

# What Price Human Happiness?

by [Jillian Becker](#) (December 2023)



Baby at Play– Thomas Eakins, 1876

In Dostoyevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, Ivan, the intellectual brother, famously asks Alyosha, the religious brother, this question:

*Tell me frankly, I challenge you—answer me. Imagine you are granted the task of designing the structure of human destiny so that it would end in the happiness, peace and contentment of all mankind, but to achieve that end it is necessary, absolutely unavoidable, for you first to torture one tiny child to death—the little girl who beat her breast with her little fist, for instance—and found the edifice on*

*her unavenged tears, would you consent to be the architect on those conditions?*

“No, I wouldn’t,” Alyosha replies. He is one of the two saintly characters in Dostoyevsky’s canon. Is he right?

His answer is the one Ivan wants. Ivan is deeply troubled by cruelty, especially when children are the victims. He has earlier related to his brother the heart-wrenching story of the suffering little girl he refers to in his question. Is the tortured agony of just one single child a price too high to pay for the lasting happiness of all mankind?

The Jewish diarist Anne Frank, before she was taken by the Nazis to die at the age of sixteen in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, wrote: “In spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart.” Was she right?

It is comfortable for us to believe that our fellow human beings are good, kind, merciful. Our language expects it. The word “humane” means *it is human to be merciful*. But is it?

Some weeks ago, on October 7, 2023, an invading crowd of Hamas terrorists broke into Israel from the Gaza Strip and set about torturing and killing men, women, and children. Why? Because they were Jewish citizens of the Jewish state of Israel and the invaders wanted them to suffer and die. To serve this cause, one man shut a living babe-in-arms in a heated oven. The tiny child, set down on the red-hot element, was slowly grilled and roasted to death.

The fact of the atrocity must be reported in the simplest terms because the suffering of the baby defies description. There can be no adequate words for it in any language.

Yet millions of people are thrilled by what he did. They are delighted by all the atrocities and gloat over the baby in the

oven. One woman joked in a video on Instagram: "Each time I come across the story of the baby that was put in the oven I wonder if they put salt pepper, did they add thyme, and what [fat] did they roast it in? And what were the side dishes? You don't ask yourself the question? The side dish to this baby leg was just a classic plate of fries with ketchup and mayonnaise. And we marinated it in salt, thyme, and a barbecue sauce, and paprika. Not bad! I think it's a rather nice menu!"

In America, Britain, Western Europe, Australia, Hamas admirers have rallied in crowds of hundreds of thousands to celebrate what their heroes did that day. "Kill the Jews," they roar. "Kill the Jews," their placards demand. In Washington, D.C., New York, London, Paris, Berlin, Sydney, they howl for the genocide of the Jews. Why? Because "the Jews are genocidal colonialists," they pretend. "The Jews murder civilians, children, babies," they lie.

In fact, mass murder and extreme cruelty are not at all untypical of human behavior. For millennia, when armies conquered cities they slew all the inhabitants with fire and sword. Kings and noblemen, east and west, had torture chambers in their castles and never lacked torturers. For centuries in Eastern Europe, Jews of all ages were murdered in pogroms.

About eighty years ago, millions of Jews—babies, toddlers, schoolkids, teenagers and adults—were shut in gas-chambers and gassed to death by the Nazis for no reason but they were Jews. The Jews call that genocidal event in their history the Holocaust. When the world got to know about it after Germany's defeat in 1945, good people swore, "Never again."

But even as they swore, mass murder was being perpetrated in Communist Russia—had been since the revolution.

Ten years before the Holocaust began, when Hitler was beginning to rise to power in 1932 and 1933, Stalin deliberately starved millions of Ukrainian peasants to death.

Some devoured their own babies. (But—historians say—they preferred to swap their children for a neighbor's rather than eat their own.) In the Great Terror of 1936 to 1938, about two million people, many of them loyal members of the Communist Party, were executed or sent to hellish labor camps by Stalin's orders.

