

The anatomy of cruelty

Theodore Dalrymple is the pen name of the English psychiatrist who writes clearly and acutely about the criminality, addiction, and fecklessness of the urban underclass. (It is impermissible in Britain for a doctor to write about his patients under his real name, which is Anthony Daniels.) Dalrymple is an exemplary small-c conservative: he is the *soi-disant* realist about original sin and the value of combatting it with traditional religion (even though he is an atheist); he is the scornful opponent of all that the liberals have done since he was ten years old to encourage individualist excess (even though, like most of his confreres, he gratefully accepts all the good that liberals did for the human race *up until* then, in the teeth of the opposition of all the small-c conservatives of their own time who fought them every step of the way). Like the late Allan Bloom, literate America's favorite right-wing scold, Dalrymple is forever lamenting that we did not close the barn door before all the horses of the 1960s got out. He is certainly right that the fracturing of the traditional family has wreaked havoc in modern Western societies, but since he isn't quite willing to restore woman to her traditional place in the kitchen and the bedroom and put her back under the thumb of patriarchal subjugation, he does little but whinge about it.

Unlike most American conservatives who write for the popular media, he is

historically informed and intelligent. So, for instance, he knows full well that the immigrant influx into member nations of the European Union is the unfortunate legacy of colonialism, and that the British, having done immense evil to Islamic nations, are reaping what they sowed now that they have a problem with unassimilated Muslims. This does not invalidate his grim assessment of the social dysfunction afflicting the former colonial powers, which, even if it is a form of rough justice, does nobody any good, least of all the Muslim immigrants themselves.

Dalrymple can say, with Shakespeare's Jacques in *Twelfth Night*, "I have gained my experience." For much of his career, he worked directly with this population as a prison doctor. Pointing out that poverty in other parts of the world is not automatically the incubator of anomie, destructiveness, hopelessness, lack of civility, lack of civic-mindedness, and a viciously corrupted value-world, Dalrymple blames liberals for propagandizing the urban underclass of modern secular civilization with the disorders of extreme personal freedom and identity politics. Much of his jeremiad is cogent: liberals have indeed made consequential errors these past 50 years, overemphasizing individual rights while seeming to deny that the white majority should have them to the same degree as historically oppressed minorities. Today's leftists have turned their backs on the vision of democratic socialism that energized their grandparents in the first half of the 20th century. Many have abandoned the Enlightenment project of universal justice and cooperation and instead promoted the balkanization of multiculturalism. Campaigns against racism and misogyny, while well intended, have replaced efforts to stanch corporate plunder and reverse the widening gap between rich and poor. Guilt-tripping the haves of society for their white privilege neither empowers

the societal losers who suffer from structural poverty and disenfranchisement nor encourages a helpful attitude among the winners in the economic sweepstakes. Liberal leniency toward thugs on the grounds that they are victims of discrimination and survivors of childhood abuse tends to be as deleterious as Dalrymple thinks it is, although his own preferred counter-measure – harsher punishments – is no more effective.

Dalrymple must be partially a social constructionist to make such an analysis at all. What vitiates it is his blaming liberals alone. In the past, the stability that he values so highly was purchased by keeping women subjugated by patriarchal marriage and minorities quashed by the tyranny of the majority. Meanwhile capitalism, about which he is mostly silent, is, almost by definition, the war of all against all on an un-level playing field. Having pointed out that poverty in other countries is not automatically destabilizing or inimical to ethical behavior, he fails to draw the moral: instead of pursuing his analysis of social conditioning to its core, which would involve an in-depth analysis of *all* of Britain's social inequities and dysfunctions, he pins the responsibility solely on progressives and then switches back to his favorite hobby-horse of man's inherent wickedness. In his mind, this is not a dodge: he thinks that liberalism's fallibility is ultimately rooted in its failure to reckon with our natural propensity for evil.

Dalrymple and Marie

To beat his usual drum, he seizes upon an incident of violence perpetrated by teenaged thugs against a tolerant French teacher, identified only as Marie. After her

attackers are arrested, she tries to intervene with the court to lessen their punishment. (The article coyly withholds the ethnic identification of the perpetrators, but the school is located in a governmental Zone of Priority Education, which almost always indicates students of North African Muslim descent.) For Dalrymple, the teacher's bleeding heart is liberal fatuity at its most egregious. The title of his article – "The Difference Between Firmness and Cruelty" (*Taki's Magazine*, March 16, 2014) – states the distinction that he wishes to make for the edification of blinkered progressives: what the youths need is a very firm hand, not therapeutic nostrums; therefore, the serious penalties encoded in the law are not in the least cruel.

But conservative shibboleths are so thoughtlessly applied to every possible situation by arch-traditionalists that even as sensible a writer as Dalrymple can trip on his own shoelaces without even noticing. The emphases are added:

Unfortunately, there will always be some very nasty people in the world, and not all of them will be deterred from carrying out nasty acts *by whatever consequences they will suffer.*

Switching back to the defendant in the court case, still in the same paragraph:

It is even possible that *fear of consequences, by inhibiting him*, would have made him a better person in the truly moral sense, for virtue and goodness are at least in part matters of habit, as every mother knows – or ought to know.

Dalrymple just told us that the evil doer cannot be deterred by unpleasant consequences; now he is saying that fear of consequences *will* deter him. Put another way, humans, being incorrigibly attracted to evil, cannot be brought around by any

punishment that you mete out; but the answer to crime is punishment.

What just happened in Dalrymple's brain?

Like all acolytes of original sin, Dalrymple is unable to take his own concept seriously. If we are born craving evil instead of good – if this attraction is genetically determined – then *nothing in the environment can change that*. Punishment least of all. This truth was illustrated brutally but unmistakably in the second half of the 20th century by the experiment of so-called reparative therapy for gay men. In those interesting times, the men's sexual orientation was treated precisely as a crime (or a sickness or a sin); so some of them wished to be "rehabilitated." They volunteered to undergo calibrated doses of torture in the hope of extinguishing their urges *via* operant conditioning and thereby acquiring virtue and goodness. The "treatment" consisted of showing the patient arousing images of naked men and delivering an electric shock at the same time. Naturally this aversion therapy never managed to implant a positive erotic response to women in the gay subject – how could it? It did have an inhibiting effect on the man's same-sex attraction, so he was "cured" of his homosexual tendencies – at least until the Pavlovian association of his sexual appetite with the unpleasant consequence of an electric shock wore off. (After dropping homosexuality from its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, the American Psychological Association strongly condemned all attempts to "treat" it.)

Here we have the model for punitive incarceration. In just such a fashion does punishment "work" wherever it is applied. Nothing about punishment or the threat of punishment actually teaches, or *could* teach, good values as an inner commitment and spiritual realization. But, thinks Dalrymple, by making the prisoner associate his

punishment with his crime, the cruelty of prison may succeed in inhibiting the reprobate when he is tempted to act on his impulses. And over time, this habit of keeping his nose clean solely out of fear of consequences may produce a self-regulating automaton. (If Dalrymple thinks that such a stimulus-response machine is now the locus of *genuine* virtue and goodness, he knows much more than what "every mother knows.")

Dalrymple's confusion stems from his commitment to two mantras of conservatism: that human nature is depraved; and that the only methods for keeping it in check are propaganda, punishment, or, in the worst-case scenarios, extermination of the agents of evil. (The propaganda is the promise made to our children that an adulthood of conventionality and conformism will lead to happiness under our present social and political arrangements.)

