

Richard Bernstein,

Book on radical evil finished on September 1, 2001.

Political scientists and philosophers rarely talk about evil as a concept. Theologians are concerned with question if you believe in evil, how do you reconcile that with religious belief. How can Evil be reconciled with an Omnipotent God?

What do we mean when we say that something is really Evil?

- (1) Is there a difference between someone who plots the murder of an aunt to get her estate?
- (2) Someone who systematically plans the murder of an entire people?

Disaster of introducing language of Good and Evil into politics. This is a regression and we are being manipulated.

NYT headlines on September 12: War Against Evil.

Tremendous emotive appeal, but what does it mean? When something is really evil, there is no compromise, there is no room for negotiation.

Something essentially anti-political about Discourse of Evil. If we know intuitively what Evil is, then we don't need to talk about it.

A simple, binary opposition: a call not to think. What is it appealing to? In a time of uncertainty, gives a reassurance of the Star Wars logic. A return to a simplistic world.

Language of evil mirrors the language of what we are supposedly opposing. True believers and infidels.

Not a pacifist. Just war possible. You don't fight just because you label something evil, but fight because you have identified what is evil.

If you don't get caught up in this rhetoric, you are gutless and naïve.

Fight for soul of America. Fight for the soul of the Republican Party.

Intelligent ways of talking about evil. Done a lot of work on Hannah Arendt, political theorist who lived through the Nazi period, lived in Paris for a while, and escaped.

*The Origins of Totalitarianism* argues something distinctive and unique. Radical evil and banality of evil.

Radical evil emerges in a system in which individuals are regarded as superfluous, perpetrators do not care whether they themselves are alive or dead.

Theme of superfluity. Logic of domination. Killing of the juridical person (taking away of all kinds of rights); successive denial of rights. Killing of juridical person preliminary to killing of moral persons. Murder of moral person in a human being. There is no moral choice between killing your

friends or your family. Third stage: after the murder of the moral person, the destruction of individuality. Turn people into automatons.

Adolf Eichmann involved in section of German bureaucracy that was responsible for transporting Jews to death camps. What does banality of evil mean?

Prosecution portrayed Eichmann as a vicious anti-Semite who enjoyed murder. Arendt said he was a “desk murderer.” Following orders, he was a good bureaucrat. “The deeds were monstrous, but not the man.” He was not a psychopath or a sadist. A middle-range bureaucrat. No difference in sending cattle or people to slaughter.

You have to understand how ordinary individuals can perform absolutely horrendous acts in a given situation.

Job of an intellectual is to raise questions and make us think.

McNamara documentary, *Fog of War* – running a war as if it was Ford Industry.

Skeptical of simple definition of evil.

Very critical of using discourse to stop thinking in a world of uncertainty.

Fighting fanaticism or fighting bad fundamentalism not with same methods.

What is the culpability or responsibility of bystanders? Everyone is responsible. Live in a culture of undermining responsibility: oh, I was abused as a child; I grew up in a ghetto.

Hitler in very shaky situation in 1933, well supported by 1935.

Everyone knew what was happening in Rwanda.

Very hard not to be cynical about practice of international justice. Milosevic can be put on trial, but unimaginable that Bush would ever be. Justice for the weak, but not for the strong.

“I am a realist.” I am against a soupy rhetoric. Movement of Truth and Reconciliation – an alternative way of holding people accountable.

Is this just a new trend? This kind of thinking comes back at various times. Something socially psychologically necessary/useful.

Carl Schmidt: Politics depends on an Enemy.