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**NAVAL
POSTGRADUATE
SCHOOL**

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**BRINGING THE MEANING BACK IN: EXPLORING
EXISTENTIALLY MOTIVATED TERRORISM**

by

Nicholas R. Dubaz

June 2016

Thesis Advisor:
Second Reader:

Gordon H. McCormick
George Lober

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**BRINGING THE MEANING BACK IN: EXPLORING EXISTENTIALLY
MOTIVATED TERRORISM**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN DEFENSE ANALYSIS

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**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
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ABSTRACT

Radicalization and political violence are traditionally explained as rational, instrumental choices motivated by grievances, deprivation, oppression, and other factors external to the individual. This explanatory model, however, is dangerously incomplete; many radicalized individuals appear to be internally motivated toward violence as a way to bring meaning to their lives. Western philosophy, and the existentialist school in particular, has long recognized the centrality of meaning to human existence. Psychology and sociology have more recently empirically demonstrated meaning-in-life's close connection to happiness, psychological well-being, and even physical health. This thesis examines both the philosophy and science of meaning-in-life, demonstrating the process through which it is produced and terrorism's unique ability to do so. Finally, this thesis examines four case studies across time, place, and ideological basis to establish the influence of existential motives in the history of terrorism. Understanding and accounting for the importance of meaning-in-life and its role in terrorism will help develop effective counter-radicalization and counter-violent extremism programs that account for more than rational, instrumental motives.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CT	counter-terrorism
CVE	counter-violent extremism
DM	Deutschmarks
ETA	Euskadi ta Askatasuna
ETArras	Members of the ETA
GDP	gross domestic product
IS	Islamic State
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham
LIR	Life Regard Index
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization
PMP	Personal Meaning Profile
RAF	Red Army Faction
TMT	terror management theory
WEIRD	white, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic

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I. INTRODUCTION

On July 13th 2015, the Federal Bureau of Investigation arrested the son of a well-regarded Boston Police Captain for felony possession of firearms, among other charges. Twenty-three-year-old Andrew Ciccilo, or as he preferred to be known, Ali Al Amriki, is alleged to have planned to attack multiple college campuses with explosive devices and firearms in an Islamic State (IS) inspired plot.¹ Raised in comfort in an upper-middle-class family free from state violence and oppression, he exhibited few markers common to terrorists and insurgents prior to his arrest. He is but one of an estimated four thousand Westerners who have left their lives of relative comfort and safety to take up the cause of the Islamic State at home or abroad.² Five decades earlier, the young men and women in Italy's Red Brigades and Germany's Red Army Faction, who unleashed a reign of terror across Europe, were often educated professionals with privileged upbringings. These are but a few of the many conundra for which standard explanations for why individuals become terrorists offer few satisfying answers.

Albert Camus begins *The Rebel*, his study of the motivation for rebellion and revolution, by positing that “there are crimes of passion and crimes of logic.”³ Camus’ “crimes of logic” are those acts for which cause and effect can be traced to a political, instrumental objective. Indeed, traditional efforts to explain radicalization and the decision to employ political violence regard such choices as rational, instrumental, and motivated by factors external to individuals. Yet, this model is dangerously incomplete and underdetermined. Anomalies like Andrew Ciccilo are found across time and across cultures—individuals whose positions in society belie the conventional conceptions of radicalization and who appear instead to be internally motivated toward violence.

¹ Travis Anderson and Astead W. Herndon, “Father of Adams Man Tipped off FBI on Son’s Terror Leanings,” *Boston Globe*, July 13, 2015, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2015/07/13/adams-man-charged-connection-with-alleged-terror-plot/v3fGrcmdc03Bzh0xl8skGL/story.html>.

² Scott Gates and Sukanya Podder, “Social Media, Recruitment, Allegiance and the Islamic State,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 4 (July 21, 2015): 107, <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/446>.

³ Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, trans. Anthony Bower, 1st Vintage International ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 3.

Research on radicalization and terrorism today emphasizes logical, causal mechanisms—finding political violence’s roots in greed, grievance, relative deprivation, nationalism and religious faith, among many other correlations.⁴ Each individual who pursues political violence and terrorism is then assumed to make a rational calculation. On the surface, this is compelling and logical. If root causes can be determined, they can be mitigated and it makes clear sense to focus upon the external ideological and instrumental motivations of terrorists that might be shifted changes in conditions. However, the rational, strategic model of terrorist decision making faces a mounting challenge to its empirical and explanatory capability.⁵ Neither the decision making of terrorist organizations nor their strategic manifestations appear to always obey what might be predicted by the rational model.⁶ Terrorists are rarely pure utility maximizers who carefully examine their available options and make a calculation to pursue and action when the expected gains outweigh the costs of their actions.⁷

The psychological approach to understanding why individuals become terrorists fares no better than the rational choice model in its explanatory power as a discrete paradigm. Logically, if external forces cannot explain terrorism, it must find its motivation from the mind or an abnormality therein. Despite intensive attempts to locate

⁴ Among the most cited works in this tradition are Martha Crenshaw, “The Causes of Terrorism,” *Comparative Politics* 13, no. 4 (July 1, 1981): 379–99, doi:10.2307/421717; Martha Crenshaw, “Theories of Terrorism: Instrumental and Organizational Approaches,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 10, no. 4 (December 1, 1987): 13–31, doi:10.1080/01402398708437313; James A. Piazza, “Incubators of Terror: Do Failed and Failing States Promote Transnational Terrorism?,” *International Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (September 1, 2008): 469–88, doi:10.1111/j.1468-2478.2008.00511.x; Randy Borum, “Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories,” *Journal of Strategic Security* 4, no. 4 (January 1, 2011), doi:10.5038/1944-0472.4.4.1.

