

Existential angst and how it can lead to religious terrorism

The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy.

Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it.

Through violence you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth.

Through violence you may murder the hater, but you do not murder hate.

In fact, violence merely increases hate.

So it goes.

Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars.

Darkness cannot drive out darkness:

only light can do that.

Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

He declares violence to be the wrong way of trying to end hate and evil and thus creating light and love. Light and love are seen to give value to life so it follows that violence is a way to try and make life have meaning.

Is belief in God a wonderful and peaceful thing and distorted by religious bloodletters? But the reality is that no belief can guarantee inner peace in this turbulent world. The evil and violence in the world require a response and some understandably feel that the appropriate, fastest and best response is violence. Religious terrorists have startling moral views. They feel God inspires them to have them and rewards them and thrive on the promise that God will reward their struggles given long enough. They experience God as giving them spiritual and emotional support through it all. So the bad morals become evidence that their bloodletting version of God exists. The "morals" capture what they understand by God. Even peaceful views of God argue that violence and evil are needed in some way otherwise they would not be happening. Intending the belief to be peaceful does not change the fact that it cannot truly be. Pretending otherwise is incompatible with respect for the victims of religious violence.

Simone De Beauvoir once wrote: "Meaning is never fixed. It must be constantly won." There is no simple formula. Religion tells people there is. They do what it says and still feel unfulfilled and useless. They think if they become extremists and maybe kill for the religion they will find the elusive meaning. Whether we decide to be good or bad we are seeking meaning. The drive for meaning has nothing to do with being good or bad. They are just tools. A religion that says it gives meaning to life and turns people good and peaceful is a fraud.

Religion likes to say how it is essential if you want to feel your life has meaning. So it tries to trigger an existential anxiety and agony in you to create a dependence on its "services" and clergy. But what if the person continues to suffer? A person can suffer from existential anxiety that leads her or him to be willing to kill themselves in an attempt to relieve the agony. This is thought to explain the acts of some Islamic State terrorists. It can happen when a religion or anything gives them bullshit answers when they want to feel their lives count for something. A religion with violent role models such as Moses or Jesus or Muhammad will be a catalyst for all that. And a religion with a violent God who gives it scriptures will be as bad.

The terrorists know they cannot really terrify a whole nation. So why do they use terror as a weapon? It is in the hope of seeming noble so that others will want to copy them to the degree that terrorism becomes so prevalent the nation cannot function and its inner peace is ruined. This is an act of faith in their ideology which they think is divine and obviously true. That is key to understanding why they use terror as a weapon. Part of it is down to a belief in revenge which like it or not has enjoyed scriptural approval in many faiths. Such doctrines are so terrible that the believer feels he wants to suffer and die for at least he controls them instead of waiting for fate to take over and maybe make things worse.