



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on August 22, 2018

Millennial Writes “Evil is a Make-believe Concept” — Then Is Killed by ISIS

It was supposed to be a chance for adventure and the trip of a lifetime, the kind you tell your grandkids about. But Jay Austin and Lauren Geoghegan (shown) will never have kids. Their around-the-world bike tour ended abruptly this summer at the hands of Islamic State jihadis — just, ironically, about three months after Austin wrote in a blog that “evil is a make-believe concept.”



Austin and Geoghegan, both 29, were certainly of a mind. The pair met in 2012 in Washington, D.C., where Austin worked at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and Geoghegan had a job in Georgetown University’s admissions office. The two came from opposite ends of the country — Austin hailed from New Jersey while Geoghegan was a Southern California native — but they shared a love of travel.

Austin’s tastes ran riskier than Geoghegan’s, but his adventurous spirit rubbed off on her. The two decided to quit their jobs and embark upon a ‘round-the-world bike trip, which began in July 2017 at Africa’s southernmost tip. It was a risky endeavor, and their blog details some close calls they had along the way to and through Europe. But then came that fateful day.

On Day 369 of their voyage, July 29, Austin and Geoghegan were biking with other tourists on a stretch of road in southwestern Tajikistan. A carload of men who’d reportedly made a video pledging allegiance to the Islamic State noticed the travelers and, as the *New York Times* [relates](#), “A [grainy cellphone clip](#) recorded by a driver shows what happened next: The men’s Daewoo sedan passes the cyclists and then makes a sharp U-turn. It doubles back, and aims directly for the bikers, ramming into them and lurching over their fallen forms. In all, four people were killed: Mr. Austin, Ms. Geoghegan and cyclists from Switzerland and the Netherlands.”

“Two days later, the Islamic State released a video showing five men it identified as the attackers, sitting before the ISIS flag. They face the camera and make a vow: to kill ‘disbelievers,’” the paper continued.

The tragic event was covered in the news at the time. What breathed new life into the story, however, was the discovery of an April [blog post](#) in which Austin expressed the very “liberal” idea that evil is a myth:

You watch the news and you read the papers and you’re led to believe that the world is a big, scary place. People, the narrative goes, are not to be trusted. People are bad. People are evil. People are axe murderers and monsters and worse.

I don’t buy it. Evil is a make-believe concept we’ve invented to deal with the complexities of fellow humans holding values and beliefs and perspectives different than our own — it’s easier to dismiss an opinion as abhorrent than strive to understand it. Badness exists, sure, but even that’s quite rare. By and large, humans are kind. Self-interested sometimes, myopic sometimes, but kind.



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Generous and wonderful and kind. No greater revelation has come from our journey than this.

While some outlets have reported that Austin's and Geoghegan's trip was an attempt to prove evil didn't exist, this [doesn't appear true](#). Rather, their motivation was a desire to taste life and see the world. Yet there are lessons to be learned here.

While Austin did write in an October 2016 [blog post](#) that biking makes you "more vulnerable," he emphasized that it also makes you "more approachable" and invites hospitality. True — but it also invites a very different kind of attention.

I can relate to this because I, too, as an aspiring athlete many moons ago, once traveled to exotic locales such as Morocco and Algeria. It's important to realize that an American sticks out like a sore thumb in such lands; we generally dress and appear quite different. Moreover, given that we may be carrying money the [equivalent of many months' Third World wages](#), it's like Bill Gates walking down the street. Add to this that today Americans are prime terrorist targets, and, in a sense, we have bull's-eyes on our backs.

As for cycling, I used a bike for transportation briefly when I was 19 and living in the New York City area. I was almost hit by vehicles twice in a nine-month period. Thus, biking the world — including some of the wildest areas of Africa and the Near East — seems a bit like playing Russian roulette.

Yet most of the pair's experiences were good, and Austin detailed some [amazing examples](#) of the hospitality he received. I can relate to this, too, as I also encountered touchingly hospitable individuals (notably in southern France). And Austin was correct to bemoan a cynicism that would paint all people as untrustworthy. He was correct that most people are relatively kind.

It's the other two percent who kill you, though.

But there's another, deeper lesson here, one generally missed. The notion that "evil is a make-believe concept" is not only common today, it's a corollary of atheism (which is spreading in the West). Many dispute this, but it's just Philosophy 101 and something that could be called "philosophical fact." Here's how I [generally explain it](#) (with apologies to regular readers who've seen this once or twice — or seven times):

"If God exists and has a will — what is often called His 'law' or Truth — then we can say that morality is something real, existing apart from and being above man. Yet if God doesn't exist and man is, as Protagoras said, 'the measure of all things,' then humans are the source of what we only may call morality. And the operative word is 'call' because we are then confronted with a striking proposition: Morality doesn't really exist."

And then how can something rightly be labeled "evil"? Who is to say? As I further explained:

After all, imagine we learned that 90 percent of the world loved vanilla but hated chocolate. Would this make chocolate "bad" or "wrong"? It would just be a matter of whatever flavor works for you. But then how does it make any more sense to say that murder is "bad" or "wrong" if the only reason we do so is that the vast majority of the world prefers that we not kill other humans in a manner the vast majority considers "unjust"? If consensus preference is all it is, it then falls into the same category as flavors: taste. This explains why it's no surprise that "whatever works for you" is now often applied to behavior as well.

It's a notion leading to the idea that there aren't moral problems, only psychological ones; this is why what once were called sins now have been redefined as diseases and conditions of the brain. We're just



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organic robots who sometimes don't function in the accepted way, dontcha' know?

The point is that Austin had merely embraced the spirit of the age. Would he and Geoghegan have embarked upon their perilous journey if they hadn't fallen victim to it? Maybe, maybe not. But the real lesson is that the morally relativistic/nihilistic delusion makes civilization's journey perilous. After all, if everything is relative, mere preference, why not rape, kill, or steal if it pleases you? Who's to say it's wrong? And if there's no evil, why worry about what cultures are introduced into Western nations? For then there is no "better" or "worse" — only the "different."

We don't know if moral relativism/nihilism killed Austin and Geoghegan. But this juvenile philosophy, which makes sociopathy seem sensible, certainly is killing our civilization.

Photo of Jay Austin and Lauren Geoghegan: [Simplycycling.org](#)



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