⁵ See Max Abrahms, “Are Terrorists Really Rational? The Palestinian Example,” *Orbis* 48, no. 3 (2004): 546, doi:10.1016/j.orbis.2004.04.001; Marc Sageman, “The Stagnation in Terrorism Research,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no. 4 (September 1, 2014): 565–67, doi:10.1080/09546553.2014.895649; Anthony N. Celso, “Cycles of Jihadist Movements and the Role of Irrationality,” *Orbis* 58, no. 2 (2014): 230–32, doi:10.1016/j.orbis.2014.02.003.

⁶ Bryan Caplan, “Terrorism: The Relevance of the Rational Choice Model,” *Public Choice* 128, no. 1–2 (July 21, 2006): 97–98, doi:10.1007/s11127-006-9046-8.

⁷ Max Abrahms, “What Terrorists Really Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy,” *International Security* 32, no. 4 (April 1, 2008): 79, doi:10.1162/isec.2008.32.4.78.

a pathological and deviant terrorist psychology, these efforts have roundly failed.⁸ No reliable or consistent profile of terrorists exists; rather, the singular consistency between terrorists across cultures and time remains their fundamental normality.⁹ Despite these failures and given the equifinality toward terrorism, we know that the turn to violence must, in its essence, result from factors internal to the human mind. Though the field of terrorism studies has come far since the attacks of September 11th 2001, many gaps remain in our knowledge. At the same time, counter-terrorism (CT) programs and policies pursued by many governments continue to be constructed upon incomplete theories of terrorist motivation rooted in flawed western assumptions of universal values. The role of emotions in violence and terrorism is acknowledged by most, yet explored in depth by few, but both are inexorably intertwined.¹⁰ Instrumental rationality cannot be separated from the emotional component of terrorism if we are to get any closer to answering the fundamental question: what leads a person to turn to political violence?¹¹

Perhaps scholars of terrorism and political violence, in their zeal to locate rational root causes and deterministic causal mechanisms or psychological profiles, have overlooked a key attribute of human behavior understood and explored by philosophers for millennia: the existential drive. Few individuals who join terrorist organizations initially appear to be motivated by religious narratives or intense belief in a cause.¹²

⁸ Laurence Miller, "The Terrorist Mind II. Typologies, Psychopathologies, and Practical Guidelines for Investigation," *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 50, no. 3 (June 1, 2006): 261–67, doi:10.1177/0306624X05281406; John Horgan, "From Profiles to Pathways and Roots to Routes: Perspectives from Psychology on Radicalization into Terrorism," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 618, no. 1 (July 1, 2008): 80, doi:10.1177/0002716208317539.

⁹ John Horgan, "The Search for the Terrorist Personality," in *Terrorists, Victims and Society: Psychological Perspectives on Terrorism and Its Consequences*, ed. Andrew Silke (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2003), 16–18; Andrew Silke, "Cheshire-Cat Logic: The Recurring Theme of Terrorist Abnormality in Psychological Research," *Psychology, Crime & Law* 4, no. 1 (January 1, 1998): 53, doi:10.1080/10683169808401747.

¹⁰ Stephen Vertigans, *The Sociology of Terrorism: Peoples, Places and Processes* (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge, 2011), 23.

¹¹ Sageman, "The Stagnation in Terrorism Research," 565.

¹² See Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); and Bakker finds those specifically involved in jihadist terrorism from Europe to be living normal lives similar to their neighbors, see Edwin Bakker, *Jihadi Terrorists in Europe: Their Characteristics and the Circumstances in Which They Joined the Jihad ; an Exploratory Study*, Clingendael Security Paper, No. 2 (Den Haag: Clingendael, 2006), 49.

Many have never been directly victimized by the enemy they seek to fight.¹³ Radical beliefs are neither necessary nor sufficient causes for terrorism, nor is poverty, deprivation, or oppression.¹⁴ If they were, terrorism would be a far more common phenomenon. Even in the deepest examinations, many instances of terrorism appear to have no discernable ex ante political motivation, with the cause and justification often constructed after the act.¹⁵ For these terrorists, their acts are not always instrumental. Rather, suffering and self-overcoming achieved through violence and “crimes of passion,” are their own reward, unsubordinated to rationality and any political consequence of their actions. As it was for Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*, struggle is both means and end.¹⁶

Recognition of the power of the drive for meaning-in-life and passion in motivating people to action has a long tradition across a wide range of philosophical and sociological schools. Seventeenth century French moralist Jean de La Bruyère found that, “nothing is easier for passion than to overcome reason, but the greatest triumph is to conquer a man’s own interests.”¹⁷ Nothing could be more contrary to an individual’s interests in their traditional conception than suicide terrorism, yet it has occurred over five thousand times since 1980.¹⁸ Three-hundred years after La Bruyère, fellow

¹³ Thomas Hegghammer, “The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad,” *International Security* 35, no. 3 (December 1, 2010): 57–59, doi:10.1162/ISEC_a_00023.

¹⁴ James A. Piazza, “Rooted in Poverty?: Terrorism, Poor Economic Development, and Social Cleavages,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 18, no. 1 (March 1, 2006): 170, doi:10.1080/095465590944578; Alan B. Krueger, *What Makes a Terrorist: Economics and the Roots of Terrorism*, Lionel Robbins Lectures (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 2; Crenshaw, “The Causes of Terrorism,” 388.

¹⁵ Sarah Colvin, *Ulrike Meinhof and West German Terrorism: Language, Violence, and Identity*, Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009), 9; Hans-Peter van den Broek, “BORROKA—The Legitimation of Street Violence in the Political Discourse of Radical Basque Nationalists,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16, no. 4 (January 1, 2004): 723–24, doi:10.1080/095465590885141.

¹⁶ Leslie Paul Thiele, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of the Soul: A Study of Heroic Individualism*, Studies in Moral, Political, and Legal Philosophy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 12.

¹⁷ Quoted in Jon Elster, *Alchemies of the Mind: Rationality and the Emotions* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 337.

¹⁸ Bruce Hoffman and Gordon H. McCormick, “Terrorism, Signaling, and Suicide Attack,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 27, no. 4 (July 1, 2004): 250, doi:10.1080/10576100490466498; Benjamin Acosta, “Dying for Survival Why Militant Organizations Continue to Conduct Suicide Attacks,” *Journal of Peace Research*, January 14, 2016, 3, doi:10.1177/0022343315618001.

