

question is, Why did any place abolish human sacrifice? Why did any place abolish slavery? Why did any place create wealth? That's what you should ask. But nobody asks that! It is a non-college asked question.

doctrine The evil is universal, so let's discount it. The question is, Why there is good, not why there is evil that is the norm? That is why I am convinced that the question I ask to find out if I'm speaking to a fool, even intelligent and kind—you can be intelligent, kind, and foolish, for the record—is that I ask them if they believe people are basically good. If they do, and some of you might and I don't mean to offend you, in that regard you are a fool. And why people *choose* [Prager's emphasis] to believe in something so patently absurd is beyond me.

I am very involved, among other things, in Jewish life—to the extent that Jews tolerate me being a conservative. But it's hard not to because a I wrote a very very widely used introduction to Judaism and I've spoken at a thousand synagogues—not that, eight hundred—so it's hard to ignore me in Jewish life. I'm a columnist for the Jewish Journal of Los Angeles, which has a big presence on the Internet. And I wrote a column when I started as a columnist, *Why do Jews Think People are Basically Good?* Which is part of the reason the Jews are on the left, because if you think people are basically good you tend to go leftward. And there are many answers to that.

But the amount of hate mail that that column received was fascinating. They hated me for writing that people were not basically good. This is a generation after Auschwitz. Jews still believe that people are basically good, as do liberals generally.

So, we're not. And that's why good needs to be studied and analyzed, not evil! For every book on evil there are ... Let's put it this way. For every thousand books studying human evil there might be one, maybe one—I doubt it; I think the ratio is one to a thousand; it's probably one to fifty thousand, books on why people are good. I have read every book I know of on rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust. I am sure there are under twenty. There are thousand of books about Nazi evil. And there might be—might be— twenty books on analyzing the people who saved Jews. That to me is a much bigger riddle. I understand why people torture, murder, go with the herd. Why do people stand up to the herd is an infinitely more important question, it would strike me.

core doctrine So Western civilization had evils like every other civilization, every other! But it had unique good. Human rights. Western concept, universal human rights, Western, uniquely Western. These are not just Western, they are uniquely. Human equality: all people are equal; Western. Democracy: Western. Abolition of slavery: Western. The greatest music, the greatest art, the greatest architecture: Western.

Now people will say, "Oh, please, that is so dismissive of other music, art, or architecture." But it isn't! It's a statement that *those* [Prager's emphasis] people believe. Ask Japanese, "What is the greatest music ever written?" And they'll say, "Bach." I'm very involved in classical music, so that is the art I will use. I conduct orchestras in southern California; it's a very serious pursuit of mine in my life. So I will tell you the greatest edition of the Bach cantatas—the greatest, the greatest generally universally acknowledged—was done by a man named Suzuki and he just finished like his three hundredth CD just the last year. Suzuki, and they're all

Wisdom is not to be found in universities, but outside of academia (the "common" people?). Prager's foundational stance re wisdom is not met by the university trained people he has encountered (an evaluation).

Marker: if a person believes that people are basically good, then they are not wise.

Fool: a person is not going to change if you call him an idiot, evil, or monstrous; but being called a fool while at the same time being praised for being kind, etc., allows for the possibility of no longer being a fool. Prager is very careful not to offend a person's dignity, even if he considers them to be wrong.

Wisdom is primary? This statement supports the idea that Judaism doesn't necessarily come first for Prager, wisdom does (foundational decision). If true, Judaism, as ethical monotheism, becomes the primary vehicle for gaining wisdom. It also suggests that Prager's stance is **not one of faith, but of reason**—otherwise he too would believe all people are born good. He defines himself as a "conservative Jew." This requires a degree of moral courage in the face of deep opposition.

An historical consciousness? Prager's stance includes a heavy dose of history that, given today's largely a-historical education (amount of hate mail?), may explain why he finds this "[belief] in something so patently absurd is beyond [him]." (evaluation) (21:35)

If one believes that evil is ubiquitous, then it becomes impossible to believe that oneself is intrinsically good. Prager's foundational stance includes this tension between what Christians understand as original sin and the ethical revelations from God as set down in the Torah. "There is no good in us" goes an Anglican prayer, which explains why it is next to impossible to be good and wise over the long term without the direct help of the Divine Mystery. This is **the problem of liberation** that is met by sustaining an encounter with God. Prager does this by **religiously keeping the Sabbath** as well as all the other **work he does within the Jewish community** (22:00+).

Why distinct from other civilizations? Western culture was built around this **tension between an awareness of one's own ethical fallibility and the ethical demands of monotheism**. Prager's foundational stance is built around this tension, which not only explains why he is aware of such demands but why **it is only Western civilization, riddled as it was and is by evil, has set out to redeem itself by bringing good into the world**. But it is hard to live in such a state of tension, hence both the reaction to Western society to destroy it and the opposition on the part of non-western societies to escape its demands. (Anti-life generative principle in an universal dialectic between good and evil, while the pro-life generative principle is the God of the Jews and Christians; **anger and rage vs love and charity**.) From this perspective, **the loss of God in Western affairs would doom Western society to a life of poverty and servitude**.