

## ARIEL GLUCKLICH'S BOOK, DYING FOR HEAVEN, SHOWS THAT RELIGIOUS MURDERERS FOR FAITH DO SO FOR THEY GET SPIRITUAL ENJOYMENT

“What is objectionable, what is dangerous about extremists is not that they are extreme, but that they are intolerant. The evil is not what they say about their cause, but what they say about their opponents.” —Robert F. Kennedy

Ariel Glucklich, Professor of Religion, Georgetown, points to the fact that "people go to war not just out of aggression but for honour and even for love."

He warns in this book that religious terrorists are so determined that threats and incentives to make them leave their path will not work. In the light of nations being terrorists and not just individuals or small groups this is quite alarming. We could be facing a religion spawned nuclear war. He says that a day will come when this happens and points to how some Muslim leaders were looking forward the nuclear countdown for Israel. My thought here is that there is enough to possibly make such war happen without religion contributing or being the only necessary contributing factor.

The only criticism I have of this book is that he never asks, "Is the belief that faith can give pleasure and gives you pleasure - whether the belief is right or wrong - enough to do all that harm?" It is obvious that spiritual pipe dreams can be that damaging.

A religion needs to be considered as a unit not as a collection of individuals for it is not a mere collection but a unit. That is why a religion's violent past especially when it had no answer to nobody bigger than itself reflects what we can expect of it maybe one day again. The tendency to religious violence has to appear in at least some individuals for the fact is the religion as a unit is tarnished and bloodstained. It has to have an effect however hard it is to find the effect.

The book mentions different forms of groups - natural groups is interesting. A natural group may need no founder. He distinguishes moral group from natural. But is it really true that a religion cannot be a natural group when religions come in all shapes and forms? Not all religion is obvious religion.

Glucklich thinks evolution is the reason that we have pleasure and joy and thus it must be the cause of religion if religion is about joy. He says "the destructive aspects of religion are inseparable from the constructive aspects, since both give rise to a profound feeling of joy." He says that "God Himself is often identified with happiness - either as the source or the very essence of this feeling."

Evolution is red in tooth and claw so that would be very worrying. The good side is not really good if it is only luck that makes it a good side. A great experience in a hospital that treats only with arsenic is not really a good experience. It is a bad one worthy only of condemnation. Religion is evil if it thinks of itself as importantly good!

He explains that religious terrorists speak of how happy they are but they see that as a reward or by-product of their suffering for a divine or religious or spiritual purpose. He discusses hedonistic restraint. I'd mention that that is the only real way to succeed at being hedonistic. All hedonism has some level of restraint. He points to how if you experience self-discipline such as by refusing to drink water and then drinking the brain will reward you with good feelings about self-mastery and doing the right thing. So it is possible to use discipline and service in a hedonistic way. That would be an abuse of discipline and service for they are not just about how you feel or might feel or are going to feel. Glucklich writes, "the general principle appears to be that the greater the cost of a decision, the greater the reported benefit (pleasure). Participants in such experiments rarely understand why they report their particular level of happiness- they may think they are simply responding to the quality of an item, an exclusive club activity, or a marital partner. In fact, the cost of their choice and the removal of options have a great deal to do with their level of satisfaction. All of this may be invisible to the person who makes the choice." And he adds, "According to basic prospect theory, the fear of loss exceeds the advantage of gain."

Glucklich points out that "the terrorist who chooses the day and method of his own death may be deriving greater satisfaction from the act of choosing freely than the man who merely survives a dreary and involuntary status quo." For Glucklich, "only religion offers a compelling way - for all those who take religion seriously - to turn the act of sacrifice into the very source of joy and happiness." He learns this from how the suicide aggressor speaks of his faith and his joy in his faith and in what he is doing as terrible as it is. He thinks religion is a form of hedonism.

Religion may lead to violence against yourself such as how people have hurt themselves by religious practice and how some religionists will not use medicine for they think it is a sin. Gandhi he says fasted to make those who hurt him feel bad. It is wrong to think that a religion just hurts outsiders and other religions. It may not but may hurt its own or be some kind

of masochistic experiment. He observes that faith terrorists are trying to fight their own heretics and moderates in their religion for they see them as threats to the purity and integrity of the religion and its duty to be true to its message.