Frenchman Albert Camus offered a similar appraisal, writing that “the rebel does not ask for life, but for reasons for living.”¹⁹ Here, the tradition of existentialist philosophy in which Camus was writing offers an alternative explanation of why otherwise normal individuals, living otherwise normal lives might turn to violence and terrorism against all logic and reason. In the face of many questions asked, but unanswered, existentialist philosophy may offer some answers.

At its core, existentialist philosophy proposes that all humans face the emptiness of essential meaning or purpose in their lives. This so called “angst or “anguish” is a result of the freedom of choice and forces man to confront both the appeal and terror of the responsibility afforded by free will—popularly known as the “existential crisis.” For the existentialists, lacking any teleological purpose, people have both the ability and responsibility to develop the meaning of their own lives and should live them authentically and passionately. Importantly, for both the devout Christian Søren Kierkegaard and the atheist Jean-Paul Sartre, individuals must embark on an authentic, lived experience to find their own purpose in a fundamentally meaningless world.

While some fulfill this imperative through innocuous activities as diverse as parenting and skydiving, others find war and violence to be the “ultimate experience” whose life-affirming ability is unequalled.²⁰ For Nietzsche, who knew war as a young man, strife was “the perpetual food of the soul.”²¹ From Tolstoy to Ernst Jünger to *American Sniper*, the inner experience of war and violence is distinguished as inimitable and uniquely transformational. The extremes of war push people beyond their limits and test their constitution in the most difficult of circumstances, producing what popular discourse often describes as the most authentic of life experiences; one that reveals the truth about the world and offers meaning to its participants.²² While political science,

¹⁹ Camus, *The Rebel*, 101.

²⁰ The phrase “ultimate experience” here is borrowed from the title of Yuval N. Harari, *The Ultimate Experience: Battlefield Revelations and the Making of Modern War Culture, 1450-2000* (Basingstoke, UK ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

²¹ Quoted in Rebekah S. Peery, *Nietzsche on War* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2009), 137.

²² Harari, *The Ultimate Experience*, 10.

sociology and psychology have brought us far in understanding motivations toward terrorism, philosophy can expand our knowledge even further.

Two lines of evidence suggest that the existential motivation is of particular importance to modern terrorism. The first is the nature of modern life or the influence of the “condition of modernity” on the psycho-social development of the individual. A lacuna in meaning-in-life for many may simply be a feature of modern life.²³ Here, modernity is a general term reflecting what Anthony Giddens defines as the “modes of social life or organization which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence.”²⁴ These modes reflect a turn away from traditional society, religion and the social norms that had grounded society to predictable, stable structures. By the turn of the 19th century, philosophers, psychologists, and sociologists alike recognized the unmooring effects of modernity and its potential to alienate individuals and atomize society, creating a kind of social strain Émile Durkheim termed *anomie*.²⁵

Today, modernity is even more *liquid*, in Zygmunt Bauman’s term, with rapid changes in information technology, economic structure and social archetypes shifting at an ever faster pace on a global level. Today, life is increasingly characterized most fundamentally by uncertainty.²⁶ In *liquid modernity*, traditional patterns of life and meaning-in-life must be replaced by self-chosen ones.²⁷ Given this environment, the loss of traditional sources of meaning-in-life must be supplanted by others, and it is through terrorism that many are finding their new “reasons for living.” Like the narrator from Dostoyevsky’s *Notes from Underground*, a modern terrorist, too, might be overheard

²³ Sandra Carlisle, Gregor Henderson, and Phil W. Hanlon, “‘Wellbeing’: A Collateral Casualty of Modernity?,” *Social Science & Medicine* 69, no. 10 (November 2009): 1559, doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2009.08.029.

²⁴ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 1.

²⁵ Émile Durkheim, *Suicide, a Study in Sociology*, trans. John A. Spaulding and George Simpson (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1951), 254.

²⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge, UK : Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2000), 21.

²⁷ Zygmunt Bauman, *On the World and Ourselves*, 1st ed. (Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2015), 8.

saying, “I made up adventures and devised a life for myself so as to live, at least somehow, a little.”²⁸

The second line of evidence comes from the burgeoning field of the psychology of the meaning of life and the recognition of its fundamental importance to human development and living a fulfilled life. Far from simply a philosophical or rhetorical exercise, modern psychology understands the term meaning-in-life as a core part of what constitutes being human. Indeed, meaning-in-life directly affects both psychological and physiological well-being, affecting stress levels and happiness and presaging susceptibility to factors as diverse as substance abuse and fear.²⁹ When individuals face a lack of meaning, they often attempt to reconstruct meaning through alternative methods, and action and lived experience are the most effective means of doing so.³⁰

Supporting a qualitative theory requires marshalling factual material in such a way described best by Anatol Rapoport, “that the reader who views this ‘evidence’ through the metaphors, concepts, and definitions of which the ‘theory’ is constructed will have the experience of ‘understanding.’”³¹ In that light, this thesis approaches the existential problem in terrorism from a multidisciplinary perspective. The fields of social psychology, happiness studies, cognitive science, and even tourism and sport studies offer significant contributions to our understandings of meaning-in-life, its importance, and its development. Most importantly, they provide empirical evidence that substantiates its place within the hierarchy of motivations to terror and political violence and the

²⁸ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Notes from Underground*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, Everyman’s Library 271 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 17.

²⁹ For a review of the evidence, see Sheryl Zika and Kerry Chamberlain, “On the Relation between Meaning-in-life and Psychological Well-Being,” *British Journal of Psychology* 83, no. 1 (February 1, 1992): 133–45, doi:10.1111/j.2044-8295.1992.tb02429.x.

