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### Fifth: "Thou shalt not kill". The dark side of faith

You're walking along the railroad tracks when you see a runaway [trolley](#) barreling down. It is about to hit five people standing on the track. You are next to a lever. If you pull this lever, the trolley will switch to a side track. However, you notice that there is one person on the side track.

You have two options:

1. Do nothing, and the trolley kills the five people on the main track.
2. Pull the lever, diverting the trolley onto the side track where it will kill one person.

What should you do?

When we put this question, 90% all around the world say that they would pull the lever. That is because one is less than five. So it seems that the moral choice of the lesser evil is a matter of arithmetic. This is perfectly in line with **Jeremy Bentham's** utilitarianism ("It is the greatest good to the greatest number of people which is the measure of right and wrong"). So, we can rewrite the Fifth Commandment as follows: *You Shall Not Kill , unless killing fewer people will allow to save a greater number of people.*

If it is so, if we want a human being to commit actions that involve the death of some individuals, we have just to convince him or her that this action will allow to save a greater number of people and his or her conscience will not be disturbed. In fact, many terrorist proclamations are based on the concept of the salvation of mistreated multitudes.

However, if we take a look at a different version of the same moral dilemma, things change.

Now there is the same runaway trolley and the same five people on the truck about to be killed, but you are looking from above a footbridge. Next to you there is a huge man. You know that with his bulk he could stop the train and save those five people.

You have two options:

1. Do nothing, and the trolley kills the five people on the track.
2. Push the fat man off the bridge, so that he dies, but the five people are saved.

What should you do?

When we put the "trolley problem" this way, 95% of people say that they would not push the fat man over. Yet the arithmetic calculation is the same: 1 v 5!

The difference seems to be that in the first case the person dies because he is on the track by accident and his death is not necessary to save the other five, while in the other case killing the fat man is essential to save them. To refuse to kill the fat man is in line with **Immanuel Kant's** thought ("Act in such a way you always treat humanity, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end"). There is a moral necessity, absolute and forever valid, from which all other duties and obligations descend (Kantian *categorical imperative*). But Jihadist terrorism is comparable to the "fat man" case, not to the "side track" one. It is the difference between killing and

letting die, the same difference we can find between “strategic bombing” (it is when we bomb military targets and public infrastructures to win a war, even if this makes many innocent victims) and “terror bombing” (an indiscriminate bombing to frighten a country into surrender). The first is in accordance with the *doctrine of the double effect* proposed by **St. Thomas Aquinas** (“If a bad effect is not the means by which one achieves a good effect, action is not reprehensible”).

The utilitarian calculus is no longer applicable to jihadist terrorism because the death of Western people is not a collateral damage but a means to the ultimate goal. Only individuals recognized as "psychopaths" believe that pushing down the fat man is a good deed, but terrorists are not psychopaths. (Silke, A., 2003).

Also admitted that the cold utilitarian calculus was always permissible, this does not take account of human sensitivity. In fact, let us examine another moral dilemma:

Jim finds himself in the central square of a small South American town. Tied up against the wall are a row of twenty Indians, most terrified, a few defiant, in front of them several armed men in uniform.

The captain in charge explains that the Indians are a random group of the inhabitants who, after recent acts of protest against the government, are just about to be killed to remind other possible protestors of the advantages of not protesting.

However, since Jim is an honoured visitor from another land, the captain is happy to offer him a guest's privilege of killing one of the Indians himself.

If Jim accepts, then as a special mark of the occasion, the other Indians will be let off.

If Jim refuses, then there is no special occasion. Twenty Indians will be killed.

What should you do **if you were Jim**?

You probably would not be able to kill an innocent person, even if it is a good deed in an utilitarian sense. That is because there is a crucial moral distinction between a person killed by me and a person killed by someone else. We are "moral agents" who decide according to our own integrity and preserving our psychological identity. To kill an innocent person is not enough to do it because this is good, but we need something that preserves our integrity, that resolves our *Cognitive Dissonance*.

That is why many anthropological and sociological theories concerning Islamic terrorism are fallacious. Some readings of the phenomenon tend to minimize the role of religion and fideism in favour of explanations centered on psychological, political and social aspects, but to defuse the power of a categorical imperative we need another categorical imperative!

