BOOK REVIEW

Frontiers of Social Psychology

The Psychology of Extremism
A Motivational Perspective

Edited by Arie W. Kruglanski,
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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF EXTREMISM
A MOTIVATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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Book Review

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34

Book Review

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF EXTREMISM

A MOTIVATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

This book offers a multidisciplinary exploration of extreme behaviors such as political and religious extremism, extreme diets, extreme sports, extreme infatuations, diverse addictions, as well as violent extremism. Thirty-one researchers contributed to the thorough investigation of this panoramic topic, including the introduction and the two major parts.

Part One deals, in six chapters, across different strata of analysis, with the motivations and causes behind extremism due to various types of imbalance. **Part Two** consists of five chapters which offer examples of these motives within the framework of interests and inclinations. The three editors of the book are Arie W. Kruglanski, University of Maryland, USA, Ewa Szumowska, Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland, and Catalina Kopetz, Wayne State University, USA, published by Routledge.

Introduction

The introduction presents the basic ideas and perspectives related to the psychology of extremism, with a general view of the topic from different vantage points. It also presents the motivational imbalance model of extremism and lays the theoretical grounds for chapters in this volume. The editors start with explication of the familiar usage of the term extremism in various disciplines as in absolute advocates of a given party or a certain political dispensation, the narcissist, the lover, and the extreme sports fan. There are also extreme sports practitioners as in mountaineers. The cover page carries a symbolic drawing of this extreme type of sports. In brief, extremism is shown as engulfing all aspects of human life.

The introduction provides a comprehensive overview of extremism, with a focus also to balance, as both represent basic phenomena in human societies. An individual's chief requirements fall into two categories: biological (the needs for nutrition, shelter, hydration, and rest) and psychogenic (e.g., autonomy, relatedness, control, understanding, and significance). An individual's inclination to the balanced realization of these basic needs is characterized as a moderate state, whereas imbalance occurs when he or she exaggeratedly insists upon realizing some needs at the expense of others. The balanced attempt to satisfy all one's basic needs defines the state of moderation, whereas the dominance of one need at the expense of others defines the state of extremism.

The introduction also presents various examples of imbalance such as workaholics who take interest in their work at the expense of the needs of their families, friends, and community in addition to those who suffer from an exaggerated cognitive focus on a dominant goal accompanied by "blindness" to alternative concerns. Other cases of imbalance include individuals who covet specific value-added matters to the negligence of others, a fact which leads other individuals to be greedy as well. Consequently, greed creates not only a state of intrapersonal imbalance but also an imbalance in the social environment of a greedy individual.

Extremism comes into being when one prioritizes one's work along certain stages that can gradually achieve the desired goals then proceeds towards realization of these goals depending on the set priorities. Within this

framework, despite evidence to the contrary, some imbalance or extremism can be detected in such stages which exclusively address particular dimensions to the exclusion of others.

The contributors maintain that the extremist's outlook to life is lacking in balance and that there are lots of causes behind imbalance. The introduction provides a detailed, comprehensive framework for relevant problems In the following section, a summary of all chapters of the two parts will be provided.

Part One

Motivational Imbalance at Different Levels of Analysis

This part features strikingly distinct approaches to the phenomenon of extremism, ranging all the way from the neural to the cultural perspectives and even to those perspectives on the borderline between these two poles. In six chapters, this volume explores Irrational Miswanting and Extreme Motivation, Attitudinal Extremism, Extreme Behaviour and Outcomes, Strict and Loose Boundaries, and the Evolution of Extremism across the Ages.

1- Irrational Miswanting and Extreme Motivation

This chapter argues that irrational miswanting and extreme motivation occurs when decision-taking is contributed through auxiliary means that call for the use of force, while predicted, experienced, and remembered utilities of its outcome are all low or even negative. The chapter provides examples of such behaviors with a comprehensive framework for irrational motivations conducive to extremism and to hurting the self and others. A telling example example of this is drug addiction, an extremist behaviour victimizing the addict, family, and work environment. Lots of those who were cured of addiction reverted to it once more, perhaps several times, under neurotic motivations such as stress and depression and upon meeting old drug addiction friends. What applies to drug addicts applies also to other states of extremist behaviour characterized by violence against others and triggered by quite irrational psychological motivations.

2- Attitudinal Extremism

One's attitude to life in different situations is explored in detail in this chapter, including consumption, pur-

chasing, central topics of public discourse, and voting in elections. Studies based on these attitudes contribute to our understanding of the nature and characteristics of extremism, with examples and explanations. It is indeed inevitable to conduct such studies of extremism which can exceed one's ulterior conviction and grow into a malignant behaviour. Four major characteristics of attitudinal extremism include:

First: Attitude Polarization

This means that one is biased for a given party against another or at the expense of other parties or aspects.