³⁰ Kristin L. Sommer, Roy F. Baumeister, and Tyler F. Stillman, “The Construction of Meaning from Life Events: Empirical Studies of Personal Narratives,” in *The Human Quest for Meaning: Theories, Research, and Applications*, ed. Paul T. P. Wong, 2nd ed, Personality and Clinical Psychology Series (New York: Routledge, 2012), 299–300; Leaf Van Boven and Thomas Gilovich, “To Do or to Have? That Is the Question,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 85, no. 6 (2003): 199–200, doi:10.1037/0022-3514.85.6.1193; Peter A. Caprariello and Harry T. Reis, “To Do, to Have, or to Share? Valuing Experiences over Material Possessions Depends on the Involvement of Others.,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 104, no. 2 (February 2013): 210, doi:10.1037/a0030953.

³¹ Anatol Rapoport, “Various Meanings of ‘Theory’,” *American Political Science Review* 52, no. 4 (December 1958): 981–82, doi:10.2307/1951979.

mechanisms though with the search for meaning influences behavior. Together, these two lines of evidence suggest that meaning-in-life is of the utmost importance, that it is lacking for some in modernity, that it can be manufactured by an individual, and that experience-through-action is the most effective means toward achieving meaning.

Demonstrating the existential drive in terrorism also requires its validity to hold across both time and culture. To do so, this thesis utilizes David Rapoport's "Four Waves of Modern Terrorism" to select cases from divergent eras, geographies, ideologies and cultures. Rapoport identifies four core "waves" of terrorism, each representing cycles of violence lasting about a human generation in duration. Composed of both individuals and organizations, the waves are international in character and are motivated by a "common predominant energy."³² Recent evidence suggests that the waves are not simply a rhetorical device or a retroactive historical classification, but are a real, empirically demonstrable phenomenon.³³

In the what we now conceive of as the first wave of terrorism, the Russian anarchists introduced the super-empowered individual terrorist bent on changing the course of human history, and themselves in the process. After the end of the anarchist wave, a nationalist, anti-colonialist wave emerged through the 1970s. The Basque terrorist organization and separatist movement, Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA), offers insight into the motivations for terrorism inside a nationalist group with a clear grievance and well defined and bounded source of aggrieved recruits. The third wave of terrorism, or "new left" terrorism, is of particular interest since its most prominent groups grew and operated in western, secular, highly developed democracies. Of these, the Red Army Faction (RAF), popularly known as the "Baader-Meinhof Gang" offers extensive primary source evidence of the motivations and self-reported emotions of its key members. The RAF's growth, persistence in the face of its early leadership's capture, and its unique

³² David C. Rapoport, "The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism," in *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy*, ed. Audrey Kurth Cronin and James M. Ludes (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004), 47.

³³ Karen Rasler and William R. Thompson, "Looking for Waves of Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21, no. 1 (January 5, 2009): 37, doi:10.1080/09546550802544425.

collaboration with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) illuminates the organizational-level implications of existential motivations.

Finally, today in the fourth wave of terrorism, the organization variously known as the “Islamic State” (IS) or the “Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham” (ISIS) appears to explicitly understand the power of intrinsic motivations for pursuing terrorism. This is especially apparent in its propaganda and recruiting materials aimed at elite and western audiences.³⁴ Several thousand young men and women have traveled to Syria and Iraq, leaving behind comfortable, if imperfect western lives for a life of intense violence, suffering and struggle.³⁵ While some of these individuals are doubtlessly social outcasts, many others are educated professionals from middle class backgrounds where atavistic tendencies should not be expected. The case of the Islamic State demonstrates that existential motivations are not just artifacts of history, but current problems that must be better understood if counter-terrorism and counter-violent extremism (CVE) programs are to effectively grapple with the full complexity of the sources of modern terrorism.

The idea that propensity toward terrorism may lie in an essential element of the human condition or might arise from the malaise of modernity is a disturbing proposition. Externally motivated political violence is susceptible to efforts to change the strategic calculations of rational actors. In contrast, internally motivated actors represent a significant vulnerability for which counter-radicalization and counter-terrorism efforts offer no treatment. These individuals defy western assumptions of universal materialist, rational instrumentalism and often rise into the highest ranks of leadership of violent organizations. Distressingly, counter-violent extremism programs pursued by western governments operate on core premises grounded in the rational choice theory of terrorism and radicalization theory.³⁶ Individuals who find their only source of individual meaning

³⁴ Jessica Stern and J. M. Berger, *ISIS: The State of Terror*, 1st ed. (New York: Ecco Press, 2015), 77.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 78–79.

³⁶ For an overview of rational choice based counter-radicalization theories, see David J. Kilcullen, “Countering Global Insurgency,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28, no. 4 (August 1, 2005): 597–617, doi:10.1080/01402390500300956; Lorenzo Vidino, “A Preliminary Assessment of Counter-Radicalization in the Netherlands,” *CTC Sentinel* 30, no. 7 (2007): 579–590; Samuel J. Rascoff, “Establishing Official Islam? The Law and Strategy of Counter-Radicalization,” *Stanford Law Review* 64, no. 1 (January 2012): 125–89.

through terrorism cannot simply be dissuaded from their path by rational, utility based counter violent extremism approaches. It is essential to better understand this phenomenon.

II. MODELS OF TERRORISM

The study of why individuals become terrorists, like the broader field of terrorism, is the subject of a vast literature, but surprisingly little consensus.³⁷ Approaches abound to the study of the problem. Studies exist at the individual, group, state and even international level of analysis and methodological heterogeneity continues within each level of analysis. Broadly though, the explanations for the individual turn toward violence fall within two popular schools of inquiry: rational choice and psychological.³⁸ Rational choice forms the dominant theoretical school, explaining terrorism as a logical, instrumental choice in response to political grievances. In contrast, the psychological model considers the individual level of analysis, focusing upon the mind, personalities and behavior. Combining aspects of both approaches, radicalization theory examines terrorists with a multidisciplinary integration of psychology and rational choice along pathways and processes toward terrorism. Within radicalization, the role of social networks merits special attention, locating terrorism's sources in the interplay of individuals with their social networks and society. These schools are not mutually exclusive, and each draws upon the others to inform theory. Each also suffers from weaknesses that result in their failure to explain the turn to violence for a significant number of terrorists.

