

ON THE PRINCIPLE “NO ENEMIES ON THE RIGHT”

October 2, 2023

Last December, one evening, I made a throwaway comment on Twitter. It was a response to Rod Dreher, who was yet again viciously publicly trying to destroy the life of someone on the Right (that day, a young father and schoolteacher whose private statements had offended Dreher). My comment was “Who cares? No enemies to the Right!” I would never have thought about my comment again, except that Dreher promptly exploded in spluttering rage, on his (now defunct) blog at *The American Conservative*, among other things attempting to also destroy my livelihood. I responded in IM-1776. This began a variety of discussion around the tactical doctrine sometimes called NETTR.

NETTR has occasioned a good deal of commentary on the Right, some of it low quality, some of it high quality. As to low quality, quite a lot of discussion about NETTR avoids actually discussing NETTR. Instead, we get preening, posturing, virtue signaling, hyperfeminized shrieking, question begging, and most of all, endless attacks on straw men. Some of this is deliberate, the typical degraded rhetoric, never interested in the truth, of late-stage leftism and its sympathizers and fellow travelers. But some of it is accidental, because those who legitimately want to discuss NETTR do not always fully understand the concept, in part because of the straw men set up by the first group. As to high quality, which mostly comes from several different figures on the Right, we will specifically discuss arguments from all the major responses of which I am aware, which are listed and linked at the end of this article.

My purpose is to bring clarity to the discussion. To be sure, most of those who have attacked the core tenets of NETTR don't want clarity. They don't really want to defeat the Left, so their main object is to prevent NETTR from being used to defeat the Left, by throwing sand in the gears—ironically, the same tactic NETTR is designed to prevent. Regardless, today I will supplement my original piece (you should, however, read both pieces for a complete view). First I will define the basic tenets of NETTR, and offer thoughts on whether the doctrine should be phrased as “to the Right” or “on the Right.” Then I will address objections and responses, dividing them into appropriate categories (necessary because quite a few of the responses to NETTR have been

theological in nature, and that frame is not necessarily the correct, and definitely not the exclusive, frame for a political doctrine).

The discussion here is directed only to those on the Right (a term I will precisely define). To be sure, the Left also would object to NETTR, because it is one of the few political tactics which actually erodes Left power. But so far, the Left hasn't noticed NETTR; this entire discussion has been confined to relatively small circles on the Right. And if the Left did notice NETTR, you can be sure no coherent objections would be raised, merely shrieking low-IQ “linguistic kill shots” (in the words of Scott Adams) amid strenuous attempts to destroy anyone advancing or supporting NETTR. Trying to engage the Left as a whole in rational discussion is a worthless and stupid task, and it will not be attempted here, or anywhere else, by me.

At the same time, it is also worth noting that were the Left paying attention, they would enjoy nothing more than the spectacle of the Right arguing about NETTR. Part of that is mere opportunism; if the Right is arguing about NETTR, we can't be consistently applying NETTR. Divide and conquer is always an excellent strategy. Yes, the majority of those on the Right who are opposed to NETTR are useless in terms of their contributions to actually defeating the Left. But they are still aligned with the Right on many, if not most, specific political matters. I doubt if they'll be convinced by anything I say here, but if any of them are, it will be to our collective benefit. The goal, therefore, is not to exclude them from the Right. How could it be, if there are no enemies on the Right?

“On the Right” vs. “To the Right”

My original statement was “no enemies *to* the Right,” echoing the modern usage of the term by Alexander Kerensky, but inverting his meaning. As shorthand for the young man whom Dreher was trying to destroy professionally and personally, this statement was adequate and accurate. A problem has arisen, however, as my original locution has been generalized, because its plain reading suggests that a key matter is the relative position on the Right between a decisionmaker and a potential enemy whom he is considering.