What all such unthinking traditionalists miss is the inherent contradiction, which Dalrymple accidentally exposes, between positing a fixed human nature that is attracted to evil and then in the next breath claiming the ability to alter it by behavioral conditioning. The problem to be solved is the human predilection for self-aggrandizing violence, which, so Dalrymple thinks, resides in the DNA of every individual from birth: his solution is to *inflict* violence or the threat of violence on the individual as a deterrent. This will inculcate . . . *goodness*.

As the bad boys, bullies, and sociopaths already know, this program is merely the rationalization employed by the sheep and their shepherds for engaging in the very evil that they profess to be subduing. The prisoners see clearly and acutely that the warden gets precisely the same satisfaction out of perpetrating violence that they get.

Wrapping up his screed with a last potshot at his real target – not Muslim thugs but liberal airheads – Dalrymple makes the French teacher his *idiot du jour*, ending with a breathtaking charge against her:

Marie, like all the sentimentalists who confuse law with therapy, believes that firmness and cruelty are the same. This unwillingness or inability to make proper distinctions is a symptom of our time. It is a form of moral cowardice.

"Moral cowardice" is quite an accusation to make against a woman who chose to teach in precisely the most dangerous school in the country, out of a heartfelt desire to confront the poverty, ignorance, and violence that doom immigrant children to lives of hopelessness and failure. But what can be more instructive than the judgment made by a man sitting in a place of perfect safety upon the courage of a woman in a veritable war zone?

There is indeed a difference between firmness and cruelty, even if Dalrymple thinks there is. But what *he* means by firmness *is* cruelty. He is making a familiar mistake, one that is located at the dead center of the pathogenesis of evil: that a perpetrator's *motive* is the defining element in an act of torture. Dalrymple imagines that the distinction between firmness and cruelty *depends upon the motive*: because our interrogators at Guantánamo were seeking information rather than gratuitously abusing prisoners for their own sadistic satisfaction, they were not guilty of torture – only of firmness; because prison guards intend to transform the reprobate into a productive citizen, their torments cannot be called "cruel" – merely "firm." But an act of torture is an act of torture; cruelty is cruelty. If Dalrymple is ever on the receiving end,

he will understand how little it matters to the victim what the perpetrator's professed motive is.

There is more to say. If Dalrymple's theory is correct – that some humans are so dedicated to evil that they are inured against threats of retribution, yet the only protocol for rehabilitating them is to apply so massive a dose of pain that they will be forever deterred from risking another such dose – then the practice of punishment can *only* err in the direction of being too lenient. It can hardly be too cruel for its purpose, which is to be so aversive that even the most recalcitrant criminal – one who is unregenerate and unreachable by gentler methods of persuasion – will refrain from criminal depredations for the rest of his life solely out of his fear of undergoing another round of dissuasion by the Department of Corrections. "Firmness" is for sissies; "cruelty" is for the realists who have to impose the necessary regimen. Wringing our hands over the definition of torture becomes another exercise in liberal imbecility: the whole *point* of effective punishment is to torture the offender; and the cruelty will have been carried too far only if, as legal memos ginned up by the Bush-Cheney administration opined, it results in organ failure or death.

However unattractive we may find Dalrymple's morality of harshness masquerading as firmness, if his theory of human nature is correct – that evil people love evil in the same way that good people love good – then we might have to grudgingly concede that the practice of cruelly aversive punishment is warranted. Nothing less will succeed in concentrating the mind of the vicious offender on the imperative of behaving well. He cannot be reached by kindness and compassion – according to Dalrymple, he scorns

actual goodness and makes evil his good.

Before we even take up the theory more carefully, however, we can point to a serious deficit in Dalrymple's thinking – one that characterizes conservatives and traditionalists generally. The definition of "neurosis" is the commitment to repeat what has never yet worked. The neurotic persists in demanding that the world be other than it is, and does, over and over, what he has always done, always to no avail. Reality cannot persuade him out of his *m.o.* – it is reality, he insists, that must finally change.

Dalrymple's theory of evil and practice of punishment has had a long run in human history, with what result we all see. It has given us the world that we have. At what point, then, will the eternal conservative acknowledge that his program is not working?

The usual answer would make the angels weep – it is that we have not yet applied the program rigorously enough. We need to double down on the harshness of the punishments. Perhaps with enough determination and a willingness to stay the course, we can arrive at a more sensible schedule of sentencing guidelines – restoring the days, not long past, when a starving child could be hanged for the theft of a loaf of bread. That even those punishments did not deter crime in their own day seems to be a fact of history that is lost on the tough-minded traditionalists.

There is every pragmatic reason to give up on Dalrymple's failed regime. However, it is requisite to say that his theory is no more correct than his practice is effective. *No person is intrinsically or innately evil* – that is, attracted to evil, as a result of inborn tendencies or genetic inheritance, analogous to the way that good people are attracted to good. This is, or should be, manifest. If conservative canards were not

already substituting for the exercise of actual thought, Dalrymple would catch a gigantic paralogism in his thesis: if sin is original, then there *aren't* any good people who are attracted to good. His project of inculcating goodness and virtue by means of violence would be over the moon, because he is trying to reorient the individual's moral compass to point to a non-existent location. If aversion therapy could extinguish the love of evil, nonetheless it could never instill the love of goodness. In the case of the gay men who submitted themselves to torture, at least women were out there, to be theoretically available to becoming objects of attraction. But according to the theory of original sin, goodness is *not* out there – it can't be out there – it could only be out there already if there were any good people who embodied it. But there can be no such people. (We all agree, I hope, that goodness is not out there *disembodied*, like the monolith in *2001: A Space Odyssey*.) Out there is only the evil that attracts us based on our depraved human natures. Who could have been the first "man of character" who decided to counteract his natural depravity by means of discipline, renunciation, and deferred gratification? Where could *his* goodness have come from?

Christianity posits a solution of sorts to this conundrum – God is out there. Although I am as attracted to evil as ever, Christ enters my organism and acts in my stead. I am occupied territory, and *He* does the good. But Dalrymple is an atheist. He has nowhere to turn.

Punishment cannot re-generate what has never yet been generated in the first place. Where would the good be, toward which the bad person is now to be nudged, or shoved, by the encouragements of cruelty? Where could it be in the world?

I will pass by without elaboration the paradox that there is no one to administer

the cruelty who is not himself tainted by original sin and therefore naturally attracted to evil. It seems to my untutored mind to be taking a terrible risk to put the instruments of torture in the hands of a person whose inborn inclinations are already vicious. Such a temptation may be too much for even the Christ within to overcome. There is no dearth of examples to illustrate this danger. I will content myself with only one.

Judge Susie Pritchett and Patricia Spottedcrow

When Judge Susie Pritchett of Kingfisher County, Oklahoma sentenced first-time offender Patricia Spottedcrow, a 24-year-old mother of four young children, to 12 years in jail in 2010 for selling \$31 worth of marijuana to an undercover cop, she told a reporter that Spottedcrow "needed to learn that there were consequences to this lifestyle she had chosen." We were thereby given another demonstration of what might be paradoxically called the moral basis of cruelty. The sentence is evidence of a justice system run amok; but it is also purely evil, and evil of an especially stomach-churning kind. What causes us to miss this salient fact about it is, obviously, the respectability of the judge and the authority of the law that she invoked. We do not see her engaged in violence, torture, or physical abuse – only in pronouncing a few words in a calm voice in a courtroom. That very imperturbability should put us on high alert: the words must have been devastating to the defendant; we would not be surprised if we learned that she screamed uncontrollably or fainted dead away. A person would have to be empathy-impaired to the last degree possible to do what Susie Pritchett did to Patricia Spottedcrow. For her to do it calmly and with satisfaction might seem to take

us into psychological *terra incognita*. But if we accuse Judge Pritchett of emotional abuse, nonetheless we must admit that she did not resort to vicious taunting or name-calling. Her vocabulary of derogation was confined to colorless descriptions of offenses against the law. In her formal capacity she expressed no gloating.

