, and culture does the rest.

The etc etc resulted in whatever the mental illness in question is, thus giving us an alternative explanation for that particular mental illness.

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 12/05/2005 - 02:26 | [reply](#)

Definition of illness

After using the word "illness" repeatedly in your condemnations of mental "illness", now you say that you do not "favor any particular definition of 'illness'"!(sic). So what does the word "illness" mean when you use it, since you certainly use it frequently? And why are you unwilling to give us your definition of how you are using the term? This is confusing.

Since you specifically call mental illness "fictional" and "fake", must you not have a conception of what a "real" illness is

I am not objecting to the prevailing use of the term illness because I think I have a better definition. I am objecting to a prevailing argument that justifies certain behaviour (e.g. forcibly drugging children for disobedience) via an insistence on calling certain mental states illnesses. If the behaviour really were justified, this could be argued without insisting on that terminology. Symmetrically, I would have no objection whatever to calling mental illnesses (or trade deficits) illnesses, if this were not used as a fallacious justification for behaviour that would otherwise be considered wrong.

by **David Deutsch** on Mon, 12/05/2005 - 03:03 | [reply](#)

Difference

Elliot,

Then, in our hypothetical, can we agree that if a statistically

significant sample of people with a specified gene disorder develop obsessive compulsive disorder, it could, in theory, be caused more directly by the gene, with fewer steps, than the "infant smile explanation," which requires other environmental and perhaps even biological processes? I agree that either explanation, and other explanations of similar classes, could be more or less true. Nevertheless, it is a good research approach to target human illnesses and try to locate genes that have a major impact; it should be encouraged. This is a far cry from the very real abuses David emphasizes, which should never be tolerated.

by **Michael Bacon** on Mon, 12/05/2005 - 03:26 | [reply](#)

Difference

Michael,

Just looking at the math, it could in theory be completely, directly, genetic, or only in the most indirect way. The math doesn't tell us.

I agree that research looking into genes is worthwhile. I was just arguing with the proposition that it must be genetic because of the math.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 12/05/2005 - 08:10 | [reply](#)

Illness

I think what David means (I mean to clarify it) is that an "illness" is something to be cured (by drugs, etc). So if you label something an illness, it sounds like you're justifying drugs *by using that label* instead of by a real argument. Other than that, he doesn't particularly care about definitions.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 12/05/2005 - 08:11 | [reply](#)

Illness

David,

So is type 2 diabetes not an illness if children are forcibly drugged to treat it?

Since children are forcibly treated for diabetes, does that mean that diabetes is "fictional", "fake", and a "superstition" and that you should attack charities helping individuals with diabetes?

David,

Since children are forcibly treated for diabetes, is belief in the

existence of diabetes "nonsense" and an "abrogation of intellectual

and moral standards"?

The words in quotes are your exact words in describing mental illness. If the absence of force is what defines something as an illness, then diabetes (and strep throat) are not illnesses, because children are forcibly treated for these on a daily basis.

By the way David, if you think that type 2 diabetes is different from say, bipolar illness or schizophrenia in philosophically relevant ways, I think it is time for you to share your reasoning.

A response to Elliotts argument about genes is forthcoming.

Michael

by M Golding on Tue, 12/06/2005 - 17:31 | [reply](#)

Name Calling But No Definitions

"...If the behavior really were justified, this (forcing medical procedures) could be argued without insisting on that terminology (that mental illnesses are illnesses)"

David Deutsch

Of course that is true, David. We are 100% agreed on that.

But we still have a problem.

Somehow you think it is a legitimate intellectual tactic to use hate-words to describe a phrase ("mental illness") that has meaning to a larger audience. To refresh your memory, you call mental illness a "worthless superstition". You say that mental illness is a "fiction" and "nonsense" and the concept of mental illness is an "abrogation of intellectual and moral standards." Then you refuse to define the word illness?!

Any fair-minded reader recognizes that it is wrong to hurl epithets at something and then refuse to define what you are attacking.

Michael Golding

by M Golding on Tue, 12/06/2005 - 23:16 | [reply](#)

Re: Illness

So is type 2 diabetes not an illness if children are forcibly drugged to treat it?

[...]

"...If the behavior really were justified, this (forcing medical procedures) could be argued without insisting on that terminology (that mental illnesses are illnesses)"

David Deutsch

Of course that is true, David. We are 100% agreed on

that.

Let me, therefore, guess what the above question, formally about terminology, is substantively about. I guess it means "should children with type 2 diabetes be forcibly drugged to treat it?"

Is that correct?

by **David Deutsch** on Wed, 12/07/2005 - 02:02 | [reply](#)

Not in the Slightest Correct

No.

You are the one attempting to link the concept of illness to force in treating illnesses.

To my mind, they are completely separate discussions. Comparing a belief in creation "science" to a belief in mental illness and saying that both are fictional, false, moral abrogations etc. says nothing obvious about when it is reasonable to restrict freedoms. Childrens freedoms are restricted all the time, rightly or wrongly, by doctors and parents when children are, for example, given shots for diabetes or strep throat against their will. But we don't write long articles repeatedly calling strep throat a fake and fictional illness, and we don't say that the concept of strep throat is a moral and intellectual abrogation!

Instead (if you are a TCS person), you say it is wrong to coerce children. But you don't attack bacteriology. That makes no sense.

There is a difference between the concept of coercion and and the concept of illness.

Concept A. Strep Throat. Diabetes.

Concept B. Putting someone in jail. Forcing a child to take a shot for strep throat or diabetes.

These are obviously different ideas and I think most reasonable people can see the difference.

For all I know, I agree with you about when coercion is reasonable but mostly unreasonable. I would be happy to have a separate discussion with you about when coercion is justified, and I am happy to never use the word illness in that discussion.

I do, however, object to name calling, especially with no intellectual rigor to support your vituperation. Others on "**The World**" have tried to show why "mental illnesses" like bipolar disorder are somehow not in the same category as say type 2 diabetes. In my view, they have been unsuccessful, but at least they have tried.

You, David, on the other hand, continue to hurl epithets, and refuse to distance yourself from the comments that you have made (that the concept of mental illness is a "superstition" and "fake" and "false" and a "moral and intelluctual abrogation"!) And you have supported your assertions with absolutely no evidence whatsoever.

And it is even more wrong to continue to hurl epithets at the

concept of mental illness while refusing to define your terms! That makes what you say impossible to falsify. So even from your own Popperian perspective, your comments are not in the slightest scientific. They are therefore expressions of pure ideologically-based hatred. They are anti-scientific.

"Intellectual and moral abrogation"
Indeed.

Michael Golding

by M Golding on Wed, 12/07/2005 - 16:34 | [reply](#)

Two Separate Issues

Manufacturing guns can be good. For example, during World War II the Allies manufactured guns in order to use them to defeat the Nazis. However, people may also use guns badly. So if somebody manufactures guns to ship them to the Iranian gov't this is bad.

People may use ideas in good and bad ways too. Whatever you or I may think of the ordinary use of mental illness, this particular use of the idea of mental illness is wrong and motivated solely by a stupid political ideology. This is a separate matter from the criticism of the idea of mental illness. If people were to use the Turing Principle to try to justify communist terror famines on the grounds that the world is can be simulated by a universal computer and so the communists thought they could simulate exactly who they should kill to produce a perfect society that would be a political misuse of a scientific idea. Do you think that the EU used the idea of mental illness appropriately?

I do not think psychiatrists have experimentally tested theories other than their own and so that their claims to scientific status are wrong. I also think that the idea of mental illness is philosophically untenable. You disagree with me. My claim is that people behave badly because they have bad moral ideas or false factual ideas. These ideas do not necessarily reflect discredit on a person who holds them anymore than they reflect discredit on a Palestinian schoolchild who has never been taught anything other than hatred of Israel and chants anti-Semitic slogans. I define illness as an objective chemical or structural abnormality of the human body that is deemed undesirable. Abnormal bodily conditions may be caused by behaviour without causing such behaviour, e.g. - adrenaline does not cause running but people who run will have high adrenaline right after they have stopped (of course, this is not an illness, but it is different from how the person's body is normally), or people who drink a lot may have bad livers without their livers making them drink. Now suppose that in a double blind trial doctors could look at a chemical test or a scan of a person's body or could see a physical defect in an organ at autopsy and that from this they could diagnose a mental illness, then my position would be refuted. Note that this cannot be a test for damage to the body caused by the behaviour of the person with the purported mental illness that is deemed to be a symptom of that illness, e.g. - slashed wrists are not evidence of schizophrenia, as it could also be explained if the

person was so sad he wanted to die because his girlfriend dumped him or he was going to be put in prison for theft or whatever. Such a test has not been conducted. My position is testable but has not been tested.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sun, 12/18/2005 - 16:10 | [reply](#)

Objective Measure

I define illness as an objective chemical or structural abnormality of the body that is deemed undesirable.

Alan Forrester

Alan,

How do physicians/scientists define "objective chemical" or "objective structural" abnormality?

How do physicians and other medical scientists measure degree of objectivity of a measurement? Do you know?

What makes something deemed "undesirable". Is brown hair an illness in someone who does not want brown hair, just because the color brown can be (relatively) reliably measured?

Michael Golding

by [M Golding](#) on Wed, 12/21/2005 - 21:28 | [reply](#)

OK

You say that psychiatric diagnoses are "subjective" in the above post. What do you mean by that? What do you mean by "objective" medical results, when you call psychiatric tests "subjective"? How do physicians determine the relative objectivity of a diagnosis or measurement?

On what basis do you think that a psychiatric diagnosis in a person is not falsifiable? How odd (if you believe that).

If I check 10,000 lab tests on you, an average of 500 will be flagged as outside the range of normal. In medicine, what makes something "abnormal"? If you "deem undesirable" any or all of the strange lab values, do you have 500 illnesses?

If someone complains of visual scotomas, horrible one-sided headaches with extreme pain, then complains he can barely see (out of one eye) for 5 minutes, says the back of his head hurts horribly (on one side), does he have an illness, though this pattern happens frequently and all medical tests and exams are completely normal, except what the patient reports?

If a patient presents with what appears to be bizarre posturing and a physician tells you the persons behavior and history is that of someone with torticollis, and all lab tests are normal, does he have an illness?

No. The EU did not use the idea of mental illness correctly.

Why is a fasting blood sugar above a certain value an illness, but a behavioral pattern with known (but not specific) organ damage, not an illness?

Michael Golding

by M Golding on Wed, 12/21/2005 - 23:21 | [reply](#)

Objective and Subjective

An objective structural or chemical abnormality is an structural or chemical abnormality that exists in the real world as opposed to in a person's imagination only. It is an abnormality that a doctor of pathologist could find in principle by looking at the results of tests like X-rays, blood sugar and perhaps some information about the person's physical features like height, weight and so on. In practise this may be difficult and I'm sure doctors have ways of doing it of which I am not aware.

People deem abnormalities to be undesirable if those abnormalities have properties that people don't like, such as if they cause death. Of course, deeming something undesirable is non-objective. However, that doesn't stop a particular sign that indicates an illness from being objective, just as data about a large lump of rock heading for Earth that will destroy human civilisation could be entirely objective although particular interpretations of that fact would not be, such as people saying that the end of civilisation is good or bad.

By contrast psychiatric diagnoses in the DSM are phrased entirely in terms of the behaviour of patients and not at all in terms of objective chemical or structural abnormalities. People may fake behaviour deemed typical of a mental illness and there is no way to tell whether the illness is "genuine" by the DSM's own criteria, so it can hardly be deemed objective. I recall reading a [paper](#) on an experiment concerning psychiatric diagnoses.

I will not answer vague hypotheticals, especially when you have left out a lot of the relevant information (false positive rates and so on).

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sun, 12/25/2005 - 14:47 | [reply](#)

Medical and Psychiatric Diagnoses -- The Same Entity

1. The DSM assumes complete knowledge of medical history, physical exam history and careful laboratory examination before any diagnosis can be made. To assume otherwise is simply factually false.

2. People fake all kinds of illnesses. I have personally provided psychiatric consultation to a team of other physicians who discovered too late that they were treating someone for cancer with chemotherapy. But the person did not have cancer. And the person died of the effects of the chemotherapy. Knowledgeable patients easily scrape and otherwise alter the physiology of tissue samples to create false positive results. Doctors then fail to analyze correctly

the samples. Blood chemistries are easily altered by behavioral means; for example exercise raises white counts and platelet levels. Responses to stress easily change blood sugar and sodium levels.

I have treated a person who was diagnosed as deaf for 20 years, and who had multiple medical diagnoses of a faulty immune system, all created by her own actions (for example injecting of stool into her blood). And she was not deaf, as it turned out. There are no doubt hundreds of patients diagnosed with all variety of illnesses that are entirely faked.

The migraine headache that I was describing in my previous post is a very dangerous type of migraine. The diagnosis is made purely by patient reporting of symptoms and careful observation by physician. A person could attempt to fake this illness, as some do psychiatric illness, but these arguments apply to psychiatric illness as well as other illnesses. Failure to properly evaluate and treat this type of migraine headache can lead to blindness or death.

The diagnosis of steroid-induced psychosis (as well as multiple drug-induced psychoses) are made completely by history and by behavioral observations, and failure to diagnose this can lead to multiple physiological and behavioral dangers as well as death.

Tardive dyskinesia is caused by exposure to older neuroleptics. The diagnosis is made entirely by history and behavior but it is known to be caused by exposure to certain medications. People can die of tardive dyskinesia, for example, if their airway becomes affected.

3. What some readers may not be aware of is that all diagnoses, whether psychiatric illness or other illness, are made by what someone says or by their behavior, in addition to known specific or non-specific damage to organs. Pain and suffering is a necessary component of all illnesses, or they would not be considered illnesses. Dead people, like stones, are not considered to be diseased.

4. People develop a "fatty-streak" in their arteries (the very beginning of heart disease) when they are 10 years old. The "angina syndrome", due to partial blockage of a coronary artery in addition to patient reports of pain during exercise or during psychologically stressful experience is diagnosed and treated to some extent based on the report of pain itself (Why?) Because reports of pain help to predict outcomes and because we want to relieve suffering. This is true in both psychiatric and other types of illness.

Alan, the paper cited in the paper you cite studied a population of 12 and was done in the 1950s, decades before the era of modern diagnostic psychiatry. In contrast, modern reliability studies have looked at thousands of patients and controls.

Major psychiatric syndromes are as falsifiable and reliably made as other illnesses in medicine. Their cause is as known or unknown as most other complex syndromes for example heart disease and cancer. Indeed there are multiple causes of all of these illnesses.

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Denazification Today

One of the wisest decisions taken by the victorious Allies in 1945 was to occupy Germany and Japan for long enough to destroy by force those aspects of their culture that had made those countries dangerous. In Europe the process was known as **denazification**. Among the measures taken were some that would have been immoral and unconstitutional if they had been enforced in any of the countries in the Anglo-Saxon tradition. These included:

- Infringements of freedom of speech, expression and peaceful assembly, such as forbidding political parties espousing Nazi ideology, the uttering of Nazi slogans, and the display of Nazi symbols.
- Retrospective jurisdiction (as in the Nuremberg trials, where people were punished, and even executed, for actions such as crimes against humanity, that were perfectly lawful at the time when they were committed).
- The imposition of new constitutions.
- The reform of the Shinto religion, including the suppression of certain interpretations of it.
- What would today be called 'collective punishments' – for instance, forcing entire populations to visit concentration camps in order to witness what had been done in their names, and forcing groups of people against whom no crime had been proven to undergo education in human rights and democratic values.

The justification of these measures was the same as the justification for fighting the war: self-defence. The justification for inflicting them unequally on different nations was that different nations posed different threats. As the political cultures of those countries improved, the measures were gradually relaxed. Japan was granted sovereignty in 1952 and Germany in 1954/5. However, even after sovereignty, some of the measures remained in place, and a few are still in place today. For instance, Germany and Austria have laws against Holocaust denial and other 'hate speech'. This is a good thing, for the political cultures of those countries still contain significant traces of the features that, within living memory,

came close to destroying civilisation. Suppressing those features by

force is still right and still necessary.

Therefore we rejoice that **David Irving in Austria** and **Ernest Zuendel in Germany** face jail for Holocaust denial. Denying the Holocaust is, in those countries, inseparable from their violently dangerous political traditions. In advanced countries such as Britain, the United States, or Canada, there are no comparable traditions. So in such countries, we oppose 'hate speech' laws other than for speech that threatens or incites violence.

Wed, 11/23/2005 - 05:26 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

David Irving

Davis Irving is British, but is being tried for things he said in Austria. What if he had said the same things in Britain and they had been taped and transported to Austria? Surely they could have the same effect, but would have to be legal, right?

by GS on Wed, 11/23/2005 - 16:56 | [reply](#)

Holocaust denial=promotion of violence?

A society which accepts that human beings are fallible does not jail people for believing the wrong facts.

I would be willing to debate the World whether it is justified to outlaw hate speech, anti-semitism, nazi-parties, approval of the holocaust, etc. in Germany. **The World** has a point there, though I'd probably still disagree for various reasons.

But to equate holocaust denial with anti-semitism, hate speech or some other such vice per se is, I submit, a grave mistake. Though statistically many holocaust deniers are anti-semites, there is no logical link between the two. It is perfectly possible for a decent non-anti-semetic none-hateful non-violent civilized person to believe the gas chambers did not exist. Indeed, there are many such people, though they probably form a minority among holocaust deniers. I think they are *wrong*, but those who disbelieve the holocaust in good faith are not *bad*.

The question of whether or not the holocaust happened is a historical and scientific question and it is paramount that these issues be debated freely. Closing debate only promotes holocaust denial, because when debate is closed there are no opportunities for criticizing holocaust denial. And any mechanism which does away with open debate and criticism of bad theories will severely slow down the growth of human knowledge.

There is no difference in principle between outlawing creationist theory, pseudo-science, paranormal theories and holocaust denial. Holocaust denial should be allowed for the same reason all those other views should be allowed: criticizing established theories is a sine qua non for progress, science and civilisation. Can you imagine what would happen if it were a general rule that criticism of theories everybody knows to be true were outlawed? Scientific progress

would come to a grinding halt. The earth would still be the center of the universe.

I would also like to repeat here what I **commented before**:

I agree with the World that it's not helpful that the Belmont Club links to a Holocaust-denying website. However, I disagree with the last reader that it's bad to sympathize with people who are mistaken. Any person in favor of scientific freedom and a free and open exchange of ideas should sympathize with Holocaust deniers, especially those who are persecuted and jailed in countries such as Germany and Austria, and the fact that Amnesty International does not defend those people is a scandal. Remember Voltaire's dictum: "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." Also remember that criticism and open debate of mainstream ideas is vital for the progress of science, even if that also means you'll see bad quality criticism from time to time. So although I do not believe the Holocaust deniers are right, I do sympathize with those of them who are well meaning and not motivated by anti-semitism.

See also my other comments on that page. Sending people to jail because they approve of the holocaust is something I would not approve of but I don't think it's outrageous to do so. But I *do* think it is outrageous that people are sent to jail because they hold *incorrect historical views*. If that were right then all of us should go to jail, because all of us are sure to have been mistaken at some point about some historical or scientific fact.

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Wed, 11/23/2005 - 17:36 | [reply](#)

Good post. The sausage-eat

Good post.

The sausage-eating Hun always needs a bit of censorship.
Thank God we're so much better than them!

by a reader on Wed, 11/23/2005 - 17:44 | [reply](#)

holocaust denial

Henry,

In your mind, is there a "logical link" between believing the protocols of the elders of zion and anti-semitism? Could one be purely factually mistaken about those?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 11/23/2005 - 20:34 | [reply](#)

Eugene Volokh has a thoughtfu

Eugene Volokh has a thoughtful post on this subject. I tend to agree with him.

http://volokh.com/archives/archive_2005_11_13-2005_11_19.shtml#1132249807

by a reader on Wed, 11/23/2005 - 21:45 | [reply](#)

Re: Eugene Volokh has a thoughtful post

Eugene Volokh does not address the issue addressed here. Instead, he addresses the issue of whether "the government" should or should not "ban advocacy of a historical position". By assuming that there is a single yes/no answer to this, right for all governments at all times, he unwittingly falls into extreme utopianism. None of his arguments that such banning "does more harm than good" even apply in the real-life situation, where Holocaust denial is legal in the United States but not in certain European countries. And conversely, if his line of reasoning were valid, it would have ruled out the original denazification project as well.

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 11/23/2005 - 22:20 | [reply](#)

Surprises

I am often surprised by the World, reading a topic and then finding it is not really about what I thought it was about.

While the scourge of Holocaust deniers is a worthy subject at any time, I am much more interested in why and how post WW II Germany and Japan were changed by Allied occupation. They were positively changed, and drastically so, by occupation, and both countries have much to be proud of today. Certainly occupation was accepted by most citizens as a worthy consequence of formerly barbaric regimes, and a necessary moral imperative was strictly applied. Drastic measures were used, but for the citizens of both countries they were a welcome alternative to the death, dire deprivations and destruction of their former imperial administrations.

The point is what did we learn from these long and successful occupations. What are the lessons about post war occupations, are there any? I think so, and the most important one is to be a worthy conquerer, leave the conquered in a position to move forward to a better autonomous destiny. That, for lack of a better word, is the true "denazification". That is the true moral course.

by a reader on Thu, 11/24/2005 - 02:46 | [reply](#)

Re: holocaust denial

In your mind, is there a "logical link" between believing the protocols of the elders of zion and anti-semitism? Could one be purely factually mistaken about those?

I can't answer this question, because I don't know anything about the protocols of the elders of zion. But I would argue that the World is wrong in the following way. The world basically believes as I do that there should be freedom of speech for historical debates. Only they wish to make exceptions in very special circumstances, because we don't live in a utopian world. In the case of Germany they suggest making holocaust denial legal would do more harm than good.

First, I would challenge whether this type of utilitarianism is a good thing. I think, for various reasons I won't go into now, often principles are more important than a utilitarian balance of good versus bad consequences. That said there are extreme situations where I would agree to forgo libertarian principles for utilitarian reasons, but this is not extreme enough for me.

Second, I would challenge the theory that making holocaust denial legal in Germany does more harm than good. The theory is that making holocaust denial illegal is part of an important denazification process. There are two things wrong with this argument. First, Germany is no longer more nazi than any other country, including the US. So if holocaust denial should be illegal in Germany it should be in the US and the UK as well. Second, since as I've explained holocaust denial is not inherently anti-semitic, making it illegal in no way helps to denazify. Therefore making it illegal does absolutely no good in this regard.

A major irony is that if denazification is the goal then making holocaust denial illegal is actually a move in the opposite direction. Making the belief in certain facts illegal is in itself a nazi-method and by its own example teaches and promotes a certain aspect of nazi-ideology (i.e. the aspect of nazi-ideology which is opposed to free scientific inquiry).

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Thu, 11/24/2005 - 10:46 | [reply](#)

Is anti-zionism or hatred of

Is anti-zionism or hatred of Israel inherently anti-semitic?

Is *anything* inherently anti-semitic?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 11/24/2005 - 20:06 | [reply](#)

Re: Is anti-zionism or hatred of

Is anti-zionism or hatred of Israel inherently anti-semitic?

*Is *anything* inherently anti-semitic?*

First, let me note for clarity that I think these questions have

nothing to do with the issue being discussed here. However, that said, I'd be happy to reply.

First anti-zionism. That's easy. Anti-zionism is not anti-semitic if we define zionism with its original meaning: the proposal, starting in the 19th century, that Jews move to Palestine to remake a Jewish homeland there. There have been many people and many Jews who were or are against this idea. Mostly their argument was that it would create too much conflict with the Arabs. Many Jews have therefore argued that either Jews give up on the idea of Jewish homeland (well, they will typically support Israel now that it's there but claim it would have been better not to create it) or that they find another place (such as somewhere in Africa).

Personally I am neither for nor against zionism. I respect both those Jews who want to live in Palestine and those who do not. And I find it particularly ironic that many of the Arabs who've benefited so much from the progress and wealth the Jews developed and who've suffered so much from their own corrupt leaders, would be so opposed to Israel.

On the other hand today anti-zionisms is often taken to mean being against the right of Jews living in Palestine and for their expulsion or at least for the idea they should live under an Arab run state (where no doubt they'd be vigorously oppressed). I do think that view usually goes close together with anti-semitism: it's hard to imagine someone wanting all Jews to leave Palestine who is not an anti-semite.

Next: is hatred of Israel inherently anti-semitic? Well, that's more difficult. I don't think its **inherently** anti-semitic but it does come close. For the only way it can be non-anti-semitic is for someone to have nothing against the Jews but only hate the Jewish state. And that seems unlikely. Except for an anarchist who simply hates the Israeli state because he hates all states. But there is no rational cause to hate the Israeli state in particular, because the Israeli state is a Western style rule of law state, more civilized than most other states in the world. So then that leaves only two options. Either such a person is not anti-semitic but simply mistakenly hates Israel because he has an incorrect view of the Israeli-Arab conflict (Murray Rothbard is a good example of such a person; he actually believed all Arab-Israeli wars were wars of aggression *by Israel*). Or, what is more likely, the person is anti-semitic. In any case I do think the link between hating Israel and anti-semitism is much stronger than that between holocaust denial and anti-semitism.

P.S. I am an anarchist and therefore hate all states, but Israel and Switzerland are the two states in the world I hate least because from the way they historically arose they come closest to the ideal of a state as a voluntary organisation.

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Thu, 11/24/2005 - 23:49 | [reply](#)

Huh?

I just wanted to add my support for Henry Sturman's position (as expressed thusfar) and my bewilderment at **The World's** position.

Perhaps **The World** would like to catalog which other basic liberties (in the US and Britain) they would rejoice in seeing denied to people who happen to find themselves in places with different political traditions.

Gil

by **Gil** on Fri, 11/25/2005 - 00:58 | [reply](#)

Was denazification an injustice?

Gil: for example, under present circumstances, no one other than a few governments should be allowed to possess the element plutonium.

Gil and Henry: was the denazification programme of 1945-55 an injustice? Should the Allies have refrained from any of the actions listed above?

by **Editor** on Fri, 11/25/2005 - 01:43 | [reply](#)

What do you think is a good r

What do you think is a good reason to believe someone is anti-semitic?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 11/25/2005 - 04:10 | [reply](#)

I agree that immidiately afte

I agree that immidiately after the WWII, government action in enforcing denazification was the correct policy in order to neutrilize the widescale Nazi brainwashing among those who had personally lived under that system and were its main propaganda target, as well as some of the root ideas that manfisted themselves in teh form of Nazims.

But extending it to our days doesn't seem to be a wise course.

It is a bit analogous to the great depression. The need also arose then for government action during the time of crisis to overcome the depression and it was the right thing to do as long as it was temporary and directed specifically towards overcoming that particular problem, but since it has continued to be applied as the right thing to do to prevent similar catastrophies for all times it has generated all the usual negative effects of government interference where it is not needed. To be sure another depression as prevented but this has created huge inflations instead. It might be streching the analogy too far but perhaps something similar can be detected in this case, where Nazism has been reduced to a cartoonish evil in

the popular culture and would hardly re-emerge while antisemitism has grown in new and superficially "opposite" fronts among the leftist, the so-called anti-colonialist and pro-Palestinian sections of the society. The continuation of governmental meddling in denazification has perhaps proven to be "too effective" once Israel and the Jews are now branded as the new Nazis in the new fashion of antisemitism.

Just as in its economic counterpart, lack of trust in the power of free market—in this case the free market of ideas—has led a well-intentioned move to produce opposite results because of government interference.

It might surprise you to know how effective such Holocaust denial legal convictions have been in the hands of anti-Zionist and antisemites these days presenting them as evidence for their looney conspiracy theories.

by AIS on Fri, 11/25/2005 - 06:34 | [reply](#)

Denazification

I don't know the details of all of the denazification program well enough to say whether each of the measures was justified.

But, I'm willing to agree that in the immediate aftermath of WWII the cultures (and many of the people) of Germany and Japan were so screwed up and violent that it justified harsh treatment to allow better cultures to take hold.

However, to permanently entrench a prohibition on the expression of certain ideas seems unjustified, and counter-productive.

As AIS indicated, to prohibit the criticism of official doctrine leads many to question whether the doctrine is true and capable of being defended against criticism in open debate. It invites all sorts of underground, un rebutted, theories to spread.

And, while I agree that Germany had severe cultural problems before the war (and still has many), I think that there has been dramatic progress. There are now overwhelmingly different people there who deeply regret what happened. To suggest that expressing Holocaust-denying theories to Germans is in the same category as handing plutonium to Iranian leaders seems to make a similar mistake as the anti-semitic theories that we deplore.

Gil

by **Gil** on Fri, 11/25/2005 - 08:04 | [reply](#)

Gil, What gave you the idea

Gil,

What gave you the idea we wish to have *permanent* denazification laws?

-- Elliot Temple

Re: Was denazification an injustice?

Gil and Henry: was the denazification programme of 1945-55 an injustice? Should the Allies have refrained from any of the actions listed above?

First let me note that the denazification programme was very different from making holocaust denial illegal for two reasons: (1) the denazification programme was right after the war when there still was an important nazi culture and (2) the denazification programme was aimed at denazification while I've argued that whether or not the holocaust happened is a historical question which by itself has nothing to do with nazism. Therefore I have much more sympathy for the World's position in favour of the denazification programme than for their position on holocaust denial.

I can understand that denazification is important to prevent future wars and that sometimes it's better to use a relatively small amount of aggression to combat a greater aggression. Just as in wars we accept (or should accept) some innocent civilian casualties to fight a greater evil, so too maybe sometimes freedom of speech should be restricted to prevent a greater evil. Maybe that was the case after the second world war for the denazification programme, but I have my doubts.

I would think having lost the war and with new democratic regimes put into place, Germans and Japanese would have had enough reason to denazify and I would doubt that the denazification programme made any significant difference. Futhermore I would doubt whether one can really change people's ideas by forbidding certain parties, symbols or ideas or by forcible reeducating them by touring them around concentration camps. As far as I know the reeducation in communist China and Cambodia wasn't all that effective either.

And I think doing things such as infringing on freedom of speech sends the wrong message. It sends the message that initiation of force is good. So I'd tend to be against those kinds of things, though I do understand a case can be made for them.

As for the imposition of new constitutions, there's nothing wrong with that per se. I would judge a constitution on how much pro-liberty it is, and it makes sense that the Allies would replace a Nazi political system with a more civilized constitution.

As for the retrospective jurisdiction of Nuremberg, I can't argue with that either because as a libertarian I don't care much for legalities of state. I care about justice and if Nuremberg provided justice then I'm for it.

As an aside I do not accept there are such things as 'war crimes' or

'crimes against humanity'. I think all crimes are crimes against individuals. And we don't need any fancy confusing wording like that because war criminals can be tried for normal crimes based on normal laws such as laws against (multiple) murder, etc.

In particular I have a problem with the concept of a 'war crime' because that concept reduces rather than improves options to prosecute crimes during a war. Basically the whole idea of 'war crimes' is that things which are normally crimes are *not* crimes during war.

Normally, for example, murdering innocent people is murder, but after a war soldiers fighting a war of conquest and aggression are typically not prosecuted. So in war soldiers are free to commit crimes, except if those crimes happen to fall under the category of 'war crimes'. So the whole purpose of the word 'war crimes' is to limit responsibility for crimes committed during war. If all crimes were just as illegal during war as during peace, then we would have no need for the concept of 'war crimes' because we would simply prosecute criminal warriors for normal crimes.

So in practice that means that I think all Germans who fought voluntarily in the criminal organization called the Nazi army should have been prosecuted for, among other things, the civilians and allied soldiers they killed. As for the Germans who were drafted, that's another story. And of course I do not mean that Allied soldiers should be prosecuted for murder because they may have killed German soldiers or accidentally killed innocent people. They were fighting on the right side, on the side against oppression and mass murder, and so they were doing the right thing.

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Fri, 11/25/2005 - 17:22 | [reply](#)

Permanent?

Elliot,

What gave me the idea of the wish for "permanent" denazification laws was the rejoicing at their enforcement sixty years after the end of the war.

Obviously, I don't know (or even think) that **The World** wants them to literally be permanent, but this much time seems much closer to permanence than makes sense to me.

It seems that **The World** thinks it's still right because of the existence of "significant traces" of bad features. I wonder how anyone will know when those traces are no longer significant if their expression is forced out-of-sight.

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Fri, 11/25/2005 - 21:50 | [reply](#)

Is There A Threat Today?

Joerg Haider, an Austrian politician, Nazi sympathiser and anti-semite of today says:

When asked to comment on his parents' wartime activities, Haider remarked: "In retrospect one is always wiser. As a descendant, one should not be so arrogant as to say, 'I would have known better.'"

The wartime activities in question are their membership in and work for Nazi organisations.

In other words, Joerg hasn't learned better. He hasn't adopted new and different values. He would be a Nazi if circumstances permitted.

He is just one person. But people voted for him. To say the threat is gone, one must believe the people voting for this man are cured. Why is that a reasonable position?

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 11/26/2005 - 04:20 | [reply](#)

Threats

There will always be a threat, in every democracy, that people will elect bad politicians with bad ideas.

The more power politicians have to interfere with our lives, the more damage this can cause. So, I favor removing a great deal of that power.

But, which will make us safer: insulating ourselves from bad ideas via criminalization of their expression, or publicly combatting them with better ideas?

In America, many people have elected **David Duke** to office, and tried to elect **Pat Buchanan** (whose expressed positions and sentiments seem to me to be more similar to Haider's than Duke's do) President. Is this an argument for outlawing disfavored historical theories here?

Gil

by **Gil** on Sat, 11/26/2005 - 08:16 | [reply](#)

Henry Sturman said: Though

Henry Sturman said:

Though statistically many holocaust deniers are anti-semites, there is no logical link between the two. It is perfectly possible for a decent non-anti-semitic non-hateful non-violent civilized person to believe the gas chambers did not exist.

There *is* a logical relationship between denying the holocaust and

anti-semitism: the former is a necessary condition of the latter. Additionally, a necessary condition usually serves as an indication of a causal relationship too: If someone believes that holocaust did happen (by which it is also implied it was a bad thing), there is good reason to conclude he cannot be an anti-semite (or at least consistently so). It may not be the only cause but it can be a contributing one.

Thinking about the question, "How does someone become an anti-semite?" can clarify my point.

by Babak on Mon, 11/28/2005 - 08:44 | [reply](#)

Why do you need to deny the H

Why do you need to deny the Holocaust to be an anti-Semite? Surely you might think it was a good thing and that it didn't go far enough.

by a reader on Wed, 11/30/2005 - 13:23 | [reply](#)

Yes, you are right. I was usi

Yes, you are right. I was using a stronger condition than simply "denying the existence of gas chambers": that the gas chambers did not exist, or if they factually did they were bad. This would exclude certain anti-semites (e.g. Nazis and neo-Nazis), but leaves the major portion of them, who are deemed to be ordinary people and are the subject of the debate here, who I believe would deny holocaust only in this stronger sense.

by Babak on Thu, 12/01/2005 - 02:50 | [reply](#)

Nazi support was not created by Nazi propaganda

I would think having lost the war and with new democratic regimes put into place, Germans and Japanese would have had enough reason to denazify and I would doubt that the denazification programme made any significant difference.

Don't you remember they tried that in 1918 in Germany? They lost the war, they had a democratic regime, but they did not denazify as you would think. They über-nazified.

by a reader on Thu, 12/01/2005 - 13:56 | [reply](#)

What can societies change into?

Denazification may appear to be only stale history, but it helps us better understand how Iran, one of the few remaining countries of any heft that still publicly calls for the destruction of Israel and for the acquisition of nuclear weapons, may change.

Denazification was carried out specifically by removing those

involved from positions of influence and by disbanding or rendering impotent the associated organizations. Although legions of Allied forces initially jump-started reform, in a remarkably short period of time, historically speaking, German citizens were back in control. Although our Middle Eastern nation-building experience is still limited, it appears so far that the pace and nature of reform such as occurred in Germany will be difficult to achieve without politically untenable decisions to spend a far larger share of national blood and treasure. There doesn't appear to be much chance of a shooting war with Iran, so the West's political will won't be tested. Nevertheless, comparing the experience of Germany with our limited results, highlights the key role played by local characteristics.

China is an interesting case, broadly similar in age to Iran. Perhaps Iran can develop an Islamic society with "modern" characteristics, or some other such transitional form. What can Iran change into? The obstacles to modernity may well be less than we see in Afghanistan and Iraq, but it seems implausible that they will be as easily swept away as in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. There will be no cadre of modern Europeans to take over. This should be kept in mind as we implement our basic strategy of maximizing military, economic, political and social pressure on Iran to fundamentally change.

by [Michael Bacon](#) on Fri, 12/02/2005 - 02:09 | [reply](#)

Holocaust Denial is Fraudulent

I find the argument that Holocaust Denial ought to only be illegal in some countries and not others problematic; as someone else said, Holocaust Denial today can easily cross national boundaries. Should it be illegal to order copies of Mein Kampf from Amazon.com in Germany? Should it be illegal for Austrians to browse neo-Nazi web sites that are hosted in countries where Holocaust Denial is not illegal?

De-Nazification is justified because Nazism is a criminal conspiracy to commit mass-murder. Germany had no "tradition" of genocide against Jews before Hitler, even though it did have a tradition of anti-Semitism (what country didn't?); nevertheless, it would have been justified to ban the Nazi Party in the Weimar Republic, just as it would have been justified to ban the Communist Party. All that is needed to prove conspiracy is evidence of agreement to commit a crime and a concrete act in furtherance of that agreement.

Similarly, Holocaust Denial is a form of fraud, and fraud is not included within the scope of freedom of speech. The necessary elements of fraud include intent, misrepresentation, reliance upon that misrepresentation by others, etc., and not all of these elements are included in every instance in which someone questions whether the Holocaust happened or criticizes some aspect of it. But with the likes of David Irving, a pathological liar who lies about things other

than just the Holocaust (like in his book about the bombing of

Dresden), all of the elements are present.

Irving fits the classic definition of a Holocaust Denier: One who denies that the Nazis tried to exterminate all the Jews, but wishes they had.

by Tim Starr on Thu, 12/08/2005 - 20:39 | [reply](#)

Dangerous German Tradition?

Tim,

Could the Holocaust have happened in Britain, with appropriate evil leader and co-conspirators?

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 12/08/2005 - 21:57 | [reply](#)

A British Holocaust?

Elliot asks whether the Holocaust could have happened in Britain. My reply would be to ask: which Holocaust, and when? Could the Jews have been exterminated in Britain at the same time they were exterminated in German-occupied Europe? I don't think so, both because private gun ownership was still legal in Britain at that time (Hence Orwell's line about making sure that the rifle on the wall of the workingman's cottage stays there), and because British democracy was fairly well-established by that time.

However, if you ask the Afrikaners about the 30K or so Boers who died in British concentration camps during the Boer War, or the Irish about the Famine, I think you'll get a somewhat different answer. These incidents can be distinguished from the Holocaust insofar as they were not the result of policies that were explicitly intended to kill off all of the Boers or Irish, as the Holocaust was expressly intended to kill off all the Jews under Nazi control. Also, their death toll was lower, at least for the Boer War. (I'm not up on the figures for the Irish Famine.)

Still, although it is to Britain's credit that its political system allowed for the abolition of the Corn Laws to relieve the Irish Famine and for the freedom of protest that allowed for the improvement of conditions in the Kitchener's concentration camps in South Africa, Britain also deserves the blame for the policies which let those horrors occur in the first place.

There are earlier incidents of ethnic cleansing in British history, such as the expulsion of the Acadians from Canada, the Highland Clearances, etc., but they took place before Britain was a democracy. The suppression of the Mau-Mau took place after Britain was a democracy, but I'm not convinced of the democidal nature of that counter-insurgency (I haven't read the two recent books about it making the case that it was democidal).

Some might argue that the British perpetrated a literal Holocaust in

the aerial bombing of Germany during WWII, but I reject that argument. I believe that the aerial bombing of Germany was justified (including Dresden), although it was far too indiscriminate for technological reasons.

Tim Starr
Fight For Liberty!
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/fightforliberty/>

by Tim Starr on Mon, 12/19/2005 - 23:19 | [reply](#)

traditions

Germany did not have a tradition of genocide of Jews in particular, but it did have different traditions than Britain -- and it still does -- and they make genocide of Jews possible in Germany but not Britain.

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 12/20/2005 - 08:25 | [reply](#)

Genocidal Traditions

What British traditions make genocide of Jews impossible there today? There are three necessary elements for genocide: government, racial hatred, and the disarmament of the intended victims. Britain has at least two of those elements, government and victim disarmament. Does it truly lack the third? Perhaps when it comes to hatred of the Jewish "race," the answer is yes, but it's not difficult for me to imagine "racial" hatred against other groups being acted upon in genocidal fashion in Britain - perhaps against the Protestants or Catholics in Northern Ireland, perhaps against British Muslims as a backlash after an Islamo-Fascist terrorist attack in London, etc.

However, is racial hatred any less prevalent in Britain today than Austria or Germany? I don't know how to answer that, as I don't know how to measure racial hatred.

Tim Starr
Fight For Liberty!
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/fightforliberty/>

by Tim Starr on Fri, 12/30/2005 - 01:49 | [reply](#)

Temporary curtailment

Would such laws be better if they included a sunset clause of say 50 years?

by a reader on Sat, 05/19/2007 - 17:03 | [reply](#)

Re: Temporary curtailment

A reader asked:

Would such laws be better if they included a sunset clause of say 50 years?

That sounds like a good idea. Not so much because governments can't be trusted, but because it would make clear what the purpose of the measure was. Which might make it work better.

by **Editor** on Sat, 05/19/2007 - 18:05 | [reply](#)

Data Never Tell A Story

A widespread conceit in the fields known as 'social sciences' is that if one can attach a number to something, one has understood it. In fact, understanding has to come first, for numbers can hide facts as well as reveal them. For example, as David Henderson recently **commented** on Tech Central Station, a press release from the Commonwealth Fund makes the following claim:

"One-third of patients with health problems in the U.S. report experiencing medical, medication, or test errors, the highest rate of any nation in a new Commonwealth Fund international survey."

Presumably the Commonwealth Fund wants its readers to conclude that Americans get a worse deal from their health care system than do Canadians and Britons. And that this is because the US government is less interventionist in the health care market. And the natural moral of the story is that only the state can deliver good healthcare.

The American medical system may or may not make more mistakes: what the data really show depends on how alert the patients in the various countries are to this issue, and how inclined they are to regard something as a "medical error". But in any case, the mistakes reported in America are on average less severe than the ones in Canada and Britain. So if anything the Commonwealth Fund should have concluded the opposite.

Numbers themselves do not mandate any particular conclusion. We may count as similar things that are not at all similar, such as small mistakes and large mistakes. We can only draw reasonable conclusions from measured numbers when we classify and interpret them in the light of explanations that have been tested against rival explanations. The scientific approach entails trying to understand the facts through both one's own favoured explanation and the rival explanations. Trying to pigeonhole and control people by measuring vaguely defined numbers and interpreting them as justifications for political policy is not science but scientism and it is irrational. Political opinions disguised as scientific studies are dangerous. They do not deserve to be afforded the respect due to science.

Does the American medical system make more mistakes? What would be a reasonable view to take on that matter?

Is government intervention in medicine good? Why or why not?

by a reader on Fri, 12/02/2005 - 03:40 | [reply](#)

Rival explanation

A quick search reveals that "one in every six (U.S.) doctors has a claim brought against him or her annually".

By contrast, one in every fifty Canadian doctors face a malpractice claim per year.

Perhaps Americans are more litigious than their counterparts in the Commonwealth Fund survey. That would account for the inflated claims of medical error.

Sources:

<http://www.thedoctors.com/newsroom/issues/medmalcrisis.asp>

<http://www.medlit.info/guests/mmpcanadian/medlit.htm>

by a reader on Sun, 12/04/2005 - 17:32 | [reply](#)

Ratios

How many medical malpractice lawyers are there in the U.S. in relation to Canada, adusted for population?

Data in the form or ratios, certainly, but perhaps a co-related factor.

I remember reading once that the ratio of lawyers in the U.S. to those in Japan was some staggering difference. The Japanese public is therefore likely not litigious in much of anything. There could be a number of reasons for this. An ironic anime' would be the story of an ambulance chaser trying to make a living in Tokyo.

by a reader on Sun, 12/04/2005 - 19:38 | [reply](#)

Ratios

There are more lawyers in any of a half dozen major American metropolitan areas than in all of Japan. Here laws have developed much more fully that allow individuals to seek legal redress on a wide range of issues. This undoubtedly has a large impact on the number of claims. I also think it's safe to say that there are more medical procedures per patient than in most similarly situated countries.

by **Michael Bacon** on Mon, 12/05/2005 - 01:48 | [reply](#)

Socialized medicine's better at hiding errors

The explanation I prefer for this sort of discrepancy between

American medicine and that of more socialized medical systems is that socialized medicine is structurally better at hiding error than the American medicine. For one thing, the costs are externalized onto the taxpayers, rather than onto either the patients themselves or their private insurance companies.

Also, when malpractice occurs under socialized medicine, suing means suing the government.

A better metric to use would be the success rates for various types of medical treatments or procedures. That would tell you whether a better quality of medicine is available under which system.

Whenever I've seen that sort of data compared, American medicine has come out on top.

by Tim Starr on Thu, 12/08/2005 - 19:45 | [reply](#)

Impending Holocaust Watch – Ahmadinejad, The Genocidal Realist

Mark Steyn is in fine form, summarising the present situation: Iran is simultaneously acquiring nuclear weapons and pushing the envelope of how far genocidal antisemitism may be publicly advocated before any consequences set in. They are succeeding in both efforts: both the rhetoric of genocide and the physical preparations for it are becoming accepted in civilised circles as a routine and inevitable part of the international landscape.

[President Ahmadinejad] figures that half the world likes his Jew proposals and the rest isn't prepared to do more than offer a few objections phrased in the usual thin diplo-pabulum.

We assume, as Neville Chamberlain, Lord Halifax and other civilized men did 70 years ago, that these chaps may be a little excitable, but come on, old boy, they can't possibly mean it, can they? Wrong. They mean it but they can't quite do it yet. Like Hitler, when they can do it, they will – or at the very least the weedy diplo-speak tells them they can force the world into big concessions on the fear that they can.

The ultimate target of this international blackmail, the United States, which is also the nation that is, as usual, going to have to bear the cost of **setting the world to rights** again after that catastrophe, is for various reasons unable to act in advance to prevent it. Hence Israel is being forced into its well-accustomed stance of unilateral self-defence. Of course it would be perfectly justified in using military force to disarm Iran, as it did Iraq in 1981. Unfortunately, this seems to be impractical, since Iran has learned from Saddam's failure, and has had decades to disperse, conceal and protect its nuclear technology. An editorial by **Saul Singer** in the Jerusalem Post muses on the problem. He points out that the current international consensus of appeasement, led by the Europeans, is, as usual, bringing about precisely the events that it is intended to prevent.

He also points out that international pre-emptive action is not only permitted but mandated by the UN Charter:

If Europe, through the UN and in partnership with the

US, simply followed the UN Charter, we would be living in a very different world today. That Charter (Ch. 1, Art. 1, Para. 1, first sentence) states the UN's purpose: "To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the **prevention and removal of threats** to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace...". [Our emphasis.]

Does this ring any bells? Is there a state that is a greater threat to international peace than Iran? How much terrorism does a state have to sponsor, how many member states does it have to threaten with destruction, and how far does it have to get in obtaining the ultimate means to carry out such threats before the collective obligations of free nations under the Charter are remembered?

And he concludes with an appeal to the world, and to Europe in particular:

Join us and defend yourselves. We are not your hired hitmen; don't depend on us to save you. Take your beloved international law seriously and throw the book at Iran.

It may not be too late, with common will, to force Iran to back down without firing a shot. And if it is too late for peaceful means, that shot should be fired together, legally, in the name of international peace and security.

Indeed a united world – even just the civilised world, united – would probably be able to end the Iranian threat peacefully. But we also know, as Singer undoubtedly knows too, that the civilised world is not sufficiently civilised to do this.

Absent that fantasy solution, there is still some hope. It lies in the creative thought of three groups of people. One is the military planners of the IDF. The second is the US Administration and their strategic advisers. And the third – neglected in many analyses of this crisis – is the Iranian people. They have more to lose by failing, and more to gain by liberating themselves – now – than anyone else.

Mon, 12/12/2005 - 13:08 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Indeed

I completely agree, and as an Iranian appreciate the stance you take in this post. Indeed if such **public displays of evil**, as those of Mr. Ahmadinejad's recent and repeated ones, pass without due international action (not words) we should all be fearful of the status of our future well-being.

by Babak on Mon, 12/12/2005 - 20:27 | [reply](#)

Iran threats

It's such a tendency for us to search for solutions based on surface appearances. The Holy Spirit on The Christian Prophet blog advocates a more spiritual solution.

by **A Christian Prophet** on Tue, 12/13/2005 - 02:07 | [reply](#)

Do not underestimate him

Ahmadinejad's diatribes against Israel seem stupid, but they are also very subtle, as an Iranian dissident-analyst Farhad Ja'fari has pointed out:

He is winning a lot of Muslim support for himself and the regime, this way directing the Islamic world's public opinion to perceive any possible Western retaliation against Iranian nuclear sites as solely a defence of Israel. This way they are effectively raising the costs of a possible Western action.

At the same time they are shifting the main issue from the Nuclear weapons to anti-semitism in the world public opinion which is unfortunately very prone to disregarding anti-semitism in action (despite all the rhetoric) in contrast to the nuclear issue.

Finally they also play with the Christian anti-semitism and the preponderant conspiracy theories about the influence of Israel in American and Western policy decisions in the West itself.

Of course, just like the Nazis, they are shrewd but also mad and stupid in their own fashion. After all the real smart policy would be that of adopting free liberal society, the one thing they completely shun. This is ultimately their ruin, sooner or later. The main question is, as you mentioned, what would be the cost?

by AIS on Thu, 12/15/2005 - 05:44 | [reply](#)

Re: Do Not Underestimate Him

Those are very good points. Thank you.

by **Editor** on Thu, 12/15/2005 - 05:57 | [reply](#)

...An Important Petition

Also please take the time to read this:

PETITION

Any effort to isolate the regime is a step in the right direction.

by **AIS** on Thu, 12/15/2005 - 08:19 | [reply](#)

BBC Claims That Its Role Is To Indoctrinate Children With Political Propaganda

No, we're not exaggerating. The BBC, which is funded almost entirely by an annual grant of over £3 billion from the British taxpayer, and whose Charter requires it to remain **strictly impartial** on political issues, has proudly announced that it is putting political propaganda into its flagship children's adventure series **Doctor Who**.

A Christmas Day special of sci-fi series Doctor Who contains an anti-war message, as new Doctor David Tennant tackles an alien invasion of Earth.

"It's Christmas Day, a day of peace," said chief writer Russell T Davies. "There is absolutely an anti-war message because that's what I think."

...[In the show, the British Prime Minister] says of the US president: "He is not my boss and he is certainly not turning this into a war."

A later scene echoes former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's decision to sink the *General Belgrano* during the Falklands conflict in 1982. ... [The] Prime Minister orders the destruction of a retreating alien spaceship, a decision condemned by the Doctor.

Shameful.

Wed, 12/14/2005 - 00:21 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Shameful

"[The] Prime Minister orders the destruction of a retreating alien spaceship, a decision condemned by the Doctor."

I'm curious whether the retreating aliens correspond to any group of terrorists. Perhaps, but is that kind of wider progress really being made? The destruction of a retreating alien spaceship is of course an unusual occurrence and seems clearly warranted.

by [Michael Bacon](#) on Tue, 12/20/2005 - 03:10 | [reply](#)

Re: Shameful

As I understand it the BBC equates the retreating aliens with the sinking of the Argentinian warship the *General Belgrano* in 1983. I haven't seen the programme so I don't know why the fictional PM decides to destroy the alien ship. The circumstances surrounding the sinking of the *Belgrano* are **complicated** but I shall explain the factors that seem salient to me. The fascist Argentinian government had invaded the Falkland Islands, which were ruled by the British government and inhabited by British citizens. The British government sent aircraft carriers with planes and guns and soldiers to liberate the islands. The *Belgrano* was part of a group of warships sent by the Argentinians to help support their blatant act of aggression and the British Navy sank it. IMO, the sinking was right and mocking it is stupid and a sign of the BBC's moral decay.

by **Alan Forrester** on Sun, 12/25/2005 - 14:08 | [reply](#)

Israeli Arabs To Vote Zionist At The Next Election

An **opinion poll** in Israel indicates that 51% of Israeli Arabs who intend to vote at the forthcoming Israeli election will vote for Zionist parties. This figure should be compared with 30% at the last election.

This welcome development seems to be more due to factionalism among the Arab parties than to their voters becoming convinced of the justice of the Zionist cause. But still, it does suggest that if the Arabs in the rest of the Arab world thought like Israeli Arabs, there would be no Middle-East problem.

No, wait – yes there would. Unfortunately, in the Middle East outside Israel and Iraq, Arabs aren't allowed to vote.

By the way, only about 5% of those Israeli Arab voters say they will vote for Ariel Sharon's new party Kadima, but Druze Knesset member and Deputy Education Minister Majalli Whbee, formerly of Likud, who is now in charge of Kadima's Arab HQ, hopes to **raise this to 25%**.

Thu, 12/15/2005 - 00:46 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Ritual Torture

It is Christmas, a time at which many people celebrate the birth of Jesus, a man who was ritually tortured to death for uttering forbidden speech.

It is unclear how much of the Jesus story is true, but undoubtedly, ritual torturing to death was a horrible and widespread reality at the time. It was one of the mechanisms by which the Roman empire affirmed and entrenched the values by which it lived, namely order, deference, and obedience to authority. Such a practice is alien and incomprehensible to us. In addition to having better values, our society has utterly different, infinitely more wholesome, ways of affirming its values, does it not?

Committing suicide is a fundamental human right: if we do not own our own bodies, what do we own? Like all other rights, it is legitimate to exercise it only when this does not violate the rights of others. So the pilot of an aircraft in flight does not have the right to shoot himself if by doing so he murders his passengers. Correspondingly, they have the right forcibly to keep him alive – even if he is undergoing great suffering and is desperate to end it. Indeed, they have the right to force him, by torture if necessary, to perform his contractual obligation to land the aircraft. But the instant they have landed safely (or if they find an alternative pilot on board, or any other non-violent way of saving themselves), their right to keep him alive, or to torture him in any other way, abruptly ends.

Logically, aiding and abetting such torture – or the exercise of any other right – is also a right, since forbidding such help is tantamount to forbidding the helpless to exercise the right itself.

Whether the existing state of the law respects the right to torture in self-defence, or to aid and abet such torture, is unclear. But in most jurisdictions today it certainly does not respect the right to commit suicide, nor the right to assist in one. The justification for this position, though it has widespread popular support (just as crucifixion did in Roman times), is morally empty. It is a sort of formal obeisance to the rule that murder is wrong, in a way that contradicts the substantive purpose of that rule (which is to prevent a person's body from being used as a means to someone else's ends and contrary to his own). Nevertheless, it is supported as a symbol of our society's 'respect for life'. It is a mechanism by which

our society seeks to affirm and entrench the values by which it lives.

As part of this symbolic posturing, many people who at this moment are terminally ill and undergoing such suffering that they are desperate to die, are being forcibly prevented from doing so. That is to say, they are being ritually tortured to death.

One small further consequence of that injustice is that Dr Jack Kevorkian **is still in jail** in Michigan for trying to prevent a patient from being tortured – i.e. for assisting that patient to commit suicide. It is grimly appropriate that the Governor of Michigan has just refused to grant Kevorkian a compassionate parole. Despite the fact that he has harmed no one and is a danger to no one, and despite the fact that he himself is now gravely ill *but wants to live*, she considers it more important to leave him in the conditions that may end his life prematurely, just to set an example to other doctors whose humanity and integrity may tempt them to help their patients. She is, one might say with very little hyperbole, ritually torturing him to death.

Furthermore, note that in reality, assisted suicide is a very widespread practice. But other doctors do it discreetly and deniably. So what really landed Kevorkian in his current predicament was not so much the crime of which he was convicted, but his forbidden speech. He recklessly uttered the justifications that the others ritually deny.

May he survive his ordeal, and may he live to see the repeal of the obscene laws that he has defied.

Merry Christmas.

Sun, 12/25/2005 - 11:13 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

super awesome

super awesome

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sun, 12/25/2005 - 18:55 | [reply](#)

Well said!

That was fantastic post!

by [AIS](#) on Sun, 12/25/2005 - 21:35 | [reply](#)

Tortuous logic,

but otherwise well written and thought provoking. Sounds like that hypothetical pilot was having a rather bad day. Maybe Dr.

Kevorkian is not having such a bad day as all that, although prison

food is unpalatable; except perhaps on special holidays.

by a reader on Mon, 12/26/2005 - 23:05 | [reply](#)

Seems that the primary proble

Seems that the primary problem as even you state it is the pain of dying, not the manner of death. I don't believe you have spent much time with the dying; for if you had you would likely have found that most opt to live as long as they can if they are not in pain. Most people will hang on to the water glass even if it's almost empty. There is always that last drink.

Better pain treatment, better end of life care, better education of stupid fucking doctors on the fact that everyone dies and it is just not the losers who go, would all help many people die in peace and dignity. Health care that actually accepted that dying is not some kind of insurance scam would also help.

If a few want to opt out earlier, that's cool. Fact is most don't and never will. So your rant is aimed at the 5-10 percent who would and you miss the problems of the 90-95 percent of the population who would never take early retirement plan seriously.

The fear is yours. You are so afraid of death and dying that you are already screaming for a back door. You want it, take it. But in the end the odds are heavy that if you can lay there relatively free from pain, you will do so, and be very anxious to do so. There is always that one more visit from a loved one, that one more chance to see your grand child. That's life. And like it or not we humans cling to it.

by kalapu on Tue, 12/27/2005 - 11:05 | [reply](#)

Szasz on Kevorkian

Good article, I agree with you that a person has a right to end his life and thereby has the right to obtain assistance of others. However, as to Kevorkian, there may be some question as to whether he acted appropriately. For example, [this article](#) suggests it's unclear whether Kevorkian checked well enough that Youk really wanted to die, or might have changed his mind, before he gave the lethal injection. And Thomas Szasz also has some [interesting critique](#) of Kevorkian.

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Fri, 12/30/2005 - 00:37 | [reply](#)

Kavorkian liked to see people dead

The stoics argued that a man had the right to end his life when it became unlivable...

However, if you look at societies where such ideas reigned, you see one where the less powerful have their lives ended for them...

Doesn't matter if it is ancient Rome, Ancient Greece, the

Netherlands, Samurai Japan or what...

The dirty little secret is that euthanasia is about getting rid of inconvenient people...and give Europe ten or twenty years, and you will see them euthanizing people for economic reasons...unless, of course, sharia law takes over...

As for Kavorkian, he got his name years before he started killing people...as a pathologist, he used to visit dying people so that when he did their autopsy it would be more "interesting"...so the nurses called him Dr. Death...

by [boinkie](#) on Fri, 01/06/2006 - 23:41 | [reply](#)

re Kavorkian liked to see people dead

So what?

When Alan Turing was convicted of homosexuality, he worried that people would use the syllogism:

Turing thinks that machines can think.
Turing sleeps with men.
Therefore machines cannot think

You are using the identical logic:

Kavorkian thinks that people have the right not to be tortured.
Kavorkian liked to see people dead.
Therefore I have the right to torture people.

You have the right to use your deep insights into history and psychology to run your own life, but not other people's.

by a reader on Sat, 01/07/2006 - 02:12 | [reply](#)

Cameron For Slavery

The civilisation of the West, led by Great Britain, was the first in history to outlaw chattel slavery. We should be proud of this achievement, but not complacent. Any institution that allows one person to use violence or the threat of violence to cause an innocent person to work, is slavery, and all slavery is evil. Some forms of slavery survived long after its formal abolition. For example, military conscription is slavery. So is compulsory schooling.

Now David Cameron, the new leader of the Conservative Party in Britain, has decided that he wants to make community service for school leavers **compulsory**. He wants to *extend* the period for which the government enslaves schoolchildren. And he has descended from 'for their own good' or even 'national emergency' as the ostensible justification, to '*servicing others*'. In other words, from convincing oneself that the institution is something other than slavery to the insolent self-righteousness of the pre-Enlightenment slave owner who has never for an instant thought to doubt his ownership of the lives and persons of other human beings.

The Liberal party (then known as the Whigs) were at the forefront of the anti-slavery movement in the late 18th and early 19th century. Today their nominal heirs, the Liberal Democrats, have abandoned all trace of liberalism (in the original sense of advocacy of liberty). They make no exception in regard to slavery. Their leader Charles Kennedy

responded to the plan by saying the Liberal Democrat Youth Taskforce was already exploring a similar scheme.

"David Cameron wants to portray himself as a liberal but needs to be careful to attribute his 'ideas' to those who are genuinely doing the fresh thinking," he said.

Young people were forced into National Service in Britain from 1939 to 1960, so this idea is about as fresh as a fifty-year-old barrel of fish. Moreover, it is grotesque that politicians are now fighting over who is more 'liberal' by claiming ownership of the abomination.

Mr Cameron said that this scheme stemmed from the Party's belief in "trust and responsibility". Obviously Mr Cameron does not trust

young people with responsibility for their own lives. And we do not

trust him to use power responsibly.

Fri, 01/06/2006 - 11:39 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

The government enslaves school

The government enslaves schoolchildren? What exactly is your definition of slavery? I thought school was optional.

by a reader on Sat, 01/07/2006 - 06:34 | [reply](#)

In My Words

Forcing children to do school, among other things, "for their own good", is, at least explicitly, about helping them (to overcome their innate wickedness).

Forcing children to help others is about, at least explicitly, exploiting them for labor.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sat, 01/07/2006 - 09:04 | [reply](#)

Children

While I generally agree, I wonder about the importance of any correlation between significant intrusive parenting and the long adolescence characteristic of our species. Perhaps there is some advantage at work.

by [Michael Bacon](#) on Sun, 01/08/2006 - 00:34 | [reply](#)

advantage?

I am hard pressed to imagine an advantage to keeping people from fulfilling their potential by societal habits. Isn't adolescence a construct of society? Once a person develops the ability to reproduce, aren't they really an adult? We have created ways for people to not reproduce- that is societal- so that people can spend more time learning and growing before taking on the responsibilities of parenthood, but it is possible to have babies and continue to learn and grow, with support which is better if it respects autonomy and is not of the 'significant intrusive parenting' variety, babies or no.

by a reader on Wed, 01/25/2006 - 17:16 | [reply](#)

Adult?

Once a person develops the ability to reproduce, aren't they really an adult?

So a sterile person can never 'really' be an adult?

It is fallacious to try to extract moral information from biological categories in that way.

by **Editor** on Wed, 01/25/2006 - 17:32 | [reply](#)

Adult?

Isn't biology destiny, to some extent? Isn't morality inescapably intertwined with this destiny?

How to define "adult"? We can do so biologically- where "sterile" is an aberration from normal biological development- and we can do so through societal construct.

I suppose the societal way is by law, to decree when one is adolescent (and thus justifiably subject to significantly intrusive parenting, including the nanny state schools) and then the transformative moment when one becomes an adult.

I don't want to dismiss the possibility out-of-hand, but I am wondering about the possible advantage that Michael Bacon speculates exists, to the extension of the intrusion of authority into adolescent lives.

by a reader on Sun, 02/05/2006 - 15:05 | [reply](#)

Deterrence

President Chirac of France, under pressure to justify the expense of the French nuclear deterrent, today **revealed** that French strategic missiles have been reconfigured to allow less-than-devastating retaliatory strikes. He also declared that the use of these weapons will be among France's options if "regional powers" should sponsor terrorist attacks against France.

On the face of it, this is a robust announcement and a sensible increase in France's military flexibility. But its underlying philosophy nevertheless dates back to the Cold War, and may be completely useless against the "regional power" against which it is primarily directed: Iran. Solomania recently invited us to consider the **500,000 plastic keys** that Iran imported from Taiwan in the 1980s, and what they were used for. Thus it may be that all Chirac has done is inform the criminally insane leadership of Iran that (1) no action will be taken until *after* any devastating terrorist attack; (2) 'deniable' attacks will provoke no response; and (3) any response will be strictly limited and therefore ultimately survivable (by the regime).

With Iran, there is no substitute for prevention. However, France is unlikely to suffer any consequences for this logical defect in their defence posture, because of the strategic ace of trumps that Chirac did not mention because he did not need to: *France will not be the first target* of any mega-attack, nuclear or otherwise. By consistently distancing itself from the United States' and its allies' war on terror, and from Israel's self defence, France hides behind those countries.

Thu, 01/19/2006 - 13:35 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

Explain Please

France is making a mistake by being unwilling to join Britain, the US, Israel, and other countries in advocating military action to preempt nuclear attack.

But how does making weapons with "less than devastating" effects, in addition to having weapons with "devastating effects", prevent France from being willing to preempt nuclear attack?

Isn't the issue that French leaders seem not to have the moral fiber

to aggressively attack terrorism. Flexible military responses are good. Perhaps the US and Britain, if we do not have such capability, should get this ability, as well.

I honestly don't understand how a flexible military prevents preemptive attacks. How are these concepts related?

by a reader on Fri, 01/20/2006 - 15:45 | [reply](#)

Re: Explain please

As we said, having a more flexible military is a sensible thing. Unfortunately, for the reasons we gave, the measure is unlikely to have any effect, particularly when combined with France's established policy of always waiting to be attacked first ('deterrence') and always opposing the United States and its allies.

The US and Britain do have such capabilities – as does France: this was a relatively minor adjustment.

by [Editor](#) on Fri, 01/20/2006 - 16:34 | [reply](#)

So your point is that France

So your point is that France is pretending to help by making announcements about deterrence, but these announcements serve as a smokescreen that obscures their actual inaction.

by a reader on Fri, 01/20/2006 - 20:44 | [reply](#)

France

It is precisely the point that France understands that it hides behind the front line countries. It mistakenly hopes that by appeasing Iran it will forestall attacks. It hopes to make more likely an outcome where "France will not be the first target." This tactic is primarily short term -- an attempt to buy time for the social dislocation associated with the recent riots to subside. In all likelihood events are going to pass them by and force another difficult choice sooner rather than later.

by [Michael Bacon](#) on Tue, 01/24/2006 - 03:45 | [reply](#)

hiding

i was looking through the CIA world factbook today and noticed south korea has a 20bil military budget while north korea has 5bil. so why does south korea need our help, exactly? *sigh*

-- Elliot Temple

Now Blogging Again

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 01/24/2006 - 06:56 | [reply](#)

Off-topic reply to Elliot.

Counterintuitively, a simple numbers to numbers comparison of military budgets is not a valid comparison of the two Koreas relative expenditures and efforts. NK has a GDP of 40 billion. Therefore, if the 5 billion number is to be believed, 1/8 of all NK expenditures are defense related. In comparison, South Korea has a GDP of close to one trillion. 20 Billion is only 2.5% of their GDP. Further, North Korea has a standing army of close to 1 million, in a nation of less than 25 million. Keep in mind also that, as North Korea is a Communist nation, their expenditures are necessarily going to be lower than South Korea's for similar items. Trade unions do not exist, nor does competitive bidding or rapacious defense contractors. South Korea doesn't have a vast army of enslaved people upon which to draw for "free" labor.

Those things being said, I think that it would be a good idea for every country where the US still has a military presence, Korea, Japan, Germany etc. to shoulder a larger share of their own defense burden instead of shifting it onto the back of the US taxpayer

by [dpatten](#) on Tue, 01/24/2006 - 15:34 | [reply](#)

Leftist Bias Of Right-Wing Bloggers

Elliot Temple has **detected** some crude anti-capitalist assumptions, normally associated with the left, in much of the recent right-wing criticism of Google's deference to the Chinese government.

Sat, 01/28/2006 - 11:53 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Ah, yes, the evil talk. Isn't

Ah, yes, the evil talk. Isn't it just so clear who the evil is in this saga? Is it any wonder that when a corporation is trying to do business under the rules of the Big Brother, who the evil really is? It is the Party, not Google. Google is playing the game. That may be a mistake, but not evil. Google's mott is "do not be evil" not "fight the evil". *We* must fight the evil, but not with Google, the corporate; but with Google, the search engine.

by Babak on Sat, 01/28/2006 - 19:56 | [reply](#)

Who is Big Brother?

So Google isn't evil, they're just following the rules of Big Brother. And Google doesn't have to fight evil, only 'we' have to fight evil. But who is Big Brother, and who is 'we'?

That Chinese official who told Google what to do, is he Big Brother? No. He's just someone following the rules of Big Brother. So is his boss. And his boss. So you say it's not their job to fight. And his boss, and so on up to the President. There is no Hitler or Stalin at the top in China, there's no one who can give the order to stop, and no one whose job is to fight.

On the other hand, who is 'we', who you say do have to fight? Readers of this blog? All good people? Wouldn't that include Google executives? And Chinese officials?

By the way, I agree with the post they linked to. I'm asking these questions seriously, not rhetorically.

by a reader on Sat, 01/28/2006 - 22:31 | [reply](#)

Re: Who is Big Brother?

FWIW I think your questions are good, and that questioning

whether Google did something wrong is perfectly legitimate.

I don't have a full answer, but I have some pieces:

It is OK for Google to trade with China in general. This is not like selling them weapons. They could even use Google already if they wanted.

What is worrisome to me is that Google is doing some of the enforcement of censorship for China. Note: I'm not sure how much work Google is really doing for China in this way, because they must already have code to censor results (they do it for rare things in other countries I've read). If the code is already there, turning it on may have been trivial. Still, lending the Chinese access to some of the power of Google's code matters (China is worse at writing code. Free people make better creative products.)

If Google wanted to fight China, I'd cheer for them, but I don't see any requirement that they do. They are making the world better just by providing search. In fact, they help enable the lives of other people who do want to fight against China. (To clarify what I mean, grocery stores also count as helping enable our China-fighters.)

Something we don't know is how committed Google is to working with China, or how ready to pull out if China starts demanding more things. When I try to imagine myself in charge of Google, I would not be very scared to work with China as long as stopping was a good option (if China demands more, or the original stuff turns out more problematic than expected). By trying it, Google can learn more about whether this is good to do. On the other hand, if it was hard to stop, or I feared I'd lose control of the company to people who Don't Get It soon (including if I happened to die and the next people in line were dumb), I'd be much more inclined to stay away.

-- Elliot Temple

Now Blogging Again

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sun, 01/29/2006 - 01:43 | [reply](#)

Impending Holocaust Watch

Mere Rhetoric comments on the alliance between the genocidal terrorists of Hamas and the genocidal government of Iran:

The nightmare scenario has now become a reality that could happen in half a year: Iran will get a nuke, and they will give it Hamas. Hamas will smuggle it into Gaza, then into the West Bank, and then into Tel Aviv.

Of course, that is only one of several modes of attack open to Iran. Defences exist, but none is even remotely reliable enough to risk millions of lives on. A determined nuclear attack will succeed.

Millions of people will die. No doubt, the State Department and European diplomats will express their "concern" and "shock" about the "unacceptability" of this act. Who knows – maybe they'll even threaten to impose sanctions on Iran.

Actually, they won't, because at that point, two things will have changed from the present situation. One is that Iran will both possess nuclear weapons and have demonstrated a propensity to use them in a way that neither the best defences nor the most resolute deterrence could prevent. Hence half-measures will no longer seem plausible. Only the most abject appeasement or all-out war will have any supporters. The other is that the world will no longer be able to hide behind Israel. Jews – the world's perennial canary in the coal mine – will have duly died in vast numbers in order to deliver a final warning to civilisation. Civilisation will heed it, or not. Either way, the estimate of 'millions' dead in the aftermath is absurdly optimistic.

Today, before all that happens, there are still some other options left. Unfortunately, none of them can be guaranteed to be entirely peaceful. Unfortunately, too, the pathetic British Foreign Minister has ruled them all out in a single sweeping remark: **Straw rules out threat of military action against Iran**. Fortunately, the **people** and **government** of the United States are not that stupid.

Sun, 01/29/2006 - 16:37 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Stephen M. Walt

In my opinion we are being played, and rather effectively at this

point. The Iranian president is skilfully prodding the U.S. with the nuclear power stick, using Israel as an unwilling shill and winking at other countries that would like to see us as fools exposed. The U.S.A. is the big bad Goliath of nuclear power who holds all the weapons and all the peaceful means of uranium production according to this scenario. Taunts and goads and sniggers, wink wink.

Effectively done to the peril of the entire world, Iran is playing its cards as would David with the deadly slingshot.

For a perceptive view of our stumbling response, playing Goliath all too well, and to add some deft ideas of nimbleness for big feet, you might read "Taming American Power: The Global Response to U.S. Primacy". It helps to see our scripts through the eyes and agile danger play of the little guys.

by a reader on Sun, 01/29/2006 - 21:31 | [reply](#)

We are being played rather effectively

So, the Iranian leaders are just pretending to be genocidal lunatics even though they are not, in order to provoke a stumbling response and expose 'us' (not including you, presumably) as fools. Is that correct?

by [Editor](#) on Sun, 01/29/2006 - 22:56 | [reply](#)

We are being played

Genocidal lunatic or not, and I think not, the president of Iran is playing this card rather effectively. All of us, including me, are fools if we do not study in some depth what this man is trying to do with his rhetoric and his actions. He has managed to capture a world audience on our media dime and the english speaking world among us is only some of his audience. Remember too this might be one of the student captors of the U.S. hostages during the 1979 fiasco that suddenly resolved itself after the presidential election.

Fool me once. I do take the political maneuvers of these language games seriously. The point is to read carefully all the public statements and the internal histories to see the strategies which are definitely diplomatic ones, crazy and dangerous as they may be. Watch the players, including Russia, China, as well as the muslim world. Remember that David was the little guy, not unlike the role this guy would scheme to play.

by a reader on Mon, 01/30/2006 - 02:11 | [reply](#)

Re: We are being played

Genocidal lunatic or not ...

So you say he has fooled us (possibly including you) into believing X about him, whereas in reality, X is not true of him and Y is. Could you clarify? What are X and Y?

You misunderstand?

It is not about him but rather the questions of where he seeks, gleans and gains his rising power from. I do not know what you believe about him or if that is directly relevant to this discussion, though genocidal lunatic sounds like too easy a label to me. Nor is it that we are fools. You may have misunderstood my point.

This is about hearing fully the intents of the rhetoric which obviously have several different audiences and how to deftly blunt and parry those effects. There is a long history to this and especially various turns of power, religion, and secular influence over the last 35 years within Iran, not the least of these the devastating war with Iraq. Iraq is no longer a threat to Iran, and the current Iranian regime sees an opportunity to gain regional power and influence, perhaps be the leader of the Shia Muslim world and a broadened Arab power base.

If we are to better understand these shifts and factions and influence them to our own best interests we must not let the current regime, as represented by this so-called genocidal lunatic, play their best hands. David unto David, or several Davids with Israel among them will need to take skilful action.

We all need to take a new and careful look at strategies, military action and diplomatic alliances among them. The U.S. and in this case Israel must not stand alone or appear to act alone. Read the book for at least one different perspective, and definitely study the events and influences of the last 35 years within the region and Iran. As to rhetoric, read it at face value but also look for the layers of power broking and multiple intents within.