For contrast, let's consider “no enemies *on* the Right”—NEOTR. Because who is on the Left can be easily defined with a high degree of accuracy, at least to the extent any person or entity is open and honest

about his views, NEOTR is binary, with no relative aspect at all. It makes application of the doctrine simple. It is an expression of common purpose and solidarity; once the initial determination of position is made, the only questions of interaction among those on the Right with differing views are strictly practical (of which more later).

NETTR, on the other hand, implies that for any given position on the Right, relative to it there are positions closer to the Left and further from the Left, which must be analyzed before the doctrine can even begin to be applied. Such a relative determination is likely to be largely or wholly subjective. Moreover, if that determination finds that someone is on the Right, but not as far Right as the person applying the doctrine, the formulation “to the Right” incorrectly implies that the doctrine becomes irrelevant. These complications, which substantially degrade the tactical usefulness of the doctrine, can be avoided by using the formulation NEOTR, both for nomenclature and for practice, and that is what I will do here.

NEOTR is not a softening of NETTR. Quite the contrary, because the greater includes the lesser, it is an expansion. Under NEOTR, it is true that there are no enemies to the right—but whether any person or entity is in fact to the right is not the key inquiry. In practice, however, NEOTR is largely indistinguishable from NETTR, because the Left’s command is to police our rightward boundary, and it is this that NEOTR will prevent in most instances.

Tenets of NEOTR

1. The only present real-life goal of the Right which matters is total, permanent defeat of the Left. All else, including any possibility of the future flourishing of mankind, depends on this defeat and is downstream from it.
2. The Left are those individuals, entities, organizations, and systems animated by Left ideology.
3. Left ideology is the ideology that is the essence of the so-called Enlightenment. This consists of demands for total emancipation from all bonds not continuously chosen, combined with forced egalitarianism, all in the belief these principles will lead to an actual utopia, a heaven on earth.

4. The Left is the enemy of mankind. An enemy is, as Carl Schmitt said, an “adversary [who] intends to negate his opponent’s way of life and therefore must be repulsed or fought in order to preserve one’s own form of existence.” An enemy is not someone with whom you merely disagree on strategy, tactics, or aesthetics.
5. At this present moment, the Right is properly defined as anyone and anything not Left. The Right is extremely diverse in belief, relative to the Left. This is irrelevant, at least today.
6. Disagreement and animus, and therefore conflict, among those on the Right will always exist; this is the nature of man and politics. What to do with respect to such conflicts should be evaluated solely with the criterion whether any given action serves to defeat the Left. This does not mean one cannot say “I don’t like your tactics,” “I don’t like your policy proposals,” or, for that matter, “I don’t like you.” It does mean that no person on the Right needs to “be repulsed or fought in order to preserve one’s own form of existence,” because only the Left threatens our existence, and that most imminently. Therefore no action towards anyone on the Right should ever seek to, or threaten to, stop that person from earning a living or from being a full member of society (what is sometimes, though the term is not very helpful, called “cancellation”).
7. Some disagreement on the Right is helpful to achieve our common goal; some is not helpful but not destructive. Either way, disagreement on the Right should always be conducted in a way that does not benefit the Left, but rather advances the goal of the Right to permanently end all Left power. Usually, this means necessary disagreement should be done as privately as feasible. However, the default position with respect to someone with whom one disagrees on important matters should be ignoring that person, if he brings nothing to the political table, or cooperating with him where it serves to defeat the Left.
8. Occasionally, as with the so-called Intellectual Dark Web or “classical liberals,” some on the Left may espouse some principles or policies of benefit to the Right—not to help us, ever, to be sure, but to help themselves. Cooperation with such people to achieve limited present political ends should not be rejected. But because the primary loyalty of such people is to the Left, we should always realize they are,

and always will be, eager to destroy us at the first opportunity. They are our enemies, and always will be, unless they change themselves and reject the premises of the Left.

9. NEOTR is not a permanent principle. When the Right gains power, and the Left is utterly defeated, there will be enemies on the Right, because disputes will arise about how to exercise that power. This is simply the nature of human political action.
10. NEOTR could be phrased in different, longer, more complex ways, making subtle distinctions. These have philosophical value, but they undercut a first principle of politics, which is that winning must take precedence over intellectual hair-splitting. We should stick with the clear, simple formulation of NEOTR.