Ineluctably, we are reminded of Adolf Eichmann at work: we see him at his desk, pushing papers; we see him consulting statutory requirements and responding to direct orders from superiors; we never see him engaged in Jew-baiting, petty harassments, or expressions of personal animus toward those who will board his trains. We see only the he is pleased with himself over a job well done and gratified by commendations bestowed upon him by his superiors.

The language Judge Pritchett used to justify the outrageous sentence that she handed down exposes the immense sense of righteousness and certitude that she felt. She could go home to a good dinner and sleep the sleep of the just. *This* is what Hannah Arendt meant by the banality of evil. Not that the *deed* is banal – no, the deed is malefic, utterly barbarous, altogether outside the norms of decency. The banality lies in the words "needed to learn that there were consequences" and the imaginative constriction that they reveal. The banality lies in saying something so pedestrian, so conformist, so morally insensate that we have to ask if the statement even rises to the level of thought. This was in fact the quality in Eichmann that so engrossed Arendt's attention. The controversy stirred up by those who willfully misunderstood Arendt and accused her, despicably and idiotically, of calling the murder of six million people "banal," caused most commentators to miss her most sensational claim: that there is "a strange interdependence between thoughtlessness and evil." Because Eichmann

evinced a total "lack of imagination" and "repeated word for word the same stock phrases," he betrayed "an inability to *think*, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else." His continual recourse to "officialise," for which he apologized to his captors, was symptomatic: "he was genuinely incapable of uttering a single sentence that was not a cliché." In Arendt's judgment, "He *merely*, to put the matter colloquially, *never realized what he was doing*. . . . He was not stupid. It was sheer thoughtlessness – something by no means identical with stupidity – that predisposed him to become one of the greatest criminals of that period." This is the only analysis that can make Judge Pritchett intelligible to us. We grasp at that straw – that she cannot possibly have realized what she was doing.

When I was growing up, the word "thoughtless" was always used with a negative connotation of "didn't give a damn" – "You thoughtless bastard!" Thoughtlessness was assumed to be a deliberate refusal to think about the consequences for others. At some point in my life, I deduced that it must once have had a connotation much closer to "absent-minded." Thought went missing; it never occurred. The thought-less person was certainly blame-worthy, but not necessarily for failing to care.

I believe Arendt meant neither. She meant a marked incapacity to think *at all*, if thinking is something more than snippets of vocabulary in our heads that we apply to situations *pro forma*. By "thought," she meant the use of language to meaningfully investigate, discover, ramify, reach conclusions not already contained in premises, and so forth. In place of thought are stock phrases and clichés, truisms, quotations, what others say, what the law says, and what time is it. So the thoughtlessness of Eichmann and Judge Pritchett cannot be "deliberate." Eichmann wouldn't have understood what

we were asking him to *do* with thought. He believed he was already doing it when he repeated the party platform or his instructions from his superiors or even, amazingly, the Nazi version of Kant's categorical imperative. Kant reformulated came out this way: since the little person cannot know all that the leaders of the nation know, it would be presumptuous for him to legislate maxims for others; so he transforms the imperative into "Act on the maxim that the Führer, if he knew of your action, would approve of it." Eichmann defended this maxim as a good one for an underling. And indeed, this is most people's categorical imperative, substituting for "the Führer" the church, the laws, the parental voice of the superego, tradition, and especially "what everybody thinks." (As a gently ironical Prince Hal says to Poins after eliciting his opinion in *Henry IV, Part Two*, "It would be every man's thought, and thou art a blessed fellow to think as every man thinks. Never a man's thought in the world keeps the roadway better than thine.")

It feels unsatisfactory to explain Judge Pritchett or Eichmann by saying that they didn't know what they were doing and couldn't help what they were doing. But the fear that explanation is tantamount to exculpation is a red herring. Explanation takes place in one universe of discourse and judgment about accountability in another. There is, or should be, no overlap – we need never go down the garden path of "diminished responsibility." Arendt approved of hanging Eichmann: he suffered no worse at the hands of his executioners, she argued, than what he had meted out to unoffending others. He did the deeds; and he wasn't really remorseful. (Remorse is, in any case, another red herring). Judge Pritchett pronounced the sentence; no one else did; it could have been anything she chose. It is critical to note that, whatever her intention and however damaged a human being she may be, she took satisfaction in the

sentence and was even proud of it. She knew that it spread disaster among multiple lives. She wasn't missing any information. She wanted to do it; it expressed her idea of herself; it symbolized her values. If no one except the defendant committed the crime that was adjudicated in her courtroom, and only the defendant was accountable, the same was true of the judge herself – she alone was responsible for the sentence she handed down. It's all on her. We aren't going to blame her parents, or God, or even the sentencing guidelines. It was not the law that did it – the law permitted her to sentence Spotted Crow to community service with no jail time whatsoever.

What Arendt is saying is that there is a tremendous hole in the judge's imaginative faculty – there is something missing. She's an automaton: in terms of ethical cognition, she's as brainless as a machine. The input is the letter of the law, clichés about the drug culture, shibboleths about the importance of consequences. The output is a sentence at the high end of the guidelines, very predictable if we have been spending time with the judge and listening to her banalities. If she also felt especially vindictive that day, due to a bad night's sleep, she still could have said that she had good reason for her bad mood: too many of these drug offenses have gone unpunished, enough is enough, the law has been too lenient in the past, we must not make a scarecrow of the law, it is time to "send a message." (Another cliché). As Angelo explains with great surface plausibility in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, a hanging judge shows pity most of all when he hands down the death sentence: he has compassion for would-be offenders in the future by deterring them. (A more sophisticated, and sophistical, cliché.)

Arendt had already made a comprehensive statement about the banality of evil

18 years before the Eichmann trial. There are two reasons that her thesis caused so much hot air in 1962. The obvious one was Jewish proprietorship of the Holocaust, like right-wing American ownership of 9/11. Whenever you mention either, you are required to turn red in the face and stamp. So a certain type of demagogue will feign outrage when he hears the word "banality" uttered anywhere within or near the sacred precincts. But the more sinister reason is our secret knowledge that we, too, would follow any order given on the job by any person who outranks us in the table of organization. If we don't know this about ourselves, we don't know much of anything, and thus serve as further exhibits of Arendt's concept of thoughtlessness. To ward off awareness of our guilt, we have to go on pretending that evildoers are monsters – nothing at all like us. So a lot of ink has been spent trying to refute Arendt's picture of Eichmann, including an entire book by Deborah Lipstadt endeavoring to prove that blood dripped from Eichmann's viciously anti-Semitic fangs. But Arendt got her portrait of Eichmann's ordinariness from the six Israeli psychologists who examined him and found him normal, almost startlingly so. At one point, she speculates (a little wickedly) that it may have been precisely all those stock phrases and clichés that so reassured them. When Lipstadt unearths anti-Semitic pronouncements from Eichmann's past, she reinforces Arendt's point: anti-Semitic platitudes in the mouth of a Nazi functionary are the exact equivalent of "needed to learn that there were consequences" in the mouth of an American judge running a drug court.

