



# laetus in praesens

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## Beheading versus Befooting

### In quest of the lesser evil for the greater good

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## Introduction

Much is currently made of beheading of individuals by ISIS militants as being an act of pure evil. Prime Minister of Australia, [Tony Abbott](#), says 'pure evil' of Isis militants means action necessary 'to protect people from this murderous rage' (*The beheading of American photojournalist James Foley: a despicable act of pure evil*, *The Daily Telegraph*, 16 February 2015; *Isis beheading 'justifies' Australia's Iraq intervention, says Abbott*, *The Guardian*, 3 September 2014). The quality of evil has been variously recognized by other commentators (*Security Expert: ISIS Is Nothing But 'Pure Evil'*, *CBNNNews.com*, 20 August 2014; *Christian Leader: ISIS Caliphate Is "Systematically Beheading" Children In Iraq, "World Hasn't Seen An Evil Like This"*, 7 August 2014; Editorial, *By beheading US journalists, Islamic State radicals have simply hardened the resolve of civilised people to extinguish their evil*, *News Corp Australia*, 4 September 2014).

Framed as "pure evil", such assertions raise the question of other degrees of evil of lesser "purity". What makes that evil so pure? Is it the video coverage of an isolated event -- specifically promoted by the mass media, whilst ignoring other forms of killing? Is it the mode of killing, despite the widespread use of other forms -- possibly indifferent to the duration of the excruciating pain prior to death? Is it the deliberate process of beheading -- despite the existence of equally deliberate forms of capital punishment? Is it the absence of due legal process -- despite widespread use of extrajudicial killing?

How does beheading relate to [decapitation](#) as has long been used as a form of capital punishment -- possibly following a legal process which may well be later found to be characterized by some form of miscarriage of justice? *Wikipedia* offers indications of its use in a range of countries: [Asia](#) (China, India, Pakistan, Japan, Korea, Thailand, Syria); [Europe](#) (Celts, Classical Antiquity, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, France, Nordic countries, Spain); [North America](#) (Mexico, United States, Canada); [Middle East](#) (Saudi Arabia, Iraq).

Is decapitation -- as has been widely practiced in the history of western civilization -- to be distinguished from [hanging](#)? This is after all a process of severing the linkage provided by the spinal chord. How is the purity of the evil to be distinguished from that of a recent execution in the USA which required some hours for the person to die (*Joseph Wood: Arizona murderer dies almost two hours after execution begins*, *The Guardian*, 24 July 2014; *Inmate's execution takes nearly 2 hours*, *USA Today*, 24 July 2014; *Oklahoma state report on botched lethal injection cites medical failures*, *The Guardian*, 5 September 2014). According to a pattern reminiscent of the practice of the Catholic Church in transferring clergy associated with sexual abuse, the responsible officer took up a similar position in another institution where a similar issue had occurred (*Prison warden present at botched execution handed Oklahoma role*, *he Guardian*, 5 September 2014).

With respect to any comparative study of evil, so-called [capital punishment](#), could usefully be explored in terms of other methods variously promoted and practiced by civilized societies. These include: [electrocution](#), [firing squad](#), [gas chamber](#), [lethal injection](#), [shooting](#), and [stoning](#). The assertion of evil may be qualified by the legality of the process of conviction. Can the legality of the process be challenged with respect to the evil embodied in the law -- as was arguably the case with respect to use of gas chambers in the

Holocaust? Otherwise, can it be argued that if it is legal, then the process of execution cannot be evil?

More problematic with respect to such arguments is the extensively debated issue of [extrajudicial execution](#). This is the killing of a person by governmental authorities without the sanction of any judicial proceeding or legal process. It is notably characteristic of [targeted assassination](#). This is the premeditated killing of an individual by a state organization or institution outside a judicial procedure or a battlefield. Again is the implication that if initiated by such an authority then it cannot be "evil"? Is the beheading practiced by ISIS militants then to be characterized as "pure evil" primarily because ISIS is not recognized as having status in international law?

