Values, Mutual Trust and Terrorism

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ABSTRACT

Elliott Jaques explores what is evil about terrorism and the specific good that this evil destroys. It is essential to formulate the foundations of systems of relationships, justice, and law that can guarantee the global victory of good over evil. The basic glue that allows humanity to live together is global mutual trust that each will not harm the other. To be able to rely upon that bond is the final good. For individuals to decide to break that bond is the essence of evil. One prominent condition that succors and supports the primal evil expressed in terrorism is the experience of circumstances in which some seem to be succeeding unjustly at the expense of others. The war against terrorism requires both that the USA leads a coalition of willing nations against the perpetrators of evil as well as becoming the leader of the people of the world in sustaining the primal good of world-wide mutual trust. Copyright © 2006 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Key words: Elliott Jaques, evil, mutual trust, terrorism, values

The current wave of unspeakable terrorism tests our systems of values to the core. It questions the deepest roots of these values in our ideas about the nature of good and the nature of evil. What is it specifically that is so evil about terrorism? And what specifically is the good that this evil destroys? Unless we can answer these questions, our response to terrorism will always fall short of what that response needs to be. A clearer answer to these questions will strengthen us in mourning and remembering those whose lives have been cut short so undeservedly; and in ensuring that it never happens again.

Philosophy of ethics has been preoccupied, unsuccessfully, with the problem of good and evil, ever since Socrates and Plato began the exercise, 2500 years ago. We have had the utilitarian and hedonist solutions in terms of the good as pleasure, or happiness, or usefulness, or self-realization, or satisfaction, or the summum bonum; or in terms of the so-called metaphysical or supernatural solutions, in terms of the good as virtue, or perfection, or conscience, or the will of God; or in terms of individual obligations such as the Golden Rule.

None of these solutions gets to the heart of the problem, certainly not in casting light upon the particular quality of evil that goes with terrorism. They
have a quality of innocence, of floating along the surface of this dreadful reality. And they do not readily lend themselves to formulation of the foundations of systems of relationships, justice, and law that can guarantee the global victory of good over evil.

I was faced by the need to plumb the depths of this issue in work on which I have been engaged over the past 55 years in trying to develop better managerial leadership systems for the all pervasive managerial organizations that dominate the social atmosphere of economically advanced nations. What were the underlying human values that must be satisfied? I had gradually been driven to recognize the vital importance of having systems that engendered mutual trust between employees and managers and the company. But, not just any sort of trust. It was the trust that no one, colleague or stranger, would decide to act in such a way as to satisfy self-interest at the expense of causing damage or harm to others or to cause them injury.

The attack on the World Trade Center suddenly made it obvious how much we depend upon being able to rely upon this kind of mutual trust to exist globally. Without it, humanity itself is not safe. We all know what it feels like walking in a city at night, when you are not sure that you can trust the strangers whom you might pass in the dark. When that feeling is extended in a global world, to the point where there are unknown people everywhere whom you can no longer be sure that you can trust not to decide to harm or to kill you, then true terror and paralysis of society sets in, with the whole of humanity rendered immobile.

It is in these circumstances that it suddenly becomes clear that the basic glue that holds us together, that allows humanity to live together, that is the foundation of the existence of humanity, is the existence of mutual trust that each will not harm the other. To be able to rely upon that bond is the final good. For individuals to decide to break that bond is the essence of evil. Species survival, humanity, is at stake.

**FELT INJUSTICE AS THE SEED OF THE DESPAIR THAT IS THE BREEDING GROUND FOR TERRORIST EVIL**

To deal with global terrorism, we must ask whether there are conditions that exist that succor and support the primal evil expressed in terrorism. There is one such condition that above all others can act in this way. That condition is the experience of circumstances in which some seem to be succeeding unjustly at the expense of others. In a small way this condition is characteristic of many standard managerial practices within companies: it stirs a sense of injustice which may breed despair. In a large way this condition exists in the great disparity of daily life between the rich and the poor countries of the world.

This disparity is expressed loosely by the Russian journalist Vladimir Posner as the disparity between the nations of the northern hemisphere and the poorer nations of the southern hemisphere. This situation, regardless of the rights or
wrongs of the case, is a potent source of felt injustice among the ordinary people. It is when this sense of injustice among the people is fed by, and combines with, a sense of despair that nothing can be done about it, that life no longer matters and a dangerous situation arises that can create support for evil in the form of hatred and terrorist attacks against humanity.

The war against terrorism will be the most difficult to win. It is unlike other wars in that there can be no final victory. It is like crime that also has to be fought against, but only to ensure that it is safely under control. In order for the USA, as the leader of the free world, to achieve this end we shall have to relearn the lesson from our experience in Germany after World War I. A deep sense of inequity-based injustice arising from the scale of imposed reparations provided the opportunity for the emergence of the evil that was Hitler. We did not repeat this experience at the end of World War II, and the Marshall and MacArthur plans enabled Germany, Italy, and Japan to rejoin the world.

In this same vein, a double program will have to be engaged against terrorism. First, to lead a coalition of willing nations against the perpetrators of evil and thereby to regain and secure our sense of safety. Second – and simultaneously – for America to seek to become the leader of the masses of the people of the world in the war to sustain the primal good of world-wide mutual trust. Such a lead means pursing the difficult task of developing programs to help to remove the inequities that stir widespread feeling of injustice, more urgently and effectively than we have succeeded in doing so far; and in so doing, to give continuing evidence of the warmth and generosity that is the spirit of the American people. The first without the second cannot win the fight to decimate evil. America needs to become the manifest leader in the global war to vouchsafe all humanity against injustice stirring inequities everywhere.