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WHY EVIL MEN NEED NOBLE SPIRITS

With Trump and Israel, the masks have fallen; the enemy is simply to be destroyed, and again, for this a figure like Kirk is needed

[Slavoj Žižek](#)

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· Paid



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At Charlie Kirk's memorial service in Arizona on Sunday, September 21, 2025, his widow forgave his killer, but not Trump, who characterized Kirk as "a missionary with a noble spirit and a great, great purpose," and then went on:

“He did not hate his opponents. He wanted the best for them. That’s where I disagreed with Charlie. I hate my opponents. And I don’t want the best for them.”¹

This apparent inconsistency is a key feature of the Trumpian universe. Trump is, of course, not a “noble spirit”: he hates his opponents and considers them trash to be annihilated. However, in order to somehow justify his brutal hatred, he needs a figure like Kirk as a good man who wants the best even for his enemies. (It’s a little bit like Christians who need the good Christ, whose death justifies brutal persecution of anti-Christians.) This is why Kirk needs to be elevated into a figure of martyrdom of almost divine proportions: this elevation is just the obverse of the brutality of the Trumpian ethos. The standard hypocritical logic claims that we are attacking a country or a people to help the victims of its oppressive regime. In the 1930s, even Japan argued that it occupied most of China to civilize its people – the Chinese are like naughty children who have to be disciplined for their own good... In the ongoing Middle East war, Bernard-Henri Lévy tried to follow this line: Israel is doing what it does in Gaza and on the West Bank to help Palestinians, to liberate them from the grip of Muslim fundamentalists who oppress them...

With Trump and Israel, the masks have fallen; the enemy is simply to be destroyed, and again, for this a figure like Kirk is needed. Trump is not original here – on the very first page of his Republic, Plato wonderfully depicts how

the Trumpian populists (here represented by Polemarchus) treat their opponents (here represented by Socrates, the narrator):

“Polemarchus said to me: ‘I perceive, Socrates, that you and your companion are already on your way to the city.’ ‘You are not far wrong,’ I said. ‘But do you see,’ he rejoined, ‘how many we are?’ ‘Of course.’ ‘And are you stronger than all these? For if not, you will have to remain where you are.’ ‘May there not be the alternative,’ I said, ‘that we may persuade you to let us go?’ ‘But can you persuade us, if we refuse to listen to you?’ he said. ‘Certainly not,’ replied Glaucon. ‘Then we are not going to listen; of that you may be assured.’”²

The stance of simply not listening to your opponent (if you are stronger than him) is what we encounter today again and again in big politics – and even in philosophy. One of the standard critiques of Hegel is that the notion of dialectical progress presupposes the urge to go on thinking and to bring out every consequence of a specific thought or stance: say, if you are an ascetic, thinking about it will make you realize that asceticism is an egotist stance – you are totally focused on yourself, trying desperately to erase all remains of pleasure and joy... But Hegel knows this: at the very beginning of his *Logic*, which analyses the logical order of pure categories of thinking without any empirical presuppositions, he points out that *Logic* is nonetheless grounded in an (ultimately contingent) act of will, a willful decision to think. An

ascetic individual can simply say: “OK, I am really an egotist, but I don’t care about it, I refuse to think about what my asceticism implies, I just accept that this is what I am.”

This refusal to listen and/or think is not just a single primordial decision; it takes place continuously in our lives. Those who support Israel unconditionally simply ignore all the obvious arguments that a genocide is going on there; they just straightforwardly dismiss them as anti-Semitic lies. This happens to me again and again: when I recently listed arguments regarding our environmental crisis, the reply I got was a variation of “we are not going to listen; of that you may be assured,” and the brief explanation was that the struggle against global warming is a campaign motivated by dark reasons (destroying the prosperous West). Along these lines, Trump said in his speech at the UN General Assembly on September 23, 2025, that climate change is “the greatest con job ever perpetrated on the world.”³ This stance is grounded in a precise notion of justice articulated a couple of pages later by Thrasymachus, who says: “I proclaim that justice is nothing else than the interest of the stronger.”⁴ And he goes on to explain how

“the different forms of government make laws—democratical, aristocratical, tyrannical—with a view to their several interests; and these laws, which are made by them for their own interests, are the justice which they deliver to their subjects, and him who

transgresses them they punish as a breaker of the law, and unjust. And that is what I mean when I say that in all states there is the same principle of justice, which is the interest of the government; and as the government must be supposed to have power, the only reasonable conclusion is that everywhere there is one principle of justice, which is the interest of the stronger.”