Second: Attitude Strength

This refers to the individual's adherence to his or her attitude; it can be resolute or precarious.

Third: Attitude Deviance

It is possible that even neutral or weak attitudes could reflect extremism if they are incredibly deviant or unusual, if measured against previous normal attitudes.

Fourthly: Attitude Social Disapproval

This characteristic differs from the foregoing one in that it represents disapproval of society and social norms.

Extremist attitude involves polarization, certainty regarding commitment to this polarization, and social disapproval. The chapter draws a conclusion that further studies have yet to be conducted in the field for more clear-cut findings.

3- Extremist Behaviour and Outcomes

Contributors believe that extremist behaviour is one of those rare, highly-motivated phenomena. It must be noted that this type of behaviour (1) can be violent; (2) can lead to positive or negative outcomes depending on the issue at hand; and (3) the motive behind it is usually powerful and influential. The third chapter substantiates these arguments from previous studies that emphasize the close passionate connection between the culprit and the issue at stake, with the proviso that passionate inclinations are not necessarily conducive bearing in mind extremist behaviour.

The chapter also explores the passionate aspect of to extremist behaviour as well as the associated formative environment. It displays the dualistic model of analyzing the effect of the passion in extremist behaviour, taking into consideration the individual's personal characteristics and interaction with others. The dualistic model of analysis is defined as a powerful attachment to a certain object, activity, concept or person for the sake of love, appreciation, repeated investment of time and energy on

a regular basis, or loyalty. Within this framework, the dualistic model distinguishes between the passion that is capable of adaptation and compatibility and that which is less adaptive and obsessive. In this sense, extremist behaviour is essentially associated with obsession.

The book differentiates between the passionate dimension of extremist behaviour in interacting with others and the same dimension on the level of one's image It has been found out that the passion of obsession is conducive to extreme behaviour towards others such as religious violence, political violence, violence of competition, and violence of romantic, sexual, and sports relationships. As for one's relationship to oneself, the passion of obsession is also conducive to extremist behaviour as in addiction, bankruptcy, and hygienic, physical, and health problems.

4- Mental Extremist Group

The Extremist Group is characterized by a deliberate collective behaviour that departs from normal established rules. Collective behaviour results from the common goals, limitations, and effects of the group in addition to the integration of their actions.

The contributor analyze the psychological and social processes that underlie group extremism, understood as willful collective behavior that substantially violates the norms of an expected behavior in a given context such as cults, religious orders, and single-issue political groups. This analysis draws on the model which views extremism as imbalance that is geared towards satisfying one need only at the expense of other needs. According to this model, extremist groups work through three avenues:

First: the desire to achieve some individual success in reality;

Second: the interest in arriving at an ideological and dogmatic framework that justifies the extremist tools adopted by the group;

Third: the importance of the social network which is keen on legalizing and justifying this extremist behaviour.

Chapter Four explores six categories of extremist groups, based on the concept of extremism engendered by imbalance. These include politically radical groups, religiously radical groups that are militant in nature, sectarian and religiously extremist groups, Christian extremist groups following a specific saint, extremist groups engrossed solely in one object, and extremist groups in the health domain.

Table (1) Categories and Examples of Extremist Groups	
Groups	**Examples**
Political Groups	Al-Qaeda
	Neo-Nazis
Ideologically oriented military formations	Waffen SS, the militant arm of the Neo-Nazi Party
	Iranian Revolutionary Guards
Cults	Heaven's Gate (an American religious movement with peculiar convictions, well-known for having carried out a communal suicide in 1997).
	Unification Church; a Christian movement with pecu-li-ar convictions, established in Korea and spread world-wide; its followers are called Unifica-tionists or Moonies.
Religious orders	Benedictine Monks, Catholic followers of Saint Ben-edict.
	Poor Clare Nuns; nunner-ies that are followers of Saint Clare of Assisi.
Single-issue political groups	Operation Rescue
	Climate Direct Action
Health-related groups	pro-anorexia [Pro-Ana] advocates of loss of appetite
	Vaccine Choice Canada

Table (1) illustrates these six categories, providing two examples for each one. These examples are controversial in essence as ISIS has been categorized for instance as a political group in complete negligence of its doctrinal, ideological, and legal dimensions. Similarly, the doctrinal dimension of extremist groups has included the military arm of the Nazi Party and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.