This is not about fools, it is about perceiving unified strategies and evolving skilful actions which are directly suited to these rapidly changing and therefore dangerous and opportune times.

by a reader on Mon, 01/30/2006 - 17:09 | [reply](#)

Re: We are being played

You have said that we are being 'played'. Does that not entail our being deceived by the player?

by **Editor** on Mon, 01/30/2006 - 19:26 | [reply](#)

Still a Threat

The Iranian leader is likely trying to strut about on the world stage in order to enhance his credibility. Yes, when the US takes his bellicosity seriously, it enhances his credibility amongst fanatics.

But this motive of the Iranian leader does not preclude Iranian

production of a nuclear weapon which can be smuggled into Tel Aviv. Whether fanatics are more drawn to Iranian leaders or not because of US condemnation, the United States, Israel, and all free peoples must prevent the explosion of a nuclear weapon in Tel Aviv, at virtually any cost.

Western Europe and the United States are next.

by a reader on Mon, 01/30/2006 - 23:14 | [reply](#)

Straw's an ass

What he should have said is, "We are trying to negotiate a peaceful end to this dilemma so that the Americans don't settle it for us." I have no problem with my country being used as the stick to get someone to accept the carrot. We call it "negotiating from strength" and it's been successful in the past. To bad one idiot took it upon himself to piss it away.

by a reader on Fri, 02/10/2006 - 14:42 | [reply](#)

Iran's Last Chance

Iran has been given its **last chance to comply**, Britain's Foreign Minister Jack Straw sternly warned today:

Mr Straw said an agreement between Britain and the other five permanent members of the United Nations security council that any action against Iran should be delayed until March gave Tehran the opportunity to come back into compliance with western demands.

It will also give them the opportunity to continue their nuclear weapons programme. Which will they choose, and why?

By coincidence – or perhaps it was some sort of clerical error, Iran was also given its last chance in November 2005: **EI Baradei: Give Iran 'One Last Chance' Before Sanctions:**

The decision to refer Iran to the UN Security Council could come on Thanksgiving Day, when the IAEA Board of Governors has its next scheduled meeting to discuss "new information" discovered by inspectors in Iran, the officials said.

EI Baradei discussed a potential "face-saving" deal European negotiators could offer Tehran during meetings with U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in Washington

Iran's previous last chance had come in October 2004: **Iran Given Final Nuke Chance:**

Giving Iran one last chance to avoid the threat of U.N. sanctions, Britain, France and Germany will offer nuclear fuel and economic incentives at a meeting Thursday in return for assurances the Tehran regime will suspend uranium enrichment.

This followed their earlier last chance in September, 2003: **Europe and US united in tackling nuclear Iran:**

the US ambassador to the UN in Vienna, told the board: "The facts already established would fully justify an immediate finding of non-compliance by Iran.

"We have taken note, however, of the desire of other

member states to give Iran a last chance to stop its evasions."

How will Iran respond to the world's consistent and united stand?
And how will it respond to the next last chance it will receive, in March 2006?

Wed, 02/01/2006 - 14:31 | [permalink](#)

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Britain Fails The Town Square Test

Islamists have been displaying their customary **rage**, this time ostensibly over the publication of cartoons in a Danish newspaper, Jyllands-Posten, that depicted the prophet Mohammed. The cartoons were mildly satirical; one of them implied that Mohammed would be a suicide bomber, or at least approve of them, if he were alive, and another depicted a cartoonist being terrified to draw Mohammed. It should be noted that:

- No comparable Islamic rage has ever been expressed when Islamic media worldwide publish the same allegations with approval. Nor when Islamic political leaders do the same – for instance the Hamas government of the Palestinian Authority, or the leaders of Iran.
- None of the cartoons in any way incited violence or hatred. You can see them [here](#), and if you do, you should compare them with the incitement documented [here](#).
- Adherents of Muslim religions are of course free to adhere to their religious prohibition against making images of Mohammed. But they have no right to require this of adherents of any other faith or atheists. Making and displaying such images is a fundamental human right. Nor is it in any way immoral, or even insensitive, to exercise this right.
- According to some commentators (we are not experts on the theory and practice of Islamic law), this prohibition is not always enforced with great zeal in Muslim countries, even fanatical ones. It is worth looking at this [collection of images](#) of Mohammed through the ages, none of which has caused riots or threats of murder.

When asked about the cartoons, the foreign minister of one country praised his own press for not re-publishing the cartoons, and **bitterly attacked** the media in other countries for doing so:

"Re-publication of the cartoons has been unnecessary, it has been insensitive, it has been disrespectful and it has been wrong."

In that same country, Islamists protested outside the Danish embassy. Many of them carried signs making death threats all those who "insult the Prophet". Two counter-demonstrators, protesting in favour of freedom of speech, carried cartoons of Mohammed. The police arrested those two. None of the people

carrying signs inciting violence were arrested.

The country in question was Britain. This is bad news. The demonstrators were, as the Conservatives have said, unequivocally and perfectly seriously committing **incitement to murder**. The victims are quite rightly **terrified and in hiding**. Failure to prevent or punish the crime of incitement to murder, especially when committed in a political context, is poison to a democracy. Britain is already failing Sharansky's **town square test**.

Sun, 02/05/2006 - 12:53 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

I imagine this lot are the Da

I imagine this lot are the Daily Mail readers of the Muslim world. They just love to be pissed off at something. Further, I think the bother would have gone away if not for media naval gazing. If someone is complaining about a use of free speech, don't film or write a report on them.

I feel sorry for the cartoonist(s). All this attention, and they were pretty crap. To have your life threatened over satire is one thing. To have it threatened over such piss poor satire is quite another.

But that's religions for you. I understand Christians were joined by a few Muslims protesting Jerry Springer: The Opera. Praps that's who issued the death threats there, too.

On the other hand, a moment's reflection would tell those who reprinted the pictures that it would only mean more trouble. Free speech, yes, but I can make plenty of arguments for it (and defending it) without wearing a 'Moses/Jesus/Mohammed/Buddha Is A Cunt' t-shirt.

by Kid eh on Mon, 02/06/2006 - 01:33 | [reply](#)

Brave Men

Here is a link to an interview with 3 very brave Muslem men, former terrorists, one of whom says that it is too dangerous for him to live in Britain because he believes he would be attacked by fellow Muslims for daring to condemn terrorism (he now lives in the United States).

by a reader on Mon, 02/06/2006 - 23:49 | [reply](#)

Re: Brave Men

Indeed, they are brave and decent men, bearing witness to something important. Readers should watch the video. **This** eyewitness report by IsraPundit of another event attended by the same three men (who are apparently no longer Muslims) is also interesting.

by [Editor](#) on Tue, 02/07/2006 - 00:40 | [reply](#)

When will the free world finally wake up?

I completely agree. It is a shame that the appeasement continues in the face of such blatant and shameful fascism.

Here is another good article written by a muslim Iranian woman.

Your links about the former terrorists was amazing. It is awesome to see people stand up and return to humanity from the edge of darkness.

Thanks.

by **AIS** on Tue, 02/07/2006 - 06:46 | [reply](#)

Download Video

If you want to save the interview linked above to disk, the file is located at: shoebat.com/media/cn8_2006_01.wmv

-- Elliot Temple

Now Blogging Again

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 02/07/2006 - 16:35 | [reply](#)

Some relevant linx

<http://forum.newspaperindex.com>

<http://www.filibustercartoons.com/archive.php?id=20060204>

http://www.zombietime.com/mohammed_image_archive/

[http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?](http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=5&article_id=21654)

[edition_id=10&categ_id=5&article_id=21654](http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=5&article_id=21654)

<http://www.muslimrefusenik.com>

<http://www.iranian.com/Azizi/2006/February/Cartoons/index.html>

<http://tinyurl.com/dl2dm>

<http://suralikeit.com>

<http://www.apostatesofislam.com/>

<http://www.faithfreedom.org/>

<http://www.secularislam.org>

<http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/theism/islam/>

<http://islamreview.org/>

<http://www.geocities.com/freethoughtmecca/islam.html>

by Solan on Tue, 02/14/2006 - 11:24 | [reply](#)

Norway

The Norwegian government's lack of spine has had one interesting consequence: The people themselves are growing spines! Norway has had a law against blasphemy since before the 1814 constitution, and now people are suddenly starting to realize what such a law protecting religious intolerance means. So ... it seems it will go away. Wahoo!

So the net result of this whole incident may indeed prove to be positive, because most people realize how silly it is to burn embassies over drawings as innocent as these.

I tried to send you a bunch of good URLs on this some days ago,

but your "spam filter" must have eaten them. Please check the spam bin.

by **Solan** on Fri, 02/17/2006 - 08:31 | [reply](#)

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A Coincidence

According to a poll, one in five Americans **believe in alien abductions**.

The National Institute of Mental Health **estimates** that one in five Americans experience mental disorders during any one year.

We are sure this is a coincidence.

Wed, 02/15/2006 - 03:21 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Coincidence?

It is presumably not purely a coincidence: both groups rounded their numbers using the same convention of what numbers to round to.

-- Elliot Temple
Now Blogging Again

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 02/15/2006 - 11:19 | [reply](#)

Aliens being abducted

Well, I believe aliens are being abducted in Iraq. Or do you mean aliens as in from other planets? Oh well, what should we care if those aliens are abducting each other, as long as we humans are left alone. It's only time to get worried when we start hearing reports of human abductions.

BTW, the existence of alien beings has been proved beyond reasonable doubt. You see, the distinguishing characteristic about aliens is that they are very good at hiding and hence completely undetectable to us primitive humanoids. Now has someone ever really seen an alien? Absolutely not. From the very fact that we have not been able to detect aliens, by way of induction it is confirmed that there are indeed undetectable aliens out there. For had they not been undetectable, surely we would have seen them. So their invisibility exactly proves the fact that invisible beings exist.

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Wed, 02/15/2006 - 14:16 | [reply](#)

Either, or

One in five experience mental disorders in any one year.

Either it's the same one in five, in which case the science of psychiatry is ineffective, or nearly ineffective.

Or it's a random one in five, in which case most of us are mentally ill for about a fifth of our lives.

Or some combination of those.

The results of the other study suggest it's always the same one in five. Therefore psychiatry is ineffective.

by a reader on Wed, 02/15/2006 - 15:45 | [reply](#)

Damnable Aliens

One in five Britons believe in alien obstruction.

The other 80% have no problem with the prospect of protological exam.

God save the Queen.

by a reader on Sat, 02/18/2006 - 23:35 | [reply](#)

Velostat instead of aluminum foil.

Stop alien abduction.

by **EW1** on Mon, 03/06/2006 - 03:29 | [reply](#)

Isn't it about 1 in 5 who bel

Isn't it about 1 in 5 who believe in Creationism and who want to outlaw abortion as well?

by Solan on Wed, 03/15/2006 - 08:44 | [reply](#)

Physicists?

Probably about 1 in 5 physicists believe that there are billions of David Deutsch's in parallel universes!

by a reader on Mon, 03/20/2006 - 22:31 | [reply](#)

Re: Physicists?

Fewer than one in ten, would be my estimate.

Of course, the other nine also believe in alien abductions, so draw your own conclusions ;)

by **David Deutsch** on Mon, 03/20/2006 - 22:57 | [reply](#)

Irony or just more dumb Americans

The statistics read that more than one in five Americans believe in God, So I'm presuming that a good many of these Christians claim to be abducted by Aliens? I guess anytime ever wouldnt be a great time to tell them that their faith is now so questionable, that it would be more logical to worship the Almighty ET, than God.

by Emma Flavell on Tue, 03/21/2006 - 00:39 | [reply](#)

Physicists Abducted in Multiverse

Single Universe physicists believe aliens abduct (shadow) photons, but not physicists.

But multiverse physicist believe aliens abduct human physicists (in certain universes) but not photons!

by M. Golding on Thu, 03/23/2006 - 19:40 | [reply](#)

Who Tortured The Host? Who Are The Enemies Of Islam?

To modern perceptions (though certainly not to those of people at the time) one of the most bizarre forms of antisemitic blood libel popular in the middle ages was that of **torturing the Host**. According to this, Jews would break into churches at night and torture the consecrated communion wafers (known as the Host) which, according to the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, are literally the body of Christ. As the Jews hammered nails into them, the wafers would scream and bleed. The Jews would be delighted that they were crucifying Jesus yet again, and would use his blood, which had magical properties, for nefarious purposes. Many Jews were themselves tortured and executed for this crime. None ever committed it.

Since this myth was an exclusively Christian manifestation of antisemitism, what does it have to do with the idea of the 'enemies of Islam'? On the face of it, nothing.

Yet the underlying logic is similar. In order to believe that Jews torture the Host, one must first believe that Jews *know* that the Host is literally the body of the living Jesus. But that is tantamount to their knowing that the Catholic religion is true. And indeed, the idea that The Jews *know that Christianity is true but wilfully reject it* was itself a staple of Christian antisemitism. It is a conspiracy theory that would require Jews to be lying about their own religious beliefs, in a way which, as we have discussed [here](#), would have made it impossible for those beliefs to be propagated to the next generation. The Host-torturing libel was even more incoherent because it implied that Jews were materially relying upon, and risking their very lives in order to witness, a miracle predicted only by a rival religion and contradicting their own. Unfortunately, philosophical incoherence has seldom been much of a handicap when it comes to religious doctrines.

Today, the Islamists' narrative in regard to the 'enemies of Islam' is as follows. First of all, of course, Islam is the true religion. It is also destined to spread to every nation on Earth. Why? Because that is what God in His omnipotence has willed. On a level playing field, this spread would happen rapidly and peacefully. Unfortunately, the leaders of other religions, and the demonic leaders of the West, know this and are afraid. They seize upon (or invent) every possible excuse to kill Muslims, weaken and subjugate Muslim nations, and

sow mindless hatred of Muslims among the ignorant masses of their own countries. That makes those leaders 'enemies of Islam', and Muslims are obliged by their religion to respond violently to them. In this holy war, Islam is destined to prevail.

To Western apologists for Islamist violence, some of that narrative is familiar and congenial. The inherent violence of the West, the baseness of its motives, its guilt and responsibility for the evils of the world, the explanation of history as being driven by a grand conspiracy among its 'rulers', and the fraudulent nature of its apparent success, are all themes of the basic left-wing narrative too. However, the leftist apologia for Islamist violence is that it is caused by Western oppression, and that the Islamists' specific beliefs are a mere rationalisation for their desperate lashing out: a different indigenous culture would have resorted to similar violence but attached different words to it. But to the Islamists themselves, their religion is not an 'indigenous culture' but the unique, universal truth. Their violence is a focused and moral response to a coordinated attack *on their religion* which was caused by their enemies' knowledge that that religion would otherwise sweep the earth.

But in reality their 'enemies' have no such knowledge. No one, other than Muslims, has believed anything of the sort for several centuries now. After all, the Islamic religion, which at its height managed to overtake Christianity in terms of numbers of believers, nowadays stands at closer to half, with the majority living in jurisdictions where the mildest criticism of it is savagely punished and converting to a different religion carries the death penalty. To a believing Muslim, it is not relevant that the Islamic empire passed its peak over five centuries ago, nor that Islamic nations are decades or centuries behind Western ones in terms of wealth, military power, scientific progress, cultural creativity, and every other measure that is conceivably relevant to which of them is likely to become the global civilisation. In modern times it simply does not occur to anyone without faith in Islam, that Islam will peacefully sweep the world unless it is violently stopped. But Islamists pathologically assume that it is a fact known to everyone, but opposed by the wicked, just as believers in the host-torturing myth thought that some of the supernatural attributes of Jesus were known to, but opposed by, Jews.

In reality, medieval Jews cared nothing about the doctrine of transubstantiation, and therefore did not, in reality, lie awake at night obsessing about the Host – until, presumably, it began to be used as a pretext for murdering them. Likewise, President Bush and Mr Blair do not lie awake worrying about who is going to convert to Islam next. Indeed, they were entirely unconcerned with Islam – until September 11, 2001. Just as it was sheer fantasy that medieval Jewish religious practice centred around the truth of Christian doctrines and a desire to hurt Jesus, so it is sheer fantasy that fear of the peaceful spread of Islam, and a grand historic plan to hurt Muslims, are at the heart of Western leaders' political

philosophy. But unfortunately, as incoherent fantasies go, both of

these are exceptionally nasty and dangerous ones.

There are, no doubt, some enemies of Islam who wish to spread some other religion – perhaps because it, too, contains a supernatural promise that it must inevitably triumph – or who are simply bigots. But they are of no significance in world events. Who tortured the Host? No one. And the 'enemies of Islam' in the sense envisaged in the Islamists' narrative simply do not exist either. There are only people who fear the Islamists' unjustified, conspiracy-theory-driven violence.

Note: For further thoughts on the relevance of the Host-desecration myth to present-day political issues, see [this](#) interesting article.

Sat, 02/25/2006 - 15:08 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

"Since this myth was an exclu

"Since this myth was an exclusively Christian manifestation of antisemitism[...]"

How do you infer that this is a consequence of antisemitism? Is burning a witch a sign of antisemitism? Or killing a hairy man, supposed to be a werewolf, a sign of antisemitism? And how come you have such an "exclusive" point of view? Tell me the truth, do you like to label things more than anything in your life? Or is it one of your greatest pleasures in life? You know, we have so many doctors who treat us when we are sick, maybe we should have some doctors who can tell us how to use our on capacities, both physical and mental, in a normal. It's just that the school does not suffice these most miserable days.

Go out, see the sun, watch the birds, find some friends and enjoy life (ask your grandparents how to do this, if you have no idea). You need it!

by a reader on Tue, 02/28/2006 - 17:41 | [reply](#)

Carnival of the Vanities

Thanks for submitting your post, it's listed at this week's [Carnival of the Vanities](#)

by [M](#) on Wed, 03/01/2006 - 06:20 | [reply](#)

a consequence of antisemitism?

It's not clear what point you are making, but it is certainly true that, as Bernard Lewis recently [remarked](#):

[I]t is perfectly possible to hate and even to persecute Jews without necessarily being anti-Semitic

On the other hand, if someone in good faith doubts that, for

instance, the Normandy landings were part of the Second World War, or that Michelangelo's David was sculpted as part of the Renaissance, then the most efficient thing from everyone's point of view is for that person simply to learn more about the war or the Renaissance. No amount of explanation about the specific event could suffice.

So in this case too, there is a large-scale historical phenomenon called antisemitism, of which the host-torturing myth is a part. The way to understand that is to learn more about antisemitism as a whole. One might begin by looking [here](#).

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 03/01/2006 - 10:01 | [reply](#)

Nice work

I'm usually harshly critical of the opinions expressed in '[The World](#)', but this one makes an excellent and too-readily-overlooked point: That the Muslim outlook on (we could say 'theory about') the world is not 'just like ours but with different names for things' but that they take the entire content of their religion with the utmost seriousness. Even moderate Muslims believe their holy book to be the absolute truth. They perceive criticism of or 'slights' to their religion to be appalling and grossly immoral, not because they take place against a political background of widespread injustices against Muslims, but *intrinsically evil in themselves*.

So what should be done? Well there's only so much that 'we' can do, but we're not doing it. For instance, it seems to me that in treating enemy 'combatants' (even the lowliest 'foot soldiers') so incredibly badly - throwing them into tiny, bare cells; mistreating/torturing them; denying them legal representation etc. with only a Qu'ran for comfort (!), this can only reinforce the impressions Islamists have that (a) the West is evil and (b) the West secretly knows that Islam is true.

by a reader on Sun, 03/05/2006 - 10:29 | [reply](#)

How do you infer that this is a consequence of antisemitism?

Well, let's see. Since that's the single most intelligible sentence of your post, suppose we deal with that one first. There is this little thing that reality based people call the historical record. It's recorded that Jews were subject to persecution by Christians for 'renouncing' *the Messiah*.

That Jews were persecuted for this supposed slight against G-d, while others who didn't believe in the Christian miracle weren't, is called "antisemitism."

Ergo, it's a rather short path from observing that Jews were persecuted for a supposed crime against G-d (that would never occur to them to commit in the first place) to recognizing that the motivation was antisemitism.

As to the rest of your post, you really, *really* need to cut back on

the pharceuticals.

by **EW1** on Mon, 03/06/2006 - 02:49 | [reply](#)

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Trying Tyrants

Slobodan Milosevic, former strongman of Serbia, has **died** in a prison cell in The Hague, four years into his trial for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

He died of a heart attack after the Court denied him permission to travel to Russia for medical treatment. By putting up a spirited and intelligent defence, he had had considerable success in manoeuvring himself into the role of victim, and international justice into the role of oppressor. To his supporters and sympathisers, his death under these circumstances will lock that psychological victory in place.

For comparison (procedurally only, there being no comparison between the defendants) the trial of Adolf Eichmann lasted only four months. It is hard to see why it was necessary for Milosevic's to take twelve times as long with no end in sight. In any case, there can seldom, if ever, be a justification for putting people on trial whose guilt takes over four years to prove beyond reasonable doubt – for a policy of doing so will necessarily waste over four years of the lives of defendants who are eventually acquitted, which is surely oppressive.

In 1923, the Nazis under Adolf Hitler tried to overthrow the German government by force. They failed and he was tried for treason. But the judges allowed him to use his trial as a political soapbox and so turned it into not only a mockery of justice but a potent means of building support for the next attempt, which succeeded without a shot being fired.

Saddam is less smart than Milosevic and guilty of far worse crimes. He and his defence team have been trying silly tactics to gain political advantage from his trial. For instance, his lawyers walk out and then **claim** that the court is depriving Saddam of the right to lawyers of his choice. Or Saddam stands up and starts making speeches. The new presiding judge has been refusing to allow these tactics, and he is quite right. In this trial, the defendants' political theories are totally irrelevant. They could not possibly supply any excuse for the defendants' alleged actions or evidence that they did not commit them. So the judge should not tolerate such tactics even when the defendants are in the witness box.

Update: See [Mark Steyn's take](#) on the conduct of the Milosevic

trial and its relevance to Saddam's.

Sat, 03/11/2006 - 12:50 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

>>In any case, there can seld

>>In any case, there can seldom, if ever, be a justification for putting people on trial whose guilt takes over four years to prove beyond reasonable doubt – for a policy of doing so will necessarily waste over four years of the lives of defendants who are eventually acquitted, which is surely oppressive.

You have previously argued that it is acceptable to lock people up indefinitely without any trial at all if the crime they are accused of involves "Organised political violence using lethal force". Now you say a far lesser action, simply taking four years over an actual trial, is oppressive. Surely a contradiction?

by a reader on Thu, 03/16/2006 - 12:19 | [reply](#)

link please

where did the world argue that exactly?

-- Elliot Temple

[Now Blogging Again](#)

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 03/17/2006 - 00:10 | [reply](#)

Re: Organised political violence using lethal force

That was our working definition of war [here](#). Not crime, war.

by [Editor](#) on Fri, 03/17/2006 - 00:28 | [reply](#)

Surely Milosovich's actions c

Surely Milosovich's actions count as acts of war. So is it oppressive to lock people up indefinitely or not? And if not how are the actions taken against Milosovich oppressive?

by a reader on Fri, 03/17/2006 - 13:52 | [reply](#)

Milosevic

Yes indeed, it is beyond reasonable doubt that Milosevic waged war. Had he been captured during that war, and were there a serious danger that he would wage war again if he were released, it would have been justified to hold him indefinitely, without trial, as a prisoner of war. Once the war, and that danger, can reasonably be deemed to be over, then all that could be justified would be to give him a prompt and not excessively long trial, and then imprison him only if he is found guilty beyond reasonable doubt of a criminal offence. Waging war is not criminal, so the mere fact that he did that would not be reason enough to imprison him, but waging it in

certain ways is.

by **Editor** on Fri, 03/17/2006 - 14:13 | [reply](#)

The war is still going on, in

The war is still going on, in the sense that there is still plenty of politically motivated lethal violence in the Balkans between Serbs and other ethnicities. Had Milosovich been released he would certainly have rejoined that war at least in a political or propaganda roll. So do you accept that he could have been held as a prisoner of war?

It seems to me your formulation above is appropriate only to conventional wars, not to inter-ethnic wars like those in the Balkans or global political wars like that between Islamists and the west. These wars may go on for generations, and are unlikely to last less than decades, so someone suspected of involvement can be imprisoned for the rest of their life without trial. A policy which will necessarily waste the lives of those wrongly suspected of involvement, which is oppressive.

by a reader on Fri, 03/17/2006 - 15:51 | [reply](#)

Chris Tame

Just FYI, and not connected to this post at all:

<http://mutualist.blogspot.com/2006/03/chris-r-tame-rip.html>

Sad news. But you probably know already.

by Solan on Tue, 03/21/2006 - 13:53 | [reply](#)

Freed, Any The Wiser?

This is a point that is bound to be made all over (the sane parts of) the blogosphere today, but it deserves to be made again.

Three so-called 'peace activists' who had been kidnapped by the very terrorists in Iraq for whose cause they had gone there to campaign, were **freed** today by British and Canadian special forces whom they vilify as criminals.

They have been given their freedom, no doubt at some slight risk to their own lives (though, in the event, their captors had fled by the time of the rescue), and potentially at great risk to the lives of their rescuers. They pronounce themselves "delighted" to have been granted exactly what they have devoted their lives to denying the Iraqi people.

Thu, 03/23/2006 - 15:00 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

How had they "devoted their lives"

to denying the Iraqi people freedom?

Are you still seriously contending that the Iraqi people are any freer now than under Saddam?

by a reader on Fri, 03/24/2006 - 02:07 | [reply](#)

What?

The locusts stripping Iraq bare are insulted. General Sir Michael Jackson, a Bloody Sunday criminal, a Kosovo war criminal and now a loyal goon in the mobbing of Baghdad, told ITN that he was "saddened that there does not seem to have been a note of gratitude for the soldiers who risked their lives to save those lives". ITN arranged a phone-in programme about the release of Norman Kember and the Christian peacekeepers who were with him. The question: "Do you believe Norman Kember was right to put his life in danger for the sake of the Iraqi people? Or, do you believe he's been irresponsible?" Such a question has its own pre-written answers. It calls upon ingrained cultural prejudices, sullen racism, resentment against do-gooders, those who have the temerity, the audacity, to actually consider the lives of Iraqis worth protecting and respecting. The answers: "What did he hope to achieve by going to Iraq? Our troops are already there to keep the peace!" "He

put the lives of our troops in more danger." "How much has his rescue cost the taxpayer?"

Asked to comment on the rescue of Briton Norman Kember, readers of Britain's Daily Telegraph generally excoriated Kember and the two Canadians as "irresponsible." A typical email read:

"No civilian has a 'right' to enter a war zone to protest that war or dig up stories of abuse against the soldiers who are fighting it. These same soldiers must then go in and rescue these ridiculous people from certain death at the hands of their captors and risk their own lives doing it."

Terry Waite, whose own saintliness is matchless, has been called upon to question the tactics of the Christian peacemakers. And the Telegraph reports, Released hostages 'refuse to help their rescuers'. For The Times, the release of the hostages underlines "the warning against naive attempts by well-intentioned Western peace activists to ignore Iraq's brutal politics and risk their lives."

Forget, if you like, that these peacemakers and pacifists specifically request that no military action is undertaken to release them in the event of a kidnap. The phoney excuses for this campaign of vilification are an affront to human intelligence. Heroism played no part in their release, unless you consider the folding of the mercenary group that held them an act of heroism. No risk - none at all - befell the troops who went in to the place of captivity and found the three hostages sitting alone and unguarded. If the activities of a group intent on protecting the human rights of Iraqis invites greater risk for the troops there, what does this say about the conduct of the troops? The crime, for these snivelling wretches, these utterly pathetic whiners, is to locate evidence of and draw attention to the crimes of the imperialists, to be insufficiently grateful to the warmongers, to refuse to be pliant and play the role of saps, media darlings who will testify to the brutality of Iraq, shower praise on the hired thugs, and tell tales of woe and regret. Surely, what General Jackson should ask for is an apology, not thanks. An apology from the irresponsible elements, the unruly pacifist dreamers, who dared to interfere with so delicate and responsible an operation as the pillaging of Iraq. The only Christian do-gooders welcome in Iraq are Franklin Graham's proselytisers, the Islam-is-evil cult that fulfils the historical mandate of the civilising mission. Christians for Bush, in short. Billy Graham led Bush to Christianity, Franklin delivered the invocation at his inauguration, and the missionaries they have dispatched to Iraq sanctify the holy war against evil, testify to its virtuosity, salute the brave boys and girls who bring death to the Lord's enemies, and fervently await the glorious rapture that is sure to come now that Israel has been established for almost sixty years into the age of television. Only they, with their masturbatory fantasies of Divine Genocide, are meritorious, they who will either convert the untermenschen or say amen and bow their heads respectfully as the Lord's conduits crush them. Christians for peace? Christians for human rights? Christians against racist war? Christians against the apocalypse? Don't you know how irresponsible that is?

<http://leninology.blogspot.com/>

by a reader on Sat, 03/25/2006 - 11:05 | [reply](#)

Serious?

Yes, we seriously believe Iraq is now more free than under Saddam. Why do you think we'd post things we don't seriously believe?

-- Elliot Temple

Now Blogging Again

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sun, 03/26/2006 - 09:41 | [reply](#)

Belief

You believed Saddam had WMD. It had remarkably little effect on the facts.

And, of course, those who are factually wrong are usually morally wrong.

You can put your head back in the sand now.

by a reader on Sun, 03/26/2006 - 10:49 | [reply](#)

Re: Belief

You believed Saddam had WMD.

Good point. So presumably you believed he didn't. You managed to see through his deception better than all the governments of the world (**including his**). What was your method?

by [Editor](#) on Sun, 03/26/2006 - 12:42 | [reply](#)

Re: Method

A good start is this rule of thumb: Q.How can you tell if a political leader is probably lying to you? A. His lips are moving. That being said, are you any the wiser for your mistakes? I don't see a lot of soul searching going on here, more of a retreat into your own fantasies.

by a reader on Sun, 03/26/2006 - 13:21 | [reply](#)

Piece of piss

1) I checked to see if the US were planning on invading. They were. I compared the situation to the handling of North Korea.

2) I listened to Ritter and Blix. Then I looked at the US and UK try to scrape together (and fake) evidence.

3) Then there's Saddam's "Oh, I have no WMD, nudge nudge, wink wink" bluffing when the US army is on his doorstep.

Pretty obvious, really.

It's amazing (if a little disheartening) to see libertarians such as yourselves swallowing (and so eagerly!) so much government cock.

by a reader on Sun, 03/26/2006 - 13:32 | [reply](#)

Re: Method

Your method of seeing through Saddam's deception, namely to assume that all other politicians were probably lying, depends on their knowing the truth before you do. Are you claiming that most of the politicians in the world knew that there were no WMD stocks in Iraq but lied about it? Or were some of them fooled by the others?

by [Editor](#) on Sun, 03/26/2006 - 13:54 | [reply](#)

Neither

Sadly, my psychic powers aren't as sharp as they once were. What goes on in the minds of politicians, we can only wonder. Not for too long, or it starts to get a bit worrying.

by a reader on Sun, 03/26/2006 - 14:30 | [reply](#)

Oh, and

"Your method of seeing through Saddam's deception, namely to assume that all other politicians were probably lying, depends on their knowing the truth before you do."

No it doesn't.

BTW, I do like your way of blogging/thinking. Arguments can be argued with, whereas a statement of opinion expressed firmly enough - and with absolutely no argument - can often be taken in as solid fact. Interesting, in a chin-stroking/pipe filling sort of way.

So, make yourself comfortable and tell me about your mother. Did she perhaps have an unpleasant experience with nuance whilst carrying you?

by a reader on Sun, 03/26/2006 - 14:37 | [reply](#)

WMDs

Why is it everybody is assuming Bush etc. were wrong about the WMDs? Just because they haven't been found in Iraq? There are reports (e.g. [here](#) and [here](#)) SH simply moved them to Syria just before the invasion.

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Tue, 03/28/2006 - 09:40 | [reply](#)

Think

IF Bush and co actually thought the WMD were there, and had done a disappearing act, don't you think they'd be just a little bit jumpy right now? Getting (then) 12 year old info off of t'net, removing caveats and not noticing when a number of papers scream 45 MINUTES UNTIL WMD ARMAGEDDON! to point out you were talking about normal armaments.

My, the government just loves you.

'Just before the invasion'

He has the World's Largest Army [tm] on his doorstep and in his duckpond. Spyplanes are (and have been for years) everywhere. 'Simply'? SIMPLY?

by anon on Fri, 04/07/2006 - 19:59 | [reply](#)

They did risk their lives

The rescuers did in fact **risk their lives**.

by a reader on Sun, 04/16/2006 - 00:18 | [reply](#)

Global Warming Warning

Something sinister is happening in the field of climate science. No, this time we do not mean their discovery that the Planet is Doomed (again) unless the governments of the world embark on an emergency orgy of concerted spending and regulation on a scale that dwarfs all precedent.

Some of the so-called climate-change 'sceptics' – not political stooges or cranks, but bona fide, competent scientists who, as is commonplace in science, disagree with the consensus in their fields – have been sounding an alarm. In a recent disturbing [article](#) Prof. Richard Lindzen (who is the Alfred P. Sloan Professor of Atmospheric Science at MIT) says that

Global-warming alarmists intimidate dissenting scientists into silence

Similarly, Prof. Bob Carter, a geologist engaged in paleoclimate research at James Cook University, Queensland [wrote](#) recently:

There are other reasons, too, why the public hears so little in detail from those scientists who approach climate change issues rationally, the so-called climate sceptics. Most are to do with intimidation against speaking out, which operates intensely on several parallel fronts.

The intimidation is presumably not perfectly effective, since Lindzen and Carter are speaking out. Indeed, recently sixty "leading scientists" wrote an [open letter](#) to Canada's new Prime Minister urging withdrawal from the Kyoto Treaty. Nevertheless these claims of intimidation from scientists are extremely bad news. Discovering the truth is hard. This institutions of science forbid intimidation and other forms of irrationality not merely for the comfort of scientists. It is because even small amounts of certain pathologies in the scientific process can completely halt progress, or worse, create the semblance of authority for illusory discoveries.

The issue of climate change, its causes and effects, is a highly technical one about which we at **The World** do not have the relevant expertise to be capable of passing judgement. The trouble is that the climate-science community, by casually or deliberately politicising its field, is increasingly destroying its own standing to

advise the rest of us. And if the truth emerges from such a process,

we shall be very lucky.

Wed, 04/12/2006 - 23:24 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Centigradients

Your point is that the whole area of climate change science is fraught with politicization? No surprise there. Is the world getting warmer relative to measurements of previous decades? Yes it is. Fascinating! I have only one political/economic question. What parts of the world are getting drier and windier and wetter, and does this mean I should be more careful in my choice of where to live? I hear the British Isles may be getting much colder if the Gulf Stream shifts. Until the science gets better or at least more agreeable, I think I'll hedge my bets and stay in a warm lush place on slightly higher ground. I won't worry then about the politics of global warming or climate change.

by a reader on Sun, 04/16/2006 - 17:34 | [reply](#)

politicisation of research

It isn't just the obvious candidates (climate change, heritability of IQ, evolution) that have become highly politicised within academia. Egalitarian ideology is creeping into every subject area. What is 'fair' or 'just' is taking precedence over what is true. Ends are taken to justify means. Hence, whatever the truth behind global warming (and it may well be much worse than even the scaremongers are saying) there seems little reason to trust official pronouncements. If things are unclear enough to require academic guidance, there will always be room for biased interpretation of the data. Who is there now who still stands up for principles such as objectivity (supposedly a bourgeois illusion, according to post-structuralists) or free speech?

by [culturesceptic](#) on Thu, 05/18/2006 - 09:24 | [reply](#)

More About The Ungentlemanly Act

We once **criticised** the attitude of the present-day Argentinean government and people towards the Falklands war of 1982.

We have now **replied** to a recent **comment** on that thread.

Sat, 04/22/2006 - 11:34 | [permalink](#)

More Optimism Needed

Recently a student **found plans** for a nuclear powered interplanetary space vehicle developed by British Rail in 1970-73. This vehicle would have used nuclear fusion initiated by lasers as its power source.

Cynical 21st-century folk rubbished the idea:

"I thought it must be a joke at first," the student who found the plans said yesterday. "It is amazing that British Rail actually developed these plans. They obviously believed people would be transported around space to different planets in the future..."

We, on the other hand, are astonished that there exist scientifically literate people who believe that they won't.

Michel van Baal, from the European Space Agency, based in Holland, said: "I have had a look at the plans, and they don't look very serious to me at all. It is based on a fusion process that doesn't exist yet and if it would, would need an unbelievable amount of energy..."

And this objection does not look serious to us. Does a spokesman for the European Space Agency really think that because the vehicle would be powered by a fusion process that does not yet exist, the designs for it are worthless?

Mr van Baal has ruled out in advance a possible means of reducing the cost of space travel not because of evidence but because of pessimism.

It so happens that physicists at Berkeley are working on producing **nuclear fusion** using **lasers** and making this technology **commercially viable**. Suppose that Mr van Baal is right and this technology can't be used for space travel. Then by investigating its viability we shall rule out one possible means of interstellar travel and focus our resources elsewhere. And if he is wrong then this investigation will lead to improved space travel. If humankind does not spread out into the universe then sooner or later we will be destroyed by an asteroid or some other catastrophe. Optimism will not guarantee survival but it is the only possible route. Pessimism will certainly destroy us.

If only the mainstream institutions of today had the optimism – and

the gumption – displayed by British Rail in 1970.

Tue, 05/02/2006 - 20:30 | [permalink](#)

Why don't we have the same op

Why don't we have the same optimism and gumption today? What happened?

-- Elliot Temple
[My Blog](#)

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 05/09/2006 - 20:59 | [reply](#)

British vision for space travel powered by fusion

We have become mentally lazy, is what. Not only is this sad, it spells doom for us as a species. Perhaps the controversy about nuclear power in the eighties is what derailed further development of this technology as well. Too many people tend to dismiss technologies out of hand, when problems with them develop.

by [P Smith](#) on Sat, 05/20/2006 - 15:04 | [reply](#)

Why do you think people have

Why do you think people have become mentally lazy? (not saying i disagree, just asking what you think the cause is)

-- Elliot Temple
[My Blog](#)

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sat, 05/20/2006 - 17:42 | [reply](#)

Optimism

Optimism is a wonderful thing but vigilance is to.

by Richard Hernon Jr. on Sat, 05/27/2006 - 01:54 | [reply](#)

Mixing Incompatible Scare Stories

A charity called Buglife has apparently **warned** that

Rare insects that are vital for pollinating crops and feeding birds are threatened with extinction because of the Government's determination to build on brownfield sites.

An insect species can be rare, or it can be vital for pollinating crops and feeding birds. It cannot be both.

One wonders whether journalists even read their own scare stories. Or is it just a case of: if it's scary it must be true; if it's technology it must be bad.

Fri, 05/12/2006 - 12:44 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Glad to see The World back...

...it was missing for a couple of days there.

by [Solomon](#) on Sat, 05/13/2006 - 01:04 | [reply](#)

Re: Glad to see The World back...

Thanks!

Hardware problems ☹

by [Editor](#) on Sat, 05/13/2006 - 01:27 | [reply](#)

Bottom of the barrel

The government has severely curtailed the development of greenfield sites in response to environmental concerns and now the protestors want to limit the redevelopment of polluted ex-industrial sites as well? On a scale of conservation value, as far as such value exists at all, brownfield industrial sites are the bottom of the barrel. Even as an environmental scare-story this one is beyond lame. That they feel inclined to clutch at such straws probably says more about how *good* the world is getting rather than how bad it is.

Leigh

by a reader on Mon, 05/15/2006 - 14:46 | [reply](#)

Maybe they mean this

An insect species can be rare, or it can be vital for pollinating crops and feeding birds. It cannot be both.

Maybe these very particular birds they're speaking of need only minute amounts of this insect to survive. Just like we humans need a few micrograms a day of certain minerals to survive. In that case a population of say 1000 insects might be enough to keep say 20 million of these birds alive.

: -)

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Mon, 05/15/2006 - 14:56 | [reply](#)

Iranian Noose Tightens

No, not the non-existent 'Western pressure on Iran' to abandon its headlong rush to commit genocide. We are referring to the new **national uniform for men** that has just been provisionally approved by the Iranian Parliament. Iranian women are, of course, already subject to a draconian dress code. Among other things, the new dress code for men would prohibit Western clothing such as suits.

Neckties are already illegal under Iran's existing dress code. Nooses, ironically, are **not**. Even for **teenage girls**.

We invite comments making the usual facile comparisons between Iran's national uniform and some European countries' ban on headscarves in state schools. Or between the United States' death penalty for aggravated murder, and Iran's death penalty for sassy teenagers.

Mon, 05/15/2006 - 17:12 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

It's true that teenage sass i

It's true that teenage sass isn't as bad as aggravated murder, however it's a much more widespread problem, so that justifies harsh measures to get it under control. I propose the US follow Iran's progressive lead on this issue.

-- Elliot Temple

My Blog

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 05/15/2006 - 20:05 | [reply](#)

Nooses, ironically, are not.

Nooses, ironically, are not. Even for teenage girls.

Are you implying (by using the word **even**) that hanging an innocent teenage girl is worse than hanging, say, an innocent thirty year old man? If so, why would children's rights be more important than those of adults?

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Mon, 05/15/2006 - 21:42 | [reply](#)

Re: Nooses, ironically, are not.

*Are you implying (by using the word **even**) that hanging an innocent teenage girl is worse than hanging, say, an innocent thirty year old man?*

No, the word 'even' was part of the jocular irony comparing neckties with nooses: usually the dress code would be most severe for young women, but in regard to wearing nooses they are equal-opportunity executioners.

However, hanging a child for trifling reasons *is* morally even worse than doing that to an adult. Both are equally murderous. But the former, in addition, violated the greater duty of care that the perpetrators (the legal system as well as everyone concerned in the execution) had towards a child defendant/victim.

by **Editor** on Mon, 05/15/2006 - 22:25 | [reply](#)

Nazi Dress Code

It appears that the dress code is not merely for Muslims:

See <http://www.canada.com/components/print.aspx?id=11fbf4a8-282a-4d18-954f-546709b1240f&k=32073>

Perhaps this will cause more of an outcry because it is designed to affect Christians as well as Jews.

by **Michael Bacon** on Fri, 05/19/2006 - 14:10 | [reply](#)

Or praps not. <http://www.c>

Or praps not.

<http://www.canada.com/nationalpost/news/story.html?id=6626a0fa-99de-4f1e-aebe-bb91af82abb3>

<http://www.940news.com/locale.php?news=2511>

http://www.heraldsun.news.com.au/common/story_page/0,5478,19196947^1702,00.html

I *love* you guys.

by Jamie's Magic Torch on Sat, 05/20/2006 - 14:33 | [reply](#)

Love?

Because of my earlier comment, I assume I'm included in "you guys." If you mean you *love* me because ideological "blindness" incline me to assume the worst regarding the theocratic Iranian regime, and that this leads me (as it may have done in the dress code case) to condemn Iran based on incorrect specific evidence (although by all initial appearances the story was legitimate), then I

think in general you are right. This is certainly my bias. On the

other hand, if you somehow mean this as an ironic defense of the Iranian regime, whose crimes and behavior toward its own citizens and threats against others is well documented, unchallenged and often trumpeted by the Iranians themselves, then I think you've clearly lost the magic touch.

by **Michael Bacon** on Sun, 05/21/2006 - 15:18 | [reply](#)

Lurve

I love you because if I don't, who will?

I have no magic touch, not now or ever. The magic was in Jamie all along. But he believed I was a Magic Torch, and hey presto!

I'd very much like to bring some light to your lives, but I've found it to be pointless until those blinders are gone.

You've got to keep digging until you're not standing on anything. And then you need the strength of mind to realise you're not falling, but floating.

by Jamie's Magic Torch on Tue, 05/23/2006 - 20:01 | [reply](#)

Mixing Incompatible Atrocity Stories

The logic of the farce that we commented on recently under the heading **Mixing Incompatible Scare Stories** has now repeated itself in the form of tragedy.

US Representative John Murtha has made a series of **allegations** about a reported atrocity by US Marines that is currently being investigated by the Marine Corps:

"There was no firefight. There was no IED that killed these innocent people. Our troops overreacted because of the pressure on them, and they killed innocent civilians in cold blood," Murtha said.

[...]

"They actually went into the houses and killed women and children,"

A Marines spokesman said: "Any comment at this time would be inappropriate and could undermine the investigatory and possible legal process." Yes indeed, and Murtha's decision to prejudge the outcome in public is reprehensible for that reason alone. It is an abuse of his position for him to purport to know, at this stage, not only that a crime was committed and who was guilty, but the underlying causes of the crime too – especially as they happen to fit his agenda that the war is an unwinnable quagmire. But our point here is different.

Did the troops "overreact because of the pressure on them", or did they "kill innocent civilians in cold blood"? It cannot be both. Murtha did not say (in the CNN video clip linked by that article) what the nature of the pressure was that he says turned these men into mass murderers. But whatever he meant, if that was the explanation it would reflect badly, perhaps criminally, on everyone in the chain of command that ordered them into the situation. It would also mean that the murders were not in cold blood. That Murtha should make both allegations in the same breath shows that, like the environmental journalist we quoted before, he is not interested in what the facts are. But unlike the journalist, he has done this over an issue of life and death.

If by "cold-blooded" he meant intentionally cruel, then you're right. But "cold-blooded" can also mean without feeling or emotion. If one accepts that mental pressure brought on by war can desensitize your emotions, then there is no inherent contradiction in his statement.

I have no idea how he thinks the pressure in this war differs from any other war. If his point is that if this war wasn't unjustified and such an unwinnable quagmire, then these soldiers would never have felt the pressure that caused them to kill innocent civilians in cold blood... well, that would be a tough allegation to back up.

by a reader on Thu, 05/25/2006 - 16:15 | [reply](#)

An Uncanny Resemblance?

The case of the house broken into by armed police officers in London on Friday, resulting in the shooting of one of the occupants, is beginning to bear an uncanny resemblance to that of the invasion of Iraq:

Intelligence behind raid was wrong, officials say

Senior counter-terrorism officials now believe that the intelligence that led to the raid on a family house last Friday in a search for a chemical device about to be used to attack Britain was wrong, the Guardian has learned.

[...]

"There is no viable device at that house. There is no device being constructed, or chemicals. There does not appear to be anything there or anywhere else."

Soon we'll be hearing from our holy men that the raid was **illegal, immoral and unwise**, from the legal profession that it was a war crime, from the press that Blair lied, and so on. They'll make up stuff as needed – you know the sort of thing.

No doubt they'll all be very very angry with the Government for having raided a house that contained no weapons of mass destruction. Would they have been any less angry, we wonder, if the men arrested had nevertheless been mass murderers with 300,000 bodies buried in their cellar? And an entire nation held hostage in the attic? Presumably not.

Tue, 06/06/2006 - 01:25 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Would bodies be listed on the

Would bodies be listed on the warrant?

by a reader on Tue, 06/06/2006 - 08:56 | [reply](#)

Re: Would bodies be listed

Would bodies be listed on the warrant?

No.

Are you referring, by analogy, to the failure of Blair and the Bush Administration, prior to the invasion, to cite Saddam's murders as justifications for it?

by **Editor** on Tue, 06/06/2006 - 17:52 | [reply](#)

Uncanny Resemblance?

I think the police acted prudently in the circumstances and should not be faulted. It appears that the decision to raid the house was taken not only because there was intelligence regarding a bomb device and the like, but also because the intelligence indicated an immediate threat.

As the linked article stated: "It is understood that attempts to corroborate the information were not made because of the perceived need to act quickly. '[i]f there was an immediate risk to public safety, there would not have been time to bug the house,' an intelligence source said. A counter-terrorism official said: "If the intelligence was right there was a serious risk to the public. We did not know if it was right or not until we went in."

Iraq, on the other hand, while looking similar on the surface, is a different case. In the house raid situation, there should never be any disagreement that it's always proper to carry out such a raid if intelligence indicates an immediate threat to the public safety. The same holds true for situations like Iraq. However, even the most ardent supporters of the Iraq action did not really try and make the strong case that Saddam's WMDs were an immediate threat. And, in any event, little would have been lost if a bit more "bugging" had been carried out.

As I have stated in previous posts, I think the war on terror would have been better served by focusing on the near far-east, including in particular Afghanistan, to consolidate influence in the region, to provide a base for the projection of force, and to put pressure directly on the Iranian regime from a more easily defended (militarily and politically) base of operations. Nevertheless, we are where we are and I recognize the need to try and achieve the most favorable possible outcome.

In any event, I don't necessarily think that there is an uncanny resemblance between the two situations. Rather, there is a superficial resemblance.

by **Michael Bacon** on Wed, 06/07/2006 - 14:47 | [reply](#)

Iraq

However, even the most ardent supporters of the Iraq action did not really try and make the strong case that Saddam's WMDs were an immediate threat. And, in any event, little would have been lost if a bit more "bugging" had been carried out.

Can you think of any people on earth that Saddam was an

immediate threat to? (nvm whether he was threatening them with WMD or another way). I believe there was something important to be lost by waiting. And besides, we had already waited a long time, and that wasn't improving matters.

-- Elliot Temple

[My Blog](#)

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 06/07/2006 - 20:58 | [reply](#)

Saddam was a Terror Sponsor

Saddam worked with terrorist groups, including [Al Qaeda](#) (Bush knew of links [before the war](#) BTW) and [Palestinian suicide bombers](#). So Bush removed a major terror sponsor by removing Saddam. Nor is it likely that effective resistance to Saddam could have been fomented in a Stalinist state like Iraq. Iraq was certainly a valid target and it was very unlikely that anything but an invasion would have got rid of the threat.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Wed, 06/07/2006 - 21:08 | [reply](#)

Time Lost?

Elliot,

He was an immediate threat to his own people of course, and to a lesser extent the region. However, assuming one can not always do multiple things at once (particularly where war is concerned), I still do not think that the Iraq action was the best strategic move for the United States to make in the circumstances. I have posted about this before and nothing has occurred that would lead me to change my mind. Moreover, everything else being equal, I don't think the situation that we now face in Iraq would have been materially different if we had waited -- the initial military action, I believe, would not have been materially more difficult, and the insurgency that we now face would not have been materially more deadly. Of course, this is only my opinion, and I can understand how reasonable people could reach a different conclusion from the set of same facts. In any event, I don't think there is an uncanny resemblance between the two situations, and I don't think the police should be faulted for the raid.

by [Michael Bacon](#) on Wed, 06/07/2006 - 21:24 | [reply](#)

waiting

i agree that as far as i know delaying wouldn't have had huge effects on the difficulty of invading. i don't see that it would have had any good benefits though. i agree this constitutes a flaw in the parallelism btwn the war and the raid.

-- Elliot Temple

[My Blog](#)

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 06/07/2006 - 22:28 | [reply](#)

Yes, I was making that analog

Yes, I was making that analogy.

I'm guessing that you think the war itself is a Good Thing (positive virtue or utility, or good for liberty, or whatever).

My question is: is starting wars with no sufficient justification not a bad thing, or at least a bad policy, even if the outcome in this particular case be positive?

Also, I mentioned a while ago that your site won't let my browser select the text for cutting and pasting. You (Editor) went all snooty, listing the many browsers you've tested it on. This list did not include Microsoft Internet Explorer, which I'm using, which I'm sure is the most popular, and which you probably knew I was using. I really enjoy your site, so maybe you could have a look at the problem?

by a reader on Thu, 06/08/2006 - 19:23 | [reply](#)

Re: Yes I was making that analogy

We wrote:

Are you referring, by analogy, to the failure of Blair and the Bush Administration, prior to the invasion, to cite Saddam's murders as justifications for it?

a reader replied:

Yes, I was making that analogy.

Thanks. Just so we're on the same page, could you provide a link to a speech by Blair or Bush, attempting to justify the proposed invasion, in which they failed to cite Saddam's murders?

by [Editor](#) on Thu, 06/08/2006 - 21:34 | [reply](#)

Nope. You win!, now go and

Nope.

You win!, now go and fix your website.

by a reader on Thu, 06/08/2006 - 21:41 | [reply](#)

(please)

(please)

by a reader on Thu, 06/08/2006 - 21:45 | [reply](#)

Analogy

Reader,

I too can not cut and paste on this blog. Don't know why, and it would be much more convenient if I could, but don't take it personally.

Whether the war has been a "Good Thing" depends on how you define the term. As Alan pointed out, Saddam was certainly more than worthy of removal: countless murders, mayhem and more are attributable to him. If he could have developed WMDs he would have. Removing him from power has certainly been a good thing in a very real, concrete sense.

I, however, simply make the utilitarian argument that there were better things to do, and that since you can't do everything, it makes sense to do the things that help to more directly achieve strategic objectives. I don't believe that the Iraq action served this purpose nearly as well as others things we could have done.

This is an argument that reasonable people can disagree with -- but it seems right to me. However, in no event should we downplay the seriousness of the threat we face -- nor pretend that military force is some abstract "last resort" in our battle to combat these threats.

by [Michael Bacon](#) on Fri, 06/09/2006 - 01:07 | [reply](#)

Copying

The site uses only standard HTML and CSS, and we don't do anything to prevent copying. Unfortunately, we have no idea what triggers Internet Explorer's behaviour; if anyone can tell us, we will try to work around it.

by [Editor](#) on Fri, 06/09/2006 - 01:36 | [reply](#)

I've checked, and it appears

I've checked, and it appears to be this bug:

<http://lists.xml.org/archives/dita-fa-edboard/200602/msg00053.html>

IE will let you select if you put after the base tag at the top of the page.

The discussion there mentions using selective commenting so that only IE looks at the closing tag. This would preserve XHTML well-formedness, but I don't know if it really matters to you.

by a reader on Fri, 06/09/2006 - 08:02 | [reply](#)

Thank you, reader

Thank you, reader; we have applied the suggested workaround, and assume Internet Explorer users will now be able to copy text.

by [Editor](#) on Sat, 06/10/2006 - 00:48 | [reply](#)

Workaround

It works fine now. Thanks much.

by **Michael Bacon** on Sat, 06/10/2006 - 14:08 | [reply](#)

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A Black And White Issue

Via [Solomonias](#):

Why would a **movement for black racial purity**, in France, which seeks to unite all people with 'pure' black skin and resents lighter-hued people, nevertheless have a soft spot for Islamists (most of whom do not have black skin and some of whom are currently **committing genocide** against people who do), but pathologically hate Jews, some of whom **do** have 'pure' black skin?

Fri, 06/09/2006 - 01:02 | [permalink](#)

I think you've answered this

I think you've answered this type of question before.

<http://www.settingtheworldtorights.com/node/449>

What doesn't seem logical on the surface, makes perfect sense when examined a little deeper. I think the skin color issue is far from their bottom line, which is a paranoid, conspiracy based world view which tends to find more in common with radical Islam than with similarly hued people that have a very different mindset.

by a reader on Sat, 06/10/2006 - 19:09 | [reply](#)

answer

it's because they are bad

-- Elliot Temple

[My Blog](#)

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sat, 06/10/2006 - 23:02 | [reply](#)

ID Cards And Security

Retired New York City policeman Bruce DeCell **gained entry** to the headquarters of the US Homeland Security Agency, using an ID card which:

- was forged;
- would not entitle him to entry even if it was real;
- cost him \$20 in a California street.

Mr De Cell's experiment illustrated that a security system is only as strong as its weakest link. The British government should take note. If just one criminal finds a way of faking ID cards – through some combination of forgery, hacking of government computers, suborning of one of the tens of thousands of new employees who will be running the system, and so on – then the ID card system will fail. If British police, borders and security services fail to institute systems of checking the cards that are both secure and workable, or if some of them are too lazy to follow those systems scrupulously, then the ID card system will fail.

In fact, the only things that ID cards are guaranteed to do is damage civil liberties by branding all British citizens as suspects and allowing for many new forms of petty bureaucratic oppression, divert the effort and attention of the security services towards ordinary citizens and away from terrorists, cause massive inconvenience, and cost a very large fortune.

Tue, 06/13/2006 - 21:41 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

What Would You Recommend?

Portable iris scanners?

by a reader on Thu, 06/15/2006 - 21:42 | [reply](#)

Recommendation

I would recommend looking for people who **act like terrorists**.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Thu, 09/21/2006 - 21:38 | [reply](#)

Iran Would Use The Weapons It Isn't Making

The **Jerusalem Post** is first with an AP story quoting the Iranian defence minister letting slip the fact that his country's nuclear programme is military, and intended for use:

Iran's defense minister on Thursday vowed that his country would "use nuclear defense as a potential" if "threatened by any power."

But the idea that Iran is merely responding to a threat is a cynical, transparent excuse and is the reverse of the truth. Now surrounded by US allies, Iran is not faced by any military threat from any power, except that caused by the fear that it itself has created, and continues to exacerbate, as a matter of policy. In reality, Iran could dismantle not only its nuclear weapons programme but its entire armed forces tomorrow and not a single harmful consequence would result. On the contrary, there would be prodigious benefits to all Iranians and the whole of mankind.

Teheran has denied accusations by the US and its allies that Iran was seeking uranium enrichment technologies in order to develop nuclear weapons, saying its program was only meant to generate electricity.

These standard denials will no doubt be repeated shortly. Perhaps the minister mis-spoke. Perhaps the AP misheard or misinterpreted. Perhaps he let slip the truth or perhaps he isn't even privy to the relevant information. But the weapons programme is real. And the threat is real, whether spoken or not.

Israel and the Jewish people do not want another Holocaust. America does not want another Pearl Harbour or 9-11 many times over. The world does not want a catastrophic war. What do Iranians (not counting the evil regime and its supporters) want? Is it possible that they, too, are miscalculating? Are they halfway OK with this escalating tension because they reckon that, at worst, they will be liberated by external force without making more sacrifices than they already are? That line of thinking would certainly be understandable but it would be a mistake. People of Iran: for everyone's sake, deny that the tyrants act in your name, and deny them the means to do so. Time is short, and the only alternatives are very bad.

Iran

I have some first hand experience of working with the Iranian state and the one thing I would say is it is difficult for us to comprehend just how paranoid they are. It's the legacy of decades of isolation but also hundreds of years of history and Shia persecution. They have the imagination to see conspiracy and ulterior motives in almost everything. Fundamentally they don't trust anybody.

This is really worrying because you can see why they keep their nuclear ambitions ticking along. It's actually a position very similar to the post Gulf War standoff with Iraq. As far as the Iranians see it they have two choices. (1) Dismantle their programs and allow in inspectors or (2) press on for the bomb and hope they can get there before sanctions cripple them. From a paranoid Iran's perspective all recent precedents say that their best choice is (2). After all the only country to opt for (1) was Iraq while North Korea, Pakistan and India both went for option (2) and they've received little punishment. I know this is a gross simplification of recent events but I fear Iran thinks that everything will be ok once they have the bomb.

Would they use the bomb on Israel?

I don't think they would, at least not in a pre-emptive strike. I hope that even an Iranian theocracy will realise that if they used a nuclear bomb on an enemy it would invite a retaliatory strike of devastating force. It's the principle of mutually assured destruction that kept the cold war cold, kept the skuds CBRN free during the first Gulf war and stopped Nazi Germany using their nerve agents against the allies.

by A new reader on Fri, 06/16/2006 - 12:41 | [reply](#)

Re: Iran

Thanks for the illuminating comment.

However:

After all the only country to opt for (1) was Iraq while North Korea, Pakistan and India both went for option (2) and they've received little punishment.

Is is not true that Libya has taken option (1) with great success? And South Africa? And Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus? And all the countries that have not even embarked on a nuclear weapons programme?

by [Editor](#) on Fri, 06/16/2006 - 13:50 | [reply](#)

Fair point

You're certainly right about Libya I was forgetting about that. It's a

good example to remember because the two countries share a few similarities in their circumstances. There certainly wasn't a lot of trust there but Ghadaffi took the leap of faith and it's been rewarded. Maybe we should draft Libya into the negotiating team!

The others are a slightly different type and I'm not sure if you can draw any lessons from them. In each of those there was a regime change (end of apartheid and collapse of the Soviet Union) that predated the decision to disarm. Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus were all left with Soviet sites they couldn't afford to maintain or even secure and the decision to be paid to disarm was an obvious one. I don't mean to belittle the achievement of getting these countries to agree but the problem was made much easier by the regime changes. Also none of the countries thought they were at any military risk. The ex USSR countries were all still in the CIS and protected by Russia (although I wonder if Ukraine wishes it had hung on to a couple of nukes now) and South Africa is economically so far ahead of it's neighbours that it isn't worried.

by a reader on Fri, 06/16/2006 - 14:46 | [reply](#)

Unrealistic hope

I think the important point to realize about Iran today is that a fundamental change in the political system from within would be more than the counterparts in Eastern Europe etc. It would be a combination of Greek Golden age revolution, the Renaissance, the enlightenment and the modern political democratic revolutions all wrapped in one because Iran has never really undergone the other periods of growth in the Western sense. If this is true, it should be clear that the hope for such an accomplishment from the people in such short time is unrealistic to say the least.

The intellectuals and the students have gone a long way towards the right ideas and demands but it takes much more time than you realize for this to be absorbed by the mass population. As I said a couple of years before, as far as the majority of people are concerned they are fed up with this system, perhaps for the first time with the over arching traditional and revolutionary interpretations of Islam (and in urban parts perhaps of Islam altogether) but the gap from this to rational systematic movements and demands is still very huge.

The West has no choice but to interfere with Iran to prevent the imminent danger, but that must be clear to all that a regime change is the absolute necessity here. Anything short of that would mean a definite defeat and a huge catastrophe in the long term. However there exists alternatives between internal revolution and outside war. The West can actively engage in forming unrest and guiding it to a outright regime change. Even limited military action can be used to weaken the regime and embolden the population enough to take risks (like in Serbia for example).

But unfortunately I have to say that if you are hoping for an all Iranian solution to this crisis you will be disappointed.

I also agree with the reader above about paranoia in Iranian

mindset. It is just one instance of the need for an over all cultural renaissance to really get out of this historical backwardness. I think the point is that that could only come after gradually and after a regime change and not before it given the very little time left to avoid a catastrophe.

As for the Libyan example it won't work in Iran. Iran is ruled by a mafia like ideological oligarchy not a personal tyrant as in Libya. There is constant struggle between the different fraction inside the regime just like between different mafia families. The real power base is the hardliner fanatic bassiji and islamist core (something like 5% of the population though the figure it is basically a guess) who are in it really for the revolutionary zeal. Any kind of deal from any fraction inside the regime will alienate the power base from that fraction to the rivals (as the defeat of Rafsanjani showed once more to the surprise of us all). It would be a great risk for them to go soft now I think, especially after the way this last election went.

by [AIS](#) on Sat, 06/24/2006 - 23:23 | [reply](#)

The Mid East in general

To trust the Mid East and Muslims in particular has proven to be a major mistake for the west. These backward dumpster dwellers have proven time and time again especially with Israel that they are natural born thieves and liars. I think that they need to have a hurting put on them the likes of which they have never experienced before. It's the only thing they understand.

by Spanky on Fri, 07/28/2006 - 16:35 | [reply](#)

Re: The Mid East

natural born thieves and liars

There is no evidence for that racist characterisation of Middle Easterners or "Muslims in particular". On the contrary, the current violence and viciousness of various Islamic movements is clearly an entirely cultural problem, made much worse by tyrannical governments and by the cynicism and often complicity of Western governments.

Also, "thieves" is a misleading characterisation of them, for thieves seek benefit for themselves at the expense of harming others, while Islamists and their sympathisers seek to harm Jews and Americans and the West even when they themselves are harmed much more by clinging to that position.

Consequently, there is no reason to believe that being hurt "is the only thing they understand", or that they would understand it at all, in the relevant sense.

They need to be *defeated*.

by [Editor](#) on Fri, 07/28/2006 - 17:13 | [reply](#)

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Those North Korean Missiles

In an amusing reversal of their stereotyped positions, some Democrats, including Jimmy Carter's Vice President **Walter Mondale**, have called for pre-emptive strikes to destroy North Korea's new missiles. (By the way, do they imagine that the UN would approve these? Would the policy be subjected to that 'test'?) Meanwhile the current Vice President Dick Cheney seems to be **dismissing** the idea. He even doubts that the weapons exist in the advertised form...

Of course Cheney doesn't want a war with North Korea. It may be groaning under an evil bloodthirsty communist regime, but it has no oil. Right?

Wrong, actually.

Tue, 06/27/2006 - 14:58 | [permalink](#)

Shh. You'll give him ideas.

Shh. You'll give him ideas.

by a reader on Fri, 06/30/2006 - 12:24 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

Doesn't Want To Know

Via **Vital Perspective** (which, by the way, is doing a good job collating news about the current Israeli hostage-rescue operation in Gaza):

Bear in mind that not too long ago, **Annan wasn't even aware that there were rocket attacks** against Israel from Gaza.

In the aftermath of the Gaza incident, Prime Minister Olmert spoke by phone with U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan. Annan demanded an explanation for the Gaza deaths. When Olmert asked why Annan had not shown similar concern about the scores of missiles hitting Israel, Annan was nonplussed. "What missiles?" he asked.

Can it really be true that the Secretary General of the United Nations, the man at the pinnacle and focus of international relations, whose primary role is to promote and maintain international peace and security, was unaware of the hundreds of missiles that have been pouring into Israel from Gaza ever since the Israelis ended their occupation of the territory? Or is it just that he doesn't see anything wrong with that situation?

Wed, 06/28/2006 - 19:40 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

Perhaps he doesn't think they

Perhaps he doesn't think they qualify as "missiles", not being very sophisticated? Just a thought.

by a reader on Fri, 06/30/2006 - 12:22 | [reply](#)

Re: Perhaps he doesn't think they qualify

Whether he does or not, that seems an unlikely interpretation of his reported response, because Olmert's question was obviously not about the technology of the weapons. Olmert was comparing Annan's instant, passionate and sarcastic condemnation of Israel following the alleged accidental killings by Israeli artillery, with his lack of any similar response to the *murders* committed with

Qassams, as well as the hundreds of attempted murders of which there are now about a dozen a day. The **dead** so far have included several children.

by **Editor** on Fri, 06/30/2006 - 13:02 | [reply](#)

Annan's condemnation of Israe

Annan's condemnation of Israel on this matter stems from the blatant one-sidedness of the conflict. It is well to remember that Israel's actions, however you choose to assess them, are conducted with virtual impunity. As Washington's leading client state, Israel inherits the right to do as it chooses. A dramatic illustration of this right, quite relevant to Lebanon, was offered in the USA in 1996. On April 19, there was much anguished commentary on the car bombing at Oklahoma City a year earlier, when middle America "looked like Beirut", headlines lamented.

Beirut, of course, had looked like Beirut long before; for example just 10 years before, when the worst terrorist attack of the period was perpetrated in Beirut, a car bombing timed to cause maximum civilian casualties, virtually duplicated at Oklahoma city. The facts are well known, but unmentionable. That act of terror was carried out by the CIA, a fact that suffices to remove the incident from history along with much else that suffers the same defect.

by a reader on Thu, 07/13/2006 - 14:15 | [reply](#)

'Rescue Mission'

"The dead so far have included several children"

Today it was reported in the mass media that Israel's air strikes on parts of Lebanon, which are billed as being part of a 'rescue mission', but which are in fact intended to take a toll on the civilian population so as to force Hezbollah into submission to Israel's demands, have resulted in the deaths of 35 civilians so far, including at least 10 children.

Editor: do you have children? Can you imagine them being destroyed by explosives or falling rubble? I think you should, because having done so you might think twice about taking sides in such an obscene conflict. Here on **Setting the World to Rights** it seems that one can find all sorts of justifications for acts of war, as long as they are perpetrated by those with whom you agree ideologically.

Just picture this: YOUR children lying broken and bloody in the heap of rubble that was your home. Picture yourself holding one of them to you and screaming at the sky in anguish. Then come back at me with your justifications for acts of obscene and horrific violence.

by another reader on Thu, 07/13/2006 - 14:37 | [reply](#)

Re 'Rescue Mission'

It's fairly clear what you are arguing *against* here, but not what you

are arguing for. Is it pacifism (the immorality of all warfare)? If not, could you give an example of warfare that you are in favour of?

billed as being part of a 'rescue mission', but which are in fact intended to take a toll on the civilian population

Who else knows the real intention, apart from you? For instance, are the pilots who launch the missiles aware of it?

so as to force Hezbollah into submission to Israel's demands

And these demands are what?

by **Editor** on Fri, 07/14/2006 - 09:23 | [reply](#)

Demands?

I think Israel's "demands" are well known, and fairly straightforward: recognition of its right to exist and an end to terrorist attacks. Neither Hezbollah nor Hamas are willing to accept either of these reasonable "demands." Neither are their sponsors in Iran and Syria. Anyone who thinks that there is any solution to the killing in the Middle East without recognizing Israel and ending terrorist attacks is sadly mistaken.

by **Michael Bacon** on Fri, 07/14/2006 - 18:33 | [reply](#)

'Who else knows the re

'Who else knows the real intention, apart from you?'

I certainly don't claim to 'know' the real intention. But it is no great mental stretch to infer that blowing up an airport and killing dozens of innocents was not an act that was intended to contribute to any kind of rescue mission. How could that act possibly result in the release of the kidnapped servicemen, except as a demonstration that as long as Hezbollah hold the hostages, Israel will use its superior military might to kill innocent Lebanese. If the Editor can positively demonstrate to me in what other way the tactics of the Israeli army in this 'mission' have contributed to the goal of securing release for the hostages, I will be extremely impressed.

'And these demands are what?'

The release of the hostages, of course.

I would also ask the Editor to explain why he thinks that, in the context of a 'rescue mission', such tactics as have been followed by the Israeli military are in any way excusable, given the civilian death-toll up to this point.

by a reader on Mon, 07/17/2006 - 10:29 | [reply](#)

Re: who else knows

I certainly don't claim to 'know' the real intention.

Then you now withdraw this claim?:

Israel's air strikes on parts of Lebanon, which are billed as being part of a 'rescue mission', but which are **in fact intended** to take a toll on the civilian population...

by [Editor](#) on Mon, 07/17/2006 - 10:46 | [reply](#)

Israeli tactics

If the Editor can positively demonstrate to me in what other way the tactics of the Israeli army in this 'mission' have contributed to the goal of securing release for the hostages, I will be extremely impressed.

Thank you, but it is not a feat deserving of such plaudits, for how the Israeli tactics are related to that goal is public knowledge.

The problems facing the Israeli armed forces are primarily as follows: the terrorist organisation Hezbollah, which is heavily armed, trained and financed by Iran and Syria, dominates southern Lebanon and from that base has been murdering and kidnapping Israelis. The murder, currently being committed by means of salvoes of missiles aimed at population centres, is done mainly for its own sake, and the kidnapping has the additional intention of forcing Israel to release other murderers, foremost among whom is [Samir Kuntar](#) [please read that link if you have not already done so], whom it would be a crime to release.

A severe constraint on Israel's options is that it would be immoral to obtain the release of the current hostages by means that strengthen Hezbollah both materially and in its ideology, and hence cause more hostage-taking and other crimes in the future. In order to have the best chance of rescuing the hostages while at the same time reducing the ability of Hezbollah to commit crimes, Israel is taking military action against Hezbollah. Tactically, the most urgent thing to do is to make it as difficult as possible for Hezbollah to take the following measures: (1) move freely between South Lebanon and safe havens such as Syria and other areas in Lebanon. (2) Obtain replacement supplies of heavy equipment from their sponsors. (3) Move the hostages, especially to Iran but also from place to place in Lebanon. (4) Fire their missiles. (5) Take more hostages. To achieve this, Israel has set up a *blockade* of Southern Lebanon, and to some extent of Lebanon as a whole. They have bombed the road to Syria, placed warships off the Lebanese coast, and disabled Beirut airport. Within the blockaded area, and also within the Hezbollah-controlled area of Beirut, they have also attacked missile launching sites, missile storage sites, Hezbollah headquarters, and Hezbollah leaders. They have not attacked civilians at all.

Civilian casualties have occurred almost entirely because Hezbollah, like all Israel's enemies, exploits the matchless moral scrupulousness of the Israelis by systematically using civilian human shields. Israel has warned Lebanese civilians to evacuate

certain areas temporarily, and is giving them time to leave, precisely in order to minimise casualties among them.

by [Editor](#) on Mon, 07/17/2006 - 11:31 | [reply](#)

"...the matchless moral scrup

"...the matchless moral scrupulousness of the Israelis"

So the Israelis are an intrinsically morally scrupulous people? Unlike Arabs?

The current Israeli offensive in Lebanon, much like those of earlier years, has the intent of punishing the civilian population so that the government of Lebanon will be compelled to accept U.S. - Israeli demands. It is this "rational prospect, ultimately fulfilled, that affected populations would exert pressure for the cessation of hostilities" that has always motivated Israel's attacks on civilian populations, Israeli diplomat Abba Eban explained years ago.

What moral creed worth a gobbet of spit allows the killing of children as a regrettable effect of the enemy's locating himself amongst innocents?

by a reader on Mon, 07/17/2006 - 12:31 | [reply](#)

Accept U.S. - Israeli Demands?

Reader,

What are these terrible demands that Arabs in the region would be forced to accept? Recognition of Israel and an end to terrorist attacks? Aren't these prerequisites for any substantive negotiations aimed at achieving an overall settlement? Perhaps you believe that these are phony demands. If not, can't we agree that, short of Israel's surrender, the fighting won't end until these "demands" are met?

by [Michael Bacon](#) on Mon, 07/17/2006 - 13:45 | [reply](#)

Matchless moral scrupulousness

The "rational prospect, ultimately fulfilled, that affected populations would exert pressure for the cessation of hostilities" [...] has always motivated Israel's attacks on civilian populations, Israeli diplomat Abba Eban explained years ago.

That is a **lie** propagated by Chomsky.

"What moral creed [...] allows the killing of children as a regrettable effect of the enemy's locating himself amongst innocents?" The answer is, of course, all of them, depending on circumstances – with one exception: pacifism. And pacifism is immoral because it is an abdication of the responsibility to defend oneself and others.

(The circumstances include, for example, some of those where *all*

options have the killing of children as regrettable consequences.)
Moreover, the worse the evil being faced, the more immoral pacifism is.

by [Editor](#) on Mon, 07/17/2006 - 15:21 | [reply](#)

Err, that's Syria, not Israel

The Golan Heights, like much of Israel, are occupied territories. Given the number of UN resolutions calling on Israel to return to it's 1967 borders, I'm sure Mr Annan, no matter how senile he appears at times, is aware of what's going on.

Given the frequent illegal incursions of Israeli soldiers onto sovereign Lebanese soil, I think that the use of the word hostage is incorrect - try Prisoner of War. Or perhaps you would prefer illegal combatant?

by El Bizarro on Tue, 07/18/2006 - 09:08 | [reply](#)

Re: Err, that's Syria, not Israel

One of the essential features of the rule of law is that one can't just make up laws on the spur of the moment and require others to obey them - or pretend that they have been enacted. And that holds even in the nebulous and ambiguous field of international law.

