

## The Cunning of Radical Evil

These three interviews with three important critical thinkers shed much light upon why Australia's recognition of a Palestinian state is such a frustratingly contradictory mix of right and wrong, and an apparently good "step in the right direction" happening instead of the right thing, thereby preventing it from occurring:

Anthony Loewenstein: <https://youtu.be/oavWVuxgbfw>

Ali Abunimah: <https://youtu.be/Nen7UWx-1ME?t=300>

Dan Steinbock: [https://youtu.be/36QUAp\\_LZyE](https://youtu.be/36QUAp_LZyE)

Likewise, this Francesca Albanese interview on the recognition of Palestine with the insufferably smug BBC interviewer Stuart Norval, now working for "France 24 English" is particularly revealing: <https://youtu.be/kdDDXdqTYjc> Norval's condescending attitude makes the interview all but unwatchable, but Francesca Albanese's unflappable grace under pressure is exemplary. Norval parrots Israel's set script, as is only to be expected from a BBC functionary, harping as usual on "October the 8<sup>th</sup>", as if Hamas's Operation Al Aqsa Flood occurred in a vacuum, a misperception thoroughly rebutted by Albanese. Echoing Netanyahu & Co., Norval's only real point is that Hamas has been "designated as a terrorist organisation," and so the act of recognising Palestine is in effect rewarding terrorism.

This is deeply problematic, for two reasons.

On the one hand, the verb "designated" is presented in the passive voice as if it were a simple statement of objective fact, rather than being described for what it is, namely, a strategy used in the war between Hamas and Israel. Using the word "designation" without qualification is a speech act which gives a false sense of objectivity. If instead it is more accurately said that "Israel calls Hamas a terrorist organisation," this aura of objectivity dissipates, and the obvious fact shows through that such naming is a tactic in a war.

On the other hand, the IDF is never referred to in western media as a terrorist organisation. And yet what else were the notorious pager attacks carried out by Israel on Hezbollah in Lebanon? Israel planned this attack for years, and had the booby-trapped devices manufactured and distributed knowing full well that civilians would be killed and maimed by them. If they had booby-trapped military equipment such as missiles or machine guns, it could be argued that this Israeli operation was within the rules of war. But to booby-trap civilian communication devices is a text-book case of terrorism. Yet the western media described this in glowing terms as a brilliant strategy, and the IDF were never once called terrorists, let alone "designated" as such.

Here we come to the essence of the problem with the term "terrorism" for terrorism is extremely difficult to define. Just as difficult to define as it is easy to recognise. This is

because it is not just one thing, but a family of things related through resemblance without a single defining essence. Perhaps the only thing this family of phenomena share is the of use fear to achieve a political end.

Today, the whole world is afraid of/for Israel. The ambiguity of this “of/for” is crucial. Having spent the three decades since Yitzhak Rabin’s murder painting itself into a corner, making such a catastrophic mess of its diplomacy, and destroying whatever good will there was between itself and its neighbours, Israel is like a cornered wounded animal, so dangerous precisely because it is so afraid. It casts its eyes wildly around the world, saying “you hate me, don’t you? why do you hate me?” with the increasingly irrational charges of antisemitism which it perceives in a truly paranoid manner to be emanating from every quarter of the planet, while it’s hand hovers nervously over the big red nuclear button, saying “don’t think I won’t do it.” And no, we don’t think they won’t. In a sense this is the Nazis’ revenge from beyond their collective graves, a kind of triumph of their evil despite its defeat.

Many like to cite Hannah Arendt and quote the apt phrase she coined upon watching the trial of Eichmann in Jerusalem, labelling evil as banal. This is satisfying, because we thereby get to condescend to evil, apparently disarming it by patting it on its head like a naughty school child, and thereby feel a sense of power over it. But banality is only one of evil’s ruses, as the few who have actually read Arendt’s works well know. Her actual readers understand that she explains how evil is not just banal, but that it is also radical too. Like those who dismiss Kant as a naïve idealist dreaming of “Perpetual Peace,” these lazy readers haven’t actually done the hard homework necessary to see what Arendt learned from §83 of Kant’s third *Critique*: “man himself does all he can to work for the destruction of his own species.”

It is quite significant, a structural element in the realm of human affairs, that men are unable to forgive what they cannot punish and that they are unable to punish what has turned out to be unforgivable. This is the true hallmark of those offences which, since Kant, we call ‘radical evil’ and about whose nature so little is known, even to us who have been exposed to one of their rare outbursts on the public scene. All we know is that we can neither punish nor forgive such offences and that they therefore transcend the realm of human affairs and the potentialities of human power, both of which they radically destroy wherever they make their appearance. (*The Human Condition* p.217)

Hegel turned this upside down and called it “*die List der Vernunft*” – the cunning of reason, able to turn the negativity of the bad into the positivity of the good through conceptualisation. Murder is bad, for example, but understanding the concept of murder is good, because only through conceptualisation can we understand it and learn how to stop it. But Arendt stands on her feet beside Kant, and warns Hegel that his idealism is here uncritical, and that this conceptualisation is in fact nothing but a rationalisation. For while reason is wily enough, it is only evil which is truly cunning.

The cunning of radical evil is that it can reproduce itself in the background, without our consciousness and despite our best attempts to overcome it. Unlike the cartoonish conception of the problem of evil devolving upon “bad guys” which simply need to be gotten rid of, radical evil grows like a fungus (as Nietzsche says in *Human All Too Human* I §468), able to use people who act in good conscience with good intentions, just as much as those who act in bad conscience with bad intentions. This is the problem with the Platonic conception of evil, and in fact the problem with Plato *per se*, who teaches that evil is only a species of ignorance – that all will the good, but that some just have a confused idea of what is good, and that therefore eradicating evil is possible through education.

Take Germany for example. With the best of intentions, post-war Germany legislated antisemitism as among the worst of crimes, and single-mindedly threw its support behind Israel, lest Nazi anti-Jewish racism ever begin to raise its ugly head in their country once again. All good and well. But this led to a single-minded and uncritical support of Israel, which has now led to the contradictory spectacle of Germany becoming fascistic towards peaceful German supporters of the plight of Palestine, persecuting all non-violent protestors in Germany who dare to criticise Netanyahu & Co., while at the same time apparently turning a blind eye to what Israel is doing with the massive amounts of weapons which Germany sells them. If only evil were so simple, that making it illegal would make it go away. But the radical cunning of evil is that it can use attempts to fight it as a way to replicate itself. And so now we witness the absurd and contradictory spectacle of Germany acting like Nazis in order to prevent the possibility of a resurgence of Nazism.

Likewise with the recognition by Australia of a Palestinian state. With the best of intentions, Anthony Albanese and his government want to assert the right of the Palestinian people to exist and to have their homeland, just as much the Jewish people have right to exist and to have theirs. And I really want to say “onyá Albo” for this is a brave stance in the face of US partisanship and the ever more deluded and demented Donald Trump and his administration of bimbos and himbos who are debasing the mighty ideal of America into nothing but an extended episode of *The Apprentice*. But consistency demands that just as the violence of Hamas must be denounced and that they must be made to disarm, then so also must the IDF be denounced (whose terror and violence is of so much greater proportions) and that they too must likewise be made to disarm. But on this score, I haven’t heard a peep from Albo and his government, or anyone else for that matter.

This crucial message from the brilliant Shahid Bolsen to the nation of Israel needs to be heeded today more than ever, here in Australia no less than in the Middle East, the UK, Europe, and the USA. It really is a must-watch: <https://youtu.be/RG9yDgIOxgw>