A. RATIONALIST EXPLANATIONS

Rational choice, also variously known as the instrumental or strategic model, continues to be the dominant paradigm in terrorism studies today. Within this model, individual terrorists are utility maximizers, pursuing political violence to achieve the maximum gains for their interests. In terrorism, as viewed through the lens of classical economic theory, the rational model hinges upon three fundamental assumptions:

³⁷ John Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism*, 1st ed., Cass Series on Political Violence (New York: Routledge, 2005), 1.

³⁸ A third school, the organizational approach, finds terrorism's roots in the dynamics and ideologies of groups. It is not examined in detail here since its level of analysis is above that of the individual. See Gordon H. McCormick, "Terrorist Decision Making," *Annual Review of Political Science* 6, no. 1 (2003): 473-507, doi:10.1146/annurev.polisci.6.121901.085601.

(1) terrorists are motivated by relatively stable and consistent political preferences; (2) terrorists evaluate the expected political payoffs of their available options, or at least the most obvious ones; and (3) terrorism is adopted when the expected political return is superior to those of alternative options.³⁹

Though terrorism is rarely effective in achieving the often maximalist goals of terrorist organizations,⁴⁰ it is a rational, instrumental tool of political change.⁴¹ Terrorism is also strategic, meaning that the consequence of each action are evaluated with respect to their consequences and are directed in the most efficient manner. Terrorist acts are also costly signals used to communicate intent and capability toward political gains.⁴² From this perspective, violence is merely a means to an end, and is but one of many alternatives in a strategic game.⁴³

A corollary to this school is the search for so called “root causes”—underlying social, economic, political, and demographic conditions that cause terrorist activity. If terrorism’s objective is political, its cause must be as well. Here, the grievances of the population arising from some sort of deprivation or oppression interact with precipitating events to produce the response of terrorism. Empirical studies find explanations for terrorism in poverty, demographic strain, political exclusion, political and social change, identity, foreign military invention and geopolitics.⁴⁴ More promising recent empirical works find terrorism more narrowly linked to human rights abuses of governments and the political exclusion of minorities, but remain focused upon environmental

³⁹ Abrahms, “What Terrorists Really Want,” 79.

⁴⁰ Max Abrahms, “Why Terrorism Does Not Work,” *International Security* 31, no. 2 (October 1, 2006): 43–44, doi:10.1162/isec.2006.31.2.42.

⁴¹ Abrahms, “Are Terrorists Really Rational?,” 547.

⁴² Hoffman and McCormick, “Terrorism, Signaling, and Suicide Attack,” 247.

⁴³ McCormick, “Terrorist Decision Making,” 477.

⁴⁴ See Tim Krieger and Daniel Meierrieks, “What Causes Terrorism?,” *Public Choice* 147, no. 1–2 (January 28, 2010): 3–27, doi:10.1007/s11127-010-9601-1; Edward Newman, “Exploring the ‘Root Causes’ of Terrorism,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29, no. 8 (December 1, 2006): 749–72, doi:10.1080/10576100600704069; Robert A. Pape, “The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism,” *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 3 (August 2003): 343–361, doi:10.1017/S000305540300073X; Ethan Bueno De Mesquita, “The Political Economy of Terrorism: A Selective Overview of Recent Work,” *The Political Economist* 10, no. 1 (2008): 1–12; Navin A. Bapat, “The Internationalization of Terrorist Campaigns,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 24, no. 4 (October 25, 2007): 265–80, doi:10.1080/07388940701643607.

antecedents.⁴⁵ Each of these factors doubtlessly contributes to the formation of terrorist groups and the radicalization of individual terrorists, but neither individually nor together are they necessary and sufficient causes.

The rational model and its root cause corollary are especially dominant in the policy arena. Counterterrorism and counter-violent extremism strategies executed by the United States and European governments often seek to shift the utility calculation made by terrorists—either by making it more costly to pursue, or less likely to achieve the desired aims. Yet, it is unclear whether such an approach is truly grounded in sound theory or is effective at all. Were poverty, discrimination and grievance the lone or even primary motivators of terrorism, terrorist acts would be expected far more often they actually occur. Nor is terrorism the sole or dominant province of the poor and downtrodden. The anarchist terrorism at the turn of the 20th century, the left-wing terrorism of the 1970s and ‘80s, and even the leadership of Al Qaeda largely drew from the privileged and educated. Even with a broad definition of “rational,” the pure instrumentality of terrorism toward a political objective cannot alone explain the individual decision to pursue its use.

B. PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPLANATIONS

The second broad field of terrorism studies focuses on the psychology of terrorism. If there are no clear necessary and sufficient environmental causes of terrorism, its source must arise from the mind. Violence is not a willful choice in this model, but rather terrorists turn to violent means through psychological forces.⁴⁶ Individual psychological traits or abnormalities combine with upbringing and environment to lead an individual down a path toward violence. It is psychology which draws individuals

⁴⁵ Piazza, “Incubators of Terror”; James A. Piazza, “Poverty, Minority Economic Discrimination, and Domestic Terrorism,” *Journal of Peace Research* 48, no. 3 (May 1, 2011): 339–53, doi:10.1177/0022343310397404.

⁴⁶ Jerrold M. Post, “Terrorist Psycho-Logic: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Psychological Forces,” in *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*, ed. Walter Reich (Washington, DC : Baltimore ; London: Woodrow Wilson Center Press ; distributed by the Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 25.

toward the path of terrorism with logical and external causes only forming ex post facto justifications or helping to accelerate or catalyze changes.