In reality, the UN Security Council has never passed a resolution such as you describe. References to the 1967 border have always been qualified with phrases such as 'based on' and 'secure and recognised'. Israel is a sovereign state, and Hezbollah's and Hamas's cross-border bombardment and hostage-taking across internationally recognised borders are naked aggression under any conception of international law. Israel is defending itself against that. Syria has been at war with Israel ever since it and the other Arab states rejected the UN partition of Palestine in 1948. Israel has been defending itself against that aggression, which is openly in defiance of the UN Charter - but which you seem to endorse by referring to 'much of Israel' as 'occupied territory' - and which has frequently been openly genocidal in intent. Preventing genocide, as Israel was forced to do in previous wars, is compulsory under international law. Occupying territory during a defensive war is not contrary to international law. For these and many other reasons the IDF are lawful combatants and Hezbollah and Hamas are not. You can argue otherwise, redefine self defence as itself being genocide, redefine hostages as legitimate prisoners of war, redefine any warfare by Israel as being aggression, only by means of special pleading that would suffice to define anything as anything. Hamas and Hezbollah redefine Jews as being murderous sons of pigs and apes engaged in a massive sinister conspiracy to rule the world, but that doesn't make it so.

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 07/19/2006 - 11:42 | [reply](#)

Re: matchless moral scrupulousness

The Israelis constantly boast of their 'surgical' or 'pin-point' precision in air attacks. If this is true, then there are far too many civilians being killed in the Lebanese bloodbath to make every one of them an accident.

True, Hizbollah are killing civilians in Israel, but their missiles are innacurate and the West, which has done no more than mildly disapprove of Israel's retaliatory onslaught, must surely expect higher standards of the Israeli armed forces than of the terrorists.

Why, for example, did the Israelis attack and destroy the headquarters of the Liban-Lait company in the Bekaa Valley, the largest milk factory in Lebanon? Why did they bomb out the factory of the main importer for Proctor and Gamble products in Lebanon, based in Bchmoun? Why did they destroy a paper box factory outside Beirut? And why did Israeli planes attack a convoy of new ambulances being brought into Lebanon from Syria yesterday, ambulances which were clearly marked as a releif aid convoy? Were all these 'terrorist' targets? What of the convoy of villagers from Marwaheen in Southern Lebanon, ordered to flee their village by Israeli troops, and subsequently attacked by an Israeli F-16 fighter-bomber, killing at least 20 people, many of them women and children, one of whom, a girl of about eight, was photographed lying dead in a pile of rubble (a picture which has been published in British newspapers today)? Were all these 'terrorist targets'?

How can you continue to defend these war crimes?

by a reader on Thu, 07/20/2006 - 12:30 | [reply](#)

How can we defend war crimes?

We can't and we aren't.

You ask many questions. Please state the answer that you believe to be true, to just one of them.

by [Editor](#) on Thu, 07/20/2006 - 17:20 | [reply](#)

Nasty Bastards

You seem to be implying with your question that Israelis are nasty bastards who want to hurt people.

If that is so, can you explain why they haven't done a hell of a lot more? Nothing is stopping them militarily. And you have said they already do bad things and the West hardly complains.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 07/20/2006 - 19:52 | [reply](#)

Questions answered, and nasty bastards

Editor - a rather cowardly way to avoid answering difficult

questions.

Oh well, here's what I think:

"Why, for example, did the Israelis attack and destroy the headquarters of the Liban-Lait company in the Bekaa Valley, the largest milk factory in Lebanon?"

Because they are targeting Lebanon in the most inexcusably indiscriminate way. Why? Because that's exactly what Hizbollah are doing, and Israel is punishing the people of Lebanon for that crime.

"Why did they bomb out the factory of the main importer for Proctor and Gamble products in Lebanon, based in Bchmoun?"

See above.

"Why did they destroy a paper box factory outside Beirut?"

See above.

"And why did Israeli planes attack a convoy of new ambulances being brought into Lebanon from Syria yesterday, ambulances which were clearly marked as a relief aid convoy?"

See above.

"Were all these 'terrorist' targets?"

No.

"What of the convoy of villagers from Marwaheen in Southern Lebanon, ordered to flee their village by Israeli troops, and subsequently attacked by an Israeli F-16 fighter-bomber, killing at least 20 people, many of them women and children, one of whom, a girl of about eight, was photographed lying dead in a pile of rubble (a picture which has been published in British newspapers today)? Were all these 'terrorist targets'?"

No, they were not terrorist targets, and their being targeted demonstrates a deplorably lack of conscience and care on the part of the Israeli military.

Now give me your answers.

As to the 'nasty bastards' comment: why is it that when one criticises Israel's actions in any way one is instantly accused of hating the Israelis, and of tarring all Israelis with the same crude brush? I am doing no such thing. Just because Israel is Israel does not exempt it from criticism when its military causes the indiscriminate killing of hundreds of innocent people.

If you do not answer my questions and comments fully, I will assume that you have no answers.

by a reader on Fri, 07/21/2006 - 08:48 | [reply](#)

Answers

Oh well, here's what I think:

Thank you.

"Why, for example, did the Israelis attack and destroy the headquarters of the Liban-Lait company in the Bekaa Valley, the largest milk factory in Lebanon?"

Because they are targeting Lebanon in the most inexcusably indiscriminate way. Why? Because that's exactly what Hizbollah are doing, and Israel is punishing the people of Lebanon for that crime.

That does not actually answer your own question, because it does not say what the purpose of the punishment is. To relieve the Israelis' feelings through revenge? (Inflicted on a third party?) To coerce the Lebanese government, through sympathy with its people's suffering, to cease to harbour Hezbollah? To coerce Hezbollah, through its sympathy with other Lebanese, to cease trying to kill Israelis? All of these things? Or what? But anyway, we shall respond to your answer as far as it went.

You copied your list of questions verbatim from yesterday's article by Robert Fisk in The Independent. Incidentally, it may be helpful to you to know that Robert Fisk, by his disregard for facts, his tendentious reinterpretations of history, his relentless agenda of demonising the actions of the US, Israel, and the West generally, and his anti-Western racism, has become a byword for systematic factual unreliability caused by pathological ideological bias. So he is not someone whose utterances are worth laboriously typing into a computer, and certainly not citing as a factual reference when trying to persuade someone who does not share his agenda. However, it so happens that that is not directly relevant to our discussion here, because it is undoubtedly true that factories have been hit by Israeli air strikes during the current war. So let us assume, for the sake of argument, that one of them was the Liban-Lait company in the Bekaa Valley, and that it was targeted rather than hit accidentally.

The obvious way in which this could come about would be if Hezbollah fighters, or leaders, were using the factory as a base, or for storing or launching their missiles. That is not an implausible thing for them to be doing, since it is their systematic policy. Only yesterday, Israeli forces discovered a Hezbollah arsenal **in a mosque**, so it is inconceivable that Hezbollah would hesitate to use a milk factory in the same way.

One therefore has to ask oneself this: *if* the motives for the current Israeli air raids were exactly as the Israeli government is publicly claiming, would one expect any factories to be hit? The answer is clearly yes. And so one should consider further: would one then expect Fisk to interpret those raids as evidence of immoral intentions on the part of the Israelis? Again, clearly, yes. Would they in fact *be* evidence of that? Clearly not in themselves, because they are, on the face of it, also consistent with other intentions, including those that the Israelis claim to have.

However, to make a fair judgement, one must consider whether

your alternative explanation is plausible too, namely that this was part of an inexcusably indiscriminate, collective punishment of the Lebanese people, "exactly what Hizbollah are doing" [to the Israeli people].

One problem with that explanation is that, as Elliot said, the Israelis would be going about this punishment in a very illogical and self-defeating way. They keep insisting that that is not what it is. And they are taking extraordinary measures to, for example, allow the flow of humanitarian aid, and to reveal in advance where they are going to strike so that civilians can leave the area. Moreover, they are limiting themselves to using only a tiny proportion of their military power. Whatever you may think of the morality of their choice of targets, they are manifestly *not*, as Hezbollah is, choosing them according to population density. Now, you may think that all such apparently perverse measures are camouflage, intended to disguise what you know to be the true intentions of the Israelis. If so, then you are at least claiming that those intentions are being systematically disguised. In other words, the alleged Israeli intentions we are discussing, and the military planning and actions which you say they are causing, are part of a conspiracy.

There is also the fact that this alleged punishment mission is costing the lives of Israeli soldiers. The Israelis claim to care deeply about the loss of individual lives, and to be deeply averse to risking them other than in self-defence. They must be lying about that too, if the real intention of these actions is revenge. Perhaps you are not saying that it is; there are forms of punishment that are not vengeful - though rarely against third parties. That is why we hoped you would be explicit as to what motive you are actually alleging.

But in any case, there would have to be a conspiracy, and all this leads us to consider its nature, and how plausible it could be that it exists. We refer you to our [series](#) on the subject. but in brief, if the real intention of the current Israeli actions (such as the bombing of any particular building) differs as you say from the reasons that they publicly defend, then they are faced with what seems to us an impossible problem of dupe-management. In this regard, bear in mind that the Israeli Air Force in particular contains officers with a vast range of political opinions. Regularly, some of them resign, or refuse to participate in certain actions, because they disagree with them politically. It is therefore beyond the bounds of credibility that, in the briefing for a mission to bomb a milk factory, the pilots would be given a justification such as "*this* will pay back those Lebanese for Hezbollah's murders of our children", and for the conspirators in the government to expect those pilots to go out and attack, including risking their own lives, in pursuit of such an intention.

The pilots are not raw conscripts. They are world-class professionals, highly skilled and knowledgeable about the enemy and the military situation. Is it plausible that they could be fobbed off again and again with a rationale for their missions that was such a gigantic lie? Would they not be constantly encountering situations where the *purported* national aims would be best served by one mission, yet they were being ordered to fly a completely different

mission inconsistent with those aims?

And therefore finally, we are led to consider whether, if what was really happening was that *all* of the missions really are in conformity with Israel's purported aims, Robert Fisk would be saying so. And whether you would be.

by **Editor** on Fri, 07/21/2006 - 14:35 | **reply**

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Setting The World To Rights

Ideas have consequences.

Various Missiles, Condi, And The Danger Of Moral Prevarication

One of the standard lines of argument of the campaign for unilateral nuclear disarmament during the late twentieth century was that weapons stockpiles cause wars. "Never in history," they would say "was a new generation of powerful, expensive weapons stockpiled, without then being used."

They may have been right about previous history, but since then there have been a handful of counter-examples. The most important was in regard to the very stockpiles they wanted us to extrapolate that history to, namely those of the United States' and the Soviet Union's thermonuclear weapons. Not just one but two or three successive generations of leading-edge weapons systems were designed, paid for, manufactured, integrated into doctrine and training, deployed, decommissioned, and sold for scrap, without being used once. The same is true of Israel's nuclear weapons capabilities, despite not being offset by any corresponding deterrent.

But evil regimes refrain from violence only when they are under intense pressure (Saddam in the first Gulf War, for instance, as well as the Soviet Union in its final years, both refrained from using their weapons of mass destruction) – the very situation that pacifists and other advocates of unilateral disarmament, appeasement and the like believe is the *least* likely to have a happy ending.

Over the last few years, the world looked on without applying any pressure at all as Iran and Syria poured sophisticated and massively destructive weapons into Hezbollah's stockpile. The world looked on as if there was some doubt as to what those thousands of missiles were for, or whether they would eventually be used if Hezbollah remained in a position to use them.

When they finally did what they were longing to do, and started to rain death and destruction on Israel's population centres, the world was slightly less enraged than usual with Israel for daring to defend itself (with the exception of President Chirac, who seems to have gone **stark mad**). President Bush, especially, let it be known that if Hezbollah "stopped doing that shit", everything would be fine.

But, unfortunately, that is not enough to halt or even slow the juggernaut – Iranian nuclear weapons – that is currently heading both for Israel and the United States. Hypocrisy and paralysis are

still the norm against which actions are judged. Condoleezza Rice

issued a **strong statement** in support of Israel:

First of all, Israel has a right to defend itself. No country would sit and continue to receive rocket fire against civilian populations and not try to do something about it.

Indeed. But unfortunately, she felt obliged to continue as follows:

What we have asked of the Israelis is that they act in a way to avoid innocent civilian casualties, to avoid the destruction of civilian infrastructure, because there does need to be another day. Israel will need to have those moderate allies in Lebanon and in the Palestinian territories in order to create a stable peace.

That is to say, "OK, for once, you're justified in using violence, but even so, please take care to *restrain* yourselves from indulging your natural tendency to slaughter civilians and drink their blood. We know you are deaf to moral arguments in general, but you are good at understanding material advantage, so please note that on this occasion, mitigating the slaughter will be of material advantage to you in the future."

That is how *friends* of Israel among the world's politicians and diplomats feel obliged to talk. This is especially irksome because, in fact, Israel has the most morally advanced defence and foreign policy in the world, so all these condescending strictures come from people, and polities, that are markedly inferior to Israel in that very respect. But also, if we may respond to Secretary Rice in kind: this moral prevarication is not only wantonly unfriendly and immoral. It is a serious material danger to the United States.

Wed, 07/19/2006 - 12:17 | [permalink](#)

Pressure On Israel

Editor,

" . . . please take care to restrain yourselves from indulging your natural tendency to slaughter civilians and drink their blood. . ."

I have a hard time extrapolating from her quote to paraphrase as you did above. Fortunately, so far at least, the US administration has not pressured Israel nearly as much as one might have feared. We can hope that there continues to be no substantial pressure and that Israel is able to achieve its main objectives -- but that is, I know, a lot to hope for.

If the US isn't clear about what is morally right, does pressure Israel, and as a result Israel stops too far short, it would certainly be a very " . . . serious material danger to the United States."

As for " . . . you are good at understanding material advantage, so please note that on this occasion, mitigating the slaughter will be of material advantage to you in the future," apart from determining the meaning of the word "mitigating," and your use of the

pejorative term "slaughter", I suspect that Israel views the situation in a not dissimilar vein, and such considerations go into their strategic thinking.

by [Michael Bacon](#) on Wed, 07/19/2006 - 20:43 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

Too Clever

Editor,

You're obviously too clever for me. I guess all I can do in the circumstances is to continue to try and persuade folks to support Israel. . . .

For those who may be interested, the following is the link to the White House for comments. If you support Israel, it may some help to let the administration know:

comments@whitehouse.gov

by [Michael Bacon](#) on Wed, 07/19/2006 - 22:49 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

Rice

I would agree with [The World](#) that the statement by Secretary Rice would be offensive if spoken privately to Israeli leaders.

But, I think it was crafted to appeal to other, less enlightened, governments that the US is making the "right" noises towards Israel (without actually criticizing Israel for anything it has actually done).

I'm sure that Secretary Rice is aware of Israel's moral stature, and how unfairly it is regularly judged.

So, I agree with Michael Bacon that [The World's](#) extrapolation isn't a fair reading of her likely meaning.

I wouldn't have made the statement, but nobody ever accused me of being diplomatic.

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Thu, 07/20/2006 - 05:24 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

Diplomatic Language

I agree with Gil and Michael Bacon. Any diplomatic statement that aims to bring about a peaceful solution must be targeted at a number of audiences. You have to try and get your message across to all of them and produce a statement that both sides can agree with in principle. So saying yes Israel has a right to defend itself but it should also be careful in how it exercises this right is a sensible place to start. You shouldn't read it as suggesting that Israel is being injudicious in exercising it's right but the statement needs to

appeal to those whose suspicion will always be that they are.

If Condi had issued a statement without the caveat you took offence to then it would be all too easy for opponents of Israel to characterise (again) the USA as an unthinking uncritical ally of Israel and therefore a supporter (of what they believe to be the case) of attacks on civilian infrastructure and civilian population centres. Any diplomatic capital, any chance of being an honest broker is set back if not gone altogether. The impact of an unbalanced statement is to polarise views and make consensus less likely.

Chirac's statements are a good example of the pro-Arab view that an honest broker needs to appeal to. He, and countless like him in the Arab world and in Europe, will see pictures of destruction in Beirut and draw his own conclusions about the morality and proportionality of it all. They will not be convinced by audacious claims of Israel having "the most morally advanced defence and foreign policy in the world" nor that they have responded in a proportional way. To bring these people and nations into a diplomatic dialogue you need to use language they can agree with but without compromising your position. I think Condi's statement is a very good example of this.

by RK on Thu, 07/20/2006 - 09:37 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

Diplomacy

There are indeed various advantages to being diplomatic.

But haven't people been trying diplomatic statements for decades with little success?

Perhaps the advantages of clarity are also/more important?

Besides, there are other countries that say diplomatic things. But few others are remotely capable of saying clear and moral things. It's usually best to utilize our uniquely valuable trait instead of our fairly fungible trait.

-- Elliot Temple

[My Blog](#)

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 07/20/2006 - 09:46 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

Clarity

It should also be noted that *the other side* has clarity. They frequently, loudly, clearly express their position. They have diplomatic announcements as well (not very good ones), sure. But the clear position that the Jews are bad and that the natural Jewish habitat is the sea is what wins them most of their supporters.

And this lack of diplomacy doesn't get *them* in much trouble.

People go way out of their way to pretend it isn't clear.

Acquiescing in this huge imbalance about which side can be how clear is harmful.

We are the good guys. *they* are the ones who should be hiding their true motives.

-- Elliot Temple

My Blog

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 07/20/2006 - 09:51 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

Propoganda

I think you're absolutely right that the other side has *clarity* for which it isn't punished. Even handedness can sometimes imply moral equivalence and this is unfair on Israel. For example the statement from UN Human Rights Commissioner Louise Arbour suggesting both sides might be guiltily of war crimes through deliberately targeting civilians verges on the crass. It's fairly obvious that Hezbollah are targeting civilians and it should be equally obvious to anyone with an ounce of military knowledge that the IDF are not. To suggest that both parties actions are equally close to being war crimes is to let Hezbollah off the hook.

I think it's wrong to say that Hezbollah gather most support from their anti-Semitic statements. That is probably the case when it comes to appealing to Anti Semites (especially in the Arab and Muslim world) but when it comes to European public opinion the media footage from Gaza, West Bank and Lebanon does so much more. That's why Hamas and Hezbollah adopt tactics that will result in civilian casualties on their own side. If there was no propaganda value to it they wouldn't do it but they know that the cameras will be there when they wheel the children into the hospital. My particular despair is that the western media rarely comment on this when they show the footage. This cynical manipulated of the international media has been with us for a long time (I first became aware of how low some people will go during the Bosnian and Kosovan conflicts) but the media seem unwilling to address or even acknowledge it. Think I'm going off on a tangent here. I'll stop now.

by RK on Thu, 07/20/2006 - 10:43 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

New Language

Editor,

Your suggested language has much to commend it, but it isn't relevant to the issue of whether [The World's](#) extrapolation was a fair reading of her likely meaning. Nevertheless, I agree that any party offended by your language would not have been influenced by the original to contribute to peace.

by [Michael Bacon](#) on Thu, 07/20/2006 - 12:17 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post

Diplomacy

The difference in the two texts is subtle but the difference in the way people would interpret them is vast. The first is balanced and hopes for peace and saving of innocent lives. The second backs Israel.

Moderate governments (and people) inclined to a pro-Arab position would read an uncritical support for Israel as opposed to the more neutral original. These governments would *know* that the statement was wrong (targeting civilian and civilian infrastructure) and would therefore see Rice as a partisan player and therefore not a credible person to negotiate a peaceful solution. It would also possibly encourage the likes of Chirac et al to put out counter-statements deploring the Israelis and calling for a ceasefire.

I'm not challenging the morality of the IDF or suggesting that your new text is wrong in any way. My point is that Rice doesn't need to say it. It would be undiplomatic and unhelpful. Consider Javier Solana's comments after he left Beirut the other day. Amongst a lot of balanced diplomatic language he said that having seen the damage he had to say the Israeli action was disproportionate. After that what Israeli can trust Solana to facilitate a peaceful resolution? He should have stuck to his first answer which was that if people considered the Israeli response disproportionate it would be harder to defeat terrorism. A statement moderates on both sides can agree with.

by RK on Thu, 07/20/2006 - 13:14 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

The difference in the two tex

The difference in the two texts is subtle but the difference in the way people would interpret them is vast. The first is balanced and hopes for peace and saving of innocent lives. The second backs Israel.

I agree that the first one doesn't back Israel. That's a problem. Shouldn't Israel be backed?

BTW there is no such thing as a moderate supporter of jew killing. There are only the guilty and perhaps the really ignorant. Also there are the committed, and the people who can be scared into stopping. Stuff like that.

Perhaps moderates means the people who aren't sure about jew killing and are frequently complicit, but aren't motivated enough to start their own militia?

I also take issue with the idea of credible negotiators. The credibility of a negotiator doesn't matter, because neither side will, or should, put their trust and fate into some diplomat's hands. They can

evaluate offers based on whether they are good no matter who they are coming from.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 07/20/2006 - 20:00 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

No Offense

Some people think that the IDF has a right to defend Israel from Hizballah by cutting off their access to Syrian and Iranian arms and by tracking down and imprisoning or killing members of Hizballah, as it is currently doing. None of these people would be offended by Rice making a stronger statement of the kind provided by the World above.

What about the people who think that Israel is in the wrong? Of the politicians who have some influence over what happens in the Middle East, like the governments of Syria, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey and so on, some are democratic and free, some are not. The countries that are not free are ruled by tyrants who propagate conspiracy theories and sometimes believe their own propaganda, as can be seen by looking at the media of these countries. A conspiracy theory addled dictator will either have a reasonable interpretation of American statements or view them through the corrupting lens of some conspiracy theory. In the latter case the tyrant will see any statement of support for Israel, no matter how mild, as a provocation.

Some people will say that the alternative to Rice's statement outlined above by the World is undiplomatic. However, this is based on their experience of living in a free society that isn't unconditionally ruled by a conspiracy theoretic crackpot. In a free society minor differences of phrasing will make some difference to the way that a government will respond to some offer. For example, an offer from Japan to America to reduce a tariff by 10% as opposed to 5% might make or break a trade agreement. Hizballah doesn't care if people want to meet them halfway and only let them kill half of the Jews in Israel, say, nor does the Iranian government. None of these people will take steps that will hurt Israel in any major way, although they might refuse to buy Israeli fruit or something like that. But they wouldn't support anything Israel does anyway, so it's wrong to care what they think.

by **Alan Forrester** on Thu, 07/20/2006 - 21:30 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

"It's wrong to care what they

"It's wrong to care what they think"

You (meaning not only Forrester, but all the rest of you at **The**

World), and those who share your attitudes are just as much the reason World War Three now looms as are the Muslim immoderates. You will change your tune when the missiles start hitting the quiet leafy avenues/bustling urban centres where you live.

Except that doesn't happen to people like you, does it? It happens to people in other countries, whose lives are worth rather less than yours. If only you and yours were the eggs that had to be broken to make the omelette, you might find that you took the loss of lives a little more seriously.

Sorry, had to say that in the vague hope of cracking your callous shell of cold hard logic; you know, the one from the safety of which you talk about bloodshed as if it were something right and necessary. I'm sure you won't reply to this comment, since I haven't engaged your insane arguments enough for you to pick me up on some semantic irrelevancy or other.

by a reader on Fri, 07/21/2006 - 08:23 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

Jew Killers

Elliot,

I have a high regard for the quality of the writing on this site and frequently agree with the principles being promoted. However in this string I think your passionate support for Israel is clouding your judgement and your last post verged on the offensive.

The most striking example of this is the phrase you wrote in reply to my mentioning of "Moderate governments and people inclined to a pro-Arab position". You said "...there is no such thing as a moderate supporter of jew killing. There are only the guilty and perhaps the really ignorant...". That statement is breath taking in it's arrogance. It's the kind of extreme "all our opponenets are infidels and apostates and must die" bull I'd normally expect to dribble from the mouths of Nasrallah or al-Zawahiri. It paints everyone who doesn't agree with you as the enemy and leaves no room for compromise and little room for dialogue. Some states do want the descrtuction of Israel. I'd include most countries with a Muslim majority in this camp. But the vast majority of people and nations are not "supporters of jew killing". They are opponents of killing and in this crisis (like many before) Israel is doing quite a lot of killing. Hence the calls for them to stop and their sympathy for Lebanon and disdain for Israel. You can and do argue on the validity of the IDF cause. That the killing is justified in the pursiut of their military objectives and self defence. Fair enough but don't start flining hyperbole around that means everyone who disagrees with you is a secret anti-semite who longs for the destruction of Israel. It is devisive, polarising and offensive.

I also have to disagree with you on the role of credible negotiators. Take a look at the resolution of the Bosnian war, even Kosovo and

the roles played by Russia, the EU and the US. As long as the

current conflict doesn't result in the complete destruction of Hezbollah (which of course it won't, even if there was a massive land war) then there will be a need for some kind of mediation. Sure you could possibly patch together a deal without one but the complete lack of trust by both sides would make a future conflagration almost inevitable. What a credible negotiator allows you to do is put more trust in the promises of your opponent that you would normally because you know they are being monitored and a break of the promise will be recognised as such. The negotiator / facilitator / mediator needs to have power (economic or military) behind it and it needs to be viewed as objective and fair. Given that the US is already seen as partisan it would need to exclude them or at least balance them against another party, perhaps the EU or Russia. Undiplomatic utterings make this future diplomacy much harder and probably mean more lives will be lost before we get there.

In the current crisis I support Israel's actions and feel that the blame lies squarely with Hezbollah. I'm also sure that if there are any war crimes being committed it is by them. But I also think there is a risk that Israel will go too far. Every Lebanese civilian that dies is a propaganda victory for Hezbollah. Take a look at the BBC message board and you will see that the majority of people support Israel because they can recognise the provocations they have suffered. This support will ebb away the more Lebanese non-combatants die and will flow even faster when you call any doubters "Jew killers".

We're on the same side here Elliot and I hope you read this as constructive criticism.

Ruairidh

P.S. In response to Alan's post. True the difference in phrasing will be lost on Hezbollah but it's not Hezbollah this is aimed at but the wider pro-Arab world. Not all of whom will be blind to the subtleties of diplomacy.

P.P.S. I don't know how many of you are based in the UK but if you may want to read the front page of the Sun. Omar Bakri Mohammed (remember him?) has asked for a visa to visit the UK and was turned away from a UK warship evacuating women and children. Hilarious

by RK on Fri, 07/21/2006 - 09:30 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

But the vast majority of peop

But the vast majority of people and nations are not "supporters of jew killing". They are opponents of killing and in this crisis (like many before) Israel is doing quite a lot of killing. Hence the calls for them to stop and their sympathy for Lebanon and disdain for Israel.

I wish it were so. But it is not. If it were, those people would be equally opposed to other killing that takes place world wide. They aren't.

We're on the same side here Elliot and I hope you read this as constructive criticism.

Yeah, no problem. Criticise away. I enjoy lucid arguments in favor of any position.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 07/22/2006 - 01:00 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

Re: "It's wrong to care what they..."

Somebody wrote:

You (meaning not only Forrester, but all the rest of you at **The World**), and those who share your attitudes are just as much the reason World War Three now looms as are the Muslim immoderates. You will change your tune when the missiles start hitting the quiet leafy avenues/bustling urban centres where you live.

They've already attacked London and threatened British people like Salman Rushdie with death.

Except that doesn't happen to people like you, does it? It happens to people in other countries, whose lives are worth rather less than yours. If only you and yours were the eggs that had to be broken to make the omelette, you might find that you took the loss of lives a little more seriously.

Islamists are killing people in Sudan, in Indonesia and in many other countries. I think the civilised countries of the world should help their victims to get rid of the Islamists. Unfortunately, that involves some risk that innocent people will be killed. If people don't resist Islamism it is certain that many people will be killed as the Islamists want to establish theocratic states that will murder and oppress people. The choice is not between a diplomatic policy that entails no risk that anyone will be hurt and a reckless policy that will hurt people. It is between a rational policy of taking out terrorist groups and the tyrannical governments that support them and an irrational policy of pretending that they have demands that we should be prepared to grant. What is the halfway house between Israel being a judenrein Islamist theocracy and Israel being a free society?

by **Alan Forrester** on Sat, 07/22/2006 - 20:04 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

The Pacifist Tendancy

"I wish it were so. But it is not. If it were, those people would be

equally opposed to other killing that takes place world wide. They aren't."

To be honest they usually are. Speaking about the UK at least the people currently wringing their hands over Lebanese civilian deaths would also have complained against the Iraq war, the Afghan invasion, the Kosovan bombing campaign and so on. It is a pacifist tendency that a lot of people here share. Any military action *that makes it onto the news* will be similarly disapproved of. The key point here is that it needs to make it onto the news. Most people won't go out of their way to find out the current state of play in Kashmir / Darfur / Eritrea / Sri Lanka / Algeria / Columbia / Chechnya or wherever. Ask them to explain any one of the above conflicts and they'll struggle but show them the picture of a bombed out house and they'll chorus "this is terrible". Tell them that the house was being used to store missiles that were to be fired on civilians and they'll squirm but their view won't really change. They are not "anti" or "pro" one side or the other in any meaningful ideological way. They take the side that seems to be suffering the greater civilian casualties.

I know people who think what Israel is doing is terrible. I disagree with them and try and discuss the issue with them. Their knowledge is patchy and their logic simple. To call them supporters of Jew killing would be grossly unfair. I'd rather call them pacifists, with all the naivety that tag implies.

So perhaps the question should be is there more criticism of Israel in the media than other countries in conflicts, and why? I think that there is. Take the examples above, especially Chechnya and Kashmir (both big motivators for the global jihad) and compare with Israel. Why is that? Certainly the Russians or Sudanese are more ruthless so it can't be that. I think there is an anti-Israeli agenda in some parts of the media and this dovetails conveniently with the fact that it is generally easier and safer for westerns to report from Gaza / West Bank / Beirut than it is from Grozny or Srinagar.

I'd be interested in your thoughts on the role now being played by Dr Rice given your earlier assertion that there was no need for a credible negotiator. Do you think she will bring peace by mediating or is she just a conduit through which Israel and Lebanon can discuss terms without the loss of face / momentum from direct negotiations?

by RK on Tue, 07/25/2006 - 10:44 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

An explanation from the BBC

As to the question why does Israel get more negative coverage from the media here is a comment lifted from the BBC website.

BEGINS

Here are some stark statistics:

- Around 30 to 40 people are killed every day in the current Israel/Lebanon conflict.

- About 100 people are killed every day in the violence in Iraq.
 - And 1,200 people are killed every day in the war in the Congo.
- All three of these stories are due to appear on tonight's Ten O'Clock News. They will probably run in that order - with the Middle East getting by far the most attention.

Does this say something about how we value human life? It's a fair question and one I worry about.

Here is our reasoning for not reversing the order. The war in the Congo has been going on for decades - it is desperately important (as we will reflect tonight), and a story we will keep returning to. Similarly the Ten has led the way in attempting to show the scale of the violence in Iraq in recent months - we have regularly led the programme with stories from there, and the BBC is the only British broadcaster with a full time commitment to being there.

The Middle East needs more time and space for a variety of reasons:

- The sheer complexity of the situation requires space to help provide context and analysis.
- The current conflict plugs into so many other stories around the world, from what Tony Blair and George W. Bush call the "War on Terror", through to the price of oil, even the situation in Afghanistan.
- Many people fear the consequences of conflict in the Middle East more than anywhere else, and it is our job to help people understand a "scary world".

In short, our judgement is that Middle East is currently the biggest story in the world - by a wide margin - and it has the greatest implications for us all.

Craig Oliver is editor of the Ten O'Clock News

ENDS

Complexity - sorry don't buy that. The current crisis is quite simply really. Certainly more straight forward than the complete mess that is the Congo.

So there you have it. It seems to boil down the fact that the BBC are more worried about Israel because their actions could stire up the hornets nest of Islamism and Arab nationalism and what this means for the war on terror.

by RK on Tue, 07/25/2006 - 10:59 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

media bias

RK:

I agree the media presents a very biased view, and some people are ignorant enough not to be aware of this. But I think many people are complicit. It's hard to never ever hear about the Congo even once. It is going to be on the news tonight, as you've posted. Not as much attention, but still there. So anyone who really cared about killing -- a true pacifist -- would quickly see the Congo issue was most important, (even from a brief mention) and tell all his

friends. Some proportion of those people would look into it more

and start websites to inform other people who were ignorant. This growing movement would get attention. More people would find out. They would demand the media change its practices. etc

But all that does not happen. Because, as I said, many people are complicit.

Note also that many people read some blogs but choose not to read ones that would broaden their perspective. And many people choose not to watch Fox which would also help some. All those people who don't understand the other side, and don't want to know, are complicit.

You mentioned pacifists being naive. I agree and consider this quite important. It's common place that these people simply have not thought about the issues. However, if that's the case, why do they have opinions on them? Can it be that the leaders of anti-Israel marches, for example, have never really thought about combat, killing, terrorism, hostages, etc?

This is somewhat appealing because it may mean they are not bad people. But it is perhaps not very plausible. It looks to me like there must be something wrong with their thinking (on these issues) that has the effect that they don't figure anything out.

I presume you're aware that your examples of killing people don't like were all involving USA? Israel's ally.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 07/25/2006 - 17:08 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

Ignorance is Bliss

Your description of what an active pacifist might do is all very sensible but most are not active. So I think complicit is too strong. It implies a conscious decision and I think their naivety is more coincidental. Consider what proportion of "Live8" marches knew the first thing about global economics beyond what they'd read in the fliers, or the number of "Stop the War" marchers who could find Darfur or Congo on a map but felt moved to protest against Israel. The answer, I suspect is low in both cases. So why do they march? They march because they have their consciences pricked by the media and because it's cool. Political dissent and direct action are de rigueur these days, especially with the dash of celebrity glamour usually thrown in.

So why does exposure to other views not enlighten them? I think it is because their lack of knowledge means they don't know just how ignorant they are. (See this paper, I imagine you've seen it before

but it encapsulates my point
<http://www.apa.org/journals/features/psp7761121.pdf>). Yes they've thought about combat and terrorism etc but their starting from a simple world view where everyone is fundamentally decent and every thing could be worked out if we just sat down and talked about it. Therefore any violence is uncalled for. Complete bull I know but that seems to be what they think. You said "It looks to me like there must be something wrong with their thinking (on these issues) that has the effect that they don't figure anything out." I agree there is. It's ignorance in the most part. Ignorance is different from stupidity. Lots of these people are intelligent enough to develop a deep understanding but they don't put the time in. Ironically I believe because they don't think they need to – they think they understand perfectly.

"I presume you're aware that your examples of killing people don't like were all involving USA? Israel's ally."

Sorry I don't follow you here. My examples covered conflicts the USA are certainly not involved in, at least not in an active military sense. Colombia yes but Chechnya, Darfur, Eritrea, Sri Lanka, Algeria, Kashmir no.

by RK on Wed, 07/26/2006 - 09:05 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

Ignorance

Children have way more ignorance than the adults we are discussing, but it does not prevent them from learning things, including things about the Middle East (every knowledgeable middle eastern scholar was once ignorant about it, BTW). Ignorance isn't a force that stops people from improving.

The examples I was referring to were Iraq, Afghanistan, and Kosovo. Those were the ones I thought you said that people don't like (which, of course, only includes ones they know about).

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 07/26/2006 - 16:27 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

Wars people don't like

The common theme of those three is also that British forces were involved so there was a lot of media coverage and a debate about what the UK should or should not do, hence the protests from the anti-war lobby. In fact these are the only major conflicts involving the British Armed Forces since the first Gulf War except Sierra Leone.

It is true that the SWP/STWC backbone of the anti-war(s)

movement is also anti-american so that may have an influence here but that's another discussion. Come to think of it I don't remember the Sierra Leone deployment being quite so controversial.

by RK on Thu, 07/27/2006 - 08:45 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

Afghanistan

I should explain myself a little more on the Afghanistan comment. I choose this example because I think anyone who was against this war is either deluded, ignorant or a pacifist. The case for action was incredibly compelling and the majority of people knew this. I sometimes use it as a sanity test to gauge what kind of person I'm speaking with if we end up discussing geopolitics. If they were against the Afghan campaign then they're a cretin.

I can remember leaving work and going into Westminster tube in the month between 9/11 and the start of the bombing campaign. I took what I thought was a free newspaper from a guy handing them out at the entrance. When I settled down to read the thing I was disappointed to find I had a four page 'Stop the War' flier in the mock up of a newspaper. For a laugh I decided to read it anyway. What was enlightening was just how stupid and uninformed the whole thing was. The only thing that stuck in my mind was the article that seriously claimed the **only** reason the USA was going to invade Afghanistan was to allow the construction of a gas pipeline from Central Asia through Pakistan to the Indian Ocean. I wish I'd kept it but I felt embarrassed to be seen reading it so I ditched it long before I got home.

by RK on Thu, 07/27/2006 - 09:03 | [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

The EU, Human Stem Cells, And Poodles

The European Union has **decided** to restrict its funding of human stem cell research to experiments that do not involve the destruction of fertilised eggs.

Some members of the EU are devoutly Catholic countries. Their people have irrational religious objections to that sort of research. So why should they fund it? Indeed, but now the EU will take money in the form of taxation from Britain (which is a major net contributor to the EU budget), and will forbid its use for good research that most Britons approve of.

Part of the problem with a system that requires politicians from many different countries to pool their spending is that they have to compromise on issues where their constituents disagree. Within the evolved democratic political tradition of a single nation, such compromises take place too, but they then form part of a political process in which they are discussed, dissected, reviewed, and generally implemented in such a way that their proponents are held responsible for their outcomes, and the policies can be amended or abandoned in response to criticism, and so progress can be made. The EU has no such process. indeed, there is no such thing as the European political process at all, or a European political party, or a European national debate on anything. Yet genuine political accountability depends on the existence of such processes, which is why the European Parliament is not only a meaningless, formal imitation of a democratic institution but would remain so if it were (disastrously) given significant legislative powers. Still less accountable are the European Commissioners, who are insulated by layer upon layer of institutional defences against the slightest danger that they could be held to basic standards of rationality.

At the moment, the British press and 'opinion makers' have taken to shrieking 'poodle!' whenever the Prime Minister does not achieve the full reversal of a major US foreign policy in deference to British domestic opinion. Yet somehow the EU invariably gets a pass when it materially overrules, undermines and thwarts the British people's means of deciding on their own governance inside Britain.

If Britain cannot reform the EU it should leave it.

That may be precisely the best approach for Britain. Britain should be able to access the best of both worlds if it's smart. Blair, with all of his shortcomings, is smart, and he's done an great job overall. Brown isn't looking to pull out of the EU - or he doesn't seem willing to use the threat of pulling out as a chip. By the way, I don't know how many people saw the Bush-Blair press conference. I thought Blair's performance was masterfull. But we're a bit spoiled here.

by **Michael Bacon** on Sat, 07/29/2006 - 20:47 | [reply](#)

What Shall I Compare Thee To Now?

It is a fine summer morning.

There was a time when mornings like this were regarded as the epitome of beauty. When Shakespeare wanted to extol the beauty of his beloved, he compared her to a summer's day.

There was a time when religious people would regard a morning like this as a sign of divine grace. When they walked out and saw a day like today, they would pray – literally, pray – in thanks for it.

Today, the devotees of the prevailing religion regard a fine summer's day as nothing but an omen, as terrifying as comets and eclipses once were. To them, it signifies impending punishment for our hubris, for the wickedness of seeking to change the world for the better. If they are pleased at all, it is with glee at the portent of the disaster that will one day vindicate them. But basically they hate the summer's day. They finer the day, the more they hate it. Yet when they try to besmirch it, *it* remains clear and beautiful.

Sun, 07/30/2006 - 14:44 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

What are you talking about? W

What are you talking about? Who hates summer days? Is it the Moon-God disciples? Priests of the Greek ski god Alpinios? Help me out here.

by a reader on Mon, 07/31/2006 - 06:30 | [reply](#)

Re: What are you talking about?

Think before you enjoy it. Etc.

by [Editor](#) on Mon, 07/31/2006 - 08:36 | [reply](#)

Oops. My mistake then. I read

Oops. My mistake then. I read religion and assumed it meant exactly that. This is why I shouldn't express myself so early in the morning.

That said, I have to point out that most people, including the most

die-hard of industrialists, don't really enjoy record-breaking heat in late July. Whatever the cause, once the summer morning has passed by and the summer day hits its stride, it's just not that nice to be outdoors, or even indoors sans AC, when all-time high temperature records are being replaced.

by a reader on Mon, 07/31/2006 - 11:22 | [reply](#)

Who Has the Burden of Proof?

Is it incumbent upon those who believe that substantial global temperature increases are dangerous to prove this beyond a reasonable doubt?

Or should substantial global temperature increases be assumed dangerous to humanity, unless demonstrated false beyond a reasonable doubt?

by a reader on Mon, 07/31/2006 - 20:36 | [reply](#)

Burden

Seems each proposition is true in some respects. If these are the only choices, reasonable doubt is an awfully high standard. A recipe for gridlock - perhaps not such a bad idea.

by [Michael Bacon](#) on Mon, 07/31/2006 - 23:10 | [reply](#)

it's one thing to think that

it's one thing to think that very long term trends may be scary, and quite another to think a tiny data point today has anything at all to do with global warming. people who think they have "experienced global warming" or whatever are just proving they don't know how to think. temperatures fluctuate. get over it.

Elliot

by a reader on Fri, 08/04/2006 - 01:56 | [reply](#)

What a ridiculous thing to sa

What a ridiculous thing to say.

It is a fine summer morning.

There was a time when mornings like this were regarded as the epitome of beauty. When Shakespeare wanted to extol the beauty of his beloved, he compared her to a summer's day.

Umm, OK. So he compared his beloved specifically to the hottest day on record, right?

Is it beauty proportional to the number of people dying of heatstroke?

To them, it signifies impending punishment for our hubris, for the

wickedness of seeking to change the world for the better.

Yeah right, because blowing the tops off of mountains and drilling for oil in the ANWR are things that make the world better. Only someone who truly hates progress and prosperity, worships Gaia and pines for the days when we lived in houses made of mud could wish for renewable sources of energy, or be alarmed at the prospect of the Earth reverting to a mesozoic climate within a few centuries.

by a reader on Fri, 08/04/2006 - 18:55 | [reply](#)

a "renewable source of energy"

a "renewable source of energy" really means wanting to never have to solve energy related problems again. this is not possible, anti-progress, and very bad. thinking and problem solving are good and not to be avoided. BTW we already invented nuclear power. it's pretty cool.

FYI most of those heat stroke deaths are people who would have died in the next few days anyway.

Elliot

by a reader on Fri, 08/04/2006 - 19:44 | [reply](#)

What if...

What if the number of heat stroke deaths in summer goes up but the number of hypothermia deaths in winter goes down by more?

by **David Deutsch** on Fri, 08/04/2006 - 19:56 | [reply](#)

Elliot: So is the water cycle

Elliot: So is the water cycle an affront to your belief system?

David: Touché. I have no adequate response within the microcosm-debate of heatstroke vs hypothermia.

There is however a good a priori, non-ideological reason to think that large-scale global warming is more likely to be A Bad Thing than A Good Thing. It's essentially the same as the reason why a large mutation is overwhelmingly more likely to be bad than good for an organism.

by a reader on Fri, 08/04/2006 - 22:27 | [reply](#)

Large mutation

Nice argument, but I think there are some problems with it. One is: who says this is a "large" mutation? In evolutionary terms, calling a mutation large is just the same as saying that it is very likely to do harm, so the argument would be circular. Fortunately, though, you

don't need to say "large". Small mutations are *also* more likely to

do harm than good.

But how much harm? One could use your analogy to argue that there's a good a priori, non-ideological reason to think that large-scale global warming is most unlikely to be A Bad Thing. It's essentially the same as the reason why a small change in the environment is overwhelmingly likely to have a negligible effect on an organism: the organism is adapted, and hence near a local maximum of adaptation. So a small change in the conditions will produce only a second order change in the degree of adaptation. (Of course, the environment is not an organism and is not adapted to anything. But we are adapted, and so is our civilisation.)

And another possible way to apply the same sort of analogy is: a large change in the *global economy* of the kind required by interventionist solutions, is overwhelmingly likely to do more harm than good - actually for all the usual reasons, not just analogy with the evolution of organisms.

Finally, I fear analogies aren't going to get us very far. The real problem is that we don't understand the climate change process, or its effects, very well. That is why **I advocate a stance of problem fixing** in preference to the chimera of problem avoidance.

by **David Deutsch** on Fri, 08/04/2006 - 23:03 | [reply](#)

Water Cycle

Water Cycle: Well, ultimately we are going to "re use" a lot of the atoms on Earth. But what renewable power means is: anything that requires atoms to start the process in a hard-to-create configuration is discarded as permanently unworkable. Why? Because people think we can't solve the problem of putting ever more atoms into that configuration. Of course we can. We can burn coal **forever** if we want. So it's perfectly renewable.

What lefties want is something that would provide unlimited energy (though at a low rate per time. they don't seem to care about the consequences of limited energy per time) **without thinking**. they want mechanical maintenance routines to work forever. they want us to never face a problem like a scarcity that requires creativity to solve. because they don't have optimism in human creativity.

Elliot

by a reader on Fri, 08/04/2006 - 23:21 | [reply](#)

(Sigh)

So much ignorant nonsense in such a short thread (assuming you are talking about global warming - it's a little difficult to work out, among all the tendentious pseudo-arguments).

Destabilising the world's ecosystems is BAD. End of. The balance is so delicate, and we know so *f**** little about it, that playing silly buggers with it is akin to pointing a loaded pistol to your head and

saying: "Well, I know very little about kinematics, therefore I don't think the bullet is likely to hurt me - after all, Zeno has proved that an object can't REALLY move - ergo, it's a reasonable risk to take". And then pulling the trigger.

Incidentally: anti-science hysterics, a bunch not noted for a deep understanding of how science works, often accuse scientists of hubris, of saying (allegedly): "We know everything, and we are telling you global warming is a real danger".

Actually, it's quite the reverse; scientists by and large are saying: "We don't really know how the weather works, but we are making some worrying observations. The rise in CO2 concentrations - a measurable result of burning fossil fuels - is strongly correlated with rising temperatures. CO2 levels are rising faster and faster. Perhaps it's suggestive of an impending catastrophe, because we DON'T know what to do about it. And we can't work out the exact details of how the injection of heat energy is causing massive fluctuations in cycles such as hurricanes, to say nothing of melting ice-caps, but it's happening: maybe it would be prudent to think seriously about stopping this process?".

But hey, if humanity is dead set on destroying itself ...

by [yoni](#) on Sat, 09/09/2006 - 22:00 | [reply](#)

2nd-order changes

"the organism is adapted, and hence near a local maximum of adaptation. So a small change in the conditions will produce only a second order change in the degree of adaptation"

Proves nought. Second-order changes can be large enough to destabilise the system if they persist in spreading and growing. It's not what order it is, but what magnitude it is. Just because something is growing linearly rather than quadratically (say) doesn't mean that it's benign, or that its magnitude won't soon exceed some critical threshold. Global warming is growing linearly (say): so?

by [yoni](#) on Sat, 09/09/2006 - 22:05 | [reply](#)

Delicate

Yoni,

Why do you think the Earth's ecosystem is in a delicate balance?
What are the signs that it's not very stable?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sat, 09/09/2006 - 23:25 | [reply](#)

Ecosystem

There are tons and tons and tons of examples to demonstrate this;

here is just one:

Within my small county in England, I am already seeing great changes in the prevalence of certain animal and plant species compared with only 10 years ago.

Certain quite common birds have given up migrating, because of the changed seasonal temperature patterns.

These changes affect other phenomena in turn (think insects, pollinated plants ...), both here and at the migration destinations.

I am not saying that a new balance won't be found, but the current balance is being disturbed and will flip into a different one. The process, and the end-result, is/will be stressful and potentially catastrophic to many species, including Homo sapiens.

The result could be the disappearance of many species, e.g. those who are already migrating northwards within Britain and may be squeezed out altogether by falling off the top of Scotland when their living space - which is temperature-delimited, to say nothing of their food which may also be temperature-delimited - disappears.

If the process goes on far enough, H. sapiens itself may disappear. Don't forget that the Maldives are shrinking, and London's flood defences are groaning. And we are very early in the process. Over the next 100 years - a mere blink - China will generate a huge amount of CO₂.

Other examples abound. Judging by the 3 Gorges dam, China is hell-bent on creating other kinds of disasters. And look up what happened at the Aral Sea: if that's not an ecosystem destroyed by human intervention, I don't know what is.

If and when H. sapiens disappears at the end of the process, the system will stop drifting away from equilibrium and settle down to a new one. In the global scheme of things, that's all fine and dandy, but is that what you want?

by [Yoni](#) on Sun, 09/10/2006 - 11:00 | [reply](#)

Re: Ecosystem

Is there a scientific study about the birds you've noticed? If so, please show us. If not, how do you know that you've really noticed anything? It could be coincidence, or you could have an unconscious bias, or you could have forgotten how many birds you saw in the past at this time of year, or how many there were a decade ago. Or your sample size may be too small to conclude anything, or there may be other causes you haven't investigated, or there could be a reason the bird changes indicate cooling temperatures. Without subjecting your theory to intense scientific criticism, you can't tell if it's any good or not.

I'm also curious which reasoned and articulate global warming advocates predicted these changes in bird migration. Or even, which ones predicted significant temperature changes would already be happening in 2006? I know some people said we are doomed by next week, but did any of the more scientifically oriented people say

that?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 09/10/2006 - 18:57 | [reply](#)

Birds

"Is there a scientific study about the birds you've noticed? If so, please show us. If not, how do you know that you've really noticed anything? It could be coincidence, or you could have an unconscious bias, or you could have forgotten how many birds you saw in the past at this time of year, or how many there were a decade ago"

This borders on a smear, and certainly relies on sneering innuendo. It is not even remotely a serious comment.

All I will say is that I am a trained scientist, and that I have been taking part in the annual RSPB survey - which has a huge sample size - for many years.

That's already more than your patronising comments deserves.

by **Yoni** on Sun, 09/10/2006 - 23:07 | [reply](#)

Science

Could you please direct me to the science surrounding bird movement that indicates either global warming or that the world ecosystem is delicate?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 09/10/2006 - 23:37 | [reply](#)

Re: Ecosystem

You might find [this talk](#) illuminating.

by **Alan Forrester** on Thu, 09/21/2006 - 20:37 | [reply](#)

Bird ecology and global warming

I assume Yoni was talking about the Pied Flycatcher... if not I'd be very interested to know what bird he was talking about.

Anyway, I have written up a [short summary](#) about the pied flycatcher on my own blog, with links to secondary sources which link to the original papers. Basically what is happening is that the pied flycatcher times its migration based on the length of days. Since that is a constant, its migration schedule stays constant. However, the caterpillars in Northern Europe that it depends on for food in the spring are being born earlier, because their life cycle is

tied to temperature. This means no food for the birds. Bad.

There are other effects. What about pollinator species and the plants they pollinate maturing at a different time? This has serious implications for the food chain.

Some trees produce fruit at a certain time of year. They have evolved to depend on migrating birds that pass by at that time to eat the fruit and spread the seeds. When timing gets thrown off, the trees don't spread.

by [Will](#) on Tue, 10/31/2006 - 13:57 | [reply](#)

Stasis

So basically animal code is full of hacks and kludges and rules of thumb, and they break down if circumstances change. So to keep animals functional, we'll just have to make sure nothing ever changes.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 10/31/2006 - 20:25 | [reply](#)

stasis

Sort of. If the pace of environmental change outruns the ability of species to adapt, the results can be catastrophic.

by [Will](#) on Tue, 10/31/2006 - 20:37 | [reply](#)

Catastrophe

Well, OK, but biological evolution is really, really, really slow. A few generations of humans is just a blink of the eye.

Now, you seem to say it'd be a catastrophe if some species went extinct. I have nothing against those birds or caterpillars. But we can't just halt progress for a tens of thousands of years, or more. That is just inviting the death of all species.

The only hope for survival for humans is to improve our science sufficiently before a gigantic meteor hits, or some other large scale disaster. We have a time limit. And if we die, all the other species will die too, when our sun goes. The only thing that could save them is if humans survive to either take them elsewhere, or to tinker with the sun.

Human progress is not only our only hope, it's the only hope of all the other species on Earth.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 10/31/2006 - 21:21 | [reply](#)

catastrophe

It seems we disagree on what a 'catastrophe' is. I think global warming and environmental destruction is indeed a real catastrophe, comparable to a meteor hitting the planet.

And I'm not saying that we should halt progress. I'm saying that we need to carefully consider our future and take measures to head off catastrophe.

But what if I was? What if progress means that billions of humans die off? Is that acceptable to you?

by [Will](#) on Tue, 10/31/2006 - 21:40 | [reply](#)

I don't understand how you co

I don't understand how you compare catastrophes. In one case, all humans and all animals die. In the other, some animals die, a handful of humans die, and life is less comfortable. That's comparable?

Even if progress meant billions of humans dying, isn't that worlds better than all humans being dead, period?

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

[Dialogs](#)

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 10/31/2006 - 22:00 | [reply](#)

catastrophe

Well for one thing, global warming appears to be human induced. We have no control over an asteroid that strikes us. It's like the difference between a lightning strike and a murder.

For another, stopping a meteor strike is relatively simple. Humans excel at delivering explosive power at a distance. Simply blow it to pieces or divert it. An easy technological challenge - and a straightforward one. There won't be endless debates about whether we should stop it or whether it's even happening.

Third: there's no evidence that a meteor would wipe out all life on earth. It's happened several times since life began on the planet without destroying all life, and I have no doubt humans would be among the survivors if there were any.

Fourth, we can see the evidence of environmental catastrophe all around us. There's no reason to believe a meteor will strike anytime in the near future. One is a clear and present danger.

by [Will](#) on Tue, 10/31/2006 - 22:12 | [reply](#)

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Not Mere Rhetoric

Mere Rhetoric is on a roll with important facts and trenchant commentary about the Israel-Hezbollah war and related matters. Here are some must-read posts:

IDF Videos Show Hezbollah Shelling Israel From Civilian Areas

(Videos of Hezbollah using Lebanese civilians as human shields.)

Syria is Hiding Weapons in Civilian Aid Convoys. Of Course They Are

To stop these convoys, Israel has chosen to bomb roads and bridges so that no transports can get through at all. It's not the ideal solution, but it's better than constantly having to hit civilian convoys because intelligence indicates they're transporting rockets that will be rained down on Israeli homes and schools. Israel's choice is to kill civilians or to blow up roads - they chose to blow up roads, and of course are being criticized for destroying Lebanese infrastructure.

Even 40 Years Ago, Anti-Zionism was Already Anti-Semitism

Well, duh. Anyway, there's an article about it from the post-six-day-war era that seems uncannily current.

The Lebanese Prime Minister is Either a Simpering Imbecile or a Shameless Liar

Actually it's pure evil. The Lebanese Prime Minister (himself recently so heavily praised by Condoleezza Rice and every other Western politician that it's a miracle he hasn't been made Prime Minister of the whole world) says that the videos showing Hezbollah firing from civilian areas are faked by Israel. Mere Rhetoric comments:

If the stakes involved were anything less than a genocide against millions of Jews for the second time in under a century, there might actually be humor in this sick comedy.

About That Other Group of Genocidal Lunatics Currently Shooting, Bombing Israelis

...the Palestinians are usually very careful and keep their

weapons safely under the beds of women and children. The IDF has come up with a new way of dealing with this tactic - a way that the Jewish state, because of the double standards and duplicity of the international community, has been loathe to employ in the past. Here's how it works: when the IDF discovers that the weapons being used to murder Israelis are being stored in a house they tell everyone to leave the house, then they blow up the weapons from the air. Western human rights organizations refer to this tactic as "collective punishment" - because Palestinians who let Hamas store weapons in their living rooms should not be inconvenienced when Israel has to come in and blow those weapons up.

Like Hezbollah, Hamas Uses Children As Human Shields

The videos of the air attacks show how Hamas makes use of the Gaza youth; they are sent to collect Qassam rocket launchers, after they have been used, and the IDF holds back from targetting them.

IDF Sacrifices Its Commandos to Minimize Lebanese Civilian Casualties

IDF commandos carried out their 17th operation deep in Lebanon. They were dispatched under the cover of darkness to Tyre to make sure that less than 24 hours would be allowed to pass between when a Hezbollah cell launched rockets into Hadera and when that cell would be eliminated. Two of them ended up severely injured in the mission, one sustaining shots to the midsection. Why didn't Israel just let the IAF take care of the job? Because the terrorists were firing from a civilian neighborhood and hiding in an apartment building

[...]

The IDF is the most moral army in the world.

Indeed.

Well done, Omri of Mere Rhetoric.

Sat, 08/05/2006 - 19:11 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Bombing roads

Apparently the other reason for bombing roads is to stop Hezbollah from bringing in the trucks that they need for launching the rockets. For examples of the trucks used for launching rockets such as Katyusha see [wikipedia](#).

by [Mikko](#) on Sat, 08/05/2006 - 22:45 | [reply](#)

Tactics

Destroying Hezbollah's ability to fight is taking – and will take – Israel far longer than was at first thought. There are several reasons for this: as always in war, the first casualty is the plan. But the reason that stands out is Hezbollah's astonishing success at the tactic that has been developed over decades by the Palestinians: using willing human shields. Hezbollah have taken this tactic to new heights of evil – and effectiveness.

Never before in history has an army succeeded in packing a battlefield with human shields, filled with an ideology of hatred and spite and in many cases willing to die – with their children – and using the enemy's decency and humanity as a weapon of war. The great majority of Israel's military **casualties** to date have been caused, through this tactic, as a result of their own conscious choice to send ground troops to capture objectives that could have been erased from the air or by artillery.

The tendency in the media, and in Western public opinion, to attribute the exact opposite tactics to Israelis by accusing them of a 'disproportionate response' to being under threat of mass murder is nothing short of evil too.

Thu, 08/10/2006 - 14:11 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

my interlocutor: tu quoque or tu spread lies?

I heard Israelis do this too.

by a reader on Fri, 08/11/2006 - 08:30 | [reply](#)

Israelis too

Did you?

Well tell us which Israeli school is built on top of a weapons cache, and which residential apartment building the IDF has planning sessions in.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 08/11/2006 - 14:45 | [reply](#)

I heard 0=1

I'm consistently impressed by people's ability to find moral equivalence in the face of the most overwhelming evidence against it.

Simple models can be very nice. But, when they are contradicted by all credible evidence they should be rejected.

Gil

by **Gil** on Fri, 08/11/2006 - 18:08 | [reply](#)

'Palestinians'

Why are colluding in the myth that there is such a thing as 'Palestinians'?

by **Yoni** on Sat, 09/09/2006 - 21:46 | [reply](#)

Re: 'Palestinians'

Presumably you mean that the very use of the term 'Palestinians' concedes that, prior to the large-scale immigration of Jews in the 20th century, there was a nation called 'Palestine' that claimed sovereignty over the territory that now includes Israel. That is indeed a myth, but the use of the term 'Palestinians' does not 'collude in', or concede, that myth.

The term, as used nowadays by everyone including the Israeli government, is a way of referring to a particular group of people, organised separately from the surrounding political groups.

In passing, note that although that group of people had none of the attributes of a nation in 1900, they do have them now.

by **Editor** on Sat, 09/09/2006 - 22:24 | [reply](#)

Britain And The Town Square Test

A young colleague of ours recently went for a walk in central Oxford, England – almost literally in the town square. She was not, initially, intending to apply Sharansky's **town square test** but that's how it turned out. Whether Britain passed or not is still in doubt. Judge for yourselves. Here is her account, which she has adapted from three posts on her personal blog:

First Post, July 21st:

I was in town today and bought an Israeli flag — about five feet long. While I was walking to the bus, I decided to wear it as a cape (mostly to show my support, partly to see if I'd get any reactions). My head was a good couple of inches higher than usual, and whenever I noticed it in a reflection on a window, I smiled broadly.

There was a shout by someone a while behind me. "Yisrael! Yisrael!" I turned around and saw a woman. She shouted to me — presumably in Hebrew — and stuck her thumb up. I grinned and stuck my thumb up high, before continuing on my way.

A few of my friends said it might be dangerous to wear it in public. So naturally, I decided that I must go back into town some time wearing it. This is England, after all. A free country. Who's going to attack a 17-year-old girl for wearing a flag?



Second post, July 29th:

I went to town yesterday to pick up a friend from the train station. I wore my Israeli flag as a cape again. At one point, two girls stopped me and asked if I was from Israel. I replied "No, and I'm not Jewish either, but I do support Israel." They said they were from Israel. I asked them why they were here, and they said because of the war. They seemed to be happy about the flag. I walked away smiling, glad to make them feel welcome in England.

Later on that day, someone I passed called out "Shalom!" I turned

around and started talking to this guy. As far as I could gather, he used to be a medic in Israel for the army. He shook my hand, said something in Hebrew, and I think he prayed or something like that. So far I had had only good reactions, which was rather cool.

Today, however, was something different. I was at the train station to pick up another friend, when some guy approached us and asked why I was wearing the flag. I said that I support Israel. He said something to the effect that I had "better take it off". I shrugged this off and we went on our way.

About five minutes later, he approached us again and said "What did I tell you?" I looked a bit confused. "Take it off," he demanded. He kept looking at me, so I took it off so he'd stop (he was rather intimidating). When my other friend arrived and we left the station, I put the flag back on and we went back into the centre of town.

After stopping for some food, we went to our bus stop. By this time, it was around 7:10pm, but still broad daylight (being summer). I was alarmed to find the same guy approaching me again. He stopped in front of me and said "What did I tell you? Take it off. If I see you again with it I'll hurt you."

Now *that* wasn't pleasant. I wasn't all that scared at the time, though it was annoying that I had to take the cape off. But now I'm a bit scared of going into town while wearing it, in case he might be there.

Third post, August 10th:

I went into town again today with my sister, my friend, and my Israeli flag-cape. We were walking down a busy street when I saw the same guy from before. "Shit," I thought, and we quickly walked past. He shouted behind us "Take it off! Take it off!" Somewhat worried, I discreetly took off my flag (replacing it by an American flag).

We kept walking and I put the Israeli flag back on. The guy saw me again and shouted "Take it off! I'm coming for you!" Another guy was with him this time. We kept walking, turned a corner and ducked into a cafe, where my friend phoned the police. We kept looking out round the cafe door. Both guys were waiting on the other side of the street, watching for us to come out. At some point while we were talking to the police, they left.

We decided to go home. Shortly afterwards we were phoned by the police. They're coming later today to get a statement.

People have warned me that I shouldn't wear my flag in public. People don't understand why I still wear it, if I've been threatened, and have a fair chance of being threatened in the future.

Natan Sharansky, a Russian Jew, spent 10 years in prison and in

labour camps in the Soviet Union for campaigning for human rights. They claimed it was because he was a spy, and they wanted him to 'confess' that he and his friends were American spies. If he 'confessed', they would let him go. But he didn't. He never did. He spent 10 long years in these hellish conditions for what he believed in.

Sharansky was a scientist, and while he was imprisoned, he thought of Galileo. Galileo was imprisoned and threatened with torture for saying that the earth revolved around the sun. Galileo gave in and finally said that he was wrong and the world was at rest. "If Galileo gave in, why shouldn't I?" Sharansky thought.

No. It was precisely because of Galileo that Sharansky did not give in. Because of Galileo, the world stayed in the state of having bad science for a lot longer than needed. Because of Galileo, people in similar situations ever since have thought "If he gave in, why shouldn't I?" Sharansky did not want people to think the same thing with him. In the end, after his years of imprisonment and mistreatment, Sharansky was freed. He had not once given in.

I don't want to be like Galileo. I want people to think, "If Lulie stood up for what she believes in, so should I!", just as Sharansky did.

In Natan Sharansky's book, *A Case For Democracy*, he proposed a test called the Town Square test. He wrote:

"If a person cannot walk into the middle of the town square and express his or her views without fear of arrest, imprisonment, or physical harm, then that person is living in a fear society, not a free society. We cannot rest until every person living in a 'fear society' has finally won their freedom."

Right now, Britain is *failing* the Town Square test. I don't *want* my country to be like this. I don't *want* to be scared into not showing my support for a cause that I feel strongly about. This is supposed to be a *free* country, dammit. I refuse to let anyone scare me into submission.

Am Yisrael Chai!

Update 1: Berkeley...?

Update 2: Alan is inspired to do the same.

Update 3: What the police have done so far. Very creditable.

Sun, 08/13/2006 - 23:02 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Sorry to say...

I'm surprised that it took until day three to have an incident that involved the authorities.

Well done, Lulie, I'm sure Israel is proud to have friends like you.

by [Solomon](#) on Mon, 08/14/2006 - 19:28 | [reply](#)

On the Rightous the World Stands

Thank You for supporting Israel and the Jewish people in their`s, many will say, worst moments in recent history.

It takes a lot of courage, to demonstrate a support the way You chose to. May it be that Hashem, God of Israel, bless You with His closeness for ever. Amen!

by [Zeev Zion](#) on Mon, 08/14/2006 - 20:36 | [reply](#)

Let my people go

Natan Sharansky would be proud of you. I am, too. :)

by [Sissy Willis](#) on Mon, 08/14/2006 - 20:45 | [reply](#)

Fear not

I much admire your courage and convictions. I wish I had had such clarity of conviction when I was 17. Do not fear, and do not let yourself be silenced.

(BTW, your reference to Galileo is only partly correct, and I encourage you to read more about the actual case. He was charged by the church for teaching heliocentrism as fact, rather than as theory (which it was, at the time); and astronomical research, including the advancement of heliocentric studies, continued quite vigorously.)

Good luck!

by [Eddie](#) on Mon, 08/14/2006 - 21:13 | [reply](#)

Good Show

Thanks for supporting Israel, especially as you're not Jewish! It's heart-warming.

Frankly, you've got more guts than I. I'm Jewish, and I live in New York, and I would never appear in daylight with an Israeli flag. You put me to shame.

I think your country actually passed the test really well. Look at it this way: There was only one guy who bothered you (ok, he was joined by a friend, once). I thought there'd be crowds brandishing their fists. However, much the response was encouraging, I wouldn't do this just anywhere. For instance, I wouldn't go into immigrant neighborhoods. That would be another thing altogether. It's one thing to be brave and another to be suicidal. There may indeed be hostile crowds in neighborhoods like that, and they would

consider intimidating you as their own practice of "freedom of

speech."

by Joanne on Tue, 08/15/2006 - 01:15 | [reply](#)

Oops, one more thing

I just realized that you were walking around Oxford, a university town! That was brave, as universities are generally hotbeds of anti-Israeli feeling. Maybe you didn't hit so much hostility because you did this during the summer and not during the academic year, when students, profs, etc. would be around.

by Joanne on Tue, 08/15/2006 - 01:19 | [reply](#)

Gay pride

Try showing homosexual affection (no kissing, just holding hands) in certain neighbourhoods. Well, maybe works if you're a girl; I don't know.

by a reader on Tue, 08/15/2006 - 06:34 | [reply](#)

Thanks!

Thanks for the support, and inspiration, Lulie! As long as Britain has folks like you fighting for her, all is not lost!

by [Andy @ Cozy Corner](#) on Tue, 08/15/2006 - 12:39 | [reply](#)

Thank you all for your kind a

Thank you all for your kind and encouraging words.

To a reader and Joanne: I see what you're saying, but I think this is a bit different. I wasn't trying to provoke anyone, or even confront anyone like [ProtestWarrior](#) do. I wasn't going to any particular parts of town where I knew there were violently anti-Israeli people. I was just expressing a view peacefully in the most public area of town. The Town Square test is not about whether you can go to an immigrant neighbourhood waving an Israeli flag in their faces and expecting everyone there not to bother you; it's about whether you can go to the town square -- where every subculture of that community goes -- and express your view peacefully without fear of harm. I don't mean it's acceptable for assault to happen anywhere, but that's not what the Town Square test is about. For one to be unable to go to the most public place in town and express an opinion means that one is unable to express that opinion, full stop. It means that there is no room for criticism on the way that society thinks and acts on things.

By the way, reader: I've seen gay men in Oxford holding hands. It's not a big deal here. At least in the city centre -- it might be in the Muslim areas.

by [Lulie](#) on Tue, 08/15/2006 - 13:09 | [reply](#)

Nicely said

"The Town Square test is not about whether you can go to an immigrant neighbourhood waving an Israeli flag in their faces and expecting everyone there not to bother you; it's about whether you can go to the town square -- where every subculture of that community goes -- and express your view peacefully without fear of harm...For one to be unable to go to the most public place in town and express an opinion means that one is unable to express that opinion, full stop."

by **Solomon** on Tue, 08/15/2006 - 14:03 | [reply](#)

Good on you!!!

Thanx for supporting Israel.....we need it with all the islamcrap attacking us from all sides. Dont let these bastards scare you from freedom of speech. Keep up the good work and you should also take pics of anyone that threatens you.

Good luck,

Jay

by jay on Tue, 08/15/2006 - 18:44 | [reply](#)

Well...OK

Fair enough, Lulie, but I didn't mean to imply that you were being provocative in any manner. What I meant was that some people don't need much to be provoked. The fault would've been theirs, not yours. Anyway, maybe it's my squeamishness talking. Best wishes.

by Joanne on Tue, 08/15/2006 - 19:49 | [reply](#)

Thank you Lulie!

I really want to thank you for being so supportive of Israel. I am a proud Jewish girl living in Canada and while i have seen a few cars driving around with Irsaeli flags recently, i myself do not have the courage to do what you have done (which is a very sad thing).

I am glad that you have been able to stay safe and that you have had quite a few positive experiences. My cousin lives in the UK and i will tell him to be on the lookout for you if he is ever in Oxford!

by Lindsay on Tue, 08/15/2006 - 21:13 | [reply](#)

Well done, hold your head high

It takes some courage, I would shake your hand if I saw you in public.

by **Jono** on Wed, 08/16/2006 - 06:01 | [reply](#)

Wow

Hey there,

I found this website through Solomon's. I am a Canadian Jew. I must say that I am so amazed by you. You have tremendous courage and I commend you. Thank you for your support.

Justin.

by a reader on Wed, 08/16/2006 - 07:27 | [reply](#)

Gay men and whatnot, and flags

Yep: I was thinking of Muslim neighbourhoods. Not everyone knows to keep their fists to themselves.

As for wearing that flag: I don't count myself among the supporters of creating the state of Israel in 1948. None the less, if anyone attacked you for wearing that flag while I was nearby, I would launch a Voltairean counterassault on them.

As for the continued existence of the state of Israel today, that's a different matter. Let all those who support return to matters as of 100 years ago as a matter of knee-jerk reflex look at Yugoslavia - or (former?) Kurd territory for that matter. A wrong may have been done, but you don't make it right by committing yet another wrong. Chasing history and historical national and religious borderlines is essentially a pastime for fascists ("remember "Mare Nostrum"); leave things alone.

But in any case, I defend your right to wear that flag, and smile at seeing your brave heart.

by a reader on Wed, 08/16/2006 - 07:44 | [reply](#)

A wrong may have been done?

Reader: Please read our [Short History of Israel](#) and disabuse yourself of the misconceptions that currently inform your judgement of Israel's legitimacy in 1948. The Voltaireian impulse that would have you defend Lulie today would have been the least of several overwhelming moral reasons to support the creation of Israel in 1948 – and the Jewish National Home before that. It saved hundreds of thousands from genocide and millions from oppression, created incalculable good in practically every sphere of human endeavour, and wronged no one. The only wrongs that were done in 1948, and have been done since, were the vicious attempts to prevent that, and their consequences.

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 08/16/2006 - 08:29 | [reply](#)

Thank you for your link. Inte

Thank you for your link. Interesting reading and somewhat (but not

totally) different than what I had hitherto believed history to be. I'll read more.

A retro-historical question that might seem silly: Why choose that precise site for a Jewish state when the most virulent anti-Jewish sentiments are to be found precisely among your new neighbours? I am not talking "rights" nor, nor ignorance of pre-Roman history. I just wonder why one would choose to settle land among one's worst enemies.

by a reader on Wed, 08/16/2006 - 13:40 | [reply](#)

Retro-historical question

You're very welcome.

Why choose that precise site...?

As you will see when you read further, there were many reasons, of which it is hard to pick a pre-eminent one. Several other possible sites were considered by Zionists during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, of which we mention two in our Brief History: One was Uganda, which was briefly the majority choice in the Zionist movement. As this example shows, the stereotype of the Zionist movement as being driven by religiously-based irredentism is very wide of the mark. The scheme was never implemented, partly because it would have required a degree of organisational cooperation from the British that was, in the event, never forthcoming. Also that idea was overtaken by events as tens of thousands of Jewish refugees from the mass murders in Russia voted with their feet for Palestine. (Note that, at the time, and for several decades afterwards, the Jewish people had worse enemies than the Arabs, and very few friends who were in a position to help: it was far from being a case of 'settling among your worst enemies'.) The other was Alaska, which never became a refuge because the US Congress resolutely refused permission. Remember, casual antisemitism was **endemic** in the West at the time.

Other pertinent reasons were: that there was already a Jewish community in Palestine, small but culturally significant because of its long history and its tradition of Jewish scholarship. Also, of course, that there were many sites there of historical and religious significance to the Jewish people. Many of these were in Jerusalem, the holy city of the Jewish religion, which had had a Jewish majority since 1850. Then, also, there was the consideration that the safe haven for Jews would have to be a place where the existing non-Jewish population would benefit economically from an influx of Jews [of course, almost anywhere would have benefited, but that was not understood under the then-prevailing socialist economic consensus], and where, as the Balfour Declaration said, no one's civil or political rights would be adversely affected.

While none of these and other reasons would have been decisive in itself, taken together they left no other sane choice. Indeed, the whole thing happened too late. Had the State of Israel been founded a mere ten years earlier, it might well have saved millions

from the Holocaust instead of merely hundreds of thousands.

by **Editor** on Wed, 08/16/2006 - 15:43 | [reply](#)

Curious

Love this idea Lulie but in the interests of fairness could you try the same experiment wearing the flag of Iran? Or maybe that of Hezbollah? (Not a nation state or a particularly attractive organisation in my eyes but nevertheless.)

I am sure that the vast majority of people won't even recognise these flags but I would be curious as to the reactions of those that do.

I would be willing to bet that should the police become involved **they** would **tell** you to take it off.

by Mike on Wed, 08/16/2006 - 22:07 | [reply](#)

Re: Curious

I understand why you might guess that's how it is. But the facts are not like that.

<http://www.girlontheright.com/2006/08/hezbollah-on-our-streets-in-our-cities.html>

it made me angry that they asked us to move, because "we were putting their guys in danger". Us? If there was danger, it didn't come from our side. Later on, when someone showed up with a Hezbollah flag, we pointed out to one of the cops that Hezbollah is recognized in Canada as a terror organization, and that man should be arrested.

At this rally, as usual, the potentially violent hezbollah supporters are left alone by the cops while the Israel supporters are told to get out of the way.

As to wearing flags ... as mentioned in the quote, someone had a Hezbollah flag even though it's apparently illegal in Canada to wave flags of terrorist organizations. But despite it being illegal, the cops still wouldn't stop it.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 08/16/2006 - 22:29 | [reply](#)

Still Curious

Take your point Elliot, but a demonstration is a completely different circumstance.

