

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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PERSPECTIVE NUMBER ONE

THE UNITED STATES AND ISLAMIC TERRORISTS

Over the past ten days or so, two events have revealed the confusion and the absence of purpose within the US when it comes to dealing with Islamic terrorism. Both of these developments illustrate that this confusion must end. American lives are at stake!

- First is the case of Major Nidal Malik Hasan, who took two handguns and killed 13 people and wounded 31 at Fort Hood, Texas. Was Major Hasan a victim? Early news reports and commentaries presented this case as one in which Major Hasan was a victim of anti-Muslim harassing and that his behavior must be understood as a result of stress and the fear of imminent deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan. Hasan-as-war-victim was a theme heard frequently in the days subsequent to the tragedy. His exposure to the stories of men who had been deployed provoked him to do what he did. Was he a victim of pre-traumatic stress syndrome and a secondary stress disorder that comes from hearing about other people's stress? Was he traumatized by the thought of going into a combat zone? Are these the factors that explain his horrific butchery? The possibility of Islamic extremism and terrorism as an explanation was played down immediately in the press. This was an isolated personal incident, a breakdown that had nothing to do with Radical Islamic ideology. Columnist David Brooks writes: "A shroud of political correctness settled over the conversation. Hasan was portrayed as a victim of society, a poor soul who was pushed over the edge by prejudice and unhappiness. There was a national rush to therapy." The end result of this "national therapy" was that it absolved Hasan before any definitive evidence was gathered and/or clarified. So, what **do** we know for certain about Hasan?

1. We know that Hasan killed his fellow Americans, who were unarmed and in the most helpless of circumstances as he screamed Allahu Akbar ("God is great").
2. We know that Hasan chose an extreme Islamic terrorist ideology. He was in touch with and read some writings of a most vitriolic, anti-American imam, the radical cleric now in Yemen, Anwar al-Awlaki.
3. We know that his business card included the cryptic abbreviation "SoA," apparently Soldier of Allah.
4. We know from emails Hasan sent in December 2008 that he was deeply engaged with applying religious values to violence. He suggested that a suicide bomber might have just as noble a purpose as a soldier who throws himself on a grenade to protect his comrades.
5. In June 2007 he made a PowerPoint presentation at Walter Reed arguing that the Koran forbids Muslims from killing other Muslims. Iraq and Afghanistan were impossible wars

therefore for Muslims. Similarly, he made another PowerPoint presentation entitled “Why the War on Terror is a War on Islam.”

6. He was a regular attendee at the Killeen mosque near the base where he frequently expounded on his view that Muslim soldiers should not be required to fight in Muslim lands.

Based on these facts, it is quite difficult to view Hasan as a victim. He is a perfect example of a self-radicalized Muslim. There is very little evidence of stress syndrome or victimization. This whole narrative of Hasan as victim has ignored a central premise of the war on terror—the struggle against Islam is [or should be recognized as] the central feature of American foreign policy. This whole narrative also ignored what Brooks calls the “possibility of evil” long before the evidence was in; “it sought to reduce a heinous act to social maladjustment.” A mature, ethically serious nation should not do that! Put another way, we do so to our peril. Major Nidal Malik Hasan was not a victim. He is a perfect example of a self-radicalized Muslim who killed 13 of his fellow Americans! It is ethically wrong and shallow to ignore the fact that radicalized Islam is possible and can be a dire threat to the national security of the US.