Glucklich refers to Suso's account of suffering. Suso says that suffering and dissolution are the same thing. Its a breaking down from what you should and can be. Suso says that it is not really suffering that exists. It is sufferings. Each form of suffering is a league of its own. It could have a word of its own to describe it. Spiritual suffering for Suso means you part with all you are and have for God. Suffering always involves surrender to something you cannot do anything about right now. You may do something about it in a minute but you can do nothing about the suffering you have in the present moment.

Glucklich quotes the psychologist Erikson on Gandhi, "Here self-suffering could harbour the despotism of a cruel (if 'cruelly kind') father who, by his self-suffering, hurts ever so much more vindictively, and ever so more unfathomly than an outright angry one." Glucklich says it may be unfair to think Gandhi was that passive-aggressive and righteously vindictive but argues that self-sacrifice can be intended to hurt people in the guise of loving them. It is trying to hurt people by making them think the suffering and the message it gives is their fault. Christianity is a pro-violence faith in outlook for it makes you feel Jesus chose to hurt himself for your sins on the cross and even if there was no sinner but you he had to be slaughtered and degraded for you.

Glucklich points out that suicide bombers care less about how many they take with them than they care about the psychological message that their action will deliver. I would amend that to spiritual message. This is more than about getting a mental or emotional reaction from people. It is sending a message, "You are bad and sinful."

We don't risk our lives just for the greater good or to survive. We just risk them. For example, we may perform dangerous sports. That can lead to you taking the risk that the message will thrive or you may think God has blessed your mission and so it has to survive.

He points out that the terrorists believe that what they are doing is a loving sacrifice for God and for the righteous. They feel inspired in doing so and part of that inspiration is the good feelings. Also, there will be the promise of even more good feelings typically as a reward in the afterlife.

The feelings are so powerful that trying to assist the terrorist to see the light can backfire. The terrorist may fail to see that he is being used by a bad stupid mob with a bad stupid cause.

Glucklich asks, "Why is cognitive dissonance so uncomfortable that it must be resolved at all cost?" One suggestion he gives elsewhere in relation to the followers of Mrs Keech when she was proven to be a fraud to her followers they reacted by believing in her even more and getting more attached to her for the pain of realising they were fools was too much. But why would being right matter so much? It can only matter to that degree if you think you want and need not truth but truth from God. There is something existential and spiritual about it. You act as if you are given the purpose by some higher power of adhering to this "truth". It need not be explicitly religious to be so toxic. It is probably worse if it is not obviously religious. It is harder to deal with then!

The religious terrorists according to Glucklich are not as irrational as we like to think. You can be rational and wrong. They give reasons for their stances that attract others or at least get grudging admiration. We are beings in a world where all vie for resources and stature. Life is struggle even if we are not aware. Being not aware is part of struggling too for it reduces the stress of the struggle. So we all have reasons to think that the person or the group needs to fight. So it is often said that we don't need reasons to do harm in the name of faith or religion or politics. We have them already. We just need reasons to give in to the reasons that call us to kill and hurt. That reluctance can only be overcome by a sense of vocation - you think you are helping the evil of others destroy them for evil does not last. It is faith in the power of evil to self-destruct itself and take those who embrace it with them. So your job is to give it a little help. It explains why a few suicide bombers think their impact will be huge. God is about two ideas: one that evil is inherently self-destructive and two is that he gives it a hand to self-destruct by using evil against itself. The religious terrorist sees the battle as good versus evil or using evil to avert a worse evil. He consoles himself by noting how the good often at war with itself so everything seems to be about hostility on some level.

The author finds that religion gives people transcendent joy that can lead them to be great saints who change the world for the better or it can just as easily go the other way and make them joyful at the thought of say becoming suicide-bombers for faith. "To understand what makes religion truly dangerous in a nuclear scenario, we need to realize that religion at its very best - the place where grace and love meet patience and humility - is astonishingly, where the seeds of self-annihilation may sprout. The feelings of love that great mystics report as emanating from God at the moment of supreme spiritual achievement are based on an error that is unique to pleasure." He calls this effect, The Prozac Effect. Indeed if brain chemicals are doing it you would expect it to either make you very harmless or very harmful. Chemicals go either way. He says the Effect gets its value from seeming to come not from you or your biology but from say God. It feels like it comes from something bigger than you. So "God is a proxy for supreme joy, for feeling really good." They deny that pleasure is

just there. It is not just there - it is put there. It has to be put there. I would add that the danger with pleasure is that it always feels like it was put there. It is like you need to go to a place to find it. Religion will enhance that perception.