In all Communist countries—China, Cuba, Cambodia, North Korea, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (the pre-Communist setting of Joseph Conrad's story *Heart of Darkness*) —the people are ruled by fear; torture is routine and massacre common. Mass killings are frequent in almost all African countries, particularly in Chad, Sudan, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Burundi, Mozambique, Mali, Nigeria. Villagers, farmers, are slaughtered by the dozen or the hundreds at a time by governments, or tribal foes, or terrorist bands of religious fanatics. Photos can be found on the internet of Nigerian Christian children and babies lying charred and dead on the ashes of bonfires beside the corpses of their mothers and fathers. The worst bloodbath was in Rwanda in 1994 when for three months, April to June, Hutus killed Tutsis. Some 800,000 Tutsis, including babies, were murdered by their neighbors in an attempted genocide.

The Hamas terrorists' cruelty to the harmless is not exceptional, nor is their pleasure in it. Gleefully they killed some 1,400 men, women, and children. They tied up their victims and burned them; raped them; hacked off breasts and limbs; took hostages; dragged naked, broken-limbed, blood-drenched, gang-raped young women through the streets to be laughed at and spat on by fellow invaders and their women and children. One of the murderers seized the cell phone of a victim and called his parents to boast excitedly that he had "killed ten Jews" with his "bare hands," inviting Mom and Dad to be proud of him, to praise him. This they did, lavishly. Like almost all the parents and teachers of Gaza, in obedience to their elected Hamas rulers they raised their children to

hate and kill Jews.

Is the world shocked? No. In addition to the Hamas admirers who rally with placards and the flag of an imaginary country called Palestine to celebrate the great deeds of their heroes, there are esteemed sages and experts on ethics who want Israel wiped off the map and Jews off the planet. Numerous Hamas supporters and sympathizers are in positions of power. They dominate the United Nations and its sub-agencies; they head Amnesty International; they govern all but 6 of the 50 Islamic states, and China, Russia, Turkey, and Iran (whose theocratic government helped hatch the plan for the Hamas invasion); they influence Western governments, local councils, political parties, churches; they command urban police forces; they deliver judgment in lawcourts; they direct most American universities and state schools; they control an overwhelming majority of the propaganda media—T.V., radio, film and theater, national and local newspapers; in swarms they affect public opinion with murderous messages on social media— X, Facebook, TikTok, Instagram ...

What do we learn about human nature when millions of people exult over Hamas's torture and murder of Jews? Will the lesson break the belief of *bien-pensants* that "people are really good at heart"?

Let's imagine no crowds cheered; the perpetrators killed themselves in remorse; the torturing to death of *that one baby* so appalled and outraged humanity that a final lasting age of "happiness, peace and contentment for all mankind" began. Is it worth the baby's suffering?

Alyosha Karamazov is right: the answer is no.

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Jillian Becker writes both fiction and non-fiction. Her first novel, *The Keep*, is now a Penguin Modern Classic. Her best known work of non-fiction is *Hitler's Children: The Story of the Baader-Meinhof Terrorist Gang*, an international best-seller and Newsweek (Europe) Book of the Year 1977. She was Director of the London-based Institute for the Study of Terrorism 1985-1990, and on the subject of terrorism contributed to TV and radio current affairs programs in Britain, the US, Canada, and Germany. Among her published studies of terrorism is *The PLO: the Rise and Fall of the Palestine Liberation Organization*. Her articles on various subjects have been published in newspapers and periodicals on both sides of the Atlantic, among them *Commentary*, *The New Criterion*, *City Journal* (US); *The Wall Street Journal* (Europe); *Encounter*, *The Times*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *The Telegraph Magazine*, *The Salisbury Review*, *Standpoint*(UK). She was born in South Africa but made her home in London. All her early books were banned or embargoed in the land of her birth while it was under an all-white government. In 2007 she moved to California to be near two of her three daughters and four of her six grandchildren. Her website is [www.theatheistconservative.com](http://www.theatheistconservative.com).

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