Such arguments suggest the need for further exploration of the category of "lesser evil" -- in contrast with "pure evil" ([Michael Ignatieff, \*The Lesser Evil: political ethics in an Age of Terror\*, 2005](#); Joshua Frank, [\*Zarqawi and Lesser-Evil Politics: a contest no one wins, Anti-War.com\*, 15 June 2006](#)). *Wikipedia* usefully profiles the so-called [lesser evil principle](#).

In quest of the lesser evil for the greater good, the focus here is "befooting" as a consequence of the widespread and deliberate design and deployment of anti-personnel landmines. The term is not however used -- although the consequences are real. It could be said that befooting is ensured on an industrial scale through the development, sale and dissemination of such landmines.

## Befooting and befooled?

It might be assumed that the process of befooting has not been graced with its own term, in contrast to beheading. A number of references can however be detected to "befooled", especially when associated in any search with "beheaded". There is some use of both in relation to the preparation of animals for consumption -- most notably in slaughterhouses. Reviewers note how it features in the movie [Ironclad](#) (2011). Somewhat astounding is its use in a report by Joe Lamy ([\*U.S. can help end Mexico's drug war\*, Las Vegas Sun, 19 May 2012](#)):

Our neighbor to the south has been fighting an awful war. The [Mexican drug war](#) has taken its toll on a country whose tourism base has largely evaporated because of this war that last week dumped nearly 50 bodies on a highway, all beheaded, beheaded and befooled. Torture is commonplace. Extortion and kidnapping have eclipsed all records. It's been estimated that 50,000 people have been killed in the past six years. What would drive such a bloodthirsty war? The answer is something most of you know. Politicians sure don't want to visit the issue. When they do, they show a human trait frequently regarded as weakness. But here's the truth: Americans buy the Mexican cartels' drugs.

As noted in an extensive survey by Anna Mavroforou and colleagues ([\*Punitive Limb Amputation, Clinical Orthopaedics and Related Research\*, February 2014](#)), amputation as a punitive or correctional method has its roots in old civilizations. It has been used through the ages in various parts of the world. While it has been abandoned in modern western societies, punitive amputation is still used in several third-world countries. As [legal punishment](#), befooting could be framed by various uses of punitive amputation -- again as practiced by a variety of countries including Iran, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Islamic regions of Nigeria.

It can be seen as consistent with the continuing practice of decapitation ([Robert Fisk, \*Isis Isn't the first Group to Use the Butcher's Knife as an Instrument of Policy: nor will it be the last\*, Information Clearing House, September 2014](#); [Alastair Crooke, \*You Can't Understand ISIS If You Don't Know the History of Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia\*, Information Clearing House, 2 September 2014](#)). For Fisk:

Chopping off someone's head or sawing it off or slicing it off is about gore. Blood. Pain. Grotesquerie. Death by the blade is about shame, suffering in an animal slaughterhouse. It's the most repulsive theatre, understood by the Romans, the Tudors, the French revolutionaries, the austere guardians of Wahhabism. Colour it bright red. To be hanged, drawn and quartered was about fear, terror - a word liberally used in Paris after 1789 - and obedience. It still is.

Oddly, back then - in the days when decapitation was regarded as a mundane if unpleasant ritual in Wahhabi Saudi society... no one worried about the sins of... [those executed]... nor the "trial" they underwent, nor the pain they must have endured. It was all part of a timeless tradition. You know, these warrior chaps, always chopping off bits of one another. Decapitations, amputations, you name it.

Now that the habit has stretched across the deserts to Iraq and Syria, however, and embraced the good, the bad, the ugly and the truly innocent, we're all talking about genocide, apocalypse and the end of the world. Isis, the latest Middle Eastern plague we have to fear and loathe - remember Khomeini's hangmen, Saddam's torturers and Assad's executioners? - has quite deliberately turned to the butcher's knife as an instrument of policy. Debate, discussion, objections have no place in the polity of this Salafist lot.

Ironically with respect to "purity", Fisk continues:

There's no point in searching for the dark inspiration behind decapitation. Almost every ancient text can be used to justify judicial murder, ethnic cleansing or genocide. The Bible is packed with the stuff. But the unique element about Isis - true to the bleak 18th-century philosophy of Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab himself, so harsh and intolerant that the people of Basra threw him out of their city after his brief visit to what is now Iraq - is the idea of a return to the origins of Islam, to purity. Which means pre-schism Islam, before the great Shia divide. And purity is about absolutes, absolute right and absolute wrong, which is why the flag of Isis is black and white - as was the flag of al-Qa'ida.

