"More on Refusing Evil"
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In my article "Technology and Evil," I presented Steven Bartlett's ideas about human evil, considered as a clinical term referring to destructiveness towards other humans, other species and the environment. Applying Bartlett's analysis to technology leads to a number of implications, including the need to condemn as well as analyse technologies designed to cause harm.

Kelly Moore in her response, "Refusing Evil by (Sociotechnical) Design," offers many insightful comments. As a scholar who has studied scientists' movements against war, she is well positioned to make the important point that not everyone goes along with business as usual, especially when the business is destructive. I agree that resistance is vitally important; that is why I have been studying it for many years. Nevertheless, I think there are important things to be learned from Bartlett's analysis, precisely because it focuses attention on the obstacles to human betterment, not just courageous campaigners.

Bartlett argues that studies of human psychology, and studies of human behaviour associated with genocide, terrorism, war and ecological destruction, show that humans are pathogenic, namely disease-causing. In saying this, Bartlett draws on the large literature on pathology and applies it to humans. Bartlett argues that human destructiveness is linked to disorders in human thought and conduct.

Contrary to Moore, Bartlett does not say that humans are unique in any of this. Indeed, it makes sense to see the pathology of humans as an evolutionary product, and to expect some precursors.

Moore points to the bright side of human activity, including large numbers of people living together peacefully, and passionate resistance to destructive systems. Bartlett is quite aware of the positives in the human species. His concern is that looking always at the positives means avoiding the dark sides of humans.

It is quite possible for an individual to function well, to be physically and mentally active, and yet harbour pathogens harmful to self and others, for example HIV. By analogy, humans as a species can seem harmonious and altruistic much of the time while still carrying the capacity for evil. This is true of genocide and preparations for war, and even more so of the routine destruction of the environment and enslavement of other species.

Moore notes that I sound "a pessimistic note throughout the essay," which is accurate. Bartlett, though, in *The Pathology of Man,* is far more pessimistic. I wanted to be faithful to his perspective while providing some positive angles, angles that Bartlett himself preferred not to pursue. I can understand his thinking. He observes that most people avoid dwelling on the potential for human evil, so in his book he refused to end on an uplifting note, maintaining his focus on what others avoid. Unlike Bartlett, I aimed to offer a few suggestions for ways forward.

Moore and I are in agreement about many things, perhaps most. She highlights the role of scientists in antiwar mobilisations, which is indeed encouraging. She points to the militarisation of everyday life, including though warlike metaphors, and to methods of training soldiers that are adopted in civilian life.

In opening her comment, Moore refers to several recent massacres, including the killing of fifty Muslims in New Zealand. Until this massacre, I was not aware that New Zealand's gun laws were laxer than Australia's. To understand this, it's necessary to go back to 1996, when a man named Martin Bryant used a semi-automatic rifle to kill 35 people in Tasmania. At the time, this was the most deadly massacre of its type anywhere in the world. Australia's newly elected prime minister, John Howard, took the lead in pushing through strong gun-control laws, having to obtain the support of all of Australia's state governments. Ironically, Howard led the more conservative of Australia's two major political parties, and thus acted against the prevailing tendency for conservative governments to be more sympathetic to the gun lobby. Ever since 1996, Australia's gun laws, and the absence of any further massacres, have been an example for gun-control advocates elsewhere, especially in the US.

This is a good news story, but it is worth looking at the role of obedience and business-as-usual in the problem of weapons that facilitate massacres. There is little evidence of organised opposition within gun manufacturing and sales enterprises. Nor is there much evidence of resistance among scientists and engineers who design guns. In the US, many individuals have an emotional attachment to guns and gun culture.

It is worrying that only an exceptional moment in Australia's history, the combination of a massacre and a crusading prime minister, enabled some controls to be put on the gun culture. There are other good news stories too, such as bans on land mines and the stigmatisation of nuclear weapons. But these are in the context of the normalisation of weapons design and manufacture, and the use throughout the world of technologies for torture and social control.

Moore and I look to social movements to challenge dangerous and damaging activities, including technologies that facilitate them. It can be asked, why is that so many activists have to run their activities on a shoestring while governments pour hundreds of billions of dollars into military systems? Why do so many people ignore the problems, taking no personal responsibility for addressing them? What is the role of technology in facilitating human destructiveness? What can be done to foster the development and use of technologies that reflect and foster the positive aspects of human thought and behaviour?

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References

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