Objections and Responses (Not Involving Religion)

Objection: The Left holds all the levers of power and controls the Narrative. Therefore, we must weaken their ability to attack the Right, by removing those on the Right who are easy to attack because the Left has successfully painted their positions or statements as “extremist.”

Response: This incorrectly views Left characterization of Right positions as a legitimate search for truth, rather than merely a political weapon. Unless the Right is made to wholly agree with the Left, and bow to Left power, thereby ceasing to exist, the Left will always use control of the Narrative to paint some Right position as extremist. Moreover, they will, and do, use total lies as necessary to do this, without any regard to the truth. Attempting to cleanse the Right in order to hobble Left attacks will therefore always be pointlessly self-defeating.

Objection: The Left holds all the levers of power and controls the Narrative. Therefore, even if the Left has achieved success with “no enemies to the Left,” we cannot assume that we will also achieve such success.

Response: This is a straw man. The claim of NEOTR is not “let’s copy the Left’s success.” It is impossible for today’s Right to copy how the Left seized power. The claim is instead that NEOTR is sound tactical advice for us, who lack power, to obtain power, and we should therefore adopt it.

Objection: Part of the aim of NEOTR is to move the Overton Window rightwards, allowing political ends to be achieved that could not be achieved before. However, in practice when the Overton Window shifts rightwards, this repulses supposed moderates, whose views, and votes, effectively move left as a result. Thus, if the Right does not police itself to remove those too far to the right, as defined by the Left, political moderates will refuse to grant power to anyone on the Right, leaving the Right politically worse off than before the Overton Window shifted rightwards.

Response: This argument, while plausible in the abstract, is totally divorced from reality. As has been shown over and over and over again, when the Right “purifies” itself, supposed moderates (whatever that means) do not react by endorsing the purified Right principles, but by recoiling from the Right as a whole, which is now perceived as tainted, and self-admitted as tainted. This is inevitable, because the Left controls the Narrative, and ensures this result through propaganda and coercion. This free grant of power to the Left to further harm the Right is, of course, a key reason why the Left loves to make the Right purify itself.

In truth, this is an argument for preemptive surrender, which is what most or all of its advocates actually want. This is obvious from the self-cripplingly circular nature of the argument. If you are on the Right, it means you are not allowed to persuade anyone about anything not approved by the Left. So, in order to not be able to persuade, you must make sure you immediately purge yourself of anything by which supposed moderates are not already persuaded. As Christopher Rufo said of a critic of his work to reform New College of Florida, “His philosophy amounts to ‘don’t start winning now so that we can keep losing later.’”

It is also true that there is an even broader failure of this argument, because it falsely assumes that the way to political power on the Right is persuasion through Left-controlled channels, which is a chimera and an impossibility. True, as José Ortega y Gasset said, “Force follows public opinion.” But that persuasion can only take place outside the Narrative (which is why the Left is so very, very angry that Twitter is now largely a space uncontrolled by the Left).

Objection: NEOTR leads to self-defeating purity spirals, as anyone on the Right tries to avoid being tagged as “Left adjacent,” and either moves right, leaves the coalition, or silences himself, and then a new, more Right, group becomes the “Left adjacent” group, while the cycle repeats itself.

Response: This is one reason it should be NEOTR, not NETTR. More broadly, purity spirals are far more likely on the Left, because of its unitary and ideological view of progress. Diversity is not only allowed, but ubiquitous, on the Right. This is not necessarily a strength (diversity is almost never a strength), but in this case it can be, because it much more easily allows prudential control of any tendency toward purity spirals.

Objection: NEOTR is unprincipled. Machiavellian. Manichean. Not nice. Toxically masculine. Not based in consensus. Not agreeable.

Response: So what? Who cares? Man up; there is work to do.