Most curiously, the issue of purity emerges otherwise in the traditional practice of ensuring the purity of women in a harem by [castrating](#)

[males](#) -- [eunuchs](#) -- who cared for the inhabitants and were otherwise valued as political advisers, given their inability to engender a dynasty. With respect to usage, in contrast to beheading, befooting and behaving, it would seem that "betesticled" is now used to refer to those who continue to be so equipped -- rather than those who have been castrated.

It is also appropriate to note the abandoned tradition of castration before puberty to achieve the much-valued quality of singing voice of the *castrati*. With respect to associating "pure evil" with any such practices, much could be said of the castration of [Alan Turing](#) in 1952 under pressure from UK authorities -- despite his pioneering role in modern computing. Controversy continues regarding [female circumcision](#). Similarly to be explored -- as a non-fatal form of beheading -- the controversial practice of [lobotomy](#) increased dramatically in some countries from the early 1940s and into the 1950s; by 1951, almost 20,000 lobotomies had been performed in the USA.

Terminologically, in strange contrast to the implications for the head of "capital punishment" (and the absence of a corresponding term for the other extremity), a degree of publicity has been given to the practice of "pedal punishment" in Brazil (*Brazilian Inmates Pedal Punishment Away*, *Capital.gr*, 10 July 2012).

## Befooting by anti-personnel landmines

[Anti-personnel mines](#) are a form of landmine designed for use against individuals rather than against vehicles. Their primary purpose as blast mines is to blow the victim's foot or leg off, disabling them.

Befooting is achieved because the mines are often designed to injure victims (rather than to kill them) in order to increase the logistical (mostly medical) support required by enemy forces that encounter them. When a person steps on a blast mine and activates it, the shock wave transfers the force into the subject's footwear and foot. This results in a massive compression force being applied to the victim's foot. Typically the victim's foot is blown off by the blast wave. The stages distinguished are:

- initial blast tears the foot apart, causing the foot and toes to peel away from the leg.
- action of the blast forces dirt, mine fragments, bone and tissue to be driven deep up into what is remaining of the leg, the genitalia and torso.
- outer leg skin returns into place and hides the full extent of the damage.
- if the leg is lost above the knee, the consequence is double amputation, the victims can expect to be reliant on crutches or a wheelchair for the rest of their lives.

The [International Campaign to Ban Landmines](#) has sought to ban land mines. This culminated in the 1997 [Ottawa Treaty](#). There are currently 161 States Parties and one signatory to the Mine Ban Treaty:

- Poland ratified the Mine Ban Treaty on 27 December 2012; now all 28 European Union member states are States Parties.
- The USA stated in December 2012 that a decision on the on the matter of accession to the Mine Ban Treaty would be announced "soon".

The treaty has not yet been accepted by a number of countries -- including the USA, Russia, People's Republic of China, Pakistan and India. *The Landmine Monitor Report 2013* is the 15th annual report providing a global overview of developments in mine ban policy, contamination, clearance, casualties, victim assistance, and support for mine action.

As variously noted in the *History of Landmines*, *Landmines: the facts* (*New Internationalist*) and the *Landmine Monitor Report* (2013):

- It has been estimated that there are some 10 million anti-personnel mines in the ground and another 100 million stockpiled around the world. More than 350 different types of anti-personnel mines exist. Even if no more mines are ever laid, they will continue to maim and kill for many years to come. Collectively, 87 States Parties of the Mine Ban Treaty have destroyed more than 47 million stockpiled antipersonnel mines, including more than 250,000 destroyed in 2012. Nearly 11 million antipersonnel mines await destruction by eight States Parties.
- [Human Rights Watch \(Landmines\)](#) has identified almost 100 companies and government agencies in 48 countries that have manufactured more than 340 types of anti-personnel landmines in recent decades. They include more than one dozen countries and more than 150 landmines not previously publicly identified anywhere.
- From a total of more than 50 states before the Mine Ban Treaty's existence, potential producers of anti-personnel landmines now include:
  - Current (12 countries): China, Cuba, India, Iran, Myanmar, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, USA, and Vietnam.
  - Former (38 countries)