Early psychological perspectives attempted to locate a deviant explanation for terrorism and operated from the assumption that terrorists must be insane or psychopathic.⁴⁷ Though it remained a dominant popular view for some time, the simplistic psychopathic hypothesis was quickly dismissed with forensic psychological examinations of terrorists in the 1970s.⁴⁸ Later psychological approaches sought to develop a terrorist profile from characteristics both internal and external to the individual. Demographic studies from the 1960s and 1970s focused upon a simplistic socioeconomic profile, finding the median terrorist to be “a well-educated single male in his mid-twenties from a middle-class background.”⁴⁹ Analyses from the 1980s onward examined more complex psychological factors including personality traits and upbringing. A general characterization of terrorists as aggressive, excitement-seeking individuals arose from these efforts, but few characteristics distinguish violent terrorists from mere philosophical radicals. Terrorists are either poor, middle-class or wealthy; unschooled and unskilled or well-educated; and from many different kinds of families and upbringings, suggesting little that is generalizable about those who turn to political violence.⁵⁰

In a more complex psychological approach to understanding an individual’s turn to violence and terrorism, two related psychological hypotheses emerged beyond the reductionist profiling approach. Bridging between psychology and external motivations,

⁴⁷ H. H. A. Cooper, “Psychopath as Terrorist,” *Legal Medical Quarterly* 2 (1978): 253.

⁴⁸ Crenshaw, “The Causes of Terrorism,” 390.

⁴⁹ Jeff Victoroff, “The Mind of the Terrorist: A Review and Critique of Psychological Approaches,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49, no. 1 (February 1, 2005): 7, doi:10.1177/0022002704272040; Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism*, 68.

⁵⁰ Alexander Lee, “Who Becomes a Terrorist?: Poverty, Education, and the Origins of Political Violence,” *World Politics* 63, no. 2 (April 2011): 240–41, doi:10.1017/S0043887111000013; Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalkenko, “Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 3 (July 1, 2008): 429, doi:10.1080/09546550802073367; Paul Gill, John Horgan, and Paige Deckert, “Bombing Alone: Tracing the Motivations and Antecedent Behaviors of Lone-Actor Terrorists,,” *Journal of Forensic Sciences* 59, no. 2 (March 1, 2014): 428, doi:10.1111/1556-4029.12312; Horgan, “From Profiles to Pathways and Roots to Routes,” 83.

the frustration-aggression hypothesis seeks to explain how deprivation can cause a turn to violence. Here, aggression or terrorism emerges as a response to the “frustration” of an individual’s attempt to achieve a goal.⁵¹ Others have adapted this theory to suggest that deprivation need not be absolute, but only needs to be relative to others observed to provoke frustration.⁵² While frustration-aggression may explain a subset of terrorists, it cannot do so more widely. Seeking to account for other hypotheses’ weaknesses, narcissism-aggression explains terrorism’s attractiveness through how the individual’s ego interacts with the external world. Narcissistic injury and disappointment, where a person’s self-worth and image has been harmed leads to resentment that must be avenged through aggression.⁵³ While an ex post study of terrorist autobiographical literature found narcissism’s presence in up to 90% of terrorists, its causal validity remains uncertain.⁵⁴ Neither hypothesis stands alone as a complete explanation of the individual decision to pursue terrorism, nor does current psychological research appear to be any closer to a complete model.

Decades of terrorism research largely belies any notion of a unique “terrorist personality,” profile or a single psychological causal mechanism.⁵⁵ The consensus of decades of psychological profiles of individual terrorists finds but one commonality—their essential normalness.⁵⁶ Explaining terrorism through abnormal psychology is intuitively attractive as a simple explanation of a complex phenomenon. Antisocial,

⁵¹ H.G. Tittmar, “Urban Terrorism: A Psychological Interpretation,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 4, no. 3 (September 1, 1992): 65–66, doi:10.1080/09546559208427160.

⁵² See Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, 40th anniversary ed (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2010).

⁵³ Richard M. Pearlstein, *The Mind of the Political Terrorist* (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1991), 35.

⁵⁴ Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism*, 59; Pearlstein, *The Mind of the Political Terrorist*, 7.

⁵⁵ Jerrold M. Post, “Notes on a Psychodynamic Theory of Terrorist Behavior,” *Terrorism* 7, no. 2 (January 1, 1984): 242, doi:10.1080/10576108408435577; Robin M. Frost, “Terrorist Psychology, Motivation and Strategy,” *The Adelphi Papers* 45, no. 378 (December 1, 2005): 42, doi:10.1080/05679320500519039; Martha Crenshaw, *Explaining Terrorism: Causes, Processes, and Consequences*, Cass Series on Political Violence (London ; New York: Routledge, 2011), 43–44; Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism*, 48.

⁵⁶ Horgan, “The Search for the Terrorist Personality,” 16–17; Silke, “Cheshire-Cat Logic,” 53; Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, *Friction: How Radicalization Happens to Them and Us* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 12; Christine Sixta Rinehart, *Volatile Social Movements and the Origins of Terrorism: The Radicalization of Change* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), 7.

narcissistic and paranoid personality types have striking similarities to terrorist behavior, but have not been found to be predictive or prevalent in actual terrorists.⁵⁷ Evil, as it was in the case of Adolph Eichmann, is essentially banal in the case of individual terrorists.⁵⁸

C. RADICALIZATION

Though not distinct as a separate school of terrorism studies, radicalization theory combines the rational and psychological frames to explore the problem as a dynamic process across time through which individuals become terrorists. Though poorly defined in the literature, radicalization, in its most simple form, is described as a process by which an individual's desire to see and then personally participate in interest in profound societal changes increases.⁵⁹ There must be a change in the nature and intensity of an individual's beliefs for radicalization to occur. In this sense, the radicalization approach seeks to understand both what people believe and how they come to believe it. Radicalization also has both a functional component, where it is a process by which individuals and social groups advance in their commitment and preparation to social change and violence.⁶⁰

Radicalization has no single cause and exhibits different characteristics for different people in similar circumstances. Much like the literature in the psychological approach, there is little agreement upon the individual dimensions of the pathway to radicalization and individuals exhibit a high level of equifinality toward radical positions and acts. Causal factors identified in the broader body of literature demonstrate a division between deprivation and political grievances that are said to "push" individuals toward a

⁵⁷ Silke, "Cheshire-Cat Logic," 55–56, 61–62.