The book points out that pleasure is not a simple thing but rather a vague thing. It is hard to be accurate about it. So he says that mystical pleasure is impossible to describe accurately and if pleasure is going to turn you into an assassin in the name of faith spiritual and mystical will be worse. How? If it is so unclear you don't know what effect it is going to have on you and neither does anybody else. What does spiritual enjoyment actually mean? Most of us call stuff spiritual when it is naturally explicable. A nice sunset may be described like a mystical religious experience but it is not really! So killing for genuine spiritual reasons such as when you have a personal experience that will be uniquely individual to you and you feel that some power that nature or no one can detect or explain is changing you and inspiring you.

Mystics love God so much they want to find him and get experiences that they interpret as being of God. Interestingly Jesus Christ never claimed such experiences. Anyway if mystics pose any potential danger then the desire to be like them if strong enough can be bad too. Love comes in many forms so Glucklich asks if the mystic loves like a parent would? A lover? A friend?

I'd add in more examples than that. And a mystic may love God like a parent and a lover so it may be a very broad mixture of loves. Its loves not love. There is some ingredient of social support there - you and God are your little unit.

The book talks about the euphoria experienced by those who are about to conduct religious terrorism. The euphoria is there no doubt though it should not be. It is almost as if it rises from something or somebody outside of the person. It is like a magical person is putting it there. He cites the case of Hizbollah's Salah Ghandour in 1995 whose last video tape recordings show his joy at about what he was going to do. He drove a car rigged with explosives and killed himself and a number of victims and it had taken him three years to convince his leaders that he wanted to commit to a suicide mission. The book says the euphoria is sufficient to motivate a religious terrorist.

I must express disappointment at how the author failed to point out that there is another motivation to talk about here. The killer to be is not doing it merely because he feels great joy but because he sees the joy as a communication from God. It is God saying to him to do it and rewarding him in anticipation.

The book says, "mystics represent a tiny minority of religious practitioners, and they are rarely individually influential." But he thinks that though most of us do not have a mystical love union with God it is enough to think of God as being what love is about and what being loving is about. That suffers from the problem that if spiritual mystical union with God is such a joyful mystery a person can be a mystic without advertising or showing it. A mystic doesn't have to navel gaze all the time or even a lot of the time! If the mystic is the best and most defining person in a religion then religion as popularly understood is not really religion - only a tiny bit is!

Glucklich thinks for religious people that "religious happiness trumps religious knowledge." He thinks religion is not really about duties and duties to God but thrills. "People are not religious out of a sense of duty." So he concludes, "spiritual devotion is more dangerous than blind observance of religious law." So, "the more voluntary an adherent's membership in a religious group is - whether by converting, becoming a monk, or joining an world church" the more you can expect religious suicides can happen.

If you live in squalor it is understandable if you think you can eliminate yourself for some good cause - eg religious suicide bombing. Hell with a purpose seems to be better than sitting around Hell letting it happen to you. He says, "suicide bombings have little to do with personal despair." As evidence he points to the leader of the 9/11 attacks, Atta, who was a man of advantageous background and education. He says they are not really suicide bombers so much as people who use themselves as weapons in some kind of strategy.

He points out how such killers end up being glorified in cultural ways such as songs and so on.

Groups are involved in religious acts of violence as are lone wolf operators. Both have the main thing in common - they have reasons for thinking they have a holy mission. There is no such thing as a strict lone wolf. That person has been formed by somebody or something even at a distance. The believer in God sees God as forming him through others so faith in God is ultimately to blame.

He writes that he does not "believe that the question of God's existence can or should be settled by whether He consoles, redeems, or gives other forms of pleasure."

Dying for Heaven should be taken seriously for the testimony of those who knew murderous religious militants and those who were involved in such terrorism do bear witness to an amazing buzz at the though they are doing something so extreme for a worthy cause.

Let us look at a study that may question that.

The Journal of Individual Differences talks about the extremist mindset and says it really exists. Janko Mededovic and Goran Knezevic talk about the Militant Extremist Mindset or MEM. Employed in Belgrade's Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research, they found you can tell if a person or group will probably commit acts of violence when you learn what they believe and what reasons motivate them.

One thing all the extremists they studied had was a belief that violence can and often does work for the greater good. COMMENT: Nobody has the right to deny that any political party or religion that exists today is dependent on killing opponents inside and out. They might not do it but violence put them where they are in the society map. For example, if Catholicism had not managed to get Jewish critics silenced and killed, get heretical groups liquidated and control women by burning them as witches do you think it would even be around? Moral and doctrinal purity demand some kind of elimination process and it can be a bloody elimination. The hidden message of politics and religions is that violence has served them well.

