

The Mind of the Terrorist

Seventy years ago, a judge named Robert Schirokauer heard cases against Nazis in his Berlin court. As a young boy growing up in Germany, Nazi gangs had regularly beaten him up, so he was very familiar with the evil of the Nazis. Even though the Nazis were not yet in control of Germany, things were very different. Now Schirokauer was hearing the Nazis talk about their crimes. Now he was listening to the Nazis defend their actions. Now he was seeing the absence of remorse in the Nazis. Now he was seeing that the Nazis genuinely believed that what they were doing was good. Schirokauer was troubled to the core of his being. He became consumed with the question, "Since people do what they believe is good, how do people know or decide what is good?" In June 1933, four months after Hitler overthrew Kaiser Wilhelm II's regime, Schirokauer fled Germany using a fake passport with his new name, Robert S. Hartman.

Many years later, living and teaching in the United States, Hartman unlocked the code. He did what no philosopher or scientist throughout all of history had been able to do: he defined "the good." In 1955, Hartman opened a new era of understanding when he presented his findings at the National Philosopher's Convention in Chicago. He not only presented a definition of "the good," he presented a deductive science of the "good." Dr. Robert Hartman had discovered the "physics of personality and thinking" and wrote a definitive description of it in his book, The Structure of Value. The terrorist's mind of the Nazis had been the catalyst for this genius to discover the science of formal axiology.

Now we fast forward to New York City and Washington D.C. in September 2001. Dr. Hartman has been dead for 28 years, having died two days after receiving notification of his nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize. Since his death, the Hartman Institute at the University of Tennessee has advanced his work and I have applied this science to professional and personal development and decision-making contexts. Now Americans are more troubled than ever by the same questions that had consumed Dr. Hartman seventy years earlier: "How could a person, or group of people, think that it was good to hijack and fly jets into occupied office buildings? How do such people think such that they can do such a thing and think that it is good?" While Americans had asked the same question after Timothy McVeigh bombed the federal office building in Oklahoma City, the magnitude of the terrorists' deeds of September 11, 2001 heightened the concern a thousand-fold.

Dr. Hartman's and my work in axiology shed light on and help us understand and measure how we think, how others think, and how terrorists think. Hartman identified and defined three different ways things, people and ourselves can be known. He also discovered that the properties of those different ways of knowing (which he titled the dimensions of value) were exactly the same as the properties of the different sets in transfinite math.

Significant advances have been made since Hartman's early discoveries, including Dr. Mark Moore's discovery that the properties of the different dimensions of value were identical to the properties of the different wave characteristics in quantum mechanics and were able to be modeled by the math of quantum physicists. My studies in the nature of our brains coupled to my work using axiology in industry, has led to my concluding that the different parts of our brains that process the different dimensions of value act like our senses. Both our senses and the different processing regions of our brains are modular, independent, interdependent, variable in their sensitivity, and specifically suited for certain evaluations or tasks. Just as one person's sense of smell is significantly more sensitive than his eyesight, a second person can have razor sharp eyesight and a weak sense of smell. In this case, it is more likely that the second person's apartment smells worse and looks better than the first's!

Dr. Hartman identified three dimensions of value (different ways of knowing things): intrinsic, extrinsic, and systemic value. He also said that these dimensions are applied to the world around us (things and people) and to ourselves. This means that there are six different modules of thinking that can be involved in our deciding "the good." No one tested over the past fourteen years has demonstrated that s/he uses all six thinking modules equally to make a decision. So in other words, everyone only sees part of the picture, when making decisions, evaluating things, and thinking about one's self.

When a person does not use the appropriate thinking modules the decision looks good to the person while being obviously bad to others. Again, our thinking is like our senses, so an example using senses can make things clearer. A person can use his hands to "see," but in many cases such a substitution can be catastrophic (feeling his way across a room is OK, across a freeway is lethal). A person with no sense of smell may choose a skunk as a pet, while everyone with any sense of smell knows what a horrible choice that animal is as a pet. We run the risk of improperly or wrongly deciding when we use the wrong thinking module to reach a decision. So if we think about how much money we can get for an inherited heirloom, we have misapplied extrinsic value to a thing that is rich in intrinsic value, we have barbarized a gift of love. So how do terrorists think that lead them to be so much in error?