⁵⁸ This refers to Hannah Arendt's assessment of the Nazi SS Obersturmbannführer as being fundamentally normal (banal), rather than essentially evil as one might expect of an organizer of industrial scale murder. See Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Penguin Classics (New York: Penguin Books, 2006).

⁵⁹ Tarik Fraihi, "(De-) Escalating Radicalisation: The Debate within Muslim and Immigrant Communities," in *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge: European and American Experiences*, ed. Rik Coolsaet, 2nd ed. (Farnham, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), 209.

⁶⁰ McCauley and Moskalenko, "Mechanisms of Political Radicalization," 416.

radical cause and individualized “pull” factors that attract them along a pathway.⁶¹ The pathway need not be linear either. For some, ideology leads to them to join a group, while for others, social networks lead to ideological commitment.⁶²

Radicalization is also often described as a change facilitated by people and processes external to the individuals,⁶³ though self-radicalization is a sub-phenomenon in the literature.⁶⁴ Social networks exert a significant influence on the process of radicalization toward terrorism. Individuals do not make decisions in isolation, but are instead highly shaped by other actors in the networks in which they exist.⁶⁵ The attributes of a person may be individually important, but they often cannot alone explain similarities and differences in behavior because they ignore the broader social and relational context in which actors interact.⁶⁶ Patterns of interaction and ties with other humans, events, and places among other relational ties have a disparate impact in the process of radicalization.⁶⁷

While each individual may enter a terrorist group with their own predispositions, the group dynamic and the ties that form between individuals will have a profound

⁶¹ Randy Borum, “Radicalization into Violent Extremism II: A Review of Conceptual Models and Empirical Research,” *Journal of Strategic Security* 4, no. 4 (January 1, 2011): 44, doi:10.5038/1944-0472.4.4.2.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 57.

⁶³ Borum, “Radicalization into Violent Extremism I,” 13–14.

⁶⁴ See J. Reid Meloy and Jessica Yakeley, “The Violent True Believer as a ‘Lone Wolf’ – Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Terrorism,” *Behavioral Sciences & the Law* 32, no. 3 (May 1, 2014): 347–65, doi:10.1002/bsl.2109; Susan Currie Sivek, “Packaging Inspiration: Al Qaeda’s Digital Magazine Inspire in the Self-Radicalization Process,” *International Journal of Communication* 7 (2013), http://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/mscmfac_pubs/12/; Lars Erik Berntzen and Sveinung Sandberg, “The Collective Nature of Lone Wolf Terrorism: Anders Behring Breivik and the Anti-Islamic Social Movement,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no. 5 (October 20, 2014): 759–79, doi:10.1080/09546553.2013.767245; Peter J Phillips, “Lone Wolf Terrorism,” *Peace Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy* 17, no. 1 (2011), doi:10.2202/1554-8597.1207; Richard Bach Jensen, “The Pre-1914 Anarchist ‘Lone Wolf’ Terrorist and Governmental Responses,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no. 1 (January 1, 2014): 86–94, doi:10.1080/09546553.2014.849919.

⁶⁵ Mark S. Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties,” *American Journal of Sociology* 78, no. 6 (May 1, 1973): 1377–78.

⁶⁶ David Krackhardt and Jeffrey R. Hanson, “Informal Networks,” *Harvard Business Review* 71, no. 4 (1993): 104.

⁶⁷ Sean F. Everton, *Disrupting Dark Networks*, Structural Analysis in the Social Sciences 34 (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 24–26.

impact on how they make decisions. The density of a network can also affect behavior. Sparse networks tend to lack social control mechanisms that prevent deviant behavior, while denser networks often exhibit greater levels of conformity to social norms.⁶⁸ Each of these patterns of behavior is an emergent property of the relationship ties and topography of networks of actors and exists irrespective of individual attributes. In short, our agency as humans is circumscribed by our place in the social networks in which we exist.

Though typically intertwined with radical Islamic terrorism in the most recent research, radicalization need not be negative or necessarily associated directly with violence. Causes as diverse as environmentalism, disabled rights and animal rights all have produced radicalized fringes.⁶⁹ Though the models vary, they generally include stages of progressively greater involvement in a cause that begins from a feeling of grievance and deprivation. Grievances, rather than being purely rational motivators toward terrorism here are part of a pathway. Individuals are radicalized through individual, group and societal level processes where personal victimization, political grievances, and group dynamics coalesce to push and pull an individual on a pathway to violent radicalism.⁷⁰ Each stage of radicalization is reached by fewer people and most never reach the level of actually engaging in terrorism. However, within the primary models of radicalization toward terrorism, violence is the ultimate outcome.

Generically, radicalization can be distilled into a process with stages described as pre-radicalization, identification, indoctrination, and action. In pre-radicalization, an individual experiences a conversion of personal belief. Identification is the process of deepening the identification toward the cause and the development of a binary “us-versus-them” outlook toward an out-group. Here an individual may receive reinforcing guidance from others involved in the cause. Indoctrination is group-level process that

⁶⁸ Ibid., 10–11; H. Brinton Milward and Jörg Raab, “Dark Networks as Organizational Problems: Elements of a Theory,” *International Public Management Journal* 9, no. 3 (September 1, 2006): 344–45, doi:10.1080/10967490600899747.

⁶⁹ Melissa Dearey, *Radicalization: The Life Writings of Political Prisoners* (Oxon ; New York: Routledge, 2010), 2–3.

⁷⁰ Borum, “Radicalization into Violent Extremism II,” 44; Horgan, “From Profiles to Pathways and Roots to Routes,” 90.

develops social ties increasing commitment to a cause and the propensity for action.⁷¹ Finally, action describes the execution of terrorist activities after all barriers and inhibitions are removed. Other models augment this process with additional steps that explain the removal of inhibitions toward violence and ideological shifts, but the process is generally consistent across the body of literature.⁷²

Radicalization theory suffers from several flaws that complicate its explanatory value. Root causes form the base of radicalization while psychological and sociological processes move individuals toward terrorism. Most mechanisms in radicalization are external to the individual and neither alone nor together are they necessary and sufficient to predict terrorism. Furthermore, radicalization explains few of the catalysts that activate the process. Even less is known about the relative importance of individual factors. Few individuals become radicalized, and even fewer actually employ violence. Ultimately, radicalization accumulates the weaknesses of the rational choice and psychosocial theories from which it is derived, leaving its empirical validity uncertain and explanatory value incomprehensive.