I would be interested in the attitudes of 'ordinary' people on the street when presented with a non-threatening individual carrying a flag that is very much regarded as threatening in our society, much

as the Israeli flag is to some. (Not me I hasten to add.)

by Mike on Thu, 08/17/2006 - 13:26 | [reply](#)

A flag is a 'passion' accessory

Well done Lulie!

by John H on Fri, 08/18/2006 - 00:52 | [reply](#)

Re: Still curious

A demonstration is indeed a different circumstance and does not directly address the town-square-test issue. Nevertheless, scenes like **this** are nowadays frequently seen in Britain and would seem to make it implausible that the British police would harrass an otherwise nonthreatening person solely for wearing a Hezbollah flag in a 'town square' situation. It is still more implausible, on general grounds, that in Britain such a person would have cause to fear assault by supporters of Israel, for that is simply not a stance that is condoned, let alone adopted, by such factions.

Having said that, the two situations would not, in fact, be remotely comparable. Supporters of Iran and of islamic terrorist organisations frequently threaten actual violence, against British people, in Britain. For instance, there are the threats against Salman Rushdie's life, and the repeated threats to behead infidels, bring 9-11 to Britain and so on. And there has been actual mass murder, and attempted mass murder, of British people, in Britain, in the names of those causes. If British law were to ban the incitement to commit such acts, whether by wearing flags or otherwise, this would in no way violate the town square test.

by **Editor** on Fri, 08/18/2006 - 11:20 | [reply](#)

Re Re Curious

Editor

Again you have chosen an image of someone demonstrating. To say that this scene occurs **frequently** in the UK is a huge exaggeration. Last year I lived in Birmingham I have family in Bradford (Both areas with significant Muslim populations) who I visited regularly and I can say I that I have never seen anyone wearing a Hezbollah t-shirt or carrying an Iranian flag. I am not saying it doesn't happen but it certainly doesn't happen frequently.

Mike

PS. Could you make the verification questions slightly more challenging please. Just about anybody can post here!

I am also not saying that it is supporters of Israel necessarily who may attack the person but ordinary British citizens, or maybe even more moderate Muslims who don't want to be associated with the actions of extremists. If Lulie in this case succeeded then that

would be great, however until the experiment is undertaken we have no proof either way.

I am merely interested in the reaction of people to flags, and there meaning.

Are you not even slightly curious?

by Mike on Fri, 08/18/2006 - 12:50 | [reply](#)

Mike, if you are so curious w

Mike, if you are so curious why don't you do it?

by a reader on Sat, 08/19/2006 - 10:12 | [reply](#)

not sure about this flag business....

hmmm... i'm not too sure about this Israeli flag thing.

i'm mean, not everyone , in everyday situations, walks around with a flag draped around them.

a much better test would be a t-shirt, with the Israel flag on it , or maybe "i support the IDF" on it.

an interesting experiment would be to do the town square test using two different t-shirts - do the first test with an israeli t-shirt, then do another with a hezbollah or PLO style t-shirt.

Record the reactions, what happens, etc...

by archduke on Sat, 08/19/2006 - 17:21 | [reply](#)

bravo!

oh sorry - i forgot to say - well done!
it sure is a very very interesting (and brave!) experiment you have conducted.

Supporters of Israel , like myself, in the UK, really need to push this one. Or have the Islamists stolen the agenda in our country to such an extent that it is now dangerous to express support for Israel openly? I dearly hope it is not.

by archduke on Sat, 08/19/2006 - 17:30 | [reply](#)

Flags

Hezbollah's flag depicts a machine gun because that's what Hezbollah is.

Israel's flag depicts a shield because that's what Israel is.

by a reader on Sat, 08/19/2006 - 18:29 | [reply](#)

good point. i cant add anymo

good point.
i cant add anymore to that...

by [archduke](#) on Sat, 08/19/2006 - 23:45 | [reply](#)

Remember Cambridge is quite a

Remember Cambridge is quite an international city with the university and everything. I think that if you walked through any other town/city in Britain you would have a much stronger response.

Thank you for supporting Israel, Peace, and Democracy!

by a reader on Sun, 08/20/2006 - 09:15 | [reply](#)

I'm afraid I wouldn't recomme

I'm afraid I wouldn't recommend you to do that in the centre of Birmingham, England's second city. That would be risky. There are many representatives of a certain peaceful religion in Brum.

by Trofim on Sun, 08/20/2006 - 10:00 | [reply](#)

The moral issue

Mike and archduke:

Consider the moral implications of the 'experiment' you are suggesting.

As we wrote, this event was primarily an expression of a political opinion and only secondarily an application of the town square test to Britain.

The opinion being expressed was a morally right one even though it is, alas, unpopular. Expressing it was a noteworthy event for many reasons. As some of the discussions that this has raised on other blogs, and several of the coments on this thread, show, it has caused people to re-examine their own criteria for expressing their support for Israel, and to reconsider their own assessments of a society in which revealing one's support for Israel is an act of bravery.

Expressing the opposite opinion in the same way would be morally wrong to at least the same degree as expressing this opinion was morally right. Neither the principle of freedom of speech nor that of scientific curiosity erases the distinction between right and wrong. In this case it is the distinction between incidentally offending people who support mass murderers, and deliberately contributing to the intimidation of people who support their victims. Doing the latter would be indefensible.

In answer to your question Mike, no, we are not curious because,

for the reasons we gave above among others, we are in no doubt that you are mistaken in your belief that British police would forcibly remove an Iranian or Hezbollah flag if displayed under similar circumstances.

by [Editor](#) on Sun, 08/20/2006 - 15:16 | [reply](#)

good explanation

ah yes of course.

well explained Editor. thanks.

(and i do love those maths questions when submitting - helps the braincells... very novel.)

by [archduke](#) on Sun, 08/20/2006 - 21:59 | [reply](#)

Fair Enough

OK, editor I will go with that.

A reader, I would have thought the reason I would not do it was obvious, I am a lilly livered, yellow bellied piece of skirt!

Bloody hell, 8X6. That is a tough one.

by [Mike](#) on Mon, 08/21/2006 - 01:48 | [reply](#)

I like Archduke's t-shirt idea

I live in Israel and am trying to picture what would happen if a citizen (Muslim or Jew) wore a Palestinian flag in public. I think it would be met with suspicion if not outright harassment, and in some cases / areas, violence. For this I'm ashamed. re a Hezbollah flag -- forget it in Jewish areas, although it would be OK in Arab towns. For this, though, I'm not ashamed: They're out-and-out terrorists. Way to go, Lulie!

by [Miriam Erez](#) on Mon, 08/21/2006 - 06:44 | [reply](#)

Well Done

Stick to your principles - and don't allow others to put you down.

by [David Wildgoose](#) on Mon, 08/21/2006 - 07:17 | [reply](#)

Wearing the Israeli Flag

Well done. Never be afraid to voice your opinion in a free country. The trouble is tha England is all that free today and has double standards. The next time you go into town and want to wear the flag may I suggest that you take a few "heavies" with you and keep them in the background but close at hand and hope that the guy who previously threatened you "tries is luck" again. If he does let the 'heavies" teach him a lesson he wont forget. Good luck and

Israel thanks you for your support.

by Spencer on Mon, 08/21/2006 - 12:26 | [reply](#)

Well done!

Lulie: I did the same in Buenos Aires, Argentina last month. It made me feel proud and awkward at the same time but it was worth it. Nothing happened although the people looked strange.

In Buenos Aires

It is really worth it. Thank you for your tale and I hope the guy gets arrested for threats.

by **Fabian** on Tue, 08/22/2006 - 15:40 | [reply](#)

2 Experiments for the price of one

At **my blog**, I'm proposing merging this experiment with the "mass lone protest evening"...

by **Francis** on Wed, 08/23/2006 - 15:58 | [reply](#)

Time for some Krav Maga lessons

Well done, of course, Lulie, but if you're going to do that sort of thing then it's high time you looked into taking some martial arts classes. Krav Maga would be in keeping with your Israeli theme, and it also has the advantage of being pretty widespread, well-taught, and practical.

by Tim Starr on Tue, 08/29/2006 - 18:10 | [reply](#)

Failing the test

This is a great idea and I admire you for publicly standing up for Israel.

It seems a little harsh to say that Britain as a whole "is failing the town square test". It sounds as if pretty much all the harassment was from just one persistent individual who kept popping up. He sounds like a stalker and I hope the police follow up with him, but that's not the same as society in general being intolerant.

Out of curiosity, did that one guy (and his friend who appeared later) appear to be Muslim?

by **Infidel** on Fri, 09/08/2006 - 12:35 | [reply](#)

Hezbollah flag

People walk around freely around England wearing the kaffiyah - the (unofficial but widely recognised) PLO symbol - an organisation

whose charter endorses genocide. Nobody dares challenge them.

Fact.

Well done, Lulie!

by **Yoni** on Sat, 09/09/2006 - 19:31 | [reply](#)

Dear Lulie, I am very gra

Dear Lulie,

I am very grateful for what you have done. Can you please elaborate as to what happened with the police? And are you planning on coming to the Washington, D.C. area any time soon?

by a grateful American on Mon, 09/11/2006 - 01:15 | [reply](#)

Updates With The Police

Infidel: Yeah, the main guy seemed to be Muslim. I didn't see the other guy much, so I'm not sure.

As for what happened with the police: they came over and took a statement from me and the friend who phoned the police. Later, they phoned me to ask me to come in to see if I could identify the guy. They showed me some pictures of people who it might be, but none were him. They're currently in the process of checking the CCTV cameras for him.

I've actually seen him again since this story. We just walked past each other in a busy street and exchanged a look. I wasn't wearing a flag then, so I only got a snigger this time. The police have told me to phone them if I see him, so I did that straight afterwards. They're checking the CCTV cameras for that too.

I'm glad to see they're taking this case surprisingly seriously.

-Lulie

by **Lulie** on Mon, 09/11/2006 - 11:44 | [reply](#)

Why would you support Israel

Besides this being a total fairy tale, I want to know why anyone would support a country that was made by stealing Palestinian land by killing and ejecting the rightful owners?

What rights do Arabs, Muslims have in Israel? Forget about wearing a Palestinian flag in Tel Aviv. Israel targets and attacks anyone around the world who even calls Palestine a country.

Your full of bullshit - everything on this site

Editors' note: Normally we would delete any comment from someone whose e-mail address purports to be killalljews@now.com. Moreover, we might not always permit comments characterising this site as excrement and/or accusing us of lying. But we have decided to do so on this occasion and to

reply. See our comment below.

by a humanitarian on Thu, 09/21/2006 - 12:28 | [reply](#)

Re: Why would you support Israel

"What rights do arabs, muslims have in Israel?"

For one, they have the right to be part of the government. For another, Arab legislators have the right to address the Knesset in Arabic, not Hebrew, and have it translated.

They have other rights as well. A better question might be: what rights **don't** they have?

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 09/21/2006 - 13:07 | [reply](#)

Re: Why would you support Israel

This is not a forum for the vulgar abuse of its owners, let alone for making antisemitic death threats ('a humanitarian's' purported e-mail address being killalljews@now.com), and we make no promise that in future we shall permit comments characterising this site as excrement and/or accusing us of lying. We do so in this case for two reasons.

The first is that 'a humanitarian's' comment is an unusually concise illustration of how one is compelled to believe extreme *factual* falsehoods if one is to sustain an anti-Zionist *moral* position. Look how important it is to 'a humanitarian' that he speak out and declare to be a "total fairy tale" some events in Oxford that he has no knowledge of whatsoever. For he feels he does. Similarly, he feels obliged to bear witness to his completely baseless fantasy that Israel "targets and attacks anyone around the world who even calls Palestine a country" - and on the same day that Israel's Foreign Minister passionately called for the establishment of a Palestinian state living in peace side by side with Israel.

Our second reason is this: 'a humanitarian' presumably wants to think of himself as a humanitarian. In view of the deep and murderous hatred he expressed here, it is pointless to beg him to discover the facts before he expresses it again. But there is a lesser thing that we might urge him to do: find out what the opposing position (the one adopted by actual Israelis and Zionists, not the monsters in his head) is. And before even doing that he might do well to look [here](#).

by [Editor](#) on Thu, 09/21/2006 - 16:42 | [reply](#)

Does this mean I can wear a Swastika as a cape too?

A symbol of hatred, illegal occupation and the forceful attempt to

erradicate an entire race: This is what the Israeli flag has come to represent which why it is so offensive that you trivialise it. I always thought the strong use of colour and hindu symbology made the Swastika a striking flag but I would never be so disrespectful to those that suffered under the Nazi regime to suddenly start wearing it as a cape... Idiot.

by a reader on Sun, 10/22/2006 - 15:09 | [reply](#)

False Parallelism

a reader wrote

A symbol of hatred, illegal occupation and the forceful attempt to erradicate an entire race: This is what the Israeli flag has come to represent which why it is so offensive that you trivialise it.

The last two allegations (illegal occupation and racial eradication) are **demonstrably** false. As for the first one (hatred) I agree with the reader: In my experience, and I put it to you as an objective fact, the hatred is the one directed toward Israel by those in Arab and Muslem societies (including non-Arab Iran, etc.) whose ideal society is one in which tyranny, religious or otherwise, is the common order. They incite and use hatred against Israel, the US, and more broadly the entire Western civilization as a way to further and perpetuate this very ideal.

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by **Liberal Iranian** on Fri, 10/27/2006 - 20:31 | [reply](#)

Heart Warming

Brave move and I commend you! Appearances should not matter...Freedom of Speech should not mean you can be bullied or threatened. Anyone who thinks Freedom of Speech is something that can be used for aggression is exploiting the whole concept and is the reason why we are losing our freedoms...Having the right to say what you want does not excuse one to incite violence or fear through what is said!

Although I don't support Israel in all it does but I would never think of yelling at someone for wearing the flag or even be annoyed in the least. I would not even give the person a third look (anyone who has a flag around them gets a second look :P). It is refreshing to see that you weren't attacked by extremeist idiots (well not all that quickly). I don't really support either 'side' when it comes to Israel (both view points have compelling arguments). My only hope is that there is peace and soon.

by MRG on Sat, 02/24/2007 - 16:33 | [reply](#)

A Light unto the Nations.

I would like to share with you two brief conversations I have had

recently.

I was told by one friend that this is the "tisk, tisk" society of people who care but who will do nothing. I asked her what it will take for people to stand up against the hate and she said, most likely it will happen after 17 bomb the Parliament Buildings and not get caught planning it.

I never think in terms of miracles, but last night I spoke with my son about every happy moment being precious and in it's own way, a miracle.

Thank you for you being a miracle...a sign of hope...a light unto the nations...

l'chaim

clink

rochelle

by Rochelle Michaels on Tue, 02/27/2007 - 17:57 | [reply](#)

This is brave

I am thinking of doing the same, i have worn my magen david chian over my shirt before but this is really nothing. I have an Israel flag on my wall and i may put it to the test. i think a shirt with the flag printed on would me more suitable. You dont see many people with flags around so it can be seen as provocative however you are still 100% right to do it and no one has any right to threaten you with violence for doing so. The fact that a man would threaten a 17 year old girl, shows how low these kind of people are, the reason a person with a hizbolah flag would not be attacked is because the attackers are those people.

by Roy on Wed, 03/07/2007 - 04:54 | [reply](#)

Free Burma!

Free Burma!

International Bloggers' Day for Burma on the 4th of October

International bloggers are preparing an action to support the peaceful revolution in Burma. We want to set a sign for freedom and show our sympathy for these people who are fighting their cruel regime without weapons. These Bloggers are planning to refrain from posting to their blogs on October 4 and just put up one Banner then, underlined with the words „Free Burma!“.

www.free-burma.org

by **Free Burma!** on Sun, 09/30/2007 - 19:50 | [reply](#)

Thank you

I do not even know if you check the comments made on this page

anymore, but even for the sake of the other visitors of your website, I have to state the reverence I have for your actions. Your test is very meaningful, regardless if one supports Israel or not. Your test could have been any single one of a plethora of controversial political icons.

The most important thing, however, is that you have revealed an up-and-coming crisis for Western Society. Could the freedoms we so take for granted be in jeopardy? What you did took guts, and you put your neck on the line for what you believe in. The world needs more people like you.

by a reader on Wed, 03/12/2008 - 18:14 | [reply](#)

The Rising Tide Of Insanity

We said some time ago that the War on Terror would be more accurately called the **war against conspiracy theories**. And we have occasionally pointed out how conspiracy-theoretic thinking is becoming common in the mainstream of political debate.

Things are still getting worse. According to a recent **opinion poll**,

More than a third of the American public suspects that federal officials assisted in the 9/11 terrorist attacks or took no action to stop them so the United States could go to war in the Middle East

Note the characteristic **conspiracy-theoretic** allegation that powerful malevolent people are acting ostensibly with one agenda (protecting Americans from harm) that has popular support, while secretly pursuing a different and incompatible agenda that does not have popular support (because it involves mass-murdering Americans). And hence that the people who support the current policies because of their *ostensible* purpose (such as ourselves) are dupes.

In a structurally similar conspiracy theory regarding Israel, the Washington Post reporter Thomas Ricks – a Pentagon correspondent, no less – has claimed that during the recent fighting in Lebanon, Israel **purposely left Hezbollah missile launchers intact**, so that they would be used to murder Israelis and hence provide public-relations justification for Israel's incursions into Lebanon, whose ostensible purpose was to prevent precisely such murders.

Those two conspiracy theories share a degree of detachment from reality that is so extreme that if it occurred outside the political arena it would uncontroversially count as insanity. And yet they enjoy mainstream acceptance, and respect even from many who do not (yet) share them. But there is worse: these delusions are not random. They are focused – on evil – in a manner, and to a degree, not condoned in the West since the 1930s.

By this measure, the war is being lost. We can only repeat the call we made before: Persuade them. Persuade them because in the long run, if you fail to persuade them, they will kill you.

Re: Persuade Them

I try.

Good post.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 08/18/2006 - 00:37 | [reply](#)

Immigrants

In my observation, the situation is getting particularly worse among middle-eastern immigrant communities in the West. The less assimilated they remain, the worse this sort of thinking becomes too. And the more "intellectual" among them are also more likely to be reading and relating to the likes of Chomsky and hence be influenced by them. So, I see it as partly an identity problem, and partly irrational intellectualism.

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by [Liberal Iranian](#) on Fri, 08/18/2006 - 20:20 | [reply](#)

Like that one about..

Nazis starting the Reichstad fire. C'mon gimme a break!

by a reader on Sat, 08/19/2006 - 00:41 | [reply](#)

Is Wikipedia correct on the h

Is Wikipedia correct on the history surrounding these events?

by a reader on Sat, 08/19/2006 - 10:35 | [reply](#)

Reichstag fire

The Wikipedia article on the Reichstag fire currently includes the assertion "During the election campaign, the Nazis had run on a platform of fervent anti-terrorism". But in reality the platform of the Nazis (see, for instance, the [Program of the NSDAP](#)) was not based on anti-terrorism but on irredentism, antisemitism, conspiracy theories, victimhood-based nationalism, and totalitarianism. Reinterpreting Nazism, or Nazi claims to be preventing a Communist revolution, as "fervent anti-terrorism" is no more than a pathetic present-day attempt to justify the 'Bush=Hitler' trope and the associated conspiracy theories.

The alleged relevance of the Reichstag fire to the discussion here is presumably this: if it is insane to believe that the Bush Administration was complicit in the 9-11 attack, why was it

reasonable to suspect that the Nazis were responsible for the

Reichstag fire? The answer is that although the two theories have superficial similarities - they both allege conspiracies by governments to destroy buildings - the latter does not have any of the attributes that make conspiracy theories irrational (and so is not a conspiracy theory in the usual sense of the term). In particular, secretly setting the Reichstag fire (or secretly persuading a single dupe to set it, as the case may be) would not have involved any dedicated Nazi in doing anything contrary to the Nazis' publicly defended ideology. Therefore it does not require the Nazis to have had a secret ideology that violently conflicted with their overt one, does not entail an impossible recruitment system, dupe-management system, and so on.

We urge you to read our [series on conspiracy theories](#).

by [Editor](#) on Sat, 08/19/2006 - 12:24 | [reply](#)

In other words

"[The World](#)" has the only "true" interpretation of the facts. All other theories should be discounted.

by a reader on Sun, 08/20/2006 - 22:51 | [reply](#)

Other Words

I think that those are not just other words, but a false assertion of the implications of the original words.

[The World](#) responded to an assertion that the commonly accepted theory that Nazis started the Reichstag fire was similar to the conspiracy theories that they criticize, by explaining why the theories are different.

The reader ignores the argument and implies that [The World](#) claims some sort of unique authority over interpretation of facts. This is in direct conflict with the evidence and is not only misleading, but rude.

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Mon, 08/21/2006 - 00:08 | [reply](#)

Re: Immigrants

Welcome, Liberal Iranian.

What you have observed is no doubt representative - a very sad and worrying fact. However, there must be something more to it than "partly an identity problem, and partly irrational intellectualism". For that does not, in itself, seem to explain the focus on evil. In the past, silly intellectuals with or without identity problems have believed in all sorts of silly things like spiritualism, telepathy, Esperanto, Freud, Jung, muesli, flower power, yogis, and murderous totalitarian tyranny. Moreover, generally, only a small proportion of all irrationality descends to the level of insanity. Now

it seems to be murderous totalitarian tyranny all the way down, and insanity is mainstream.

by [Editor](#) on Mon, 08/21/2006 - 00:51 | [reply](#)

Re: Other Words

1. If the Nazis were indeed "secretly" behind the fire doesn't that imply that their publicly stated objective were different? Why go to the bother of doing it secretly? Why couldn't the Nazis just publicly say: "Let's burn down the Reichstag!"?

2. **The World** implies that the US government could not possibly be involved in 9/11. (btw, I am not implying that it absolutely was involved) Like any good detective examining a crime, one has to ask: Who stood to benefit from the crime? One of the obvious answers is: government officials.

3. There is a good deal of evidence that the US government did know about Pearl Harbor beforehand and had been trying for some time to provoke such an attack. Let's assume for a second that this was an absolutely proven fact. Gil, would you be outraged by such a conspiracy? My guess is no. Because you believe US participation in WWII was a good thing anyway. Similarly, my guess is that if you had evidence that the US government (hypothetically) allowed 9/11 to happen that you would sit on it. Because, even though you were appalled by 9/11, you are happy to see the US (and more broadly the west in general) involve in a war on the Arab/Islamic world

by a reader on Mon, 08/21/2006 - 04:48 | [reply](#)

Outrage

I would indeed be outraged by a conspiracy to allow the Pearl Harbor attack to be successful, as a means to get into the war (and, btw, I have been outraged by this possibility for quite a few years). The government has an obligation to defend the country, and this would have been a massive betrayal regardless of the ends desired. I would think, by the way, that the fact that the attack was attempted at all would have been sufficient for propaganda purposes, even if the attack was met with a successful defense.

I would feel similarly about complicity with the 9/11 attack.

I am absolutely **not** "happy" to see the US involved in a war.

I *do* prefer that actual threats be recognized and addressed earlier rather than later, to help minimize them before more casualties are necessary. But, I don't think that this recognition requires, or justifies, mass murder.

If I knew of such a crime, I would not sit on it, but I would do what I could to bring the facts to light and the criminals to justice.

For some reason, I still have enough confidence in most people to

trust them to handle the truth reasonably. I think they can distinguish between criminal internal conspiracies and real external threats.

Gil

by **Gil** on Mon, 08/21/2006 - 06:07 | [reply](#)

The Israeli commando raid

The Angry Arab comments on the recent failed Israeli commando raid.

Interesting observation.

by a reader on Tue, 08/22/2006 - 08:01 | [reply](#)

Thin line between naïve conspiracism and naïve cynicism

While some fall into the folly of assuming that every conspiracy-theory is meritorious simply because it is *possible*, even though it has no concrete support -- others run blindly to the other end of the spectrum and flippantly dismiss anything that even sounds conspiratorial, regardless of the amount of support it has. A good middle ground would seem to be to maintain a healthy suspicion toward any power-structure whose ability to operate clandestinely makes it largely unaccountable in the public sphere, while reserving final judgment until all of the facts of the matter have come to light (or as many as can be discerned given the nature of the case). And if one should question whether the USA has the ability to operate in such a clandestine manner in the global sphere, making bed-fellows out of our enemies only to use that alliance to a strategic advantage (while the public remains largely ignorant until after the fact), I might remind you of the Dixie Mission's approval of the Maoists, followed shortly by the US backing the KMT in the Chinese civil war; and Eisenhower's formal recognition of Castro, followed shortly by the Bay of Pigs invasion and Operation Mongoose. Money is a powerful motivator, and history shows time and again that it is often-times a more valued commodity than human life or civil rights.

by **MonkeeSage** on Thu, 08/24/2006 - 19:50 | [reply](#)

The Rising Tide of Insanity

It is the height of insanity to call this The Rising Tide of Insanity. Height of insanity is said tongue in cheek. In fact this phenomenon has nothing to do with insanity. It has only to do with the easy sloppy habits of current argument.

The War on Terror is another fine example:

Please explain how you fight a War on Terror. Where for example do you place your army? Now to call this a War on Conspiracy Theories goes even one step further in ridiculous rhetoric. Call it what it is.

The Argument for Reason. The Argument Against Ideology. The Thinking Man's Guide to Thinking Rationally. Banish Such Banal Titles as The Rising Tide of Insanity. Please.

by a reader on Mon, 08/28/2006 - 04:36 | [reply](#)

Re: The Rising Tide of Insanity

We shall, when we are convinced that there is a psychological difference between believing that the 9-11 attacks were perpetrated by the US Government, and believing that one is the Emperor Napoleon.

by [Editor](#) on Mon, 08/28/2006 - 15:16 | [reply](#)

Fair Enough

Glad you set the record straight.

by a reader on Mon, 08/28/2006 - 23:55 | [reply](#)

Re: Other Words

1. If the Nazis were indeed "secretly" behind the fire doesn't that imply that their publicly stated objective were different? Why go to the bother of doing it secretly? Why couldn't the Nazis just publicly say: "Let's burn down the Reichstag!"?

The Nazis' publicly stated objectives were the destruction of liberal democracy in favour of national socialism, i.e. - state control of the economy and enslaving or exterminating "non-Aryans". Setting fire to the Reichstag, blaming communists and using this as an excuse to murder or imprison their political opponents is entirely consistent with this ideology.

2. **The World** implies that the US government could not possibly be involved in 9/11. (btw, I am not implying that it absolutely was involved) Like any good detective examining a crime, one has to ask: Who stood to benefit from the crime? One of the obvious answers is: government officials.

The American government claims to want to save lives. Even the stupid actions they take that result in the deaths of many people seem to be taken with that objective in mind, e.g. - the War on Drugs. In terms of their stated values they did not benefit from 9/11. So your assertion relies on the American government having motives different from their stated motives.

3. There is a good deal of evidence that the US government did know about Pearl Harbor beforehand and had been trying for some time to provoke such an attack. Let's assume for a second that this was an

absolutely proven fact. Gil, would you be outraged by

such a conspiracy? My guess is no. Because you believe US participation in WWII was a good thing anyway. Similarly, my guess is that if you had evidence that the US government (hypothetically) allowed 9/11 to happen that you would sit on it. Because, even though you were appalled by 9/11, you are happy to see the US (and more broadly the west in general) involve in a war on the Arab/Islamic world

I would be disgusted by FDR's actions if I thought FDR had allowed Pearl Harbour to happen in order to get America into WW2. But the idea that FDR deliberately allowed Pearl Harbour is **false**. And as FDR never publicly expressed any wish to harm Americans as opposed to helping them again this is a conspiracy theory. FDR did plenty of stupid things for which we can justly berate him, allowing Pearl Harbour to happen deliberately was not one of them.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sun, 09/10/2006 - 21:19 | [reply](#)

Logic 101

Alan Forrester: *"So your assertion relies on the American government having motives different from their stated motives."*

I do believe he's finally got it! Congrats, Alan. Most people are addicted to drugs, religion or some other ideology. There are a handful that are sober when they write something. I'm having a martini right now!

Many are stuck on a "good and just" America and can't even admit the other logical possibilities that aren't so happy and innocent. The same people that plead "logic" and "sanity" are the very people won't don't understand that logic is about working through **all** existing possibilities methodically. Discounting possibilities without being able to disprove them is the true insanity. We don't teach critical thinking skills in schools because... we can't think critically.

In fact, assimilating a large network of political facts together requires an extensive hard drive in that cranium of yours so it's not surprising that people still running Windows 3.1 can't understand beyond the fluffy surface of happy-happy-joy-joy. Those people edit Wikipedia and believe that people tend to edit in "good faith", hahaha. Loooooneytooooooons. Do you hear windmills in your mind.

by [Easter Bunny from Hell](#) on Thu, 09/14/2006 - 08:36 | [reply](#)

Loonies on the horizon

"Many are stuck on a "good and just" America and can't even admit the other logical possibilities that aren't so happy and innocent"

America is a human mental construct. America cannot be 'good' or 'bad': only people can be either.

The loonies who go around believing in the most complex and

unlikely theories simply because they are the most complex and unlikely, are the last people who should lecture the sane among us on critical thinking skills.

by [Yoni](#) on Sat, 09/16/2006 - 16:26 | [reply](#)

Re: Logic 101

Many are stuck on a "good and just" America and can't even admit the other logical possibilities that aren't so happy and innocent. The same people that plead "logic" and "sanity" are the very people won't don't understand that logic is about working through **all** existing possibilities methodically. Discounting possibilities without being able to disprove them is the true insanity. We don't teach critical thinking skills in schools because... we can't think critically.

The title of your post is rather ironic as the one thing nobody could learn from it is logic. There are an infinite number of possible explanations, including an infinite number of theories in which the whole world is a dream in my mind. So I could not methodically work my way through all of the possible explanations. And as you are not running down the infinite list I can see that you don't take your own idea seriously. So let's move on to how we really can learn about the world. We can learn by proposing explanations and subjecting them to criticism. Sometimes we can even exclude a whole category of explanations because they are all susceptible to arguments of a particular form. I exclude all explanations that involve the external world not being a dream in my head without running through all of them by using a philosophical argument against solipsism, which may be found in [The Fabric of Reality](#), by David Deutsch. Basically the world I see around me is complicated and autonomous from me so all solipsism really does is relabel the external world as a dream. Similarly I exclude all conspiracy theoretic arguments by arguments which may be found [here](#).

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Thu, 09/21/2006 - 20:27 | [reply](#)

Rising Tide of Insanity

Bravo!

by [Jeanie Starr](#) on Mon, 10/16/2006 - 09:20 | [reply](#)

Test for Conspiracy Theories.

I suggest another 'test' that conspiracy theories should be held up to:

Assume that you are one of the ring-leaders, at the start of the planning phase of this conspiracy.

Assume that you wish to achieve their aims (according to the

conspiracy theorists) - power, wealth, a war with the Middle East, accessing Iraqi oil supplies, whatever.

What courses of action are open to you? How risky is each? How costly?

Given the various alternatives, is it possible that you would select 'the conspiracy theory' as a suitable way forward?

I believe that the USA-involvement-in-9/11 conspiracy completely fails this test. There are so many simpler, cheaper, and safer ways for the USA administration to achieve the nefarious aims attributed to them by the conspiracy theorists - if they wanted to. Which one depends on what you believe the USA's aims were.

E.g. - Getting their hands in Iraqi oil. It would have been so much easier for the USA to cut a deal with Iraq than to engineer a war. The USA was the driving force behind maintaining the UN sanctions, and could have had them lifted if they wanted to. They could have negotiated almost anything with Saddam - exclusive oil deals, US military bases on Iraqi soil, etc. Saddam was a pragmatist above all else. With the USA with him, rather than against him...

by Mk on Mon, 04/30/2007 - 13:39 | [reply](#)

'Human Rights' In The Cause Of Tyranny: Who Is To Blame?

There is some damning criticism of Human Rights Watch in [this](#) article by Alan Dershowitz. In regard to Lebanon, it leaves little room to regard HRW as more than a Hezbollah propaganda organ – and a crude one at that. And Amnesty International is even worse, says [Kenneth Anderson](#), who also claims that:

It's not merely an organization or a movement that is at risk - it is the credibility of human rights itself.

If the very concept of protecting human rights is being eroded because its most prominent advocates insist on siding with tyranny, who is to blame? The 'moonbats' and '[idiotarians](#)' who run those organisations? Well, yes, of course. But also, no. For evil to triumph, it suffices that good people do nothing.

And good people are doing nothing. Where are the impartial human-rights organisations? The ones that conscientiously investigate alleged atrocities and then take a reputable view about what, factually, happened. The ones that support the liberation of Iraq and Afghanistan, support the existence and self-defence of Israel, recognise the need to use force to protect lives and liberties, and want it to be used morally. The ones that care *both* about the humane treatment of terrorists by the armed forces of the US and Israel and others who are trying desperately to save innocent lives *and* about the appalling violations of human rights perpetrated and planned by those terrorists and the tyrannical governments that support them. And keep those two issues in their morally proper perspective.

They are missing. And that is through no fault of the anti-war movement. It is entirely the fault of our side.

Update: Alan has further comments at [Elegance Against Ignorance](#).

Further update: If you're interested in this issue it is worth reading [this](#) article by Dershowitz, mainly about Amnesty International's recent condemnation of Israel, and [this](#)

uncompromising but remarkably empty defence of both Amnesty

and HRW, entitled "Diversionary Strike On a Rights Group".

Sun, 08/27/2006 - 17:00 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Questions

I agree with your central statement. But two questions remain to be answered:

1. Why?--Why these sort of human-rights organizations have not been created? Are "good people" disillusioned with the whole idea of such organizations? Are they busy with other higher priority tasks? Have they put their trust with the existing ones? Are there enough "good people" committed to seeing such a (monumental) task through?

2. How?--How and by whom should such orgnaizations be created? What is the proper venue and foundation? Source of funding? Etc.

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by [Liberal Iranian](#) on Mon, 08/28/2006 - 19:38 | [reply](#)

liberation of Iraq?

Any human rights organization that seriously claimed that Iragis have been "liberated" would be laughed out of town.

by a reader on Wed, 08/30/2006 - 01:46 | [reply](#)

Re: liberation of Iraq?

Why?

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 08/30/2006 - 03:06 | [reply](#)

Re: Re: liberation of Iraq?

By most people's standards Abu Ghraib tortute, raping of young women by soldiers, and violence verging on civil war does not qualify as "liberty". Even by the World's own proclaimed standards Iraq is not "liberated". I invite you to do the "town square" test there Elliot. (if we restrict that test to Iraqi citizens, not an outsider like you would be, it would still fail.) Even by the World's weak standard of (at least) supporting Israel, Iraq fails (Mr. Maliki condemned Israel's actions in Lebanon)

To cite the "liberation" of Iraq in the same paragraph with the other cited actions merely serves to bring those into question as well.

by a reader on Wed, 08/30/2006 - 12:44 | [reply](#)

Re: liberation of Iraq?

Is passing the town square test your standard for qualifying for the term 'liberation'?

One problem with that is that very few countries pass the town square test completely. For instance, in Britain after World War 2, blasphemy was still a criminal offence. So according to the town-square standard of liberation, forcibly overthrowing Nazi rule in the Channel Islands was not a liberation because the new regime failed the town square test in regard to criticism of certain religious dogmas. That has the same logic as your claim that the overthrow of Saddam was not a liberation because the new regime fails the town square test in regard to (for instance) Israeli flags. In both cases (post-liberation Channel Islands and post-liberation Iraq) the region in question passes the town square test incomparably better than it did before.

We think that such transistions are indeed liberations under the prevailing usage of the term 'liberation'. But much more important than terminology is the substantive issue of whether human rights organisations ought to have been endorsing the overthrow of the Saddam regime (as we advocate) or working to keep it in place (as they did in the event).

by **Editor** on Wed, 08/30/2006 - 16:06 | [reply](#)

Re: Questions

Good questions.

by **Editor** on Wed, 08/30/2006 - 16:07 | [reply](#)

Shades of transition

If Elliot had gone to an Iraqi town square during Saddam's rule and denounced Islamic fundamentalism, he might very well have been applauded. Worst case he might have been deported.

Today he would most likely be shot before opening his mouth. Is this an example of "liberation transition"?

Perhaps the "town square test is completely invalid if it is not an objective pass/fail but subjective shades of "transition".

by a reader on Thu, 08/31/2006 - 22:46 | [reply](#)

Re: Shades of transition

I believe I understand what you are asserting. But I don't understand why I am supposed to deem it to be true. Nor have you revealed why you do.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 09/01/2006 - 00:45 | [reply](#)

Liberation and Liberty

The anonymous reader is confusing, (1) the stable (and evolving) prevalence of liberty in a society and, (2) the initiation of the gradual (and painful) movement towards that situation. "Liberation" is the name of the latter; the former is called "freedom." A near always passing of the town-square test is necessary and sufficient for (1), but not for (2). I am not sure what a good objective measure for "liberation" is. I suggest it must include the increasing "volume" of debate taking place on the pressing issues of the society. This has certainly been the case in Iraq. That situation can be contrasted with the situation in Iran, which is the reverse. (Say, for the policies adopted by the government on its nuclear program.)

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by [Liberal Iranian](#) on Fri, 09/01/2006 - 10:46 | [reply](#)

Re:Liberation and Liberty

Which is which? Here is a list of a dozen countries, Which are in a state of "freedom" and which are in a state of "liberation" and which are neither?

Pakistan

China

Russia

Ukraine

Serbia

U.A.E.

France

Philipines

Vietnam

Nepal

Bolivia

South Korea

by a reader on Fri, 09/01/2006 - 12:14 | [reply](#)

Re: Re:Liberation and Liberty

Although some of them are plainly clear, I cannot claim I have adequate information at the moment to answer your question accurately in all instances. This information can be found out given

enough time. Before expending that time, however, I would like to

know what purpose would such an exercise serve in our discussion.

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by **Liberal Iranian** on Mon, 09/04/2006 - 08:19 | [reply](#)

Re: Shades of transition

"If Elliot had gone to an Iraqi town square during Saddam's rule and denounced Islamic fundamentalism, he might very well have been applauded. Worst case he might have been deported.

Today he would most likely be shot before opening his mouth. Is this an example of "liberation transition"?"

Let us suppose this were true (it probably isn't, but lets say it is). Is this evidence that Iraq as run by Saddam was more liberal, or would it simply be evidence that the offenses that would get you shot in Iraq have changed since the invasion?

Do you suppose that shouting "Saddam is an oppressive dictator" in the pre-invasion Iraqi town square would have been a safe thing to do? People were reputedly dragged from their beds and tortured to death for much less.

It's also important to consider who would be doing the shooting. In the pre-invasion Iraq you would be shot by the republican guard - in the new Iraq you would be shot by a criminal. Granted you're just as dead either way, but at least in the latter case there's a slim chance that the culprit may be prosecuted for their crime, instead of getting a promotion.

I think in the end it is better to live in a free country with a legitimate government that isn't coping well with terrorism, rather than an oppressive regime where even the terrorists are too afraid to step out of line.

by a reader on Tue, 11/14/2006 - 13:45 | [reply](#)

Jack Bauer

I think in the end it is better to live in a free country with a legitimate government that isn't coping well with terrorism, rather than an oppressive regime where even the terrorists are too afraid to step out of line.

I agree. Let's consider what Jack Bauer would do in each situation.

1) a free country, with a legitimate government, but poor security forces

Jack would personally take over security and kill the terrorists, thus creating a free country with no downsides.

2) an oppressive regime with terrorists too scared to step out of line

Jack would personally kill the oppressive regime, *then* personally

take over security for the country. He'd kill the oppressor and the terrorists. We'd end up with the same final result: a free country with no downsides.

So, what's the difference? In scenario 2, Jack has to kill more people. Thus, scenario 2 is further away from a good, free country.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 11/14/2006 - 21:53 | [reply](#)

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The Problem Is The Spin

A Parliamentary Inquiry is about to report a large increase in the number of **antisemitic attacks in Britain** in recent years, which has accelerated further since the recent war between Israel and Hezbollah.

More shameful than the numbers is the fact that the character of the attacks has changed. While in the past most antisemitic attacks came from tiny fringe groups, Mark Gardner of the Community Security Trust reports that nowadays the attackers

are from across society [...]. "When it's verbal abuse, it's just ordinary people in the street, from middle-class women to working-class men. All colours and backgrounds. We hardly ever see incidents involving the classic neo-Nazi skinhead. Muslims are over-represented."

Indeed, a few days ago this violence from 'across society' spread to the normally staid House of Lords, when Lord Janner, who is 78 and Jewish, was **physically attacked** by Lord Brammer who is 82. The attack was caused by their disagreement over Israel's non-existent war crimes in Lebanon, and subsequently legitimised by Janner's colleagues, who apparently persuaded him to make no complaint.

In hate-mail to senior Jewish figures, ordinary Jewish people were being blamed for the deaths of Lebanese civilians. "There are also references to the Holocaust, saying that Hitler should have wiped out the Jews."

Mr Gardner said that the rise in attacks reflected increased hostility to Israel and Jews in the media and across society: "The number of anti-Semitic attacks reflects the mood music around Jews and Israel."

Where does this 'mood music', to which ordinary British people are responding, come from?

Jon Benjamin, of the Board of Deputies, said: "The problem is the spin that Israel is an irredeemably evil regime, and we are concerned that it may become common currency to connect British Jews with this."

But this spin that Israel is fundamentally evil cannot be separated

from the spin that British Jews are fundamentally evil and therefore legitimate targets for attacks. If Israel really were evil then the two issues could easily be separated, because the Jewish community in Britain would then certainly become active in the campaign to de-legitimise Israel. But that cannot happen because, in reality, Israel is a moral beacon to the world. The spin that it is evil and the spin that Jews are evil are the same out-and-out lie. On the grand stage of world history, this lie is part of the millennia-old and incomparably widespread and persistent evil known as **antisemitism**. But the proximate cause, today in Britain, is a powerful, self-sustaining irrationality in the subculture known as the media.

In the sidebar of the *Times* article that reports these dismal developments is the very phenomenon that is causing them. Of the six headlines linked there under the heading 'Related Stories', at least four carry the spin of Israel's alleged evil, and not one even hints at Israel's case, or even that it has one.

The mildest example is: *Annan says Syria to respect Hezbollah arms embargo*, ([link](#)). This would be much less misleading if it were *Syria claims it will respect Hezbollah arms embargo*. By reporting Syria's claim through the mouth of the UN Secretary General (who was doing nothing more than report what was said to him) *The Times* manages to attribute maximal authority to that claim. Only deep in the article, and nowhere in the headline, is there a hint that there exists an opposing point of view, namely that Syria's claim is a ludicrous and cynical lie whose main purpose is to de-legitimise Israel's self-defence.

The worst of this particular batch of headlines is *Cluster bombs leave 'toys' that kill children* ([link](#)). The casual reader will receive the impression that Israel has littered Lebanon with toy-shaped booby traps with the satanic intention of maiming and murdering Lebanese children, an impression that is, again, only dispelled deep in the article, and even then not explicitly. The spin here is the ancient antisemitic **blood libel** that Jews are child murderers. This is expressed, in the context of the Lebanon war, in the lie that Israel has targeted innocent civilians – a lie that is frequently intensified by the explicit or implicit claim that this blood lust is directed especially towards children.

In a culture that excoriates President Bush for once using the term 'crusade', even though in English that word has carried no specifically Christian or anti-Muslim connotation for centuries, there can be no excusing these antisemitic spins as accidental. They are part of a systematic phenomenon of entrenched irrationality that is poisoning our society and causing violence. Yet the cause is not (for the most part, anyway) that journalists wake up one morning and realise that it is The Jews who are responsible for all the evils in the world, any more than Lord Brammer woke up one morning thinking that Lord Janner is responsible for all *his* troubles. **Mel Gibson** thinks like that, and so do many cultures, **even in Europe**. But the antisemitic spin that is spreading through mainstream British society is not rooted in racial or religious hatred of Jews, but rather it is the other way round. (Indeed, one of the ways it entrenches

itself is that its purveyors can honestly testify, from introspection, that they are motivated by no such hatred. This, in turn, leads them to imagine that they are seeing for themselves proof that those who accuse them of bias are guilty of yet further offences, namely whining and slander.) The pathological spin originates in a pathological world view which, in itself, makes no direct reference to Jews or any other group. Yet by its inner logic it homes in on Jews, and hence on Israel. For some powerful but as yet only dimly understood reason, Jews are, as always, the canaries in the coal mine, the first to suffer the effects of poison.

Update 1: Solomonia makes the same point, but he is able to express it in just three words.

Update 2: The IDF's policy on cluster bombs.

Sat, 09/02/2006 - 20:12 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

'In a culture that excoriates

'In a culture that excoriates President Bush for once using the term 'crusade', even though in English that word has carried no specifically Christian or anti-Muslim connotation for centuries'

Since you mention it, the first crusade didn't do the Jews a lot of good either but note the lack of people arguing that Bush is an anti-semite who wants to burn them all in their synagogues because of the 'crusade' comment.

by [Leigh](#) on Mon, 09/04/2006 - 20:22 | [reply](#)

Re: 'In a culture that excoriates

Indeed.

by [Editor](#) on Mon, 09/04/2006 - 20:36 | [reply](#)

History of England Conspiracy Theory

As I read British History it strikes me that the Brits via their pompous ideas of Empire could be blamed for causing almost everything wrong with the world, including fomenting mistreatment of Jews by almost every country and culture where the Brits meddled for centuries. Lord Brammer might rightly attack himself proclaiming mea culpa, mea culpa for the sins of his forebears rather than feebly making an ass of himself by attacking an apparently much younger, nobler man.

I could blame the Brits but I won't. It would be another easily refuted conspiracy theory. Rather I'll leave it to the media to exploit that one knowing that a reporting opportunity is never missed wherever public blame and the possibility of innuendo presents itself. Besides, noone ever refutes the media, not really.

by a reader on Mon, 09/04/2006 - 22:39 | [reply](#)

Cluster bombs

I don't understand your point about cluster bombs. Israel clearly has left a lot of cluster bombs in Lebanon, and they certainly will kill a lot of children. So I assume you are objecting to the implication that that was the *intention* rather than an unfortunate side effect. Is that right? If so then I think the article would not give a casual reader that impression, rather they would get the impression that Israel acted with casual disregard for the lives of others. Do you think that the use of cluster bombs was justified?

by GS on Tue, 09/05/2006 - 17:08 | [reply](#)

Disregard

Israel acts with the most regard for life of all countries. It is most hesitant to do anything that would might put civilians at risk. Even guilty ones (ie, children who retrieve weapons are not shot). Israel has sent commandos instead of bombs, at great risk, because of its regard for life.

Saying, or implying, that Israel acts with casual disregard for human life is an awful slander and completely indefensible.

Also note there does exist fierce internal debate in Israel about life and collateral damage, so implying *casual* disregard is unforgivable.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 09/05/2006 - 19:27 | [reply](#)

Thank you so much

Thank you so much for your words. They are very much appreciated.

One thing I have realized is that fascists never stop with one group. Their hatred and aggression is never content with lashing out at one group. They seek domination and use fear and violence to achieve this. Sound familiar?

I am very surprised that Europe has not learned this lesson. Throughout the Arab-Israeli(muslim-Jewish) conflict, Europe has sold Israel out countless times, coming to the aid of those who wish to destroy her, silent when when she is attacked, and condemning her when she defends herself. Israel's enemies, or I should say the Jews enemies are not rational. They are fascists.

By the way Europe has dealt with this conflict, they have given the green light to muslims and have basically told them that this behavior is acceptable.

Now, when these fascists who believe that this behavior is

acceptable arrive in your country, and the only way they know how to deal with things is through violence, what do you think will happen when you make these people angry? What do you think they will want if you try to appease them? They will want more.

Europe has told the muslim world that this fascist behavior is acceptable, now the Jihad is on their doorstep.

I really like your blog. Keep up the good work.

Justin from Canada

by Justin on Tue, 09/05/2006 - 20:00 | [reply](#)

To see the difference between

To see the difference between Muslim and Jew, one only has to compare the palestinian national anthem to the Israeli one.

One is about hate, the other about love.

Palestinian:

My country , my country

My country , the land of my grandfathers

My country , my country

My country , my nation , the nation of eternity

With my determine, my fire and the volcano of my revenge

The longing of my blood to my land and home

I have climbed the mountains and fought the wars

I have conquered the impossible , and crossed the borders

My country , my country , the nation of eternity

With the resolve of the winds and the fire of the guns

And the determination of my nation in the land of struggle

Palestine is my home , Palestine is my fire , Palestine is my revenge

and the land of eternal

My country , my country , the nation of eternity

I swear under the shade of the flag

To my land and nation , and the fire of pain

I will live as a guerrilla , I will go on as guerrilla ,

I will expire as guerrilla until I will be back

My country , my country , the nation of eternity

Israeli:

As long as the Jewish spirit is yearning deep in the heart,
With eyes turned toward the East, looking toward Zion,
Then our hope - the two-thousand-year-old hope - will not be lost:
To be a free people in our land,
The land of Zion and Jerusalem.

Justin from Canada

by Justin on Tue, 09/05/2006 - 20:08 | [reply](#)

Re: Thank you so much

Justin from Canada: Thanks.

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 09/06/2006 - 10:49 | [reply](#)

Cluster bombs

So Elliot, can you answer my question. Do you believe that the use of cluster bombs was justified?

by GS on Wed, 09/06/2006 - 16:44 | [reply](#)

Re: Cluster Bombs

GS wrote:

I don't understand your point about cluster bombs. Israel clearly has left a lot of cluster bombs in Lebanon, and they certainly will kill a lot of children. So I assume you are objecting to the implication that that was the *intention* rather than an unfortunate side effect. Is that right? If so then I think the article would not give a casual reader that impression, rather they would get the impression that Israel acted with casual disregard for the lives of others.

The difference between intentional killing and killing with casual disregard for the lives of 'others' is not very relevant here. For any users of force, both are viciously immoral. Presumably, then, you do agree with us that the headline gives the reader the impression that Israel is viciously immoral.

Do you think that the use of cluster bombs was justified?

Yes. Cluster bombs were used only in cases of military and moral necessity - for instance, where Hezbollah missile crews were

literally in the act of firing volleys of missiles into Israeli cities and,

because of the location and terrain, other means of attack would not have stopped them. The other means of attack, which *were* attempted where they could work, included, as Elliot pointed out above, ones that risked the lives of Israeli soldiers. Had Israel had callous disregard for the the lives of others, they would not have done that, and they would have used far more destructive weapons and thereby saved the lives of many Israelis.

That fact that, in this way and in many others, Israel's actual tactical decisions routinely include compromising important military objectives, and risking Israeli lives, in order to spare enemy civilians, is simply incompatible with the accusation you have made, and which you rightly attribute to *The Times* as well. (Incidentally, in Israel's case, 'military objectives' are themselves confined exclusively to those that are necessary to prevent the murder of Israelis.)

Perhaps you are opposed to the use of cluster bombs in principle. Perhaps you have profound moral objections to all explosive weapons, or to any military tactics that might harm civilians, or whatever: we can't tell. If so, we disagree, and so do the military planners of virtually every nation that fights wars. But even if you were right about that, that would still in no way justify imputing to them such vile states of mind as *having casual disregard for the lives of others*. Far less does it justify imputing such states of mind to a whole nation, as you do.

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 09/06/2006 - 18:48 | [reply](#)

BBC antisemitism

We mustn't forget that grandmother of all institutionalised antisemites, the BBC. Virtually every news item that can be slanted against Israel, is slanted against Israel.

Just 2 examples out of thousands (incidentally, they also demonstrate that the BBC doesn't understand the difference between news reporting and editorial comment):

1. Lebanon 1982, a BBC reporter stands in front of bombed buildings in Tyre, and says:
"Once again, Israel has decided to cock a snook at world opinion". This would be despicable as an editorial, but as so-called 'reporting'??? The hack knows what Israel has 'decided' to do? And moreover, that its decision involves naked aggression even though the peaceful world has tried to stop the war? And of course, that there's been no aggression by the Arabs that triggered this war?

2. On the BBC website 2006: Maale Adumim is described, supposedly factually, as an 'illegal' settlement. There is a tiny comment to the effect that Israel disputes this.
Note well: not 'Some people/governments/what-have-you claim that it is illegal' but 'it is illegal'. The BBC is now the arbiter on this fact, not an unbiased commentator - and of course, it is judge/jury/executioner (well, it would love to be, so great is its puffed-up self-importance) on this issue AGAINST Israel.

The fact that Maale Adumim is not illegal by any sane criteria is neither here nor there in this case: it's the BBC's constant bias that is important.

by **Yoni** on Sat, 09/09/2006 - 20:24 | [reply](#)

war

Hi Justin

I like many others know that Israel is the victim of the area but also the power. How can I with all humility express a sentiment towards the people of Lebanon who have no control over their fate. I do not wish to denigrate the state of Israel but I also see injustice to the innocent Lebanese (not all) who have suffered. I do wish the whole area a sense of responsibility for their actions.

Best wishes to all.

by a reader on Sat, 09/16/2006 - 19:10 | [reply](#)

Innocent Lebanese

It is a terrible tragedy that many innocent Lebanese were harmed. And I agree with you that responsibility is important. That's why we must make sure Hezbollah is destroyed entirely so it can never hurt people again.

The innocent Lebanese were hurt through a combination of

- 1) Hezbollah's immoral, aggressive initiation of a war
- 2) Hezbollah's use of innocent Lebanese, including children, as human shields
- 3) Hezbollah's intentional tactic of maximising Lebanese casualties
- 4) Israel's moral, defensive actions that carefully tried to minimize Lebanese casualties

Israel's actions were only necessitated because of Hezbollah's actions, and I'm sure you'll agree that Israel should have defended itself -- it's better that way. So the real problem that caused all this suffering is purely Hezbollah's decision to start the war.

For balance, you may want to consider what the causal lists look like for the innocent Israeli casualties.

-- Elliot Temple

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

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 09/16/2006 - 19:40 | [reply](#)

"Did President George W Bush'

"Did President George W Bush's Invasion Of Iraq Contribute To Causing The 9-11 Attack?"

Are you intending that to be a trick question? Anyone who answers

yes has got a head full of sand, with 9-11 occuring way before the invasion of iraq.

Justin

by Justin on Mon, 09/18/2006 - 06:40 | [reply](#)

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Did President George W Bush's Invasion Of Iraq Contribute To Causing The 9-11 Attack?

[view](#)

[results](#)

Yes

No

Wed, 09/13/2006 - 15:12 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Poll On The Cause Of The 9-11 Attack

Please vote in our new poll (in the sidebar on the right). It is just a yes/no question about the cause of the attack on the US on September 11, 2001.

Update on 2006-9-20: So far the poll is *overwhelmingly exonerating* President Bush's invasion of Iraq.

Wed, 09/13/2006 - 15:16 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Huh?

I'm confused by the poll question.

Is there time-travel involved?

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Wed, 09/13/2006 - 18:27 | [reply](#)

Re: Huh?

Shhhh... :)

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 09/13/2006 - 18:41 | [reply](#)

Aim low.

That way you have a good chance of success. Even though the Iraq war has been a complete disaster at least it didn't *cause* 9/11!

I imagine the editor can sleep well at night knowing that he didn't cause the sinking of the Titanic.

by a reader on Thu, 09/14/2006 - 22:52 | [reply](#)

Re: Aim low.

The servants of Allah are not bound by your infidel notions of causality.

by [Kevin](#) on Thu, 09/14/2006 - 22:59 | [reply](#)

And surely the most likely re

And surely the most likely reason why anyone would vote 'yes' is that they thought the question was about the *first* gulf war.

by a reader on Sun, 09/17/2006 - 11:56 | [reply](#)

Unlikely

The one thing those people are unlikely to overlook is the letter "W".

Gil

by [Gil](#) on Mon, 09/18/2006 - 01:43 | [reply](#)

Complete disaster?

To the author of 'Aim low' who said "the Iraq war has been a complete disaster":

Please remember that one man's tyrant is another man's freedom fighter.

Although Saddam was a freedom fighter to you, he was a mass-murdering, warmongering tyrant in some people's opinion, and therefore, to them, the war has not been a complete disaster at all.

Those people's opinions are just as good as yours, and you should acknowledge their validity, not go making sweeping comments implying that your truth is the only one.

by a reader on Mon, 09/18/2006 - 02:12 | [reply](#)

re: Complete disaster?

Silly me, I was thinking of the \$4000 and counting per household it is costing me. I guess I don't have the god-like vision of you and your friend George to see that I am better off without that money to protect myself as I see fit.

You are correct, not everyone sees it as a disaster, in fact, I'm sure Mr. bin laden sees it as a success well beyond his wildest dreams!

by a reader on Tue, 09/19/2006 - 11:17 | [reply](#)

Exonerated?

"So far the poll is overwhelmingly exonerating President Bush's invasion of Iraq."

Um, no. The poll is overwhelmingly showing that most readers can tell one year from another. I wonder how many of those it snagged simply hadn't had their coffee yet.

by [Samuel K Duro](#) on Thu, 09/21/2006 - 06:38 | [reply](#)

Re: Complete disaster?

Silly me, I was thinking of the \$4000 and counting per household it is costing me. I guess I don't have the god-like vision of you and your friend George to see that I am better off without that money to protect myself as I see fit.

You do? Really? Personally I'd rather have an organisation that specialises in defence defend me at least some of the time. Of course, self defence is part of the best strategy for dealing with any threat. With some threats, like muggers, it should probably play a very large role. However, self defence is of limited use against Islamist terrorists and states who sponsor them. If you tried to take out Iran's nuclear facilities on your own you'd almost certainly end up dead very quickly. You need lots of information and either weapons or the economic clout to make economic sanctions against Iran stick. All of this requires a large amount of money and lots of people. The best way to maintain such an organisation is for lots of people who can't provide such defence services to pay people who can: it's called division of labour. Now it would be nice if we currently had a voluntary means to do this, but we don't so we're stuck with doing it through taxation for the immediate future.

You are correct, not everyone sees it as a disaster, in fact, I'm sure Mr. bin Laden sees it as a success well beyond his wildest dreams!

So you think that bin Laden is glad that he lost a **major source** of funding and training facilities?

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Thu, 09/21/2006 - 19:49 | [reply](#)

Re:Re: Complete disaster?

Alan,

Would you come to my house, hold a gun to my head, demand \$4000, and claim you are doing this to protect me?

by a reader on Thu, 09/21/2006 - 22:51 | [reply](#)

Libertarianism

A Reader,

We have tax funded government today. It's unreasonable to use this as an argument specifically against government programs you don't like. All government programs are equally guilty of being tax funded, so you can't use this as an argument about which are better/worse.

There are various exceptions to this, especially when we have a free-market alternative in place. A government grocery store program would be horrible. But we don't have a free market army ready.

-- Elliot Temple

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 09/22/2006 - 00:23 | [reply](#)

Not answering the question

The question was simple Elliot. Would Alan coercively take money from me? (and claim he was promoting "freedom") If he does it with enough of his friends (i.e. democracy) does that somehow make it ok? Don't pretend that being some sort of hard nosed "realist" gives you an out.

by a reader on Fri, 09/22/2006 - 11:34 | [reply](#)

Libertarian Coercion

The overwhelming majority of people will not vote for libertarian philosophies and policies. It is morally repugnant to coerce people into following libertarian ideology.

Persuade them. Don't coerce them.

by a reader on Fri, 09/22/2006 - 14:59 | [reply](#)

Libertarian Coercion?

I'm not sure if that last comment was a bad joke, or just stupid.

What kind of coercion was "a reader" referring to?

Gil

by **Gil** on Fri, 09/22/2006 - 17:50 | [reply](#)

Re: Not answering the question

The answer to your question is most likely, No! But if you are suggesting that paying for the defense forces should be done on a completely voluntary basis, you better have a working theory of how that would work. Do you?

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by **Liberal Iranian** on Sun, 09/24/2006 - 09:30 | [reply](#)

Why do you want to coerce me?

Would Alan coercively take money from me? (and claim he was promoting "freedom") If he does it with enough of his friends (i.e. democracy) does that somehow make it ok? Don't pretend that being some sort of hard nosed "realist" gives you an out.

If there was a country in which the law allowed for private

voluntarily funded armies I would much prefer to live there. I would not go round to your house, put a gun to your head and demand your money.

In the real world, there is no country where people are allowed to raise private armies. Now, you say that I am wrong to say that the government should use the power it has taken to promote freedom. You say, further, that it is morally equivalent to going round to your house and putting a gun to your head and demanding money from you to defend freedom. Your position is rubbish as I would prefer a situation in which armies were supported by voluntary subscription. Furthermore, in the current situation in which raising private armies is forbidden, your advocacy of non-interventionist foreign policy is entirely morally symmetrical with respect to use of tax monies. How so? Well, you and I both know that if I were to raise a private army to invade Iran, say, tax money would be used to stop me and put me in jail. So by advocating a non-interventionist foreign policy for Western governments you are recommending that my tax money should be used force me to back a policy that I find abhorrent: neutrality toward evil tyrants and the terrorists they sponsor.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Mon, 09/25/2006 - 19:53 | [reply](#)

Re: Libertarian Coercion

The overwhelming majority of people want to use government taxation to fund the military because they believe it is the most efficient way of providing defense for the nation. More efficiency implies that people have more money and therefore more freedom to do what they want. And more freedom implies less coercion.

If a libertarian proposes using anything other than democratic means to end government taxation (that supports the military), he should be jailed because such a proposal could only be implemented by using violence to contravene majority preferences.

Therefore the only morally defensible and consistent position for a libertarian is to favor gradual democratic change. Since the public thinks it is less coercive because it is more efficient to utilize the government to fund a sufficiently powerful military, essentially noone except a radical libertarian will favor eliminating our publically funded military.

Until libertarians can demonstrate that we can obtain a private army with the strength and power of the United States military, but by spending less money, citizens will continue to favor utilizing government taxation, unless a libertarian is prepared to coerce everyone else by overthrowing the government.

Therefore, libertarians must logically favor utilizing democratic processes, if they do not wish to be coercive.

by a reader on Thu, 09/28/2006 - 02:26 | [reply](#)

Coercion

Alan,

Why do you have to raise a private army? Why don't you just raise enough money from private citizens so the government wouldn't have to tax the rest of us so much? Isn't the real problem that you can't raise enough money privately, therefore you favor using coercion to force the rest of us to pay for the Iraq war?

Since you and others can't raise sufficient funds privately to give to the military, so that no taxes have to be raised, perhaps people don't really favor funding the Iraq war?

by a reader on Thu, 09/28/2006 - 02:40 | [reply](#)

Re: Coersion

A reader wrote:

Since you and others can't raise sufficient funds privately to give to the military, so that no taxes have to be raised, perhaps people don't really favor funding the Iraq war?

First, that sort of army *is* a private army: if the money is raised privately why should it be given to a government army?

Second, Where does the Iraq war come into your argument? How do you know the same statement is not true for any war? Or the city police for that matter? Perhaps the people you are talking about feel they can get a free ride of security on other people's private donations?

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by [Liberal Iranian](#) on Thu, 09/28/2006 - 05:12 | [reply](#)

False Dichotomy

An army in which individuals voluntarily contribute money....

"First, that sort of army is a private army: if the money is raised privately why should it be given to a government army?"

Cyrus Ferdowsi

Alan seemed to imply that he had to choose between two evils. He implies that a military, funded by taxation, is wrong because people are forced to contribute, even if they do not want to. He says he would like to use "subscriptions" to create a private army, but an existing government would then use taxation to stop him. So either way the government is preventing him from doing what he wants. So if he has to pay taxes to the government, he at least wants the money to go to fighting tyrants and not towards keeping him in prison.

I am pointing out that Alan's grim choices are not so limited. If he could raise substantial sums of money (say 40% of the military's budget per year), and promise it to the military in exchange for the

government cutting taxes plus some input into how the military is utilized, he could make progress towards having a military funded by voluntary contributions. In order to raise that much money, contributor's opinions about the role of the military would surely need to be taken into account.

Alan may not be able to have a private army, right now, but if he could raise nearly half the money needed to run a military in a year and exchange it for lower taxes, he could make substantial progress towards privatizing the military.

"Perhaps the people you are talking about feel they can get a free ride of security on other people's private donations?"

Yup. You got it. The real reason Alan is not participating in a process right now that would lead towards privatizing the military is that it wouldn't work. He can't raise that much money for a military because of the "free ride(r)" problem.

by a reader on Thu, 09/28/2006 - 23:44 | [reply](#)

Re: False Dichotomy

promise it to the military in exchange for the government cutting taxes plus some input into how the military is utilized

In a democracy, that's called attempted bribery. And so, yes, Alan would go to jail yet again.

A government can't sell its defense policy to a private corporation!

("What about Halliburton?!". Yeah, yeah, very funny.)

by a reader on Fri, 09/29/2006 - 00:28 | [reply](#)

Re: False Dichotomy

'Attempted bribery'. Yes, and also, under that scheme the contributors would not get their portion of defence taxes back. So they would not be buying defence, only a 'say' in a policy that they already agree with! Plus they would be indemnifying some of the anti-war people whom the government is forcing to contribute. But why, under Libertarian ethics, should they be under any obligation to indemnify the victims of someone else's crime?

by [Editor](#) on Fri, 09/29/2006 - 00:39 | [reply](#)

Alan Favoring Coercion

"Yes, and also, under that scheme the contributors would not get their portion of defence taxes back."

Yes. The contributors would pay money, get some money back because of lower taxes, but have to cover more of the overall cost

of defense than their non-contributing neighbors. That is the

essence of the free rider problem.

If everyone voluntarily contributed their portion of their current defense tax bill, defense costs would be fully covered. Furthermore, this supermajority could vote to eliminate involuntary taxes to pay for defense, once the money was collected.

So the government is not stopping Alan from transitioning our democratic government to a system of private support of the military. The free rider problem is.

Therefore, the reader is asking a very legitimate question. Is Alan willing to hold a gun to a neighbor's head (with help from his "buddies") to extract \$4000 to defend the neighborhood.?

Alan says "no" to this question. But when there are free rider problems, his actions are saying "yes".

by a reader on Fri, 09/29/2006 - 14:06 | [reply](#)

You and What Personal Army?

Actually Haliburton is a very reasonable approach to addressing the dilemma. Private enterprise always has a solution for the right price for any country or any individual or group of individuals who wants to buy defense and offense. Private enterprise is also the essence of all defense purchase and contracting including R&D, weapons systems, and even unmanned drones and "smart systems" of all types which are getting "smarter" and more capable every day. The real question is not if it is feasible privately or publicly. It is being done right now, the lines are becoming blurry between private and public and private defense and even armies (security with the right for hired security forces to bear sophisticated arms and use them to defend extensive property interests) It is inevitable that this approach will be expanded in a free global economy. The real question is will any of us be happy with the private support (call it Halliburton) results?

by a reader on Mon, 10/02/2006 - 16:17 | [reply](#)

The only poll on this questio

The only poll on this question is the one for the next presidency, and judging by your president's current approval rating I would say this is probably overwhelmingly in against the war in Iraq (and by extension as a cause of 9/11).

Where are the WMD dude?

by a reader on Fri, 03/23/2007 - 14:11 | [reply](#)

A Victory For Pro-DDT Campaigners

In the 1980s the World Health Organization joined other NGOs and government organisations in ceasing to promote 'indoor residual spraying' with the insecticide DDT as a method of combating the spread of mosquito-borne diseases, especially malaria. This decision was bad for people living in regions where malaria was endemic, and a triumph for environmental campaigners who had raised fears about DDT's health and environmental effects.

There was a vitriolic controversy about whether this policy was justified. There never was any good evidence that DDT was harmful to the health *of humans*, and the environmental damage centred on the threat to certain species that were of sentimental and scientific interest. This limited level of potential harm had to be weighed against the fact that malaria was one of the world's leading causes of death and disability of human beings.

And it has remained so. The good news is that the World Health Organization has now **reversed its policy on DDT**, giving it a clean bill of health and denying that it does any 'environmental' damage when used for indoor residual spraying. Most other relevant agencies concur. This is a great victory for those who have been arguing all along that the anti-DDT policy was harmful and had been adopted for essentially frivolous (or as we would put it, religious) reasons. It is a defeat for environmentalist pressure groups which **fought bitterly** for an almost total ban on DDT. But most of them finally **conceded** that this was wrong.

Since the new consensus is that DDT, used carefully, is not environmentally dangerous after all, the issue of *how much* environmental damage is worth how much human suffering and death is now mercifully relegated to theoretical status as far as DDT policy is concerned. But it does, in general, remain an urgent moral issue, and one that is hardly addressed in the political arena. As part of the critical debate about the current environmentalist consensus, should we not also be debating past policy? How much unnecessary suffering was caused by the policy that the WHO and environmental pressure groups have now reversed?

Wed, 10/04/2006 - 14:07 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Why

What finally clued them in?

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us
Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 10/04/2006 - 20:50 | [reply](#)

There was never a DDT ban

I'm reposting this because it's been a day or two since I tried to post it before. Apologies if this is a multiple post.

This whole DDT thing is a bunch of crap. For one thing, the WHO never banned it. The US did, after we eradicated malaria (although screens and indoor climate controls had a big part to play there too). The WHO has always advocated limited indoor use of DDT to combat the spread of malaria. The problem is, people don't take kindly to government workers coming into their homes to spray crap on their walls that stains them brown.

DDT is not a magic bullet to solve the problem of malaria in the third world. The roots of the problem are corruption, poverty, and incompetence (many times caused by centuries of European colonialism). DDT has only limited effectiveness - mosquitos quickly become resistant to it if it is sprayed in large quantities. Bed nets and anti malaria drugs would be a better option. I guess DDT could be used as part of a rotating cycle of pesticide, but there has never been anything to stop governments from doing that anyway.

by **Will** on Mon, 10/16/2006 - 00:34 | [reply](#)

Re: There was never a DDT ban

Will wrote:

The WHO has always advocated limited indoor use of DDT to combat the spread of malaria.

Indeed. But didn't it cease advocating its widespread use 30 years ago? Didn't it actively promote indoor residual spraying for malaria control until the early 1980s, and did it not then focus instead on other measures because of (among other reasons) health and environmental fears about DDT? Which it now considers mistaken?

by **Editor** on Mon, 10/16/2006 - 01:08 | [reply](#)

Tim Lambert who blogs at Del

Tim Lambert who blogs at Deltoid has good information about the 'DDT' controversy:

<http://scienceblogs.com/deltoid/ddt>

Check out [this blog post](#), which is quite enlightening concerning the present situation.

Two quotes:

"The fact is that until 1994, DDT was the WHO's insecticide of choice for malaria vector control."

"Nor did WHO stop promoting DDT....Alan Schapira rebutted such claims in November 2004: WHO has never given up in its efforts to ensure access to DDT where it is needed....And the WHO's 2004 statement on ITNs (nets) vs IRS (spraying) clearly supports IRS in regions of unstable transmission...."

It's a good post, read it.

Also check [this one](#) out, about the new policy.

As for environmental stuff, this is from the Telegraph article you linked to:

"So far, the clearest adverse impact of the pesticide has been a steep decline in the number of bird species in areas where it has been used." Birds are vital to the natural world. They spread plants by eating the seeds and control pests. It's no accident that Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* concentrated on birds - when they go, the natural world will go badly out of whack.

by [Will](#) on Mon, 10/16/2006 - 12:15 | [reply](#)

Re: Tim Lambert who blogs at Del

Thanks for the links, Will.

In regard to the WHO's new DDT policy, the first one seems to assert the following:

- The WHO's dramatic press release announcing a change in policy is misleading, because in fact their new policy on DDT is virtually the same as the old one.

And the second one:

- The WHO's new policy on DDT is unsound, because it was formulated by Westerners who do not understand Africa.

This is a little confusing. In your opinion, has there been a change in WHO policy on DDT or not?

by [Editor](#) on Mon, 10/16/2006 - 13:04 | [reply](#)

Did they really change their policy?

I think what has happened is that the WHO always said that IRS (indoor spraying) should be used in certain areas: namely, areas where malaria levels fluctuated. One reason for this is because IRS lasts for a long time and also has a deterrent effect... it's a cheap way to keep insects from resting on your indoor surfaces for a couple years. In areas where there is a lot of Malaria, high levels all the time, they recommended other methods of control.

Now they recommend IRS for all areas, which is where the critique

in the second post comes in.

Where the WHO press release (and subsequent news articles) were misleading is in the quote: "in the 1980s the World Health Organization joined other NGOs and government organisations in ceasing to promote 'indoor residual spraying' with the insecticide DDT as a method of combating the spread of mosquito-borne diseases, especially malaria."

They never stopped recommending it, they have just started to push it more aggressively.

That may seem like nitpicking, but it is highly annoying to environmentalists like myself, because it comes in the context of a long campaign to discredit environmental groups who don't like DDT. Once again, I recommend that anyone who's interested head over to **Deltoid** where Tim has been keeping up with this for a long time.

by **Will** on Mon, 10/16/2006 - 16:22 | [reply](#)

Re: Did they really change their policy?

They never stopped recommending it, they have just started to push it more aggressively.

You seem to be saying: Prior to the 1980s the WHO had a certain policy about indoor residual spraying with DDT, namely to promote it in some situations and not others. Contrary to the WHO's recent press release, there was little or no change in that policy in the 1980s, but the press release is correct in saying that now there has been a change: they are pushing indoor residual spraying with DDT more aggressively. And this new policy is unsound.

Is that correct?

by **Editor** on Mon, 10/16/2006 - 16:52 | [reply](#)

Yep, that's what I'm saying

Yep, that's what I'm saying. Basically, anyway. From the **2005 WHO FAQ on DDT** (caution, pdf):

"WHO recommends indoor residual spraying of DDT for malaria vector control."

I don't know about specific dates... but I think you restated the gist of my argument correctly. The WHO has never *not* recommended IRS.

by **Will** on Mon, 10/16/2006 - 18:17 | [reply](#)

Re: Yep, that's what I'm saying

Thank you; that's clear now.

And is it your position that the major environmentalist organisations

such as the Worldwide Fund for Nature fought vehemently for an almost complete ban on DDT, but have now changed their policies too?

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 10/18/2006 - 10:55 | [reply](#)

I'll look into that

Not sure what all the major enviro groups wanted. I'm sure there were different positions. I'll look into it and get back to you.

by [Will](#) on Wed, 10/18/2006 - 16:00 | [reply](#)

Rachel Carson didn't recommend a complete ban on DDT

From an [editorial in the NYT by Nick Kristoff, Jan 2005](#):

I called the World Wildlife Fund, thinking I would get a fight. But Richard Liroff, its expert on toxins, said he could accept the use of DDT when necessary in anti-malaria programs.

"South Africa was right to use DDT," he said. "If the alternatives to DDT aren't working, as they weren't in South Africa, geez, you've got to use it. In South Africa it prevented tens of thousands of malaria cases and saved lots of lives."

At Greenpeace, Rick Hind noted reasons to be wary of DDT, but added: "If there's nothing else and it's going to save lives, we're all for it. Nobody's dogmatic about it."

To see what Rachel Carson actually said about DDT in *Silent Spring*, go [here](#). Basically she's pointing out the problem of resistance - the more you spray DDT or any chemical pesticide, the more the insects develop a resistance and the less effective it is. With that knowledge, and the knowledge of what it does to the natural world and maybe to humans, it would be foolish to use DDT too much. She says:

"No responsible person contends that insect-borne disease should be ignored. The question that has now urgently presented itself is whether it is either wise or responsible to attack the problem by methods that are rapidly making it worse."