The Key Components of the Terrorist Mind

1. A terrorist does not have the capacity to think about people as individual persons. Most people are able to value others intrinsically and therefore are unable to understand how a terrorist could do what s/he does. Just as a person without a sense of smell can have a skunk as a pet, a terrorist does not see the infinite, unique, singular value of people and therefore does not see what is wrong with killing or maiming another person. Actually, when this part of the brain is not working, the resultant effect is worse than just ignoring; it leads to suspicion concerning the inherent goodness of the individuals. In other words, the unique, singular value not only is not processed, it is seen as being something that is bad. So terrorists believe it is good to treat individuals with contempt, to mistreat them, to cause them pain, and to devalue their lives! It is good from the perspective of the terrorist to rid the world of these people who think individually, think they deserve to be treated as individuals and who seek their own well-being.

2. The terrorist, like the Nazis and like gang members, has a fixation on systemic value. This means that they emotionally crave membership in the organization, group, or order to which they belong. They are not able to see or reason about the rightness of the membership requirements, rules, justice, principles, or reasoning. They blindly endorse whatever requirements to membership their group requires. The rules are the rules and they are not able to question them. The goals and values of the group are the righteous law, and they cannot question those. The terrorist does not reason, s/he just blindly embraces that which the organization holds to be true.

3. The terrorist has no sense or awareness of his/her own intrinsic value. These people have no sense of self, of one's own individual life, or individuality. Not only is there no self-esteem, there is a very limited sense of being. This means that the terrorist gets his/her sense of being from something other than being, feelings, love, or personal relationships. These people cannot love because no self exists from which love can originate. Couple this with the blind allegiance to the group, and you have a person whose meaning and very life comes from being a dutiful soldier and member of the group. The goals and purposes of the group become the source of life for the terrorist. This is why it is not hard to get kamikazes to fly their planes into battleships, cult members to drink laced Kool-Aid, or fanatics to fly planes into buildings. If a person gets his sense of meaning from belonging to the group, then life itself comes from standing for those

things and doing those things that advances the group's cause. While these people often have an awareness of the skills and abilities that s/he bring to the group, the sense of deserving does not accompany that awareness. Because there is no sense of self, the idea of deserving to feel good, to be recognized, or to be acknowledged does not enter the decision process.

4. The terrorist has a blind fixation of his/her own sense of destiny and purpose. This is the part of the brain that processes one's own systemic value. This is one's own "self-image." This is where a person processes understanding and definitions about one's own self. If a person defines himself as being dependable and this part of his brain cannot process or think about alternatives, then that person will never quit - no matter what the cost. This fixation results in the person's being unable to distinguish when a value or commitment is critical and when it is merely important. All self-held values and all commitments are viewed equally. There is no way that the terrorist can consider reneging on a commitment because to do so would be the same as denying one's own self.

This is wrong thinking because it leads the person to think that the striving after and fulfillment of those goals and commitments will fulfill his/her own destiny. The person substitutes his/her sense of self and value with a set of goals, commitments, and ideals. Just as the blind person uses his hands to feel his way across a room, this person goes through life striving after self-imposed goals, believing that the attainment of those goals will lead to fulfillment. Because these goals and standards are not clearly defined, they reside in the mind of the person as a fuzzy, general sense of direction. This results in the person's not having an accurate picture of attainment because s/he is not able to see it when s/he reaches it. So the striving and pushing to perfectly belong to the group continue, never satisfying the basic drives of the human person, and therefore pushing the person all the more to deny those basic drives within him/herself.

As you think about the choices and actions of terrorists, Nazis, cult members, or gang members, keep in mind that they do not think in the same ways that you do and therefore their decisions will not make sense to you. Just as the blind golfer's choosing to play golf at night is crazy from the perspective of a sighted golfer, the actions of terrorists make no sense to people whose intrinsic and systemic brain modules are working and processing clearly.

Ultimately, you will not be able to reason with a terrorist, because the reasoning part of his brain is broken. Terrorists think they reason accurately, but in fact major parts of their brains are

deformed or broken. You will not be able to engage personally with terrorists, because the parts of their brains that engage personally are broken. And you will not be able to live in a world with terrorists, because they cannot see the value of people who love other individuals and they cannot believe that the world is good when people different from themselves cooperate and co-exist.

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