Another is that the potential terrorists think cultures and the world in general are going off the moral rails. COMMENT: There is so much lying and corruption that peace cannot do much if anything. For example, if you believe abortion is murder and getting more and more rife and extreme you will feel that either way, peaceful protest or violence is still leading to babies being killed so it does not matter what way you go. The belief that evil people eventually eat themselves up make you think that if you hurt them you are saving them from worse than what they can do to themselves. The notion that evil defeats itself encourages you to give it a helping hand for nobody says it should be left alone to fester.

Another making what might be termed the top three is the sense and feeling that some godly force bigger than them is poised to use the violence for a greater good and justifies or at least understands it. COMMENT: This belief tends to result in suicide bombing martyrs. This is closely related to the previous one where you are seen as helping evil self-destruct. It may not be articulated prophet style as in dictations from God running, "Thus says the Lord, the United Kingdom and USA will bear the fruit of their evil actions and perish in agony. But beauty and love shall rise from the ashes." But there is a prophet forecast mentality there.

The links between the extremists expresses something. You cannot think you need violence without feeling you are a hero to be or a potential one. You get pleasure even if it is only relief at the thought that you can maybe do something big about how society is going down the moral toilet. You get pleasure and a sense of support from thinking you are acting for and with God.

Take what Kennedy said about the danger with the fanatic is how he thinks of enemies and perceived enemies. All our insights about what religious terrorists have in common can be summarised by saying the problem is how enemies are evaluated. Let us explore this. God goes with the notion that he despite appearances will be working against the wicked to support the good. Crushing them or killing them is seen as paving way for the greater good. Or it is seen AS the greater good. They are seen as lacking the spiritual gift of spiritual pleasure that God grants which is why they are sinners or rebels from God or potential rebels. Each rebel is a potentially worse rebel which makes it more disturbing. If a religious person sees an abortion affirming culture as a murderous one what can you expect them to do but want to kill the people responsible for that culture or who are part of it?

Belief can get a person to kill for God or faith or the faith-group. Belief can also remove reasons for leaving people alone away from those who want to kill heretics and infidels. Either of those scenarios is bad and you can have both together at the one time as well.

Glucklich reminds us that the mentally-ill no more use violence than the mentally healthy do. It is good to see this book moving away from the bigoted and lazy assumption that religious terrorists are to be assumed to be driven by mental illness such as schizophrenia or whatever. If you want to blame religion and say it is the mental illness then that is up to you. Antisocial personality disorders often get the blame too. But if somebody is not fitting in society but is happy with God and feels close to God and God is enough for him then can you call that person a sufferer of an antisocial disorder? Faith can hide how much hate a person has for society. It is easy for the believer in God to be nice to you and charming when he thinks he is channelling and directing his hate by getting God to do bad things to you if not now then in God's own time.

Those who act alone rather than group members tend to show signs of personality disorders or mental illness. There could be some psychotic symptoms even in those who have not developed full mental illness. What counts then as such a symptom? Disintegration mainly.

Accordingly another body of research has found that developing this personality trait of disintegration which it describes as, "proneness to see and feel connections, among factually unrelated phenomena, leading to the weakened reality testing and various psychotic-like phenomena" seems to be the symptom we should talk about. It is essentially seeing meaning and patterns in life or events that are in fact not there. The religious terrorist may go on a shooting rampage if he opens his

Bible/Koran looking for a message from God and sees a pro-violence one. It does not matter if the terrorist finds this message strong or weak. It may be enough to get him to act violently. The trouble is that imagining signs is what fuels religious faith and trust in God! Can we call this a mental illness only when it may lead to something bad? The problem makes it hard to find clues if x will suicide-bomb instead of y who thinks the same way.

#### LAST BUT NOT LEAST

Dying for Heaven is a timely book. The real blame for religious terrorism is schools and parents and clergy who condition and influence their children into religious faith. Beliefs kill not guns and not terrorist's bombs. What leads to the bomb being made and carried and used in the first place? Somebody's belief.

All religion can say is to quote the book, "If one can love God, one surely ought to love another human." Then the next sentence is, "In practice, however, no such horizontal love can be detected in large-scale groups."

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Janko Međedović, Goran Knežević. Dark and Peculiar: The Key Features of Militant Extremist Thinking Pattern? Journal of Individual Differences, 2019.