

Where is the Nuance in Our Thinking?

I am still surprised by the constant, black and white, simplistic, all or nothing arguments in nearly everything I read or hear today. Do people see a middle ground? Or, is it just the people we listen to that think in such absolute terms? Here are some examples.

I was watching a rather pedestrian debate about the United States one evening between two well-known men. After the critic explained what is wrong with America, the defender began his defense. After a minute or two, the critic interrupted him, to proclaim that the United States is not perfect. He repeated those words again, believing that he just scored a major debate point. The debate continued, but I found the argument to be revealing. Is perfection the standard by which we judge a country? If so, what country would pass that criterion?

Some people will not use the label 'Radical Islam' for what are clearly radical acts in the name of Islam. Perhaps they believe that such a title will make Americans believe that every Muslim is a radical. I think that is unlikely. Yet, critics blame Christianity for the Crusades and the Inquisition. They frequently label the United States a "racist nation." We even blame Conservative Christians in America for Timothy McVeigh's terrorist act in Oklahoma – even though it still is not clear if he was a practicing Catholic, or as he claimed, an "agnostic," and "science is my religion."

A Black-American recently wrote an op-ed on race relations. He admitted that he was reluctant to recognize progress these past few decades, because he was concerned that many whites believe racism no longer exists.

America's Founding Fathers also come to mind. Some were indeed slaveholders; however, they were also brilliant men. They created a system that over time allowed their country to become the greatest nation in the world. Should they receive no credit for anything in life because of slavery? Every country in the Western Hemisphere allowed slaves. So America did not become rich and powerful because of slavery. If that were the case, the entire hemisphere would be prosperous.

I have been watching an eye-opening series on PBS about Nazi weapons. The Nazis were virtually decades ahead of the Allies in technology. Does that diminish their evil?

There is also rigid thinking when it comes to torture. Some believe that the United States engaged in torture of prisoners at Guantanamo

Bay Naval Base in Cuba. However, at least two claims made in those assertions are downright illogical. The first is that “torture is torture.” This is easy to refute. Which would you choose – a week of sleep deprivation or a week of hot metal pokers burning your flesh? Clearly, there are various levels of torture, and not all torture is equal. The second claim is that “torture never works.” Obviously, torture does not always work, yet it surpasses believability that it never works. If two men break into your home, hold you down and threaten to cut off a finger every sixty seconds until you tell them where the cash is, do you think you might succumb to torture and tell them? Yes, torture can work.

Isn't it possible that the United States of America is the greatest country in the world, and still has many flaws?

Isn't it possible that there is a minority element of Islam that produces radicals who kill in the name of their religion?

Can't we acknowledge that America has made substantial progress in race relations, but there is still room to improve?

Couldn't America's Founding Fathers be heroes for establishing a great nation and changing the world, while engaging in the despicable act of slavery?

Can we acknowledge that Nazi scientists and engineers were indeed brilliant without condoning in any way the actions of one of the world's most evil regimes?

Isn't it possible that some forms of torture are more severe and even more effective than others?

I believe these questions answer themselves, but only if we stop viewing the world from a two-dimensional perspective.

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