Spottedcrow's story is unusual in the annals of American jurisprudence in exhibiting an element of ultimate mitigation:

The senseless severity of her sentence caught the attention of advocates who quickly moved to support Spottedcrow, spawning a grassroots uprising that led to a highly unusual decrease in her sentence and, ultimately, to her early release on parole. . . . she was reunited with her four children and her mother, who cared for them during her two-year absence. [ACLU report, December 2012]

This happened literally over Judge Pritchett's dead body.

Mary Sue "Susie" Pritchett joined our Savior June 22, 2011. A role model to many and a friend to all, Susie loved the people she met throughout her life. . . . Being the Judge of Kingfisher County was her greatest joy. She loved her community with a passion and desired to protect it and to help every citizen, even when that help involved tough decisions. Susie was a strong believer in the American Justice system and the need for courts to be places where all can receive a fair hearing and where justice can be done. . . . An important part of Susie's life has been her faith. She took the walk to Emmaus and regularly attended Church with her family after being saved. In the spirit of Christ, she believed that helping others was a duty and was always willing to open her home to those in need. Over the years, she had a number of house-guests stay with her and her family until they were able to get back on their feet, including troubled teens and two Vietnamese refugees who lived with them for a year after the fall of South Vietnam. Susie died as she lived her life, surrounded by Jesus, her friends and family. Though it is a little darker down here, Heaven just got a little brighter. Love you Mom. [Obituary published in *The Oklahoman*]

I think additional comment here would be not only superfluous, but impossible.

Dalrymple and Edmund

Let us come at the problem *via* literature rather than life. Dalrymple, fancying himself something of a polymath, uses Shakespeare's *King Lear* as a stalking horse for his concept of original sin. This is exceptionally brazen on his part, as his thesis is

doggedly conventional while Shakespeare was nothing if not imaginative.

Since his detour into literary analysis did not impinge upon doctor-patient confidentiality, he published "Diagnosing Lear" (*The New Criterion*, June 2007) under his real name. His article begins by lamenting the tendency of critics to "medicalize" Lear's senile rashness, but quickly abandons the mad king to take up Edmund the bastard son of Gloucester – the foil for his theory of evil.

The actor who assays the part and does not mind being hissed off the stage as an arch-villain is rewarded with one of Shakespeare's most quotable monologues. Edmund's weak-minded father, already duped into believing that his legitimate and true-hearted son Edgar is a traitor, has just exited the stage babbling the inanities of astrology and attributing disasters brought on by faults of character to "these late eclipses in the sun and moon." This causes an outburst of hilarity in Edmund:

This is the excellent foppery of the world, that, when we are sick in fortune – often the surfeit of our own behavior – we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon and the stars, as if we were villains on necessity; fools by heavenly compulsion; knaves, thieves, and treachers, by spherical predominance; drunkards, liars, and adulterers, by an enforced obedience of planetary influence; and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on. An admirable evasion of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish disposition on the charge of a star!

Edmund goes on to reflect sarcastically upon the putative origin of his own bad character:

My father compounded with my mother under a dragon's tail; and my nativity was under Ursa Major; so that it follows, I am rough and lecherous.

He dismisses this explanation with a snort of contempt:

Tut! I should have been that I am, had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardizing.

But Edmund's theory of evil is no deeper than Gloucester's: "I am what I am" is as arbitrary and unempirical as "The stars made me do it." Furthermore, Edmund's narcissism makes him as blind to himself as he is to others: in point of fact, he does not really know why he does evil. His theories about himself are no profounder than those of sociologists who push the abuse excuse. He has contempt for liberal sympathizers, which makes us almost praise him as an honest fellow enough; but his own explanation of "nature" is word-magic, a woolly term substituted for a fact, a vague name for what he and we do not understand.

Thou, nature, art my goddess; to thy law
My services are bound.

What law is he referring to? His soliloquy moves immediately to justifying his scheme to get his brother disinherited, if not judicially murdered, and to take all their father's land for himself. If any law is implied, it is the law of dog eat dog and the devil take the hindmost. But this is not the law that Kent and Cordelia read out of nature. Social Darwinians do, maybe; not decent people.

But if both Gloucester and Edmund are unable to account for evil, how shall we?

Before dismissing the theory of social construction on Edmund's say-so, we should at least remember that his rejection of his illegitimacy as the explanation of his wickedness may be mistaken. The afflicted individual may not be the most reliable

witness, in spite of the temptation for us to regard his statement about his own feelings as decisive.

Coleridge, mostly out of his depth as a psychologist or a Shakespearean critic, knew enough to understand that Edmund in *King Lear* has been given every incentive, by his father's lewd acknowledgment of his bastardy, to hate his brother Edgar. Says the Earl of Gloucester to the Earl of Kent:

Though this knave came something saucily into the world before he was sent for, yet was his mother fair; there was good sport at his making, and the whoreson must be acknowledged.

Possessed of more than the customary allotment of intelligence, prowess, and discernment, Edmund is nonetheless brought up to be the subject of his father's raillery about a good romp in an illicit bed and cannot help but experience, as Coleridge observes, "pangs of shame personally undeserved, and therefore felt as wrongs." Furthermore, since the law of primogeniture guarantees that every good thing falls to the elder and legitimate brother, it follows as the night the day that Edgar's "stainless birth and lawful honors were the constant remembrancers of his own debasement, and were ever in the way to prevent all chance of its being unknown, or overlooked and forgotten."

The Bible gives us a great deal of information about the etiology of evil, but always by accident. No doubt the author of Genesis thought that original sin lay in the transgression of the commandment about the forbidden fruit rather than in Yahweh's promulgation of the commandment itself. Similarly, the author imagined that Cain, rather than the Lord, was the author of the first murder. But what could be clearer than

this passage in Genesis?

And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord. And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect.

Cain, as a tiller of the ground, naturally brought an offering of the fruit of that ground; Abel, as a keeper of sheep, naturally brought a firstling of his flock. The Lord respected Abel's offering but not Cain's. A Protestant minister will have no difficulty expounding this passage: Abel was diligent and made certain he brought the best sheep he had; Cain was lazy and no doubt gathered up any old fruit. But the story does not say that. Cain certainly brought something. The author may have had a motive in calling the offering merely "the fruit of the ground" and not the "firstfruits"; but he does not say that Cain's offering was shabby. As long as our learned interpreters are letting their imaginations run rampant, adding to the story what cannot safely be said even to be implied, they might with more plausibility extrapolate that the Lord just prefers a shepherd to a farmer.

But whether or not we can gauge the temper of the Lord from the violent careerings of his behavior in the rest of Genesis, we might be entitled to cull this much from the tale: that presumably He – maker of heaven and earth and creator of humankind – knew some of the rudiments of human psychology from his having endowed his creation with it; and that he might therefore have been expected to know

further that there could be no better way of stirring up enmity between brothers than to show partiality to one over the other on a whim.

Dalrymple, settling into his true topic, offers this explanation of Edmund: he "is evil and scheming, but has a Machiavellian understanding of the people around him. And he believes in Original Sin, or at least the irredeemably flawed nature of man." Dalrymple then quotes the aforementioned monologue.

