

Are all human lives equally valuable?



Nicholas D. Kristof, Columnist, The New York Times

by Lev Tsitrin

“President Biden noted that if you adjust for population, the death toll [from Hamas’ October 7 attack on Israel] was the equivalent of about 15 Sept. 11 attacks. It’s also true ... that Gaza has suffered the equivalent of about 400 Sept. 11 attacks.”

I think this quote from Nicholas Kristof’s recent op-ed in the [New York Times](#) tells one all one needs to know about Mr. Kristof, and the paper itself (for Mr. Kristof is not alone in this assertion – in fact, he kindly credits the math to his “colleague Ezra Klein.” Birds of the feather flock together!).

But quite apart from the idiocy of the comparison (which is indeed idiotic – for by such logic, not only did the Al Qaeda inflict the 9/11 on America, but America inflicted several 9/11s on the Al Qaeda, in Tora Bora and elsewhere, hence, America is guiltier than Al Qaeda; what Mr. Kristof and Mr. Klein fail to understand is that the intentions, and not just the body count, matter), the underpinning question is rather interesting: do all lives really matter equally? Or to put it differently, are “both sides” at fault, to again quote Mr, Kristof’s op-ed?

Let’s start at some distance, and talk of animals. Are all cattle equally valuable? Clearly, they aren’t – as any butcher or dairy farmer will tell. Not every bull will fetch the same price in the market, and not every cow. Only bulls of the same age and weight, only cows with the same output of milk will be valued equally. Their worth is in the quantity of meat or milk that they can yield.

People are not animals, and we like to think of them as equal – yet we do rank people, too. This ranking is not based on their physical characteristics (except for the athletes, of course), but on their actions – which are, ultimately, guided by the mind.

The mind is the key. Because people are able to think, they, unlike bulls and cows, have agency – and they act according to the ideas running in their heads. Those ideas differ from one person to the next. While human hardware is exactly the same for all, the software can be very different. Are Hitler and Churchill “equal”? I guess even Nicholas Kristof – even assisted by his “colleague Ezra Klein” – is not likely to let “both Hitler and Churchill” drop out of his mouth, or onto the pages of the *New York Times*, the word “both” in this context is clearly out of place. Hitler deserves nothing but condemnation; Churchill, nothing but praise.

But why? Weren’t they “both” human? Well, yes – but that’s not

the right criteria for comparison. Since their ideas turn people into what they are, the right criteria is the worth (or worthlessness) of the ideas that cause them to act. And for Hitler and Churchill those ideas (and the resulting actions) were, needless to say, very different indeed; hence, the word "both" is inapplicable.

Ideas can be wrong – and acting on such wrong ideas can be deadly, not just for the others, but also for the very person who got those wrong ideas into the head in the first place. A great Greek philosopher Empedocles got the nagging thought that he was a god, and he jumped into the crater of Mount Etna to prove it. Well, it didn't work out; he only proved that the sincerity with which one believes in one's ideas is no guarantee that those ideas are right; and that to follow the ideas that aren't right can be suicidal.

The members of Hamas have very similar ideas, and like Empedocles, they follow those ideas to action. To them, Islam is not a mere religion that may, or equivalently, may not be true, but is a token of heritage and identity. To them, it is truth incarnate, to be spread until it conquers the world – and if they become "martyrs" in the process, it is well and good because after death they will lead god-like existence in Paradise – as promised by Mohammed in the Koran. Hence, Islamist terrorism the world over; hence, the October 7 attack. But somehow it does not occur to them that the truth of that idea is predicated on the truth of another idea – an idea that one can know whether God indeed talked to Mohammed – and this latter idea is most definitely wrong. And by following this wrong idea, Hamas made themselves targets of the Israelis who are now rightly determined to rid the world of the plague that is Hamas – and not because something is wrong with the Israelis, but because everything is wrong with the Hamas. What goes around, comes around; it is that simple.

And everything is wrong with the Hamas because the central tenet of the software that runs in its followers' minds – that

they can know for sure that Koran is God's word, the tenet that gives them their bloody agency, is plain wrong – in religious terms, it is idolatrous.

So the question is not “are all people equally valuable?” but “are all ideas that people get into their heads equally true?” Because the answer to the latter question is obviously a “no,” the answer to the former question is a “no,” too. This is not to say that such people should be deliberately hunted down and killed – but that by following wrong ideas they put themselves in mortal danger. The children who die in Gaza, die because they did not leave Gaza city for the much safer south. And they did not leave because they (or their parents) had the idea that they'd rather be “martyrs.” And they wanted to be “martyrs” because they got the idolatrous garbage in their heads – and this mental garbage prevents them from making right decisions – resulting in their deaths, for which they have only themselves to blame, and not the Israelis.

People who run on bad – that is, wrong – software are materially different from people who run on software that isn't wrong. There is no equality, no equivalency, between error, and the absence thereof. So yes, people who have garbage in their heads are not equal to those who don't. As a result of their choices, people driven by wrong ideas wind up in bad places, places like prisons – or cemeteries. And if the good-hearted people like Nicholas Kristof, assisted by his “colleague Ezra Klein,” blame the good people who have to send the bad people to prisons and cemeteries, it is a sure indicator that something isn't quite right in Mr. Kristof's and Mr. Klein's heads, too.

Mr. Kristof and Mr. Klein should re-examine their thoughts, and get rid of their own mental garbage – like that “Gaza has suffered the equivalent of about 400 Sept. 11 attacks.” Gaza – and its Islamist ilk – suffers from idolatrous Islamism, and from nothing else. But of this, Mr. Kristof and Mr. Klein have not a clue. The software running in their heads is not

particularly good.

Lev Tsitrin is the author of "[The Pitfall Of Truth: Holy War, Its Rationale And Folly](#)"