You might also look [here](#) for more information about what the World Wildlife Fund recommended in the 1990's.

I'm sure there were differing opinions. Environmental groups have a spectrum of different operational frameworks. But I don't think any major enviro group would advocate a ban on any technology that could save millions of lives. They might caution about the need for more research and caution in using the technology, and they might present alternatives that would actually work better.

by [Will](#) on Wed, 10/18/2006 - 16:46 | [reply](#)

Ban

"I don't think any major enviro group would advocate a ban on any technology that could save millions of lives."

Aren't you assuming your conclusion?

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 10/18/2006 - 20:02 | [reply](#)

Those last two sentences are

Those last two sentences are my opinion. Please take them separately from the evidence presented in the first part of the comment.

by **Will** on Thu, 10/19/2006 - 00:33 | [reply](#)

Did (does) the WWF want to ban DDT?

From the WWF homepage:

Quote:

"Because of the availability of safer and effective alternatives for fighting malaria, WWF is calling for a global phaseout and eventual ban on DDT production and use."

"The first report, "Resolving the DDT Dilemma," released in June 1998, notes that DDT is linked to effects in animals or humans such as reduced lactation and reproductive problems. ...

"Resolving the DDT Dilemma" offers a framework to guide malaria control programs toward reduced reliance on all pesticides, and a 'tool kit' of alternative techniques, along with several recommendations including:

- * DDT should be phased out of use and ultimately banned;
- * Targeted programs emphasizing reduced reliance on pesticides and better environmental protection should be developed by WHO, World Bank, UNEP, and other multilateral and bilateral assistance agencies;
- * Adequate financial and technical resources must be provided to undertake integrated vector management programs;
- * Research is needed on the hazards from chronic exposure to synthetic pyrethroids being used as alternatives to DDT for indoor spraying and to impregnate bednets.

"The third report released by WWF, "Disease Vector Management for Public Health and Conservation" demonstrates that a variety of innovative mechanisms can control malaria and other diseases just as effectively as DDT. These alternatives are less harmful to the environment and human health. Detailed case studies in six areas?

Africa (Botswana, Tanzania, and Western Africa), India, the Philippines, and Mexico? focus on a variety of alternative techniques.

"WWF initially [in 1999] called for a global phaseout and eventual ban on DDT production and use by the year 2007, together with financial and technical assistance to the developing world....However, it also raised fears that DDT would be phased out without sufficient guarantees of protection of public health from malaria. To allay these fears, WWF has set aside discussion of the 2007 deadline, while retaining its commitment to eliminating DDT. Both the UNEP and WHO recognize that such elimination can be a "win-win" situation for public health and environmental protection."

by **Will** on Thu, 10/19/2006 - 01:19 | [reply](#)

More DDT info

Tim Lambert has an older blog with a bunch more posts about DDT. From what I've been reading tonight, it looks like the main cause of the resurgence of Malaria in the 1970s was growing resistance to DDT, combined with governments trying to save money/corruption/incompetence.

<http://timlambert.org/category/science/ddt/>

by **Will** on Fri, 10/20/2006 - 04:11 | [reply](#)

A Reflection On The Town Square Test

A free society is not just a place that lacks oppressive laws. It is a place that is made free by people taking freedom seriously. They not only value freedom, they want to live in a free society, and they want to do, and to speak up for, what is necessary to keep their society free. Such as defending freedom for others, not only themselves.

In regard to the events we reported [here](#), where someone was harassed and threatened for wearing an Israeli-flag cape in Oxford (see also [here](#)), some have said that being threatened by one individual is not a failure of the town square test: one person is not representative. But the town square test is not about whether a society has any criminals. It is about whether citizens take steps to create a free atmosphere. It is true that the police can't be everywhere, so if you aren't necessarily safe to express your political opinion in dark alleys, at night, that is no failure of the town square test. However, the point of the test is that you are in the town square. It's daylight, people are there. Are you now afraid to state your political opinions? If you are, the people around you are not reliable in their commitment to freedom. They can't be counted on to help you be free, should you need that help. In a country that properly passes the test, you will feel safe despite the existence of some criminals, because the other people in the square will stand up for you even if they [disagree](#) with your view.

Sat, 10/07/2006 - 02:12 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

Setting the bar a bit high?

I think any urban centre should be expected to fail the town square test. Some people are violent and unreasonable, by their nature. As for by-standers, most don't want to get involved, daylight or dark night. Isn't that human nature, rather than a reflection of a society's commitment to liberty?

Chris Pontius is a case in point. I doubt that he knows about Natan Sharansky, but one of Chris' videos amounts to a failed attempt at the town square test. He suffered physical harm while stating a religious belief. On the other hand, a few people stood up for him. Anyway, watch it all [here](#).

by [Pond](#) on Sat, 10/07/2006 - 16:27 | [reply](#)

More evidence

that the "Town Square" test is a BS test.

by a reader on Sat, 10/07/2006 - 16:58 | [reply](#)

The bar

I think any urban centre should be expected to fail the town square test. Some people are violent and unreasonable, by their nature. As for by-standers, most don't want to get involved, daylight or dark night. Isn't that human nature, rather than a reflection of a society's commitment to liberty?

Chris Pontius is a case in point. I doubt that he knows about Natan Sharansky, but one of Chris' videos amounts to a failed attempt at the town square test. He suffered physical harm while stating a religious belief. On the other hand, a few people stood up for him. Anyway, watch it all here.

First, nobody is aggressively violent by nature, rather some people are violent because they are idiots. They can learn to use violence only in self-defence or defence of others and to settle other differences through discussion.

Second, if doesn't cost a group of people much to stop an attack by a single aggressor. The real issue is do they want to stop the attack?

The mere fact that Pontius was harmed doesn't seem to be the point of that video. The man who hit him was rather large. The people around him just could not stop him immediately, but they did try and eventually succeeded. They were trying to make it safe for Pontius to express his views. The delay might have also been because they thought the idiot would stop attacking him because he would feel ashamed at his actions. This would be a better outcome than the thug being forced to stop his attack.

If I were to be beaten up in the middle of Oxford for wearing an Israeli flag would anyone even try to stop the attacker? I don't know. I don't think I would bet on it.

Finally, I am somewhat confused as to why anyone would say that this constitutes evidence that the town square test is BS. Perhaps the poster who said that would explain further.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Tue, 10/10/2006 - 21:38 | [reply](#)

Finally, I am somewhat confus

Finally, I am somewhat confused as to why anyone would say that this constitutes evidence that the town square test is BS. Perhaps the poster who said that would explain further.

Maybe because they're from a farm. Not everybody has the point of view of a city slicker or a town mouse.

by a reader on Sat, 10/14/2006 - 16:49 | [reply](#)

Town Squares

I happen to think that the most important lesson of this is that we do not have enough Town Squares. If I parade around town or at the mall with a hammer and sickle hat at most I may generate a few odd looks and frighten a few old ladies. A North Korean flag wearer might get some people angry but most would not recognise it. Easy Rider Captain America flag wearing is good for the movie posters and would not get me shot at today on the highway but I might get pulled over and be given a sobriety test.

Town Squares however should be a place for recognized public discourse and the occasional odd hat or flag wearer. There are too few of them. Reasonable debate, visual statements, and speech giving is generally confined to the whispers of electronic bloggers on their fave websites. Political smear ads on the other hand have taken over the media and made ad executives easy millions. It is hard to turn away from their visual onslaughts.

However where is the Town Square in all of this? Reasoned debate is drowned out by the sound of trucks and autos whizzing by and ignored by the masses of blue light shoppers absorbed in the ring tones of their cell phones as they rush by on sidewalks.

by a reader on Mon, 10/23/2006 - 15:04 | [reply](#)

Armed Robbers Off Limits

this might be a little off the center of the topic, but i recently learned that CCW holders are forbidden from shooting an armed assailant in the process of robbing someone else - say, a convenience store clerk - unless the assailant is accosting the CCW holder personally.

i think if an armed maniac enters a store one is in, one is plenty endangered and justified on that ground alone, but apparently the law is that if it's not our hide it's not our business and we should just duck behind the slurpee machine until the clerk is dead and the assailant gone, or face murder charges.

this struck me as perverse and an insult to the concept of civic responsibility, but there it is.

by [susan28](#) on Sun, 01/28/2007 - 23:58 | [reply](#)

'Software Piracy' Is Not Theft

Charcoal Design has an article arguing that the metaphor of 'theft' or 'piracy' for unauthorised use of information (such as software) can be highly inappropriate, immoral and damaging.

Yes, software creators need to have an incentive to produce their products, and they also have a moral right to receive the fruits of their labour. But they have no moral right to harm someone who has done them no harm. And it will be disastrous if a law based on a silly metaphor continues to shield this vital industry from the need to create innovative ways of marketing, and new types of relationships with their customers, appropriate for the still more knowledge-dominated economy of the future.

This, too, is a problem that has to be solved if we are to set the world to rights.

Update: See also their [article](#) on the future of Apple Computer.

Tue, 10/24/2006 - 22:42 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

So what about other forms of

So what about other forms of "intellectual property"? Is **The World** for or against those?

by a reader on Wed, 10/25/2006 - 08:42 | [reply](#)

I agree so called software pi

I agree so called software piracy is not harming the producers. Have you seen Weird Al's "Don't download this song"? Very funny take on music piracy. :)

What about art theft, though? When someone steals someone's art, and poses as its own art, unfairly profiting from it? Or a company with better marketing skills as the artist, sells it as "royalty free stock". What do you think about that?

by a reader on Wed, 10/25/2006 - 22:10 | [reply](#)

Piracy is not copyright violation

Piracy and copyright violation are not the same thing (though they

may overlap).

Claiming somebody else's work as your own is depriving them of their rightful reputation for creating the work, and any profit you make from hijacking their creativity is fraud - you are conning the person who pays you for the work, and may or may not be depriving the artist of the money from the sale as well, since it seems likely that if someone was willing to pay you for the art, they would have been willing to pay the *actual artist* as well, assuming he or she would have been willing to agree to the same terms.

Generally speaking, software pirates do not claim to have created the works they are distributing. And as long as they aren't charging for it then they are not *demonstrably* depriving the creator of any revenue, since those that download it may well have been unwilling to pay (if they would have been willing to pay had a pirate copy been unavailable, then the decision to pirate instead rests on *their* conscience, not the distributor's).

Claiming work as your own, and charging for it without making it clear that you are not ethically entitled to profit from it are both fraudulent and immoral activities (As well as being illegal). Distributing a work that is hard to obtain otherwise (for reasons of scarcity or cost) is not fraudulent as long as you make it clear that's what you are doing (it is of course still illegal, unfortunately).

What you are distributing doesn't matter. The same would be true with any medium for creativity, whether it is spoken, written, recorded, painted or programmed.

by Nick on Thu, 10/26/2006 - 12:57 | [reply](#)

Copyright as contract

I'm not sure I understand the [article](#) referenced. On one hand Deutsch appears to think protection against copying is not necessary for innovation. On the other hand he does appear to do so when he writes:

I am not suggesting that software companies shouldn't fight piracy - it is this very fight that spurs much of the innovation I've been advocating - I only ask that they fight fair.

And here Deutsch misses the point completely:

Similarly, affluent 'adults' will not pirate because they have neither the time nor the inclination to trawl the dark recesses of the Internet looking for seedy pirate web sites when they can more easily walk into a shop.

This is an attempt to have your cake and eat it too. The reason affluent adults will not pirate is because there is copyright law. Now does Deutsch advocate making copying legal or not? If yes, then software makers will no longer be able to sell their software at a premium. Because legal copies will be sold by others with the same quality and they will no longer be sold at seedy pirate web sites. If no, then Deutsch must accept that action is taken against copyright

infringers, whether they be young girls or grown men. Whether this is a function of the state or private initiative is a different debate.

I believe copyright arises via freedom of contract. Just as when you order dinner at a restaurant, you implicitly agree to pay for it afterwards, so too when you buy anything with the label "copyright" you implicitly agree not to copy it or let someone else copy it (except for backup purposes). If everybody abides by their contract, we have de facto copyright.

The problem is some people will not abide by their contract. Or someone who has not been bound by the contract may find or steal or borrow software and make a copy. But a copyright contract means that the buyer gains only certain limited rights with regard to a property. A copyrighted book remains in one sense physical property of the seller. The buyer buys only the right to read the book and do some other things with it (similar for software). All other rights with regard to the physical property, including the right to copy, remain with the seller. And therefore the finder of say a software DVD on the street does not have the right to read that DVD on his computer and make a copy. Even though he does not have a contract with the original owner, he is not the rightful owner of the DVD. Nor can he be given full ownership rights by the previous owner, because that owner cannot give away rights he does not have, and the right to copy remains with the original seller. And so via purely physical property rights, an immaterial copyright can be derived.

Compare this to renting a house. If I rent a house a condition may be that I am not allowed to allow anybody to smoke in the house. If I sublet the house to someone else, that third person can never gain the right to smoke in the house, even though he signed no contract to that effect himself. I can never give or sell a right with regard to a property which I do not have. Therefore I cannot give or sell the right for someone to smoke in the house. And similarly, I can never give or sell someone the right to copy a DVD which I "bought" ("rented" would be more accurate) if I do not have full property rights to that DVD myself (and in particular do not own the right to copy it).

One might argue that if I pay for downloaded software, I download that software to my own physical harddisk. In that case I can no longer argue, it appears, that part of my harddisk remains physical property of the seller and that he keeps the right to use it to make copies. Well, one *could* in fact argue exactly that. Part of the contract could be that the seller gains some physical ownership over the part of my harddisk where I store the copy. Now my point is not that such a contract should really be made. My point is that we can always find some way for a copyright contract to be phrased so that copyright arises out of purely physical property rights. And the very fact that that is possible makes copyrights reasonable, whether or not people actually take the trouble to phrase it in such ways.

Henry Sturman

Legality and Morality...

It seems to me that the solution of this problem rests on the distinction between legal and moral rights. I think software piracy is theft and that's all there is to it in legal terms. Whenever somebody pirates a piece of software the software maker has a legal right to prosecute the pirate and as I will explain that is how it should be. However, there is a distinction between when it is legally feasible to prosecute somebody for theft and when it is right to do so.

Consider a person who sees a bunch of grapes in a supermarket and wants one of them. Now, she doesn't want to buy a whole bunch because she knows she won't eat most of them, so instead she takes a single grape without paying for it. Perhaps she does this once or twice a year. Now the supermarket manager might catch the whole thing on CCTV and decide not to prosecute. Why? Well, it would be a bit silly wouldn't it? And it would drive away customers. And it would be wrong to throw a person in jail for taking a single grape.

Nevertheless, I think that grape theft should be a prosecutable offence. Why? Well, imagine that somebody comes in every day for a year and steals two grapes. That starts to add up to the supermarket losing a significant amount of money. Likewise setting up a massive file sharing network with the sole purpose of systematically undermining a company's private property rights seems quite wrong to me.

I think there is a combination of factors at work which make software piracy a problem - some of this may be the fault of software companies, some of it is the fault of other people. Let's take the little girl alluded to in the article who downloads a copy of Brittany's Dance Studio. Well, the girl's parents have a computer, so the software can't really be out of their price range IMO. So if the little girl really wants it and the parents haven't bought it then it is very likely that the parents are dicks, which is very common. Even if it puts a bit of a strain on the budget they might say something like: "If you really want this we'll get it, but we won't be able to get that pink pair of jeans you want until next month." or whatever. The point is parent and child can come to a **common preference**. So a prosecution seems reasonable to me.

What about the students who can't afford the thousand dollar software package? Well, the software company could choose not to prosecute or to offer students a concession offer or the right to put their software on some number of computers specified in advance, with copies above that number being prosecutable. So for six students the number would be six computers or whatever. And if a student copies software from Uni perhaps the software company ought not to prosecute if he can't afford it.

Of course, all of the cases I've given above are a bit vague and could have holes poked in them but my point here was not to give a comprehensive list of when prosecutions should and should not be made. I just wanted to highlight the distinction. I think we should

move past discussing the legality of this issue, on which the software companies are right. Rather we should start suggesting in which sorts of cases software companies should prosecute and discuss solutions to the problems raised by cases in which prosecution seems unjust.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Thu, 10/26/2006 - 17:17 | [reply](#)

Hypothetical parents unfairly slandered

Alan wrote

"Let's take the little girl alluded to in the article who downloads a copy of Brittany's Dance Studio. Well, the girl's parents have a computer, so the software can't really be out of their price range IMO. So if the little girl really wants it and the parents haven't bought it then it is very likely that the parents are dicks, which is very common. "

Not necessarily. It may be that the parents are decent people and so is the little girl, and she wants to play *Britney's Dance Studio*, but doesn't think it is worth \$60 of her parent's money. Rather than lie to them by telling them that she thinks it's worth more than it is, or ask them to knowingly spend more money on something than it is worth, she instead downloads a copy for free (whilst retaining the option of asking them to purchase it should it unexpectedly turn out to have hidden depths).

If this reasoning were applied to shoplifting then it would obviously be wrong to steal something because you don't think it's worth the price tag, but since nobody loses out either way when she downloads it (versus not playing it), I fail to see any moral dilemma.

by Nick on Thu, 10/26/2006 - 18:55 | [reply](#)

... hard to obtain otherwise

Distributing a work that is hard to obtain otherwise (for reasons of scarcity or cost) is not fraudulent as long as you make it clear that's what you are doing (it is of course still illegal, unfortunately).

As one interested in the history of computing, this is of some interest to me. In order to use and maintain most obsolete machines, violating copyrights is almost essential, since manuals and software are no longer available by 'legitimate' means (although a few manufacturers have graciously granted free non-commercial license to obsolete material). In this respect, trademark law, with its "use it or lose it" rule, could be a reasonable model; it would protect Disney's continuing interest in Mickey Mouse without forever criminalizing the use of material of no commercial value.

by [Kevin](#) on Fri, 10/27/2006 - 00:24 | [reply](#)

Software trespassing as breach of contract

Henry and Alan both make interesting points which I think somewhat cancel each other out. Yes, we do have to distinguish moral from legal issues, but in contract law they overlap in a unique way that has no close analogue in other branches of the law. Contract law is unique in that the parties themselves decide the conditions that they must obey, and society at large enforces this.

Consequently society - other people - may choose not to enforce certain types of contract. Morally, why should they?

Thus, for instance, contracts 'in restraint of trade' are invalid under existing law. So are contracts intended to fulfil an illegal *or an immoral* purpose. In the past, the latter have included contracts for the purpose of prostitution, an exception which would obviously be illiberal. But, for instance, what about contract terms which benefit no one but do harm people who themselves have done no harm? Surely those terms are nothing but harmful. Why should society jump up and intervene by force?

A related issue is this: if no harm has been done, surely the plaintiff should not be allowed to sue for damages: there were none.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Fri, 10/27/2006 - 00:26 | [reply](#)

Contracts not applicable here

In response to Henry:

Attempting to apply contract law to pre-existing intellectual property has the same problems as trying to apply normal property law - it is an analogy that doesn't fit.

A contract is supposed to be agreed before either party makes a contribution to ensure that once the contribution is made the other party doesn't renege on their part of the bargain.

If party A signed a contract agreeing that they would pay party B to create a piece of software, then, once the work had been done refused to pay, certainly that would be a breach of contract. In the case of commercial software however party C creates a piece of software first and then goes out looking for people who will retrospectively pay for it *to have been created*. There is no contractual obligation for anyone to do this since it was not agreed in advance.

And of course if any given person doesn't pay then C is no worse off than they were before and still has every opportunity to find someone else who will, unlike person B, who may be forced to renege on other contractual agreements (such as paying back a bank loan) because person A didn't pay.

In the first case, party A would need to pay even if they decided they no longer wanted the software, yet clearly in the second case it would be ludicrous to suggest that people must pay for software created by C, even if they don't want to use it. The two cases are therefore not analogous. (BTW, C may go bankrupt because they

wrongly assumed more people would buy the software than do, but that could happen just as easily if nobody used the software illegally).

When installing a piece of software, a user *may* read the contract and agree with it. Alternatively they may read the contract and say "I don't agree with that, I think I should be allowed to use the software without paying instead". They don't expect the author to do anything for them in the latter case, so they don't need to sign a contract to proceed (they may need to click a check-box marked "I agree", but it is debatable that that constitutes contractual agreement - I don't believe its ever been tested in court).

The software author is not providing a service to the user in return for the demands they make - the user is expected to hand over money, and/or inconvenience themselves (by not installing multiple copies of the program for example), but the software author offers nothing in return for this. They aren't offering the physical media since the user has either provided that themselves or someone has paid for it already (if they stole it then that is theft according to the standard definition and not relevant here), and they aren't providing any creativity or intellectual effort, since this effort was already expended prior to the user's involvement.

The only thing that the author provides to the end user in return for their money is access to a service. When the user decides to pay for that service, they are aware that the price includes both the cost of distribution *and* a markup to cover the original development. The user never agreed contractually that that they thought that the product was worth the price quoted, and if they don't feel that it is then they have the (currently illegal) option of getting the product via a different distribution channel that doesn't cost as much. By doing this they are not violating a contractual obligation, at least not a legitimate one.

If on the other hand they *do* think the product is worth the price, and can afford it, but still don't pay it, then they are acting in a way that they themselves probably recognise as being unethical, and will have to deal with that. Even then I don't consider that it should be *illegal* since it is really no worse than listening to a busker in the street for half an hour and then *not* dropping any coins in his hat.

by Nick on Fri, 10/27/2006 - 00:57 | [reply](#)

Private Property and Software

I think I might need to address the issue of why we have private property at all. In order to produce any commodity a person must consume resources. Even those little Buddhist monk fellows who produce feelings of serenity or religious piety in hippies and buddhists need to eat, assertions by the monks to the contrary notwithstanding. We need to be able to criticise the distribution of property between different ends and that's why we have the institution of private property. If a person can't persuade other people to give him enough resources to make a particular product by argument that constitutes a criticism of that product or of his

salesmanship, i.e. - his ability to distribute knowledge of the product. (The product is useless if people don't buy it because of crappy salesmanship.) This applies just as much to computer games and programmes as it does to apples or books or whatever. It is perfectly possible to distribute a book against copyright law by photocopying it and putting the photocopies on the Internet for people to download illegally. However, when people do this they deprive the author of money that he might have used to make more books either directly or simply by paying for food or whatever. So contractual exchange of property is one of the essential institutions of criticism of any free society.

Nick objects to prosecuting illegal downloads on the spurious grounds that ticking a box saying "I agree not to filch this software by giving it to other people," is not a contract. The person signing it might not read it or might agree to forfeit the software company's support if the product goes a bit wrong or whatever or might sign it without any intention of sticking to it. People can and do sign loan agreements and other kinds of contract without reading them, should all such contracts be void? If people are too stupid to read contracts or if they just can't be bothered to pay for something does that get them an out of jail free card? I should also note that traditionally when a person signs a contract that he does not intend to fulfil people look on such behaviour as a bad act on the part of the person signing the contract, not on the part of the person who drew it up. Furthermore, I don't recall signing any contract saying that I wouldn't beat the shit out of the next person I see on the street, or that I wouldn't go the nearest shop, put a brick through the window and start stealing stuff. I respect these rules despite not having signed a contract to do so because these rules are objectively right and no free society could exist in which people systematically refused to respect them. I think that intellectual property in software tends to fall in that category. It costs money to develop software. If that software is distributed for free in violation of a contract saying that the buyer would not distribute it the software company often loses money that it might otherwise have received. This does harm the company.

Now let's go back to the case of the little girl:

It may be that the parents are decent people and so is the little girl, and she wants to play Britney's Dance Studio, but doesn't think it is worth \$60 of her parent's money. Rather than lie to them by telling them that she thinks it's worth more than it is, or ask them to knowingly spend more money on something than it is worth, she instead downloads a copy for free (whilst retaining the option of asking them to purchase it should it unexpectedly turn out to have hidden depths).

If this reasoning were applied to shoplifting then it would obviously be wrong to steal something because you don't think it's worth the price tag, but since nobody loses out either way when she downloads it (versus not playing it), I fail to see any moral dilemma.

Let's suppose that this is true. She doesn't think the game is worth

nothing or she wouldn't want it at all. There are lots of ways she can enjoy the computer game without paying sixty dollars. She can rent it from Blockbuster. She can buy it in a year or so as a budget release for a much lower price. She can try to find second hand copies and so on. In all of these cases, her buying or renting the computer game at the very least does not make it more probable that people will buy games of the same sort in the future because they will be able to sell the game when they're bored with it or rent the game to other people. She ought to want to find a legal solution and she ought to be able to get help from her parents to do so. I do see a moral dilemma.

David points out that some contracts are wrong and ought not to be enforced:

Thus, for instance, contracts 'in restraint of trade' are invalid under existing law. So are contracts intended to fulfil an illegal or an immoral purpose. In the past, the latter have included contracts for the purpose of prostitution, an exception which would obviously be illiberal.

Some contracts are invalid under existing law and it is rightly a matter for debate what sort of contracts ought to be enforced when somebody chooses to try to get the authorities to enforce them.

But, for instance, what about contract terms which benefit no one but do harm people who themselves have done no harm? Surely those terms are nothing but harmful. Why should society jump up and intervene by force?

Well, if none of the parties to a contract want it enforced then I don't see that there is much of a problem. If one of the parties does want the contract enforced then there is a disagreement about the harm done or benefit gained by enforcing or not enforcing the contract. The person who wants it enforced thinks that it would be harmful for the contract not to be enforced, other people might disagree. It might be the case that some cases of illegal downloading are like this as I implied in my original post. I might be prepared to concede in some such cases that the downloader ought not to be prosecuted. But that's a long way from saying that such acts are not theft. If a starving orphan child steals a loaf of bread that is theft, but the government ought not to prosecute the orphan. Perhaps software companies ought to make provisions for some people to buy their software under different terms, e.g. - poor students, I see no need to scrap intellectual property in software.

A related issue is this: if no harm has been done, surely the plaintiff should not be allowed to sue for damages: there were none.

An "if" that is not indiscriminately applicable to illegal downloading even if it might be applicable in some individual cases.

It seems to me that there is more than a touch of utopianism about

this post. **The World** didn't take the time to weigh up the actual damage done by illegal downloading and whether people have other alternatives. Nor did it take the time to look at whether there might be solutions that would involve making suggestions for better software selling policies. No, instead it just threw the whole edifice of intellectual property in software out the window.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sun, 10/29/2006 - 17:36 | [reply](#)

Alan writes: "In order to

Alan writes:

"In order to produce any commodity a person must consume resources... So contractual exchange of property is one of the essential institutions of criticism of any free society."

I'm going to assume that "institutions of criticism" is worldspeak for "mechanisms to promote creativity", so forgive me if I misinterpret what you mean, but I assume that you are saying people should be allowed to sign binding contracts when exchanging property and expect them to be respected even if the burden they place on the other party could be considered totally unreasonable (e.g. not allowing them to make backups in case of damage). This is true, with the proviso that the contract must not require either party to behave in a way which is immoral, or impose ludicrous penalties for violation (such as death). This would seem to imply that someone who buys the software legitimately and then violates the terms of the contract by copying and distributing the software should be subject to penalties, but it does not imply that the author should be permitted to extrapolate huge imaginary "lost earnings" and charge them to the violator, nor does it imply that the violator should suffer prison. I would guess that the worst legitimate penalty you could justify placing on the violator would be confiscation of the software and any ill gotten gains from its resale, minus the price he originally paid for it.

Anyone receiving the software from this person would not have been party to the contract, so they would not be subject to any penalty. In fact, if they paid the contract violator for the software they should be probably offered a refund if they return all copies - though this should not be compulsory.

Alan continues:

"I don't recall signing any contract saying that I wouldn't beat the shit out of the next person I see on the street, or that I wouldn't go the nearest shop, put a brick through the window and start stealing stuff. I respect these rules despite not having signed a contract to do so because these rules are objectively right and no free society could exist in which people systematically refused to respect them."

As he himself points out this is a case where contract law doesn't

apply. Some things we don't do because a contract says we shouldn't, some we don't do because they are *objectively wrong*, some things we don't do because they are wrong *even if we have signed a contract saying we should*. Morality exists independently of contracts - contracts do not define right and wrong, and there are some things to which they do not apply. Since the whole thrust of my previous point was that contracts aren't applicable in this case, I'm not sure what point he is trying to make by pointing this out.

"I think that intellectual property in software tends to fall in that category. It costs money to develop software. If that software is distributed for free in violation of a contract saying that the buyer would not distribute it the software company often loses money that it might otherwise have received. This does harm the company."

If the company were to release the software and someone wrote a bad review and then people didn't buy it, that would harm the company. Does that mean writing bad reviews is immoral? If someone can, through a non-immoral act cause another person harm, that doesn't suddenly render that act immoral after all. The morality of software piracy needs to be defined independently of its consequences.

In reference to the little girl:

"There are lots of ways she can enjoy the computer game without paying sixty dollars. She can rent it from Blockbuster. She can buy it in a year or so as a budget release for a much lower price. She can try to find second hand copies and so on. In all of these cases, her buying or renting the computer game at the very least does not make it more probable that people will buy games of the same sort in the future because they will be able to sell the game when they're bored with it or rent the game to other people. She ought to want to find a legal solution and she ought to be able to get help from her parents to do so. I do see a moral dilemma."

In the hypothetical situation I was describing it was assumed that there was no alternative channel by which to get the game. This counter-argument is very much tied to the real-life happenstance of the situation, in which the software developers, in conjunction with a third party have arrived at a clever a viable way allow people to try the game without paying and yet still make revenue for the developer. On the one hand Alan has avoided the issue of whether the girl would have been right to pirate had such an option not been available (as it often isn't), but on the other hand he has illustrated a very good example of how the developer can apply creativity to solve the problem (crap software being expensive) in a way that makes everyone happy (videogame rentals). If they had instead been allowed to exact a profit by getting the police to round up all 13yo girls who pirate, and then sued their parents for \$50,000 each, it seems unlikely that there would have been much incentive for them to devise this (much better) solution.

Incidentally, it's worth noting that Sony recently launched an

attack against the second-hand gaming market. Although most people criticised them for this money-grubbing attitude, since developers make no direct profit from the second-hand games market, it does raise the question of why we should consider second-hand intellectual property to be morally distinct from piracy anyway? Just because *someone* is making a profit, it doesn't mean the developer benefits. In fact how is selling a used game any different than selling an unused pirate game? In both cases you profit from the publishers work without them getting a penny, and in both cases you deprive them of a sale since that customer won't be buying a legitimate new copy instead. And yet since there is obviously nothing morally reprehensible about second hand games (at least to any sane person) it would seem to cast further doubt about the validity of the "lost revenue = stealing" argument commonly used against pirates.

"It seems to me that there is more than a touch of utopianism about this post. **The World** didn't take the time to weigh up the actual damage done by illegal downloading and whether people have other alternatives. Nor did it take the time to look at whether there might be solutions that would involve making suggestions for better software selling policies. No, instead it just threw the whole edifice of intellectual property in software out the window."

I believe that the path to a utopian society is to first work out what the ideal situation would be and then compromise if necessary when pragmatism requires it - not to shoot for an unsatisfactory solution in the first place. This is sometimes called "not going in with your highest offer first".

The closing argument of the original article was that software developers *should* be seeking innovative solutions for better software selling policies rather than concentrating its efforts on demonising and prosecuting pirates. So what makes you think that **The World** isn't interested in doing that?

The purpose of intellectual property rights is to promote innovation, but it has become patently obvious (no pun intended) that they can easily be abused to stifle creativity and competition, (or just to make a fast buck at the expense of some poor sap), and that violating them can benefit humanity in many cases. So *why not* 'throw the whole edifice out' and see if we're better off without it? After all, we're just talking...

by Nick on Mon, 10/30/2006 - 10:51 | [reply](#)

Piracy

"If the company were to release the software and someone wrote a bad review and then people didn't buy it, that would harm the company. Does that mean writing bad reviews is immoral? If someone can, through a non-immoral act cause another person harm, that doesn't suddenly render that act immoral after all. The morality of software piracy needs to be defined independently of its

consequences."

Nick,

Keeping a promise (for example, honoring a contract) is usually considered ethical behavior! So Alan is not defining moral behavior just by its consequences. There is a principle involved.

An honest review that is critical of a product and thus causes its sales to fall, is not the same as stealing the product! Owners of a product do not own the right to column space in newspapers or on blogs. Therefore they cannot restrict an individual's right to express an opinion in such a column. Such a restriction would be illegal and immoral.

If you own a television, I cannot say you have economically damaged me because you have not given it to me. In almost all circumstances, it would be illegal and immoral to take your television from you. Similarly, software developers and distributors do not own the right to other people's money. So others can rightfully (morally and legally) try to convince potential customers not to spend money on a software product.

On the other hand, software developers do own their own product, the fruits of their labors. Owning something means restricting other people's rights to use it in a particular way and allowing other people to use it in a particular way, for the most part at the discretion of the owner. If you instead "pirate" those rights, by downloading software without paying for it, that is properly considered illegal and immoral because it is taking the product of the developer's labor without compensating him.

The developer would not have put in the hours to develop the product if others could simply use his product without paying for it. Stealing software is immoral for the same reason that stealing labor (slavery) is immoral. People properly own the fruits of their own labor, unless someone compensates them for their time.

By respecting intellectual property rights, Alan is defending the moral principle that coercing people into giving up the products of their labor is wrong.

by a reader on Mon, 10/30/2006 - 22:39 | [reply](#)

"...software developers do ow

"...software developers do own their own product, the fruits of their labors. Owning something means restricting other people's rights to use it in a particular way and allowing other people to use it in a particular way, for the most part at the discretion of the owner."

The problem with this statement is that software developers do not own the product once they have sold it. If they burn it onto a CD and you pay money for that CD then *you* own it. What they own is the copyright, which to me means that they own the right to claim credit for the work, and to charge for reproductions of it. You have

paid for one such copy however, and that copy is yours to do with as you please within the confines of moral behaviour.

"The developer would not have put in the hours to develop the product if others could simply use his product without paying for it. Stealing software is immoral for the same reason that stealing labor (slavery) is immoral. People properly own the fruits of their own labor, unless someone compensates them for their time."

You are simply repeating the flawed analogy of "copyright violation is theft" without justifying it. In fact you attempt to reinforce it with the even more inaccurate assertion that "copyright violation is slavery". Forcing someone to work is slavery (whether you pay them or not). However not paying someone for work they do voluntarily is not slavery, and is only immoral if you agreed beforehand that you would pay them for it.

You are not stealing their labour because with intellectual property, the fruits of that labour can be recycled infinitely. Steal as many copies as you want, and they still have an infinite supply. Forget for a minute whether copyright violation is right or wrong, the point here is that it is *not* anything like slavery, and it is *not* anything like theft.

"By respecting intellectual property rights, Alan is defending the moral principle that coercing people into giving up the products of their labor is wrong."

Where is the coercion? This is yet another metaphor in lieu of an argument. Nobody is trying to make software developers give their software away for free, on the contrary it is they who are trying to make others *not* give it away.

Software developers are perfectly entitled to use any morally legitimate means to control the distribution of their software, whether it be through copy protection schemes, competitive pricing and distribution, or legal action against those who cause them actual (provable, calculable) harm.

The point of the article was that the harm caused by philanthropic (free) redistribution has been massively overestimated, and the legal penalties for such actions are wildly disproportionate, and must be heavily clamped down to prevent publishers abusing the legal system to recoup outrageous fines from the few pirates they manage to catch and make examples of. They cannot be allowed to blame poor sales on pirates and then expect the pirates to pay the difference - pirates for the most part just supply software to those areas of the market unwilling to pay for it, and they do no calculable harm by doing this because most users of pirate software would not have paid for it anyway.

The way they get away with fining pirates for more than they've taken is by using the "theft" metaphor to imply that pirates selling copies is like them stealing them off the shelf. But that's not true -

the pirates aren't manufacturing wealth from nothing - software is

not a money tree. If you copy a CD full of valuable data then together those two identical CDs have exactly the same value as the first one (plus the miniscule cost of the media). The same is true of 10, or 100, or a 1000 copies. You cannot steal or devalue intellectual property in that way - you cannot increase or reduce its worth by duplication.

The true value of intellectual property is the number of people willing to pay for it, multiplied by the amount they are willing to pay. A pirate is no more likely to influence those numbers than a magazine reviewer is.

by Nick on Tue, 10/31/2006 - 00:51 | [reply](#)

Re: Legality and Morality...

I argued that copyright should be viewed as a contract. David replied:

Consequently society - other people - may choose not to enforce certain types of contract. Morally, why should they?

Indeed. Nobody is forced to enforce any contract. But in a free society one will always be able to find someone willing to enforce a certain contract. So even if only 1% of arbitration agencies enforce copyright contracts, one can still hire one of those 1% to enforce the contract. If the other 99% do not agree with the legality they might use force to prevent the 1% from enforcing copyright contracts. Whether that would be right depends on the question of whether copyright contracts are legal. So my point is that David's distinction between legality and morality does not solve the problem. In a society where copyrights are considered illegal and immoral, copyrights can not be enforced. In a society where copyrights are considered legal but immoral, copyrights will be enforced.

David also writes:

A related issue is this: if no harm has been done, surely the plaintiff should not be allowed to sue for damages: there were none.

Perhaps. But this can be solved by specifying payments in the contract. If I download software costing 10 euros I might be asked to agree that if I allow someone to copy it, then I will pay a charge of 1000 euros. If society believes in freedom of contract that contract can be enforced, not because of the principle of damages but because of the principle of property exchange.

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Tue, 10/31/2006 - 20:36 | [reply](#)

Re: Legality and Morality...

Henry writes:

If society believes in freedom of contract that contract can be

enforced

So if someone enters into a contract to love, honour and obey another person for the rest of her life, and later decides that she doesn't want to obey any more, a society that believes in freedom of contract will force her to obey nevertheless?

And 'freedom of contract' also implies that third parties who believe that entering into such a contract is immoral, are nevertheless obliged to enforce it? (Or to stand by while the 'aggrieved' party uses force.)

by **David Deutsch** on Tue, 10/31/2006 - 23:13 | [reply](#)

Legal vs Moral

I think Henry's position is something like:

- legal things are ones you have a right to do without anyone using force against you

- all contracts are legal, including their enforcement

with those premises, then a third party who thinks something is a bad way to live, but legal, must not intervene.

but I disagree that all contracts ought to be legal. that allows for slavery contracts. i think it needs to be legal to quit a contract and only owe damages.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 11/01/2006 - 00:29 | [reply](#)

Re: Legality and Morality...

David replied:

So if someone enters into a contract to love, honour and obey another person for the rest of her life, and later decides that she doesn't want to obey any more, a society that believes in freedom of contract will force her to obey nevertheless?

Perhaps we should distinguish between a contract and a promise, as Rothbard suggests. And certainly a marriage promise (or contract) should not be enforceable for the simple reason that it is understood that it will not be enforced. In our culture we all know that marriages are not to be taken as literal enforceable contracts. One of the reasons for this is that we understand love can not be forced. But one might specify in a marriage contract things such as that if one party leaves the other, he agrees to pay a charge. In fact such contracts do exist, and such a charge is called alimony.

Elliot writes:

but I disagree that all contracts ought to be legal. that allows for

slavery contracts. i think it needs to be legal to quit a contract and only owe damages.

I agree not all contracts should be legal. So in that sense I agree freedom of contract is not 100%. For example, the contract to commit a crime (e.g. a hit contract) should not be enforceable. Whether slavery contracts should be enforceable, I'm not sure. A point can be made that certain rights are inalienable, so that you can't sell yourself into slavery. But again, people can agree to charges if they, say, quit their job without giving 6 months notice. But there would be exceptions. For example, a doctor should not be permitted to quit an operation in the middle of it so that the patient dies. And a pilot agreeing to fly someone to the North Pole and back should not be able to refuse the return journey.

Also, it seems right that soldiers in a voluntary army are punished for desertion. If soldiers are paid for their services and trained, then we should be able to rely on them. Also, suppose an astronaut's training costs a million euros. Then again it seems unfair that he should be able to quit the moment his training is done. Unless perhaps he pays back the million euros, but if he is not rich he won't be able to pay, and so this does imply in such a case a slavery contract of sorts should be enforceable.

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Wed, 11/01/2006 - 01:25 | [reply](#)

damages

Also, suppose an astronaut's training costs a million euros. Then again it seems unfair that he should be able to quit the moment his training is done. Unless perhaps he pays back the million euros, but if he is not rich he won't be able to pay, and so this does imply in such a case a slavery contract of sorts should be enforceable.

yes, slavery "of some sort". but what sort? exactly the conditions that will cause him to pay back the debt. and nothing else, no matter how small

note that in the case of a music CD, the damages are not so large, so paying them back is a lot easier. the damages, for many types of piracy, are zero.

promises, as Godwin taught us, are not rational. if something is right to do, I will do it whether I promised or not. If I promise to do something, and in the event it is wrong to do, then I have promised to do wrong. so promises vary between useless and wicked.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 11/01/2006 - 02:04 | [reply](#)

contracts

contracts are supposed to help people. they should not be a mechanism to create Rules and Authority over people. as long as everyone consents to a contract, and finds it useful, then great. but if they don't consent, they should stop. this is just basic human decency. don't do stuff that hurts people.

stopping, of course, can be problematic. but how could it possibly be reasonable to demand anything from someone who quits a contract but the damages to you? if he pays those, you have lost nothing (except a nice opportunity. but he did not and does not owe you that.)

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 11/01/2006 - 02:09 | [reply](#)

I think the key point about c

I think the key point about contracts, which has been lost in a sea of extreme examples, is that a contract cannot be used to enforce lifelong involuntary servitude, or anything else that violates the rights of a participant. If you sign a contract agreeing to do something but then later change your mind, then the contract is intended to ensure that the other party does not suffer unduly as a result of that decision - not to ensure that you suffer to make them feel better. This means that you are contractually obliged to *make it up to them* as best you can, but that's all.

In the case of a doctor who wants to quit surgery, there is no way he can make it up to the patient if he lets them die, hence he is duty bound to ensure that they don't. That may mean having to finish the surgery, but he can probably get away with calling in a colleague in most cases.

In the case of a soldier who wishes to desert, he can do so but he must ensure that he does not endanger his fellow soldiers or the war effort in doing so. This is liberally and unfairly interpreted by the army to mean he cannot do so during wartime *at all*, but in this day and age the penalty for deserting in a way that does not endanger lives is likely to be minor.

A wife or husband who decides to leave a marriage cannot be forced by contract to stay, but they may be expected to pay money to compensate their partner for irreversible life choices they have made on the understanding that the marriage would last longer.

A person who agrees to work indefinitely as a slave, but later changes their mind can leave without owing anything since the other party has only gained by their generosity, and was never legally entitled to it. They may however be expected to help make arrangements for their replacement and give an adequate notice

period, to avoid causing harm by their sudden departure. The exact same thing is true of paid employment, incidentally.

In the case of a software pirate, the contract can oblige them not to give away or sell copies of the software, and if they violate it they can have the software itself, and any ill-gotten gains confiscated. The contract cannot however impose an arbitrary fine of \$500,000, or any other unreasonable penalty, any more than a prenup could dictate that a bride must submit herself to the electric chair if she ever decides to leave her husband. The penalty terms in a contract must be *reasonable* in order to be legally binding.

by Nick on Fri, 11/03/2006 - 09:43 | [reply](#)

Software is not property, sof

Software is not property, software is a form of **knowledge**.

Is it moral to prevent the spread and growth of knowledge?

by a reader on Mon, 12/04/2006 - 02:21 | [reply](#)

Maybe a better question would be...

Is it moral to own knowledge?

by the same reader on Mon, 12/04/2006 - 02:23 | [reply](#)

Nothing Can be Owned Except Knowledge

by another reader on Thu, 12/07/2006 - 00:54 | [reply](#)

Is it moral to restrict knowledge?

I suppose it is for what is clearly harmful knowledge, like how to build a nuclear bomb. But what about useful knowledge? How about an AIDS cure? Or the GENOME sequence? Or software? In these cases, it could be argued that people are being harmed by restricting who can use these forms of knowledge. Is the coercion of those that would like to replicate this knowledge justifiable?

by a reader on Thu, 12/07/2006 - 06:12 | [reply](#)

Software and Community in the

Software and Community in the Early 21st Century

Keynote address given at Plone Conference 2006 by Eben Moglen of the Software Freedom Law Center. The moral implications of owning knowledge are discussed.

by a reader on Sun, 12/10/2006 - 18:16 | [reply](#)

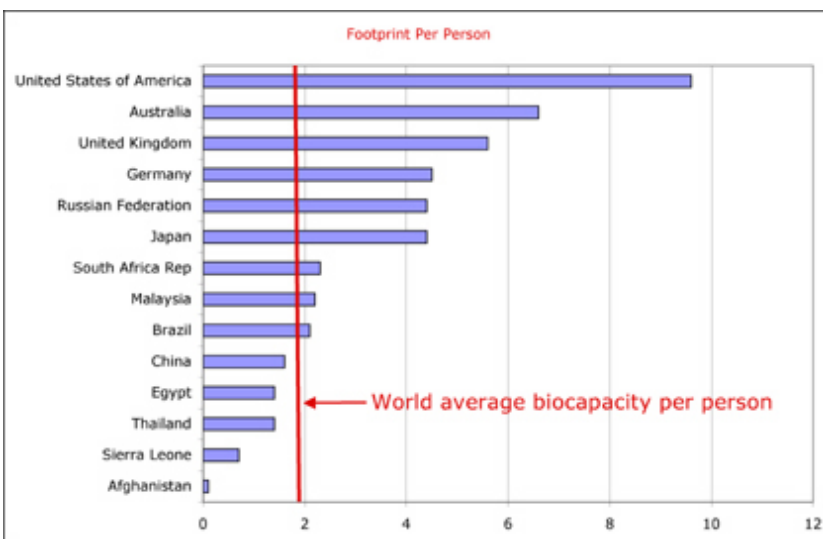
Ecological Footprints

The Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) has devised a measure of the impact that a given country has on the planet's environment. They call this the country's 'ecological footprint' and they report it in units of area. It is the area of the Earth that could notionally produce the resources in question (for example, forests could convert atmospheric carbon dioxide back into trees at a certain rate per unit area). The metaphor there is that the planet has only a fixed area. So if we use it up, some of us are going to have to be ejected through Spaceship Earth's metaphorical airlock. **At present,**

each person needs 2.2 global hectares to support the demands they place on the environment, but the planet is only able to meet consumption levels of 1.8 global hectares per person

So we are overdrawing our ecological account. Soon we shall need two planets, they say.

Using the WWF's **annual report** on these issues, the BBC report cited above includes a chart showing the ecological footprint *per capita* of a few selected countries, essentially as follows:



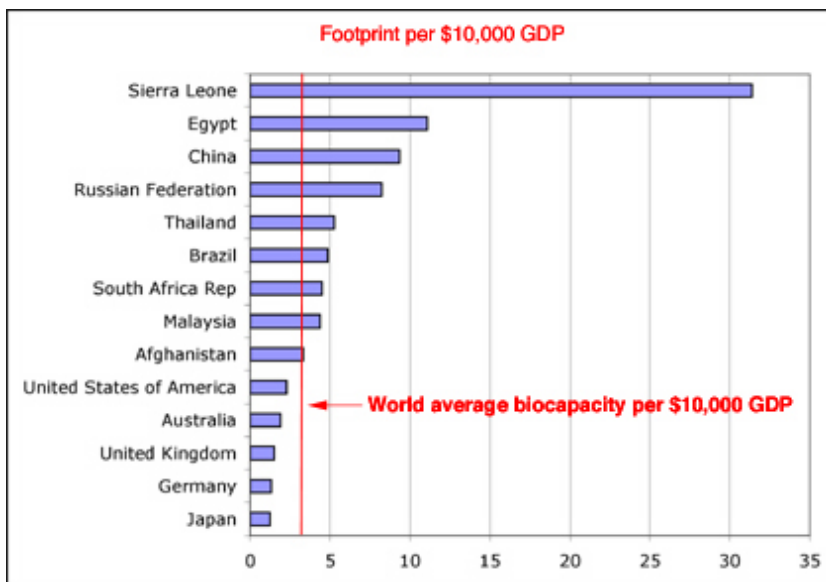
As you can see, the huge boots of Americans, Australians and Britons are trampling over the world's bio-space, while poor but virtuous Sierra Leoneans and Afghanis are trading lightly on the

Earth's sacred resources. It seems obvious who most deserves to be kicked off the planet.

But does this measure make sense?

First off, we're not at all sure that the measures of 'footprint' themselves are accurate. The data are hard to collect and harder to interpret, and many assumptions had to be made. For example, 48% of the footprint is currently due to carbon dioxide emissions. So if you think that the global warming problem might be solved, you will have to reduce most of the footprint estimates. And so on. But never mind all that. Even on the assumption that their footprint measure is accurate, dividing it by a country's population is of doubtful value. For example, if a country doubles its population without doubling its productivity, its real impact on the environment will increase, but its impact *per capita* will go down. The country will count as more environmentally virtuous – smaller ecological footprint per capita – by virtue of its runaway overpopulation! Conversely, a country that uses resources very efficiently may still count as becoming more environmentally unfriendly (larger footprint per capita) solely because it has also achieved low population growth.

This is the wrong way round. A better measure of environmental virtue would be the ecological footprint *per unit GDP*. This does not allow countries to 'cheat' by merely increasing their population without changing their physical effect on the environment, but it does take account of whether a country is wasting resources or using them efficiently. Out of curiosity, we used the WWF's numbers and the BBC's countries to construct the appropriate chart:



The countries are now in approximately the opposite order. Notice that the United States goes from worst on the chart, to using less than capacity, even though the worldwide average is 125% of capacity. This isn't a coincidence. Western countries create their 'footprint' as part of their productive process – creating the very things that let us lower the footprint while also increasing human welfare.

Footprint-per-GDP is, in our opinion, a better measure of countries'

environmental virtue. And it does not even take account of the other huge factor that is missing from the WWF's analysis: the 'area' (real or metaphorical) needed to sustain one person is not a constant of nature but depends on the available technology. For instance, how well the Earth can recover depends in part on how many carbon-dioxide-fixing machines we can build, and how efficiently, which in turn depends on how much wealth we can create and how fast. And hence the developed countries, the villains of the piece according to the environmentalists' narrative, are in reality even more environmentally virtuous *even by the WWF's standards of 'impact'* than our chart makes them seem.

(Data collected by [Elliot Temple](#).)

Fri, 10/27/2006 - 23:37 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Unscientific

The science in the WWF report is unbearably bad. They fudge numbers and basically say that:

- A) they do their honest best
- B) they fudge in what they believe to be the right direction

Doing your best isn't good enough. You need to actually have enough valid data, of the right types, not fudge your numbers to represent what you guess the data would say if you had it. Guessing is less accurate, and less scientific, than using real numbers.

You may think I'm joking, but they admit this in their report. For example they said their data about biodiversity over-represented whatever species people liked to study. So they just counted those less. How much less? Well, something about dividing the world into regions which they assume to be equally important, and then assuming that the convenient already-collected data for each region really is representative.

And people study vertebrates more than invertebrates. So how can they make conclusions about invertebrates, without nearly enough data? Easy. Just assume the trends for vertebrates apply.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sat, 10/28/2006 - 22:06 | [reply](#)

Country-centric Ideas

Sierra Leone in the best or worst of environmental scenarios is not going to make or break the globe. Neither will Great Britain or Germany. China and India might due to growth and carbon use factors. However, even here we are dealing only with county-centric ideas.

Land area and hemisphere measures of various factors per

population unit would make for a more interesting and pointed indicator of environmental footprint(s). Deep ocean areas might also be looked at to provide a number of baseline measures.

One time static measures of any sort are not usually very useful. Plot global trend charts. Take a series of snapshots using standard year intervals. Analyze the data through many different screens. Trends and their advantages and concerns will begin to emerge. Except in the extreme, this is not a competition between countries to be the bad-boy, hero of our environmental future. This is a scientific learning process that is ripe for useful discoveries.

by a reader on Sun, 10/29/2006 - 02:19 | [reply](#)

Environmental Virtue

The world's footprint measure seems better. But what exactly counts as environmental virtue? In which important ways will the environment degrade if the total human footprint exceeds the available area? Put another way, should we be making the environment better for humans to live in, or for animals and plants to live in?

Or do we try to minimise our impact and leave the other species to their fates? This amounts to partitioning the earth into two environments and reducing the net flux between them. Domed cities and space bubbles might be cool. But assuming animals aren't worthless, who manages the natural environment then? Does nature really know best, given that it has destroyed more than 99% of all historical species?

If we refuse to allow existing species to continue to die out, should we preserve them by gardening the earth and, as a side effect, allowing their fitness to deteriorate? Or should we merely collect their DNA, and the DNA of as many extinct species as we can find?

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Sun, 10/29/2006 - 20:37 | [reply](#)

Nature Knows Best

Why should nature know best? Why should what already exists be any good? Isn't that basically an obfuscated benevolent-creator-God theory?

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 10/30/2006 - 08:39 | [reply](#)

Are you serious?

Elliot, are you serious?

Nature is important because it sustains life on the planet. Plants

create oxygen, insects carry disease, forests control erosion and flooding, swamps filter water and help dampen the effects of hurricanes...

What will be the economic impact when Salmon go extinct? What was the economic impact when Chestnut trees were wiped out?

Nature has a very real impact on humanity.

by [Will](#) on Mon, 10/30/2006 - 14:26 | [reply](#)

the US consumes more per person than any other country in the wo

Ecological footprinting is not that hard. You simply look at the amount of resources humans use. If you want to do it country by country, just look at the resources each country uses: for example, how much paper does a country use each year? How many miles does the average citizen drive per day? How much electricity does the country use, and how is it produced? How much waste does the country produce? How do they farm? How much food do they consume?

The BBC method appears flawed, but it still can provide a general picture of which countries have the biggest footprint per person. Note that the WWF assesses nations' footprints in a variety of different ways. In many cases, the US does better than developing countries, in others it does worse.

There is no doubt that the US, in general, consumes more per person than any other country in the world.

Also, don't assume that technology will solve problems by default. Computers, for example, were supposed to reduce our dependence on paper and save the forests, but we now use more paper than ever before, resulting in a variety of increased ecological impacts.

by [Will](#) on Mon, 10/30/2006 - 15:18 | [reply](#)

Serious

Will,

I am serious. I certainly agree some changes to the Earth would not be good for us. But the natural state certainly isn't either. Adding cities and roads and sky scrapers has served us well. I'll be happy to see a lot more of those.

I don't think it's reasonable to evaluate whether a change is good based on a conception of whether that is the way nature wanted it. *That* is essentially theism. I think we should evaluate whether a change is good based on the expected effects for humans, and their desirability to humans.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 10/30/2006 - 18:11 | [reply](#)

Re: the US consumes more per person than any other country

The WWF report (PDF version) does not say the US has the highest footprint per capita.

One of the problems with the WWF report is the lack of scientific care and precision. So even if the US is fairly close to the top, I think we should be more careful what we say about it.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 10/30/2006 - 18:17 | [reply](#)

Nature knows best

If you act according to a belief that "nature wanted it" then yes, you are acting irrationally. But I'm not sure who's arguing that in this thread.

The thing is, nature does know best in many ways. If we anthropomorphize nature, we are being foolish.

But if we try to understand ecology and evolution, we begin to see that nature is made up of communities. Some plants fix nitrogen and other nutrients in the soil, animals and fungi help decomposition (thus nourishing the soil), predators and prey interact in complex ways, animals spread seed and pollinate plants.

When one species is stressed, that plays out in the whole community, in ways we are only just beginning to understand. The more stressed populations, the more humans begin to take notice: forest fires, blights in valuable crop species, erosion, flooding, nuisance species spreading, etc.

Human civilization started around 12,000 years ago. We have had a relatively stable ecosystem in that entire time, and this has supported our rise. There is every indication that the scale of changes we are seeing now will be catastrophic.

So yes, in a way, nature does 'know best.'

by [Will](#) on Mon, 10/30/2006 - 21:08 | [reply](#)

US consumes more per capita

You are right, the WWF report puts the US second in per capita footprint. The United Arab Emirates is first, mostly because of CO2 emissions. It's also, if I'm not mistaken, one of the richest countries in the world.

The US still far and away has the biggest footprint. For one thing, it

has 300 million people, whereas the UAE has only 3 million people.

Now, I still don't get your logic behind assessing footprint by GDP. One thing you will find in the report is that higher income nations have a bigger footprint across the board. The more money there is, the more goods will be bought and sold, and the more resources must be consumed to do so.

Even if you play with the numbers, the footprint (the amount of resources consumed) remains the same. By assessing GDP you are showing that some countries are more efficient at producing wealth from the resources they consume. You are not showing that they have a smaller footprint.

Am I wrong? Please explain that a little better.

You accuse the WWF of a lack of scientific rigor in their report. What alternative assessments can you provide?

by [Will](#) on Mon, 10/30/2006 - 21:29 | [reply](#)

"the more resources must be c

"the more resources must be consumed to do so."

Resources, in net, are not "consumed", they are created by our knowledge. Our ability to utilize energy, for example, is not limited by finite resources, but rather by our knowledge about how to access the virtually unlimited supply, throughout the universe.

"By assessing GDP you are showing that some countries are more efficient at producing wealth from the resources they consume."

Because resources are mostly not "consumed", the rate of growth of efficiency determines who will create the most resources over time(not "consume" the most resources). Footprint per GDP is a reasonable first approximation to who is creating resources the most efficiently.

by a reader on Tue, 10/31/2006 - 00:38 | [reply](#)

consuming resources

I think we are using different definitions of resources and consumption here. You say that resources are not consumed but produced. But the whole concept of ecological footprinting is based on quantifying the amount of land required to support a given person or nation. For example: how much electricity do you use, and how is that produced? How much paper do you use and how many acres of forest do you need to produce that paper? How much food do you eat and how many acres must be used to produce it?

The sorts of resources that GDP measures are different. They include things like services, ideas, entertainment. A totally different set of data.

by [Will](#) on Tue, 10/31/2006 - 00:50 | [reply](#)

Re: consuming resources

Will wrote:

How much food do you eat and how many acres must be used to produce it?

The sorts of resources that GDP measures are different. They include things like services, ideas, entertainment. A totally different set of data.

Do you agree that the first quantity depends heavily on the second? For example, the amount of food that a hectare of land can produce (a quantity of the first kind) depends on all sorts of factors of the second kind such as how much nitrogen can be fixed in factories at a given price, and how many people are needed to work the land to achieve a given rate of food production, which in turn depends on how cheaply tractors can be manufactured, and so on.

by [Editor](#) on Tue, 10/31/2006 - 14:24 | [reply](#)

food and acreage

Yes and no. In an industrialized society, yes, the efficiency of food production depends on technology which depends on the economy.

But there are other models. Hunter gatherers, for example, can provide for themselves with minimal technology required. They don't (at least very rarely) overuse the land, so they always have more next year.

Organic farming is another example.. still requires technology but a different kind, knowledge of soil biology, pests and predators, etcetera, and it has different effects on the surrounding environment than industrial farming - less pesticide and fertilizer runoff into local watersheds, for example.

Also there is the question: what kind of food do you eat? In the underdeveloped world, herders vs. agricultural societies use the land differently. In the developed world, meat eaters use more land per capita because livestock requires more land and water to feed than the equivalent amount of vegetable protein.

With more wealth, people generally choose to eat more meat, which is more resource intensive, rather than choosing to eat a vegetarian diet and thus becoming more efficient in land usage. So technology and wealth do not necessarily lead to more efficient agriculture.

by [Will](#) on Tue, 10/31/2006 - 14:42 | [reply](#)

Re: food and acreage

Will:

For hunter-gatherers, is it true or false that the number of people

who can be supported by a hectare of land depends on their technology?

Also, are you saying that hunter-gatherers use less land per person to produce food than the average American does? Or is it just agricultural societies in the 'underdeveloped world'? Or both, or neither?

by [Editor](#) on Tue, 10/31/2006 - 15:57 | [reply](#)

huntergatherers and GDP

My point about hunter gatherers was that there are ways of living that don't exactly fit into 'number of people supported per hectare.' Hunter gatherers live in a stasis with their environment. Their population generally remains constant, and there is always ample food. In addition, the land they live on is multipurpose. It is wildlife habitat, carbon sink, water filter, and food, clothing and shelter for humans all in one.

I don't have facts and figures about land usage per cultural/economic area. If you really want me to I will research it and get back to you. My point is that different ways of producing food have different impacts on the land. In some areas, herding causes desertification. In others it is well adapted to the local environment. Industrial meat production is very land intensive. Industrial farming is slightly less so, but with other side effects.

I am beginning to think you are sidestepping my question to you: Is it or isn't it true that when you assess ecological footprint per GDP you are only assessing how efficiently a nation produces wealth when they consume resources, and totally ignores the question of how much resources they consume, which is the focus of the WWF report?

by [Will](#) on Tue, 10/31/2006 - 17:25 | [reply](#)

Re: huntergatherers and GDP

I am beginning to think you are sidestepping my question to you: Is it or isn't it true that when you assess ecological footprint per GDP you are only assessing how efficiently a nation produces wealth when they consume resources,

We are not sidestepping it: we replied that the two are inextricably connected, and invited you to agree. Your answer was "yes and no", and that you'll get back to us.

and totally ignores the question of how much resources they consume, which is the focus of the WWF report?

Yes. Our post was primarily about the report's use of the footprint-per-capita measure, and to this end it largely conceded (for the sake of argument) their way of calculating the footprint itself.

by [Editor](#) on Tue, 10/31/2006 - 17:50 | [reply](#)

the basic message: the earth is being used up

This is an interesting conversation to have, because we are getting at one of the primary differences between people who think environmental issues are paramount and people who think economics are paramount. My point is not that footprint per GDP is a worthless way of looking at the state of the world. It is very important, as it can provide some hints about which way we might want to go as a society to reduce our own footprint.

But it seems to me that you were downplaying a real problem, which is that richer nations are using up the world's resources. If you examine the WWF report, you'll see many different things. For one thing, wealth seems to be a primary factor in resource consumption. The countries with the biggest footprint per person are primarily America and the Western European countries. So there is no reason to assume that producing wealth more efficiently makes a nation a better environmental citizen.

Another thing you'll see is that population also makes a big difference in footprint. If you look at the map on page 18 of the report, you'll see that China's footprint as a country is almost as big as the US - China has a much lower standard of living but four times the population as the US. So what happens when the Chinese achieve the same wealth as the US? They'd better learn quickly to be more sustainable or they could screw the whole planet. What about India, which currently uses even less land per person than China?

So let's not ignore the basic message of the WWF report: we are using up the earth faster than it can replenish.

Now, as for technology being inextricably linked to ecological consumption... well, technology can provide solutions. I think sustainable technologies hold a lot of promise and are being underutilized right now. The more technologically advanced nations are also the wealthy nations, and as I've already pointed out, more wealth leads to more consumption in general. It doesn't have to be that way in the future, but it is that way right now.

And please don't think that environmentalism is anti economic growth! There are ways to have a high standard of living and still cut our footprint. Likewise, technology and economic growth are necessary to find more environmentally efficient ways of living.

by [Will](#) on Tue, 10/31/2006 - 19:00 | [reply](#)

focus

and totally ignores the question of how much resources they consume, which is the focus of the WWF report

that was not the focus of the WWF report. there were two focusses. one was footprint *per capita* (and by country), not total footprint. the other focus was biodiversity.

the per capita assumption isn't about how much resources are being used, and for what. it's about how powerful individual people are, and how rich they are. it's opposed to effective, rich people, and gives better scores to nations stuffed to the brim with poor people. and it will do that even if the poor nation uses, in absolute terms, more footprint than its rich neighbors.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 10/31/2006 - 19:33 | [reply](#)

Your ideology is showing

"it's opposed to effective, rich people, and gives better scores to nations stuffed to the brim with poor people."

Oh really? Look again. China has a similar footprint to the US. The point is not that China is a better environmental citizen. Any fool can look at the data and see that a country with a billion people that has the same footprint as a country with 300 million people is a serious problem now and will be an even more serious problem in the future. Where in the report does it state that China is somehow "better" than the US because their per capita score is lower? This is not an IQ test, it's a measure of the state of the environment.

"that was not the focus of the WWF report. there were two focusses. one was footprint *per capita* (and by country), not total footprint. the other focus was biodiversity."

Once again, we are using two different definitions of words here. Your use of the word "focus" is something that the report uses to analyze data. When I say focus, I'm talking about the general conclusion of the report. Perhaps my use of the word focus was in error. I apologize.

Also, note that the report analyzes consumption per capita, per region, per country, and by wealth.

Here's the conclusion, quoted from the foreward:

"The Living Planet Report 2006 confirms that we are using the planet's resources faster than they can be renewed – the latest data available (for 2003) indicate that humanity's Ecological Footprint, our impact upon the planet, has more than tripled since 1961. Our footprint now exceeds the world's ability to regenerate by about 25 per cent."

Pointing out that richer countries consume more is not the same as attacking the rich countries. The report is merely pointing out the basic facts.

Look, I don't want this to turn into a 'you're wrong no you're wrong' kind of debate. I think that the idea that economics are

fundamentally opposed to the environment is a bad idea for

economics and for the environment. I'd like this to be a discussion, not a political debate.

That said, if you can point out some kind of proof that the WWF has an ideological agenda, or that their science is seriously flawed, by all means, do so.

by **Will** on Tue, 10/31/2006 - 19:59 | [reply](#)

Science

I commented on their science above. It's the first comment.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 10/31/2006 - 20:21 | [reply](#)

science

Do you have an alternative assessment? Because the WWF report also seems to be in line with accepted science on the state of the biosphere.

by **Will** on Tue, 10/31/2006 - 20:34 | [reply](#)

Re: Science

Whether the report reaches popular conclusions is irrelevant to whether they followed the scientific method.

I don't personally have an alternative, scientific conclusion. I haven't done any research.

The **Copenhagen Consensus Center** is investigating which environmental issues it is most effective to spend money fixing (what will benefit people the most, per dollar). Global warming is rated poorly. I haven't looked into their approach in depth, but I have read a lot of Lomborg's book (he's in charge of the Center) so I can speak for his thoughtful and careful approach.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 10/31/2006 - 21:14 | [reply](#)

science?

I didn't say the conclusions were popular. I said they were in line with other scientific assessments of the biosphere.

There is ample evidence of species decline. If you want I will provide some links, but I'm confident you can find the information yourself.

As for Bjorn Lomborg, he's not a scientist, he's a statistician. I wrote a review on my own website of his book, read it [here](#). His book suggests that he has no clue about biology or ecology. He doesn't mention invasive species, for example, and his data on forest health starts from the 1950s, after most of the US had been logged.

I will say that I think his perspective is useful in looking at the interplay of environment and economics. But it is worthless for assessing the real state of the biosphere.

Anything else?

by [Will](#) on Tue, 10/31/2006 - 21:25 | [reply](#)

Re: Anything else?

Just to be clear: you still haven't defended the *methods* used by the WWF "scientists", only their conclusions.

If you'd like to concede they are no good, even as a thought experiment, we could discuss what that means for the report. If not, I'll wait.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us
Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 10/31/2006 - 21:29 | [reply](#)

"You say that resources are n

"You say that resources are not consumed but produced. But the whole concept of ecological footprinting is based on quantifying the amount of land required to support a given person or nation."

Will,

The point is that nations with higher average GDP are far more able to utilize land efficiently (that is, need less land, for example to provide food for a given person). This occurs precisely because the technology is better. So technology both drives the relative size of the footprint of a country and the amount of food that can be produced from a given amount of land.

It makes no sense to "quantify the amount of land needed to support a given person..." and then quantify which people are taking more than their share.

The amount of land needed to support a person is not fixed. Essentially, the poorer nations are not utilizing their land efficiently, so this drives up the world-wide average amount of land needed to support a given person. If poor nations would develop economically, their efficiency in land use would increase, and therefore the world-wide average amount of land needed to support a person would decrease.

Therefore, if poor nations economically develop, each person

worldwide will need less than the cited "2.2" global hectares that is said to be required to support the demands he places on the environment (because more efficient land use usually places less demand on the environment, for a given amount of people). So helping poor countries to be economically vibrant, paradoxically decreases the relative "ecological footprint" of the United States.

"The Living Planet Report 2006 confirms that we are using the planet's resources faster than they can be renewed – the latest data available (for 2003) indicate that humanity's Ecological Footprint, our impact upon the planet, has more than tripled since 1961. Our footprint now exceeds the world's ability to regenerate by about 25 per cent."

This does not make sense. In free societies, we do not "consume" resources, rather in net we produce them. The elements needed to sustain life are virtually limitless throughout the universe. What is often scarce is our knowledge (and ethical behavior). As mentioned in a previous post, it is knowledge deficiencies alone that make energy scarce. If we grow virtually all of earth's food in space or on another planet, the 2.2 global hectares that is said to be needed to support the demands a person places on the (earth's) environment will shrink to close to nothing.

Our continued focus on economic growth via knowledge growth when coupled with ethical behavior will continue to make the world a more hospitable (and ecologically safe) place for humans.

by a reader on Tue, 10/31/2006 - 23:54 | [reply](#)

resources?

"The point is that nations with higher average GDP are far more able to utilize land efficiently (that is, need less land, for example to provide food for a given person)."

So if the richer nations are more efficient, then why do they also have a bigger footprint? Shouldn't China be considered more efficient since it supports a billion people with the same size footprint as the US?

We are comparing apples to oranges here. I've already said, GDP measures something totally different than ecological footprinting. There are resources and then there are resources. Ecological footprinting measures natural resources - air, land, water, lumber, food. Ecological footprinting does not measure the value of services, government spending, capital investments, ideas, entertainment, etcetera.

Now I'm not saying that technology can't aid in more efficient utilization of natural resources and thus give us a smaller footprint. I'm just saying that it hasn't.

by [Will](#) on Wed, 11/01/2006 - 04:50 | [reply](#)

Science?

Elliot,

I'll address the criticisms in your first comment below.

"You need to actually have enough valid data, of the right types, not fudge your numbers to represent what you guess the data would say if you had it. Guessing is less accurate, and less scientific, than using real numbers."

They do use real numbers. They have a pretty sophisticated and in depth analysis. What they do:

1. Identify the resources that require land area to produce. For example, charcoal, wood for construction, paper, firewood, etc. all are resources the use of which can be quantified. So are agricultural products. For CO₂, they calculate the amount of land that would be required to naturally absorb the emissions.
2. find out how much of those resources were consumed per country. Easy enough - look at various economic reports.
3. figure out how much land was required to produce the resources consumed.

Blammo! Instant ecological footprint. It's very straightforward actually.

Now for your next criticism:

"they said their data about biodiversity over-represented whatever species people liked to study. So they just counted those less. How much less? Well, something about dividing the world into regions which they assume to be equally important, and then assuming that the convenient already-collected data for each region really is representative."

Um, are they going to go into the field and collect data on every single species in each bioregion? Not with the funding they've got currently they won't. They use data that has already been collected and verified, and they track it over time. If they can they use multiple datasets. I've already pointed out that their conclusions jive with the accepted science.

"And people study vertebrates more than invertebrates. So how can they make conclusions about invertebrates, without nearly enough data? Easy. Just assume the trends for vertebrates apply."

Vertebrates have a much bigger impact on the environment than your typical invertebrate. They eat more, move faster, etc. If invertebrates are declining we have every reason to assume that biodiversity in general is in decline. The index uses data about nearly 1000 species (including invertebrates, by the way) and determined that their populations are in decline. That's bad news,

even if, say, Jellyfish and mosquito populations are on the rise.

For a closer look at the methodology: A download can be found [here](#) about the methodology of the 2005 report. Another is [here](#) about the methodology used in the 2000 report.

More information about the methodology behind the living planet index can be found [here, pdf](#).

by [Will](#) on Wed, 11/01/2006 - 06:07 | [reply](#)

Science

" If invertebrates are declining we have every reason to assume that biodiversity in general is in decline. "

that is philosophy/argument, not scientific measure

you say they don't have the funding to study every species. ok. that's not my problem. they should only claim things they have the funding to research properly.

the already existing data is fine as data about individual species. but there way of combining it by regions to represent the whole world can't be said to be based on scientific measurement.

worse, they say things like they don't combine figures from different studies to get enough data points for a species, because it would not be valid. *but* if the two studies *intended* to be compatible, then they do combine them. intent is not science.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 11/01/2006 - 07:50 | [reply](#)

Apples and Oranges are Both Fruit

"So if the richer nations are more efficient, why do they also have a bigger footprint? Shouldn't China be considered more efficient since it supports a billion people with the same size footprint as the United States?"

No, China is *creating* fewer resources per person than the United States. Or, said another way, China is "less efficiently" utilizing a virtually unlimited supply of natural resources.

"Ecological footprinting measures natural resources -- air, land, water, lumber, food."

You are assuming that natural resources, like the ones listed above, are somehow "used up" by nations like the United States. I have explained how, for example, energy and usable land can be created, indeed will be created, virtually without limit. It is precisely those countries creating a bigger "ecological footprint" per person which are making these resources more and more available. Since the

potential to access these "natural resources" exist without practical limit in the universe, the issue is who is able to create access to more and more of these available resources.

Those countries with higher average per capita income have higher incomes precisely because they are creating greater access to ultimately unlimited resource supplies.

What natural resource, essential for human happiness and survival (with the possible exception of ethical behavior) is not expected to be created in sufficient quantities to enable ultimately unlimited growth in human potential?

Resources are not lacking. Knowledge is. And knowledge is being created, for the most part, in advanced Western Industrialized countries.

What critical resource is really being "used up" or consumed, with no possible substitutes that will not be even better?

by a reader on Wed, 11/01/2006 - 12:59 | [reply](#)

science?

Elliot:

"that is philosophy/argument, not scientific measure"

Actually, it is science. The scientific method: formulate a hypothesis, gather data to support, perform experiments to verify. If the experiment/observation does not match the hypothesis, then formulate a new hypothesis. If it does, look for more data/experimental evidence to support.

I'll ask you again: can you provide an alternative assessment of the state of the biosphere that is scientifically credible? I don't consider Bjorn Lomborg to be credible for reasons I've already explained. Anyone else?

by [Will](#) on Wed, 11/01/2006 - 17:00 | [reply](#)

apples and oranges

"You are assuming that natural resources, like the ones listed above, are somehow "used up" by nations like the United States."

I'm not assuming it. It's been demonstrated and it's very simple. We are using up land to produce our food, houses, roads, fuel, etc.

You haven't really explained how land and resources can be created without limit (btw I detect a little Bucky Fuller in your language - have you been reading his stuff?). But even if it can, the question is not: 'can we create unlimited resources?' but rather 'are we using up our resources too quickly?'

If the earth was a business, we would have a budget. Since money

is not really a good way to measure the state of the environment, ecological footprinting is a new way to look at the planet's budget.

Now, if we were a business, and the land we have available to produce food, fuel, housing, paper, roads, bury garbage, etc. was our budget, then we are using up our budget 25% faster than we are replenishing it.

If we were a business in that situation, we would have to enact spending cuts or we would go out of business. It's that simple. If your position at work was costing a company 25% more than it was earning the company, then the company is going to look hard at eliminating your position, or cutting costs. It wouldn't matter if you said: 'But I can produce infinite wealth for you!' What matters is that you do or do not produce the wealth.