Other resources are indicated in *Landmines Information on the Web*. The *Wikipedia* entry profiles examples of the anti-personnel landmines manufactured by various countries, notably permanent members of the UN Security Council:

- USA
  - [Gravel mines](#), 1960s-1970s. Simple, small mine with no moving parts. Millions were dropped during the [Vietnam War](#).
  - [M16](#): improved version of the German S-mine.
  - [BLU-43 \(Dragontooth\)](#), 1970s. Air-dropped mine used during the Vietnam War.
  - [GATOR mine system](#): modern dispersal system, includes AP (*BLU-92/B*) and anti-tank mines.
  - [M18 Claymore](#): directional mine.
  - [M86 Pursuit Deterrent Munition](#): tripwire triggered bounding mine that automatically deploys its own tripwires. It is intended to be dropped by special forces when evading a pursuing enemy.
- Russia

- [PFM-1](#) (*butterfly mine*, NATO: *Blue Parrot*), modern.
- [POMZ](#): tripwire triggered, stake-mine.
- [MON-50](#): Russian directional mine; similar to the American M18 Claymore.
- [PMN mine](#): one of the most commonly encountered mines during de-mining operations.
- [MON-200](#): large mine with a 12kg TNT charge. Also effective against light vehicles.
- UK
  - [HB 876 mine](#): 1970s-1999

The design of [improvised explosive devices](#) (IEDs) by non-state armed groups used antipersonnel mines or victim-activated improvised explosive devices in Afghanistan, Colombia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Syria, Thailand, Tunisia, and Yemen.

## Victims of befooting

Befooting is thus a form of injury which may be sustained by exposure to both conventional and improvised anti-personnel landmines -- including those manufactured and/or deployed by permanent members of the UN Security Council. As a consequence, many veterans of conventional forces may face life "befooted".

Casualty statistics tend to conflate those caused by mines, victim-activated improvised explosive devices, cluster munition remnants, and other explosive remnants of war (ERW). As variously noted in the *History of Landmines* and the *Landmine Monitor Report* (2013):

- around every 22 minutes 1 person somewhere in the world is killed or injured by a landmine. In 2012, a global total of 3,628 casualties were recorded, a 19% decline compared with 4,474 in 2011. The incidence rate of 10 casualties per day for 2012 is a 60% decrease from what was reported for 1999, when there were approximately 25 casualties each day. In many states and areas, numerous casualties go unrecorded; therefore, the true casualty figure is likely significantly higher. Nevertheless, the decrease in casualties is likely even more significant because of improvements in recording over time.
- one hundred million uncleared landmines lie in the fields and alongside the roads and footpaths of one-third of the countries in the developing world.
- claiming over 500 victims a week, landmines are weapons of mass destruction in slow motion.
- casualties were identified in 62 states and other areas in 2012, of which 42 are States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty.

A related web resource (*Victims: face the victims*) notes:

- among the weapons that remain when the war ends there may be thousands, if not millions, of anti-personnel mines.
- those people who survive the initial blast of a mine will most likely require amputations, long hospital stays and extensive rehabilitation.
- countries that have a significant landmine problem are usually also suffering many other major problems. They mostly have a poor economy; their social and economic infrastructure has been torn apart by the ongoing fighting; educational programmes have mostly ceased and professional people have long since left.
- health care is largely dependent on a variety of foreign aid agencies whose work is also hampered by the presence of mines. The local medical personnel is usually not well trained and the supplies are lacking, limited or stolen and sold in the markets.

Of potential relevance to this argument is the extraordinary extent to which "landmine" is used as a metaphor by those of Christian faith (*10 Landmines to Avoid in the Walk with Christ*, *Belief.net*, 2008; *The Landmine of Compromise*, *In Touch Ministries*; *Landmines in your spiritual walk with God*, 2013; *Spiritual Landmines*, 2012; Charles F. Stanley, *Landmines in the Path of the Believer: avoiding the hidden dangers*, 2008; Tom Nebel and Gary Rohrmayer, *Church Planting Landmines*, 2005; Ben Ingebretson and Tom Nebel, *Parent Church Landmines*, 2010).

