

Fighting Evil?

Undefinable concept leads to irrational behavior

While the word "evil" seems to hold particular shudder power over us, it appears to describe nothing in particular, effectively relieving us of the responsibility of preventing it. President Obama used the word twice in his Nobel Peace Prize speech which similarly, unfortunately, described no war in particular, and pointed to no particularly incisive commitments to altering the conditions that lead to war.

"For make no mistake," Obama imperiously warned, "evil does exist in the world." He followed this with the consensus-building example of Hitler: "A nonviolent movement could not have halted Hitler's armies."

In a passing nod to humility (and there wasn't much of it amid his unreflective defense of a moral, war-waging America, "the world's sole military superpower"), he noted that individually, at least, "We make mistakes and fall victim to the temptations of pride and power and sometimes evil." We fall victim to evil? Now *there's* a particularly passive relationship to horrible behaviors.

But evil exists largely in the eye of the beholder. A fair number of right-wingers consider Obama evil, and many regard Al-Qaeda as evil. Others figure homosexuals or abortion providers are evil. Perhaps most people would agree that the Hutus were evil in their massacre of Tutsis, but then the Hutus probably regarded as evil the previous Tutsi governors who had ruled heavily over the majority Hutus.

If I were to name something with the shape of evil, it might be industrious humanity's warming of the globe via greenhouse gas emissions, and the accompanying mass extinction of many of our distant and close relatives on Earth. As an environmental activist, however, I won't get any good results by attributing to evil our war on Earth's living. For starters, evil isn't behind global warming. Concrete public economic policies, private economic behaviors and population increases are behind global warming.

But getting back to Hitler, the embodiment of evil. I was born eight months after Hitler committed suicide and four months after my nation dropped nuclear bombs on the citizens of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I must have been about 5 when I recall my father telling me that the seeds of World War II were to be found in the Allies' economically harsh and politically humiliating treatment of Germany after World War I.

There are a lot of things my father said that I found less compelling, but I believe that particular conversation about World War II influenced how I see all human behaviors in the world: Horrific as some behaviors may be, they do have roots in earlier events. Horrifying behaviors aren't justified by preceding events, but they may be partially understandable in light of those preceding events. If we don't want horrors to take place, we had better try to trace how horrors came about and do some hard thinking and acting to create different outcomes. Yes, "a nonviolent movement could not have halted Hitler's armies," but less punitive political behavior in early 20th century might have prevented the rise of Hitler and his ilk. People tend to react badly to being humiliated.

Jason Burke, a foreign correspondent for *The Observer* who has lived in Afghanistan and Pakistan and written extensively on terrorism, writes the following in an article entitled, "What Exactly Does Al-Qaeda Want?":

[The] perception that a belligerent West is set on the humiliation, division and eventual conquest of the Islamic world is at the root of Muslim violence. The militants believe they are fighting a last-ditch battle for the survival of their society, culture, religion and way of life. They are fighting in self-defence and understand, as we in the West also believe, that self-defence can justify using tactics that might be frowned on in other circumstances.

In his Nobel speech, Obama said, "[As] a head of state sworn to protect and defend my nation, I cannot be guided by [Ghandi's and Martin Luther King's] examples alone. I face the world as it is, and cannot stand idle in the face of threats to the American people."

Could Al-Qaeda be saying the same as self-appointed defenders of their culture?

The concept of evil is a shortcut first into passivity, and then into violent reaction. Gotta fight evil with whatever it takes, since it comes out of nowhere, right?

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THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ELECTION AND LCC

Measures 66 and 67 will be on the ballot which will be arriving soon in your mailbox. I serve on the budget committees of two organizations which will be adversely affected if these measures fail and I would like to explain why many citizens of Lane County will be impacted as well.

One of the organizations which I serve is the Senior and Disabled Services for Lane County. One of their major programs is the Oregon Project Independence (OPI). If Measures 66 and 67 fail, it is likely that OPI will lose its funding. This program allows seniors to stay in their homes by providing some help to them with essential services. The entire Lane County delegation to Salem supports this program as it saves taxpayers money and the alternative would be forcing these people on to the Medicaid program which would be much more costly to the taxpayers.

I also serve as a member of the budget committee for LCC. At a recent board and budget committee meeting, Dr. Mary Spilde, the president of LCC, was asked what impact the failure of Measure 66 and 67 would have on the college's budget and its ability to meet the needs of the increased demands for vocational and professional programs. She replied that the college would lose close to \$3 million if these two measures failed. The major reason why LCC had a 15 percent increase in enrollment is the high unemployment rate in Lane County. If Measures 66 and 67 fail, many citizens of Lane County will find that the college may be forced to reduce course offerings in such programs.

It is to the benefit of taxpayers to vote yes on Measures 66 and 67. Please join me in doing so.

Dennis Shine
Springfield

SOCIAL CANNABIS

Kevin Feeney and Cheryl Smith (Viewpoint 12/24) ask: No one has proposed that any other medication should be taken in a social environment or be the

basis of social interactions, so why should this be so for marijuana?

I'm not a doctor, but here are three suggested responses:

1. There seems to be therapeutic value in using cannabis medicinally in a social environment. This is especially true for patients who have used cannabis medicinally when their use was not protected in the law but extends beyond this population.

2. Many patients suffering from debilitating medical conditions are shut-ins for whom being in a social environment in and of itself seems to have therapeutic value.

3. The Oregon Medical Marijuana Act prohibits patients from using in a public place, or in public view. Being able to use cannabis medicinally in a social environment creates a location patients can medicate when they are out of their homes.

Leland R. Berger, attorney
Portland

SOLAR'S LIMITS

Those criticizing Warren Weisman's opinion (12/3) that solar energy is of limited use should analyze the facts and choose reason over environmental symbolism.

Solar power is intermittent and unreliable like an employee who only shows up for work a few hours a day, and only when he feels like it. You don't get any solar energy at night; you get less on cloudy days, less in the morning and less in the late afternoon. That makes large scale solar power schemes horribly inefficient no matter how high we can pump up the theoretical peak output of solar panels. The cost of energy storage systems, batteries and other complex systems on top of high panel costs make solar impossibly expensive for large scale use.

The surface area of the earth we would need to cover with solar panels to collect significant amounts of energy makes it impossible on a practical economic and human level. Solar advocates have suggested that we could satisfy 69 percent of U.S. daytime electricity needs for the year 2050 by covering 34,000 square miles of our