

What Would You Say?Aug. 12<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Last year I had an upsetting discussion with my dad that I've been wanting to share ever since. It came from a hypothetical question I'd asked regarding a long-running conflict we've had, namely, his blaming me for this torture I'm suffering (and he and others suffer with me) because he feels that if nothing else, I was at least very stupid for doing the things I did on the day I was arrested. For him, my actions were stupid due to the basically predictable reactions *if* certain bebadged bullies discovered them, despite the fact that I'd done nothing illegal at all and was 100% within my rights. His basic position is: who cares if you were "right"; you should've known better anyway. Now, my dad admits that the cop bullies were wrong, that they abused their power and lied extensively, then lied some more in court to cover up the initial lies. He acknowledges, just as judge Timothy Casserty acknowledged on the record, that the cops did not act in good faith, and their actions that night were just a pretext to get me into custody for things they imagined I'd done but had no probable cause to arrest me for. No sane or honest person disputes those facts. Yet still, my dad chooses to blame me, primarily, for the consequences of their lying and abuse, letting them off the hook for having done the actual damage all around. I've never understood his reasoning on this... in fact, it seems like a stubborn avoidance of reason, to me. I've offered analogies I thought settled the issue for good (Do you blame the German Jew in 1943 for his fate at the hands of the Nazis? Should we blame black lynching victims in Jim Crow Georgia for daring to walk outside after dark? Will you blame Malala if she gets shot again for refusing to abandon her education?), but Dad keeps coming back to the same thing: "Right or wrong is irrelevant, and you should've known better."

Maybe so. Maybe we really must treat police and other punishment-machine minions not as individual sentient beings, but as a collective malignancy with no independent moral responsibility or culpability. Maybe cops and prosecutors are as disinterestedly destructive as cancer. You can't rationally be angry with cancer... it maims and kills, no question, but it's never personal. Except, see... as mindless as the agents of punishment may seem, I still don't believe we can

totally deny that they remain conscious creatures with some degree of self-awareness — less like a lichen and more like a cockroach, at least. Can't we give them at least that much credit... and responsibility? So maybe cancer is a poor metaphor, and we should instead treat society's badge-wearing bullies more like... tigers. Wolves. Sharks. Conscious predators that mean to kill, but which do so from instinct or biological necessity rather than from malice or willful ignorance. Again, you really can't resent nature's ~~deadliest~~ <sup>deadliest</sup> animals for killing your friend or taking your arm. It's what they do. You generally can't blame their victims either, though if you venture into their worlds expecting to be treated with reflective thoughtfulness or as anything other than prey, then sure... you're a fool and you should've known better. Perhaps that's all cops are, too; deadly predators that simply act when their primitive brains say it's time to kill.

But... is it? I never thought so before, and I doubt many people think so now. It's pretty ridiculous... cops AREN'T sharks or tigers, they're our brothers and daughters and parents and neighbors. Before the uniform, badge, and gun go on, they're people too. But that's a topic for another post. As for the painful talk with my dad, it began when he countered my Nazi and racism examples with this: "Suppose you're in a mosque full of fundamentalist, radical Muslims. You drop a Quran on the floor, then punt it like a holy football. What reaction should you expect? An assault? Maybe a murder?" I agreed that violence in this scenario was certainly possible, and although MOST Muslims wouldn't react violently to a Quran kicker, surely many would. Maybe millions would. So sure, you could call the kicker stupid, and you'd be right, but... my point was unchanged. Who should be BLAMED (if anyone) for his fate — the kicker or the killer? Is mere stupidity really the worst offence in this scenario? Shouldn't our greatest outrage fall on those who would kill a man just for kicking his own book? I think so, and I can barely imagine a mind that could possibly disagree, so I asked my dad — whom I love ~~very much~~ <sup>and respect</sup> very much, who taught me almost everything that informs my moral make-up today — I asked him to imagine he had a magic wand, and it could do just one of two things, his choice: He could wave it and magically eliminate whatever it is in some people's brains that might make them do something so stupid as kick a Quran in a mosque full of people likely to kill them for it;

Or, he could magically eliminate whatever is responsible in the brains of those who would kill someone for kicking a Quran. Put another way — Would he rid the world of people who do objectively harmless things that might incite reactionary psychos to violence; or rid it of the people who react like violent psychos to objectively harmless incitements? The choice seems so obvious. Which is better — oblivious jerks or murderous zealots? Who do we pick to live with, at the expense of the other? My dad chose the murderers. "I was dumbstruck. To this day, I have to believe he took such a shockingly callous position only because he was frustrated with me (and maybe other "stupid" in our family), and he was too tired to think it through. My dad is usually tired, these days. He must've felt forced into an unconscionable consistency. Honestly, it's a position no decent human being of at least average intelligence could possibly advocate with sincerity, this favoring bullies over their victims, and I just won't accept that my dad is either so mentally corrupted or so fundamentally vicious that he could've meant what he said. Yet, he said it. "

What do you say?

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My apologies if I've already given this quote, but then, it's worth repeating.

"The sad truth is that most evil is done by people who never make up their minds to be either good or evil."

— Hannah Arendt.