## Befooting as a lesser evil?

Given current efforts to frame beheading by ISIS militants as "pure evil", the question is how to understand why the millions exposed to the threat, and to the consequences of befooting, should be considered as suffering from a lesser evil. The following table effectively challenges the ease with which beheading is framed as evil of greater purity than befooting. The table thus raises the question as to whether beheading should be considered of lesser purity than befooting -- effectively a lesser evil.

Criteria for determining purity of evil?		
	Beheading	Befooting
Legitimation	deprecated by some governments	extensively used by some governments
Scope	personal executioner	impersonal industrial scale deployment
Proximity	immediate	remote
Victims	one or more occasionally	up to 65 per day
Reporting	disseminated video coverage	very infrequent reporting
Staging	dramatic framing	unstaged
Due process	questionable trial (if any)	no trial (framed as justifiable)
Specificity	selected specifically	indiscriminate (random victim selection)
Method	archaic / barbaric	high tech
Consequence	virtually instant death	lifelong suffering (for survivors)

As suggested by the following consideration of degrees of evil, those recognizing beheading as the greater evil -- in terms of its purity -- may however have further criteria to refine the table in support of that understanding. There is however the question of the purity of evil to be associated with beheading by [guillotine](#) -- last employed in France in 1977, long after becoming a permanent member of the UN

Security Council. Criteria are also complicated by comparison with [burning at the stake](#) -- long favoured by Christians of various persuasions, notably as punishment for heresy (*List of people burned as heretics*).

Input from the living victims of befooting might also be sought -- especially those whose persistent suffering encourages them to request [assisted dying](#). How to rate the evil of its refusal as being illegal -- despite indefinite prolongation of the suffering? The greatest irony would see those in need of such assistance travelling in greater numbers to places where they could be beheaded. Perhaps a source of income for the future Islamic caliphate?

Of traditional relevance with respect to beheading is an occasional practice of rewarding the executioner for a clean cut -- avoiding successive hacking (and the agonies exemplified by the recently botched Omaha execution noted above).

## Degrees of evil

Although the terminology is somewhat different, it is useful to assume that purity of evil could be explored in terms of degrees of evil -- a phrase which features in a more extensive literature. The current concern with respect to ISIS has been remarkably anticipated in earlier commentary by [Ron Rosenbaum](#) (*Degrees of Evil: some thoughts on Hitler, bin Laden, and the hierarchy of wickedness*, *The Atlantic*, 1 February 2002). This followed his earlier study (*Explaining Hitler: the search for the origins of his evil*, 1998). For Rosenbaum:

It's such a highly charged term, "evil", and so are its recently revived elaborations "evil ones" and "evildoers" -- words that President Bush has applied to Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda....

One of the curious, paradoxical things I discovered was the reluctance of so many experts to apply the word "evil" to Hitler. This was in part a kind of displacement syndrome: it wasn't really Hitler who was responsible for Nazi crimes, but "the forces of history" that he embodied... Blaming Hitler, attributing his crimes to him personally, to his conscious "agency," as it's called by the postmodernists (who don't believe in it), was considered a quaint throwback to a less sophisticated era of analysis....

In examining the philosophical literature Rosenbaum discovered not a single, all-encompassing evil but hierarchies and degrees. These distinguish:

- natural evils ("acts of God" in the theological and insurance-company vocabularies)
- man-made evils (flu epidemics from anthrax attacks, for instance), distinguished by the mindset of the perpetrator:
  - doing evil under the illusion of doing *good*
  - knowing that a crime is being committed.
- evildoers can in turn be clustered into a more rarefied category in the literature, often called "wickedness", subdivided into
  - "ordinary wickedness"
  - "selfish wickedness"
  - "conscientious wickedness"
  - "heteronomous (just following orders) wickedness"
  - "malignant wickedness" (as the highest (or lowest) degree) -- doing evil for evil's sake.

Rosenbaum argues that:

Most people (not all) would agree that a difference in degree between six million and six can be discerned, if not precisely defined. But defining degrees of evil involves calculations of both mindset and magnitude, whereby a lower body count might in some cases represent a greater degree of evil or a higher body count a lesser....