Is this not, again, Trumpian politics at its purest? The justice he imposes on other, weaker states is the arbitrary justice of the stronger: if Brazil imprisons his friend Bolsonaro, Trump raises tariffs by 30%; since Starmer kowtows to Trump, the UK gets better treatment than other European countries; if a country exports a lot to the US, he ignores fair competition and just raises tariffs... Again, Trump ensures that his actions have bad consequences for his opponents – he doesn’t even pretend that the suffering he causes them will make them better. However, it is not enough to turn this stance around and perform actions which we expect to produce good consequences for all affected. The logic here is more complex – recall how Walter Benjamin brutally rejected Goethe’s guiding principle: “Try to ensure that everything in life has a consequence.” His scathing comment is:

“This is without doubt one of the most detestable of maxims, one that you would not expect to run across in Goethe. It is the imperative of progress in its most dubious form. It is not the case that the consequence leads to what is fruitful in right action, and even less that the consequence is its fruit. On the contrary, bearing fruit is

the mark of evil acts. The acts of good people have no 'consequence' that could be ascribed (or ascribed exclusively) to them. The fruits of an act are, as is right and proper, internal to it. To enter into the interior of a mode of action is the way to test its fruitfulness."⁵

There is an obvious counter-argument against this stance: what about acting to prevent global warming, or nuclear war, or the domination of AI? Are these not cases where only the consequences matter? So, does Benjamin's argument not rely on the old distinction between poiesis and praxis? "Poiesis" is an activity aiming at a product that will exist after the activity is performed (a work of art, a table, or whatever), while "praxis" is an activity that is its own goal (like performing a work of art). However, one can argue that activities aiming at an external goal also have an immanent value. Imagine a large collective act to construct something that would diminish environmental damage: even if it fails, this activity actualizes a form of social solidarity and thus displays an immanent positive value. So, what bears the mark of evil is the very exclusive orientation on an external goal (bad or good) which ignores "the interior of the mode of action."

Jean-Claude Milner⁶ has pointed out that for non-European countries, war is a normal state of things, always lurking in the background, and times of peace are just occasional pauses between armed conflicts, while in the Christian West, peace is considered the great culmination of historical progress, the final state towards

which we all strive. Nowhere is this clearer than in Nazi Germany: it constantly evoked ewiger Frieden, which would take place after the final victory – this reference to eternal peace justified (and demanded) the total mobilization for the last war to end all wars. Today, the same madness is spreading around the world: Trump brought peace by fully supporting Israel and bombing Iran, Netanyahu tries to bring peace in the Middle East by expanding the war against Palestinians and engaging in genocide (which is, in a way, quite appropriate: after you annihilate your enemies, there IS peace...). So there is logic in the crazy fact that both Trump and Netanyahu are proposed by some states as candidates for the Nobel Peace Prize... At its extreme, Cancel Culture proceeds in a similar way: it fights for tolerance and diversity by brutally excluding all those who contest its own definition of tolerance and diversity.

Three conclusions are to be drawn from this situation. First, maybe learning to live with the threat of war is the only way to bring peace. Second, beware of “noble spirits” whose function is to justify brutality. Third, in a truly emancipated society, people do not engage in acts which have good consequences – they engage in acts which have no consequences.

1

<https://edition.cnn.com/2025/09/22/politics/trump-kirk-vance-funeral-analysis>.

2

Quoted from <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/55201/55201-h/55201-h.htm>.

3

See

<https://edition.cnn.com/politics/live-news/trump-presidency-unga-speech-09-23-25>.

4

Op.cit.

5

Quoted from Jeremy Matthew Glick, »Put Some Red on It: Maoist Brooding and Communist Laughter«, available at

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/395161530_Put_Some_Red_on_It_Maoist_Brooding_and_Communist_Laughter.

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Personal communication.