

“...Or Does It?”

There lives, in each person's mind, what appears to be an enduring and universal phenomenon—a mysterious and inexplicable faith in one's righteousness of self. Even in our own personal follies, even during our most excruciating, pride-gouging errors, humans react with the natural self-defense of rationalizing the wrongdoing; if most of us had our ways, we would never wrong. It is this curious habitual defense of justification that allows nations of various disposition to claim a right of aggression against another—never in my knowledge of history has a warring force attacked another without their so-called “reason.” This behavior of assuming the enemy's evil tendencies, often a mutual assumption on both sides, is a naïve and irrational concept, as John Dewey addresses in his work “Human Nature and Conduct, II, 3”. Dating back to the era of Achilles and the Trojan War, and yet occurring still today in our Middle Eastern conflicts, the naïve irresponsibility of the human mind often chooses to disregard the idea of an alternative, and possibly valid enemy perspective.

The story of the Trojan War, as described by the Greek documentarian Homer, is a primitive yet effective display of narrow-minded aggression. As the plot reveals two competing ideologies—the Trojan reverence for love at all costs and the Greek respect for honor at all costs, the two are forced to wage a war to decide which value is most valid, as if perhaps the denser volley of arrows or the nimbler cavalry charge would somehow manifest itself as an omniscient judge of rationale and declare one side the winner. As Dewey implies, the truth is that it is often not possible to declare one rationale more “right” than another, because reasons are very seldom singular, and often the motives for war are so expansive that logically weighing them becomes a mess of opinions—the objective virtue of logic is lost in the mix. Paris' love for Helen was admirable to some, while Agamemnon's honor and Menelaus' dignity appealed to others—however both sides were equally oblivious to the possibility of their incorrectness.

There is a curious series of debates concerning the definition of what is “right” and “just”, on which Aristotle acknowledged that most “justified” assumptions, even if globally accepted, are subjective to their justifier. He also pointed out a concrete pillar

amidst the debris of subjectivity in the statement “A is A” (Alpha is alpha), telling that there are some intangible postulates which are concrete in any circumstance—the letter ‘A,’ no matter who reads it, must be read as ‘A’ to be correct. However, these postulates cannot be applied to Dewey’s suggested motives for war, such as “rivalry, vainglory...anger...love of power,” as those are considered qualitative factors which cannot be measured, ‘and it is this inherent subjectivity that creates part of war’s incomprehensible nature.

The effects of this fallacy may appear limited to archaic figures like Homer and Aristotle, but in truth, today’s war in Iraq possesses the same irreconcilable characteristics. The mainstream American perspective portrays our effort in Iraq as a humanitarian venture by a world power in the name of democracy. On the other hand, the Iraqi resistance view the war as their deity’s calling for a Jihad—or holy war. Who is to say that our “noble” cause is more legitimate than an Iraqi’s love for his or her god? If the Christian god of Isaac and Abraham, like Allah, summoned Americans to take Iraqi lives for him—would our eighty-six percent Christian nation not be willing to do as the Muslims do? Likewise, is not the desire to spread a successful form of government just as acceptable? As humans, this disease of self-righteousness seems to deaden the sight—to shut our mind’s eye to our own shortcomings in order to protect our fragile self-images.

There was once an elderly woman who lived just next door to my house—forming a cul-de-sac in our neighborhood. One day, after I had just finished slapping two coats of new paint on my white backyard fence, the woman came over to ask if I would mind repainting her side of the fence as well. At ten years old, a few dollars is quite invigorating, and so I agreed. Thirty of my dad’s dollars later, I arrived at the woman’s door with two full buckets of white paint from the store. The woman gave me a strange look and opened the back door, revealing a weathered, royal-blue fence all around the yard. I had never been to her house, before, and so naturally I was shocked. Apologizing, I returned to the store this time with my own walled, to find some royal blue paint.

The truth is—if you’ve lived your entire life on one side of the white fence, it is all too easy to assume the other side is white as well.

There is a missing link in society's chain of rational intervention amidst conflict. The assumption seems to be—"If what I believe is correct, then therefore what you believe must be wrong," and in the majority of situations, this logical fallacy is simply that-a fallacy. There exists no such Aristotelian postulate that states that two concrete concepts cannot co-exist, and therefore it is possible that perhaps there is no universally wrong (or right) side of a battlefield. For example, Hitler's occupation on the Rhineland in the early 1930s was a violation of international policy to the rest of Europe, and his massacre of the Jewish minority was viewed as unjustifiably cruel. However, Dewey would dispute the latter of those claims. Hitler's slaughter of millions WAS justifiable-to him at least. We must remember that Adolph Hitler's racial cleansing was inspired by his god's will and desire to purify an Aryan state. To us, as historically traditional believers in our god-Hitler's use of religion to justify his actions are utterly ridiculous...but the keywords should be noted: "to us."

For this reason, we cannot blame governments or even groups of people for unjust allegations or aggressions of any means—military or otherwise; the fact of the matter is that to assume the role of the noble savior is human nature, and to deny ourselves the right of perspective our curse; but it is an individual's curse rather than the group's. It is a disease for which there will be no remedy, save maturity.

It has taken me five pages, but suddenly I have arrived at a breaking point of my own rationale. As writers, John Dewey and I have in essence taken up arms against what we deem the naivety of man to call himself right. Up to this point in my writing, I have dubbed myself the self-crowned "noble" cause in the argument. In doing so, I have to wonder...Muster Dewey, have we not ourselves become the enemy or our won ideological assault on ignoring subjectivity?

Sometimes, despite my best efforts, I cannot escape the fact that I, too, am a naïve person...However, a naïve person could never admit his naivety...Bu then again, naivety cannot be measured or proven...

It appears that people are not "right" or "wrong" in tendencies, they just "are." Oh, and the same applies to you, "noble" Mister Dewey.

Or does it?