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Israel in the Dock¹

Addressing the Questions of Survival, Chosenness, the Moral Code, Evil
& the Burden of Moral Obligation

WHY THIS ESSAY? WHY NOW?

It is August 14, 2015, the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II. This is a difficult moment for students of the period who are paying attention to the state of the culture and world, because the moral ambivalence that preceded that cataclysm is in the air right now. In hindsight, much could have been done to avert the Nazi rampage and the ensuing slaughter, and there were then, as now, prophetic voices and sound advice from students of history which, then as now, were ignored.

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Although the essay below was first published in 2010, it is more sharply relevant right now. An American president who evidences hostility to Israel seems bent on forcing that beleaguered country to passively allow the radical Islamic forces hostile to its very existence to become a member of the deadly atomic bomb club. We are asked to trust mendacious murderers and to rely on inadequate safety measures to contain their toxic ambitions.

Yet America's liberal, secular Jewish population is conflicted about the need to take decisive action to prevent Iran from acquiring the atomic bomb. This drama is playing out in a culture of moral relativism, prevalent among an intelligentsia that has uncritically adopted the prevailing secular progressive ideologies. It seems that the moral confidence of many of the "chosen people" who live in the USA is weakened. Many 21st century urban Jews abandoned the traditional moral ground of their ancestors to sign on as acolytes of a secular religion called political liberalism. They are being assimilated by a morally challenged subset of the urban intelligentsia.²

I would think that even in the fog of moral and cultural relativism, surely some moral questions are still bright-line clear. Surely one of those points of clarity is the recognition that radical Islam, a terrorist's ideology dedicated to another holocaust, surely that is a manifestation of evil. As all humans are potential recruits of evil ideation, evil mindsets and evil behavior, we need to recognize this murderous mutation within contemporary Muslim religions for what it is – yet another evil force in human affairs.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God_in_the_Dock

² Reference here: <http://jaygaskill.com/liberalismasreligion.htm>

But wait. For many, there is no evil. For certain leading members of the modern urban intelligentsia, evil is not a moral category at all. In these naïve and vulnerable minds, evil is an obsolete polemic, something that all enlightened people need to recognize as a mental disorder or illness. I am tempted to paraphrase Edmund Burke – *The only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for evil to be defined away*.

Evil is a moral category; and it is a grave and urgent existential threat whenever it manifests in the real world. Whenever an evil mindset governs an intelligent mind and worse, whenever it infects a cooperating group, a catastrophe will follow. In point of fact, evil captured the minds and hearts of a group of murderous Germans in the 1930's. In this century, evil has captured the minds and hearts of large cohorts of militant Islamists. If you must use the medical analogy, think of evil as a contagious, malevolent pathogen³ that can strongly affect susceptible minds. As I write this, their jihad is enslaving women, murdering children and other innocents. Their jihad presents a grave threat to the Jewish people, to the Jewish homeland, Israel, and to Western civilization itself. To permit this malevolent movement and its acolytes to acquire atomic weapons is suicidal lunacy.

As children of modernity, it difficult for many of us to grasp how “chosenness” can be a burden; that the bleak legacy of the Nazi attempt to exterminate Jews and the complicity of many in the West can lead to a sense of defeat, a withdrawal, a longing to blend into a comfortable modernity.

In my 2010 essay below, I have discussed what means to a modern mind, a sophisticated student of science and the human condition, to someone endowed with modern moral intelligence, to accommodate the notion of being *chosen*. I explain that the state of chosenness is not confined to the Jewish tradition, but is an inevitable consequence of waking up in the world, endowed with *moral intelligence*. In the essay, I felt it was necessary to reintroduce the notion that a sense of an ultimate moral authority is a necessary guide for human development, something that is and always has been essential to our species' survival.

But we live in a belief-hostile social environment, where many of us rarely feel free to talk openly about a Creator Being, G-d, or even about the presence of an ultimate moral law or source of moral insight. Indeed, the very notion that such things can be objectively and intimately real is too radically retrograde for polite conversation. In certain circles, the “correct view” is that morality and moral authority are cultural constructs. One construct, in which the jihad is evil, is no more valid than a different one in which “we all seek our own paths.” Our postmodern thought-monitors still insist that belief in the divine is superstition, not “scientific.” Yet more and more intelligent men and women, scientists and non-scientists, are rediscovering the rejected wisdom.

