

# To my angry and disgusted commentator: a reply

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This [comment](#) was posted on the blog this morning [in response to my article on Tory proposals to crack down on extremism](#):

*It's always about you isn't it, you disgusting, arrogant piece of shit.*

*Well, guess what, they actually came for the Jews first, again. And what did you have to say about it?*

*Fuck all.*

*And now?*

*Most of the left are actively supporting the terrorists who murdered those Jews and are taking part in "protests" glorifying it and calling for the genocide of Jews and the destruction of Israel.*

*The hypocrisy is breathtaking. Just shows how racist the left is. Safe spaces and anti-bigotry for everyone - except the if (sic) you are Jewish.*

I wondered whether to post the comment or treat it as trolling - which in so many ways (including the anonymity used to hide what was meant by TBJ - which only I, as moderator, could see) it is.

But then I decided that the commentator has a right to an opinion, even if it is one I very clearly disagree with. What follows was written as a response for the comments section. I have decided to post it here, but have not changed the personal nature of the response that I offer, so please appreciate that all that follows is addressed to TBJ who posted it, whoever he or she might be.

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Let me deal with your allegations.

Firstly, yes, that piece was about me: it was an opinion piece. It reflected my opinion. So, of course, it was about me. I don't write opinion pieces for anyone else. I am not, therefore, sure what you are alleging I have done wrong unless you are saying you wish to deny me the right to express that opinion. Is that it?

Second, as far as I can see, there is nothing about that piece that refers directly, or even very obliquely, to any issue relating to Israel, Gaza, Jews or Palestinians. So, quite why you twist it in that way is hard to understand, but you have. Maybe you might explain?

Third, I would have thought that what I wrote was clearly pro-human rights, and pro-oppressed and vulnerable people whoever they might be. There was nothing else that could be implied from it.

Fourth, what I wrote was clearly anti-racist, without in any way carving out distinctions (I hope). That is what I am: I am an anti-racist. In partial explanation (and whilst talking about me, again), it's not trendy to say it, but I remember the feeling of suspicion and even resentment from some about my Irish name when I was young when anti-Irish sentiment was still quite prevalent in the UK. That feeling has never quite left me. It was not a big issue, but it has left me acutely aware of what discrimination is and what it must feel like. I have written before about what I perceived as my father's lifelong desire to assimilate, never quite thinking he was accepted. Please do not say I have no idea what I am talking about. And please don't accuse me of being racist.

Or of being an anti-Semite because I am not. I have never been. I never will be.

And do not accuse me of denying the right of Israel to exist. I am absolutely sure it has that right.

I am also as sure that the Palestinian people have a right to their own state.

And as well also know, those two states will have to - as we all know - coexist in a limited geographic space. Anyone denying that is guilty of prejudice. I am not.

Likewise, please do not accuse me of ever supporting Hamas. I do not and never will. Just as the IRA never did represent those wanting Ireland to self-govern, I am certain Hamas does not represent the Palestinian people who want to live peacefully in a state of their own. I can differentiate the two issues.

Nor, incidentally, should you confuse my criticism of the far-right government of Netanyahu with criticism of Israel or anyone who is Jewish. Netanyahu is not Israel, nor are his opinions those of all Israelis or all Jews. I can abhor his government and defend the right of Israel to defend itself within the rules of law.

I can also defend the right of Palestinians to their own state and condemn the actions of Hamas that seem contrary to that aim.

But, of course, this requires that you accept nuance, non-binary positions, and subtlety in argument, but that's what such situations demand.

So, am I, as you suggest, actively supporting the terrorists who murdered those Jews? I am emphatically not doing so. I condemn them.

And am I, or most on the left, taking part in "protests" glorifying Hamas whilst calling for the genocide of Jews and the destruction of Israel? No, they are not. In fact, I won't go to these protests because there are too many flags for my liking, and I do not trust flags: they are the symbol of binary choice and I do not believe in that. So you have most definitely picked the wrong target with me on that issue. And I am far from alone.

That said, I uphold the right of those who are protesting about Israel's government breaking international law on warfare because I think it unambiguously has, but I blame Netanyahu, and not Isreal itself, or any Jew. I name a person.

And when it comes to a ceasefire - when I call for one, I mean one that demands Hamas also stop firing. I am not just asking for Israel to stop.

That said, I do expect Israel to stop firing in contravention of law without Hamas ceasing its onslaught whilst reserving Israel's right to self-defence if Hamas does carry on firing.

There are distinctions in these positions which are important, and very clear if only you will think about them. Those distinctions are what a complex situation demands.

So please do not accuse me of things I have not, again, said.

And finally, maybe you have not been to Dachau, but I have. I needed to know and understand what happened. I have written here before now about that experience and the fact that my eldest son, aged 15 when we went, came up to me having spent some time reading the history of the camp and said, "They'd have put you in here, Dad". He was right, because as Pastor Martin Niemöller noted in a poem that has been endorsed by the [Holocaust Memorial Day Trust](#):

First they came for the Communists  
And I did not speak out  
Because I was not a communist  
Then they came for the Socialists  
And I did not speak out  
Because I was not a socialist  
Then they came for the trade unionists  
And I did not speak out  
Because I was not a trade unionist  
Then they came for the Jews  
And I did not speak out  
Because I was not a Jew  
Then they came for me  
And there was no one left  
To speak out for me

And that is what actually happened. So your claim about the Jews being first was also wrong, although saying so is not in any way a denial of what went on to happen to Jews, and Romany's, disabled people and others, with the Jews undoubtedly suffering much the worst of all.

My point in saying so is that the evil of fascism is universal.

And what that means is that Jews are also capable of that evil. That's not because they are Jewish. Or because they live in Israel. It is because they are human and have been corrupted by far-right ideology and the binary thinking of populism, as I would suggest the current Israeli government has been. But I still, quite emphatically uphold the right of Israel to exist and do not for a moment confuse that government with Israel or a Jew anywhere.

So now, what are you trying to argue with me about?