Although the said groups are extremist they are not to be necessarily characterized by violence or terrorism. Extremist anti-abortion groups, environmental groups, and anti-vaccination groups have been categorized as violent and terrorist groups. In fact, violence and terrorism in extremist groups have to do with the challenges facing such groups, to their policies, and to the opinions and predilections of their leaders.

Therefore, this chapter has objectively dealt with extremist groups, viewing extremism mostly as fundamentally violent and terrorist and as, sometimes, an expression of opinion out of a state of imbalance.

5- Balancing Extremes of Innovation Through Tight–Loose Ambidexterity

This chapter emphasizes the universal interest in innovation in all fields as the basis for the development and prosperity of nations. Innovative ideas are beneficial to large numbers of people; they are ingeniously carried out in reality and have been properly presented to people. Innovation passes through two stages: (1) exploration: novel idea generation and (2) successful implementation of such ideas.

The book highlights the differences between these two stages and procedures. Exploration processes are characterized by risk-taking, experimentation, variation, and discovery. Exploitation processes focus on refinement, precision, efficiency, and execution depending on the principle of trial and error. If taken to their extremes, and if they focus on one object at the expense of others, these processes can produce ineffectual outcomes. Interest in exploration at the expense of exploitation would hamper the output of innovation, which becomes directly less competitive and of little use to consumers. All efforts

Table (2) Origins and Assets of Innovation in Tight-Loose Rules		
Cultural dimensions	**Two Agents of the Cultural Perspectives**	
	Tight rules	Loose rules
Assets	Conscientious-ness	Tolerance
	Social order	Creativity
	Self-control	Adaptability
Liabilities	Close-minded	Social Disorder
	Conventional	Uncoordinated
	Cultural Inertia	Impulsive

Table (3) Paradoxical Behaviors and Processes Involved in Innovation	
Loose Culture	Tight Culture
Exploration	Exploitation
• Variation • Risk-taking • Experimenttion • Discovery	• Refinement • Efficiency • Implementtion • Execution

must then be focused on exploring new solutions as well as designating possible resources toward implementation; out of this balanced perspective, novel ideas can well be translated into reality.

According to theoretical perspectives related to the imbalanced interest in one stage over the other, conducive to extremism, exclusive emphasis on tightness or on looseness would be detrimental to innovation. Cultural dimensions based on tight rules of exploitation and those loose ones based on exploration are of vital importance as illustrated in the following table:

The stage of exploration entails the presence of a culture dependent on the qualities of "discrepancy, risk-taking, experimentation, variation, and discovery". The stage of exploitation requires a culture characterized by "analysis, preparedness, efficiency, implementation, and execution".

The chapter has presented real cases of innovation and associated output, the two stages of exploration and exploitation, and tight and loose culture of innovation from North and South America, Europe, and Asia.

6- Evolution of Extremism

Based on the foregoing discussion, **Chapter Six** attempts to answer four basic questions which offer a comprehensive picture of the crisis of extremism as follows:

• How has extremism evolved?

• Who are the beneficiaries of extremism?

• Is extremism limited to human beings?

• What is the role of good manners in the prevention of extremism?

Since the dawn of history, humanity has witnessed various types of extremism especially in cases of conflict between groups fighting over strategic plans and goals, as evidenced in single-issue political groups. This chapter reveals how extremism is not limited to human

beings as it can be observed also in other creatures. Human beings are distinguished by the ability to think, to acquire knowledge, and to choose between balance and extremism. Good manners are also essential when extremism is considered. They are defined here as a number of principles that can help to distinguish between right and wrong. It is people's failure to identify what is right and what is wrong in different domains that can lead up to indescribable conflicts.

Part Two: Motivational Imbalance

Extremism differs from one person to another based on interests and needs. One may get involved in extremist activities to satisfy one's own prioritized needs. This part deals, in five chapters, with these activities through concentration on the Psychology of Extreme Sports, the Psychology of Greed, the Key Issues

For the Study of the Morally Exceptional, the Social Psychology of Violent Extremism, and Motivational Imbalance in Jihadi Online Recruitment.

1- Psychology of Extreme Sports

The contributors believe the term "extreme sport" has been used as a synonym for solo or team adventure experiences, which could be fatal if practiced erroneously, such as white-water rafting, mountaineering, skydiving and surfing, ice-skating, bungee jumping, motor races, and off-road vehicle races.