³ In other articles, dealing with a category of morally depraved murderers I am using the term “malogens” to describe the nasty anti-life, malevolent ideation, images and “memes” that have infected their weakened moral immune systems. These are metaphors, to be sure, by powerfully explanatory and predictive metaphors.

Evil, it turns out, can be a powerful teacher. And the evils of the current age are a graduate course in moral thinking.

A note about the term, Deity, as I use it at the beginning of the essay: If you prefer, the term can be thought of as a stand-in or referent to that Universal entity or principle, worthy of the deepest reverence, that is identified by whatever name or no name at all, perhaps a hidden source code deep in our evolutionary heritage, perhaps an essence of Being, a latent goodness pattern in the universe. The bottom line for me and for this essay is that our major moral categories are not just human inventions. They are discoveries. That this can actually be the case may remain a mystery, but a wonderful mystery.

Metaphors are powerful cognitive tools, that takes us farther in the exploration of the realm of meaning than we could ever manage without it. The language of art, theology and metaphysics is metaphor. I suspect it is also the language of Deity.

REFLECTIONS ON CHOSENNESS, EVIL & MORAL OBLIGATION

For purposes of this essay, I invite you to visualize Deity as an infinitely persistent transmitter of the moral code, Source of The Great Signal, if you will.

When Deity hovered over the dark abyss, not a stirring of receptive intelligence occupied the formless deep. Billions of years later, human minds emerged, endowed with the potential for moral reasoning. Deity's transmissions have only dimly been detected in the last few millennia. Even then, they are rarely received and even more rarely have they been authentically and intelligently decoded.

Chosenness is the human condition that arises when a person or a people receives and decodes enough of the Great Signal to initialize *moral obligation*. The prime directive of humankind is to acquire than act on moral knowledge.

The Great Signal decodes as follows:

- You have been chosen to receive the gift of Moral Awareness;
- I Am the Source;
- Do not mess with the Source.
- Moral Awareness is Moral Obligation.
- You are directed to keep this channel open at all costs.
- You are directed to Honor the Moral Law and the Source;
- Follow, Preserve and Teach it,
- Forever.
- Tune in at least once a week.

Given that eternally operating Divine transmitter, and the gradual evolution of receptiveness to the Great Signal among humankind, the emergence of a *first* chosen people was a matter of time. It was a question of receptivity, not electivity.

Chosenness is never a one-off event. None of us can ever close the door to the Source, nor shut down the reception, nor end the necessity of ongoing listening and intelligent decoding. Once the first Great Signal is received, the heavy lifting begins. It never stops.

Enter the Prophetic tradition. This was the collision of partly understood aspects and implications of the Great Signal as directed by a prophetic voice, that of a vulnerable human being, aimed at powerful, flawed human institutions. Irritation was the minimum blowback; decapitation was not out of the question. This explains why the life of a Prophet tends to be turbulent and brief.

The Jewish people were caught in the prophetic trap. Many have tried to escape via Diaspora, secular disengagement, amnesia or assimilation.

None of these strategies work all the time. Jewish humor is the survival mechanism of an innately intelligent people, clinging to their core humanity under duress. It is a gift to the world.

The very skill set that made the earliest Jewish people uniquely receptive (unique for their time) to the Great Signal, has been preserved over several millennia and within their culture and lines of familial continuity. Not coincidentally, the same skill set has helped many Jewish men and women achieve secular success. But success was followed by reactive jealousy, leading to defensive specialization (as in banking and lending, for example), then more success, followed as night follows day, by pogroms, then still more success under duress – then, in the dark theological irony of our era, an age of serial holocausts has followed.

The appropriate response to all this – supported by the post WWII American and European governments – was the reconstitution of Israel as a refuge state. Israel was established to be the One Safe Place for an admirable, persecuted people who were to live securely in a modern setting. Israel was founded as a *progressive*, refuge state; her immediate founders (such as David Ben-Gurion) were secular socialists committed to a secular state that protected religious freedom.

Israel prospered. Once again, Jews are being punished for success. Such is the perversity of the PGS human condition (Pre-Great-Signal).

The Prophet's legacy of persecution has followed the Jewish people everywhere, but is nowhere more evident and virulent than where their successes are most evident.

One thing is bright-line evident to me: The moral and juridical legitimacy of the Jewish state is an indisputable given, except for those twisted souls for whom the 20th century's holocaust was a bit of unfinished business.

However we parse the practical questions surrounding modern Israel, a Western democracy floating in an atavistic sea, they all vector back to the bedrock question that you would have thought was conclusively settled by those who defeated the Axis powers in WWII: The right of the first chosen people to live in and protect their traditional refuge and home is sacrosanct.