There is much that is valuable in Dalrymple's presentation. In fact, the frustration is that he so nearly hits the nail on the head, missing by the merest fraction of a centimeter. But that is how you wind up with a bruised thumb and a hole in the wall. Dalrymple asks the right question: "If not from the bad conjunction of the sun, the moon, and the stars, from what, then, does evil arise?" Surprisingly, for a writer so identified with unthinking conservatism, he starts by acknowledging the world's inveterate injustice – he quotes Edmund's complaint:

Wherefore should I
Stand in the plague of custom, and permit
The curiosity of nations to deprive me,
For that I am some twelve or fourteen moon-shines
Lag of a brother? Why bastard? wherefore base?

Edmund is right to resent the treatment that is accorded to bastards, as Shylock is right to resent the treatment accorded to Jews. In the famous speeches of these characters, Dalrymple hears Shakespeare making "a plea for tolerance and understanding." As if embarrassed, however, by having expressed so liberal a sentiment, Dalrymple quickly passes from his humane sympathy for the plight of the oppressed to a stern admonition

against our modern cult of the "immaculate victim." Of course, no one would argue with his conclusion that Edmund and Shylock take things rather too far.

It is here that Dalrymple goes to the nub of his putative psychology of evil: "Edmund's resentment takes the evil form of granting himself permission to behave any way he likes because this wrong has been done to him." Dalrymple has picked up the right end of the stick: the blank check that the self-appointed avenger grants himself is indeed the very heart of evil.

But when an apologist for "traditional morality" gets too close to this flame, he scurries away and takes up, with great relief, the individual psychology of the criminal sociopath. Edmund calls nature his goddess, and this means, to Dalrymple, that he wishes to give free rein to "his inborn inclinations, untutored and unconstrained by the moral judgment of his society," and that he is a rebel against "the moral refinement of human societies in a state of civilization." Suddenly Dalrymple sounds very little like a social constructionist and very much like John Calvin.

Now Dick Cheney, needless to say, far from being untutored and unconstrained by the moral judgment of his society, perfectly embodied the values of his society, which included the doctrine that torture is not an evil if the good administer it to the bad. Yet Cheney was believed to be a *defender* of civilization. As soon as we veer away from the center of evil – which is the blank check that Cheney awarded himself to kill some people with military power, torture other people held without due process in prisons, and illegally wiretap still other people without a court order – and instead define evil as Dalrymple does, as a violation of conventional morality, we have moved to the peripheries. With Dalrymple's net, we will catch all the serial killers who stalk

young women and the mass murderers who shoot up college campuses, and certainly we will have no trouble detecting the iniquitous intent in Edmund and Shylock – but we will have completely left the scene of the evil that claims thousands and sometimes tens of thousands of victims for every one person cut down by a malicious criminal.

(Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn marveled at the small scale and *ad hoc* nature of the depredations of Shakespearean villains relative to the monstrous efficiency of Stalin and his designated torturers Yagoda and Yezhov.) Moreover, following the standard that Dalrymple recommends, we incarcerate millions of individuals who ingest certain botanical substances in defiance of the state's prohibition – a prohibition modeled on God's equally arbitrary and senseless prohibition in the Garden of Eden – instead of finding a way to rein in the maniacal careerists, outright sadists, and near-psychopaths who have gravitated into the professions that execute these deranged laws.

(Dalrymple, like Judge Pritchett, is a strong proponent of the war on drugs.)

Our articulate right-wing carper and nag carries us to the very brink of the great insight that narcissism is the *sine qua non* of evil: "Is there any among us who does not draw conclusions about the wide world from our standpoint of one pair of eyes?" But again he draws back, refusing to cast the net wide enough to capture the fullness of the explanatory force that he has unleashed; and it is noteworthy that his failure to go the rest of the way involves two different strategies of retreat. First, he stays with the florid evil of Edmund and Lear's two ungrateful daughters. It is the besetting sin of such analysts to simply dismiss the evil of a Henry Kissinger and concentrate on the evils of a Charles Manson. Second, he falls back upon his facile universalization of evil, alluding to "the evil that lies in every heart, waiting its moment to emerge." *Every*

heart? Then tell us about your own evil propensity, since you are so definitive about the propensities of others.

Here we need some clarity, and quickly too. The "problem of evil" for a modern investigator is, or should be, not to explain why there is any evil at all, but to explain why there is so much of it at certain times and in certain persons. Or, if I accept Dalrymple's formulation that evil lies in the heart of every man waiting its moment to emerge, then the pertinent question is, "What triggers its emergence?" Earlier in the piece, he bearded the conservative lion in his den and boldly answered, "Injustice!" He does not disown that statement later on, but he discreetly withdraws from it. Now we are quickly given to understand that the tendency to do evil was already lodged in the perpetrator's heart, and he was only too glad of a pretext to indulge it; the vengeful actor, crippled by the narrowness of his perception, engages in a violent correction of the injustice that is itself an evil.

Dalrymple passes over in silence the question of what recourse the victim of state-administered injustice has. This could be excused on the grounds that he has not time to cover every aspect of his subject. But it is interesting that Lear poses the question roundly and answers in effect, "No recourse whatsoever":

Thou, rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand;
Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thine own back,
Thou hotly lusts to use her in that kind
For which thou whipp'st her. The usurer hangs the cozener.
Through tattered clothes great vices do appear;
Robes and furred gowns hide all. Plate sin with gold,
And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks;
Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw does pierce it.
None does offend, none, I say none.

Dalrymple actually quotes these memorable lines, only to dismiss them as sincere but not truthful. He takes his place in a long line of English philosophers who believe that, on the sceptered isle at least, God's in his Heaven, all's right with the world. There is justice enough in an English law court to satisfy him, if not Lear. There is wisdom enough in Anglican morality. Edmund and Shylock were mistreated, but certainly not enough to justify their evil ways. And we are getting better all the time: illegitimacy, Dalrymple says sunnily, no longer taints a man the way Edmund was tainted; and anti-Semitism like that suffered by Shylock in Elizabethan times . . . well, okay, actually anti-Semitism increased dramatically over the next four centuries and eventuated in a genocide. But there is less anti-Semitism in London today than in Shakespeare's time . . . all right, there may well be more. But, damn it, nobody could write *The Merchant of Venice* today and have it performed; so *that's* progress.

Dalrymple is especially cogent in his analysis of our present-day culture's respect for emotional display, remarking that we live in "an age of emotional and self-expressive extravagance." Contrasting the hypocritical effusions of Goneril and Regan with the taciturnity of Cordelia, Dalrymple notes that "we take vehemence for sincerity and depth of feeling." (My own favorite examples are drawn from the discourse of vituperation whenever a "heinous crime" occurs, whether of international terror or local criminality: the politicians and commentators vie with each other over who can condemn the act in the strongest language; and inevitably articles are written that further condemn those who do *not* condemn the act in the strongest language – they are said to be lacking in "moral clarity." Unfortunately for Dalrymple and his case

against bleeding-heart liberals, it is his fellow travelers among the believers in original sin who most evince this penchant for self-congratulatory theatricality.)