As can only be understood, these sports are highly risky. Most practitioners are youths, full of adventure and of the desire for self-fulfillment. There are various hypotheses attempting to interpret these phenomena; however, they have not yet been academically proven. One of these hypotheses stipulates that practitioners of extreme sports suffer from a certain malady driving them to quest for a risky and exciting sport that could draw the attention of others. Another contrasting hypothesis suggests that those individuals are lunatics in need of therapy. With the spread of these sports all over the whole world, many other interpretations came into play so as to fathom their depths. **Chapter Seven** attempts to provide a more profound understanding of the psychology of extreme sports beyond the basic initial motivations such as experimentation; an individual who continues practicing these sports has certainly fallen in love with them; they might also wish to be more experienced and more attached to the field.

2- Psychology of Greed

There are different definitions of greed. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines it as 'a selfish and ex-

cessive desire for more of something (such as money, food, and drink) than is needed'. In Wikipedia, it is defined as 'an uncontrolled longing for increase in the acquisition or use: "of material gain, be it food, land or animals/inanimate possessions); or social value, such as status, or power"'. According to Collins Dictionary, greed is an 'excessive desire for getting or having especially wealth' . Other synonyms of the term 'greed' include (avarice, voracity, insatiability, imbalance, and cupidity). Chronologically, greed has been depicted in fiction as early as 4000 years ago. In the ancient Egyptian Maxims of Ptahhotep the concept of the 'greedy heart' was introduced, based on the notion that the heart was the organ responsible for reason, understanding and good intentions; the heart used to function as our present-day understanding of the mind. The chapter delves deeper into the historical evolution of greed starting from ancient Greek civilization, pointing out in the meantime that this quality is at odds with the principles of morality and justice.

The book has also explored the question of greed in social sciences, pointing out its psychological aspects and its relationship to anthropology and to business transactions. Although greed has been under-researched, there are two major approaches that can further our understanding First, the 18th century moral philosopher Adam Smith confirms that self-interested actors are the drivers of economic progress and contributors to the greater good of society, yet he adds that in spite of man's apparent selfishness, his personal ambition does not usually trespass on the rights of the community. Smith has in mind, of course, wholesome individuals and is obviously optimistic about man's position with regard to greed. Secondly, a paper published in 2014 by Oka and Kuijt argues that greed is capable of evoking extreme passions among people, as it forces us to make judgments about their social benefit or harm that are inherently accusatory or defensive. The researchers assert that understanding of morals and greed is still inadequate, hence their pessimistic outlook on man which is intrinsically different from Smith's.

3- Morally Exceptional

The term Morally Exceptional applies to few people who do not exceed 10% in any community. **Chapter Nine** deals with three major issues centering on the benefits of exploring the morally exceptional, their personality, why they have become exceptional, and recommendations for future research on the same topic.

The book underscores most people's view that the morally exceptional person is charismatic and that he or she is loved by others. Hence, it is of paramount importance to examine the basic constituents of this type of personality, how it evolves, and the psychological factors affecting it in order to maximize positive traits and disseminate them in society to curb the spread of crimes.

The virtues of the morally exceptional person spring from the convictions on which he has been brought up and the positive motives leading up to and reflected

in his ideal behaviour. Some of his major personality traits are sympathy with others, social responsibility, truthfulness, honesty, and all the other sublime virtues recognized worldwide.

Morally exceptional people can sometimes behave positively in a way that may look extremist to some while in fact they denote courage and sacrifice. A telling example is manifested in those who venture to save others in the face of impending danger, those who donate their body parts to patients on the verge of death, and those who might risk their lives in the process of alerting others to impending devastating danger.

Some questions have either been left unanswered or have been elaborated in a contradictory manner, as in the quest for exceptional morals and exceptional behaviour. As answers differ depending on different points of view, the final judgement would be precarious. For example, Wikileaks were released in 2006, divulging many sensitive documents; an act regarded as heroic and magnificent by some and, meanwhile, criminalized by others.

4- Social Psychology of Violent Extremism

The book regards violent extremism as a specific form of extreme behavior, in that it 'exceeds the ordinary, usual or expected. Political extremism can be accompanied by assault on others and by violence conducive to genuine harm to human beings and properties in order to achieve political, ideological, or religious goals. If an individual adopts these goals, such an individual would get involved in violent extremism, at least contributing to it. Rational people do not tolerate the use of violence to achieve political or ideological goals due to the great loss in souls and properties triggered by it. Though the individual committing violence may himself be greatly injured or even killed in the process, the action itself remains of particular interest to him and to the achievement of his goals. Therefore, the book looks for academic, panoramic, and profound interpretations for this type of extremism.

Chapter Ten deals with the terrorist organizations that adopt violence for the sake of achieving their goals. It has been found that violence motivates the behaviour of both leaders and followers of such organizations. Leaders are less violent than followers as they have been committed to violence in previous operations and have less hopes for future achievement of their goals, being aware of the high risks involved. Followers get more violent as they are bent on serious self-actualization.