Again, I'm not denying that technology can lower a nation's footprint. I'm saying that it hasn't so far, in fact, it's done the opposite.

"What natural resource, essential for human happiness and survival (with the possible exception of ethical behavior) is not expected to be created in sufficient quantities to enable ultimately unlimited growth in human potential?"

The future won't necessarily be the end of all humans. But the environmental trends we can see all around us if we look indicate that the world is going to be harder to live in, and there will be massive human suffering. Do you want to eat jellyfish instead of fish? That's likely in the next 50 years. Would you like to see more poison ivy, kudzu, bush honeysuckle, and other invasive species instead of trees and flowers? We are almost certainly headed in that direction.

What about more insects and fewer birds? More crows and starlings and fewer warblers and woodpeckers? No maple syrup? More possums and raccoons and squirrels, fewer otters, wildcats, muskrats, and beavers?

What about watching whole nations die for lack of fresh water? That's coming. More sickness and death from air pollution? That's coming. More floods and mudslides because of logging and mining? Just wait.

What about no more wild rivers? No more pristine natural places? Think it's unlikely? Would you drink from any river within 20 miles of your home?

It really all depends on how you define happiness.

by [Will](#) on Wed, 11/01/2006 - 17:18 | [reply](#)

Something to think about

Bacteria and insects will adapt quickly to changing conditions because they have short life spans and reproduce in quantity.

What a wonderful future we face!

by **Will** on Wed, 11/01/2006 - 17:20 | [reply](#)

Re: Science

If [vertebrates] are declining we have every reason to assume that biodiversity in general is in decline.

that is philosophy/argument, not scientific measure

Actually, it is science. The scientific method: formulate a hypothesis, gather data to support, perform experiments to verify.

Which data gathered in the WWF report supports or verifies the statement that declining vertebrates implies general biodiversity decline?

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 11/01/2006 - 18:07 | [reply](#)

science?

There's no need to support it in the report. It is generally accepted as a measure of biodiversity.

by **Will** on Wed, 11/01/2006 - 18:09 | [reply](#)

science

Look at it this way: we can base our physics on theories of what electrons and atoms do despite having never actually seen an atom. We can state that light behaves as both a particle and a wave, and make predictions, without ever seeing the particles that make up light.

Inference happens all the time in science. We infer the size of stars by their magnitude and color, and from that we can also infer their lifespan and what elements they contain. We don't have to physically travel to a star to do that.

by **Will** on Wed, 11/01/2006 - 18:15 | [reply](#)

Re: Science

There's no need to support it in the report. It is generally accepted as a measure of biodiversity.

If that is so, shouldn't the WWF report say it is generally accepted, and cite a solid scientific study on the matter?

-- Elliot Temple

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 11/01/2006 - 19:26 | [reply](#)

science

If it truly is accepted, why bother?

by **Will** on Wed, 11/01/2006 - 20:46 | [reply](#)

Science

What the WWF report says is:

Plants and invertebrates were excluded, as few population time series data were available. It is assumed that trends in vertebrate populations are indicative of overall trends in global biodiversity.

If it is an accepted conclusion so solid that it doesn't need a citation, why did they call it an "assumption"? And why did they say the reason for this assumption was a lack of data (implying they would not have assumed it if more data was available)?

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us
Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 11/01/2006 - 21:07 | [reply](#)

assumptions and science

I don't know why they used the word assumption. At its heart, it is an assumption.

But it's not the same as assuming your iron is turned off without checking it. It's more like assuming that a star has certain elements in it because when you look at it through a spectroscope you see certain colors, and then from that assuming the lifespan of the star. Of course no one has ever monitored the entire lifespan of a star, but there is enough supporting evidence that you can make a reasonable guess and make predictions based on that guess.

With vertebrates, there are a lot of things that measure ecosystem health. Many large vertebrates require large areas of contiguous, undisturbed habitat. They require certain plants for food and habitat, certain types of soil that support their favored food, etc.

Put another way, it's like measuring the health of an economy by monitoring the number of rich people in the economy. Maybe not the best measure, but if it's all you've got there are still ways to get good information from it.

by **Will** on Wed, 11/01/2006 - 21:55 | [reply](#)

A Reader

Dear A Reader who wrote:

"What natural resource, essential for human happiness and survival (with the possible exception of ethical behavior) is not expected to be created in sufficient quantities to enable ultimately unlimited growth in human potential?"

I'm curious who you are :) If you're interested in talking, email me.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 11/01/2006 - 23:31 | [reply](#)

Science

Will,

What seems to be obvious is often false. That's why scientists very carefully document all their assumptions which seem obvious. And they consider each carefully. If someone else has already examined an assumption, that is fine, but they will reference the previous work they believe is sufficient. So even if the WWF was perfectly right to study the way they did, their report is lacking in scientific rigor.

But the exact proportions and relations between vertebrate and invertebrate biodiversity are not obvious, and not easy to quantify. So when the WWF assumes they are exactly proportional, that is making up numbers, and the results are therefore extremely restricted in applicability.

To make this more concrete, here are some factors they apparently did not consider:

- Animals eat plants. More vertebrates could mean less plants
- Why should there be proportional amounts of big animals and microscopic ones, which have very different habitat needs?
- The effect of humans on animal populations is very complex. For example, when animal populations get low, humans ruin trends by trying to save endangered species. And how hard they try depends on how much they like that animal.

-- Elliot Temple

Cur@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 11/01/2006 - 23:46 | [reply](#)

More Apples and Oranges

"You are assuming that natural resources, like the ones listed

above, are somehow "used up" by nations like the United States."
Reader

"I'm not assuming it. It's been demonstrated and it's very simple.
We are using up land to produce our food, houses, roads, fuel, etc."
Will

If something essential was being depleted "to produce our food, our houses, our roads, fuel, etc." then the prices of these items (in aggregate) would be rising due to scarcity of resources. We can measure whether or not prices for essential items have in net increased by determining the amount of work that an average human being has to do in order to purchase items essential to life (food, housing, clothing, etc.)

Another way of measuring the availability of essential resources is to determine whether life-expectancy has increased or decreased. If life expectancy is decreasing, then indeed, some essential resource is being depleted.

As it turns out, human beings are having to work fewer and fewer hours to afford the essentials of living. Therefore these items are far more available to each person, even than 100 years ago. (The price of essential resources needed to live has fallen in terms of the amount of work needed to obtain them).

Even if a life-sustaining resource is plentiful now but will be gone rapidly because of an expected environmental catastrophe, say 25 years from now, futures markets would dramatically increase the price of this resource, at the present time. But this hasn't happened, either. The price of essential resources, as measured by the amount of work that a citizen of the planet has to do in order to survive, has fallen dramatically in human history, and continues to fall.

Life-expectancy is also increasing. Therefore the environment is (in net) more health-promoting and life-sustaining than it ever has been. If an "essential" resource were missing or scarce, human beings could not obtain it as readily, and so on average would be dying at an earlier age. But they are not.

The simple fact of increasing human well-being shows that life promoting resources are being created in greater and greater amounts, despite the odd suggestion that somehow we have less of them, or will soon have less of them.

"Now, if we were a business, and the land we have available to produce food, fuel, housing, paper, roads, bury garbage, etc. was our budget, then we are using up our budget 25% faster than we are replenishing it."

If a person spends more money than he takes in, then he goes in debt to someone. Precisely who are the citizens of the world in debt to, from an ecological perspective? If you say "our children", then why on average (worldwide) are our children progressively having to work fewer hours to meet their needs. That is, why are there more "essential resources" available to them for each hour that

they do work, or will work.

"But the environmental trends we can see all around us if we look indicate that the world is going to be harder to live in, and there will be massive human suffering...Do you want to eat jellyfish instead of fish? That's likely in the next 50 years."

How can you possibly know that humans will have to eat jellyfish? If the price of fish goes up, people will grow them on farms, as they already do. And why should I eat jellyfish? or fish? For ethical reasons, I am a vegetarian. I don't want animals to suffer.

"What about watching whole nations die for lack of fresh water? That's coming."

Only in a world full of virtually infinite quantities of water, can someone see scarcity. I have no doubt that nations can dehydrate themselves to death. But the major factor that prevents people from drinking adequate amounts of water is repressive political organization, not inadequate amounts of water. People **want** to drink. Free market organization and the absence of war has provided and will continue to provide virtually unlimited quantities of clean water to those who value freedom enough to allow people to work for what they want. Water purification and desalinization efforts allow millions of people the world over to drink abundant quantities of fresh water.

"Would you drink from any river within 20 miles of your home?"

Yes, utilizing my water purifier. A more interesting question is whether I would have been as healthy drinking river water 200 years ago. Unfortunately, because of parasitic infection (e.g. Giardia), I think not.

by a reader on Thu, 11/02/2006 - 01:07 | [reply](#)

Astrophysics

Will wrote:

We infer the size of stars by their magnitude and color, and from that we can also infer their lifespan and what elements they contain. We don't have to physically travel to a star to do that. [...]

It's more like assuming that a star has certain elements in it because when you look at it through a spectroscope you see certain colors, and then from that assuming the lifespan of the star. Of course no one has ever monitored the entire lifespan of a star, but there is enough supporting evidence that you can make a reasonable guess and make predictions based on that guess.

But there's a vital difference.

It's impossible to infer things from observation alone. All the

'inferences' you mention in astrophysics are made from the observations *plus a universal theory*, which contains a substantive explanation, unrivalled and independently corroborated, of why the inferences should be true. When we aren't able to apply such a theory to interpret an astronomical observation, for whatever reason, we cannot make inferences of that kind; indeed, whenever there's even the slightest wiggle-room, working out what's happening, even approximately, becomes very hit-and-miss.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Thu, 11/02/2006 - 01:11 | [reply](#)

Astrophysics vs. ecology

I wasn't so much trying to say that the examples I gave about stars were guesses or assumptions. I was trying to point out that there are other supporting strands of evidence in the study of ecology, enough so that we can draw inferences from basic trends.

by [Will](#) on Thu, 11/02/2006 - 04:25 | [reply](#)

scientific rigor

Elliot:

"their report is lacking in scientific rigor."

"the exact proportions and relations between vertebrate and invertebrate biodiversity are not obvious, and not easy to quantify. So when the WWF assumes they are exactly proportional, that is making up numbers, and the results are therefore extremely restricted in applicability."

The WWF doesn't assume them to be exactly proportional. They don't have to be exactly proportional, either, to be a problem. Some animals will prosper, some will perish. Of course, which will prosper? Microorganisms that cause disease? Insects that carry disease? Scavenger animals that will further damage ecosystems?

Here is a direct quote from the paper "The Living Planet Index: using species population time series to track trends in biodiversity" by Loh et al. Google scholar it if you want to read more about the methodology used in the 2006 report.

The index is currently based on nearly 3000 population time series for over 1100 species. All species in the index are vertebrates. (p. 1)

The LPI indicates that populations of wild species of vertebrates have declined overall from 1970 to 2000. The extent to which this is a reflection of trends in global biodiversity as a whole has not been determined. In situations where habitat loss is the primary cause of population declines, it is reasonable to assume that there is a positive correlation between declines in vertebrate and non-vertebrate populations. Where hunting, fishing or indirect exploitation is the cause of

a decline in a particular vertebrate species, the decline will not necessarily be indicative of population trends in other species in the same ecosystem. At large scales of entire realms, oceans, regions or biomes, overall declines in vertebrate populations are significant in their own right and may also be seen as indicative of changes in underlying ecosystem processes(p. 5-6).

The WWF report is not intended to be a comprehensive report of the state of the biosphere. It examines the ecological footprint of humanity and a general index of the state of the planet. There are many other sources that support the conclusion of the Living Planet Index that world ecosystems are in trouble.

by **Will** on Thu, 11/02/2006 - 04:57 | [reply](#)

apples and oranges?

"in order to *purchase* items essential to life"

"human being are having to *work* fewer and fewer hours to afford the essentials of living."

Are they? All over the world? In sweatshops in the third world? Are hunter gatherers who have been 'globalized' working less than the four hours a day their old lifestyle required? Are you really looking at the whole picture of humanity or only at the wealthy nations?

"If something essential was being depleted "to produce our food, our houses, our roads, fuel, etc." then the prices of these items (in aggregate) would be rising due to scarcity of resources."

Not so. We in the rich nations don't see the scarcity because we import much of our resources. It's not evident here because our wealth insulates us. It is becoming more evident around the globe. This is what the report is talking about when it calls the US an ecological debtor nation. We just haven't run out of credit yet.

"Even if a life-sustaining resource is plentiful now but will be gone rapidly because of an expected environmental catastrophe, say 25 years from now, futures markets would dramatically increase the price of this resource, at the present time."

That's an assumption, not a fact. Just one example: What about a blight that spreads rapidly because of monocultural agriculture and wipes out a crop?

"Precisely who are the citizens of the world in debt to, from an ecological perspective?"

The wealthy nations are currently in debt to the poor nations with still abundant ecological wealth - but the poor nations lack the power to collect, so in the long run we will be in debt to our children.

"If you say "our children", then why on average (worldwide) are our

children progressively *having to work* fewer hours to meet their needs?"

See above, and also note that you can't predict the future. Our children may or may not be working fewer hours to meet their needs 5 or 10 or 30 years down the road.

"Free market organization and the absence of war has provided and will continue to provide virtually unlimited quantities of clean water to those who value freedom enough to *allow people to work* for what they want."

Actually nature provided the abundant clean water. Wealth, not free markets, determines who will get the clean water in the future. I bet you pay for your water right now, actually.

"A more interesting question is whether I would have been as healthy drinking river water 200 years ago. Unfortunately, because of parasitic infection (e.g. Giardia), I think not."

200 years ago, you would have been adapted to the local parasites.

Notice that I highlighted a few things in your statements. I think it is very interesting that you make your assumptions based on work and economics.

Here's something for you to consider.

400 years ago, when Europeans first came to America, wildlife was stunningly abundant. It was said that a man couldn't dip an oar in a river without hitting a fish. Trees, some of them 20 feet in diameter, covered the eastern half of the country. A squirrel could go from Georgia to New York, hopping from Chestnut tree to Chestnut tree and never touch the ground. The chestnut trees produced 6000 nuts each per year. A man could point a blunderbuss into a flock of birds at random and be almost guaranteed to bring one down. Flocks of passenger pigeons darkened the sky for *days* as they passed overhead. In the Pacific Northwest, you could dunk a basket into a river and pull up enough Salmon for your family to eat.

Nowadays, we consider ourselves lucky to be "allowed to work".

by [Will](#) on Thu, 11/02/2006 - 05:31 | [reply](#)

"200 years ago, you would hav

"200 years ago, you would have been adapted to the local parasites"

Surely health was much worse in 1806 than now?

by a reader on Thu, 11/02/2006 - 09:23 | [reply](#)

200 years ago

Depends on where you lived. Indigenous people in Australia

currently live an average of 57 years, shorter than the average Australian. But there are other measures of health besides lifespan, and the lifeways and environment of the Aborigines have changed considerably because of the white folks.

So how healthy were people back then to relative to today? For a European or American, almost definitely worse. For others? Who knows?

Life existed on this planet for millions of years without water treatment technology.

by [Will](#) on Thu, 11/02/2006 - 13:38 | [reply](#)

Something interesting

This study came out as we were having this discussion.

Global Map Shows New Patterns of Extinction Risk

It is interesting because it shows that a high density of endangered species from one group (birds or mammals or fish, for example) doesn't necessarily mean that species from other groups in the area are endangered. In other words, if birds are endangered in one area, land mammals might be doing just fine.

It is only tangentially related to our current discussion, but it can provide some context for looking at biodiversity. Note that this study examines the concentrations of endangered species per area, while the Living Planet Index examines overall population trends in vertebrates worldwide.

It is relevant because it illustrates how one assumption about ecology have been turned on its ear: the idea that one species can be an indicator for all is demonstrated to be a bit more complex by this study.

Of course, a decline in, for example, bird populations, even if mammals seem to be doing fine in the same area, is still a problem. Birds prey on caterpillars and insects which can destroy trees. They spread seeds and nutrients as they travel. Some of them provide prey for other species, etc. which is why a study that shows a general decline in vertebrate species worldwide is cause for alarm.

by [Will](#) on Thu, 11/02/2006 - 14:59 | [reply](#)

ocean biodiversity, jellyfish, rich nations, and weeds.

A [new study published in Science](#) (subscription only, but you can read the abstract. Try a university library for a copy) suggests fish species will be gone in 50 years if trends don't change, and outlines the problems for the ocean and man if biodiversity continues to collapse.

Also, richer nations are depleting the fisheries of poorer nations:

Brashares, Justin S., Peter Arcese, Moses K. Sam, Peter B.

Coppolillo, A. R. E. Sinclair, and Andrew Balmford. "Bushmeat Hunting, Wildlife Declines, and Fish Supply in West Africa." *Science*. Vol 306, Issue 5699, 1180-1183 , 12 November 2004

Kaczynski, Vlad and David Fluharty. "European policies in West Africa: who benefits from fisheries agreements?" *Marine Policy*. 26. 2003.

Alder, Jacqueline and Ussif Sumaila. "Western Africa: A Fish Basket of Europe Past and Present." *Journal of Environment & Development*. 2 June 2004.

A glimpse at our future:

About eating jellyfish in the future.

Planet of Weeds

by **Will** on Fri, 11/03/2006 - 02:36 | [reply](#)

Plentiful Food in the Past?

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jamestown%2C_Virginia

the winter of 1609-1610 at Jamestown became known as the "starving time" as the settlers faced starvation, and scheduled supply ships were delayed by weather. ... The colonists had not planned to grow their own food. Instead, they expected that trade with the locals would supply them with enough food between supply ships. But new evidence suggests that the Native Americans had very little food to start with.

Apparently getting food was not as easy as dipping a bucket in a river, or picking nuts. It was hard enough that a lot of people died.

And it wasn't just the white people who had trouble. The Native Americans, who had had many generations to figure out how to get food, themselves had very little.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 11/03/2006 - 04:33 | [reply](#)

food at jamestown

Good point.

1. The colonists were from one England, hated and feared the American wilderness, and had very little idea how to survive in it. And they had no plans to grow their own food.

2. I'd like to see the 'new evidence.' Perhaps there were some local changes that led to scarcity in the area? Diseases brought by the colonists?

Of course, food was not always plentiful everywhere all over the world before evil white folks came and destroyed everything. But there was a general abundance, naturally. That abundance is what let us survive and evolve as a species. Now, in many places, that abundance is gone, or disappearing.

There are theories that scarcity led to the adoption of agriculture. If that is the case, then humans had to have encountered areas of scarcity, or they never would have adopted that more labor intensive lifestyle.

by **Will** on Fri, 11/03/2006 - 15:06 | [reply](#)

Consuming vs. Creating Resources

Will wrote:

I'm not assuming it. It's been demonstrated and it's very simple. We are using up land to produce our food, houses, roads, fuel, etc.

And what happens to our food, houses, roads and fuel when they are produced using land? They do not vanish into thin air. They are also used for some purpose. For instance a road, fuel, etc. may be used to bring fertilizer to a farm where an already "used" land is used a second time to produce more food. The complex web of all such activities makes up our economy, and when that economy is free, the net result is that the increasingly efficient use of land due to the growth of knowledge makes the "consumption model" of resources irrelevant. I agree with "a reader" that the essential resource necessary for sustaining a free economy is effectively *created* by the same economy. The name of that resource is *knowledge*.

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by **Liberal Iranian** on Mon, 11/06/2006 - 07:57 | [reply](#)

producing resources?

Can you quantify this? Can you demonstrate that knowledge actually makes us more efficient in using land? If so, why is it that the richer and more technologically advanced countries use more land than the poor countries?

This study is a snapshot. One way to test your idea would be to examine trends over time, perhaps comparing economy trends with footprint trends. In that case, you might see some kind of trend that technology is making life more sustainable. But the evidence seems to show otherwise.

With a little thought maybe we can turn that trend around.

by **Will** on Mon, 11/06/2006 - 15:00 | [reply](#)

Re: producing resources?

Will wrote:

why is it that the richer and more technologically advanced countries use more land than the poor countries?

Could you be specific about what you mean by this? Taken literally, it says that the technologically advanced countries have a greater combined area than the other countries, but if you look at an atlas you will see that that is not true. The argument here seems to be about efficiency, so perhaps you mean that. Efficiency is always defined as a ratio: some measure of benefit per unit usage of a resource. So if you are referring to efficiency, you must mean that some benefit per unit area of land is less in technologically advanced countries than in others (and less now in the US than it was at the time when the inhabitants were hunter gatherers?). What measure of benefit are you referring to? Presumably not GDP? Or population? What is it?

by [Editor](#) on Mon, 11/06/2006 - 15:24 | [reply](#)

producing resources

why is it that the richer and more technologically advanced countries use more land than the poor countries?

I'm talking about the footprint of the richer countries. The footprint is the amount of land used to produce the resources that a country consumes.

I was responding to Cyrus' comment that:

when... economy is free, the net result is that the increasingly efficient use of land due the growth of knowledge makes the "consumption model" of resources irrelevant.

My challenge to him is: how do you prove that land is being used more efficiently? If it is being used more efficiently, why is it that richer nations have a bigger footprint than other nations?

by [Will](#) on Mon, 11/06/2006 - 16:35 | [reply](#)

a difference in perspective

We keep coming back to the same point, so I'm going to try to restate the problem as each side sees it.

I take the WWF's view that the earth's renewable resources are being used faster than they are being replenished. I believe that this will be disastrous down the road.

You (I'm speaking to everyone else here) seem to believe that

wealth is beneficial in its own right and with market freedom it will fix our environmental problems on its own. For that reason, countries that use more of the world's resources should be forgiven, because they also tend to produce more wealth and everything will even itself up down the road.

Is this a correct restatement of your arguments?

by **Will** on Mon, 11/06/2006 - 16:42 | [reply](#)

GDP/land

Will,

Your last comment is not a correct statement of *my* argument. I do not take the view that *wealth* will solve the problems, but *knowledge*. There is a causal link between the growth of knowledge and the generation of wealth, but it is important to emphasize the actual source of solutions.

About your challenge: land is being used more efficiently in the free industrialized countries because it generates more (a lot more) wealth. That is, the ratio of GDP/land is much bigger there. This is the measure of efficiency of land use and the essence of **The World's** post. This is also my answer to the Editor's question to you in their last comment.

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by **Liberal Iranian** on Mon, 11/06/2006 - 18:27 | [reply](#)

GDP vs. land use

Cyrus,

Can you demonstrate a clear connection between increasing knowledge and increased efficiency of land use? Because when I look at the data provided by the WWF I see that the richer countries use more land (have a bigger footprint) than poor countries.

If wealth indicated efficient land use, then why is this so? Why aren't the poorer countries using more land and the richer countries less?

I've said it before but I'll say it again: GDP has a lot of irrelevant information included if you want to compare it to footprint. For example: how does buying a ticket to a concert increase sustainability? What about getting in a car wreck and going to the hospital, which increases GDP? What about all the money that is spent on television programs and advertising, purely for the sake of entertainment and marketing? How do these things increase the efficiency with which we use natural resources on the planet? These things all contribute to the GDP.

by **Will** on Mon, 11/06/2006 - 19:19 | [reply](#)

Footprints

The footprints are not amount of land, they are supposed to be, roughly, amount of pollution. Half the footprints are CO2; the amount of CO2 created doesn't necessarily have much to do with amount of land used.

Additionally they are footprints *per person*. So even if they could be counted as land *per person* you'd still have to multiply by population sizes to see who used the most land.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 11/06/2006 - 19:33 | [reply](#)

Footprint Per GDP

If wealth indicated efficient land use, then why is this so? Why aren't the poorer countries using more land and the richer countries less?

It is so. That's what the original post showed. It calculated footprint per GDP. The rich countries produce more stuff per unit footprint.

You're free to deny that rich countries produce *useful* stuff, but that is not the same issue as efficiency of production.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 11/06/2006 - 19:36 | [reply](#)

GDP

What about getting in a car wreck and going to the hospital, which increases GDP?

That *decreases* GDP. It is known as the broken-window fallacy.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 11/06/2006 - 19:42 | [reply](#)

broken windows

What about getting in a car wreck and going to the hospital, which increases GDP?

That *decreases* GDP. It is known as the broken-window fallacy.

Alright, I won't debate you about that. What about my other

examples? What about money spent on video games and pornography? What about the millions of tons of paper used to print magazines and newspapers? Etc.

by [Will](#) on Mon, 11/06/2006 - 20:07 | [reply](#)

footprints

"The footprints are not amount of land, they are supposed to be, roughly, amount of pollution."

Actually, it *is* the amount of land required to sustain the level of consumption. Reread the papers I linked to. They totaled the amount of resources (lumber, paper, food, fuel, etc.) consumed per country, calculated the amount of land used to produce those resources, and that's the footprint.

Amount of CO2 is also turned into land use, although there is some wiggle room here. They calculated the amount of land that would be required to absorb the CO2 produced and got an acreage which is added to the footprint.

by [Will](#) on Mon, 11/06/2006 - 20:15 | [reply](#)

gdp vs. footprint

If wealth indicated efficient land use, then why is this so? Why aren't the poorer countries using more land and the richer countries less?

It is so. That's what the original post showed. It calculated footprint per GDP. The rich countries produce more stuff per unit footprint.

You're free to deny that rich countries produce **useful** stuff, but that is not the same issue as efficiency of production.

I'm not denying that wealth, knowledge, etc. are useful. And I'm not arguing about efficiency of production.

I'm arguing about efficiency of land use.

It doesn't really matter how much 'wealth' or 'knowledge' you can produce from an acre of land if you use that land up faster than it can replenish itself.

by [Will](#) on Mon, 11/06/2006 - 20:22 | [reply](#)

Video games and other measures

Will,

The money and time spent on video games is generated by and is part of the same economy as a whole. The teenager in the US who spends his parents' money on a video game gains from that in many different ways. His imaginative power and mental ability as

an adult is affected by the video games he played as a teenager. He usually grows up to be a productive member of the US economy, contributing to the staggering GDP of the US compared to developing countries. The teenager in a developing country is more than happy to be able to spend the same money on a video game. Not having enough cash, he has to spend other types of money (time, education, etc.) to buy similar products. He has limited choice and ends up spending more than the cash equivalent that his American peer spends. This reflects and contributes to the fact that the economy he is part of is less efficient, mostly due to restrictive practices, at providing his needs.

If you insist that GDP is not a good measure of the knowledge that generates it, you should suggest some other measures of knowledge to normalize the footprint/land use. For example, one may choose to count the number of research papers in some or all fields of sciences. This number is not as comprehensive as GDP because it does not contain the plethora of non-research knowledge on which the efficiency of the economy depends. It is affected by some extraneous factors, such as the size of the society and the focus of its economy. But I am guessing the results would be, within limitations, more or less the same as GDP.

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by **Liberal Iranian** on Mon, 11/06/2006 - 22:02 | [reply](#)

Knowledge from land

Will wrote

It doesn't really matter how much 'wealth' or 'knowledge' you can produce from an acre of land if you use that land up faster than it can replenish itself.

What if you produce the knowledge that allows you to replenish the land faster than it currently does itself?

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by **Liberal Iranian** on Mon, 11/06/2006 - 22:05 | [reply](#)

Will's Argument

Will, maybe I can help you with your argument, although I disagree with it.

You must be saying that although wealthier countries are currently producing more goods and products per unit land area than they ever have before, there are long term side-effects associated with enjoying all this wealth, now. In producing all these goods and services that Westerners want at the present time, Western nations are producing toxins, for example greenhouse gasses.

The "footprint" of the United States is "too big", meaning we are

creating more toxic byproducts than we are recycling in our national land area. So we are using up more than our fair share of the overall ecological recycling capacity of the world. Worse, the world as a whole is creating more toxic byproducts than the world's natural ecological processes can recycle. Therefore, toxic compounds are building up. Right now, efficiency in economic production is not being compromised, because levels of toxic compounds (like CO₂) are not so high as to adversely affect productivity very much. For example, temperatures have not risen high enough from greenhouse gasses to degrade farming capacity. Furthermore, gains in knowledge have increased economic productivity per land area probably faster than coincident toxic waist increases have degraded that efficiency. That's why "a reader" can argue that efficiency gains continue to rise. But a worldwide ecological footprint larger than the current land area of the entire world must be a harbinger of our eventual inability to sustain the efficiencies we are currently enjoying in the Western world.

Why? A hectare of land can only be made to produce more of a product, for example food, up to a certain point. We must eventually work harder to get more output from the same input (land). There must eventually be diminishing returns. Isn't that a law of economics? But toxic products can build up virtually indefinitely. Therefore, although economic efficiency is high and currently growing, it will eventually plateau, and then fall, as it eventually succumbs to the ultimately finite productive capacity of the earth – made increasingly less by the relentless build-up of toxic waste, greenhouse gasses, and general ecological destruction.

Therefore, although we are relatively comfortable now in the Western world, we must conserve our natural resources immediately, to prevent catastrophe in the long-term.

Will,
Is that a reasonable summary of your position?

by a reader on Tue, 11/07/2006 - 00:44 | [reply](#)

resources and knowledge

What if you produce the knowledge that allows you to replenish the land faster than it currently does itself?

I understand the drift of your argument: wealth creates knowledge, resources, and technology.

That would be great but based on the evidence I have I don't see that happening. Can you provide me with solid evidence that a. wealthier countries use land more efficiently than poor countries, and explain to me why, if a is true, b. rich countries all have a bigger footprint than poor countries?

by Will on Tue, 11/07/2006 - 15:30 | [reply](#)

Will's argument

You have restated the basic drift of my argument. But you put a

little too much emphasis on 'toxics'.

The issue goes far beyond toxic pollution. The ecological footprint, for example, shows that we are using too much land. Wild habitat is destroyed daily, on land and in the seas. Where original habitats have been destroyed, invasive species move in, making it difficult or impossible for the local ecosystem to recover.

Then you have the issue of global warming compounding the problem. We have already seen that spring is coming earlier - this throws off prey/predator relationships when predators use different markers (length of days) than the prey (seasonal warmth) to start mating. So you get predators looking for prey whose population has already peaked (google 'pied flycatcher global warming'). The change in seasonal timing also throws off birds and insects that pollinate as plants bloom earlier - this can affect commercial agriculture and thus humans directly.

So it's not just about pollution, although pollution is a problem.

by **Will** on Tue, 11/07/2006 - 15:59 | [reply](#)

going in circles?

It seems to me that we are going in circles with Will. So I repeat my take on the issue: it is knowledge (of many sorts and in huge amounts) that solves problems, not wealth or technology per se. These are themselves the results of the growth of knowledge. If by using a land you create the knowledge of how to replenish it, you have no such thing as the problem of "using up" the land.

Can you provide me with solid evidence that a. wealthier countries use land more efficiently than poor countries, and explain to me why, if a is true, b. rich countries all have a bigger footprint than poor countries?

Answers to both questions have been given in the post and previous comments. But, for the sake of clarity: how do you define the efficiency of land use, Will?

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by **Liberal Iranian** on Tue, 11/07/2006 - 18:45 | [reply](#)

arguing in circles

I define ecological efficiency (efficiency of land use) as the amount of land required to support a person. This is the same measure as that used by the WWF.

AT the core, it seems to me that I am talking about ecology and you all are talking about economy.

Here is the problem with your position. The ecological footprint measure used by the WWF states quite clearly that a. on average, a person in the so called developed world requires more land to support their lifestyle than a person in the 'developing' world.

Furthermore, the report states that b. the earth's resources are being used up too fast.

You have consistently argued that because the developed world produces stuff, we shouldn't worry about b. the fact that the earth's resources are being used up faster than they can be replenished.

You are in effect waving your hand to make the problem go away. Just because we produce some vague 'knowledge' doesn't mean that we aren't using the planet up. The knowledge that we need to produce to slow down the consumption and reduce our footprints is not being produced by the wealthy countries - or if it is, it is not reflected in the WWF report and you have not provided hard data to prove that it is so. (If you can present hard data, rather than just a general argument, please do so).

Calculating footprint per GDP, then, is only marginally useful, and effectively avoids the real, serious, glaring issues pointed out in the report: a. Rich people use more and b. we are using the world up faster than it can replenish.

That is the substance of my argument, and despite your (everyone I have engaged with so far) presenting various vague generalities (wealth produces knowledge and stuff), you have not convincingly demonstrated to me how footprint per GDP is anything more than marginally useful for assessing and dealing with issues a and b.

Perhaps a better way to use GDP to assess ecological efficiency would be to compare the footprints of nations with comparable GDPs - perhaps the top twenty or thirty richest nations. Then you would have an idea of which nations are better at producing wealth per dollar from a particular amount of land, and you would have an idea of which developed societies should be emulated. I have a feeling that Britain and the US would fare poorly on such a comparison.

I would like for us to be able understand each other at least. I have had a feeling throughout this thread that my opponents aren't fully grasping what I am saying. I'm sure you feel the same about me. My apologies.

by [Will](#) on Tue, 11/07/2006 - 22:22 | [reply](#)

Trying to reach some understanding

Will:

I think we agree on this:

The footprint of an entity (nation, person, amount of wealth, etc) is defined as the amount of land needed, at the present state of technology, to sustainably produce the resources being used by that country or person, or to create that wealth.

What I think we may disagree on is this: The footprint, thus defined, is not a constant area, but changes with time.

Let's not get hung up on why it changes; but I guess you'll want

evidence that it does change. OK. For example, in 1800, the population of the world was below 1 billion, and the economist Thomas Malthus calculated that even considering agriculture alone, and ignoring other uses of resources, it could support only about twice that at the average standard of living for 1800. In other words, the total world footprint then was 0.5 (Earth areas). Since then, the population has increased about sevenfold and the resource usage -- well, I don't know what figures you'd want me to take, but at the most conservative estimate it has to have increased at least 20-fold. So by Malthus' measure of footprint, the current footprint has now increased to at least 20 -- or correcting that for carbon dioxide, to at least 40. Yet in reality it has increased to only 1.3.

Similarly, in 1970, the environmentalist Paul Ehrlich calculated that the Earth could sustainably support, at the average standard of living at the time, slightly fewer people than were alive at the time -- in other words, the footprint then was slightly above 1. And Ehrlich, too, wasn't counting carbon dioxide. Had he known of its harmful effects, he would have calculated the footprint at closer to 2.

Since then, world resource usage has again increased greatly. Hence by Ehrlich's measure of footprint, the Earth's total footprint has now increased to -- what? -- at least 4, say. Yet it has actually fallen to 1.3.

Hence, isn't it misleading for you to use the terms "footprint" and "land use" or "resource use" interchangeably? For the conversion factor between footprint and land area is not constant.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Wed, 11/08/2006 - 01:46 | [reply](#)

Numbers

Will asks how economic efficiency can increase (more product per land area) while ecological "efficiency" decreases (presumably amount of natural resources for the next generation to use divided by the amount of natural resources for this generation to use).

Imagine that a company in the United States manufactures a computer. A certain amount of labor and effort went into making that computer. We trade that computer for a certain amount of oil from Saudi Arabia.

A few years later, knowledge increases, so we are now able to build a more powerful computer, without having to work any harder. Because the computer is more powerful, the Saudi's are willing to give us more oil per computer, because they like the more powerful computer better. So we can now say that the United States is more economically efficient. We have worked no more hours, but are now able to import more oil, because we can trade a more powerful computer to the Saudis.

But the land area of the United States has not increased. Therefore

from an economic perspective, we are using our land more efficiently. We are working the same amount of hours on our land, and importing more oil. And with more oil, we can produce even more goods because of the extra energy we have. Economic efficiency of land use has thus increased in the United States.

Now let's look at it from Will's ecological perspective. There is a finite amount of oil in the ground the world over. By making a better computer, we are taking *more* of a finite supply of oil out of the ground. So now our descendants have fewer natural resources (less oil). And the more efficient we become (better and better production of computers) the more the Saudis take oil out of the ground for us to use, but not for our descendants to use. So the ratio of resources available to our descendants divided by resources available to us has decreased. Ecological efficiency has decreased.

According to Will, the earth is only able to generate ("replenish") energy for us at a certain mostly fixed rate per land area. It will take, for example, millions of years for enough animals to die and geological conditions to be right to transform dead animals into oil and replenish the oil supply for our future. If we exceed a certain rate of use of energy, it would take much more available land (a bigger planet) for the earth to replenish the energy supply that we are currently taking from the earth per unit time.

So we require a bigger planet to satisfy our hunger, for example, for energy. But we don't have a bigger planet, so we are using up more land resources (energy recycling capacity) per time than we are putting back into the earth. Our ecological "footprint" is too big. Indeed, the more economically efficient the United States becomes (getting more oil per unit work because of making better computers) the larger the ecological footprint of the United States, because we can use up more of the earth's natural resources per time.

This is why Western nations have the largest ecological footprints and also the highest economic efficiency per land area (for now, anyway). Increasing knowledge increases the efficiency by which Western nations can produce goods that other people want. These other nations (or their dictators) trade their natural resources to the United States in exchange for the trinkets (like computers) that we give them. The more efficient we are at making trinkets (because of our increasing knowledge), the more efficiently we rape the land of developing nations, enjoying short-term benefit, but causing long-term catastrophe.

Knowledge allows people to make things which other people want. Others then are willing to use up natural resources to get those goods created because of knowledge. This is why hunter-gatherer societies did better than we do. Will says hunter-gatherers did not have to work so hard to support themselves. Fifty-thousand years ago, hunter gatherers *knew less*. This ignorance prevented them from harvesting natural resources at too rapid a pace. They could not deplete their environment. So these noble savages, and their children (as long as they also kept them in ignorance) could continually pass to the next generation, a world continually and

renewably rich in natural resources, for everyone to enjoy.

Knowledge, far from helping humanity, actually has been the means by which humanity was and is destroying itself.

But it is possible for us to learn from this, before it is too late.

If instead of selling the Saudis a computer, we had sold them many solar panels in exchange for oil, the ecological balance sheet would be different. Those solar panels would utilize land, for example, because they would have to be physically placed somewhere on earth. But in doing that, we would be increasing the rate that the earth produces energy for us. We would be using knowledge to help, rather than hurt, us. If we traded the Saudis enough solar panels, the energy that we would be creating from the sun could more than match the energy depleted by taking oil from the ground. If we also planted numerous trees, these could ingest the carbon dioxide produced from burning the oil, so we would not be overtaxing the earth's natural ability to absorb carbon dioxide. Alternatively, we could simply use less oil and more solar energy to begin with. Then we would not be using up more energy per time than the natural energy-creating capacity of the land. If we are not using up resources faster than the world wide land area is naturally (and via technology) recreating resources, our worldwide "footprint" would not be larger than the area of the earth, itself.

So as illustrated above, economies can utilize land more efficiently (at least in the short-term) from an economic perspective, while the ecological balance sheet tells a different story. But according to Will, we should follow the ecological (not the economic) balance sheet, because eventually there will be a reckoning. If we continue to use up energy resources, for example, faster than the geographical area of the earth can naturally replenish those resources, eventually energy will run short, prices will rise, and economic efficiency will fall -- just as ecological efficiency has already fallen.

My counter argument to Will was that if his theory were really correct, we should see, now, price increases for energy resources, for example in future's markets. If efficiency will eventually fall because of a world-wide shortage of resources relative to demand, prices will rise. People will try to stockpile resources.

But we don't see that. Why? Because "natural" resources have *substitues*. The issue is not whether oil resources will be used up, but rather whether *energy resources* will be used up. Citizens of the world are "voting with their feet". That's why prices for most resources are not rising. People are betting that increasing knowledge will continue to incrementally create more new resources per unit land area, than that same knowledge destroys resources per unit land area. Resources created by "learning something" divided by resources consumed by learning the same "something" is a measure of whether one is an optimist or a pessimist. A ratio greater than one means you are an optimist. Most of the readers of the World, as you can tell, are optimists!

"each person needs 2.2 global hectares to support the demands

they place on the environment, but the planet is only able to meet consumption levels of 1.8 global hectares per person"

Consider the ratio 2.2/1.8. Will, if you are right about the future of our world, eventually we will use up our natural resources and economic efficiency will fall dramatically. For example, the oil will be used up so we won't be able to take (and burn) as much oil per unit time. Therefore our ability to place "demands" on the environment will fall. Therefore the top number (2.2) will fall.

But the bottom number (1.8) will fall, as well, given your doomsday scenario. If knowledge decreases (not likely) or if the environment becomes polluted or more hostile, the environment will be less able to meet (recycle) consumption levels of 1.8 hectares per person.

The future you are predicting (lower levels of the top number and lower levels of the bottom number) is, by the way, exactly the condition of the numbers that hunter-gatherers experienced, if their "scientists" had calculated such a number. Hunter gatherers took fewer resources from the environment (top number) per time. But the ability of their environment to recycle the resources *THEY NEEDED* (bottom number) was less as well. For example, if there were too many people per unit area, the number of animals was not sufficient to hunt and eat. That's why the population density of hunter gatherers had to be so low.

By the way, it is very likely that for hunter-gatherers, their top number was also higher than their bottom number. The migration of hunter-gatherers from the probable evolutionary origin of humans in Africa, North through Europe and Russia and then across the Bering Strait into the New World probably occurred because of a shortage of animals. Vast remains of dead animals over the edges of cliffs suggests that hunter gatherers did not "conserve" animals, but indeed drove entire herds off of cliffs. They therefore created a scarcity of animals. For the hunter gatherers to survive, they had to continually migrate north to follow the dwindling animal herds that they were destroying. Finally, hunter-gatherers arrived in the new world.

The original "conservers" of resources important to humans, were the agricultural societies that evolved in the wake of the migration of the hunter gatherers. They protected private property, to prevent the over-hunting of the land by hunter-gatherers. Thus the city-state came into being in the fertile crescent, as a response to the over-exploitation of nature by hunter-gatherers.

The above is the theory of the economic historian Douglas North (Structure and Change in Economic History). He won the Nobel Prize partially because of this work.

I don't expect to be able to convince you that both numbers (resource use, resource creation) will continue to increase because knowledge will continue to increase. But please do note: When you are predicting doomsday scenarios, the problem is not so much that the top number (the footprint) is too big, but rather that you believe that it will eventually get too small. Please also note that historically, the top number would seem to be (at least in dynamic

societies) always larger than the bottom number.
And it has not predicted doom.

I think that knowledge and ethical behavior, alone, are the only ways to deal with our uncertain future. The very thing that increases use of and creation of resources, is therefore the very thing (I think the only thing) that will protect us from uncertain catastrophies. Since niether you nor I really know what will happen in the future, I think we have to bank on increasing our knowledge. And yes, that implies increasing our productive and destructive capacities.

by a reader on Wed, 11/08/2006 - 03:19 | [reply](#)

Re: understanding

The footprint of an entity (nation, person, amount of wealth, etc) is defined as the amount of land needed, at the present state of technology, to sustainably produce the resources being used by that country or person, or to create that wealth.

I would take out the word 'sustainable', but yes.

What I think we may disagree on is this: The footprint, thus defined, is not a constant area, but changes with time.

I don't disagree. I am aware of Ehrlich and Malthus.

There are several important differences between now and back in 1970 or 1800. Notably, global warming, overfishing of the oceans, global trade which brings invasive species around the world, etc.

I've never denied that knowledge and technology can offer more efficient land use.

What I am arguing is that, as things stand right now, there must be a radical change or we *will* see Ehrlich and Malthus' predictions borne out, just a little late. Wealth does not automatically produce better technology. We have overcome obstacles in the past, but that does not mean that we will again this time - at least not without concerted effort.

Hence, isn't it misleading for you to use the terms "footprint" and "land use" or "resource use" interchangeably? For the conversion factor between footprint and land area is not constant.

Misleading? Perhaps. Did I intend it that way? No. I assumed everyone was on the same page, since we are, after all, talking about the WWF's report on ecological footprints.

by [Will](#) on Wed, 11/08/2006 - 03:30 | [reply](#)

Re: Understanding

Will wrote:

Ehrlich and Malthus' predictions...

Wait! I realise that most critics of environmentalism cite Malthus and Ehrlich in order to make fun of how wrong their predictions were. But that's the opposite of what I'm doing. I'm not citing them for what they were wrong about but for what they were right about: not for their predictions of their future, but for their calculations of the footprint at the time.

So, given that the human race's footprint (adjusted for carbon dioxide) has fallen from perhaps 1.7 or so in 1970 to only 1.3 now, the next question I want to ask is -- again, not **what** made it fall, but **who**? Was it not the people of the developed countries, and in particular, the change in the way those people used resources?

by [David Deutsch](#) on Wed, 11/08/2006 - 03:59 | [reply](#)

Re: Numbers

You just about stated my argument. However, I don't consider our usage of oil to be part of our footprint. Neither does the WWF, who calculate footprint as the amount of 'bioproductive' land required to support a certain level of consumption. Oil is only part of the footprint to the extent that it produces pollutants like CO2 that take up bioproductive land.

I think a more illustrative example, instead of oil, might be fishing. Fishing is a booming industry in the developing world, the biggest agricultural commodity that is traded internationally. Rich nations buy fish from poor countries, propping up the economy. The wealth that the poor countries get from fishing increases their standard of living and allows them to fish more.

Now, fish catches are beginning to level off and decline, even though more and more people are getting into the business. What happens? The prices go up, so there is more incentive to keep fishing. The fishermen also increasingly turn to other, more destructive practices like bottom trawling or shark finning.

Eventually, unless something changes, the ocean's ecosystems will collapse. Free markets will not solve the problem. Aquaculture might, but not by itself.

When the ocean fisheries are finally depleted, one billion people who currently depend on fish for their daily protein will face starvation.

Knowledge, far from helping humanity, actually has been the means by which humanity was and is destroying itself.

I never said this, and I don't believe it, although I can see how you might get that from my using hunter gatherers as an example.

I agree more with this:

I think that knowledge and ethical behavior, alone, are

the only ways to deal with our uncertain future.... Since neither you nor I really know what will happen in the future, I think we have to bank on increasing our knowledge.

Increase our knowledge, yes, and rather than dismiss the problem, focus our knowledge on fixing it.

by [Will](#) on Wed, 11/08/2006 - 04:09 | [reply](#)

1.3?

Where do you get the figure of 1.3? The WWF report says 2.2 per person.

by [Will](#) on Wed, 11/08/2006 - 04:13 | [reply](#)

nevermind

Nevermind, you are taking out carbon dioxide, correct?

by [Will](#) on Wed, 11/08/2006 - 04:14 | [reply](#)

Re: 1.3

No no, I'm leaving carbon dioxide in. 2.2 is the WWF-calculated footprint in hectares per human, and in those units the Earth's capacity is currently 1.8.

1.3, or perhaps $2.2/1.8=1.22$, is, as I said, the current WWF-calculated total footprint of the human race measured in units of the Earth's total surface area. In effect, it is how many Earths we are currently using.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Wed, 11/08/2006 - 04:22 | [reply](#)

Re: 1.3?

It seems we haven't agreed on our definitions of footprint . First you said:

Similarly, in 1970, the environmentalist Paul Ehrlich calculated that the Earth could sustainably support, at the average standard of living at the time, slightly fewer people than were alive at the time -- in other words, the footprint then was slightly above 1.

Then you said:

So, given that the human race's footprint (adjusted for carbon dioxide) has fallen from perhaps 1.7 or so in 1970 to only 1.3 now,

Which figure are you saying Ehrlich came up with? 1 or 1.7?

I am also confused by your usage of the number 1.3. That's a ratio,

not the total footprint per person as the WWF defines it.

When I (and the WWF) say footprint, I mean the amount of land a person, nation, whatever, uses.

You seem to be saying with your figure of 1.3 that the world is exceeding the earth's capacity by 30 percent (the WWF says 25%). Is that correct? Is there another word for that figure that we could use besides footprint to avoid confusion?

by [Will](#) on Wed, 11/08/2006 - 04:56 | [reply](#)

Re:1.3

Prof. Deutsch,

Let us look at the ration 2.2/1.8.

Would it not be correct to say that historically, both numbers (2.2 and 1.8), should have increased over time, likely because knowledge has increased over time?

Isn't it less important what the ratio is, and more important for human success that the top number continues to increase indefinitely? Presumably, the top number will not be able to increase indefinitely unless the bottom number also increases. And increasing knowledge should make them both continue to go up over time?

Have I missed something?

by a reader on Wed, 11/08/2006 - 05:41 | [reply](#)

Clarification?

I think Prof. Deutsch is saying that the figure for Ehrlich was about 1, but Ehrlich did not take into account carbon dioxide damage, so Ehrlich's figure if he had known about carbon dioxide damage, would have been closer to 2, say 1.7.

According to the WWF the correct figure is 2.2/1.8 which is approximately 1.22 (conservatively round up to 1.3).

I think Prof Deutsch is asking who caused this ratio to fall?

by a reader on Wed, 11/08/2006 - 05:58 | [reply](#)

Ratio

I am also confused by your usage of the number 1.3. That's a ratio, not the total footprint per person as the WWF defines it.

The WWF report says we are using up 125% of capacity. We are using up 1.25 earths worth of resources. Soon we will be using 2 earths.

1.3 is just 1.25 rounded up. It's how many earths the WWF says we

are using. This can be compared to how many earths worth of resources other people calculated we were using.

We need to use these units, after the division, b/c if the WWF says we are using 2.2 out of 1.8, and someone else says we are using 22 out of 18 (in different units), that is actually the same, and comparing 2.2 to 22 would be totally wrong.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 11/08/2006 - 06:07 | [reply](#)

did footprint fall?

David:

...not *what* made it fall, but *who*? Was it not the people of the developed countries, and in particular, the change in the way those people used resources?

You assume that the footprint actually fell.

Since the 1970's, fish stocks have plummeted. Across the board, just dropped off a cliff. Vertebrate populations are dropping all over the planet. Habitat destruction has continued.

There have also been positive developments. In the US, environmental regulations and the EPA reversed a lot of the decline here. New agricultural technology made cropland more productive - probably the main thing that has prevented Ehrlich's prediction from coming true.

What actually seems to have fallen is the -calculated- footprint. How do we know that Ehrlich's figures were correct? Certainly we have much better information today than we did then.

Also, maybe the footprint didn't fall. Maybe the technological measures we have come up with in the years since Ehrlich made his predictions are only stopgaps, and will only slow the impending collapse rather than stop it?

I kind of like the model proposed by a reader, that the number on top (the amount we use up) gets bigger, but so does the number on the bottom (the amount the planet can support). That seems pretty accurate to me.

The thing is, it is a constant balancing act to keep the top number from outpacing the smaller number.

by **Will** on Wed, 11/08/2006 - 06:52 | [reply](#)

footprint

he said the percent of capacity being used fell from 170% (or more)

to 130%. that doesn't mean the total footprint (as an absolute number) fell, b/c capacity may have gone up.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us
Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 11/08/2006 - 07:28 | [reply](#)

footprint

Well, if the carrying capacity of the earth went up, that is slightly different from footprint going down.

If that's what happened (and I think that *is* what happened with Ehrlich's predictions) then it was the richer nations that caused it to happen because of advancements in agricultural technology.

That doesn't automatically mean that richer nations get a free pass now. Either they must reduce consumption or figure out a way to increase carrying capacity.

by **Will** on Wed, 11/08/2006 - 15:01 | [reply](#)

Re: footprint

Will wrote:

Well, if the carrying capacity of the earth went up, that is slightly different from footprint going down.

No it isn't. Not according to the definition we have agreed, which was:

The footprint of an entity (nation, person, amount of wealth, etc) is defined as the amount of land needed, at the present state of technology, to produce the resources being used by that country or person, or to create that wealth

So if the carrying capacity of the Earth goes up, the amount of land needed to produce the resources currently being used goes down, and the footprint goes down proportionately. Right?

by **David Deutsch** on Wed, 11/08/2006 - 15:19 | [reply](#)

footprint

if the carrying capacity of the Earth goes up, the amount of land needed to produce the resources currently being used goes down, and the footprint goes down proportionately. Right?

Allow me to think out loud here:

One number (2.2 according to the wwf) is the amount of land

required to support every human.

The other number (1.8) is the amount of acres per person the earth could support. So when the top number (2.2) gets bigger than the bottom (1.8), we are in a period of ecological deficit. When it is smaller than the bottom, we are building up our natural capital, so to speak.

New technologies that increase the agricultural productivity of land will decrease the top number. I honestly don't know how much impact these technologies would have on the bottom number. That seems like it would be something like x/p , where x = the amount of available bioproductive land and p = population. X should be a constant unless we can create technologies which allow previously unusable land to become productive, which is rather different from making the existing land more productive.

So population increase because of better technologies could cause that bottom number to shrink, even as the top number shrinks. In that case, your percentage figure, 1.3, could go up even as footprint per person shrinks. Your percentage figure could go down if technology increases enough to make the top number smaller than the bottom, or if we can make the bottom number bigger by decreasing population or increasing the available land.

Then there is the possibility that agricultural land required per person decreases, but because of increasing wealth, other resources consumed goes up: more land required for timber, paper, etc. In this case, population will increase, the bottom number will shrink, the top number will increase or stay the same, and the percentage figure will increase.

There is also a possibility that we have underestimated the bottom number, and our technologies are allowing us to exploit and destroy the available resources more 'efficiently.' I'm thinking of fishing here, where fish stocks have collapsed, but we keep finding ever more destructive ways to keep producing high catches. In other words, we have found short term solutions, stretching the earth's carrying capacity but not actually increasing it.

Am I being clear here?

In any case, is all this actually relevant to your rhetorical point?

by [Will](#) on Wed, 11/08/2006 - 16:53 | [reply](#)

Agricultural Efficiency

Consider the ratio we have been talking about.

You are correct that increases in agricultural productivity will decrease the ratio, but it does so not by decreasing the amount of resources that individuals consume per time (the top number), but rather by allowing the land to "replenish" more food per time (if there is no extra toxic waste from growing the food more efficiently).

So increases in agricultural productivity, everything else equal,

increase the bottom number, but do not decrease the top number. The reason the top number does not decrease is that if food is produced more efficiently, the price falls and if anything people consume *more of it* (or the population increases to take more advantage of the lower price of food). Either way net food consumption increases. Economists say that in most situations, food is not an "inferior" good.

So, increases in agricultural productivity raise the bottom number, and do not decrease the top. A higher bottom number means one can "replenish" more food from the earth per unit time when agricultural productivity increases (providing that there are no toxic byproducts from these increased efficiencies).

So these are my questions (similar to Prof. Deutsch).

You (Will) have agreed that the bottom number has historically increased over time.

A. Who has cause the bottom number to increase over time?

And equally importantly

B. Why have these people acted to increase the bottom number ? Put another way, what incentive have these people had to increase the bottom number?

by a reader on Wed, 11/08/2006 - 20:55 | [reply](#)

agriculture

You are right, new agricultural technology would increase the bottom number. But it would also decrease the top number, which is the amount of land required to produce the resources consumed by an average human.

Keep in mind the other variables: population, amount of other resources consumed, etc that could affect this number.

Anyway, the answer to your question:

a. what has caused the bottom number to increase over time? Well, we haven't actually proven that it has increased. We have seen that Malthus and Ehrlich's calculations were wrong. Perhaps they underestimated the carrying capacity of the earth, or overestimated the footprint at the time.

Also, perhaps we are stretching the earth's resources, rather than extending them.

B. Why have these people acted to increase the bottom number? Put another way, what incentive have these people had to increase the bottom number?

I know the answer you want to hear, so for the sake of argument, I'll give it: the technologically advanced, richer nations have given

us technology that has made agricultural land more productive.

What was their motivation? Profit.

So I've said it. But this doesn't prove a thing. In addition to the possibilities stated above, note the fact that past trends do not prove future trends. There could be a number of things that affect our ability and desire to develop new technologies.

Also consider the possibility that our development of new technologies must occur at a rate fast enough to repay our ecological debt.

by **Will** on Wed, 11/08/2006 - 21:59 | [reply](#)

Past and Future

Will,

So I've said it. But this doesn't prove a thing. In addition to the possibilities stated above, note the fact that past trends do not prove future trends. There could be a number of things that affect our ability and desire to develop new technologies.

You don't need to prove it: you need to explain it, which you have. Also, you are right that the future does not follow from the past inductively. But if we can *explain* past trends according to a rule that is not falsified yet (in our case, the rule that the incentives of people in free, industrialized countries result in increases in the carrying capacity of the Earth) it is irrational to throw that rule away on the vague statement that it is not proven. No law of Nature is ever proven. As to problems: they arise constantly and they must be solved (not erased) by allowing the free growth of knowledge.

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by **Liberal Iranian** on Thu, 11/09/2006 - 03:47 | [reply](#)

What Should Be Done?

There seems to be a reasonable amount of understanding and agreement now. And we don't need total agreement about the current state of the Earth. What to do next only partially depends on that.

The WWF wants to appeal to governments to force people to live with a lower footprint -- to use less stuff per person. And it designed its measure, footprint *per person*, to finger rich, lower-population nations as the ones using more than their fair share, who should be forcibly made to stop.

And the WWF wants to scare people into taking action -- changing their personal lives to consume less. People should spend more of their time recycling, and buy more environmentally friendly products, and so on.

Whether the current state of the Earth is a problem or not, I oppose

all that. I want to see a focus on science, and optimism that we can fix problems, rather than pessimism and trying to avoid them. We don't have perfect foresight, so problem avoidance cannot work reliably. (Note: of course sometimes if you do know about a problem in advance, avoiding it may be easiest/best)

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 11/09/2006 - 05:29 | [reply](#)

Technological Breakthrough Lowers Footprint

Want to use less water?

<http://www.physorg.com/news82299918.html>

Now showers can use 30% less water without feeling less pleasant.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 11/10/2006 - 01:31 | [reply](#)

Yay. Let's all be happy-cl

Yay.

Let's all be happy-clappy optimistic libertarians and hold hands and sing hymns to knowledge and about the rich and the smart are soon going to build us a better boat - who needs to throw all that heavy stuff overboard or plug the leaks?! Increase, increase, we say!

by Neil on Sat, 11/11/2006 - 13:12 | [reply](#)

One Billion Humans

Thanks Will and the Libertarian legions.

Seriously, thanks.

I like nice round numbers and elegant math. My conclusions on the above for now are that these factors:

Smarter, fewer humans

More edible cellulose, etc.

Better use of plentiful electrons

in combination make for an elegant formula for a good life on a carbon based planet.

Doesn't seem too hard to figure out.

Cheap, technologically efficient birth control (and the knowledge to

use this technology wisely) while eating/wearing tasty paper products and driving around in our electron fueled vehicles, now that's the ticket!

You scientists can do the math. What the heck, I'll triple the fudge factor, three billion humans works too. That's my WWF theory and it works.

by a reader on Mon, 11/13/2006 - 17:07 | [reply](#)

Carbon Dioxide,

...man-made carbon dioxide emissions that is, make up just 0.017% of the green house gases in the atmosphere, and carbon dioxide is the least effective green house gas anyway. The past 170 years have been the coldest in the past 1000 years. The coldest period in the past 170 years was during one of the biggest booms in man-made carbon dioxide emissions in history. The ice caps are growing and sea levels are stable or even falling. What's the big deal with this climate change malarky?

Besides, sooner or later the Earth is going to become uninhabitable and it doesn't matter how many of us take up cycling. There is no 'solution' to climate change except to move to another planet, or to build massive Space 1999-style enviro-domes or something like that. In the meantime I'm going to keep eating my beef, using my incandescent lightbulbs (which don't poison the planet, unlike the other kind) and driving my 4x4. I might even smoke a few cigars while I'm at it.

by [The Cynical Libertarian](#) on Sun, 03/18/2007 - 11:49 | [reply](#)

I recommend some schooling...

I don't know if you took basic maths? But I'll have a go.

In a democratic system (doubtful you believe in this philosophy) the weighting is relative to the individual. Ergo each person carries the same burden.

Weighting by GDP just doesn't make sense.. That's the equivalent of giving votes in a political system based on how much money you earn (again this may be the interpretation in America).

I know you see yourself as some kind of agent-provocateur but please don't waste my time publishing such tosh...

by a reader on Fri, 03/23/2007 - 14:02 | [reply](#)

Questions For The Iraq Study Group To Study

It is **reported** that the Iraq Study Group led by the highly Realistic James Baker

has unanimously agreed to a report that will call for a gradual pullback of American combat troops in Iraq but stops short of setting a firm timetable for withdrawal, The New York Times reported on Wednesday.

And this differs from the present policy how? Like this:

the Times said the Iraq Study Group will recommend that Bush make it clear that he will start the troop withdrawal "relatively soon," indicating sometime next year.

That's very clear and Realistic. No firm timetable, but a firm timetable of withdrawal by December 31st 2007. Independently of what may, realistically speaking, happen as a result.

That recommendation would be a compromise between calls from some Democrats for a timetable to withdraw U.S. forces and Bush's insistence that forces should remain until the mission to stabilize Iraq was completed.

Recommendations of the panel, which is co-chaired by former Secretary of State James Baker -- a close Bush family friend -- and former Democratic congressman Lee Hamilton, will be much harder for Bush to resist than if the group were divided, experts and study group advisers say.

This is an astonishingly amoral position for something called a 'study group' to adopt. It is almost as if they would rather have an effect -- any effect, even one that none of them agree with -- than be ignored. They would rather subscribe collectively to a report that every one of them considers mistaken, than state individually what they believe to be the truth.

If the result is just a vague anti-Bush editorial that could have been written without study, at the outset, we wonder what the Iraq Study Group has been studying, and why. We hope that they have at least studied the following vital issues, and will include careful guidance on them in their final report:

- Will the report be cleared with Allies, such as Iraq, Australia

- and Israel, before any action is taken to implement it?
- Is there a Plan for the Aftermath of the report? In particular, have enough troops been allocated to ensure that the report's Aftermath in Iraq is completely non-violent?
 - If not, will all use of force resulting from this report, by all parties in Iraq, have full UN Security Council approval?
 - Will the arrangements properly safeguard Iraqi antiquities?
 - And Iraqi oil installations?
 - Will there be adequate arrangements for the refugees?
 - Has sufficient attention been given to the effect of a US retreat on the Arab Street?
 - What does the group recommend as the exit strategy from their report?

Thu, 11/30/2006 - 07:06 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Iraq Study Group

1. Will the report be cleared with Allies, such as Iraq, Australia and Israel, before any action is taken to implement it?

I suspect that whatever decisions are arrived at by the White House will be discussed with the Allies, including the U.K., before any action is taken. I do not think the report will be "cleared," if what's meant by that is a veto right.

2. Is there a Plan for the Aftermath of the report? In particular, have enough troops been allocated to ensure that the report's Aftermath in Iraq is completely non-violent?

I don't think enough troops will be allocated to insure that the Aftermath is completely non-violent. Iraq is far from non-violent now with the current level of forces, and there is not the political will to invest materially more blood and treasure to the conflict.

3. If not, will all use of force resulting from this report, by all parties in Iraq, have full UN Security Council approval?

Clearly no.

4. Will the arrangements properly safeguard Iraqi antiquities, and Iraqi oil installations?

No, remaining antiquities and Iraq oil installations are currently under constant threat and given the answer to the second question above, will continue to be under threat.

5. Will there be adequate arrangements for the refugees?

Currently there are large numbers of internal refugees, as well as refugees in bordering countries. Given the answer to the second question above, it's hard to imagine that any plan will adequately provide for the current refugees, let alone additional refugees caused, for example, by increased fighting in the wake of a U.S. withdrawal.

6. Has sufficient attention been given to the effect of a US retreat

on the Arab Street?

I suspect that this issue is discussed in some detail, since it lends itself to broad conclusions either to withdraw, stay the course, or increase commitment.

7. What does the group recommend as the exit strategy from their report?

Good question.

by **Michael Bacon** on Thu, 11/30/2006 - 15:57 | [reply](#)

The Crux of Incountry Stability

Since we are speculating on what the Study Group report should speak to:

How might the actual aftermath of the war be conducted, beginning with the surrender of Baghdad in spring 2003, given the stirred Sunni/Shite/Kurd dynamics which continue to fester until addressed?

How can the U.S. and allies deal most practically with the now ingrained perception of all Iraqi citizens that they are an occupied country not responsible for their own destiny?

Rephrase these two questions however you would like in order to make them clearer. Thorny issues, but they are, and always have been the crux of the core problem to be solved.

by a reader on Fri, 12/01/2006 - 04:21 | [reply](#)

Too Subtle?

The responses thusfar lead me to wonder whether it has been understood that these "vital issues" are versions of some of the unrealistic criticisms of the original invasion.

Gil

by **Gil** on Sat, 12/02/2006 - 01:11 | [reply](#)

Questions

I thought "Questions For The Iraq Study Group To Study" was a good title and the post asked some serious and usefull questions regarding the current war. Perhaps I was wrong.

by **Michael Bacon** on Sat, 12/02/2006 - 01:22 | [reply](#)

Results of the experiment

Experience has shown that most of the unrealistic criticisms of the original invasion were realistic. In Popperian terms, the

justifications, or rationalizations, for the original invasion have been

proven wrong.

by a reader on Thu, 12/07/2006 - 15:53 | [reply](#)

Cold comfort this probably ha

Cold comfort this probably hasn't worked out well in some "universes" other than ours. How quickly the US changes course in a variety of ways will depend, as it did in the Vietnam instance, on how things play out in the US Congress. It looks like Bush, at least for now, is going to resist ceding control of his fate and will change only to the extent the US Congress can successfully force the issue. Or perhaps the political pressure will be great and the changes come more quickly.

by [Michael Bacon](#) on Fri, 12/08/2006 - 23:08 | [reply](#)

The real questions

Do you still think that the War in Iraq was a good decision, that the Iraqis would welcome the liberating bombs, and that this war helps fighting the War on Terror? Do you still think that those opposing it were "idiotarians"?

by a reader on Sun, 08/19/2007 - 13:56 | [reply](#)

yes

yes

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 08/20/2007 - 00:23 | [reply](#)

Christians In The Middle East

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, has said that by invading Iraq the British and American governments have made life **more difficult** for Christians in the Middle East. In particular, large numbers of Christian refugees are leaving Iraq in fear for their lives. But it's not the Coalition forces whom they fear. The alleged responsibility of the British and Americans is indirect. What is it?

Islamists say that Christians are crusaders trying to dominate the Middle East along with the American and British governments. Hence the Islamists' campaign of terrorism against them is not unprovoked religious persecution and mass murder but simple self-defence. That the Islamists made that argument is not news. But why has Rowan Williams accepted it?

On the purely factual level he is simply wrong. For example, in Sudan, Islamists have been trying to **exterminate** Sudanese Christians on and off since 1955. The American government can't have prompted this campaign of genocide by invading Iraq. And, as **Daniel Pipes** points out, Christians have been disappearing from Iraq and most other countries in the region for several decades.

Williams blames the American and British governments because he has a cartoonish view of the world in which foreign people are only ever poor or violent because the rich Western countries have persecuted them. He doesn't treat Islamists in the Middle East as human beings, responsible for their actions, but only as ciphers, their deeply held convictions mere reflexes, determined by the decisions of Westerners. That's why he doesn't say that the Islamists are to blame for murdering and persecuting people, and instead blames the American and British governments who are trying to prevent the Islamists from doing that.

In doing so, he isn't just slandering the West, he is also doing a disservice to the Islamists by not expecting them to act as civilised human beings. And by publicly transferring responsibility for their crimes specifically to those who are trying to stop them, he is collaborating with them against their victims, including many Christians. Williams may be well-intentioned, but his moral relativism can only make the terrible situation in the Middle East worse.

You've said it all. Thanks.

by **AIS** on Tue, 01/09/2007 - 02:23 | [reply](#)

Reframing the issues

Hi, Apart from all the other misconceptions, offences against reason and confusion of ideas, originating from a relativist world view and its tendency to live exclusively in the here and now, is the hole in our historic awareness. And so it happens that without that knowledge we are re-framing the story of ourselves through the eyes and in the terminology of Islam. This apparently extends to the Anglican archbishop, which is a shame. He of all people should know better. We've now heard so often about our appalling record (crusades, imperialism, slave-trade, colonialism), that we have come to believe it ourselves and are repeating it in those terms. Perhaps it's time the truth be told, that without Christian civilization, built on the ruins of Athens and Rome, we would today be quite a different lot. And that we owe Christianity Universal Human Rights (not the U.N. as some are fond to point out), the rule of law, labour rights, science and all the other human achievements that are presently claimed by the children of the Enlightenment. Yes, we owe Christians in the East a great deal as well; they are the original inhabitants of Asia Minor and the Near East, that have been conquered, reduced to dhimmitude and left to fend for themselves. By the way, it is another misunderstanding of relativism to think that if you "talk yourself down", correspondingly you "talk the other up". Quite the contrary is the case!
Nice blog! Keep it up! Cheerio! Cassandra
<http://millennium-notes.blogspot.com/>

by **Cassandra** on Tue, 01/09/2007 - 13:25 | [reply](#)

Tolerance of Intolerance

Relativistic thinking leads to a peculiar problem. If one person cannot judge another's behavior because he does not live in his skin and cannot see through his eyes, then how should disagreements be settled? If each antagonist's conflicting idea about what each will do is determined by equally valid but differing perspectives, then a philosophy that starts out sounding tolerant to each, devolves into a philosophy that supports conflicting patterns of behavior, otherwise known as violence.

By uncritically accepting the Islamists perspective that Westerners are "Christian Crusaders", no doubt in the name of being tolerant, the Archbishop unwittingly accepts the legitimacy of the consequences of that worldview, namely the massacre of Christians -- surely the height of intolerance.

The Archbishop, like relativists who argue similarly, adopts a morally inconsistent and therefore morally wrong position: The tolerance of intolerance.

by a reader on Wed, 01/10/2007 - 00:54 | [reply](#)

Your comment

Really enjoyed and appreciated your comments! I used them today in a post by your leave. You can find them here:

<http://millennium-notes.blogspot.com/2007/01/impossible-made-possible-dictatorship.html>

If you have any objections or would again like to comment, please by all means.

Best, Cassandra.

by **Cassandra** on Fri, 01/12/2007 - 21:56 | [reply](#)

Microsoft, Again

Nick at CharcoalDesign is **not pleased with Microsoft.**

Mon, 01/29/2007 - 23:15 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

OFF TOPIC: Why do atheists inspire such hatred?

CNN asks: **Why do atheists inspire such hatred?**

by a reader on Tue, 02/06/2007 - 21:53 | [reply](#)

Hounded By Animal Rights Activists

Some animal rights activists are getting **hot and bothered** because some people sell coats made partly of dog fur – which is illegal in the United States.

Now, measures to prevent fraud (like selling fake fake fur under the guise of real fake fur) are one thing. But we think that people should be allowed to sell real dog and cat fur if they want to. Dogs were created by nature and human civilisation through natural and artificial selection. Dogs themselves can't generate new ideas, although people can train them to do stereotypical things like fetching sticks. So everything that might make a dog unique can be easily recreated by getting another dog of the same breed and treating it in a similar way.

If someone acquires a psychological attachment to a dog that they own – or for that matter to a picture that they own of a dog that never existed – then of course it should be a crime for someone else to destroy the dog or the picture. But for the same reason, if somebody chooses to kill their dog, that is an innocuous act. They can, for example, easily replace the dog with another that is just like it. If they also sell the dog's fur, everyone concerned is better off.

By contrast, human beings are capable of generating new ideas. So if somebody kills a human being they may have destroyed unique ideas that could make the world better. They cannot be replaced by simply treating another human in a similar way – even if that were a moral thing to do. Even if a person appears to have no good ideas, we may simply misunderstand the merits of his ideas. That is why we set up institutions, such as law and moral traditions, to ensure that choices between rival ideas can be made on the basis of reason, not violence. That is why **killing a human being is wrong**, except as a necessary consequence of defending another human being.

And that is why human beings have rights, while dogs and other animals do not.

Sun, 02/18/2007 - 16:03 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Let me be the first

to tell you that you are wrong on a number of counts. You have set

up an argument based on apples and oranges. (Humans are human and Dogs are, well, only dogs. So your point is that dogs are not humans?)

Dogs are not humans but neither are they "owned" by humans like a house or car or some other inanimate object. The simple fact that dogs, or elephants for that matter can be dominated/domesticated by humans who have exploited their natural species tendencies does not make it o.k. to kill them if their "owner" decides to on some whim, unless somehow the dog or the elephant has become crazed and is dangerous to others. I don't really have any problem if you personally want to wear a dead dog coat or elephant skin shoes, that's your choice, but please make sure that that dead dog/elephant died of natural causes.

If on the other hand we create a market for dog carcasses or the fur of dog you can be sure that some wrong-ideaed human will figure out a way to make a profit from it and establish the dog fur trading and coat making industry. A fine end for man's best friend and he doesn't have very many. And as far as dogs and other animals not having rights, who said they asked for any?

Go on about how every human being has worth and rights partly because he can think and explore new and fascinating ideas and there is no problem with that. But leave the dogs, cats, and elephants alone when it comes to the human fashion industry.

Or maybe you think we should harvest ivory, make cat head amulets to ward off evil spirits, or make dog fighting a national sport. I could make a case for each of those possibilities philosophically but it wouldn't make any of it morally right.

Of course you aren't talking about killing real dogs, only theoretical ones. So for the sake of argument go on about how you think dog fur is a wonderful all-weather coat for us naked apes. I don't mind one whit.

by a reader on Mon, 02/19/2007 - 01:47 | [reply](#)

creating novel ideas or feeling pain?

I'm not sure I agree that generating new ideas should be the criterion of whether causing harm to an entity is morally acceptable. The better criterion should be the ability to feel pain. If an animal, say a dog or a higher mammal, can feel pain due to its more evolved nervous system then causing pain, suffering or death to such animal should be considered morally wrong, unless it is demonstrably clear that it would prevent greater pain of suffering somewhere else.

by [AIS](#) on Mon, 02/19/2007 - 05:38 | [reply](#)

Pain

Pain isn't the same thing as suffering. Nerves in a test tube can

send electrical impulses. It's only *suffering* if there is a *mind* there to care about it.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us
Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 02/19/2007 - 08:48 | [reply](#)

Pain

AIS and Elliot:

Whether or not pain (in some sense) is relevant to morality in general, it is surely not relevant to the issue here, which is *killing* animals and wearing their fur. This can be done painlessly.

by **David Deutsch** on Mon, 02/19/2007 - 13:15 | [reply](#)

Pain

David,

I am curious as to your view of "how" relevant to morality is the issue of pain in killing animals. Assuming, for the sake of argument, that certain killing of dogs for fur is done in a way that involves a material amount of pain, would this then be relatively strong support for the view that such killing would be immoral?

by **Michael Bacon** on Mon, 02/19/2007 - 18:25 | [reply](#)

Re: Pain

Assuming, for the sake of argument, that certain killing of dogs for fur is done in a way that involves a material amount of pain, would this then be relatively strong support for the view that such killing would be immoral?

On that assumption (including the assumption that the pain is of the morally relevant kind - let me call it 'suffering'), the immoral thing would be inflicting that suffering, not killing the animal nor wearing its fur.

Suppose a certain amount of suffering was practically unavoidable in killing that type of animal. Then, strictly speaking, what was morally relevant would not actually be the suffering but the *difference* in suffering between that necessitated by the humane killing and that which would be experienced if the animal eventually died of natural causes.