Dalrymple sums up sagaciously: "human language and expression is as apt for disguising or concealing meaning and emotion as it is for expressing them." But here again, he backtracks, and associates florid emotionality with disturbers of the peace. He excoriates "those who see in self-control nothing but treason to the self." Again we brush up against the standard conservative caricature of the political leftist and the cultural secularist. Dalrymple is rebuking, not merely a few characters in *King Lear*, but, in coded language too obvious for a reader of *The New Criterion* to miss, the entire generation of 1960s radicals who gave us sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll. We have an idea whom he is talking about when he sternly reminds us that "emotions are not simply primeval forces, the psychological equivalent of volcanic eruptions that cannot be gainsaid, but are susceptible to discipline and proper proportion."

Discipline and proportion. You do have to wonder if conservative pontificators ever hear themselves talking. If they do, why aren't they bored silly? As usual with writers of his ilk, Dalrymple cannot remember the name of any particular liberal intellectual who sees in self-control nothing but treason to the self – no surprise, as that apologist for doing-your-own-thing-and-damn-everyone-else is a figment of the perfervid wingnut imagination. Meanwhile, he misses the keynote of the greatest mass killers in history, of men like Stalin, Hitler, and Himmler: an ascetic lifestyle and an exaggerated sense of duty. Many of the most efficient genocidal commanders have had their emotions very well disciplined indeed. What we need is not greater self-control, but greater empathy. Dalrymple, in his indictment of skewed perception, writes

himself right up to the point where the words "narcissistic exceptionalism" or perhaps "unthinking conventionality" should appear in the next sentence, but instead turns around and takes refuge in a false antithesis of emotional extravagance and sober self-management.

So it goes: where Edmund is confused and Shakespeare is richly ambiguous, Dalrymple is clear as a bell – which, perhaps I need not even say, is his besetting sin. He is deeply religious, so the explanation for his bogus clarity is naturally found in his faith. We should not be thrown off by his atheism: he is an apostle of the religion of character, and like other believers in a simplistic religion, he is made stupid by it.

If we accept the theory that Dalrymple attributes to Edmund, but which is really his own theory – "Original Sin, or at least the irredeemably flawed nature of man" – we still have two questions we can ask. First, why *are* we flawed, and moreover *irredeemably* flawed? This is no problem for a Christian, of course; but Dalrymple must compose his answer without any recourse to theology. Second, why are some people flawed in the manner of Dick Cheney and others in the manner of Nelson Mandela? (The beginning of a solution to *this* conundrum may lie in certain observations, *viz.*, that Cheney believed Mandela to be evil and voted in favor of keeping him imprisoned for life, whereas Mandela appears never to have become similarly obsessed with harming Cheney, in spite of Cheney's manifest moral unfitness to serve society in any office higher than that of a high school hall monitor.)

Near the end of his piece, Dalrymple calls vanity a universal vice, thus giving us the only other element in his diagnosis of our flawed nature. Once again, he is reckless with his adjectives: *universal*? But the same question arises: sometimes vanity

manifests itself as Jefferson Davis's eternal touchiness about his honor, such that, in spite of the training and intelligence that had well prepared him for the presidency of the Confederacy, his brittleness and exaggerated self-respect disabled him for effective leadership; and sometimes vanity manifests itself as Abraham Lincoln's willingness to appoint all his rivals to his Cabinet and then humble himself repeatedly to keep them working fruitfully with each other to accomplish a noble end.

Freud and Milton

Maybe the simplest way to summarize my complaint with original sin and "lack of character" is to adopt one of Freud's best lines. After sketching his explanation for the "almost universal" problem of the man who is impotent with his wife and can only perform sexually with a mistress or prostitute, Freud says that his theory is open to the objection that "it does too much": it explains the pathology but can't explain why there are any exceptions to it. If we are as naturally given to viciousness as Dalrymple thinks, then a childhood training in morality, character, and good habits wouldn't take: the individual, getting in touch with his natural selfishness, acquisitiveness, aggressiveness, and indifference toward others, would just throw off the parental injunctions as so much sentimental dross. If the so-called virtues put you at a disadvantage – make you an anvil for others to hammer on, as Freud lamented with his customary self-pity – you would jettison them in a heartbeat.

Milton, anticipating Freud, wailed that "the wicked . . . have a better portion in this life." Unless rewarded by resurrection, good men (like himself) "would be of all

men most miserable," and the sinners "most happy." Only the hope of a recompense as stupendous as immortal life could assuage his envy of the scamps. At least, though, we now understand *why* Milton aspired to do good. Freud, an atheist, had a harder time explaining why he was so moral (in his own eyes, at least). He produced the lame explanation that good people experience narcissistic satisfaction from having helped to create high culture by their renunciation of their own drives. Believe me, Freud wasn't capable of that degree of renunciation: he was greedy and grasping, for renown even more than for money; and in spite of how blessed his life was, he was jealous, vain, touchy, quarrelsome, contentious, vindictive, and a very bad friend. Milton, too, was narcissistic, combative, partisan, and impervious to the violence that Cromwell did to Irish Catholics but outraged by the violence perpetrated by Italian Catholics against Protestants. Dalrymple can see the evil in the wife-beater and drug addict: he has a much harder time seeing it in Milton, Freud, "Bomber" Harris, Henry Kissinger, Tony Blair, and Dick Cheney – all "men of character."

Fortunately for the future of the human race, Dalrymple is wrong. Biologically, every human is conceived in morality and begins in morality, because goodness is good for the organism. All animals throughout the animal kingdom are moral – an attribution of evil to any of them is ludicrous. Mammalian morality is higher than reptilian morality, because evolution introduced maternal caring into that class of animals. Excepting only predation for the sole purpose of eating to survive, and violent competition for access to females for the sole purpose of reproduction, mammals obey a morality of live-and-let-live, doing no violence to other mammals however distantly related, and especially refraining from inter-species violence unless resources are too

scarce to support the entire population. Evil entered into human experience some time in the last 10,000 years and has not yet had time to establish itself in the human genome. That much is, or should be, incontrovertible.

The belief in an evildoer's commitment to malice and wickedness for its own sake is a fantasy that is itself possessed of an extraordinary malignancy. Milton's Satan, had he truly made evil his good, would have had no followers in Hell – he would have been a black hole, devouring his own disciples for the malicious pleasure of it. In real life, *narcotraficantes* and jihadists share and share alike within their organizations. Milton is sick with malice toward those who have "a better portion in this life" and comforted only by the thought of their comeuppance in the afterlife. But the fantasy that such evil exists is the real genesis of evil. It bestows the blank check to devise stomach-churning torments for the designated evildoers. Only a twisted mind could make up this description of Hell in *Paradise Lost*:

Where peace
And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
That comes to all.

But this is the same mind that unwittingly makes God evil – a totalitarian tyrant whose punishment for the theft of an apple is death for Adam, Eve, and all their progeny unto the millionth generation – while Satan is nothing more than a heart-stung adolescent made miserable, like Cain, by The Father's preferential treatment of one of his other sons. Satan is riven with envy of Jesus, and determined to vandalize God's garden in revenge. Thus we have in Milton's moral landscape a perfect reflection of his value-world: he wanted God's totalitarian authority (for the good of all, of course); he wanted

abject submission to his will. It follows that the greatest crime he could conceive of was disobedience to his dictates. Satan's rebellion must be punished by eternal torment; the disobedience of Adam and Eve, by the death penalty not only for them but for all human beings yet unborn. We are so morally bereft that we have seen value and even beauty, truth, and goodness in Milton's obscene imaginings: we missed God's absolute evil and focused on Satan's childish spite and pathetic gestures of self-assertion.