Violence is closely associated with three important factors:

First: Some resort to violence to attract attention and to achieve defined goals.

Second, common attitudes to violence must be taken into consideration as most of them reject it and call for moderation.

Third, social media networks have a role to play in the dissemination of ideas on violence.

All in all, these factors help to interpret the reasons behind violent behaviour and the best possible ways to counteract it.

5- Motivational Imbalance in Jihadi Online Recruitment

Without recruitment, terrorism cannot prevail or even survive. Online platforms have become a useful instrument for modern terrorists' recruitment. The ISIS has recruited 40,000 fighters from as many as 90 countries via the Internet and social media. Despite significant losses, ISIS continuously recruited thousands of enthusiastic fighters from many corners of the world. Although scholars have particularly explored this phenomenon, few studies failed to present a clear-cut model for the psychological factors motivating people to join such terrorist organizations.

According to **Chapter Eleven**, the success of terrorist organizations in online recruitment can be attributed mainly to imbalance as has been explained above. Imbalance drives one to focus exclusively on one need at the expense of other needs, which is directly conducive to extremism. Once recruited by terrorist organizations like ISIS, an individual's overriding need becomes the driving need to gain importance, take revenge on and influence others, and to be prestigious within the new organization.

The chapter explores three major reasons behind the efficacy of the Internet in recruitment operations as follows:

First, the ease with which information about individuals and places can be obtained;
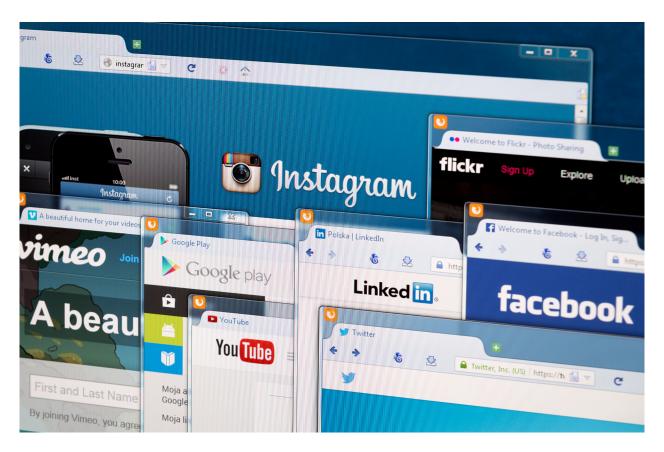
Second, the ease with which information about the organization, its ideas and activities, can be disseminated and communicated to targets all over the world, with little or no censorship; and

Third, the ease with which members of the organization can communicate with targets to exchange ideas and discuss key issues, specially over social media.

The chapter underscores the effect of motivational imbalance on extremist behaviour which is a decision to be taken gradually along the changes taking place to one's mentality and pattern of thought, thus leading to change in one's behaviour towards extremism. The ostensible success of ISIS in recruiting extremists can thus be attributed to its prompt response to man's basic needs and aspirations as it fully exploits recruits' inherent inclination towards extremism, violence, and work under such terrorist organizations.

One important technique used by terrorist groups to gain new recruits is what is called narrowcasting. Rather than broadcast, or use one message to all, the extremists 'narrowcast', targeting small groups with
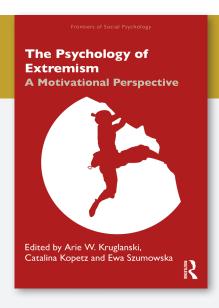
specific messages that exploit their vulnerabilities and manage to recruit them.

The chapter also deals with the ideology adopted by ISIS as well as the techniques it uses to recruit new fighters and to convince them to carry out suicide attacks. Online Jihadi recruits tend to create an imbalance of human needs by promoting a single need to a supreme dominant position, overruling and suppressing all other needs. One popular mechanism relies on issuing a fatwa; which is an Islamic religious ruling falsely promising recruits eternal paradise if they participate in protecting religion, which is the same, for them, as protecting the Islamic State. The chapter also presents examples of fighters who repented and left ISIS after joining the extremist organization and taking part in bloodshed and sabotage. Their stories help to unravel the fallacy of these terrorist organizations and the hatred and disgust they harbour towards nations. The conclusion to the chapter recommends conducting further studies and research into online recruitment by terrorist organizations, with distinct criteria and indicators for the study of extremism.

As the internet is a constant accessible resource for recruitment , particularly via social media, it has become incumbent upon all parties concerned to come up with effective ways of counteracting its adverse effect upon vulnerable candidates who could easily be drawn into the cobweb of extremism.

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