

No, two wrongs don't make a right, and a right + a wrong don't make a right, and two rights don't necessarily make a higher right--but can, which is the contention of this thinksheet.

1. "They can't both be right" is the conventional wisdom about a situation in which there's, as we say, "a flat contradiction." If, however, one investigates the type or level of the contradiction in a given instance, the truth of the bromide may be called into question. What is the "they" who are mutually opposed? If propositions, rephrasing them may establish between the positions a relation other than "flat" contradiction. If parties, the art of negotiation is sufficiently developed to enable them, if both so will, to arrive at mutual accomodation. If persons, they can--if they so will, and have the adaptive resources--shift, at least temporarily, to another aspect of the relationship (which is part of the skill of the family counselor).

2. My proposition (this thinksheet's title) looks silly when up against such Gordion knots as Israeli/"Arab" and "pro-life" vs. "pro-choice." As the exception "proves" (meaning originally not establishes but "tests") the rule, let's have a look at these two after first describing....

3....my thesis: By a "position" here I mean a public posture or self-presentation (1) founded on conviction, (2) formulated as proposition(s), (3) represented by a number of people ("persons") who cohere for common action in the interest of the position (so, "party"). Such a party is or is not educable vis-a-vis its position and the positions of other parties. If educable only as to its own position, it is a mindless-dogmatic propaganda mechanism, making nonsense of my thesis because the party's way of being "right" excludes the possibility of the rightness of any other position: two rights can't make a higher right for the simple reason that there can be, vis-a-vis the issue in view, only one right: "they" are "wrong." But if educable both to its own and to other positions, a party may, without dissolving, grant that the opposing party is also "right" not only from the opposing party's viewpoint but also in relation to some value(s) shared by both parties. In this case, the parties can contract to seek, without either violating its conviction, a "higher right" honoring the shared value(s). This is the central skill in what the West means by "democracy," a skill so far best developed by the English-speaking ("Angle-Saxon") peoples. If only one of the opposing parties has this skill, it tries to missionize the other(s) to it: when "they" don't convert, "we" face the options of acting idealistically (at risk to our party) or realistically (at risk to our gospel). (The arms talks begin today, 11Mar85: suppose each "evil empire" concentrated on what's "right" about the other's position!)

4. Orthodox (not just fundamentalist) Islam cannot concede that it may be "right" for a nonIslamic government to exist in "Islamic Lands"--so dialog between Islamic Arabs and Israelis on this has always been impossible. But dialog could shift to another level.

5. Pro-lifers have become demented and increasingly violent by their conviction that pro-choicers are so wrong that (1) no possibility of pro-choicers being "right" exists, (2) the issue is absolute, unshiftable to any other level than flat-out confrontation, and (3) talk about searching for shared values is inherently evil, as an evasion of "right" and fetal "rights."