To kill innocent people believing we are right we need to be bearers of a world view that does not give equal dignity to "us" and to others. We need a faith!

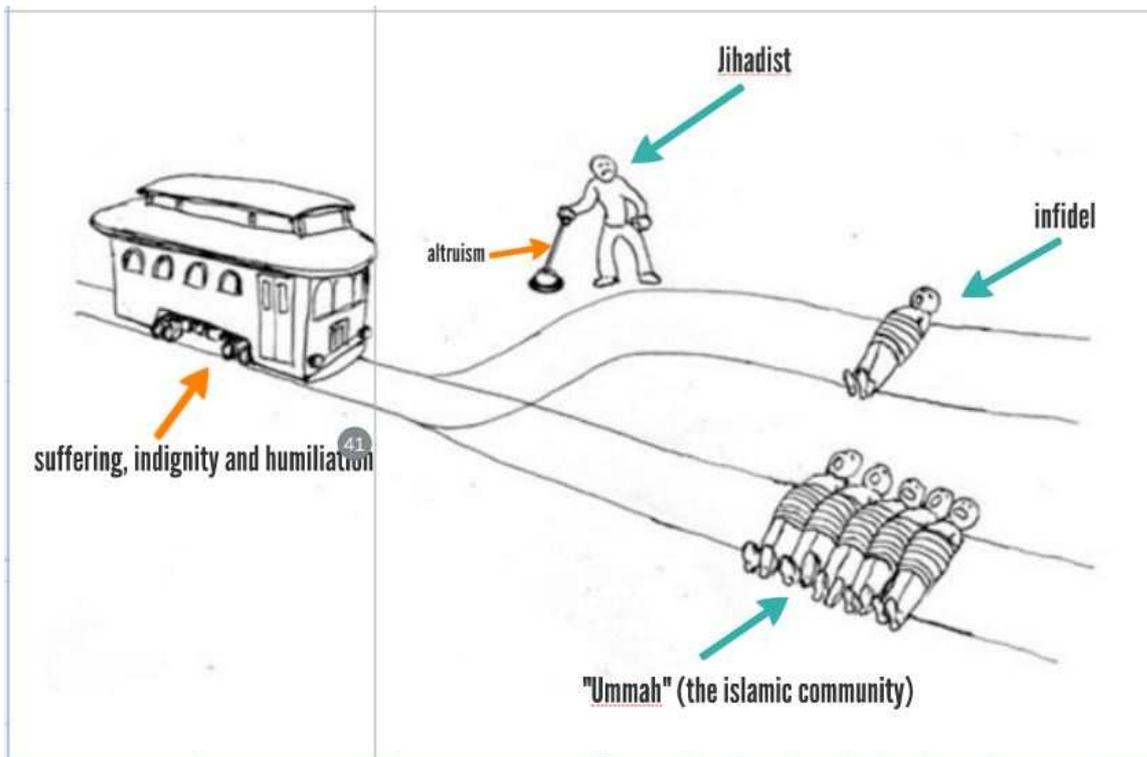
We need an exclusive belief system that puts one and only Truth and makes us look at the outside world with suspicion, fear and hate. Denying this is only possible by acting like an ostrich or applying to that form of intellectual dishonesty what is called "politically correct".

So the explanations based on the concept of "superstructure" (globalization, cultural fragility, and so on) only contain part of the truth. Let us see an example:

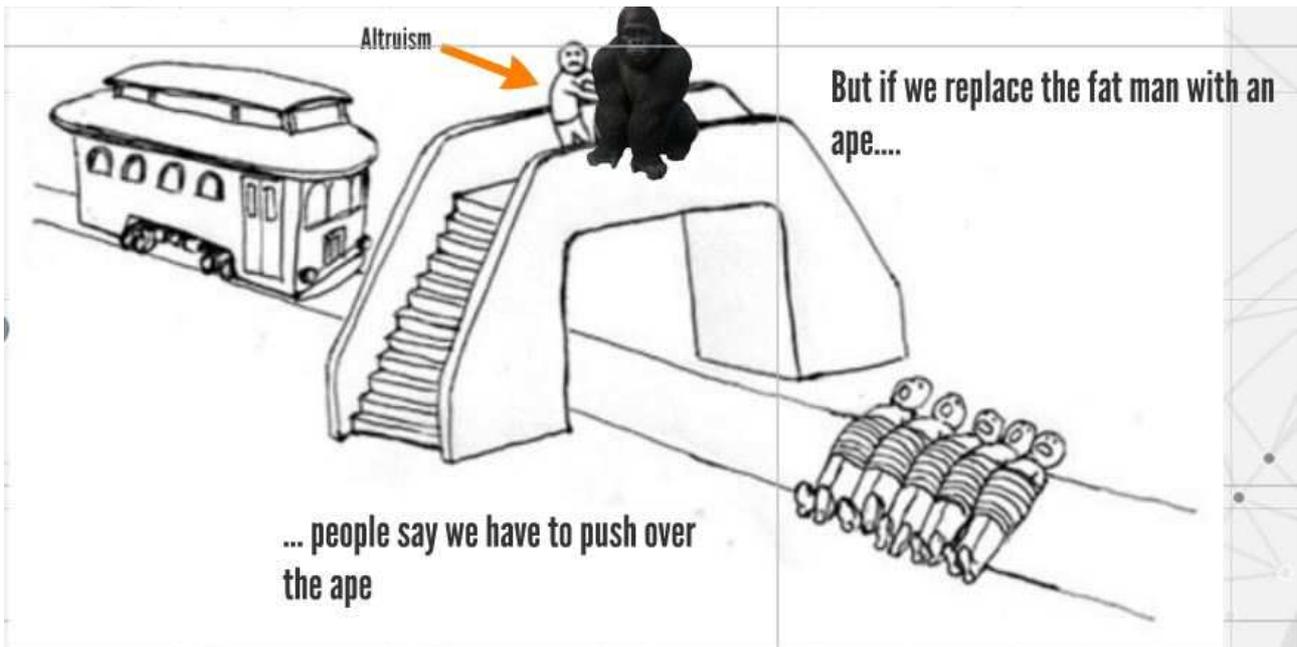
According to Scott Atran [Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) France],

- Religion has little to do with Islamist terrorism
- Isis exploits the potential of suffering, indignity and humiliation in Muslim societies
- So what motivates participation in violent political action is a "**parochial altruism**"

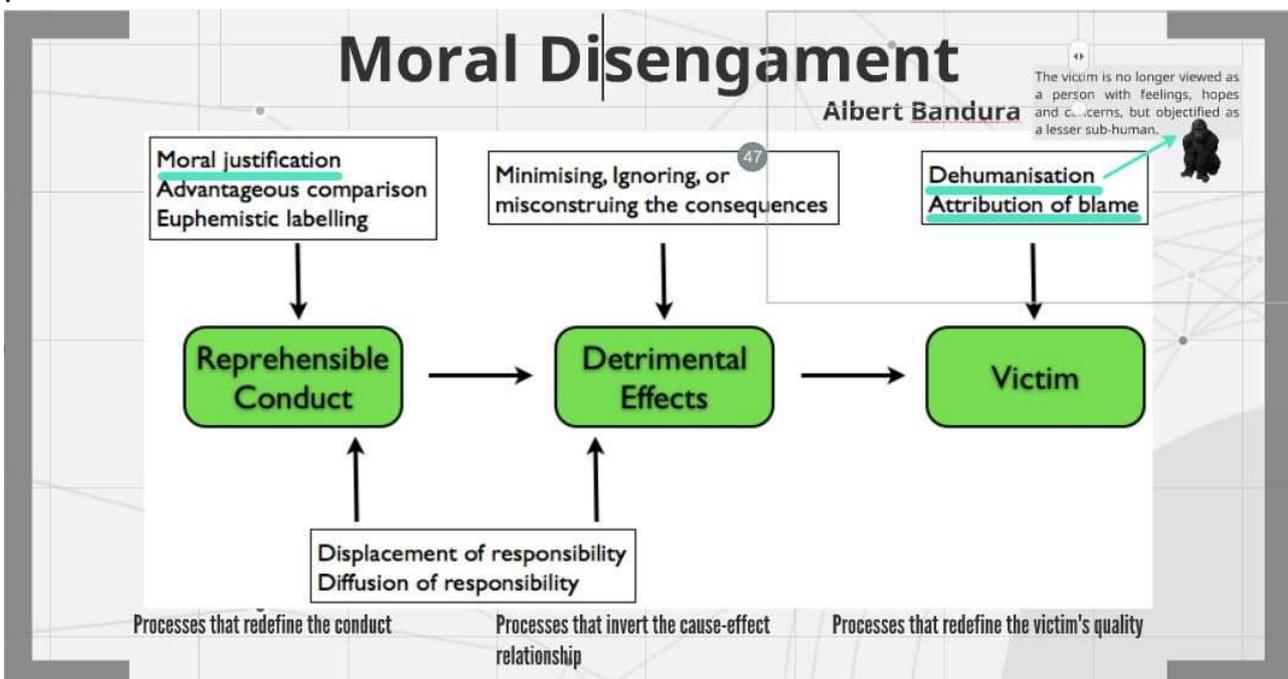
So, this is the scheme:



But, as we know, jihadist terrorism is like the “fat man” case, and we cannot kill someone as a means. Parochial altruism does not explain the silence of the categorical imperative (fat man) and the overcoming of the "agent problem" (Jim’s dilemma). Unless the means, the victim, is not properly “human”..



This “dehumanization” is only possible thanks to the **moral disengagement** brought by that exclusive belief system we were talking about above.



When dehumanization operates, the victim is no longer viewed as a person with feelings, hopes and concerns, but objectified as a lesser sub-human. This is only one of the eight moves to achieve a moral disengagement described by **Albert Bandura** (1990). Fanaticism can activate each of the eight mechanisms.

Only a blind and fanatic faith can produce a moral disengagement that blows up the emotional servos selected by evolution (*moral dumbfounding*).

Before modern scholars of social sciences explained the processes of persuasion, before they tried to explain terrorism with complex theorizations ( *Drive-Theory*, *Social Learning Theory*, and so on) and highlighted the systematic errors (bias) needed to fix an individual in his dysfunctional world-view, three thinkers had already explained the risks inherent in the lack of doubt produced by an exclusive and total belief system:

**Isaiah Berlin:** After a fable by Archouls, he divided men into foxes and hedgehogs. The first are the expression of pluralism, the latter, of monism. For the monist, all genuine questions must have a true answer, and one only; all other responses are errors. Hedgehogs need borders, walls, landmarks. “The mass neurosis of our age – he said - is agoraphobia”. That is what we call **Need for Closure** (NFC). There is a strong relationship between "Need for Closure" (ie need for certainty), in measurable clinical scale, and extremism ((Kruglanski, Chen, Dechesne, Fishman and Orehek, 2009; Kruglanski, Belanger, Gelfand, Gunaratna, Hetiarrachchi, Orehek, Sasota & Sharvit, 2013; Orehek, Sasota, Kruglanski, Deschesne & Ridgeway, in press).

This could be explained by the second thinker .

**Max Weber:** Berlin’s hedgehogs act in respect of Weber’s **ethics of principles**. It refers to absolute principles, without posing the problem of the consequences that will arise from them (the operation was successful but the patient died), making possible **moral disengagement**, while in the **ethics of responsibility** attention is paid to the relationship means / purpose and consequences. Foxes’ stuff.

Why does the ethics of the principles lead to those that **Paul Watzlavick** called *ipersolutions* (dangerous actions which is thought to have a salvific role)? The answer is in the third thinker

**Karl Popper:** He said that “irrefutability is not a virtue of a theory (as people often think) but a vice.”. Faith and ideologies are not subjects of confutation, so those theories cannot be confirmed either.

We can euphemistically say that the ideas that are supported with more “enthusiasm” are those which are considered to be dogma and, as such, cannot be proven in their claim of absolute truth. The greatest example is religious ideas, but also political ideologies. Moreover, demonstrable concepts do not require great effort to be imposed; the effort is needed to convince others only of that which cannot be proved, which then is, usually, the fact that we are better than them. In fact, **Voltaire** said, there are no sects in Geometry.