Hitler frequently compared himself to heroic medical scientists like Pasteur and Koch: the Jews were a "racial bacillus"; he was a germ fighter; extermination was a medical measure to stamp out a plague threatening all that was good. That he was dreadfully wrong in this conviction does not of necessity mean that he was *knowingly* wrong. This is Hitler as true believer -- Hitler as Osama bin Laden....

At what point, at what order of magnitude, does the number of dead override the "rectitude" rationale? If one "sincerely, if mistakenly," kills six? Six thousand? Six million? Does a holy crusade justify killing an unlimited number of infidels if one "sincerely" believes that one is carrying out God's will to rescue humanity from evil? ...

In the sometimes paradoxical-seeming hierarchy of evil that philosophers have adumbrated, such willingness to sanction mass murder openly, as a mission from God, might consign bin Laden to a lesser category of evil than the one to which Hitler's somewhat surreptitious and self-protective approach to mass murder consigns him. Bin Laden has done evil, but Hitler was knowingly wicked. That's true only if one accepts the notion that bin Laden is, like [Trevor-Roper's](#) Hitler, "sincere" -- a *true* true believer.

Clearly, with respect to the purity of the evil of ISIS militants, these extensively rehearsed arguments raise questions as to how the sincerity of Islamic belief is held by those concerned -- irrespective of how misguided they are considered to be by others. Relevant to any such exploration is the justification offered for the [massacre of a hundred Norwegians](#) in defence of Christendom by [Anders Behring Breivik](#). In arguing that it was "*gruesome but necessary*" he neatly frames the mindset so characteristic of modern governance (*Gruesome but Necessary: Global Governance in the 21st Century?* 2011). Both he and his action were widely labelled as evil, although he framed the massacre otherwise (*I would have done it again!: Anders Breivik claims his massacre was motivated by 'goodness not evil'*, *The Telegraph*, 17 Apr 2012).

Clearly the difficulty is that each is free to frame the other as constituting an evil threat in order to define the response as justified. The result is evident in the convolutions of [just war theory](#) (*jus bellum iustum*), namely the doctrine of military ethics studied by theologians, ethicists, policy makers and military leaders. This ensures that war is morally justifiable through respect for a set of criteria. It is the ease with which "evil" is attributed to the other -- with the aid of the media coverage characteristic of war propaganda -- which renders the argument questionable. As argued by [Jeff Sparrow](#), humanitarian interventionists dangerously present each crisis as a morality tale: our enemies commit atrocities out of pure malice, whereas we always mean well (*We Don't Fight Men, We Fight Monsters: another war in the name of humanitarianism*, *Information Clearing House*, 5 September 2014).

## Systemic imperceptibility of greater evil -- and of greater good?

There is an ease to attributing the quality of evil or good which calls for vigilant attention -- especially when further qualified by "pure" or some sense of "greater". There is every possibility that higher degrees of purity may render it imperceptible in either case -- as with the aspiration of secret societies or security services. One useful pointer in systemic terms is offered by management cybernetician [Stafford Beer](#) in his adaptation of *Le Chatelier's Principle* (even **prior** to his dramatic experience in the [Chile of Allende](#)):

Reformers, critics of institutions, consultants in innovation, people in short who "want to get something done", often fail to see this point. They cannot understand why their strictures, advice or demands do not result in effective change. They expect either to achieve a measure of success in their own terms or to be flung off the premises. But an ultra-stable system (like a social institution)... has no need to react in either of these ways. It specializes in equilibrational readjustment, which is to the observer a secret form of change requiring no actual alteration in the macro-systemic characteristics that he is trying to do something about. (Stafford Beer on *Le Chatelier's Principle* as applied to social systems: *The Cybernetic Cytoblast - management itself*. Chairman's Address to the International Cybernetic Congress, September 1969)

Such imperceptibility is consistent with the case made by [Johan Galtung](#) for recognition of [structural violence](#):

Personal violence is for the amateur in dominance, structural violence is the tool of the professional. The amateur who wants to dominate uses guns, the professional uses social structure... (1969)

In the case of evil of the greatest purity, this is then to be understood as being of an inherently insidious nature -- so insidious that it is perhaps difficult to distinguish from the banality to which [Hannah Arendt](#) so controversially drew attention (*Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, 1963). The challenge of comprehension can be extended to the corresponding case ([David R. Blumenthal](#), *The Banality of Good and Evil*, 1999; [Roger Cohen](#), *The Banality of Good*, *The New York Times*, 3 May 2010).

