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Trends. An Equal Opportunity for Atrocity

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Many world citizens might posit that there are special psychological profiles for perpetrators and supporters of atrocity. Must there not be a special sort of evil that lurks in the hearts of people whom only could be termed atrocity-philic? Perhaps they are psychotic or manifesters of severely antisocial or even asocial or explosive personality disorders. Surely their adaptation to society--as exemplified by psychological structure--is extremely problematic in some unusual way.

Yet a long sequence of examples of personality interacting with situational factors within a socio-historical context suggests that personality alone as an ontologically valid construct is rarely the key to atrocity. One example--involving a case currently being adjudicated in Brussels concerning atrocities in Rwanda from the 1994 slaughter by Hutus of Tutsis and so-called moderate Hutus--yields two nuns, a businessman, and an academic physicist as alleged supporters/perpetrators of atrocity. As another example, indirect psychosocial assessment of masses of individuals involved in atrocities--e.g., in Nazi Germany or Communist Russia--again fails in often finding a smoking gun of individual psychopathology.

It would seem that there may be an equal opportunity among all those who have peopled the earth for all that comprises atrocity. The only saving grace is that the same applies--perhaps at a lower frequency of opportunity--for all that is sublime. (See Courtois, S., Werth, N., Panne, J-L, Paczkowski, A., Bartosek, K., & Margolin, J-L. (1999). *The Black Book of Communism*. (Trans. J. Murphy & M. Kramer). Harvard University Press; Greiner, N., & Nunno, V. J. (1994). Psychopaths at Nuremberg? A Rorschach analysis of the records of the Nazi war criminals. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 50, 415-429; Harrower, M. (1976). Rorschach records of the Nazi war criminals: An experimental study after thirty years. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 40, 341-351; Lifton, R.J. (1986). Reflections on genocide. *Psychohistory Review*, 14, 39-54; Papadopoulos, R.K. (1998). Destructiveness, atrocities and healing: Epistemological and clinical reflections. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 43, 455-477; Pozgain, I., Mandic, N., & Barkic, J. (1998). Homicides in war and peace in Croatia. *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 43, 1124-1126; Rwandans on trial. (May 1, 2001). *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>.) (Keywords: Atrocity, Profiling.)