

**Claudia Card**

*Confronting Evils: Terrorism, Torture, Genocide.*

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*Confronting Evils* builds on Card's previous book *The Atrocity Paradigm* (2002), providing an analysis of evil in the first part and examining particular cases and kinds of evil in the second. In distinction to most approaches to evil, Card's is explicitly non-religious; the appeal of her project is in its reclamation of the concept from religion, especially from that connected with the rhetoric of the political right. Card is personally someone who has worked for liberal causes and has spoken out against forces of conservatism, and many on her side of the political discourse have been uncomfortable with endorsing the use of evil as a concept. So her claim is not only that the concept of evil is definable but that it fits well with liberal and emancipatory approaches to politics.

Card's approach is to provide an analysis of evil actions, of both individuals and of groups such as governments. She examines the relation between the evil performed by institutions and the moral assessment of the individuals that make up those institutions, and she denies that all individuals involved are thereby morally culpable. She does not make an assessment of character and so she does not assess people as being evil, and she emphatically rejects a division of people into two kinds, good and evil. Her analysis at its heart is that evil actions are inexcusable and they produce reasonably foreseeable intolerable harm. She does not require that the agent have malevolent intentions, and this will be one of the more controversial parts of her approach.

One might doubt whether we have a single pre-existing coherent secular concept of evil that is susceptible of analysis, so it is unreasonable to require that Card's analysis match our careful pre-reflective intuitions about evil. A more reasonable standard for evaluation is whether her analysis captures a good proportion of our intuitions and serves our purposes well. So it needs to be examined in practice. Some of the most interesting theoretical work in the book is her discussion of the work of Milgram, Zimbardo, and Arendt on the readiness of people to commit evil acts and the complexities of people who have a mixture of different motivations and reasons for their behavior. As experiments in social psychology show, ordinary people can intentionally perform acts of great harm while having no great desire to hurt or humiliate others, and often people get caught up in a general movement or follow social pressure. It may even be possible for evil to result from group action where no members of the group are notably malicious.

Kant claims that a will that is not good is evil, but Card disagrees with this. She also disagrees with Kant's view that we never embrace immorality as such, arguing against Kant that it is possible for humans to be diabolically evil. The second chapter of the book defends these ideas in some detail, meticulously spelling out five kinds of intermediate positions between good and evil. They are labeled as frailty, fully culpable wrongdoing that is not foreseeably harmful, ambivalence or indecisiveness at the level of principle, persons who are able to exercise good

judgment in some parts of their lives while exercising poor judgment in others, and the bad actions of people who are themselves victims of oppression under severe duress. Here, Card's discussion is rich and worthy of careful study, although there is plenty of room for disagreement with her psychological assumptions and her interpretation of real life cases. Especially notable is her discussion of the case of Sue William Silverman, whose father raped her repeatedly when she was a child. Yet her father also won the public trust in his governmental position in securing statehood for Alaska and Hawaii in the middle of the twentieth century. She uses this man as an example of someone who lacked moral integration and argues that we can make sense of holding him responsible for his evil actions, although the Kantian model of the will is not by itself able to cope with such a complex case.

The chapter on complicity is also rich in cases and in its discussion of the existing literature. Card provides a helpful discussion of when people go along with bad or risky behavior or when they allow preventable harm to others by institutions of which they are a part, even though they bear no ill will to those who may end up harmed. She discusses a variety of cases, including families, train passengers, bureaucracies, and then larger social groups that allow or facilitate the oppression of subgroups, and here one of her main examples is the oppression of women in sexist societies. Instead of arguing for a universal thesis, Card's work here has more the character of paying careful attention to the details of different kinds of cases. However, this is important work that will help people understand the variety of different kinds of wrongdoing.

The last theoretical chapter addresses what kinds of being can be harmed, and specifically addresses the cases of trees, ecosystems, species, Gaia, and groups of humans. Here Card's discussion goes quickly over a broad range of issues about what kinds of things can have interests, and while she engages in some of the existing literature, the argument is rather cursory. She does, however, make points that become important later on in the book, especially when discussing genocide.

The second part of the book addresses counterterrorism, low-profile terrorism, conscientious torture, ordinary torture, and genocide. While the chapters are less theoretical than in the first part, they integrate the discussion from the first part, and they engage in their own careful discussions. Card argues that both torture and genocide are inexcusable, while terrorism of different kinds may be morally permissible depending on the circumstances. She engages in a good deal of the recent philosophical and other discussion of the ethics of these controversial practices, and she covers both prominent and less well-known cases. Her arguments are carefully and systematically presented, and this book will be an excellent resource for anyone wanting to investigate these topics in depth.

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