With respect to evil, this is consistent with Rosenbaum's reference to the essentially invisible "forces of history" which Hitler is claimed to have embodied. Comprehension is indeed challenged by how good is understood to operate through the reverse of such structural violence -- structural enablement? -- especially when those engaged in "business as usual" are so discreet in disguising their agendas and modes of operation. Perhaps to be variously understood as a "hidden hand". Ironically purity of evil and purity of goodness may then be virtually indistinguishable to those in quest of simplicity of explanation. The point can be made speculatively in envisaging conventional public relations briefings -- based on insights from preemptive news and image management -- to those embodying either extreme (*Strategic Briefing for Satan*, 1999; *Strategic Briefing for the Messiah*, 1999).

Discernment is challenged by the opposing arguments made regarding the value of secrecy and the value of disclosure -- as so dramatically illustrated by responses to the [diplomatic cables release](#) via [WikiLeaks](#) and the [global surveillance disclosures](#) via [Edward Snowden](#). The challenge is evident in a different form in the tendency of opposing political parties and politicians to label each other as essentially evil.

With respect to befooting, it is the "discretion" with which it is undertaken that merits reflection as a consequence of widespread landmine deployment. Similarly, how to qualify the evil with which animals are befooted on an industrial scale in slaughterhouses -- possibly whilst still alive? Related issues are raised by processes of ritual slaughter practiced by two of the Abrahamic religions -- viewed by animal rights activists as cruel, since the animal may not lose consciousness instantly as claimed. Again the point to be made is the degree of discretion characteristic of slaughterhouse procedures. How is this to be understood with respect to any sense of greater or lesser evil -- especially if the processes evoke a degree of shame, perhaps disguised as squeamishness?

Curiously any shame and squeamishness is "neutralised" in the worldwide enthusiasm for ever more gory online video games -- such as *World of Warcraft* and *Modern Warfare 2* -- as noted with respect to the Norwegian massacre cited above (*Norway Terrorist Used World Of Warcraft As A Training Simulator*, 27 July 2011; *Terrorist Anders Behring Breivik Used Modern Warfare 2 as "Training-Simulation"*, 23 July 2011). Whilst enthusiasm for slaughter is upheld as honourable in the hunting of animals -- especially by elites -- would any slaughterhouse endeavour to reframe its image through offering a "slaughtering experience"? Why not?

The more fundamental issue is the enthusiasm for fighting, as addressed by [Steve Taylor](#) (*Why do human beings keep fighting wars?* *The Guardian*, 6 August 2014). He argues that warfare provides people with a semblance of psychological positivity in oppressed societies where other outlets are lacking. How then to explain the quest for gore in online video games in "non-oppressed" societies -- reinforcing the sense in which such violence is "gruesome but necessary" in practice? Why does Taylor's call for a moral equivalent of war -- as articulated by [William James](#) (*The Moral Equivalent of War*, 1910) and others -- then lack credibility?

## Paradoxes of framing the greater evil using the Devil's Gambit

A valuable analysis of a so-called Devil's Gambit has been provided by [Dominic Tierney](#) (*Bashar al-Assad and the Devil's Gambit*. *The Atlantic*, 16 July 2014). At that time he addressed the question of how the Syrian leader had become a *de facto* ally of the USA. For Tierney:

Dictators can play the devil's gambit: winning international sympathy by deliberately radicalizing regime opponents, so that these adversaries look like latter-day Hitlers....

How does the devil's gambit work? The goal is to make the opposition appear even more threatening than the regime. If you're a despot like Assad, this is no easy feat. For one thing, Damascus has an appalling human-rights record, and a list of allies that reads like the Axis of Evil, 2014 edition, including Iran and Hezbollah....

The devil's gambit requires transforming the opposition into something far more radical and dangerous. If non-violent resistance is effective at toppling tyrants, then dictators can incite rebels into using extreme tactics like terrorism. Autocrats want to turn today's Gandhis into tomorrow's jihadists....