Yet that which seemed settled is unsettled. As the poet Yeats prophetically wrote in the aftermath of WWI, "*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; mere anarchy is loosed upon the world, the blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere the ceremony of innocence is drowned; the best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity.*"

In my personal experience, all of the manifold religious, political and ideological differences I've encountered in my life have tended to operate in one of two kinds of minds: those that are reachable and teachable; or those that are *unreachable and unteachable*.

Modern Israel was started by progressive secular socialists. In another example of the many dark ironies generated in the last century, a loathsome subset of progressive, secular socialists have turned against Israel, rejecting the core premise - her right to exist as a nation state. Worse still, many of these minds have substituted a malign version of the "progressive" ethos for religion, adopting it with such unreasonable fervor that they now inhabit the world of the *unreachable and unteachable*.

I strongly suspect that there is a point at which the *unreachable and unteachable* simply have to be worked around. Too many of such minds cannot be changed after they are frozen (rare exceptions acknowledged). It follows that practical progress against frozen minds is to be made through the magic of a generational shift.

For Israel, this means a practical policy of survival, relentlessly pursuing its success as an engine of creative civilization in the region and the world, a model of prosperity that will remain open to cooperative engagement and partnership for new generations of the post-jihad neighbors. For the world at large, members of the old guard (the bloody minded jihadists of Islam and the morally irresolute "surrender monkeys" of the intelligentsia) simply need to be contained and, as necessary, defeated. For Western civilization and its brave little outpost, Israel, to survive into the 22nd century, the grip of both of these extremes on humanity's future must be stayed.

This requires tough minded line drawing and the willingness to defend the Jewish state *in extremis*, whatever that requires in real world terms. We in the civilized West desperately need to recapture the virtues and moral awareness that formed the baseline norm, say, for our parents and grandparents who served in the war against the Axis powers and Hitler's National Socialism.

In other writings I have emphasized the importance of the *intergenerational moral transmission belt*. We continue to need the armor of our greatest moral legacies. The continuity of healthy, creative, freedom-friendly civilization crucially depends on our ability to transmit the essential memories, lesson and virtues to the succeeding generations.

Not all virtues are mild.

The teachings of Jesus, Moses and Hillel converged in the life of a certain Lutheran minister imprisoned by the Reich, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), whose moral sensibilities led him to actively seek Hitler's assassination. He was hanged by Nazi thugs three weeks before the Nazi surrender.

Shalom,

Jay B Gaskill

Written on 12/21.2010 and 08/12/2015

Jay Ben Gaskill is a lawyer-writer, lay-theologian who sees humankind's most vital religious traditions through an information-age metaphor: *Religions are the cognitive "software" that connects us to a common source-code embedded in the developing universe.*

Mr. Gaskill has come to see Christianity as a creative development within first century Judaism and to believe that all life-affirming religions that promote respect for human dignity are founded on variations and attempted translations of an original "Message."

A brief list of Gaskill's related essays (with links) is set out in the attached Appendix.

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A license to link to this article or to publish pull quotes from it (with full attribution) is hereby granted. For all other permissions and comments, please contact the author via email at law@jaygaskill.com. The author, a graduate of the U. C. Berkeley Law School (Boalt Hall) served as the chief Public Defender for the County of Alameda, CA, headquartered in Oakland for 10 years, following a long career as an Assistant Public Defender, then left his "life of crime" to devote more time to writing. He has appeared on CBS 48 Hours, written countless essays, Op Ed's, articles, two novels and a collection of short stories



Learn more about Jay B Gaskill, attorney, analyst and author, at <http://jaygaskill.com/WhoIsJayBGaskill.pdf>

APPENDIX

I-2-I

The Dialogic Imperative

<http://jaygaskill.com/i2i.pdf>

Reflections on Evil And The Modern Mind

<http://www.jaygaskill.com/evil2l.htm>

The American Creative Surge And The Case for Renaissance Conservatism

<http://jaygaskill.com/ACS2011.pdf>

Creativity & Survival Building a World Renaissance

<http://jaygaskill.com/CreativityAndSurvival.htm>

Fire in the Whole: Cannibals of the Spirit

<http://jaygaskill.com/FireInTheWhole.pdf>

A Universe of In*Formation A Metaphysical Proposal, Glossary, and Theological Exercise

<http://jaygaskill.com/InFormation15.htm>
