

The Accomplices to Murder

Part Three

Since those who support Israel's attack on Gaza cannot appeal to international law, they have to rely on arguments from analogy. We demonstrated two weeks ago the deeply dubious and shallow nature of those analogies. But we can create our own analogy to add to the international law arguments we made last week condemning both what Israel is doing and how they are doing it. I will borrow this analogy from the philosopher Peter Singer. If you were walking by a public pool on your way to work for a special meeting, dressed in your finest business clothes, and you saw in a little girl drowning in the pool, would you jump in, clothes and all, to save her? Obviously the answer from all but the biggest cad would be "yes." Singer goes on to say that not only are we morally obliged to help the little girl, but that not assisting her when we can is the moral equivalent of murder.

Let us take Singer's analogy and apply it to the world's response to the Israeli attack against Gaza. This will assist us in answering the question some Gazans have asked: "Where is the world in helping to stop this?" There are two ways of answering this. First, where is Barack Obama? Second, where are the citizens of the world?

Regarding Obama, while he speaks loudly and openly about other issues, such as the economy, he has resolutely failed to say anything about this latest Israeli massacre. He talks openly about the right of Israel for self-defense, and he condemns Palestinian rocket attacks. But he will not condemn Israel's massacre of Gazan civilians. So Obama, too, is walking by the pool without helping. He is guilty of the moral equivalent of murder.

Regarding the U.S. Congress, their cowardly but overwhelmingly positive voice vote in support of Israel's actions in Gaza is their individual and collective walking by the pool while the girl drowns. Nancy Pelosi and company are guilty of the moral equivalent of murder.

But in applying the analogy to Obama and to the U.S. Congress, we see the analogy's weakness. Because the U.S. supplies Israel with both the arms they use to murder Gaza's civilians, and blanket permission to do so, we must alter Singer's original analogy somewhat, by adding the condition that not only does the person see the girl fall into the pool, but he or she has given someone fifty dollars to do what they want to anyone around the pool. Extending Singer's analogy this way makes President Obama and the U.S. Congress not just guilty of the moral equivalent of murder, but they are actual accomplices in the murder of Gazans!

Regarding the citizens of the world, while there have been some protests here and there, they are nowhere near what they ought to be in terms of numbers. Most of us have simply done nothing, except to see the violence on television and mumble "that's terrible" while we grab another handful of chips and turn on the football game or a good movie. If the citizens of the U.S. are doing nothing while watching the massacre in Gaza—if they are not writing their congressperson, not writing their local newspaper editor, not

participating in a protest—then they are walking by the pool without helping the drowning girl. They are equally guilty of the moral equivalent of murder.

Americans love their comfort, and that includes the psychological comfort of not being informed of massacre and genocide while they are shopping and watching TV. But so much more is our moral and even legal culpability when we see genocide taking place and choose to do nothing about it. For that, we really do need to start doing something about it. If we don't, we have no reason to condemn the parties who attack us with another 9/11, for after all, our existential philosophy as a country will have been that it just doesn't matter when people suffer and die, even if we are a part of their suffering and death by our support of the process.