There is bad faith here. We seem not to believe ourselves when we say that *evil isn't any good*. What holds us back? It can only be that, like Milton and Freud, we envy the evil doer. We wish we could do what he does and *get away with it*. Next best, however, is to make sure that he does *not* get away with it – does not live to flout the laws that we resentfully conform to. If we cannot have what we mistakenly believe to be the goods of life – money and power – we will at least have the pleasure of making sure that others do not acquire them by illicit means. We cannot safely scoff at the law; but we can bring its full rigor down upon those who do, and enjoy the spectacle of their bitter disappointment as they are led away in handcuffs to be treated to the thousand indignities and sadistic torments devised by the designers of our prison system. Having traded the graces of Beauty and Abundance for Duty and Accumulation, we can find Mirth only in Moral Satisfaction when we see the people we condemn subjected to cruelty. After this knowledge, what forgiveness?

But the piety that we only mouth and disbelieve happens to be true: Evil *isn't* any good. It is not good for the perpetrator any more than it is good for the victim. The people who harm others are not at the banquet of life. That they believe they *are* at the

banquet when they do the harm, and that they have no idea what they are missing, should make them objects of our compassion rather than our hatred.

However, we are deeply confused about harm assessment. No serial killer, no mass murderer, has yet claimed over one hundred victims. I would like to mention again some worthies of recent American history and introduce Dalrymple to others – esteemed figures who do not feature in his landscape of predatory evil done by the outcasts of society.

Kissinger, Gelernter, Cheney, and Krauthammer

In September 1969, Henry Kissinger, discussing with the National Security Council the options for ending the war in Vietnam during President Nixon's first term, began by repeating Nixon's old suggestion of subjecting North Vietnam to "savage punishing blows" and then said "I can't believe that a fourth-rate power like North Vietnam doesn't have a breaking point." These violent enthusiasms were curbed by the reality principle – almost 17,000 Americans had died in Vietnam in 1968 and Nixon had to set about reversing the casualty rate. He began withdrawing combat troops under the banner of "Vietnamization." But it remained important to him that this retreat not look like defeat – therefore he kept up the relentless air war against North Vietnam and on April 30, 1970 announced the widening of the war into Cambodia – an ultimately ineffectual but extravagantly destructive adventure that indirectly led to the Cambodian genocide of the middle 1970s. By the summer of 1971, Nixon and Kissinger knew that South Vietnam was doomed to fall to the communists. On his secret mission to Beijing,

Kissinger assured Premier Zhou Enlai that "We are ready to withdraw all of our forces by a fixed date and let objective realities shape the political future." The transcript of this diplomatic exchange includes a scribbled note in Kissinger's handwriting: "We want a decent interval. You have our assurance." Elsewhere Kissinger makes this explicit: "If the government [of South Vietnam] is as unpopular as you seem to think, then the quicker our forces are withdrawn the quicker it will be overthrown. And if it is overthrown after we withdraw, we will not intervene."

On August 3, 1972, Nixon and Kissinger met in the Oval Office. The conversation was taped:

Nixon: We also have to realize, Henry, that winning an election is terribly important. It's terribly important this year . . . but can we have a viable foreign policy if a year from now or two years from now, North Vietnam gobbles up South Vietnam? That's the real question.

. . . .

Kissinger: So we've got to find some formula that holds the thing together a year or two, after which – after a year, Mr. President, Vietnam will be a backwater. If we settle it, say, this October, by January '74 no one will give a damn.

As Kissinger concedes elsewhere in the conversation, too quick a capitulation will look bad: "Our opponents will say we should've done it three years ago." In fact, the final peace that was signed in January 1973 was in all relevant aspects the same that was offered by the North Vietnamese in January 1969. The entirety of Nixon's first term was devoted to a single goal: losing the war in such a way that the loss could be attributed to the South Vietnamese people instead of the American people. The regime of Nguyen van Thieu lasted 22 months after the United States sold him out. This was the

"decent interval" that cost over 20,000 American lives during the last four years of the war, over 2,000 after Kissinger assured the Chinese that we would abandon the South Vietnamese, and several hundred after Nixon and Kissinger prioritized his reelection. In the spirit of Kissinger's beloved *Realpolitik*, I will not dwell on the million or so Vietnamese soldiers and civilians who died on behalf of the 1972 election in the United States. But as a coda to this review of Kissinger's values and record, it is worth resuscitating his final judgment on the policy. A week after the signing of the January 1973 Paris Peace Accords, for which Kissinger shared the Nobel Peace Prize with his North Vietnamese counterpart, he answered a question from William Safire of *The New York Times* about what, in retrospect, he would have done differently during the last four years: "We should have bombed the hell out of them the minute we got into office."

David Gelernter, a gifted computer scientist who has written a book arguing that the Israelites of Biblical times, and not the Greeks of Periclean Athens, are the fount and origin of Western civilization, took pen in hand in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center and offered the following policy proposal in the pages of the *National Review*:

Our ultimatum should read: You have so many hours to turn over [Osama bin Laden], or prove to our satisfaction that he's not in Afghanistan. If you don't, we'll declare war and systematically destroy everything you own, every building and field, every shop and sheep in Afghanistan, one by one, until you hand the man over or there's nothing left.

The including of the livestock in the contemplated genocide gives us the authentic Old Testament touch.

Dick Cheney, the *de facto* president at the time of the attack, immediately realized that he could use it as a pretext to fulfill an ambition that he had hatched in the middle 1990s, along with other signatories to the Project for the New American Century, namely, to invade Iraq, overthrow its government, and install an American-style democracy in its place. The purpose was the control of Iraq's oil fields and the projection of American military power in the region. That Iraq had nothing to do with the 9/11 attack was a matter of inconsequence to Cheney. At one time or another, he proffered three different lies about the rationale for the invasion: that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction; that Saddam had a relationship with al Qaeda; and that the liberation of the Iraqi people from a ruthless dictatorship was a goal of American foreign policy. In fact, no better explanation for the invasion exists than the hypothesis that its real purpose was to shore up the bottom line of the Halliburton Corporation, which Cheney had chaired until he stepped down to run for vice-president. The war claimed the lives of 4500 American soldiers and maimed tens of thousands of them, not counting the appalling statistics on PTSD and suicide; hundreds of thousands of Iraqis were killed and three million of them displaced from their homes; and Iraq was turned into a failed nation, which led to the founding and initial success of the Islamic State.

As part of prosecuting a "war on terror," Cheney instituted a torture regime on the model perfected by Stalin's secret police, first hiding it from the public view, next participating in the administration's lie that "enhanced interrogation" did not violate the Geneva Accords, and finally arguing brazenly that torture is an acceptable instrument of American state policy. Meanwhile, he operated in great secrecy, building a special

bunker for himself deep below the Naval Observatory in Washington, DC and refusing to divulge the membership of an energy council that he convened and that the taxpayers funded. On the economic front, he clearly considered the widening gap between the rich and the poor to be the mark of a society that is getting the economy right. Eventually the corporate and personal greed unleashed by the administration's policies ended in the Great Recession of 2008.

Charles Krauthammer, the conservative columnist and cheerleader for the Republican Party, understood that waterboarding constituted a violation of international agreements. Nonetheless, in a column published on May 1, 2009 in the *Washington Post* that could almost pass for a Swiftian satire, Krauthammer validated Cheney's regime. Even the title of the column is risible: "Torture? No. Except . . ."