Objection: NEOTR does not seek the truth.

Response: This is a common argument from those who view themselves as “classical liberals.” Their (bogus) self-image depends on seeing themselves as brave crusaders, following the truth wherever it leads. Such types are among the most eager to rule large segments of Right thought illegitimate, because they fear being expelled from polite society if the Left decides they are tainted by association. In practice, the very last thing they want is the truth; they rather want to spin endless yarns about how good it will be if everyone only follows the supposed principles of classical liberalism, while the house in which they live burns around them. If asked to define the truth, they cannot, because they do not actually believe in objective philosophical truth.

But, to be fair, they are correct. The aim of NEOTR is not to reveal the truth. Its aim is gaining, and using, power. When the Right has power, then we can decide among ourselves what the truth is, in a world free of Left poison.

Objection: NEOTR prevents anyone on the Right from defending himself if someone on the Right attacks him, whether to correct, criticize, or destroy.

Response: Some contention among any group of political allies is inevitable. The key is to remember that on the Right, there should, with the exception discussed below, exist no enemies—none who strive to “negate [our] way of life and [who] therefore must be repulsed or fought in order to preserve one’s own form of existence.” Thus, healthy disagreements, including counter-arguments against philosophical attacks, can and should exist. They merely must be done in a way that does not benefit the Left (or, as Johann Kurtz puts it, without feeding the Left).

Those on the Right are not similarly situated to those on the Left. Any action seen as an attack on someone on the Right, for being “too far right,” can easily destroy his life. The same is never true of any attack against anyone on the Left, or for being “too far left though on the Right.” Therefore, any public attack on anyone on the Right is much more likely to lead to injustice. This buttresses the main, purely practical reason, for NEOTR.

That said, sadly some on the Right choose to make themselves enemies, in effect joining the Left, in their practice, if not in their expressed philosophy. Most notably, any person on the Right who attempts to, or worse, does, destroy the livelihood or social position of someone on the Right, for any reason whatsoever, whether he pays lip service to NEOTR or not, should be deemed a public enemy of all on the Right. He should be made the target of harsh punishment by any means possible, with the aim of correction of that person, his exile if necessary, and deterrence of such future behavior by others. However, such punishment should still be done, if possible, in a way that does not benefit the Left.

Objection: NEOTR should be a set of tactics employed as needed, when needed, and not put in place as the basis for a policy prescription. Whether it applies in any given instance should be decided by “wise, godly leaders[, who] will be men capable of doing hard things when they need to do them. . . . [NEOTR] [should not be a policy but rather] a tool, a tactic, a strategy. It is available when necessary, but by

no means need be established as the one single way for us to deal with our own radicals.”

Response: This is really just a nuanced restatement of the core NEOTR position. Prudence will always dictate following strong, competent leaders, who will hopefully wisely decide the form and degree of action. But those leaders are not now in evidence, and the looming destruction of the decent segments of mankind by the Left is very much in evidence. We should stick with the simple statement of NEOTR now; when leaders emerge, and as the power of the Left is broken, they may choose to differentially apply the doctrine that allowed them to rise. (This objection is made by Kruptos, whose excellent pieces on the topic are linked at the end.)

Objection: NEOTR dehumanizes those on the Left, and this is dangerous, as history teaches us. Carl Schmitt said, in 1932, that by “denying the enemy the quality of being human and declaring him to be an outlaw of humanity . . . a war can thereby be driven to the most extreme inhumanity.”

Response: This is undoubtedly a problem in any political struggle, and in fact it is a danger I have repeatedly identified in the past, in both my several analyses of the works of Schmitt and elsewhere. Schmitt made that statement in *The Concept of the Political*, and he also noted at the same time, summarizing Thomas Hobbes, that he “recognized correctly that the conviction of each side that it possesses the truth, the good, and the just bring about the worst enmities, finally the war of all against all.” We on the Right must guard against this tendency, at least to the extent we are Christians, and fear the judgment of Christ on a day not too far removed from today.