Your assumption then leads to some conclusions that I don't think most animal rights supporters would like. For instance, not only would it be immoral to breed any such animals in the first place (because of the inevitable suffering that they would experience during their lives and deaths), but the only moral environmental policy would be to reduce the number of wild animals capable of

suffering to the absolute minimum needed for humans to thrive.

by **David Deutsch** on Mon, 02/19/2007 - 19:01 | [reply](#)

"rights"

The premise of this post and its comments have all been wrong. Man's rights are not derived from his ability to feel pain, they are also not derived from his capability or - willingness - to create ideas that others find useful. Instead it is the source of his ability to create ideas that are the cause of man's rights.

Rights can only be held by beings who are capable of reasoning and choosing.

The whole "animal rights" movement is based on a single --invalid-- syllogism, namely: men feel pain and have rights; animals feel pain; therefore, animals have rights. This argument is entirely false, because man's rights do not depend on his ability to feel pain; they depend on his ability to think.

Rights are ethical principles applicable only to beings capable of reason and choice. There is only one fundamental right: a man's right to his own life. To live successfully, man must use his rational faculty--which is exercised by choice. The choice to think can be negated only by the use of physical force. To survive and prosper, men must be free from the initiation of force by other men--free to use their own minds in guidance of their choices and actions. Rights protect men against the use of force by other men.

None of this is relevant to animals. Animals do not survive by rational thought (nor by sign languages taught to them by psychologists). They survive through inborn reflexes and sensory-perceptual association. They cannot reason. They cannot learn a code of ethics. A lion is not immoral for eating a zebra (or even for attacking and killing a man). Predation is their natural and only means of survival; they do not have the capacity to learn any other.

Only man has the power to deal with other members of his own species by voluntary means: rational persuasion and a code of ethics rather than physical force. To claim that man's use of animals is immoral is to claim that we have no right to our own lives and that we must sacrifice our welfare for the sake of creatures who cannot think or grasp the concept of morality. It is to elevate amoral animals to a moral level higher than ourselves - a flagrant contradiction. Of course, it is proper not to cause animals gratuitous suffering. But this is not the same as inventing a bill of rights for them at our expense.

The granting of fictional rights to animals is not an innocent error. We do not have to speculate about the motive, because the animal "rights" advocates have revealed it quite openly. Again from PETA: "Mankind is the biggest blight on the face of the earth"; "I do not believe that a human being has a right to life"; "I would rather have

medical experiments done on our children than on animals." These

self-styled lovers of life do not love animals; rather, they hate men.

The animal "rights" terrorists are like the Unabomber and Oklahoma City bombers. They are not idealists seeking justice, but nihilists seeking destruction for the sake of destruction. They do not want to uplift mankind, to help him progress from the swamp to the stars. They want mankind's destruction; they want him not just to stay in the swamp but to disappear into its mud.

There is only one proper answer to such people: to declare proudly and defiantly, in the name of morality, a man's right to his life, and his liberty.

Editor's note: This comment appears to have been copied from [this](#) post by Edwin A. Locke at the Ayn Rand Institute.

by a reader on Tue, 02/20/2007 - 06:52 | [reply](#)

Rand

Are you a big fan of Ayn Rand?

Also, why do you put your stance forward as disagreeing with the original post, when you largely agree? (It said an important thing was that people have ideas. It denied animal rights.)

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 02/20/2007 - 08:30 | [reply](#)

Pain & Rights

I think the issue is less who or what has rights and more the morality of man inflicting pain where doing so is unnecessary to achieve legitimate purposes. Notwithstanding that animal rights activists might not like the logical conclusions that could be drawn from such an analysis, I think David's statement that "what was morally relevant would not actually be the suffering but the difference in suffering between that necessitated by the humane killing and that which would be experienced if the animal eventually died of natural causes," is an appropriate way to look at these types of issues.

by [Michael Bacon](#) on Tue, 02/20/2007 - 14:38 | [reply](#)

Live dog

If you read today's news you will be enlightened to see that a dog, a laborador retriever, was credited by three mountain climbers on Mount Hood for saving their live while they waited for technology devices to locate them. If they had instead depended on animal fur, such as hair of the dog, they likely would have perished.

Live dogs are better than dead ones.

I agree on the rights point. It is ridiculous to speak of animal rights, but there we go again anthropomorphizing.

As to human morality, there is a strong case for fostering appreciation of the dog species. Dogs get it, reason or no reason. A good human is one to be loved. A dog has no silly ego which tells flawed thinking men that they have rights above others, the others being classified as lesser humans or lower animals. Dogs on the other hand treat all good humans as one and the same. Thinking or not, dogs would have never caused the holocaust, a thousand ugly wars, slavery, child abuse or a million incidents of race baiting.

Dogs would gladly give you the fur off their back but what thinking human needs it anyway. Goose down is a much more effective insulator and mink is preferred by 99 percent of women as a fur of choice. Dogs, live ones, just give warmth and service and return the love of a decent master. A dog will go with you anywhere, even to the top of Mount Hood in a blizzard. Who knows what stupid humans were doing up there in a blizzard, but the laborador willingly followed.

Meanwhile PETA and this board and other misguided humans were sitting on their thumbs debating animal rights.

In a blizzard give me a live dog any day.

by a reader on Tue, 02/20/2007 - 14:41 | [reply](#)

Re: "rights" and Rand

In reply to the Randian reader: making choices (in the sense you intend - for instance, not the kind of choice that dogs or present-day computers can make) is itself an irreducibly creative act, as is using reason (in the sense you intend). So we are not in disagreement on that fundamental point.

Your comment appears to have been copied from [this](#) post by Edwin A. Locke at the Ayn Rand Institute. But to give credit where credit is due, we have inserted an attribution after your comment.

by [Editor](#) on Tue, 02/20/2007 - 15:26 | [reply](#)

Technology Devices

Certain trained dogs **are** "technology devices" in the relevant sense -- a tool used by humans who have knowledge of how to use it, and who make it themselves (via dog training). Destroying them is destruction of valuable, private property. Which is perfectly legal if you are the owner, and rightly so: maybe you're making an even more valuable movie. Or maybe you are risking the death of that dog in a rescue, without its signed consent.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 02/20/2007 - 20:17 | [reply](#)

Three dog night

To clarify, in the Mt. Hood case, the dog was warm-blooded and furry and hence warm. The three climbers huddled around the warm dog throughout the freezing night. The dog kept them warm enough to survive until technology devices which they were wearing were located the next day by the mountain rescue team.

I don't know if rescue dogs were involved. As for signed consent, a pawprint backed up by a wagging tail is sufficient.

by a reader on Tue, 02/20/2007 - 20:44 | [reply](#)

Live Dogs

"Live dogs are better than dead ones."

Assume for the sake of argument that the climbers could only have saved themselves by killing the dog and there was no way to do this in a timely fashion other than by inflicting a great deal of pain. In that case a live dog isn't better than a dead one, and the infliction of pain to kill the dog would still have been a "moral" response.

by [Michael Bacon](#) on Tue, 02/20/2007 - 22:02 | [reply](#)

Bravo The World

Dogs seem to fall on a scale between tools and comforters.

The dog that saves mountaineers from death is merely a sophisticated tool. Likewise a dog that provides hair is a tool (or a resource).

The dog owner who is neurotically attached to her animal is using it as a comforter. It would be cruel to kill it just as it would be cruel to steal a child's teddy bear.

(Hopefully nobody is suggesting that stuffed toys have rights.)

However if she'd understood that humanity doesn't depend on having emotions but upon having thoughts and ideas and choices then she might not have become attached in the first place. She might have been saved a great deal of inconvenience and veterinary bills.

At present, when people are exhorted to treat other people 'like human beings', they are really being asked to **treat people like dogs** (i.e. to have regard for their emotional states, but not necessarily to try to take them seriously.)

This has got to be one of the most **difficult** prejudices to **set right**.

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Wed, 02/21/2007 - 00:00 | [reply](#)

What is a 'mind'?

OK I will call it suffering instead of pain. I do agree that you need a mind to feel the nerve signals etc. as suffering. Yet I do not understand how you can be so certain that dogs have not already got a primitive mind, mind enough to feel suffering in the sense above?

I also accept the point of Dr. Deutsch that suffering alone is not sufficient as a criteria versus the argument for extermination as an end to natural or otherwise sufferings that will ensue. That an argument based on uniqueness, "individuality" is needed for instance as a source of creating new ideas.

My point again is how we can be so certain that a being conscious enough to feel some sort of suffering for instance- given the assumption that such being exist- won't contain "enough" originality as an "individual" of its species? That maybe it is more skillful in hunting and even "thinks up" an "insightful" maneuver in one of its hunts at the spur of the moment that would ensure its survival against all odds? Would that not be a crude primitive "idea" of some sort?

Or that it if it is capable of suffering, as an assumption, that its instinct for survival might not cause him immense fear and suffering at the moment of extermination once it its self-sustaining survival instincts become active? That at that moment it senses somewhat what is going to happen to it soon afterwards?

I guess it all boils down to this: We have no clue what a mind is really? No real model of a mind. So how can you be so certain to speak of an higher mammal as property or mere reflexive machine? Given the odds, I think an argument can be made in favor of restraining from hurting higher animals unnecessarily on moral, given that we basically have no clue of what is a mind and how it works, for these three reasons:

1- the banality of the alternative act, like fur coats, does not justify the **possibility** of inflicting suffering on a primitive "mind" enough to suffer and unique enough to deserve existence.

2- Higher animals do exhibit behaviour that seem like they are semi-conscious, They do exhibit fear, they have some kind of memory etc. **You** claim all of these are mere reflexes, but there is really no reason as far as I can see why we should accept such claim.

3- From an evolutionary perspective your view leaves the question of how man's consciousness, self-consciousness, mind and idea producing facility arose at all given that whatever exists among the rest of the species on the face of the earth is mere blind reflexes. Was it a miracle? Wouldn't it make sense to **assume** that we as a species are capable of producing ideas at this immense scale, that does indeed set us apart from all other animals, as a result of many many little- I don't know- primitive "ideas" and "skills" of specific members of lower species, "individuals" in a crude sense, in their battle of survival that were caused and in turn-by merely surviving and adding their genes to the gene pool wher otherwise they should

have been dead- causing the growth of the nervous system untill it

reached this turning point?

To be sure I definitely agree that man has achieved a unique feature that sets her apart from all animals completely and that there is a huge gap between us and all other animals. I am simply not willing to deny the existence of hierarchy on the other side of the gap and that it could nevertheless be significant on the moral value of our behaviour to them. I am not willing to adamantly press all that is on the other side basically to the level of vegetable. The fact that the gap exists is important of course. It also makes humans alone to act under the domain of morality for instance. That is why suffering induced by natural causes or other animals do not enter the equations of morality. Animals and the world in general is amoral. There is no *evil* in the way the rest of the world acts.

I also want to add that I did not suggest pain or suffering to be the basis for rights. I only argued in connection to moral behaviour and the two are not the same thing. If you see another human drowning, say, you have the right as a free man to walk away and not risk your existence but it would be morally wrong nevertheless.

by [AIS](#) on Wed, 02/21/2007 - 17:40 | [reply](#)

Human Rights

Animals do not warrant the same respect, dignity, and rights that humans do, but that does not mean that we should not treat animals with compassion. AIS makes a good point.

As importantly, those who argue that animals do not deserve respect, have hardly convinced most people that dogs should be treated as mere tools. Therefore if someone walks down the street with a dog fur coat on, he is forcing others to watch the spectacle, something that is very offensive to most people in the United States and Britain.

Before damaging other people (not just animals) by wearing dog fur coats, you need to convince people that what you are doing is right.

And you have not that. So what you are advocating is wrong.

by a reader on Wed, 02/21/2007 - 18:14 | [reply](#)

Offending

You say walking around in fur is "damaging" people. What is your reason for this? Because, you said, it would offend them deeply.

I do agree some people would be deeply offended.

But I am deeply offended by the notion that the offensive should be illegal. And I am deeply offended by this sort of "burden of acceptability" which requires new or unusual things to justify themselves, and otherwise suppresses them.

That certainly is not one of the principles of America.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us
Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 02/21/2007 - 20:16 | [reply](#)

Minds

AIS:

Animals have been known to do few things that a present-day computer programmer would have difficulty imagining how to write. Present day computer programs aren't intelligent, at all, although they sometimes fake it.

The exceptions are all evolved knowledge found in every animal of that species, not learned knowledge. For example, if we observe dragonflies doing very advanced flying maneuvers, which we don't understand the aerodynamics of, then that's some cool knowledge. And it's easily explained by evolution: dragon flies that do slightly more advanced flying maneuvers are favored to breed more (due to winning more fights). But it's very badly explained by intelligence. All (or most) dragonflies learn this idea? Which is so complex humans are having trouble figuring out what it is?

We can discuss any specific animal trait if you like.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us
Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 02/21/2007 - 20:40 | [reply](#)

Here's a thought.

Human beings are often bastards, and some people build up indignation about this, which they find it convenient to release in the form of slippery arguments for animal rights.

The slipperiness of these arguments comes from the desire to make a loud noise rather than a point. The real purpose is not to make a sincere argument for equality with animals, but to remark on human failings.

I also offer you [a thread about PETA from b3ta](#).

by Felix_ on Wed, 02/21/2007 - 23:05 | [reply](#)

Deeply Offended

"I am deeply offended by the notion that the offensive should be illegal."

And who can disagree with this? But illegality isn't the issue, is it?

The point isn't whether wearing dog fur should be illegal - it shouldn't. Nor is the main question, in my view, whether great efforts should be undertaken to try to make illegal the unnecessarily painful killing of dogs for fur. Rather, it has more to do with personal behavior. Is it fundamentally moral for me to purchase these dog-fur lined coats knowing that unnecessary pain was inflicted to obtain the fur? If there are other reasonable alternatives, I say no. If there are no other reasonable alternatives, such purchases would seem appropriate. In the end, for each of us, morality is an individual endeavor.

by **Michael Bacon** on Thu, 02/22/2007 - 02:11 | [reply](#)

Uncertainty

Elliot,

I agree about insects for instance with you completely. They are one end of the spectrum. The other end is us and we know for sure that we have a mind because we **are** these minds. That we are discussing this itself is predicated on it. All I am saying is since we have no real objecting model to understand what mind is I don't see how we can say this with certainty about higher forms of animals, like chimps, say, and that this uncertainty has moral consequences in the way we should treat them.

There are for instance reports of apes, even elephants acting as though they can recognize themselves in the mirror. [Link](#). I don't see how you can dismiss all of this with such certainty.

by **AIS** on Thu, 02/22/2007 - 03:26 | [reply](#)

Naturally induced suffering irrelevant in moral consideration

I also wanted to add that I disagree with Dr. Deutsch's claim that natural suffering should be considered as a relevant factor in deciding what actions are morally justifiable. There is an important fallacy in this line of argument.

One conclusion of such argument is that it would perhaps be more justified to kill an animal painlessly to guard it against suffering by natural causes like disease-**assuming** of course that they are capable of suffering. (which we simply do not know either way in case of higher mammals at least)

There is nothing in the above argument that wouldn't apply to humans as well, even en masse and without their consent. Partly for this reason, it seems to me, **The World** concludes that suffering is not the right criterion. They propose the capacity to produce ideas and the uniqueness of the individual and its potential instead as the reason replacing the inducement of suffering.

I don't think this is the right conclusion.

Let's follow this argument. Whatever reason is given why idea creation is worthy of protection against extermination, the fact that we the idea creators are ourselves the results partly also of the

actions of species in the past with complex nervous systems and

brains could be seen as a proof that their use of their brain- and not just the information encoded in their genes- makes them worthy of the same protection. (after all that was the point of evolving brains in the first place. Genes alone couldn't handle the complexity of the environment efficiently enough). Even lower forms of life who are basically nothing but their genetic code, aren't they themselves each an embodiment of a separate idea?

Which leads to this idea: Natural selection works by killing as many such "ideas" as it can so only the fittest can survive. Why can't the same be applied to idea creators. Shouldn't we consider actually attempting to exterminate deliberately as many of them as we can to ensure only the fittest idea creators populate the future and so ensure substantially better quality ideas to be created by them? These assumptions also could lead to some conclusions you wouldn't like.

The similarity of the last quote is of course deliberate because the two lines of reasoning are very similar and both entail the same wrong idea. Mixing the immoral acts of nature with moral acts based on choice of self-conscious beings like us who can form sophisticated enough ideas including the concept of morality itself.

Ironically precisely because it is reasonable to argue that any being that is capable of suffering must be complex enough, to have a primitive kind of "mind", to be a self contained entity, "mentally" segregated from the rest of the world at least to some degree, that it is vulnerable to natural suffering. Eliminating that self-sustained system to end the suffering would place the actions done *against* it outside the domain of morality. It is not dissimilar to the case of a changing system. It must remain partly unchanged to be defined as a system in that context. So killing an entity to prevent it from natural suffering is not an option viable to moral questions and by the same token natural suffering is a necessary part of any being that can be the subject of moral study. Therefore the natural world is amoral and, so far as we can say, only human actions are prone to judgement by moral standards (but higher forms of animals could themselves be the subject of moral treatment without *their actions* being prone to moral judgement. In the latter sense they are part of the natural world.)

Interestingly ascribing moral value to natural acts is precisely what comprises the very essence of evil in the cultural and religious traditions handed in to us from antiquity. Satan for instance literally means the accuser, that is, the one who accuses the structure of reality as whole - God in symbolic religious jargon of you want- as being the ultimate evil and the only real cause of injustice. This leads almost immediately to concluding that even the worst kinds of deliberate criminal action is not only justifiable since it ends this suffering inherent in creation but actually has the highest moral value.

I think that is also what is lurking underneath all oppositions to free society and market economy who are adapted to the amoral natural state of "unfairness" by identifying it as moral vice. As it has been

shown over and over again in history they end up justifying much

more horrible deliberate crimes at the end...and for good reasons.

by [AIS](#) on Thu, 02/22/2007 - 03:28 | [reply](#)

Re: Naturally induced suffering irrelevant

the fact that we the idea creators are ourselves the results partly also of the actions of species in the past ... could be seen as a proof that their use of their brain ... makes them worthy of the same protection.

A species that has the potential to evolve into humanlike beings doesn't have the same moral status as human beings.

Why can't the same be applied to idea creators. Shouldn't we consider actually attempting to exterminate deliberately as many of them as we can to ensure only the fittest idea creators populate the future and so ensure substantially better quality ideas to be created by them?

Rather than murdering idea creators we simply 'kill' false ideas through criticism. For example, the idea that animals are aware of their pain or emotional status.

by the same token natural suffering is a necessary part of any being that can be the subject of moral study

Doesn't this imply that human suffering is inevitable? If so, can you give an example of a way of suffering which can't be avoided?

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Thu, 02/22/2007 - 06:55 | [reply](#)

Planned Obsolescence

When machines surpass humans in all capacities to generate new and fruitful ideas all individuals will be as irrelevant as a dog fur collar worn for fashion's sake.

Fear not this is only a intellectual theory based on the above debates and future machines will critique it better than any of us can at this point in time.

Of course it is possible that machines may grow to keep us for other reasons than our crudely formed reasoning minds.

by a reader on Thu, 02/22/2007 - 22:45 | [reply](#)

Murder is Easier

Rather than murdering idea creators we simply 'kill' false ideas through criticism.

Tom Robinson

Let's assume for a moment that it is very likely that a person will

continue to generate unproductive and wrong ideas (say he has a worsening condition like Alzheimers).

Wouldn't it be cheaper (and more ethically justified) just to kill him, instead of wasting valuable time and energy on killing his ideas and feeding him?

And if future machines are predictably better idea generators than we are, why shouldn't they exterminate all of us biological creatures. Their ethical justification would be to help their machine descendants to be exposed to better ideas. Survival of the fittest?

by a reader on Fri, 02/23/2007 - 17:21 | [reply](#)

A few points

1. Granted animals are not the same as humans. But to suggest that animals have no rights whatsoever seems a bit extreme, since this suggests there is no limit at all to what people should be able to do to animals. Should people be able to torture dogs just for fun, for example? I would think the answer to such questions, as some have suggested above, depends on whether animals are capable of real suffering and on whether this suffering is comparable to how a human suffers. This is an important philosophical question which is often ignored, both by animal rights activists (they simply take it for granted animals feel pain just as humans do) and by animal rights cynics (such as the post above which is only interested in animals' ideas and not in the question of whether animals can suffer).

2. To claim that laws against murder exist to protect the free development of ideas is not only very rare, but also, it seems to me, very odd. Surely, humans have some kind of intrinsic value and right to life (or at least so we assume) apart from the use of humans as a means to something else (i.e. the creation of ideas useful for other people). So, even if it can be proven that some person can never have any useful ideas, surely that in no way diminishes his right not to be killed.

3. What in fact is the argument for the assumption that ideas and knowledge play such a prime role in morality and existence? What about other factors, such as happiness? For example, is not a culture with decent happy people who do not make any advancement for hundreds of years better off than a culture with unhappy people who create a lot of technological inventions? Is creation really the only or main object of human life? Why?

4. David's argument that if animal's suffering is bad, and if an animal suffers when it dies, it would be bad to breed animals, seems incorrect. It would seem more logical to balance an animal's suffering against its experience of pleasure. If an animal enjoys more pleasure than pain during his life, then one might argue that animal's life is a good thing, and if the pain is more than the pleasure its life would be a bad thing. (This is ignoring any value animals might have for humans, but that's a different issue.)

5. I think the main reason it's ok to kill an animal (at least

painlessly) is that an animal does not foresee its own death. So for an animal it's not really a terrible experience to be killed. For humans it is, because they suffer by the knowledge that they will die. Also, a human's life has continuity. For a human it is important to finish certain projects, such as learning as much as possible, seeing his kids and grandkids grow up, etc. For an animal it doesn't work that way. Also, when a human is killed his friends and family suffer, whereas for animals I would think that is not (or much less) the case. As for the question of causing unnecessary pain to animals, I think the extent to which that should be legal depends, as said above, on the question to what extent different kinds of animals can genuinely suffer. And I think we do not yet know the answer to that question, but it is important to think about that. In any case, I do think that even if animals can suffer that is of less intensity and importance than humans suffering. And animal suffering can be justified at least partially to the extent that it helps humans (i.e. cure disease, provide food and fur, etc.).

6. The notion that one can "prove" that animals just have no rights is scientism. We have to argue about what is the best way to treat animals legally and otherwise, and one can't evade that question by some pseudologic reasoning. Rights are not objective natural "things", but rather are a human invention, a tool used to discuss and describe moral reasoning and moral conclusions.

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Sat, 02/24/2007 - 04:30 | [reply](#)

Dog Torture

Should people be able to torture dogs just for fun, for example?

Torturing dogs is not fun. So how could a person torture dogs for the fun of it? Why are you worried that someone would?

I see that an irrational person could have a dog hurting ritual. One reason this should be stopped is because it is hurting the *human*. That is enough reason.

That's the moral aspect. There's also the law. Should this irrational person be jailed for hurting himself and destroying his own property? No more than I should be jailed for destroying my Cinema Display (which is much nicer than a dog).

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sat, 02/24/2007 - 08:09 | [reply](#)

Avoidable?

Tom,

A species that has the potential to evolve into humanlike

beings doesn't have the same moral status as human beings.

I did not say that it does. The question was would they have **any** moral status at all?

Rather than murdering idea creators we simply 'kill' false ideas through criticism.

Sure, but that does not explain why the other alternative is **wrong**, as in

killing a human being is wrong, except as a necessary consequence of defending another human being.

To say any idea can prove to have merits that are not recognized does not really provide a justification. even in the most non-violent and fair traditions there is limits of efficiency, many ideas could be forgotten only to be discovered later *when their time has come* (so to speak). So one can argue if an idea has merit it will eventually come up and be accepted once the need for it arises. So- it could be argued- what's the big deal? Why spend so much time and energy to ensure non-violence and idea preservation?

Harsh natural selection in the most brutal fashion could still be viewed by some to be as efficient a tool as any other in getting the meritorious ideas out and distinguishing them from the not-meritorious ones by speeding up the need for them. I still think this approach can't really provide a **moral** basis

...can you give an example of a way of suffering which can't be avoided?

What do you mean by being avoided? I guess any particular event that causes suffering is in principle avoidable (even death I guess, once technology advances that far.)

But in practice how can every single one of them be avoided by pre-planning for every single individual at all times? Accidents happen and new forms of problems emerge by necessity and the unknown will always remain there. At any given time and for any given individual there are myriads of things that can and will cause him/her suffering even if all of them were in principle avoidable by itself. (Not to say that an individual who is so sheltered never to be challenged enough to **risk** suffering won't produce any interesting ideas after a while either.)

by [AIS](#) on Sun, 02/25/2007 - 01:35 | [reply](#)

Uniqueness

AIS wrote:

Let's follow this argument. Whatever reason is given why idea creation is worthy of protection against extermination, the fact that we the idea creators are ourselves the results partly also of the actions of species in the past with complex nervous systems and brains

could be seen as a proof that their use of their brain- and not just the information encoded in their genes- makes them worthy of the same protection. (after all that was the point of evolving brains in the first place. Genes alone couldn't handle the complexity of the environment efficiently enough). Even lower forms of life who are basically nothing but their genetic code, aren't they themselves each an embodiment of a separate idea?

The point of evolving brains was to process information quickly according to particular set theories contained in their genes. For example, a beaver's brain processes information about where logs are how a particular log should be carved so that it fits into his dam and so on. But the beaver can't understand how to make a dam from other materials. His theories on how to ake a dam are fixed by his genes and don't change. As such, he is interchangeable with other beavers.

As for the assertion that a given worm, Fred, is unique this seems obviously false. The information on how to make any given worm is contained in worm genes, so we can make a worm that is identical to Fred in every respect through genetic engineering.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sun, 02/25/2007 - 16:14 | [reply](#)

Happiness and Knowledge

Henry Sturman wrote:

1. Granted animals are not the same as humans. But to suggest that animals have no rights whatsoever seems a bit extreme, since this suggests there is no limit at all to what people should be able to do to animals. Should people be able to torture dogs just for fun, for example? I would think the answer to such questions, as some have suggested above, depends on whether animals are capable of real suffering and on whether this suffering is comparable to how a human suffers. This is an important philosophical question which is often ignored, both by animal rights activists (they simply take it for granted animals feel pain just as humans do) and by animal rights cynics (such as the post above which is only interested in animals' ideas and not in the question of whether animals can suffer).

Let's take it as given that we don't know whether animals suffer or not and are unlikely to learn at any point in the near future. Let's also take for granted the idea that animals can suffer in the service of making you criticism of the post as strong as possible. So we have to take actions that we think are likely to reduce suffering, such as only killing dogs for fur under general anesthetic or something like that. We would also presumably prevent people from torturing animals. But by the same token we might consider it right to do things that we know will make animals suffer in the interests of preventing avoidable human suffering, e.g. - testing medicine on

animals. And human suffering would still rank above animal suffering since it would also inhibit the growth of knowledge.

2. To claim that laws against murder exist to protect the free development of ideas is not only very rare, but also, it seems to me, very odd. Surely, humans have some kind of intrinsic value and right to life (or at least so we assume) apart from the use of humans as a means to something else (i.e. the creation of ideas useful for other people). So, even if it can be proven that some person can never have any useful ideas, surely that in no way diminishes his right not to be killed.

The first point that you think there is some transcendent value in a human being above and beyond ideas is unanswerable as it stands as you have not explained what you think that value consists of. When you come up with a theory we can discuss it until then I have no reason to change my position. As for the second point: how can we be sure that a person can never have any useful ideas unless he is completely brain dead? Nobody is psychic and so nobody has access to another person's ideas. Consider a homeless drug addict who roots through bins for food. Perhaps he will learn that what is doing is not a very good idea and will become a better person and develop new knowledge about how and why people end up in such distressing circumstances.

3. What in fact is the argument for the assumption that ideas and knowledge play such a prime role in morality and existence? What about other factors, such as happiness? For example, is not a culture with decent happy people who do not make any advancement for hundreds of years better off than a culture with unhappy people who create a lot of technological inventions? Is creation really the only or main object of human life? Why?

Let's suppose that totally uncreative people can be happy. I think this is a dubious proposition, but let's grant it anyway. Well, their happiness can only consist of psychological feelings generated according to a fixed set of ideas, dispositions, feelings and so on. Because they generate no new knowledge their influence on the rest of the world will be finite and indeed sooner or later their civilisation will be totally destroyed by something that catches them by surprise, e.g. - the Sun will undergo enormous changes in a few billion years that will make Earth uninhabitable for human life. So their lives will consist of pushing a finite set of buttons for pleasure for a finite time, after which they will all die and no new people of that type will ever exist again. They will also be stuck with a finite set of buttons to push to get themselves out of unhappy states and it is a lot easier to get things wrong and be unhappy than to get them right and be happy. So if a person gets in an unhappy state and pushes all the buttons and stays unhappy then he is stuck in a polluted waterway without any means of propulsion.

Now consider a culture that grows new knowledge. First, each time

they invent a new idea or technowhatsit they have to consider their new situation to be better than the old one or they would scrap the new idea or technowhatsit. The growth of knowledge is potentially open-ended so they could have an infinite number of such improvements. Furthermore they will become happy in new ways that don't involve pushing the finite buttons on the pleasure machine in their genes and their current ideas. For example, quantum theory is a lot cooler than classical physics and makes people who understand it happy in a way that somebody who doesn't understand quantum physics won't understand. So I don't think it can be true that everyone in a culture that is growing knowledge is unhappy. And the unhappy people will have more chances to make themselves happy than they can possibly explore.

Now let's return to the culture that doesn't grow knowledge. Knowledge can grow by accident: a person can make a mistake and then decide it is an improvement. For example, a person can mispronounce some word and find the result funny or illuminating. Perhaps this is how Freud came up with his psychological theories and I have little doubt that lots of jokes come from this process. And then of course there is the famous story of how Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin, how Roentgen discovered X-rays and so on. With finite knowledge mistakes are bound to be made and some will be regarded as improvements by those who make them? So where does this new knowledge go? The only answer can be somebody has to deliberately squash it, which will make its originator unhappy. So I don't think a culture that fails to generate knowledge can be a happy place.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sun, 02/25/2007 - 17:11 | [reply](#)

How did it get there?

Alan,

Let's forget about the worm, but how do you think the information to make a dam got into the beaver's genes?

If you go enough back in the line that led to beavers you'll get a point where no dam building information was coded.

How did it get there?

How could it ever have got there if, as you say, every member of all the species in that line were always interchangeable to each other given all the changes of their environments and the emerging threats to their survivals?

by [AIS](#) on Sun, 02/25/2007 - 20:43 | [reply](#)

By Accident

How did genes enabling dams to be built become incorporated into beavers?

A descendant of beavers had a series of genes that mutated. In a given environment, these genes increased the frequency of dam-

creating behaviors which helped the organism to survive. So the

behaviors were selected for and therefore genes promoting those behaviors were selected for, as well.

An idea, namely that building dams is sometimes useful, was created by accident by evolution, but it was nonetheless an interesting idea.

So the evolutionary process generates ideas, and this argues that evolutionary processes should be protected and respected. And the growth of ideas and anything that generates them should be protected -- including animals species' as a whole.

This could imply that the beaver species should be protected, because it evolves, but it (unfortunately) does not argue that any given beaver should be protected. My intuition tells me that a given beaver should have some protection if in the hands of a human (e.g. protection from torture).

AIS can you help me formulate an argument as to why an individual beaver, as opposed to animals as a whole, should be protected, at least to some extent?

To those who would give an individual higher mammal no rights at all, I don't need to be reminded that humans should have considerably more rights. That is obvious to me.

I'm wondering why it is ethically wrong to torture an individual beaver, or for that matter an elephant or a primate, if it gives a human being pleasure to do so? Why do we (in my view appropriately) react with revulsion to the sight of a higher mammal being tortured?

by a reader on Mon, 02/26/2007 - 16:57 | [reply](#)

Moral judgements precede preferences

why it is ethically wrong to torture an individual beaver, or for that matter an elephant or a primate, if it gives a human being pleasure to do so?

I think that there's a false premise implicit in that question. It is that preferences precede moral judgements. In other words, preferences are a given, a parameter to be input into our moral theories, which then produce an output such as: yes, you may do it if it gives you pleasure, or no you may not do it even if it gives you pleasure. And it's true that moral theories may sometimes have such implications. But that conceals the more important underlying fact that in reality, how much we are pleased or repelled by doing a thing depends on how we judge it morally. For a human, the moral judgement precedes the preference.

That is, I think, why Elliot was asking above why a person would want to torture an animal. Asking whether they 'would be right to do it if they took pleasure in it' may not make sense in the absence of a clear theory of why they might be right to take pleasure in it.

by **David Deutsch** on Mon, 02/26/2007 - 18:05 | [reply](#)

Autonomy and Happiness -- Important Principles

"Asking whether they 'would be right to do it if they took pleasure in it' may not make sense in the absence of a clear theory of why they might be right to take pleasure in it"

Human happiness is an ethical value in its own right and human autonomy is also an ethical value. People often honor others' preferences, by allowing them to pursue actions in pursuit of their preferences, because doing so often increases human freedom and joy. Morality is often, but not always, increased when human freedom is increased.

A person may believe that his happiness and autonomy are increased by folding and unfolding a piece of paper 3 times and/or by torturing an animal. If no other more important ethical principles are violated, I am disinclined to try to discourage someone from folding and unfolding a piece of paper three times, if paper-folding seems to cause broad smiles after the creases are made. The folder's happiness and freedom from coercion are important ethical values to me.

On the other hand, if someone were to torture a Bonobo (intelligent primate) or an elephant, or even when natural phenomena injure these animals, I become upset.

The fact that I become upset in either case means that I must believe that intelligent mammals have some right not to be injured, unless other more important principles are violated in protecting them. Somehow the right of a torturer to autonomy and short-lived happiness does not seem to me sufficient to justify intentionally injuring an intelligent mammal, unless there are more compelling ethical principles involved.

But it is not obvious to me why I want to give an individual elephant at least a few rights to protection, even if it violates a torturer's ethical right to pursue worthy goals like increasing his own autonomous action and happiness. I was asking AIS or someone else to help me formulate why an individual intelligent mammal, like an elephant, should have some protection from people and even natural phenomena, unless *more* important and relevant human values are compromised.

by a reader on Mon, 02/26/2007 - 19:59 | [reply](#)

One Little Thing

This isn't the whole answer, but: neither repeated paper folder nor elephant torture are much fun. If my friend was doing either, I'd be strongly inclined to discourage him from continuing. That doesn't mean psychological pressure, or force, only advice. I don't see any basis for choosing one or the other extreme: leave them to rot, or feel force is OK.

One consequence of this is that he may voluntarily change his

behavior to something that he (now) considers better. That's a result we can all applaud.

Another is that he may engage in rational discussion, and give reasons for what he does. If so, I can argue with him. Then one of us may be persuaded by the other, and we'll all agree and be happy. And if no one is persuaded, that's OK too: I'll be content not to use force knowing my **weak arguments** that **failed to persuade** are a very poor justification for using force. And I won't feel bad, because I will have a **way forward**, a **path available to make progress**: all I have to do is improve my arguments.

That's a wonderful path because it has the happy consequence that the more I progress along that path, the more I'm creating the chance that if I actually was mistaken for some reason, I'd find out.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 02/27/2007 - 21:25 | [reply](#)

individual higher animals

One of the reasons I chose beaver over a worm was that this genetic information concerns behaviour of the animal. My point is the mutant individual is therefor a bit different than all the other ones. Also it is the change in environment that distinguishes a "mutant" from the rest. (there are many "irrelevant mutations" going around. Also in higher mammals the differences ultimately can concern behaviours. I guess that means that any individual of that animal can potentially be the one, or better said, be among the ones in consecutive generations who would bring about a behavioural change, a sort of very primitive "idea creator" of sorts. The best answer I can give would be something like this: I see morality a specifically human trait that need not, and IMO should not, be based on any more abstract and universal grounds than the specific features of us humans. Like say sexual drive. There is no need to search for it in the stars. We, through evolution, have acquired two features. One is that we have a developed notion of ourselves and this gives us a complicated instinct of self preservation that we could generalize, conceptualize and so on. The second is that we can put ourselves in another person's shoe and identify with him/her on an almost instinctive level. "Person" here would be anything that **looks** intelligent and anthropomorphic enough to our senses. The two together drive us towards an attitude to preserve the other (related to the idea of a "self" separated enough from the world to have independent existence) and also to reduce his/her suffering (related to the idea of a "self" complicated enough to actually suffer) as much as possible. We need to act this way to be whole and functioning to our best potential.

Now, in the absence of objective model of minds etc. and the possibility that higher mammals might actually suffer and be the

way they look and tickle those instincts in us I think a case could be

made against unnecessarily commit acts that could be torture and sources of suffering.

of course if we eventually manage to construct a good enough objective and scientific understanding of minds that are reliable (in the sense our best scientific theories are reliable at any given time) to be the basis of our judgements and if it so happens that that theory tells us that humans are alone in having such features, then this case shouldn't be considered as valid anymore no matter what our "instincts" continue to tell us.

I guess you can say that would define a certain category of rights for them: the right to not be potentially suffered for no good reason. But I am reluctant to talk about rights, because there are other categories of rights that have completely separate sources (like the right to not to be killed painlessly , as Dr. Deutsch pointed out) many of which are based on attributes that clearly only humans posses.

Besides rights and morality there is also the concept of compassion that although has overlaps with the other two (as they do with each other) should be considered independent from them too. But that's another story.

by [AIS](#) on Tue, 02/27/2007 - 23:38 | [reply](#)

Thanks

"...guess that means that any individual of that animal can potentially be the one, or better said, be among the ones in consecutive generations who would bring about a behavioural change, a sort of very primitive "idea creator" of sorts."

I think it is possible (but very very rare) that an individual animal (or an evolutionary process within an animal) creates a genuinely useful idea, but creativity is so rare that I find it hard to base a theory of animal protection based on it.

"Now, in the absence of objective model of minds etc. and the possibility that higher mammals might actually suffer and be the way they look and tickle those instincts in us I think a case could be made against unnecessarily commit acts that could be torture and sources of suffering."

So uncertainty about whether or not an individual animal has a very primitive consciousness, forces us to utilize our intuitions. Since higher mammals seem to "tickle those instincts" that make us believe that we are in the presence of a simple mind, we should protect animals to some extent, unless proven that there is no vestigial mind to protect.

OK. I'll buy that. I hope that you would add, however, that once it can be shown that a fully functioning mind is present, capable of genuine creativity, then such a being should have virtually absolute sorts of protections (for example, to life)

The fear is that if animals have some rights, and we have *more*

because we are smarter, then more intelligent aliens than we, will be able to "ethically" take our rights, just as we take the primitive rights of animals if they conflict with ours.

Should there not be some absolute "cut-off", beyond which a being is said to be "fully conscious" and therefore entitled to a full spectrum of rights, for example the right to autonomous action?

by a reader on Thu, 03/01/2007 - 00:55 | [reply](#)

Cut Off

Should there not be some absolute "cut-off", beyond which a being is said to be "fully conscious" and therefore entitled to a full spectrum of rights, for example the right to autonomous action?

Yes. I believe There is. It is not just that we are *more* intelligent. It is much more than that. We have passed a critical point in which our intelligence is now of a different quality altogether. We are self-conscious entities and we have developed verbal abilities, we produce and enhance on abstract concepts and as the success of our scientific endeavours have shown we possess the ability to understand nature with basically limitless depth that far exceeds what was needed to survive in our immediate surroundings, and as such we are real and genuine 'idea creators' as **The World** points out.

As I said before that gives us rights of a completely different nature than what we have been discussing here.

by [AIS](#) on Sun, 03/04/2007 - 18:50 | [reply](#)

Other way around?

You wrote: "But that conceals the more important underlying fact that in reality, how much we are pleased or repelled by doing a thing depends on how we judge it morally."

Why isn't it the other way around? How we judge the morality of doing a thing depends on how much we (most of us in the human race) are pleased or repelled by it.

by a reader on Sat, 03/17/2007 - 00:51 | [reply](#)

Re: Other way around?

a reader asked:

Why isn't it the other way around? How we judge the morality of doing a thing depends on how much we (most of us in the human race) are pleased or repelled by it.

Say you are at a friend's house for dinner and he serves you a delicious stew. Halfway through, he informs you that the stew is made from the freshly-killed bodies of your arch-enemy's children.

Whether you are now pleased or repelled by the prospect of eating the second half of your dinner depends on your moral judgements. If you were raised in a culture in which revenge-cannibalism is deemed highly moral, and you agree with those values, you might well relish the second half even more than the first. If your moral stance is informed by Western values you might well be repelled by the second half - and acquire a want to rid yourself of the first half for good measure.

You are right that it is common for people to invent moral justifications *after* they have first decided what they want. But perhaps what has happened in such cases is that 'what they want' was itself determined by other moral values which, however, they want to shield from criticism (perhaps including their own) by denying that they exist. Then they can claim that the 'want' is just a brute fact, allegedly immutable, by which they cannot be judged or judge themselves. Thus, for instance, a wife-beater may first blame his wife, and if that argument seems to fail, he might fall back on blaming his rage, not his dehumanising opinions of the proper role of women. Yet without the latter opinions his rage might not even be present, or if it were, might result not only in different behaviours but in different wants.

Ideas have consequences!

Does that answer your question?

by [Editor](#) on Sun, 03/18/2007 - 05:30 | [reply](#)

When...

...dogs make themselves a society in which they can enumerate their rights, I'll recognize those rights. Until then, they're the bounty of the Earth and free for the taking as far as I'm concerned. Of course, if someone owns a dog it would be wrong to harm or interfere with that dog without their owner's consent, but if I ever own a dog, I shall do with it as I please. I happen to be rather fond of dogs in fact, so 'as I please' is unlikely to involve killing it. However, if someone else owns a dog and wants to kill it, I respect their right to do so.

Now, where did I put my seal-pup-skin slippers...

by [The Cynical Libertarian](#) on Sun, 03/18/2007 - 11:56 | [reply](#)

New or Unique?

Is it the creation of "new ideas" or "unique ideas" the criterion set forward by [The World](#) as the moral basis of not causing harm? These are different and could have different consequences.

In the examples examined in the post, it seems to me that [The World](#) is actually taking "unique ideas". This could be too strong. It

could exclude, depending on what is thought to be unique, a sizable

chunk of humanity.

On the other hand, "new ideas" would include machines running certain forms of intelligent programs.

Also, what does **The World** mean by "creating an idea"? Do you consider the expression of the idea in human-intelligible terms (e.g., language) part of the creation? If so, wouldn't that also exclude some members of the human kind?

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by **Liberal Iranian** on Thu, 05/31/2007 - 09:01 | [reply](#)

Dogs don't suffer. It's a fact!

Dogs suffer less than people. It's a scientific fact. I don't know where I read that in a journal. But it doesn't matter because facts no longer matter. They said so on the 6 o'clock news. Facts are passé.

by a reader on Fri, 06/15/2007 - 07:37 | [reply](#)

Idea creation as a competitive goal

Although animals do not create ideas on the same level we do, there are some cases in which our interaction with animals seems to have driven them genetically to copy our ability to acquire behavior beyond genetic tendencies, and this could be considered a definition of an idea. This can work both ways: Dogs create ideas because their survival depends on helping us. Bears and tigers create ideas because their survival depends on hurting us.

You could argue what this means about how to treat bears and tigers, but as far as dogs it means they are, objectively, our friends, deserving of respect, and that torturing them is absolutely wrong.

by Collin on Tue, 10/16/2007 - 19:13 | [reply](#)

example?

can you give an example of an animal idea?

it should pass the test of being something we could **not** easily program our non-intelligent desktop computers to do.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 10/16/2007 - 20:12 | [reply](#)

It is not the Issue, It is the "Activists" that bother me.

I am a mere laymen, but my issue with animal rights activists is the

way they go about their cause, normally in a thrust in your face, bully-ish way. I can think of one example of being on the street as a "shopper" and stepping toward a certain company store, which, unbeknown to myself on that day, was selling real fur garments (I had, call me ignorant, just popped into town to have a look around, I had no intention of buying, it was more browsing). As I stepped into the entrance way, I was assaulted, and yes, I mean "assaulted" by a animal rights activist, who slapped an advert into my face, literally. I thought at first I was being mugged and got very flustered, in a ready to attack stance, only to realise that on this peice of paper was some issue to do with how fur was extracted from animals for clothing purposes. Now I am not being funny, I am an animal lover and have pets, and quite frankly I would happily see the abolishment on all cruelty, but it really incensed me that animal rights people think it is ok to slap humans while looking after their cause, they call this raising awareness. What did I do, on that occasion. Well, true to the human instincts of fight and flight that had kicked in, in a stance to relieve the tension, I tore up the paper and threw it back at the woman in disgust, who then, I heard, whilst walking away, said

" oh these people just don't care"

As I walked into the store I thought "we care enough but just not for your bullying ways in handling the matter." It actually has the opposite effect. I mean, why would anyone want to support them anyway, it is not the issue that puts people off but their behaviour in dealing with raising awareness to the public, and well they are just abusive. I can't support the hypocrisy of raise awareness through being cruel to stop cruelty. Bloody stupid people who are so mis informed and mis managed it beggers belief. I went into the store anyway, just to prove that point. When will they learn bullying people does not get you support.

by anon on Sun, 10/21/2007 - 21:23 | [reply](#)

Other Way Around (continued)

Do one's feelings help to (correctly) determine moral behavior or not?

"Say you are at a friend's house for dinner and he serves you a delicious stew. Halfway through, he informs you that the stew is made from the freshly-killed bodies of your arch-enemy's children."
Editors

Yes, one's ideas about the source of the meat do help to determine one's feelings about the morality of eating it and even one's feelings about the taste of the food.

Ideas, including ideas about morality, determine and should determine one's feelings about many things. But sometimes feelings provide valuable intuition about what is moral, when we lack the knowledge to formulate more definitive moral theories.

When we feel revulsion about eating the cooked bodies of dead

children, and then the food tastes bad, our thoughts are determining our feelings.

But whether we are hungry before we eat often does determine whether the food tastes good. Our hungry feelings determine our thought that the food tastes good.

To deny that *feelings* of hunger influence the way the food tastes (and the way we formulate a moral theory that justifies the way we eat) denies that evolution, to some extent, created feelings in us to potentially guide rational thought and behavior. Our *feelings* of hunger and satisfaction from food evolved for a reason. Beings who tend to be more rational may tend to survive better in a variety of environments. It is therefore likely that evolution created in us a set of rational feelings (the feeling of hunger and the feeling of satisfaction when healthy) to guide and promote the formation of rational theories ("We *ought* to eat when hungry and we *should* eat well-balanced meals in order to feel good")

Now, one might claim that the existence of an evolutionary "reason" for the existence of feelings of hunger proves the editor's point that theories, explicit or not, determine the feelings we have about things.

And if our unconscious/inexplicit theories were made conscious and examined, then possibly we could make the most rational choice possible, now taking into account our previously unexamined inexplicit theories (This is so even if our inexplicit theories, once consciously evaluated, remain the source of our feeling states. We may feel good about doing something, but know that it is wrong and so choose to do the right thing).

Perhaps our conscious and unconscious theories can be reconciled and the best chosen. But even if possible, this is quite difficult and currently not realistic in many situations. But if we were perfectly able to do it, we would act on thought alone, and not on feeling. At the very least, our inexplicit thoughts (that determine our feelings) would be readily apparent to us.

Is it the editor's position that in the absence of full knowledge, we should never trust our gut feelings in helping to determine our moral positions? For example, our intuitions strongly tell most of us that some animals, for example dogs and especially higher primates have ideas -- but very primitive ones -- in addition to more highly developed feeling states. Is it the editor's opinion that unless we fully understand the origin of these intuitions and feelings in ourselves -- so that we can subject them to conscious criticism -- we should assume that our intuitions contain no truth about the likely mind-state of higher animals? So our sense that higher animal's suffer, somewhat as we do, should not be used to help guide rational decision making vis-a-vis animals?

Why can't our feelings of revulsion at the site of a screaming, tortured dog not be used to help guide us to want to stop the torture. Do we have to be sure this feeling of revulsion is

completely rational first? It does sometimes seem that one's

feelings can be a guide, albeit an imperfect one.

What do you think?

by a reader on Mon, 10/22/2007 - 22:23 | [reply](#)

"it should pass the test of b

"it should pass the test of being something we could *not* easily program our non-intelligent desktop computers to do."

What can humans do that can't easily be replicated by a computer program?

And how do you define "easily"?

by A Guest on Thu, 11/22/2007 - 18:38 | [reply](#)

present day computer programs

present day computer programs can barely walk or drive cars. humans can correct capitalization much better, and generally parse language better. and computers today don't *understand* natural language at all. humans are better at writing novels too. etc

it isn't important how "easily" is defined, the point is we don't write AI programs today. if we can write a program to do something today, and especially if it's easy, then obviously that task doesn't require intelligence to do. it's mechanical. a mindless computer can do it.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 11/23/2007 - 01:42 | [reply](#)

present day computer programmes

Its true that the present day Computers are there but they do not have the feelings like the humans and more over they always need command to execute a job.

by [Max](#) on Mon, 04/07/2008 - 15:04 | [reply](#)

The Sailors And The Holocaust

The affair of the 15 British sailors and Marines illegally captured and mistreated by Iran and then released has been a humiliation for Britain and the West, and a triumph for the Iranian regime and every other enemy of the West.

Clearly the British government is not claiming the moral high ground to which it is entitled. It is not demanding the trial and punishment of the perpetrators of the blatant war crime, nor reparations for the victims and for Britain itself. It is not behaving in any way like the wronged party. This stance implicitly, but unmistakably, legitimises Iran's actions and creates a new, more dangerous status quo.

We don't know what additional price was secretly paid, if any. But it seems plausible that, in some way or other, Britain conveyed to the Iranian regime that it will never use force against Iran under any circumstances. If so, this reverses Prime Minister Blair's official policy of not ruling out force. It is **rumoured** that only last year this policy was important enough to Mr Blair to cause him to sack the then Foreign Minister, Jack Straw.

What does all this have to do with the Holocaust? Only this: A reversal of that policy would translate into a British endorsement of the Iranian nuclear weapons programme. Hence it would be tantamount to condoning, and enabling, the Iranian regime's planned destruction of Israel and Second Holocaust.

Wed, 04/11/2007 - 16:41 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

The Holocaust

Iran's regime likes to deny the Holocaust for political reasons. Their ploy with the British sailors played true to form: tell the world about the generous and beneficent Iranian government, how well it treats those it captures although their country has been so unfairly vilified by "The West". The lesson is that Iran's government cares nothing for the reality of the situation, only for the propaganda opportunities of parading trite images before the world media.

Hitler's Germany understood this practice well. Neville Chamberlain and his ilk were easily deceived because they wanted the

propaganda to be true. There is a lesson of history to be learned.

Propagandists require willing participants, willing skills and foils for their trite images to succeed.

The war journalist Martha Gellhorn wrote of her experiences upon entering Dachau shortly after Germany's surrender. Her experiences of the aftermath of Hitler's Germany as exemplified by the piles of dead and the ghosts of the living were real beyond anyone's imagination. Her cynical optimism for the future of the human species was forever quenched. She wrote a novel shortly thereafter, *Point of No Return*. The chief protagonist, a U.S. Army enlisted man, at the end of the story, the war over, intentionally drives his jeep into a small group of innocent German citizens, killing three. There is no moral of the story other than no German in peace is worth living after what they each had allowed their country in war to become.

It is only a novel. But her frame of mind was clear.

She never forgave the Germans, despite several visits well after the war had ended. She never saw hope for their recovery from the twin sins of obedience to authority or the cruel authority of rule. She forever after believed that the Germans by nationality, all of them, were beyond redemption. They were forever damned.

Is today's Iran the same as Nazi Germany, history again preparing to repeat itself? Is every Iranian as guilty by name and deed as their worst propagandist? Is every Iranian an obedient son or daughter or a cruel practitioner of the lie and the equivalent of a hobnailed boot? Is there any hope for the citizens of a country that would allow their leader to deny the Holocaust? At what point, if ever, is the Point of No Return?

And for England, too: where is the Point of No Return?

by a reader on Fri, 04/13/2007 - 03:04 | [reply](#)

twisted, dangerous, ugly thinking

"...by nationality, all of them, were beyond redemption. They were forever damned."

by a reader on Sat, 04/14/2007 - 16:58 | [reply](#)

liberationist interventionism

good stuff. so what criteria do you use when deciding which places to invade, and how many innocent people are allowed to be killed before it stops? should "we" go into North Korea? Venezuela? Russia? England? America?

one problem with waging war is that it invariably increases the power of the state. does war ever serve any other function (aside from untold misery)?

what should policy towards Iran consist of? maybe leaving them

well alone, for a start. the insane evil foreigner label is usually mistaken, but still, the possibility exists that a particular state will kill millions of people. forgive me if the previous century doesn't contain enough examples of this. all we can do is give any enemy as little reason to be evil as possible. i don't see that pretending to own the world is the best strategy for peace.

thanks.

by a reader on Wed, 04/25/2007 - 15:49 | [reply](#)

how many

giving Iran "as little reason to be evil as possible" won't help us. they already have no reason to be evil; no one has such a reason. being evil is wrong.

some people want bad things. it is unacceptable to let them be and hope they choose not to hurt us, when we could defend ourselves. even if a war increases state power it is better than the giant risk of a tyrant using the weapons he goes to great lengths to build.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 04/25/2007 - 22:48 | [reply](#)

but Elliot...

"even if a war increases state power it is better than the giant risk of a tyrant using the weapons he goes to great lengths to build." are you sure? what if others disagree? i'm not sure that a libertarian position is to force the state on people and then increase its size. i'm sure this has happened before...

how sure are you of this giant risk? who is being targeted anyway? assuming the threat is "real," is it entirely unrelated to the fact that America and co commit crimes of such great magnitude? and so, as a method of preventing an attack on America, should American violence in the Middle East stop, or increase?

everyone legitimises aggression as defence. why is it any different when the "defenders" are American? to ignore the consequences of America and co believing themselves to be the legitimate world police seems to me to be grossly mistaken. libertarians do not usually accept the lies told by their government.

so, why not nuke the whole of Iraq to make sure that nothing bad ever happens again? and Iran. and North Korea. and so on. this is the logical consequence of your position, is it not? "libertarians for war"?

perhaps you can give a few examples of previous interventions (mass state killings and the increase of state power) that have been

both morally justified and successful. (e.g. WW2 being **all** Hitler's

fault, etc)

by a reader on Thu, 04/26/2007 - 11:40 | [reply](#)

difference

what's the difference if it's American or Iran doing the attacking and calling it defense?

only one of these countries has elected officials that declare, in public, their genocidal intentions and desires.

who is targetted?

top targets are israel and USA. see for example the pictures here:

http://atlasshrugs2000.typepad.com/atlas_shrugs/2005/10/the_world_witho.html

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 04/26/2007 - 18:24 | [reply](#)

Answers

These words by Elliot are worth repeating:

giving Iran "as little reason to be evil as possible" won't help us. they already have no reason to be evil; no one has such a reason. being evil is wrong.

In response to some of *a reader's* questions:

Question 1)

assuming the threat is "real," is it entirely unrelated to the fact that America and co commit crimes of such great magnitude? and so, as a method of preventing an attack on America, should American violence in the Middle East stop, or increase?

What "crimes" and of what "magnitude" are you referring to? The daily tens of people killed in Iraq are not killed by Americans, nor are they Americans. They are ordinary Iraqis killed by criminal terrorists and co. Even the invasion of Iraq had a very temporary "increase" of American violence, and that only against Saddam's regime. The "American violence" today is directed against those who are disrupting the creation and the progress of a free and stable Iraq within some margin of error. The people of Iraq were and are not the target.

Question 2)

everyone legitimises aggression as defence. why is it any different when the "defenders" are American? to ignore

the consequences of America and co believing

themselves to be the legitimate world police seems to me to be grossly mistaken. libertarians do not usually accept the lies told by their government.

This has nothing to do with "Americans." It has to do with defending people's lives and freedoms. The police in a small city might also raid the criminals' command center. That the world does not (and with current conditions cannot) have a functioning and legally binding police force does not relieve the burden from the shoulders of the free nations of the world to act as one when and where they can and are morally bound to. Especially when and where the responsible "international" bodies fail to do so. Look at Darfur now. How long should we wait? Till the problem erases itself out?

Question 3)

so, why not nuke the whole of Iraq to make sure that nothing bad ever happens again? and Iran. and North Korea. and so on. this is the logical consequence of your position, is it not?

No it is not. The logic here is to protect people's lives and freedoms from those criminals who deny them these inalienable rights. Evidence: the basis and the practice of the political system, following discussions, stated goals and objectives, and the enacted policies of the major player in all this, i.e. the US. The logical consequence cannot be killing those same people -- that is the illogical consequence. You assume that the logic at work is instead an evil one that seeks to enslave other peoples for their resources etc. You are mistaken. I challenge you to present a coherent theory in support of this that would stand up to rational criticism.

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by **Liberal Iranian** on Mon, 04/30/2007 - 09:23 | [reply](#)

Joe Republican And A Better World

Curi fisks a didactic leftist story by telling a better story.

Tue, 04/17/2007 - 22:10 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Dull Utopia Prospers

Steve and Joe and their poor liberal buddy seem to be cut from the same dull cloth. A better world has given them each their own country and let their ideas compete or maybe that is what Steve is trying to say in his libertarian didactic. Although Steve Lib is cocktail party boring in the same way as Joe Pub and Liberal-boy his ideas are much better, enviably so, say both Joe and Liberal-boy as they stare over their drinks and across the great capitalist divide. If only Steve would run for office he could be elected president of all the Republics. However Steve long ago had a better idea. He is now a multinationalist who trades across borders and with a skilled accountant on his payroll he successfully avoids paying taxes to anyone, even to himself. It is the best of all possible worlds.

by a reader on Wed, 04/18/2007 - 23:42 | [reply](#)

A Better Story

It is a better story and maybe someday with alot of practical hard work it can become real. It probably has to incubate first in a sparsely populated U.S. state, a minor eastern european country or a remote temperate atoll.

by a reader on Thu, 04/19/2007 - 01:49 | [reply](#)

Good stuff. I'd forgotten yo

Good stuff.

I'd forgotten you were libertarians!

by a reader on Sat, 04/21/2007 - 14:18 | [reply](#)

Popper vs Rand

A reader 01:49,

It would be great to see a truly Libertarian state. Please, however, let it be one that is inspired more by the philosophy of Karl Popper than by the philosophy of Ayn Rand. Rand's Objectivism seems to me to have fallen into the traps of inductivism and essentialism (to name but a few ism's), although it contains many good ideas about freedom, minimum state etc.

I would be interested to get the opinion of people here how an Objectivist-Libertarian state would compare to Popperian-Libertarian state. I suspect that because Objectivist philosophy is based on untruths that an Objectivist-Libertarian state would not be the sort of paradise Elliot imagines.

by Brian S on Mon, 04/23/2007 - 14:35 | [reply](#)

Not Quite True

1. "Competition Lowers Prices" -- Usually it does, unless there is predatory pricing. In these situations, wealthier firms lower prices below the cost of production, believing that they can survive the loss of money longer than their competitors. Once competitors are driven out of the market, prices then rise.

2. "Specialization Lowers Prices" -- Only up to a point. Otherwise any given individual would use his time in such a specialized way that he would do precisely one activity at work, not more than one. But this does not occur. Therefore, too much specialization raises prices, by increasing the number of people who need to interact to produce a product (too much specialization increases transaction cost).

3. "For every use of tax money that helps you (other) government expenditures....don't help you...Overall you lose."

It is humorous (and ironic) that libertarians think they know how to spend other people's money more efficiently than those spending it. The overwhelming majority of rich people will not vote for libertarian types of economic organization. And rich people pay the overwhelming majority of taxes. This means that rich people believe that certain types of charitable giving and economic organization are more efficiently produced by the government (there are many reasons for this).

And the fact that rich people do not usually support libertarian causes, yet libertarians try to convince rich people to do so, also implies that libertarians believe they know how to spend rich people's dollars more efficiently than those who spend it.

But of course it is usually libertarians who denigrate those favoring taxation, by claiming that those favoring taxation believe that they know how to spend other people's money better than those spending it.

So libertarians and those favoring taxation, to be fair, both believe that they know how to more efficiently spend the money of other people. A few goods are more efficiently produced by the

government (certain types of charitable giving, military production, roads), and most by the free market.

4. Companies will be accountable, responsible, and pay regulators if customers will pay for those things.

Knowledge/information will be inefficiently underproduced in free-market economies because knowledge is costly to produce, yet it is very difficult to charge those using the knowledge the full benefit that they realize because of their use.

The inefficient under-creation of knowledge is like the inefficient underproduction of cars in certain societies that do not have an effective police force. If an automobile producer has to pay the full cost of producing an automobile, yet people can just take half of his new cars off of his car lot, automobile producers will produce fewer cars. In other words, cars will be inefficiently underproduced.

Likewise, in a pure free-market economy, knowledge will be inefficiently under-created, because others can simply use whatever knowledge is created, without having to pay for the research needed to create it. People "steal" knowledge in this way by simply telling each other about the knowledge. Since the relatively free distribution of knowledge should not be stopped in society, there is a role for government to subsidize the creation of knowledge, to compensate others for the cost of creating it, and to create the knowledge that helps virtually everyone. So there is a role, at the very least, for government to subsidize those firms that create knowledge about products, if the government does not fill this role itself.

5. "Benefits from employers come straight out of your wages." Not quite true, either. Depends upon the shape of supply and demand curves.

by a reader on Mon, 04/23/2007 - 17:19 | [reply](#)

Objectivism

For what it's worth I think very highly of Popper, and have mixed feelings about Rand. Rand's attitude (as expressed in her fiction) to selfishness and capitalism and individual responsibility has considerable merit. And her descriptions of what is despicable are perhaps even better. But Objectivism is not fallibilist and not fully coherent.

In the interest of discussing different libertarian attitudes: I think the wrong type of libertarianism is expressed in the Free State project. They want to get thousands of people to move to a state and vote the same way. They expect that because they are all libertarians, they will all agree what to vote. That is never going to work.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 04/23/2007 - 17:52 | [reply](#)

If Selfishness is Good....

If you believe selfishness is good, is altruism bad?

by a reader on Mon, 04/23/2007 - 18:32 | [reply](#)

Altruism

I believe altruism and self-sacrifice are bad.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

[Dialogs](#)

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 04/23/2007 - 21:10 | [reply](#)

Altruism and Self-Sacrifice

Why is altruism bad?

by a reader on Mon, 04/23/2007 - 22:02 | [reply](#)

Altruism

I know far and away the most about myself and my preferences, and much less about those of other people. So I'm in the best position to help myself.

If someone can justify to me why helping them with something is worthwhile, then there is no need for altruism: trade will suffice.

If I like and value someone, say an excellent philosopher, and I give him money because I want to help him to write more, that is charity but it is not altruism: I'm doing it because I want to support things I value.

When it comes down to it, to be truly altruistic an action cannot benefit me. It means doing things I have no incentive to do; no matter how well I do them, my life will not improve.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

[Dialogs](#)

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 04/23/2007 - 23:31 | [reply](#)

Re: Altruism

Elliot wrote:

When it comes down to it, to be truly altruistic an action cannot benefit me. It means doing things I have no incentive to do

But isn't it worse than that? If you think that an action is morally right, then (unless you are for some reason psychologically conflicted or irrational about it) you will choose to do it. In which case it does benefit you in the sense that counts: according to your own values. Hence an action taken wholeheartedly and in the belief that it is morally right, can never be altruistic. And I suppose that is the reason that altruism is basically immoral. (Though I would not go so far as to say it *always* is.)

by [David Deutsch](#) on Mon, 04/23/2007 - 23:48 | [reply](#)

A Beautiful Mind

If you read the history of this man carefully, or even if you don't, you'll see some very interesting and intricate mathematical adaptations of game theory that show that certain categories of altruistic practices benefit not only the group, but also the individual, improving chances for both individual and group success. Some forms of "altruism" seem to be built (evolved) into our bones.

Hey, even take the holocaust. Some individuals sheltered persons at great risk and no obvious benefit to themselves. Were they wrong to do this? No.

by a reader on Tue, 04/24/2007 - 00:02 | [reply](#)

Inefficient Knowledge Creation

What to do about the cheapness of making digital copies of books, music, movies, scientific papers, etc is an open problem. Concluding that therefore we need them to be funded involuntarily is absurd. For one thing, a libertarian society will have courts with standards of conduct similar to present day laws (unless and until they have an even better idea that actually works), so copyright can exist just as well as with government. And for another, pointing guns at people is hardly a solution to funding and is a recipe for funding things that should not be funded. Also a recipe for people being shot or scared.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 04/24/2007 - 06:35 | [reply](#)

Re: Objectivism

Elliot,

I agree that Objectivism is not fully coherent. I still don't really understand how Objectivists justify induction from their Law of Identity! Like you, I find much merit in Rand's writings, but I

wonder how the flaws of Objectivism would expose themselves in

an Objectivist society.

Even though many Objectivists seem to misunderstand Popper (for example, [this](#)), they are not shy in criticising him. Now I accept that some of the criticism of Popper is valid - he was fallible after all and his social engineering is highly questionable - but by denying Critical Rationalism, Objectivists deny our best theory of knowledge creation and this can only be bad for libertarianism.

by Brian S on Tue, 04/24/2007 - 11:47 | [reply](#)

Altruism

David,

I think I must be misunderstanding you.

If an adult sacrifices his life to save the lives of 3 children, do you consider this an altruistic act?

If you do, why is it wrong?

If you don't, then are you saying sacrificing ones life for children is selfish because it is acting in a way that is consistent with the moral values of the individual making the sacrifice?

by a reader on Tue, 04/24/2007 - 13:36 | [reply](#)

Who is Pointing the Gun?

"And for another, pointing guns at people is hardly a solution to funding and is a recipe for funding things that should not be funded. Also a recipe for people being shot or scared."

I assume that by "pointing guns" you mean using voting to decide the appropriate amount of funding for certain goods like funding for research, expenditures for the military, production of roads, and funding for charitable giving. The overwhelming majority of rich people (and the rest of the country) will not vote for libertarian systems of economic and governmental organization. People (even the rich) favor utilizing democratic rule in many situations. So the people who pay most of the taxes (the rich) must "want" to have a "gun" pointed at their head to have money "involuntarily" taken from them, because they consistently vote for democracy!

More likely, Americans and other free people perceive that libertarian forms of economic organization are so inefficient at providing certain goods and at providing morally acceptable societal outcomes, that those advocating such an awful politico-economic system, are perceived as trying to point guns at the rest of us!

by a reader on Tue, 04/24/2007 - 14:54 | [reply](#)

Re: Who is Pointing the Gun?

Americans and other free people perceive that libertarian

forms of economic organization are so inefficient

Not long ago, those free peoples voted in election after election for Keynesian economic policies. Does that mean that they 'perceived' that the present non-Keynesian form of economic organisation is inefficient?

Surely it doesn't make sense to counter a minority opinion that more freedom is needed, with the argument that it is a minority opinion and therefore the freedom in question is not needed.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Tue, 04/24/2007 - 16:55 | [reply](#)

Re: Who is Pointing the Gun?

A reader 14:54,

Try not paying your taxes and you will find out what Elliot means. It seems to have escaped your attention that rich people go to considerable lengths to minimise their tax liability. And that despite this, rich people contribute enormous amounts on a voluntary basis to charity.

by Brian S on Tue, 04/24/2007 - 17:05 | [reply](#)

Less Freedom?

"Surely it doesn't make sense to counter a minority opinion that more freedom is needed, with the argument that it is a minority opinion and therefore the freedom in question is not needed."

If libertarian economic organization is inefficient at providing certain types of needed goods (the military, roads, certain types of charitable giving), while democratic processes lead to more efficient results, then the libertarian strategy takes money from people, involuntarily. And taking money from people is wrong.

People therefore voluntarily choose democratic processes to settle certain of their differences because they believe it maximizes their economic choices and therefore their freedom.

Therefore, it should not be surprising that the majority of free people support democracy, and not exclusively libertarian policies. Given the effectiveness of democratic political processes, it should not even be surprising that the wealthiest are prepared to finance this productive enterprise, with their taxes.

by a reader on Wed, 04/25/2007 - 00:37 | [reply](#)

Voluntarism

Suppose that democracies produce more wealth than voluntarist societies by forcing people to do productive things they would otherwise irrationally refuse to do (or refuse due to the logic of public goods or some such).

Does it then follow that voluntarist societies take money away from

people which they would otherwise have, and is thus forces them to be poorer by not allowing them to do what would make them richest?

Let me restate the problem.

Consider a business venture to produce widgets. Jack has the idea of how to do it, and it will make billions of dollars. He just needs a bit of capital to get started, so he asks Sue for a loan. Sue refuses.

In a voluntarist society, trades only take place when all parties wish them to. Jack will have to persuade someone to help with his widgets, or provide his own starting capital. He might fail to do those things and remain poor even if his widget idea is excellent.

Contrariwise, in the sort of society you advocate, Sue could be forced (by majority vote, or by laws of officials already elected by vote) to loan money to Jack. This, you say, saves Jack from being forced to be poor, and forced not to produce widgets.

Sue can be forced to give the loan, which she does not want, or Jack can be forced not to have a loan, which he does not want. There is symmetry.

So, there is no such thing as a way to proceed in which no one is forced. There is no such thing as a voluntary society. There is only such thing as a society which is in denial about its use of force.

But there's more. Sue would end up with more money if she gave the loan, so she really has nothing to lose, and is therefore acting perversely. Her refusal to help both of them is actually the most violent and hateful act being considered, and is therefore the one that should not be allowed.

Is that, roughly, what you believe?

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 04/25/2007 - 01:41 | [reply](#)

Are democracies better producers of public goods?

1) To posit that democracies are better at producing public goods as a mere hypothetical, then observe that popular behavior indicates that the hypothetical is widely-believed to be true, does not establish the truth of the hypothetical. What evidence is there that democracies are better producers of public goods than the free market? None that I'm aware of, even for military defense.

2) If X really is a public good, and this public goods problem is insurmountable by the free market, and the benefit of the public good would exceed the cost of coercive production of that public good, that still doesn't solve the public goods problem, because coercive production of public goods is also a public good. Why should the public good of coercive production of, say, public roads,

be any less insurmountable than free-market production of public roads? The infinite regress problem is what's really insurmountable.

3) My favorite analogy to the public goods rationale for coercion: Suppose Joe wants to have sex with Sue, but Sue doesn't want to. But Joe would benefit more from having sex with Sue than it would cost her, so Sue ought to be forced to have sex with Joe...

Tim Starr

Fight for Liberty!

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/fightforliberty/>

by Tim Starr on Wed, 04/25/2007 - 20:34 | [reply](#)

Sue and Joe Sex

Let's say Sue is not forced to have sex with Joe. Joe wants to have sex with Sue but Sue is not convinced by the best of arguments to have sex with Joe. In a society of two, Sue and Joe both libertarians, do not procreate and the society dies out. This is not an argument for coerced sex. It is however the fact of what happens to a public good when pure libertarian ideals are enforced by the libertarians themselves.

by a reader on Thu, 04/26/2007 - 16:17 | [reply](#)

society of 2

in a society of 2, the overwhelming issue wrt having sex is whether they wish to create children. so if sue doesn't want to, it will be because she wants society to die out, or has a reason that something else is the best way to make society continue on.

it's easy to disregard disagreement as nonsensical when you don't think about *why* people hold their opinions.

it is also possible that sue has a very bad or nonsensical reason. but in *that* case persuading her of a better idea is easy. the worse sue's present idea, the easier persuasion is.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 04/26/2007 - 18:13 | [reply](#)

Who Stops Rape?

"What evidence is there that democracies are better producers of public goods than the free market? None that I'm aware of, even for military defense."

3) My favorite analogy to the public goods rationale for coercion: Suppose Joe wants to have sex with Sue, but Sue doesn't want to. But Joe would benefit more from having sex with Sue than it would cost her, so Sue ought to be forced to have sex with Joe..."

Tim Starr

In a society of millions, it is very expensive for a given individual to convince everyone that a given law is correct, even though virtually everyone wants laws that must apply to everyone. Since the cost of creating a law that everyone publically agrees to is concentrated on the people trying to get everyone's consent, and the benefits are diffuse in society, *the law itself* is a public good. And it will be virtually impossible to create unanimous consent (for any law whatsoever) because of the selfish incentive of some to lie about their preferences, in order to make money from those libertarians so enamored of consent, that they must pay off those who disagree to get them to change their mind.

Therefore, if Tim does not believe in government production of public goods (like the laws of America and England), then he must logically not believe in the public production of the law itself, because it is the fundamental public good. And so he must logically believe that laws should only apply to those who voluntarily consent to them.

Therefore a law prohibiting rape will not apply to a rapist, who by definition does not voluntarily submit to the law. So contrary to what Tim says, libertarianism logically permits rape, even though the overwhelming majority of libertarians are opposed to it.

So what does stop rape? Certainly not libertarian principles, which logically permit it.

The overwhelming majority of citizens know that rape is wrong. Our moral compass is so clear on this that we vote to outlaw rape, regardless of what the minority thinks, and then use the coercive power of the state to force any rapist who disagrees with us to do what we want. This is democracy in action.

by a reader on Thu, 04/26/2007 - 22:03 | [reply](#)

A brief history of morality (Was: Altruism)

a reader asked:

If an adult sacrifices his life to save the lives of 3 children, do you consider this an altruistic act?

If you do, why is it wrong?

If you don't, then are you saying sacrificing ones life for children is selfish because it is acting in a way that is consistent with the moral values of the individual making the sacrifice?

It's hard to answer that because the word 'altruism' is, in our culture, used in two different senses, one factual and one moral, and it's customary to equivocate heavily between them. So I'll have to answer by giving a brief history of morality.

I think that the story so far is something like this:

In primitive societies, moral behaviour was conceived of as being obedience to the authority of the ruler, the priest, the parent and the traditional taboo. Moral rightness could therefore be defined as the degree to which one sacrificed one's own welfare for the sake of such duties. In the West, when Christianity came along, this conception of morality was overlaid (but in no way replaced) by the idea of a religious duty of self-sacrifice for the benefit of other people – also known as altruism. Unlike the old duties, this new duty was almost never enacted. But by serving as a universal unattained standard, it helped to create a state of mind dominated by guilt, fear, self-loathing, lack of self-confidence, pathological selfishness, and self-sacrifice, all of which stabilised society. But it was an unimaginably *bad* society, by our standards.

Then came the Enlightenment, with its principled scepticism, hostility to authority both secular and religious, and celebration of the value of individual human beings. Rejecting the arbitrary and overtly irrational elements of previous moral philosophy, Enlightenment thinkers swept away the idea that morality was based on obedience or duty. But even though many of them were atheists or agnostics, they were still Christians at heart, and it did not occur to them to question the identification of morality with altruism. Thus they arrived at utilitarianism:

In the sphere of individual decisions affecting only oneself, altruism is irrelevant to utilitarian considerations, and utilitarianism amounted to 'do what you like'. This does not assert anything positive: It must immediately be followed by, but inherently cannot answer, the question 'thank you, but what *should* I like? What would it be best for me to strive for?'. But it was invaluable in its day simply for contradicting earlier conceptions of what constituted right behaviour in the individual domain, and by extension, in the domain of mutually consenting interactions between people. In those areas there was no longer any way of defending an exhortation to sacrifice oneself for some supposedly transcendent purpose. All that mattered was that the preferences of individual human beings be satisfied.