- Second is the strange and quite frankly unbelievable decision of Attorney General Eric Holder to try Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (KSM), the self-confessed mastermind of 9/11, in a civilian court in lower Manhattan. Why? Such a trial will permit Mohammad to use this trial as a venue for his anti-American, radicalized Islamic diatribes. It will be an opportunity for the world to see this terrorist and it will do the US little good when the trial is replayed all over the Muslim world. Holder says it promotes “rule of law.” But the US already has a judicial process in place for such terrorists. The 2006 Military Commissions Act, adopted by a bipartisan Congress, obliges the executive and legislative branches to approve a detailed plan to prosecute the illegal “enemy combatants” captured since 9/11. Furthermore, as the *Wall Street Journal* observes editorially, “Contrary to liberal myth, military tribunals aren’t a break with 200-plus years of American jurisprudence. Eight Nazis who snuck into the US in June 1942 were tried by a similar court and were hanged within two months.” Incredibly, Eric Holder acknowledged the value of military tribunals because the Guantanamo detainee who allegedly planned the 2000 bombing of the USS Cole off Yemen will be tried in a military tribunal. Why the difference? Holder suggested that “the Cole bombers struck a military target overseas and is thus a good fit for a military trial, while KSM and comrades hit the US and murdered civilians and thus deserve a US civilian trial.” Editorially, the *Wall Street Journal* correctly concludes that “Foreign terrorists who wage war on America and everything it stands for have no place sitting in a court of law born of the values they so detest. Mr. Holder has honored mass murder by treating it like any other crime.”

See *Wall Street Journal* editorial (14-15 November 2009); Dorothy Rabinowitz in the *Wall Street Journal* (10 November 2009); David Brooks in the *New York Times* (10 November 2009); Scott Shane and James Dao in the *New York Times* (15 November 2009).

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER TWO

ATHEISM AND DESPAIR

I have long argued that the logical result of an atheistic worldview is despair. I recently came across an extended quotation from one of the 20th century's most famous atheists: Bertrand Russell. Russell argued for the eternity of matter and that material existence is the only existence there is. There is no personal God, only impersonal matter. In his book, *Why I Am Not A Christian* (p. 107), Russell described the "world which science built for our belief" in this manner:

"That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of the universe in ruins. . . . Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built."

If one is intellectually honest, why would anyone embrace this as a worldview? How did this worldview come about? What are its major tenets? In 1933 a group of thirty-four liberal US humanists drafted "Humanist Manifesto I," which for its time was a radical document. Committed to reason, science and democracy, the document rejected orthodox and dogmatic positions and argued for a "new statement of the means and purposes of religion" [Paul Kurtz, ed., *The Humanist Manifesto I and II*, Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1973, p. 8]. The Manifesto maintained that the universe is "self-existing and not created," explained only by the evolutionary hypothesis. The Manifesto affirmed that the human race is the center of all things and that religion must be redefined in these terms. Finally, the Manifesto rejected capitalism and affirmed some kind of socialist order as the wave of the future [pp. 8-10]. In 1973 a group of 114 scholars presented "Humanist Manifesto II" that not only reaffirmed the tenets of the 1933 document but also addressed the issues of civil liberties, equality, democracy, human survival, world economic growth, population and the environment, war and peace and the building of a world community. The survival of the human race is not dependent on a divine being but on humanity itself, the Manifesto argued. In addition, it maintained that humans must abandon the archaic dogmas and ideologies that inhibit creative explorations and solutions. Human freedom must be embraced as the ultimate value and preserved at all costs.

In short, modern humanism despises conventional religion and traditional morality. It rejects any belief in God and, instead, affirms a dogmatic and optimistic belief in humankind. Modern humanists see the problems of the world--racism, oppression, militarism, war and poverty--as solvable by humans working together for the maximum fulfillment of all. Traditional religion, whatever its form, they argue, has not made progress in solving these human problems. The modern humanist claims that we must put faith in ourselves and aggressively attack the problems of the human race. Such a spirit is evident in organizations like the Americans for Democratic Action, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the National Organization for Women.

Despite the anti-supernaturalism of modern humanism, this worldview still has a theology. Here are the salient themes of that theology:

1. **Creation and the Universe.** Humanists contend that the physical world was formed from chaos and that only man's reason has brought some order to this chaos. There is no divine plan or purpose. For the humanist, the only thing eternal is matter. Carl Sagan, who popularized the humanist approach to science and cosmic evolution, argued that "The Cosmos is all that is or ever will be." In some form all the matter of the universe has always existed. Further, this matter has no relationship to any transcendent creator.