However, we should not take this moral demand too far, and falsely claim that recognizing any man or opposing group as enemy is inherently dehumanizing. Schmitt’s most famous thoughts revolved around the absolute necessity of defining one’s enemy, after all. He expressed no concern this was inherently dehumanizing—quite the contrary. For Schmitt, what leads to dehumanization is man’s attempts to reach utopia. Ideological claims, those derived from abstractions and offering

self-contained systems, tend in that direction. Recognition of the friend/enemy distinction, which is grounded in objective reality, without moral content, the opposite of an attempt to build heaven on earth, does not tend in that direction.

The larger context of Schmitt’s words is his claim that no war can be waged on behalf of humanity, “because [humanity] has no enemy, at least not on this planet.” A claim to be fighting on behalf of humanity is therefore pure lie. “At the expense of its opponent, [such a state] tries to identify itself with humanity in the same way as one can misuse peace, justice, progress, and civilization in order to claim these as one’s own and to deny the same to the enemy.” And who, in history, has so misused such terms? Those who have a utopian vision of how humanity can and must be perfected, who do not accept the reality of human limitations, who demand emancipation and egalitarianism, which we are told will unleash the perfection of humanity. That is, the Left. And we are back where we started.

No doubt a future ascendant Right will face great temptations to return to a pre-Christian morality and repay evil for evil. It will be a major challenge for us to levy justice to individuals, rather than the stock-in-trade of the Left, punishment of groups (although it has been competently done, by Francisco Franco, for example). The temptation will be even greater if the Right adopts some of the utopian impulses of the Left, which is entirely possible, though undesirable. All this is, however, a problem for the Future Right, not today’s Right, which lacks any power whatsoever.

Objections and Responses (Tied to Christian Belief)

I am not enthused by individual interpretation of Scripture, much of which is ignorant and worthless, and I think using individual interpretation of Scripture to decide political matters is of extremely limited, and usually negative, value. However, attacking NEOTR has become a big thing in certain evangelical circles, notably those which claim to be conservative. Thus, I will address these religious arguments.

The overarching objection that is cast as Christian, although it is rarely put this bluntly, is the claim that Christians are not allowed to view anyone as an enemy. NEOTR is therefore on its face a grave sin against charity. Usually, this is cast in muted terms, as Neil Shenvi does when

he says that “theology governs political engagement.” But it amounts to the same claim.

This is a bizarre idea, one that would have been laughed out of any Christian church at any point in history before 1965 (along with all the other Left-dictated heresies and practices that have infected so many putatively Christian congregations). I also wrote at length about the Christian view of political enemies in my discussion of Schmitt’s *The Concept of the Political*. In short, Scripture makes a crucial distinction, lost in English, between the “public enemy” and the “private enemy,” and we are not only not commanded to love the public enemy (*hostis* in the Vulgate), but we are commanded to defeat him. Any Christian who says that harsh, decisive political action is inherently a failure of charity, even against the enemies of God, which is who the Left are, is either ignorant or mendacious, and he spits on the memory of the millions of Christians who have died to defeat the adversaries of Christ.

We should also note that among Christian-oriented opponents of NEOTR, there is never any attempt to create a list of what is unacceptable belief or practice on the Right. They merely emote and write as if it is obvious there are manifold glaring sins on the Right, and caterwaul that ignoring these unspecified sins will adversely affect Christians as a whole. What are those sins? They are never listed because they have in mind only one—so-called racism. But if racism is a sin (and a great deal, the vast majority, of what is called racism is no sin at all, and what actual race hatred there is today in evidence is mostly directed at white people, a sin about which these blinkered Christians care not at all), it is no special sin, merely one of endless variations on the cardinal sin of pride. And there is no sin at all in associating for political ends with sinners; each one of us does so every day. To declare that one sin, and one sin only, must have the effect of precluding political association is not godly; it is a hypocritical attack masquerading as godliness. It is the sin of the Pharisee, combined with the sin of Judas, swollen to monstrous proportion, and is itself a much worse sin than racism.