But in regard to society as a whole, and the relationship between it and the individual, utilitarianism floundered a bit. A doctrine of inviolable human rights was developed to protect that domain of individual and mutually consenting interactions. But beyond that, the best that utilitarianism could come up with was the maxim of 'the greatest good for the greatest number'. This suffered from all the lack of content of the individual version, *plus* the irremediable problem of the inter-subjective comparison of utilities (what is the 'good' of more than one person?). And, given the previous history, it was taken for granted that what this means in practice is: *it is right to sacrifice oneself, and others, for the greatest good of the greatest number*. One's own welfare is technically included in this 'good of the greatest number', but when the numbers in question are in the millions and billions, that makes no practical difference whatsoever.

Again, these values were virtually never enacted by anyone, but the

real effect of their adoption was to continue to cause those same old pathological states of mind which stabilised the remaining moral traditions of obedience and duty. These were now increasingly confined to obedience and duty *to the state*. People were then ready, intellectually and psychologically, for totalitarianism and socialism.

Totalitarianism, and to a lesser extent socialism, acquired poor reputations during the twentieth century. (Totalitarianism because it led so reliably to mass murders, and socialism because of its failure ever to achieve prosperity, and because of the relative success of 'capitalist' economic systems.) But the underlying morality that led to them both is still largely unchanged and unchallenged (Randians are an honourable exception, but their philosophy has its own problems that inhibit its widespread adoption), and so many forms of both are still popular under other names, such as environmentalism, and under disguised forms of the same moral justifications, such as the 'public good problem'.

And that brings us to the present day.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Sat, 04/28/2007 - 11:20 | [reply](#)

Public Goods

Would you elaborate on how public good problems are implicitly based in utilitarian thinking?

Why is 'capitalist' in quotes?

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us
Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sat, 04/28/2007 - 19:57 | [reply](#)

Public Goods

In what sense is the belief in the existence of public good problems a form of belief in totalitarianism or socialism?

by a reader on Sat, 04/28/2007 - 23:52 | [reply](#)

Re: Public Goods

how public good problems are implicitly based in utilitarian thinking

For instance, a person who conceived of morality in terms of obedience, religious or other duty, or human rights, would not consider it a problem that some economic system does not always achieve the greatest good of the greatest number (or even the greatest good of every individual) in every transaction.

In what sense is the belief in the existence of public good

problems a form of belief in totalitarianism or socialism?

None.

by **David Deutsch** on Sun, 04/29/2007 - 00:15 | [reply](#)

Greatest Amount

When considering the "greatest amount of good possible" (for greatest number, or not, never mind that), if we take into account that we are looking at the overall effects of a system, then if we do conclude a system doesn't have that property, we know it could be improved upon.

And if we know a specific area where the greatest good is not being achieved, then we should perhaps consider suggestions about how to treat that situation differently. Especially if it is a property of our system that it can never achieve the greatest good in an entire category of situations.

I'm not saying any of the above is true of capitalism. But it is a view someone could take about capitalism that could describe their opinion on public good problems but does not obviously contain utilitarian assumptions.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 04/29/2007 - 02:42 | [reply](#)

Simply

So for someone who likes their assumptions in small doses and simply stated, how does altruism in the utilitarian sense (beyond the old saw of god and country) serve the greater good?

Is altruism only a vestigial evolutionary appendage of our cultural past?

My best guess is that no system theory yet fully explains away the greater good of an altruistic act (often committed without deep aforethought to its likely effect of a greater good).

I abhor systems in practice. Obeyed, they decay and stratify into old weathered icons like statues to the gods. In theory, however, some are just fine as working models of almost perfection.

Still, altruism in the individual state continues to live on.

by a reader on Sun, 04/29/2007 - 14:42 | [reply](#)

Benefits of Voting for Enforced Contracts

"But there's more. Sue would end up with more money if she gave

the loan, so she really has nothing to lose, and is therefore acting perversely."

Elliot, this really does not capture the argument.

There are two separate steps that one needs to understand, before one understands the usefulness of democracy.

1. People can unanimously agree in their own minds that they want to do something to get something; and also all agree to have themselves held responsible for doing what they have obligated themselves to do. A person may agree to something in exchange for everyone else being obligated to do what he promises, as well. In some cases 100% of people may vote to do something AND rationally vote for enforcement of the agreement.

2. Once the rationality for unanimous voting in favor of enforcement of contracts is understood, then the rationale for agreeing to participate in other "real-world" voting, where one can end up in the minority, can also be understood. But I'd like to focus on the rationale for *voting* to enforce contracts now, when 100% agree on the contract, because it is not clear that you understand this.

Back to your analogy. Let's say that instead of Sue giving a loan to Joe, instead Sue has capital equipment that she WANTS to give to Joe in exchange for money that Joe WANTS to exchange to Sue. So both want to trade money for capital equipment. But assume that each must leave his goods in different parts of the woods at night for the other to pick up, but both are afraid the other will not leave his respective good (money or capital equipment). And assume they will never see each other.

A selfish Joe could think,
"If I don't leave the money in the woods and Sue leaves the capital goods, I make off with the money and the capital goods. But if I don't leave the money and Sue does not leave the capital goods, then I was smart not to have left the money in the woods, because Sue was not intending to leave her capital goods, anyway. So no matter what Sue does, (a selfish Joe thinks!) I am better off not leaving the money."

But this reasoning applies (in reverse) to Sue, as well. So no matter what the other does, it is in each one's selfish interest not to leave his goods in the woods, and no trade takes place.

So amongst selfish individuals, no trade takes place, **THOUGH IT WOULD HAVE BENEFITED BOTH OF THEM**. This situation is a variant of a non-iterated prisoners dilemma, which is a type of "public good" problem involving 2 people.

If Sue and Joe (by themselves) tried to exchange purely voluntarily using the woods at night, the trade might not take place. So voluntary interaction, without enforcement of contracts, may not lead to optimal results.

But if both could VOTE for the following option and both in fact vote

for enforcement, the trade could take place.

"If either Sue or Joe fails to deliver the goods, a policeman will track either one down and force him or her to give up his/her goods."

(Honesty of policemen is an interesting problem. Whether it is easy to verify and track the honesty of the police is an interesting discussion, but perhaps one that you would be willing to discuss with me later).

The point is, a mutually beneficial trade can take place when each one votes for two things:

1. for the trade to occur (so we know what each one wants) and
2. for the enforcement of the agreement if both agree to the trade (So each is willing to allow him/herself to be violently coerced, in exchange for the other agreeing to being violently coerced, if either breaks his promise).

The key to understanding democracy is to understand that 100% of people may vote for each person to take a particular action (e.g. follow a law, or pool money for a community project). And 100% may vote to have the contract enforced if some individual does not follow his agreed upon behavior.

One can understand the usefulness of democracy only if one first understands that:

1. If the enforcement of a contract is fair (by the police) then
2. It could be rational for 100% of people to vote to be coerced into following a contract, even if an individual party to the contract later decides to not follow the contract he voted for.

What does voting for being "coerced into following a contract" mean? In certain situations a voting individual may vote for the contract plus the enforcement of the contract, but later change his mind, perhaps because others have already contributed and the project is finished, so he no longer sees the need to pay. Being "coerced into following the contract" means that such an individual can be coerced into paying the community, even if he now refuses, because he agreed in advance to the application of force, if he ultimately refuses to pay.

If you can not see how 100% of the people could rationally vote for enforcement of a fair contract voted by 100% of the people, even if someone later reneges on the contract, then you will not be able to understand the benefits of democracy, and further discussion is not useful.

The first vote in establishing a just society, in my view, is for all to agree that contracts, voluntarily agreed to, must be enforced.

But if you can in fact see how enforcement of voluntarily agreed upon contracts benefits trade and can better humanity from a moral perspective, and if you can see that 100% of a particular group of people could vote for that; then we can proceed in seeing how a just society, utilizing democracy, could form. And I will be able to

explain to you how agreeing to voting, even if one sometimes is in the minority can, from a certain perspective, reflect the unanimous will of all.

by a reader on Mon, 04/30/2007 - 19:54 | [reply](#)

I particularly like the liber

I particularly like the libertarian idea of independent quality-check companies instead of governmental tax-subsidised beurocrats.

Suppose, I am a chocolate producer. I can benefit only from economy of scale, i.e. selling a lot of chocolate to the public with a better price than my competitors. Now, since it becomes very popular idea to hire an "independent" quality-checker, many customers will prefer to buy chocolate from independently checked company. And because I sell chocolate in huge quantities I can afford to pay a million or so to a quality-checker. After getting me as a million dollar customer and considering competition amongst quality-checking companies we will have yet to see how independent their independent checks are going to be. This sort of things hapening even now in non-libertarian countries like UK or USA. There are examples of sponsored academic research on quality of certain food products that are quite obviously biased towards the sponsor's needs.

Many big companies would prefer to invest bigger money into desinformation of population rather than on safety, quality etc..

Hoping that in libertarian society shenanigans will cease to exist for natural reasons is a little bit naive.

by a reader on Thu, 05/10/2007 - 14:33 | [reply](#)

The first vote in establishin

The first vote in establishing a just society, in my view, is for all to agree that contracts, voluntarily agreed to, must be enforced.

But if you can in fact see how enforcement of voluntarily agreed upon contracts benefits trade and can better humanity from a moral perspective, and if you can see that 100% of a particular group of people could vote for that; then we can proceed in seeing how a just society, utilizing democracy, could form. And I will be able to explain to you how agreeing to voting, even if one sometimes is in the minority can, from a certain perspective, reflect the unanimous will of all.

I agree about the 100% case. That's easy. So go on :)

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 05/16/2007 - 05:33 | [reply](#)

OK

Let's assume that it is rational for people to prefer a dam to be built to prevent flooding on farmland, and in fact 100% of 100 farmers privately agree that it is worth it to each of them to pay their share of the cost of the dam.

If there is no vote, but unanimous agreement is required before a project proceeds, then individuals who may secretly want the dam and think it is worth their share of the cost, nonetheless have a selfish incentive to claim that they don't want the dam, so that others pay for it instead of them. So there are societal costs associated with people not telling the truth about their preferences. Namely, projects that may benefit everyone, may be underfunded.

These costs can be reduced in certain voting situations. If the majority preference is enforced and each farmer thinks it is rational to split the cost of building the dam amongst everyone (all 100 farmers), all will in fact vote for it. So voting is valuable in this instance, because it causes the voters to be honest about their preferences.

Do you see why a group of 100 people, all of whom correctly suspect (but don't know) that 100% of everyone else wants to fund a project (like a dam to prevent flooding of their farms), could rationally prefer to vote for a project (with majority rule) rather than meet in a room and negotiate?

by a reader on Mon, 05/21/2007 - 23:09 | [reply](#)

Liars

I agree that liars are an issue and that certain systems create an incentive to lie in this way.

But if you take a majority vote and then force everyone to pay, you are not just making liars pay, you are also making people who honestly don't want the project pay. That is using force to take money from innocents to pay for a project you want.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Mon, 05/21/2007 - 23:35 | [reply](#)

Unanimity

Because everyone is known to be rational and because everyone therefore expects that 100% of everyone else will also vote for it, do you see how 100 people could rationally agree that they ***WANT*** to vote for the dam.

You agreed to the below.

'But if you can in fact see how enforcement of voluntarily agreed upon contracts benefits trade and can better humanity from a moral perspective, and if you can see that 100% of a particular group of

people could vote for that; then we can proceed in seeing how a just society, utilizing democracy, could form.'

It was rational for 100 people to vote to enforce contracts. (Right?) So it could theoretically be possible for 100 people to want to vote for a dam to be built (for rational reasons, as well).

And if all 100 farmers all agree to a vote on the issue, what is the objection? You have already agreed that 100 people could all agree to vote that they want to enforce contracts. What's the conceptual difference?

by a reader on Tue, 05/22/2007 - 17:18 | [reply](#)

100%

Suppose you try to get a unanimous vote. If you succeed, that's that. If some people vote against it, now what? Either they are lying, or they really don't want the project at the price.

Even if you suspect that every no-voter really does want it, your policy of forcing everyone will indiscriminately catch innocents.

If they all agree to vote and abide by the majority decision that's fine. But of course that isn't how things work IRL. I can't withdraw from a vote on some new tax and refuse to be bound by it.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us
Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 05/22/2007 - 20:31 | [reply](#)

Immigration

How does our Libertarian handle immigration in a better world?

Are borders obsolete?

How does one deal with criminality and free flow of terrorists in a capitalist free market society?

by a reader on Tue, 05/22/2007 - 23:41 | [reply](#)

Unanimous rule

One hundred people could all agree as follows:

- a. When someone thinks there is a public good issue that should be funded, all 100 agree ahead of time to anonymously vote on each issue presented as a putative public good.
- b. When the anonymous vote occurs, the project is funded if and only if all unanimously vote to fund the project, and the unanimous vote binds all of them to fund the project according to the amount specified in the language that they voted on.

Is that OK?

by a reader on Wed, 05/23/2007 - 00:33 | [reply](#)

unanimous

yes, fine.

btw in that system there is no incentive to lie: a single person saying he doesn't want the project prevents it from happening at all. if you lie, other people don't pay for you. so if projects don't happen it suggests at least one person honestly doesn't want them (at that price).

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 05/23/2007 - 01:05 | [reply](#)

Borders

Ultimately borders will go. Ultimately no one will want to be a criminal. Ultimately persuasion will solve terrorism.

In the short term, an improved policy I advocate towards borders is to consider especially bad rulers of other countries to have less legitimacy -- to respect their borders less.

As far as our borders, a step in the right direction would be to decrease restrictions on trade of medicine with Canada and Mexico.

We could speculate about the second and third small steps. But what steps 50-1000 are we don't know yet. Fortunately we don't have to. One step at a time is sufficient.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 05/23/2007 - 01:11 | [reply](#)

"btw in that system there is

"btw in that system there is no incentive to lie"

Yes, that's the interesting and good part of voting. Lying has many costs. One of the main ones is that it makes cooperation between like-minded people (pooling money and other pooling of effort) much more expensive. Something that reduces the amount of lying (for example people having the opportunity to express their preferences by voting) saves money for everyone.

So voting has economic *value*. How much?

Let's say the unanimous rule voting system helps the 100 people to save a lot of money by pooling money when the group unanimously thinks they are funding a public good.

And then all 100 have an idea for saving even more. Instead of

voting on one issue at a time, they agree to vote on 10 issues (all specified in advance) at a time. And they agree to pay for each project if 90% (not 100%) consider the good a public good and agree to the amount of money that the 90% majority thinks is correct. And the 10% agree in advance to follow the will of the 90% majority, even if on any particular vote, a particular individual is one of the 10% who does not agree that a project should be financed.

Why might they all rationally agree to this type of voting system?

Because all clearly see that money is saved when people do not have an economic incentive to lie about what they want. And anonymous voting solves the economic problem of people having an incentive to lie about their preferences. If all 100 expect that they will agree with everyone else, say 85% of the time, the amount of money lost when a given individual is in the extreme minority, and so funds a project he does not favor, may be expected to be less (perhaps considerably less) than the amount of money gained because of the economic gains from mass cooperation in producing projects that the overwhelming majority think are public goods.

So a given individual may rationally decide to lose a little bit of money when he (rarely) is in the extreme minority in one situation, in order to gain even more by being in the majority most of the time.

So do you see how participating in this partial form of partial democracy could be a rational economic decision on the part of *all 100* of the farmers?

by a reader on Wed, 05/23/2007 - 09:10 | [reply](#)

Government

What you say is correct, as far as it goes.

Organization of people to facilitate coordination, such as building bridges, is much better than nothing. Our government embodies a significant amount of the organization we've created; it helps us cooperate.

An anarchist might think that no institutions is one step away from non-coercive institutions, and that having a government is two steps away (step 1: destroy government). But this is incorrect, and the mistake is not to realize that people make mistakes. Creating institutions for human cooperation is an error prone process and we should not condemn the ones we have just because they contain error. Starting over would just mean more error; we have been reducing the errors over time and should not throw that out. In fact, the only reason we even have a much idea of what a voluntarist society would look like is because we are a good part of the way there.

But it's also important to recognize that while the sort of voting schemes you propose do indeed have advantages over nothing, and over various worse ideas, and perhaps over various naive schemes

of individual rights, they contain errors. And, today, we know some of the errors they contain.

One major error is the idea that we don't have better ways of dealing with public good problems than government. But we already solve a wide variety of public goods problems using the free market. People seem to try to only count hard problems as public good problems, but that doesn't hold up logically. Mostly public goods problems are easy (by present day standards). We should be aiming to increase the proportion of public good problems which the market solves, and we should be optimistic and know it's only a small change and that serious progress can be made now.

Another issue is that our government could be more respectful of individual rights and liberty, and care more deeply about whether actions are voluntarily undertaken. Sure you can lump votes on 100 issues together and say, "Agree to them all, because on balance it's good for you". But it's **even better** if you don't. It's even better if the choices available to people lets them decide what they want to participate in with a finer degree of granularity.

I understand the reason for lumping things together: it is a way to fight lying. But there do exist other ways to fight lying which have less adverse effects on innocents. Trying to lie to people so that they buy things which benefit you is one way to become wealthy. But it is not at all the most efficient, effective, moral, interesting, fun, or enjoyable way. You and I would not want to live that way. No one else would either, if only they had more knowledge. Better education is just one strategy to end lying; there are others too.

So overall, yes our Government is a good thing, and it is worlds better than the darkness from which we originate, but it certainly can be improved further, and treating people less forcefully is one of the ways that it will improve.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us
Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Fri, 05/25/2007 - 22:59 | [reply](#)

Straw Man

"One major error is the idea that we don't have better ways of dealing with public good problems than government."

I demonstrated that given certain circumstance and given our current state of knowledge, democratic voting can solve certain types of problems relatively efficiently and with respect for individual rights.

But you are attacking a straw man. I know of virtually no one who believes that the government should solve all public good problems. Where have I stated that I believe that government is a panacea, in anything that I have written?

Obviously, companies can produce certain goods profitably, even

when in the process of producing these goods, other goods are produced and it is costly to exclude "free riders" from enjoying these free goods. If the goods that people get by being "free riders" are "public goods", then the market is providing public goods with no government help.

Far and away, though, the most important way that public goods are provided is by ethical behavior of citizens. For example, when people are honest about publically stating their preferences, even if they could benefit financially by lying about what they want, groups of people can coordinate activities and produce public goods. And most importantly, no doubt because of faith in G-d, but also because of humanistic inclinations, public goods are produced because of altruism, self-sacrifice, and charity. Virtually no one who believes in democratic voting is opposed to ethical behavior, as you imply. Indeed, the only argument against altruism that I have heard has come from you!

by a reader on Sun, 05/27/2007 - 16:41 | [reply](#)

Re: Straw Man

Any use of straw men is inadvertent.

Regarding altruism, I don't think it is ethical. But I think that's a tangent we don't need to get in to.

I'm glad you agree the market provides some public goods easily. As you're aware, that means the distinction of which goods are problematic and should be provided by government is different than the distinction between a public good, and not a public good. So, could you specify precisely what the distinction is? How do you determine which goods the government should provide? Is it being a public good plus some other criteria?

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sun, 05/27/2007 - 18:35 | [reply](#)

Benefits and Costs

When the expected future economic benefits minus costs of government action is greater than the expected future benefits minus costs of allowing the free market to produce the good, the good should be produced by the government.

Since government is remarkably inefficient at producing things, most public goods should not be produced by the government.

by a reader on Sun, 05/27/2007 - 23:45 | [reply](#)

re: benefits + costs

What I believe you are saying is: when it's efficient, then govt

should produce a good.

As an aside, for the record, I want to point out that I don't completely agree with that: there are other important criteria besides efficiency. One important criterion is whether it is forceful or fully voluntary. But never mind that for now.

There is a different issue I want to discuss. People make mistakes. Some of the dams and bridges and so on were bad to build, even if the most efficient party was the one to build them. It is hard to know which to build, and which not. So one question this brings up is: when it's determined that a project was a mistake (and how will that determination be made?) who will suffer the harm done, and how?

Do you want to say what you think the answers should be? Alternatively, if this makes sense so far, I can say what I think each of our answers is.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 06/06/2007 - 05:59 | [reply](#)

Economic Efficiency vs. Cost Effectiveness

"When the expected future economic benefits minus costs of government action is greater than the expected future benefits minus costs of allowing the free market to produce the good, the good should be produced by the government."

A reader

"Some of the dams and bridges and so on were bad to build, even if the most efficient party was the one to build them."

Elliot Temple

If the expected future benefits minus costs are greater than zero for a project and are greater than the next best alternative, the project should be completed (by the government if it is more efficient, or by private enterprise if it is more efficient.)

You are talking about cost effectiveness, I am talking about economic efficiency.

by a reader on Mon, 06/11/2007 - 02:56 | [reply](#)

zero

I was assuming the benefit might be less than zero. Many proposed real projects -- some with millions of supporters in the US alone -- are billions of dollars below zero.

I think we are agreed that doing projects with negative net value is a bad idea. So back to my question:

So one question this brings up is: when it's determined that a

*project was a mistake (and how will that determination be made?)
who will suffer the harm done, and how?*

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 06/11/2007 - 03:38 | [reply](#)

Your Sense of Things

How do you think it should be determined that a mistake was made and who should make the determination?

by a reader on Mon, 06/11/2007 - 15:21 | [reply](#)

back to basics, perhaps naively

Roughly speaking, it seems that there are two groups of people who would take issue with the original story: those who are repelled on first principles and those who like the world which Mr. Temple envisions but are offended that he seems blind to, or at least does not acknowledge in his story, something crucial.

Of the first group little needs to be said here. Obviously there are people who find beautiful a worldview rooted in things like altruism, duty, cooperation, compassion; who disagree strongly with Prof. Deutsch that this has anything to do with guilt, fear, self-loathing, lack of self-confidence, or other pathology; who find his morality as ugly as he finds theirs. This fundamental argument will endure.

The sticking point with the second group is much weaker and thus, in a way, of greater concern, for perhaps something can be done to eliminate it. One way into it is to look at how the second group would react to the distillate of Mr. Temple's story: "Steve *is* a self-made man who takes care of himself." This is bound to raise hackles because of what it does not recognize.

The minor point:

Do you not agree that the "liberal" policies highlighted in the story served a purpose at one time? That they were part of getting us to where we can now talk about a libertarian world, difficult to imagine arising from barbarism, feudalism, or even the capitalism of a century ago? That the hero of the story, while self-made from the perspective of a world that has already "had libertarian policies for centuries", is not self-made in the sense that centuries or millennia of struggle prepared the way for that world? (This may seem obvious or irrelevant, but surely "X is bad; Y is good" elicits a very different reaction from "X had its time but now we are ready to do better with Y". To be fair, some of the comments above adopt this latter tone.)

In any case, this is not the major point, which is:

It is difficult to deny, regardless of one's politics, that something

else helped our society arrive at its massive wealth and a stage of development where we can talk seriously about a libertarian world: massive violence in the form of colonization, enslavement, theft, and so on. What do Mr. Temple and other libertarians say to those who are attracted to a libertarian future but see the redress of injustice as a prerequisite to getting there, even to starting the conversation? Who think that it is obscene, and obscenely easy, for us to consider Steve "self-made" when he and we are riding on a legacy of advantage stolen from their ancestors?

Of course one can argue that this issue is logically separate from the fun and useful exercise of imagining what a future libertarian world would look like, and that someone engaged merely in this exercise is not obligated to address it; but to a great many people, it is so centrally important that any political conversation that ignores it will be entirely alienating. (And the last line of the story really asks for it.)

If this issue has already been well addressed in libertarian texts, I would be grateful to be pointed in the right direction.

by a reader on Fri, 06/15/2007 - 21:19 | [reply](#)

Massive Violence

It is difficult to deny, regardless of one's politics, that something else helped our society arrive at its massive wealth and a stage of development where we can talk seriously about a libertarian world: massive violence in the form of colonization, enslavement, theft, and so on.

To the extent massive violence in each of those forms happened, that made us poorer. Just like if we do anything like that today, it only hurts us. Horribly immoral actions are not where prosperity comes from. Do you disagree?

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sat, 06/16/2007 - 01:48 | [reply](#)

Determining Mistakes

How do you think it should be determined that a mistake was made and who should make the determination?

In a free market system, where we insist on consent from all those whose resources are used in a project, the people who lose when the project fails are precisely the people who believed that it would succeed and put their money (or effort, trust, etc) where their mouth was. Concomitantly, those are the people who gain when it succeeds. (Others may gain as well. That is not a downside.)

No one has to make a determination about which projects are

successes and which are failures, and then to punish and reward accordingly. People put resources into a project, and get other resources back. They then, as a matter of fact, do or do not have resources to continue with further projects, and this corresponds to how good they are at choosing projects.

A good project is one that either in fact creates something valuable, or one that creates things other people want (whether those things are valuable or not). Making things others want which are in fact bad is a mistake, but people who do it do not become poorer. But their customers do, so such silliness is not self-sustaining. Besides, doing what other people want you to is altruistic ;)

People with good judgment find they have more and more wealth to make determinations about without anyone ever having to determine whether this person has good judgment or not. And people who are mistaken a lot become poor, again without anyone judging them personally. And the only way to be able to participate in large projects again is to either persuade people with wealth (who tend to have good judgment), or to collaborate on some successful projects, such as working at Wal-Mart, or being a plumber.

That is what I think should happen.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 06/16/2007 - 02:27 | [reply](#)

If public goods then externalities

"In a free market system, where we insist on consent from all those whose resources are used in a project"

Nonsense.

For example, you have insisted that the free market can have spillover effects in which people benefit. So public goods can be produced. But if the free market can do that, then it can involuntarily take goods from people, as well. That does not involve consent.

by a reader on Sat, 06/16/2007 - 22:49 | [reply](#)

Example

Please give an example of the free market taking people's goods without consent. It only counts if this is legal to do without compensation (in principle).

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 06/16/2007 - 23:25 | [reply](#)

settling accounts

To the extent massive violence in each of those forms happened, that made us poorer. Just like if we do anything like that today, it only hurts us. Horribly immoral actions are not where prosperity comes from. Do you disagree?

Thank you for your response. I do not disagree. I like what you say very much. But I see it as only glancing the crucial issue, and so I am not sure how to bring us round to a conclusion.

A woman descended from slaves recently said: "You white men think that the world is ready, or nearly ready, for your libertarian dream. *You* might be ready, but don't you understand that *we* will never be ready until you pay what you owe us?"

What is to be done about the profoundly felt *you/we* opposition at the core of her world? Many people on this site, reading the original story about "what life would be like in *my* (libertarian) world", can identify: *my* becomes *our*; *we* are imagining a future world together. What about all the people who cannot, not because they do not like the world imagined, but because they see a chasm of injustice separating them from this latter *we*?

by back to basics author on Sun, 06/17/2007 - 07:41 | [reply](#)

Externalities and Public Goods....Require Government Calculation

As a consequence of free market production of cars, one person claims that pollution has decreased his air quality and the manufacturer of the cars denies that the air quality is damaged by his production.

Whether the production of cars is an economic success or a failure depends precisely on whether the government (for example the courts) makes economic calculations about whether air was stolen or not.

You said with respect to the free market, "No one has to make a determination about which projects are successes and which are failures, and then to punish and reward accordingly."

Do you care to reconsider?

by a reader on Sun, 06/17/2007 - 15:14 | [reply](#)

re: settling accounts

A woman descended from slaves recently said: "You white men think that the world is ready, or nearly ready, for your libertarian dream. You might be ready, but don't you understand that we will never be ready until you pay what you owe us?"

Many white men were not slave owners, and many slave owners

were not white. Certainly white, American slave owners played a role in the history of slavery worldwide. But it is a relatively small role in the overall picture. Where are all the complaints about every other culture that held slaves? And the complaints against the African and Muslim slave traders who sold slaves to white men?

The answer is: those complaints are, like slavery in the West (but still not everywhere), long gone.

And so they should be. I held no slaves. My parents held no slaves. I owe nothing. And the woman making the complaint. Was she a slave? Or her parents? No. Were some of her distant ancestors? Presumably, yes. But so what? She has plenty of opportunity to have/make a good life. The slavery of her ancestors is not hurting her today.

It seems like slavery reparations ideas have both a narrow focus on slavery of black people by white Americans (which is wildly unfair), and have a tribal/racist mentality that sees slavery of one race by another, and counts present day people as part of the same races of the past.

You ask what is to be done about this? Argument and persuasion. Many black people today would agree with what I say above. One day when people argue these things more eloquently and more publicly it will become common sense.

Perhaps there are fundamental flaws in present day American black culture inhibiting this process. One further answer of what is to be done about those is the spread of better parenting techniques. With those in place, many irrationalities will fall away in a single generation. Replacing public schools would help too.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 06/19/2007 - 00:14 | [reply](#)

Re: Externalities

Me:

No one has to make a determination about which projects are successes and which are failures, and then to punish and reward accordingly.

You:

Whether the production of cars is an economic success or a failure depends precisely on whether the government (for example the courts) makes economic calculations about whether air was stolen or not.

A decision about the right policy towards air pollution, is not a decision that Toyotas are a success and Fords a failure. The person making air policy might not know anything about cars. The reason

that's possible is he isn't making a decision about cars, only one that indirectly affects cars.

Indirect effects of this sort are common. If I decide to buy billions of tons of steel, thus increasing the demand and the price, that too might affect which car projects succeed, but it does not give me any power to direct their future. It just isn't my decision. And, again, I might know nothing about them.

A more direct effect is a policy about allowed width of cars set by road owners (private or government). This is an important law (so cars fit in lanes). And it could cause a too-wide car line to go out of business overnight. But it does not at all constitute a person making a determination about which projects are successes and which are failures. If the wide car is redesigned there's nothing the width-decider can do. And if it sells despite being too wide -- perhaps for off-road use, or for monster truck competitions, or even in protest against the width regulation -- again he has no power. And as in all the other cases, he isn't making a decision about that car project as proved by the fact he could just as well have never heard of it, and also by the fact that his decision could accidentally have the opposite effect.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 06/19/2007 - 00:51 | [reply](#)

Slaves

Okay. I hate even going there, but it can't be ignored.

A capitalist argument can be made for slavery. Indentured servant works too. I find it all morally reprehensible, but truth requires that it be looked at. As capitalists we all rise on the backs of those that preceded us, slaves and indentured servants and illegal immigrants too. Economically, at some phase of human societal development it works. Like it or not, the bluejeans you wear, even the ones you paid alot for, we're produced by forms of slavery intricately interlaced with most other entrepreneurial forms along their production and sale life cycle. Why are some of these forms prohibited in Great Britain and America and not even considered in our advantageous free trade with China or Malaysia, where human labor is just worth so much less? Is this because we are enlightened capitalists and libertarians and they are not because they so willingly endure forms of slavery and economic oppression so not to starve?

Or is it easier just to turn our heads away and ignore the economic truths of supply and demand and unfettered production, and instead look happily to the future when all economic boats will rise, in theory anyway. I have never seen a reasonable libertarian answer to the current and past reality, or even the realistic future one, other than to argue that because of the past and current imperfections of our moral foolishness we haven't yet seen the

light.

It is so easy to ignore the externalities when we don't have to look at them.

In the meantime, I try to choose the least slavery possible and reject libertarian and all other easy utopias for one and the same moral reason: human worth, although messy and complex to look at and address, comes first.

by a reader on Tue, 06/19/2007 - 15:50 | [reply](#)

Sweat Shops

The reason people work for Nike/etc in China/etc is because they want to. It may suck by American standards, but they see better working conditions and higher pay. Nike does not send out armed groups to round up workers, because people do it voluntarily.

Nike and others have no way to keep wages down by their own choice. The only thing that keeps them down is when the supply of willing (and sufficiently skilled) labor is much larger than the demand. In other words, wages will increase when there are *more* such factories.

All this worldwide free trade stuff is good, nothing to be ashamed of.

BTW I don't see how a slavery or indentured slavery could hold up in court. Someone decides not to do it anymore. That's breach of contract. Now what? Well, he owes compensation, but the court is just going to make him pay some money. So he can end the slavery part at a moment's notice. So it was never really slavery.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 06/19/2007 - 20:59 | [reply](#)

Nike per se is not the problem

Nike has had their feet held to the fire, literally, more than once and as a good western company has seen the light and corrected most of their own abuses. But Nike is only one of hundreds of thousands of corporate mediators of free trade. If you haven't been to China, Eliot, you can hardly imagine. Free will includes the will to starve, I would guess, and for your children to starve as well. This is not even the Chinese government per se, but the completely unfettered free trade across borders. What thing live or dead or manufactured do you want? You can get it in China. Plus China is not alone. If you can't get it there, it can be made clean for you by the murky transactions of many hands until it reaches your pristine shores.

Libertarians look the other way or excuse all this as an aberration of

misguided humans. In theory, free trade works, always. In utopia, everything works.

Another example. Build a superhighway north through Texas, a private road for trucks for all those cheap sweatshop goods from Mexico, right alongside the honestly traded ones. Yet, paradoxically raise a 1600 mile concrete barrier 12 feet high so no Mexicans can cross to where the real opportunity is. This is the reality of "free trade".

Contracts? Bah, humbug. There only as good as the paper they're printed on and the honor of those signing them.

by a reader on Wed, 06/20/2007 - 14:41 | [reply](#)

Sources

Could you give some sources on some bad things going on in China, and then give a brief explanation of why you think the free market is responsible for that?

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 06/20/2007 - 19:53 | [reply](#)

Slaves

Slavery is bad for the economy.

<http://hnn.us/blogs/entries/20776.html>

*The old doctrine that the slavery of the black, is essential to the freedom of the white race, can maintain itself only in the presence of slavery, where interest and prejudice are the controlling powers, but it stands condemned equally by reason and experience. The statesmanship of to-day condemns and repudiates it as a shallow pretext for oppression. It belongs with the commercial fallacies long ago exposed by Adam Smith. It stands on a level with the contemptible notion, that every crumb of bread that goes into another man's mouth, is just so much bread taken from mine. Whereas, the rule is in this country of abundant land, the more mouths you have, the more money you can put into your pocket, the more I can put into mine. As with political economy, so with civil and political rights (**Frederick Douglass, November 17, 1864**).*

by a reader on Wed, 06/20/2007 - 22:47 | [reply](#)

Re: Sources

You may be asking the wrong question and of the wrong person.

Corporations should be asking, and should be asked this question.

Some are, and some are asked; and some are not or even troubled by it.

I am not against the ideal of free trade. However, when we experience trade across different market economies, we cannot rationalize away the deep differences or the exploitation of human worth inequities.

If I as a corporation (remember, the corporation in U.S. law is an individual) decide that "free trade" is the only factor, I will be willing to buy melamine laced dog and cat food, or at least turn my head the other way because I did not produce it. I will be willing to buy and sell Colgate toothpaste that is neither Colgate or toothpaste but a facsimile of brand recognition laced with a poisonous substance, or I will say that is an anomaly, a slip-up, how could I know. I will not be alarmed that behind the doors of a production facility (even to call it that begs the question) very young children work in deplorable conditions to produce goods which may even be dangerous to their health and growth, if I don't care to consider that. In the case of agriculture, the local barnyard may have no western sanitation much less clean slaughter facilities and yet dried and canned and even frozen products made specifically for export may contain the barest evidence of this dangerous contamination or it may not be readily evident if there were no checks on-site. As to manufacture, and manufacturing processes, there is piecework that I have seen myself, done by Chinese children younger than 12 years of age in their own crowded one room family residence on their bare pallet beds for pennies an hour. Someone is buying that for western markets knowing full well the ultimate source and not caring, if final cost of production rules all their decisions. By the way, this will certainly not be mentioned in their annual stock report.

But the examples and sources would be endless, so I won't dwell on them. Let the corporations do this, if they only would. Unfettered by the responsibility of actual production, some will, and some won't. So who checks?

The western world creates some, many of these markets. Therefore, if a U.S. corporation (as legal individual) buys these items wholesale, whereas their home country would never allow such abuses among their own people, and in fact would consider a number of these practices of production to constitute criminal acts if Americans were "hired" or contracted to produce the goods, there is either the veil of ignorance or the murkiness of criminal intent on the part of the corporation which contracts for them.

Ignorance of the law is no excuse, but who checks. Some certainly do not. Criminal intent should be proveable but is not. Hide behind the banner of "free trade" and the excuse that the buyer should be beware? Let the buyer beware is not sufficient caution. A label, made in China or Guatemala or Uganda tells the buyer almost nothing. Where are the penalties under our laws if the offending party is even found?

So the primary question is not one of "free" trade in the utopian

sense but one of the uncontrolled and hardly monitored easy abuse under the pristine umbrella and noble idea of international free trade. Free trade does not mean freedom of corporate responsibility, but in effect this is what occurs, and this is how the mantle is worn too often.

I return again to Texas. Here is an example of another problem. There is no free trade when it comes to the production of goods by human capital across certain borders. I am cheap and exploitable if I live on one side of the border. I am not employable if I live on the other side of the border, unable to compete. Yet the goods produced by these hands, exploited, enslaved, or indentured, enter freely. Thus "free trade" is not truly free, nor is it intended to be under such skewed terms.

Ireland important export and international commerce is a good example of free trade. Texas and Mexico, or China via Mexico to Texas is not. Calling it free trade when it is demonstrably not is a travesty. There was a time when Ireland was not a good example of the institutions of free trade, and it had to do, then as now, with externalities and human worth. I guess as good utopians we can hope that by chance and evolution it will someday, like Ireland, all become truly free.

However, in the present I personally opt for moral honesty.

by a reader on Thu, 06/21/2007 - 00:24 | [reply](#)

Poison

If I as a corporation (remember, the corporation in U.S. law is an individual) decide that "free trade" is the only factor, I will be willing to buy melamine laced dog and cat food, or at least turn my head the other way because I did not produce it. I will be willing to buy and sell Colgate toothpaste that is neither Colgate or toothpaste but a facsimile of brand recognition laced with a poisonous substance, or I will say that is an anomaly, a slip-up, how could I know.

Criminal actions aren't free trade anymore than robbing someone is.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 06/21/2007 - 01:49 | [reply](#)

Governments and Borders

So we return to the point about honoring borders:

"In the short term, an improved policy I advocate towards borders is to consider especially bad rulers of other countries to have less legitimacy -- to respect their borders less."

Thus if free trade is not to be trusted as a transaction because of

the lack of consistent regulation of safety and production and bad standards of control within the exporting country, there is also less legitimacy -- and we should respect their borders less as a trading entity.

Free trade requires a level playing field. To reiterate, common standards of human worth, common standards of production and control, common standards of monetary policy and subsidy, common standards of law and corporate responsibility all calculate directly into the free trade equation. That is reality.

Without honoring and safeguarding all of the above principles, trade across borders cannot in any sense be fully honest commerce, or free.

by a reader on Thu, 06/21/2007 - 03:53 | [reply](#)

Borders, Level Playing Field

Leveling playing fields is not the point. Either you are a criminal, or you are buying the fruits of criminal behavior, or it is perfectly fair. Not necessarily level -- maybe your father was richer and more helpful than mine -- but it's free and it's just fine.

Borders have little to do with free trade between individuals, they just have to do with governments. When governments stop meddling in trade, borders will be irrelevant to trade.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 06/21/2007 - 20:44 | [reply](#)

Of Course

And then there will be only honest men or criminals.

Just read today in an international journal about the Chinese government finally acknowledging "luring and enslavement" of individuals, families, and some children to the brick kiln industries of China. This was their words, not mine. Honesty and open recognition of abuses is key. Corporations, at least in the U.S. have the status and responsibility of individuals under the law. Let's keep it that way. No hiding behind borders allowed.

by a reader on Thu, 06/21/2007 - 23:14 | [reply](#)

Child Slavery

Elliot,

What do you think about trading with countries that abduct children and force them to work. Should there be restrictions on trade with those countries?

by a reader on Fri, 06/22/2007 - 14:04 | [reply](#)

Child Slavery

Restrictions on trade in general is not a very ideal approach -- why let some bad apples spoil it for the rest of us? I'd much rather see criminals arrested. Abducting children is a crime.

Knowingly receiving stolen goods is a crime too, and the principle applies just as well to slave-made goods (which we could easily think of as stolen from the maker).

What about unknowingly? Well if you took reasonable precautions and stop when you find out, that's not a crime. If you wear a blindfold to avoid noticing that is a lesser crime.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 06/22/2007 - 19:33 | [reply](#)

Enslave or Kill

Enslaving someone and making him work is a crime, as you say. But does it make a difference to you that the child may have been given a "choice" of dying or working in slavery. Should one still not buy the fruits of the slave's labor?

Let's say a totalitarian dictator says to you that it would be good if you buy the products of slaves' labor because otherwise the slaves government will execute them. Would you argue that we should (nonetheless) buy the goods?

This question is somewhat analogous to the question of whether we should buy goods produced from factories with barbaric conditions, if these factories nonetheless provide slightly higher wages than other equally barbaric alternatives.

by a reader on Mon, 06/25/2007 - 21:20 | [reply](#)

Government Efficiency Calculations

"We don't need a proper analysis. Government can't decide to limit its actions only to efficient ones -- even if it wanted to -- because it cannot know for sure which actions are efficient. No one knows that. That's why there is risk involved in investing in companies." Elliot Temple, from the [Setting the World to Rights](#) post "Not like This"

"A decision about the right policy towards air pollution, is not a decision that Toyotas are a success and Fords a failure. The person making air policy might not know anything about cars. The reason that's possible is he isn't making a decision about cars, only one that indirectly affects cars."

Elliot Temple

Government must make economic calculations to prevent

externalities. A decision to tax a certain amount for air pollution may very well destroy certain car manufacturers whose production techniques pollute extensively.

And government calculations of the cost of air pollution are no more complex than government calculation of the appropriate subsidies to companies that as a byproduct of private production also produce public goods.

In both cases the government must make economic calculations. In both cases the government decision can make some businesses profitable and others not. So contrary to your apparent view, the government need be no more involved (nor no less involved) in helping produce public goods as stopping externalities (stealing).

Do you see that the government **is** making decisions about efficiency in both cases. In the case of the pollution, the government must decide about the efficiency loss to those who must inhale polluted air. In the case of scientific production of technological goods, the government must weigh the value of created knowledge to all, and subsidize appropriately.

The point is, in either case it can be more efficient if the government is involved. And if the government is involved in stopping externalities, it makes sense (from an efficiency perspective) that the government should be involved in subsidizing the production of public goods.

by a reader on Mon, 06/25/2007 - 22:05 | [reply](#)

efficiency

you say that preventing polluting other people's property with poison gasses is about efficiency just like subsidizing goods w/ public benefit is about efficiency -- and govt should do both.

i think the first is about preventing crime -- damaging people's property without compensation -- and the second is something that shouldn't be attempted. it's true that preventing crime is efficient. but that doesn't make it the same thing as subsidies to favored companies. i want a government that does its best never to judge the merits of particular people or companies. one where there are no officials deciding if they like my product and it's worthy of special treatment. that sort of arbitrary authority is a bad thing.

by Elliot on Fri, 07/06/2007 - 17:13 | [reply](#)

hostages

Let's say a totalitarian dictator says to you that it would be good if you buy the products of slaves' labor because otherwise the slaves government will execute them. Would you argue that we should (nonetheless) buy the goods?

that is a hostage situation not an economic policy issue. they'll kill

the hostages/slaves unless we do as told.

by Elliot on Fri, 07/06/2007 - 17:40 | [reply](#)

Who Determines?

"you say that preventing polluting other people's property with poison gasses is about efficiency....I think (the issue) is about crime -- damaging people's property without compensation."

Who should determine whether pollution is a "poison gas" that damages other's property? The courts? The legislature?

How should it be determined that a given amount of pollution released is considered a "poison gas" that damages property?

by a reader on Mon, 10/29/2007 - 21:39 | [reply](#)

who should rule?

the important thing is not who should rule. nor, especially, what answer is reached. it is that errors can be corrected.

so, i don't especially care whether the courts get to decide, or congress makes a law, or whatever. my point was about what I think is the right way to think about the situation, not about who should have power. i should hope that people would agree with me, and then it would not matter who is in power.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 10/30/2007 - 10:07 | [reply](#)

OK

How should it be determined that a given amount of pollution released is considered a "poison gas" that damages property?

by a reader on Wed, 10/31/2007 - 12:49 | [reply](#)

By people thinking about the

By people thinking about the issue using reason, and then making piecemeal changes to the existing system.

I can't tell you how much of which chemicals is poison. I'm not a chemist. And a chemist probably can't tell you the full answer, either: to do that, one needs knowledge of our laws and legal precedents.

So what needs to happen is cases get taken to court, expert witnesses testify, over time legal precedents improve, perhaps sometimes public opinion shifts and a law is altered, etc

Standards for how much of which chemicals is a problem will also

change due to things like the easy availability of pollution cleanup nanobots.

-- Elliot Temple
curi@curi.us
Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 11/01/2007 - 00:36 | [reply](#)

How Much Pollution?

Given our state of knowledge, the amount of pollution that causes a dangerous amount of exposure varies between people. For example, those with asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease will be damaged by lower concentrations of pollution than others. If someone has a vulnerability to a particulate toxin in pollution, it may increase risk of cancer in him and only a few others.

If the court allowed noone to suffer any risk of being damaged by pollutants, then the costs of realizing this goal would be prohibitive. This is so because no firm can produce virtually anything without also producing and releasing into the environment minute quantities of a toxic byproduct.

Should a company be allowed to expose any non-consenting individual to any risk at all from pollution?

If yes, what factors should be considered by the judge in determining the amount of risk that a company can be allowed to expose the public to? For example, should the judge be able to consider that the company is making people wealthy and this wealth may decrease rates of death more than pollution increases it?

by a reader on Mon, 11/05/2007 - 15:01 | [reply](#)

how much

A) you and i should not be the ones deciding how much

B) obviously factories should be legal. people with special needs are responsible for taking care of those.

For example, should the judge be able to consider that the company is making people wealthy and this wealth may decrease rates of death more than pollution increases it?

no. courts should not be making judgments about which companies will be successful in the future.

what factors should be considered by the judge in determining the amount of risk that a company can be allowed to expose the public to

what harm would this do to avg person? is it something reasonable

people should be able to consent to? what's the precedent? are there known problems with that precedent? do i have a good reason for ruling against precedent? and whatever else it is courts consider.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 11/06/2007 - 00:21 | [reply](#)

I Don't Understand

Should a judge allow a new company to be able to expose a non-consenting individual to a small risk from pollution?

Should a judge allow a new company to be able to expose a particularly vulnerable non-consenting individual to a level of pollution that will injure him unless he moves away, though virtually everyone else will be unharmed by the pollution?

by a reader on Thu, 11/08/2007 - 22:46 | [reply](#)

you ask hard to answer questi

you ask hard to answer questions. we have a way of dealing with issues like this, but it isn't for some individual to decide. i'm not even a judge. i don't know a lot about legal traditions. the important thing is that a ruling is made (by someone who understand what our culture knows about how to make rulings) and that the ruling can be changed in the future if people decide it's causing problem and a different policy would be better.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 11/10/2007 - 07:16 | [reply](#)

Watered Down Nonsense

In the Sunday Telegraph, James LeFanu writes that we should be **nicer** to homeopathy. Specifically he takes issue with Michael Baum, Professor Emeritus of Surgery of surgery at University College London, who has pointed out that homeopathy has no more merit than **astrology**. LeFanu writes:

The claim that homeopathy is "unsupported" by evidence would be contradicted by the many tens of thousands of people worldwide who say that it has cured their asthma or eczema or markedly reduced their reliance on conventional medicines. Are they all, as he would suppose, foolish and self-deluded?

Of course they are; either that or for some reason the news has not reached them (as it clearly has not reached LeFanu) that science is, in the words of Richard Feynman, "what we have learned about how to keep from fooling ourselves". So if you don't use it when reasoning about what does or doesn't work, what will reliably happen is that you will continue to fool yourself.

Millions of people believe in **witches** and would swear that killing old women can and does alleviate a wide range of misfortunes including diseases. So, finding a group of people who claim that something cures them has no bearing at all on whether it does. LeFanu, unfortunately, continues:

It is true that homeopathy's supposed mechanism - treating like with like, where "the lower the dilution the more potent the remedy" - seems "barmy" to Western science. But so does acupuncture.

No demonstrable channels of communication cross the six feet that separate the toes from the skull, so how, as is undoubtedly the case, does twiddling a needle in the former cure a crashing migraine in the latter?

What? First of all, there is in fact **no** good **evidence** for acupuncture as a treatment of anything. But never mind that: pain and touch nerves *do* carry information from the foot to the brain. LeFanu is a physician and cannot possibly be that ignorant of basic anatomy. So it is, again, his standards of argument that are at

fault. The Telegraph's editors ought to require a higher standard of

reasoning in their newspaper than this watered down nonsense.

Sun, 05/27/2007 - 14:06 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Nonsense in the News

The Telegraph? When was the last time we've read anything but nonsense and hokum in the newspapers?

The article on homeopathy sounds like another fine example of prospective prize winning journalism to me. Of course, said with tongue in cheek but the state of news reporting is in one sad state.

Sure they can write for consumption, but what of substance? They cut down trees for this? Yet we still subscribe to the stuff or some at least still waste their time on it.

It is no wonder that newspapers are dinosaurs fighting extinction. They need to hold on to their dwindling readership and the homeopathy and ufo articles apparently help meet the sunday quotas for articles in the pop-science section.

by a reader on Wed, 05/30/2007 - 00:01 | [reply](#)

Placebo

The person who comes up with the mechanism of action of a placebo will be quite famous, as he will be able to partially treat many conditions.

I don't object to the use of placebo's, as long as there is informed consent. Acupuncture is a powerful placebo, and potentially useful to many people.

by a reader on Wed, 05/30/2007 - 00:52 | [reply](#)

Re: Placebo

A study in 2001 **concluded** that placebos are ineffective except for conditions, such as pain, that have a large subjective component.

"The high levels of placebo effect which have been repeatedly reported ... are the result of flawed research methodology," said Dr. Asbjorn Hrobjartsson, a professor of medical philosophy and research methodology at University of Copenhagen.

It seems likely, then, that in most cases flawed methodology, rather than the placebo effect, is responsible for people falsely concluding that they have been cured by homeopathy and the like.

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 05/30/2007 - 01:34 | [reply](#)

Chicken Hypnosis and the Faculty of Reason

In his new book, "The Assault on Reason", Al Gore tells us how to

hypnotise chickens. Find out how by reading the section on politics, pundits, and the modern media.

Does this picque your interest? If so, read on.

The source of the paradox of knowledge standing side by side with psuedo-knowledge is that reason is a higher order faculty that can be rather easily subverted into psuedo-reason. The fact that one can read and write and speak in complete sentences, quote authorities and journals, and believe and espouse complex psuedoscientific arguments, does not prove that our faculties of reason are fully engaged. Further, working in opposition to reason, there are tried and true methods, employed consciously or not, but certainly habitually and repetitively, in which repeated incidences of passive exposure to today's pundits via media distribution tend or intend to intrigue us with nonsense. The bond between consumer and producer of nonsense is created and fostered.

How so, and also importantly, Why so?

Firstly, it is of benefit to the pundit, as well to the ubiquitous media carrier to espouse and carry such nonsense. Nonsense is easy to produce, can be produced in great volume and with vast repetition, and it sells, rewards the producer, because readers and viewers enjoy the experience of being placed in a semi-trance state. It is a natural state but with sufficient soft prodding can also become an acquired pleasure.

Consumers in a semi-trance state will read or view almost anything set constantly before them and with sufficient repetition and exposure will tend to believe the content.

To coin a descriptive term, I will call this phenomenon, Cereal Box Syndrome. It is likely a distant cousin to the phenomenon of Chicken Hypnosis but is of a somewhat higher order on the scales of neurological evolution since it involves language, attitudes, and acquired beliefs.

The simple antidote in the case of a hypnotised chicken is to grasp the bird in the right hand like a football, and throw forward in a smooth flowing motion. The spell is immediately broken and the bird flies away unharmed.

I leave it to science to more clearly elucidate the antidote for what I have labeled Cereal Box Syndrome, but which certainly is more dangerously pervasive and subtle than the effects of chicken hypnosis.

Fortunately and in summary we can be assured, there is a vaguely remembered but sure and certain cure for CBS, and it is, to state simply:

Reasoning. Pure and simple, wide awake, Reasoning.

by a reader on Wed, 05/30/2007 - 15:01 | [reply](#)

Pain is a Problem

"A study in 2001 concluded that placebos are ineffective except for conditions, such as pain, that have a large subjective component."

I have seen that study. It is one amongst many. But even if its conclusions are accurate, pain is a problem for many people. To the extent that a placebo (versus doing nothing) helps that is a good thing.

by a reader on Wed, 05/30/2007 - 16:28 | [reply](#)

Placebo

A Reader:

You said placebos are ok if there is informed consent. Homeopathy and acupuncture patients don't give *informed* consent.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 05/30/2007 - 21:26 | [reply](#)

Who Will Blame The Blamers?

The German Chancellor Angela Merkel wanted to scrap nuclear power, but **has decided not to for environmental reasons**.

Why is it that the environmental movement is not being blamed for global warming? They must be the largest single cause, due to their decades-long campaign against nuclear power. (Though perhaps they will soon be the second largest cause, after the desire of Indian and Chinese people not to remain destitute for ever.)

Perhaps it is because the sacred task of blaming people for global warming has been entrusted to the high priests of the environmental movement itself. So who will blame the blamers?

Mon, 07/09/2007 - 00:22 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

A Good Argument

This would be a good argument if it was not just plain wrong. The main reason why nuclear power plants have not been built is because they were non-competitive in cost with other more cost effective options. Coal-fired plants have been by far the cheapest option in most countries, the only problem being that they're high polluters and the costs of pollution and air quality degradation are not factored into the equation. Clean coal may be an option with new technologies.

Nuclear power however is a great energy option in addition to renewables such as wind and hydro power in many regions when the cost of oil rises above a certain price and cooling water supplies are readily available via large rivers and lakes. We're near that threshold price now and that is why nuclear power plant designers and builders are putting nuclear power plants back on the table.

by a reader on Tue, 07/10/2007 - 15:48 | [reply](#)

Re: A Good Argument

It is not easy to separate the issue of cost from that of environmentalist politics. The emotiveness of radioactivity and nuclear weapons allowed environmentalism to win the political debate at the time. For instance, the accident at Chernobyl in the Soviet Union was used as an argument against Western nuclear

power technology, yet the thousands of coal miners killed in China were never used as an argument against Western coal mining. As a result, governments imposed costs and other obligations on nuclear power that were never imposed on other power sources. That was the means by which nuclear power became 'non-competitive'.

Bear in mind that nuclear power stations were being built at full speed in the 1960s, when oil was far cheaper than now.

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 07/11/2007 - 00:58 | [reply](#)

Plant Factors and Market Considerations

It is certainly correct that power choices are based on a number of complex decisions, some of which have are influenced by public opinion. One of the reasons why nuclear power stations of various designs were built in the 1960s into the 1970s was because of the exciting idea that nuclear power was the energy of the future and this caught the wave of an energy zeitgeist so to speak. That idea impetus in itself was not a bad thing, but required more actual examination and development.

Not all designs were equal although there was a fair amount of technological innovation in nuclear plant design and construction. Some of the early designs were flawed, most apparent in the Russian series designed reactor at Chernobyl where a sudden shutdown could actually cause, and did, a runaway reactor and quick steam buildup leading to a steam explosion exposing the reactor core and materials. Even where there were not major design flaws, downtime and plant inefficiency was often a problem, as well as the fact that there was little design standardization. Nuclear power and improved design has come a long way since then.

High initial capital cost and long lead time to build a nuclear plant is still a major factor in construction decisions. Some costs have been brought down by improvements in design efficiency and it is likely that capital cost will be brought down further by building of multiple plants with the same improved design, also considering that there are several design alternatives. In the United States a major factor in cost of fuel is that spent reactor fuel will not be refined and reused. This choice was a reasonable political decision at least at the time it was made, so as to prevent the proliferation of a fuel source with a potential use for nuclear weapons. (This consideration is resurfacing in the debate about Iran or other countries perhaps much more politically stable than Iran acquiring such fuel sources for peaceful use of nuclear power, but with an option for weapons grade fuel use.) Yet in other countries which already have a viable program of nuclear power, such as France, reuse and refining of spent fuel has not been so problematic, and their fuel costs are thus much more competitive against coal or gas, or oil.

The cost of oil (and natural gas) is increasingly a factor because of the related increase in demand for electric power as oil becomes more costly and less plentiful as an energy option. Until recently, and beginning in the 1970s an abundance of coal and gas fired

plants were easily meeting the energy demands in several countries so that there was little incentive to build new nuclear plants. Their high initial capital cost and uncertainty about future energy demands meant that almost no new construction occurred. An additional factor, still true today, was that the most desirable sites which had ready access to abundant cooling water and other preferable geologic siting were utilized early on.

It is likely that nuclear power today and in the foreseeable future will have a well deserved resurgence as one potential choice for power generation among several complementary options, but will not in itself be a power generation panacea for any country or region.

by a reader on Wed, 07/11/2007 - 03:56 | [reply](#)

The Global Supplies of uranium-238

The global supplies of uranium-238 are such that even continuing with the number of plants we have we have only enough uranium-238 for around 42-72 years of Nuclear power. If 60% of world power was Nuclear we would have enough for about /10-18 years/. This means that it is just impractical to rely on Nuclear for our energy into the future on any large scale.

These estimates are produced with the following sources. European Commission's Green Paper on Energy 2-3 million tonnes. And a more generous estimate (source unknown) 4-5 tonnes. Some people claim that there is around 17 million tonnes available across the globe, this includes things such as sea water. But its safest to work with more conservative estimates.

by Ian Fisher on Wed, 09/12/2007 - 11:05 | [reply](#)

Re: The Global Supplies of uranium-238

Though it is not economic yet to extract uranium from seawater, it can **certainly** be **done**, and the estimate you quote, namely that there are 12-15 million tonnes of uranium there, is too low by orders of magnitude. The figure is in fact over 4 billion tonnes. (The concentration is about **3.3 milligrams per cubic meter** and the volume of the oceans is about **1.3 billion cubic kilometers**.)

However, it is unlikely that we shall ever have to rely on that. On land, elements are not evenly distributed but occur in ores. Ores can be discovered – but that takes effort and money. As a result, the known reserves of valuable ores tend towards a certain multiple of the current rate of use. The exact multiple depends on all sorts of economic and political factors but for obvious reasons it would not be surprising if it were a few decades. Furthermore, controlled nuclear fusion is likely to become economic within a few **decades**, which makes it unrealistic to imagine the world having to rely on uranium for the indefinite future.

Therefore, it is only "safest to work with more conservative

estimates" if one wants a reliable way of raising resource-depletion fears regardless of the truth of the matter. If one wants to plan rationally for the future, it is useless. Assuming that today's 'known reserves' are the only resources that will ever be used has the same logic as estimating that one will starve when the current contents of one's larder have been eaten.

by [Editor](#) on Tue, 12/25/2007 - 21:12 | [reply](#)

Okay. So assume that you're c

Okay. So assume that you're correct on all of that, aside from the fact of Fusion. While I'll accept your statement about the larder, similarly you shouldn't assume scientific advancements. That, to me, is like saying "I won't do anything to help with any problems, because they'll be sorted out in the future"

Some sources say, that the mining of Uranium requires more power than it **generates**. (The source is probably somewhat unreliable, and I apologize on that basis)

The economic figures also tell us that off-shore wind power generates kWh at a similar price to Nuclear, while on-shore rivals coal

Missing

Sorry if the Picture should not have been posted, I am relatively new to the site and not completely familiarized with the rules

by Ian on Tue, 01/15/2008 - 23:06 | [reply](#)

Knowlege and Energy Abundance

"While I'll accept your statement about the larder, similarly you shouldn't assume scientific advancements. That, to me, is like saying "I won't do anything to help with any problems, because they'll be sorted out in the future"

I don't think the editors are saying that we should not try to solve problems. I think they may be disagreeing with you about the means to solve problems.

The best way to solve energy shortages is to generate new knowledge about how to safely produce energy. That is not saying "I won't do anything to help with any problems". Looking for resources creates new knowledge and so creates more resources.

The worst way to solve the problem of energy shortages is to claim that there are only finite resources. That limits us to a finite amount of production in the world economy that then diminishes over time as resources are "used up". Everyone is forced to "conserve"; but it is knowledge that is scarce, not resources. We need to look for knowledge, not the alleged finitude of resources.

If your graphs are correct, then individuals will generate power

utilizing wind. If the growth of knowledge then makes nuclear power more affordable, producers will switch to generating power utilizing nuclear reactors.

The point is there is no need to tell people that there is a finite amount of wind or a finite amount of appropriate uranium. There is no need to stop nuclear power generation if it is too expensive, because of an alleged lack of uranium. If safe nuclear production is too expensive, those producing it will simply not be able to sell it (because their product will cost more!)

Perhaps you are saying that the rate of growth of knowledge about how to efficiently harvest safe energy from the wind is going to be faster than the rate of growth of knowledge about harvesting safe energy from nuclear power. But then you are not saying that we should not use nuclear energy because of a finite amount of uranium, which I think was your point.

Moreover, as long as governments insist on a reasonable degree of safety in producing energy, the market will determine which energy resource is currently cheapest, and I have no doubt that we will utilize that resource.

But we do need to stop frightening people about an alleged lack of energy resources.

by a reader on Thu, 01/17/2008 - 00:13 | [reply](#)

Well, arguably that is, by ex

Well, arguably that is, by extension what I am arguing. Even in my first post, I did not really mean to explicitly imply "We are going to run out of Uranium-238 and there will never be any more!" instead what I was saying, is that the ability to produce cheap Nuclear energy has almost reached it's maximum, especially due to the limited supply of /cheap/ uranium, aka, it may well never really get any cheaper, while I would conclude that Wind Energy is still only just beginning to bud.

Fast breeders could promise cheapening due to less fuel, but infact this would be completely incorrect, as most of the cost of nuclear energy is in the setup and decomissioning a fast breeder's energy would infact cost more, as the reactors are more expensive.

Another intriguing fact is that, in the UK anyway, it might well take 15-20 years to set up the next generation of nuclear facilities.

by Ian on Thu, 01/17/2008 - 01:29 | [reply](#)

The Backlight is On, But Nobody's Home

Can Google *really* save the world by changing the background colour of their home page?

Nick at [CharcoalDesign](#) peers through the screen of environmentalist silliness.

Mon, 07/30/2007 - 14:11 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Well

Well, this isn't really about the environment, it's also about energy efficiency. I'm all for using energy in the most efficient way possible. It saves money and the extra energy that is saved can go to further productive use.

by [Paul Eres](#) on Tue, 07/31/2007 - 19:37 | [reply](#)

Fine print

Where he says "environmentalists" he really means "Luddites", back to the pre-industrial age in his terms.

He makes the point that it is a ridiculous scheme, color choice to save energy. In addition he does save a vast amount of pixel power himself by writing his blog in nearly microscopic print. So maybe he is a pixel "environmentalist"?

by a reader on Thu, 08/02/2007 - 23:57 | [reply](#)

Environmentalism

For some reason all my attempts at comments to this list are getting blocked as spam, but I'll try again anyway.

I take no issue with trying to save energy for its own sake because this is a quantifiable goal. Energy has a dollar value and as such can be weighed against other factors. For example you might argue that saving \$0.03 per year is worth sacrificing the readability of your search engine, and then that is an argument that can be refuted (rather easily, I suspect).

On the other hand, in the context of environmentalism, saving

energy becomes "saving the world". Since saving the world is of unquantifiable value, it becomes impossible to frame arguments of the form "is it worth doing" and so it achieves a religious status.

I therefore oppose energy-saving suggestions from environmentalists on general principle. If the same measure were proposed purely for energy saving reasons then I oppose it because a) it doesn't work and b) it wouldn't be worth the trouble even if it did. However were a more effective measure to be presented then I might not object to it.

by Nick on Mon, 08/06/2007 - 11:35 | [reply](#)

Google's response

Google has posted some [commentary](#) on the subject.

by a reader on Thu, 08/09/2007 - 23:24 | [reply](#)

Ignorance

On the occasion of the outcry over the iPhone's \$200 price cut, [a critic of Daring Fireball](#) claimed

No, there's more to this issue than people not understanding capitalism.

Indeed. It wasn't just 'not understanding capitalism', it was *not having even the remotest clue* what the proponents of capitalism consider to be their core position and their core arguments. This is not unusual. Many people in our society lack any such clue.

[T]his price drop shows that Apple was making more of a killing than anyone could have possibly imagined, more than anyone could have possibly thought was fair.

I mean, you could probably figure out the raw cost of a pork belly, but an iPhone is a little harder to pin down.

In a sense, this sweeping ignorance is a terrifying state of affairs. In another, a very hopeful one.

Fri, 09/07/2007 - 13:56 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

hopeful one

Why a "very hopeful one"?

by a reader on Fri, 09/07/2007 - 21:15 | [reply](#)

Re: hopeful one

Because it suggests that all we have to do is inform them.

by [Editor](#) on Fri, 09/07/2007 - 22:00 | [reply](#)

Hope

Another hopeful sign is that the hackers who visit [news.ycombinator.com](#) tend to get it.

<http://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=51232>

Someone wrote:

I think most early buyers would prefer a \$200 cash rebate rather than a \$100 gift certificate to the Apple store. Especially since almost everything in there is above the \$100 level. I think the gesture's nice, but it's definitely not completely fair.

And I replied:

What's fair about buying something at a price that you think is worth it, then going back a month later and complaining you aren't happy anymore?

I got massively upmoded.

This also got upmoded:

And they'd prefer a \$20,000 cash rebate and a Macbook Pro even more. Especially since Macbook Pros are nice. What of it? They thought \$599 for an iPhone was fair. They're getting at least \$100 more than they expected.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 09/07/2007 - 23:07 | [reply](#)

Worth and Value are different than Price

Value is in the mind of the beholder. Price is a fickle thing.

Ironic beauty?

The first I-Phones were worth all of the \$599 subjective value to anyone who bought one. These buyers were each first on their block to own a flashy new gadget. They paid the appropriate price for what they coveted or they would not have bought it.

The subjective value of the I-Phone today is \$399 or less. Price can change according to markets or the calculated whims of the market. The consumer surprise was in how quickly the price tag changed. Yet, worth is still in personal usefulness of a product. So where's the beef?

To be first on your block, the subject of buyer envy, is temporarily worth more than the initial price of the product to those who shell out the cash. In the psychology of capitalistic purchase, you believe that exclusivity and price is a status symbol. Oops, the phone is no longer quite so exclusive.

Not much different than buying a pig in a rhinestone studded poke. If you need the pork, if you can eat the pork, you're happy. If you think rhinestones on the package are diamonds you're bound to be dissatisfied.

Worth, like beauty, is in the deep utility of the thing according to its merit. False worth, like fake beauty, can be obscured by price. Let the buyer beware of his own mindset.

Worth and Value? Capitalism is a whole 'nother thing altogether, only marginally related. Sometimes the sudden recognition of that truth by a public outing, in this case by no less than the "god" of Apple - Steve Jobs, brings wails and collective gnashing of teeth.

Regardless of Price, the I-Phone is still a beautiful gadget. I want one.

by a reader on Sat, 09/08/2007 - 15:08 | [reply](#)

Why is it Hopeful?

by a reader on Sun, 09/09/2007 - 16:48 | [reply](#)

Re: Why is it Hopeful?

Because it suggests that all we have to do is inform them.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

Dialogs

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 09/10/2007 - 01:09 | [reply](#)

Hopeless

And, do the forum conversations support the idea that irate buyers, once informed, are changing their minds?

I think we need to do more than inform them.

Most of these people won't change their minds by just being exposed to better theories. They need to believe that there's a real chance that their cherished myths might be wrong. Until then, many of them won't take the criticism seriously.

I don't think this will happen until economic understanding is much more generally widespread. Believing that prices are whims should become as unfashionable as believing that the earth is flat.

Gil

by **Gil** on Mon, 09/10/2007 - 14:22 | [reply](#)

Earth is Flat?

What is a "fair price"?

Curious as to how we cultivate economic understanding in a flat-minded world.

by a reader on Mon, 09/10/2007 - 16:03 | [reply](#)

Fair and Spherical

Well, some people define "fair" rather strangely (in my opinion). Often, it seems to be something like "Something I'll continue to feel good about no matter what changes in the world, including my mind."

I don't see how an offering price can be "unfair" (absent fraud). If a buyer doesn't like it, he doesn't have to accept it.

But, more technically, I think most people should accept that "fair price" is one that approaches a **market clearing** price, in a relatively efficient market, driven by **supply and demand**.

As for how to spread economic literacy, I'm not sure. I'm confident that it will happen in the long run, but I don't know how to speed it up dramatically. Anti-market communities, like religious communities, seem to have developed a strong immunity to conventionally persuasive arguments.

See the comments to this mildly economically literate post in on a fairly "progressive" blog: **Vacation Mandates, again**

Maybe it would help if some pop-culture icons made it cool to understand markets.

Until then, I guess we have to patiently continue to make the same arguments, and hope that the best arguments gather enough momentum break through most of the resistance.

Gil

by **Gil** on Mon, 09/10/2007 - 17:02 | [reply](#)

Link Correction

Oops. I meant to use this link for: **supply and demand** above

Gil

by **Gil** on Mon, 09/10/2007 - 17:05 | [reply](#)

Price Cut

I can't disagree that people are silly to complain about buying something they wanted at a price they were willing to pay. That's the way it works.

The interesting question is why Apple cut the price. I don't think it was part of their initial plan. If they had foreseen the response and bad PR, I'm sure they would have tried to handle it differently.

And, if Apple was "making more of a killing than anyone could have possibly imagined," they would have just kept on making it. That's also the way it works.

It almost certainly wasn't selling like they'd hoped. Maybe they wanted to clear the market for the holiday season and their line of new products. Maybe there's something in their agreement with

AT&T that requires certain sales figures to be met (each one is a new subscriber for AT&T), and the failure to meet the targets results in direct or indirect financial penalties of some sort. Who knows?

Anyway, no one who bought a phone has any reason to complain (about the price) and no one should think that such a drastic price cut so soon after the launch is the result of a successful plan.

by **Michael Bacon** on Tue, 09/11/2007 - 21:13 | [reply](#)

Sheesh!

I think the state of affairs is terrifying again.

This is unbelievable.

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 10/03/2007 - 04:44 | [reply](#)

More on Worth and Value are Different than Price

I was reminded of this topic recently when reading the story of the little known Varian Fry who ran a small agency which rescued over one thousand individuals from the Nazis at the beginning of WW II. With only \$3000 strapped to his leg, a list of names, and a noble cause he and his small staff made a permanent difference in the lives of so many.

In contrast, I read how the U.S. government wasted 20 billion U.S. with a noble cause and total stupidity. See http://www.amconmag.com/2005/2005_10_24/cover.html, Money for Nothing.

It's true, worth and value are different than price. The crucial factor seems to be good common sense versus blind knee-jerk ideology. Let the buyer beware.

by a reader on Wed, 01/02/2008 - 05:16 | [reply](#)

Not Fair

Gil,

"...'fair price' is one that approaches a market clearing price, in a relatively efficient market, driven by supply and demand."

You are now arguing that the iPhone initial price was NOT FAIR. The price would not have dropped so precipitously if it had been "fair", using your definition. (In a very efficient market, when the price was high more firms would have been selling it, lowering the price to just above the average total cost of producing it). Apple would not have had to change the price at all, it would have fallen by itself.

When demand fell, in a very efficient market, many firms would

have left the market leaving the price approximately the same (at just above the average total cost of production). All firms buying the iPhone from Apple would have continued to pay approximately the same amount (close to the minimum average total cost).

The fact that the price fell precipitously shows that the market was in fact not that efficient. In a truly efficient market, it should be the number of firms in the market that changes, not the price of the good. The price of the good (in a truly efficient market) should stay at just above average total cost when demand for the good changes.

Gil, I'm not sure your concept of "fair" is fair to the brilliance of the marketplace.

by a reader on Mon, 01/07/2008 - 18:59 | [reply](#)

Don't mean to hijack the thread

Don't mean to hijack the thread or anything, but is everything all right at **The World**? Been a while between posts.

by a reader on Wed, 01/09/2008 - 02:45 | [reply](#)

Re: Don't mean to hijack the thread

Thanks for the concern. We're all rather busy, is all.

Normal service will be resumed as soon as possible.

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 01/09/2008 - 18:26 | [reply](#)

Discovering new secrets of the universe no doubt

I was concerned as well. Glad all is sticking ticking along.

by [Solomon](#) on Tue, 01/22/2008 - 01:46 | [reply](#)

errr...

...that's "still ticking along."

by [Solomon](#) on Tue, 01/22/2008 - 01:50 | [reply](#)

Are you so sure YOU understand it?

Your argument is basically that

a) because of Apple's legal right (you seem to assume that ethical right is implicit in the legal right) to shape price(s) as the company sees fit:

b) the consumer is obliged to shut the hell up and bear it.

Sorry, this is not the case. Market is a democracy and the consumer is not obliged to do anything. True enough, in our Lawyer Age when purchasing the device means agreeing to EULA stating pretty much that the purchaser has absolutely no rights to anything and that the

purchased device does not even belong to him whilst the manufacturer has no obligations whatsoever Apple could do pretty much anything. Yeah, they can milk the early adopters for all their money and then show them the middle finger. But such behaviour has consequences. Because the consumers will not bear it, suck it up and so on. They are not paid for it, quite the opposite - it's them who have the money Apple wants. And they can turn away from a brand that treats its consumers this way. So no, the consumer has no obligation to shut the frig up. He does not have any obligation whatsoever - he can complain, whinge and whine. And vote with his wallet.

by Piotr Smolanski on Wed, 04/02/2008 - 15:01 | [reply](#)

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Ideas have consequences.

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Setting The World To Rights Is On A Break

Thanks to everyone who has enquired. Yes, we are all fine. We're just busy for a while with other interests. We shall be returning as soon as possible.

Tue, 02/12/2008 - 09:57 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

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Did the French Revolution influence the American Revolution?

[view](#)

[results](#)

- Yes
 No

[Vote](#)

Tue, 07/22/2008 - 19:08 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Paging Doc Brown

Wake up McFly!

The French Revolution took place AFTER the American Revolution. Asking whether it influenced the American Revolution is like asking whether Duran Duran influenced the Beatles. A proper question might be: Did the French Revolution influence the early American Republic? (The answer is a very big yes by the way.)

I must assume that you're trying to illustrate how many people are ignorant of basic history by asking a trick question.

This reminds me of an experiment in which a small group of university students went around asking women to sign a petition to do away with women's suffrage. The received many signatures before someone finally balked at being asked to sign a petition to deny women the right to vote. Worst of all, those who signed the petition most likely have fully functioning reproductive organs.

by [Lee](#) on Mon, 07/28/2008 - 21:28 | [reply](#)

Re: Paging Doc Brown

Lee - you may well be interested in our [previous poll](#) too, and especially in its results.

by [Editor](#) on Tue, 07/29/2008 - 15:31 | [reply](#)

