

The Other Side Isn't What's Evil

It's popular to paint the other political side as evil. The people probably aren't, but their ideas and actions may be. Remember — you are “the other side” to them.

Evil isn't just whatever you don't like. That would be too easy. Evil is any action that violates someone who isn't currently violating the life, liberty, or property of another; an act that harms someone who doesn't deserve to be harmed at this moment.

Philip Zimbardo, who became famous for his 1971 Stanford prison experiment, in his book *The Lucifer Effect*, defines evil like this: “Evil consists in intentionally behaving in ways that harm, abuse, demean, dehumanize, or destroy innocent others — or using one's authority and systemic power to encourage or permit others to do so on your behalf.” I appreciate that he counts as evil the use of political “authority” to influence others to do evil.

People aren't evil, but they can commit evil. Some seem to prefer it. I think it's useful shorthand to refer to someone as “evil” when they consistently and repeatedly commit acts of evil, even if it's not exactly accurate.

So how can you tell if the “other side” is the evil side, or if your side is? Check to see which is violating the life, liberty, or property of another. Sometimes you'll discover both sides promote evil, but in different ways.

Do you support the use of government violence — through enforcement of legislation — to take people's money or other property?

Do you advocate the use of government violence to punish people for their choice to use substances you believe they shouldn't use?

Do you approve when government violence is used against those who defended themselves from attackers in a way you didn't like or used weapons you don't believe they should use?

Do you applaud the use of government violence to ignore private property rights and the right of association in favor of government borders?

Do you favor government violence forcing parents to have their children indoctrinated into beliefs that are useful for the state?

Can you see how all these political preferences harm the life, liberty, and property of people who aren't currently harming anyone else? Do you engage in mental gymnastics to try to justify any of these positions anyway? If you can't see this for what it is, you may think of the other side as “evil” while embracing your own brand of the stuff.