Torture is an impermissible evil. Except under two circumstances. The first is the ticking time bomb.

There has never been a verifiable instance where torture was employed and elicited the life-saving information that enabled a bomb to be defused in time. But the hypothetical can certainly be tweaked to the point where any rational person would be willing to torture the psychopath who knew where a nuclear bomb was hidden and when it would detonate.

The second exception to the no-torture rule is the extraction of information from a high-value enemy in possession of high-value information likely to save lives.

In other words, torture is an impermissible evil in all circumstances, except in a case of dire emergency . . . or a case where you just really want to do it. Krauthammer's second "exception" is a green light to torture almost any person in custody. At Guantánamo, the fiction was maintained that *all* the prisoners were high-value detainees. Krauthammer does not specify that the interrogators need to know *which* prisoner has the information – it could be any of them. The point of the torture is to identify the culprit. As for those who were tortured to no avail – no harm, no foul. They were dangerous enemies even if they did not have the information. Krauthammer goes on to ask "Did it work?" Like Stalin, he believes that the answer is yes. When Stalin was informed that some of the designated enemies of the state had not yet been broken by the "interrogation," he said to keep beating them. Their eventual confessions confirmed to him that his assignment of guilt had been correct and proved the efficacy of the torture.

Henry Kissinger, David Gelernter, Dick Cheney, and Charles Krauthammer did not evince any tell-tale signs of evil in the cradle. Nor do ISIS warriors or *narcotraficantes*. But unlike Dalrymple's favorite whipping boys and girls – the members of the underclass who are given to criminality or at least bad manners – all four of these men were born and bred in white privilege and affluence and achieved high levels of education. Kissinger holds a Ph.D. from Harvard, having devoted his dissertation to the "statesmanship" of Castlereagh and Metternich – two of the most small-minded and reactionary architects of the stifling post-Napoleonic order in Europe. Gelernter did his undergraduate work at Yale and got his Ph.D. at SUNY – Stony Brook. Krauthammer

has a Harvard MD and like Dalrymple practiced as a psychiatrist. Cheney has a Masters in political science from the University of Wyoming and was working on his dissertation at the University of Wisconsin – Madison when the opportunity came to go directly to Washington as a Congressional staffer.

Even so, Cheney the instigator of torture and Gelernter the advocate of mass extermination are not *intrinsically* evil. They were infected by the premises of fictive intellectual habitats. The most conspicuous sign of the infection is their comprehensive arrogance – their confidence that they are both right and righteous, and their contemptuous dismissal of any dissenting voice. Cheney's idea was simplicity itself – the terrorists are evil, entire nations are implicated in the evil, and the party of good has a blank check to defeat evil by any means necessary. Gelernter, ever the intellectual, writes book-length rationales for the same fundamental idea.

Neither were Osama bin Laden, Stalin, Hitler, Himmler, and Eichmann intrinsically evil, innately wicked, originally sinful. All of them had tender moments with their families and friends, joked, laughed, shared food, played sports, enjoyed moments of beauty, fed the ducks, did favors for others, and were gratified when those others were made happy by the favors. This is the human default. Things started well with all of them, and then they were educated into evil ideas. Later, they attained the power to act on the ideas.

Earlier, I briefly contrasted Dalrymple's pinched vision with Shakespeare's capacious imagination – notwithstanding Dalrymple's invidious attempt to treat the Bard of Avon as his great precursor in hard-nosed realism. Edmund's cheerful acknowledgment of

his wickedness is a theatrical convenience, not a psychological demonstration. It was just such soliloquizing confessions of maleficence that so amused Solzhenitsyn:

We would prefer to say that such people as Yagoda cannot exist, that there aren't any. It is permissible to portray evildoers in a story for children, so as to keep the picture simple. But when the great world literature of the past – Shakespeare, Schiller, Dickens – inflates and inflates the images of evildoers of the blackest shades, it seems somewhat farcical and clumsy to our contemporary perception. The trouble lies in the way these classic evildoers are pictured. They recognize themselves as evildoers, and they know their souls are black. And they reason: "I cannot live unless I do evil. So I'll set my father against my brother! I'll drink the victim's sufferings until I'm drunk with them!" Iago very precisely identifies his purposes and his motives as being black and born of hate.

But no; that's not the way it is! To do evil a human being must first of all believe that what he's doing is good, or else that it's a well-considered act in conformity with natural law. Fortunately, it is in the nature of the human being to seek a *justification* for his actions.

Macbeth's self-justifications were feeble – and his conscience devoured him. Yes, even Iago was a little lamb too. The imagination and the spiritual strength of Shakespeare's evildoers stopped short at a dozen corpses. Because they had no *ideology*.

Ideology – that is what gives evil-doing its long-sought justification and gives the evildoer the necessary steadfastness and determination. That is the social theory which helps to make his acts seem good instead of bad in his own and others' eyes, so that he won't hear reproaches and curses but will receive praise and honors. That was how the agents of the Inquisition fortified their wills: by invoking Christianity; the conquerors of foreign lands, by extolling the grandeur of their Motherland; the colonizers, by civilization; the Nazis, by race; and the Jacobins (early and late), by equality, brotherhood, and the happiness of future generations.

Shakespeare did not foresee the deformities of post-Enlightenment totalitarianism; but he knew enough of Calvin's Geneva to travesty puritanism in his plays. As for how he accounted for evil, he was never one to use a play as a platform for philosophizing. But if Edmund deserves Solzhenitsyn's sardonic dismissal as a cartoon villain, it is not because Shakespeare's understanding of his character falls to the level of Dalrymple's

platitudes. Edmund's wonderful soliloquy is a form of braggadocio – never a knave of the tough-minded type but vaunts his autonomy and self-reliance. Shakespeare, ever a keen observer, had noticed that much.

Dalrymple needed to consult *Measure for Measure* before attempting to recruit Shakespeare to his ethic of cruelty as the only antidote to original sin. In that luminous play, Dalrymple's proposed panacea of serious consequences is the focal point of the action. Many scenes take place in Dalrymple's favorite institution of reformation – a prison. The people of Vienna are shown throughout to be endlessly corruptible and concupiscent; they are sinfully given and seemingly irredeemable. Is Dalrymple vindicated? At the conclusion of the play, the Duke's forgiveness embraces all the culpables: the would-be rapist and murderer Angelo is rewarded with marriage to a good woman who loves him; even the unregenerate murderer Barnardine is freed from incarceration. Lucio is excused for his outrageous slanders of the Duke and only required to right the wrongs he did to the victims of his sexual predation. The pimp is told to "Go mend." If we are all sinners on the Dalrymple model, Shakespeare's solution, based on the Biblical injunction to "Judge not, lest we be judged," is universal pardon. The expedient of incarceration is specifically disdained:

How came it that the absent duke had not either delivered him to his liberty or executed him? I have heard it was ever his manner to do so.

The duke rejects the "pedagogy" of punishment: if the miscreant is not so incorrigible as to merit execution, he should be returned to society as soon as possible so he can resume his usefulness to it. Nothing that can happen in a prison will improve the

offender. If he cannot profit from the mortification of his arrest, he will not be taught a salutary lesson by being tortured.

Where Dalrymple advocates the iron law of retributive justice in the name of all that is stultifyingly conventional and harebrained, Shakespeare radiates generosity of spirit and finds the solution to the problem of evil in love. Dalrymple had better look elsewhere for his intellectual forebears – Draco might serve his purpose.