We also must ask why this group wants to destroy sections of the Right through false accusation. The Right has no national power, or ability to force its will in any area, so “criticism” has a fundamentally different character. The real goal of much of this supposedly needed criticism is merely to signal compliance to Left dictates, so as not to be

expelled from polite society. For very human reasons, these men are desperate to signal that they are not low-status and are not a threat. Not to mention, especially for the religious, it always feels better to be pure, and to be admired by those who are pure—and since the Left controls the Narrative, and therefore can define who is pure, perhaps none of this should be any surprise.

Objection: The Bible mandates public criticism of individual sins. Thus, the prophet Nathan rebuked King David for his slaying of Uriah the Hittite. Similarly, New Testament figures such as Saint Paul and Saint Peter rebuked each other.

Response: No Biblical rebuke involved weakening God’s people in the face of an existential threat. In fact, none of the rebukes which opponents of NEOTR cite were public at all. All New Testament references, which are few, to internal arguments are precisely that, internal arguments among believers. (And just because the story of Nathan in the Bible is no evidence that it was a truly public rebuke; the internet was not around in those days.) These were attempts to correct what was seen as incorrect action, in order to harmonize the approach of the people of God to the desires of God, not attempts to overthrow King David or to drive Saint Peter out of the community of Christians. Nobody was attempting to destroy anyone.

More broadly, we should not draw a false equivalence between rebukes of those on the Right and of those on the Left. Some argue that if a Christian is willing to publicly rebuke someone on the Left, he cannot claim that rebukes on the Right should be done in private. But this is foolishness. The Left is not Saint Peter to our Saint Paul, or the reverse. The Left is rather the literal successor of the priests of Baal, and the punishment for the priests of Baal was not being called names in public. It was being executed at God’s command.

Finally, all this is cherry-picking. One can find any number of Scriptural passages that command aggressive action against the enemies of God. I do not see any value to listing them out here, but they are there, and we all know they are there.

Objection: NEOTR tends to allow corruption of Christians, especially the young, because it causes evil to not be publicly identified and rejected. Christians will view sins of the Right as less serious if they are not continuously and publicly attacked.

Response: Most who make this argument never publicly identify and attack any Left belief as evil. They certainly don't continuously and publicly attack any Left evil. They very frequently, and often eagerly, publicly cooperate and ally with atheists, abortionists, and other evildoers. They bend to the spirit of the age and direct their fire largely at supposed sins on the Right. Therefore, it is obvious that in most instances, use of this objection is mendacious and disingenuous, meant merely to divert. But if, like Diogenes, we could find an honest man who uses this argument, we need only point out that discussion of the proper path among Christians is easy to conduct without aiming to benefit, and without benefiting, the Left.

Conclusion

None of this is abstract, an ivory-tower argument irrelevant to the real world. Quite the contrary. Before our eyes, in the year of our Lord 2023, the inevitable cycle of Left mass murder of those who would block the utopia just over the horizon is building again, as it has many times since the Enlightenment reified the Left's principles. We should understand this as malicious farce, and not obey the Left's commands to make ourselves ever more pure, with purity defined as forever more compliance with their dictates. We should not dance like a monkey to their organ grinder's tune. No enemies on the Right.

Related Offerings

Debate on 9/26/23, including me, hosted by Christopher Rufo (audio)

Debate on 8/30/23, between the Distributist and Wokal Distance (YouTube)

Kruptos: "Towards a Theology of NETTR"

Kruptos: "The Ongoing NETTR Discussion: Agency and Authority"

Johann Kurtz: "Know Your Enemy"

Dave Greene (the Distributist): "20 Rules for Frens"

John Carter: "The Internet Is a Brain with Schizophrenia"

Neil Shenvi: "No Enemies to the Right: Thoughts on Christian Political Engagement"

Rod Dreher: "Sometimes You Do Have to Punch Right"