Dictators playing the devil's gambit can further this process of radicalization by targeting moderate groups for destruction, or provoking them into acts of terror

Ironically, given the recent description of beheading by ISIS militants as "pure evil", it must be asked who is now playing the Devil's Gambit. Western leadership opposed to ISIS could be seen as doing precisely what Assad is claimed to have done so skillfully in the above analysis. This most notably includes deliberately radicalizing ISIS, making ISIS appear more threatening than some perceive the Western leadership to have been, and targetting moderate groups for destruction. The complexities are evident in arguments relating to the ancient adage [the enemy of my enemy is my friend](#), as explored by Timothy Alexander Guzman (*"The Enemy of my Enemy is my Friend": How the U.S. is Using ISIS as a Pretext for War Against Syria*, *Global Research*, 29 August 2014).

## Engendering identification with the greater good, despite the necessity for lesser evil

A matter long debated by philosophers and theologians -- but as yet unresolved -- is whether either evil or goodness lends itself to gradations of degree whereby the purity of either can be satisfactorily distinguished. The matter has been notably articulated by [Thomas Aquinas](#) (*The Argument from Gradation*) in distinguishing different degrees of goodness. That presentation includes a summary list of subsequent common objections to that argument.

Ignoring such dilemmas, ramping up the greater evil of one's opponent is a standard technique of war-mongering propaganda -- and of [negative campaigning](#) more generally. Typically this includes a media focus, whether factual or fabricated, on anything that can be presented as abhorrently characteristic of the other. This avoids any necessity for objective exploration of the belief system of the other and of why it is attractive to so many -- despite such negative propaganda. Provocatively, the skills and resources required for such "purification of evil" might be usefully compared in metaphorical terms to those required for the [enrichment of uranium](#) -- with degrees of evil then represented by degrees of radioactivity.

The increasing difficulty for those facilitating such media presentations is the track record of recognized bias which now encourages much to be discounted despite any exaggeration, as discussed separately (*Vital Collective Learning from Biased Media Coverage: acquiring vigilance to deceptive strategies used in mugging the world*, 2014).

An implicit assumption made is that the more negatively problematic the other can be made to appear, the more positive becomes one's own image. This process is especially interesting in making a case for the purity of the evil of the other. It then frames the campaigner as somehow uniquely associated with "purity of goodness" -- however this is to be understood. Perhaps as Forces of the Light engaging with the Forces of Darkness. Negative campaigning also obscures any implication that those employing it might be of lesser goodness and variously tainted with evil which their opponents choose to call into question.

The process was evident in eliciting an international consensus for the invasion of Iraq in 2003 -- namely the formation of the so-called [Coalition of the Willing](#), with George Bush and Tony Blair as exemplars of the cause (necessarily far from lacking any sense of divinely mandated righteousness). This clearly had archetypal echoes of the [crusades](#) of centuries past. The term "crusade" was occasionally employed by those Christians framing the engagement as unfinished business with Islam. Use of jihad by Islam gave credence to this for all concerned. Of course Islam naturally associated jihad with purity of goodness in response to the evil which could then be associated with the crusaders -- as before.

The additional advantage of presenting the other as exemplifying the greater evil is that those who self-identify with the greater good are then free to employ methods which can be framed as of a lesser evil. This is most obvious in the case of much-to-be-regretted collateral damage associated with missile strikes. Any lesser evil is then understandably employed as an unfortunate necessity. However, as exemplifying the greater good, those employing such techniques are naturally dissociated from that evil.

It is in this sense that befooting -- as a lesser evil -- can be exploited as an unfortunate necessity in modern warfare. A tool honourably employed against the Forces of Greater Evil by the Forces of Greater Good -- however much it may occasion lasting pain and suffering to its many victims. Ironically, just as jihadi militants accept martyrdom for their own sense of the Greater Good, the befooted become unsuspecting martyrs for a cause they may not necessarily understand. Correspondingly, however, beheading may be framed as a lesser evil by jihadi militants in their pursuit of the Greater Good as they understand it.

Such confusion, whether framed as honourable or not, merits sensitive exploration as argued separately (*Eradication as the Strategic Final Solution of the 21st Century?* 2014).

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