The universe as we know it is a closed system. It cannot be reordered from anything or anyone from outside itself. Of course, then, there is no transcendent God nor can humans reorder matter either. Because humans are matter and because there is no such thing as a soul (or anything supernatural for that matter), the laws of the universe apply to humans as well. Humans do not transcend the universe in any manner whatsoever. The universe is a closed system based on a uniform set of cause-effect relationships and humans are a part of that system.

2. **God.** Humanists insist that there is no personal God who created the universe or who gives any kind of meaning to the universe. They also reject the idea of God as sovereign, as one who organizes and oversees the course of history. As "The Humans Manifesto II" asserts, "We find insufficient evidence for belief in the existence of the supernatural; it is either meaningless or irrelevant to the question of the survival and fulfillment of the human race. As non-theists, we begin with humans not God, nature not deity" [p. 16]. Thus, humans make their own history, without any master plan. There is no accountability to God and no fear of judgment from Him.
3. **Humanity.** The human race is a cosmic accident, say the humanists. Humans come from nothing and when they die go to nothing. But that does not mean man is insignificant; indeed, humans are the key to a better world. "Humanist Manifesto II" contends that "reason and intelligence are the most effective instruments that mankind possesses" [p. 17]. That is why modern humanism believes that compassion, cooperation and community will bring about a better world. For that reason, economic well-being is possible in a world of "shared human values." There is no such thing as eternity, so modern humanism affirms that happiness is the only core value for the human race.

Atheistic Humanism as a worldview contends that "man is the measure of all things." In themselves, humans are the ultimate norm by which values are determined. They are the ultimate beings and the ultimate authority; all reality and all of life center on human beings. Curiously, although humans emerge from nothing and move towards nothing at death, somehow humans acquire supreme dignity. Yet, despite the humanist's belief in human progress, what is the real reason for hope? Why should we affirm human dignity? Why should I fight to solve the problems of racism, war or poverty? Why does it really make any difference at all whether I focus on progress or focus on living for the moment now? If nothingness is my ultimate destiny, then human dignity is an illusion. Although emotionally satisfactory, humanism is intellectually dishonest and untenable.

For that reason, the issue of death remains a formidable problem for humanism. “The Humanist Manifesto II” claims that “. . . the total personality is a function of the biological organism transacting in a social and cultural context. There is no credible evidence that life survives the death of the body” [p. 17]. The only “immortality” for the human, says “The Humanist Manifesto II” is to “continue to exist in our progeny and in the way our lives have influenced others in our culture” [p. 17]. There is no hope of seeing loved ones, of life after death or of an eternal destiny. Humans live for the moment or for “influencing others.”

4. **Ethics.** Modern humanism maintains that there are no absolutes to guide humans in the ethical area. “The Humanist Manifesto II” demands that “. . . moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is *autonomous* and *situational*, needing no theological or ideological sanction. Ethics stem from human need and intent. To deny this distorts the whole basis of life. Human life has meaning because we create and develop our futures . . . We strive for the good life, here and now” [p. 17]. For that reason, all human acts are ethically neutral, except for their influence on others for good or ill. But human standards are constantly changing and fluid and vary from culture to culture. Hence, humans must create their own standards and then live consistently with them. Humanism rejects any dependence on absolute ethics; instead, sexual freedom, personal autonomy and the unbridled pursuit of personal peace and happiness are the vital center of the humanist’s ethical standard.

For decades, atheistic humanism was the dominant worldview in most colleges and universities. It pervaded the discipline of science and informed the general approach to the humanities throughout western civilization. It gives the impression of being objective, unbiased and modern. Because modern scholarship has been so closely associated with humanism’s tenets, to disagree with it is to appear backward and naive. The grip of humanism is powerful but it is filled with fatal flaws.

See “Strange Collocation” by John Piper in *World* (24 October 2009), p. 46, and James P. Eckman, *The Truth About Worldviews*, pp. 11-19.