D. SUMMARY

Walter Laqueur warns that the quest for a “general theory” of terrorism is misguided, writing that “many terrorisms exist, and their character has changed over time and from country to country.”⁷³ There are thousands of articles, monographs and books approaching terrorism as a “crime of logic.” A post-9/11 conference to reach a consensus upon the root causes of terrorism identified fourteen separate antecedents to terrorism, all with loci external to the individual terrorist.⁷⁴ Psychological and radicalization approaches also largely rely on an etiological framework.⁷⁵ Yet, it is clear that these

⁷¹ Dearey, *Radicalization*, 39–40.

⁷² Borum, “Radicalization into Violent Extremism II,” 39–45.

⁷³ Walter Laqueur, *No End to War: Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 22.

⁷⁴ Tore Bjørgo, “Conclusions,” in *Root Causes of Terrorism: Myths, Reality and Ways Forward*, ed. Tore Bjørgo (London: Routledge, 2005), 258–60.

⁷⁵ Etiology is the study of causation.

models are insufficient. Camus' "crimes of passion" arise from a source still unexplained by these models—and though it may still be rational, it need not be instrumental or political in goal. A new model is needed—one that complements, rather than replaces the rational choice and psychological models with a nuanced, but dynamic appreciation of internal motivations toward violence.

III. THE EXISTENTIAL MODEL

It is not particularly new to suggest that motivations internal to the mind are important to understand an individual's turn toward violence and war. There is no shortage of literature extolling the distinctive aesthetics of war and violence, proffering romantic vision of its experience. The modern conception of war as a crucible of experience where men are baptized by fire and forged through tests of strength, endurance and conquering is a direct product of war's place in writings of the enlightenment and romantic movements in Europe.⁷⁶ Recent writers have even generalized from individual experience to suggest that war can even give meaning to entire societies.⁷⁷ Still others have questioned whether western conceptions of violence and war in the 21st century have forgotten the essential humanity of war's experience; eschewing the existential for an excessively rational approach to conflict.⁷⁸ Indeed, the current view of violent conflict presupposes a kind of "war without warriors,"⁷⁹ abandoning one essential component of Clausewitz's fascinating trinity: that of passion, hate and enmity.⁸⁰ The last remaining vestige of any understanding of war's existential attraction seems to be acknowledged today only implicitly in the language of U.S. military recruitment literature and media and by our illiberal adversaries.⁸¹

After years of research dominated by the rational model, there appears to be a recent return to reflection upon the intrinsic motivations toward violence and terrorism. Extrapolating from the aesthetic literature on the experience of war, Simon Cottee and Keith Hayward argue motivation toward terrorism comes from desire for excitement,

⁷⁶ Harari, *The Ultimate Experience*, 23–25.

⁷⁷ See Chris Hedges, *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*, 1st ed (New York: PublicAffairs, 2002); and Anthony Loyd, *My War Gone By, I Miss It So*, Reprint (Grove Press, 2014).

⁷⁸ See Christopher Coker, *Waging War without Warriors?: The Changing Culture of Military Conflict*, IISS Studies in International Security (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁸⁰ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. O. J. Matthijs Jolles, 1st ed. (New York: The Modern Library, 1943), 18.

⁸¹ Harari, *The Ultimate Experience*, 194–95.

glory and ultimate meaning.⁸² For them, the experience of terrorism, as felt through human emotions, is as important as the justifications and expected outcomes of terrorism.⁸³ Megan McBride goes further, placing the philosophical, existential attractions of terrorism identified by others within the framework of psychology's terror management theory (TMT).⁸⁴ Alternatively, Max Abrahms suggests that terrorism can be an escape from alienation, offering social bonds and group identity to those otherwise separated from their society.⁸⁵ These recent breaks from the rational model are constructive and valuable, but their conclusions have yet to be empirically tested nor have their mechanisms been deeply theorized and investigated.

Excitement or glory may each be important, but they cannot stand alone as the motivating factors. Alienation and the need for social solidarity too may offer significant insights into the attraction to terrorism, but cannot exist alone either. Glory, excitement, and group solidarity are merely among the means through which ultimate meaning-in-life can be created. As explanations, they must exist within a wider psychological context, framework of human nature, and hierarchy of existential needs. However, to properly bring existential motivations into the study of terrorism, it is necessary to empirically demonstrate their importance and the mechanisms through which they function. In the service of this, multi-disciplinary social science can demonstrate both the importance of meaning, its status in our modern world, and its effect on both the individual and societal level processes that push individuals toward terrorism.

⁸² Simon Cottee and Keith Hayward, "Terrorist (E)motives: The Existential Attractions of Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 34, no. 12 (December 1, 2011): 966, doi:10.1080/1057610X.2011.621116.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 964.

⁸⁴ Megan K. McBride, "The Logic of Terrorism: Existential Anxiety, the Search for Meaning, and Terrorist Ideologies," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23, no. 4 (September 1, 2011): 560–81, doi:10.1080/09546553.2011.575486; "Terror," in Terror Management Theory (TMT) does not refer to terrorism. Rather TMT is a psychological theory that the "terror" of the inevitability of death has important psychological effects that must be mediated by other mechanisms, principally culture. See Jeff Greenberg and Jamie Arndt, "Terror Management Theory," in *Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology: Volume One*, ed. Paul A. M. Van Lange, Arie W. Kruglanski, and E. Tory Higgins (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2011), 398–99.

⁸⁵ Abrahms, "What Terrorists Really Want," 96–101.

A. THE PHILOSOPHY OF MEANING

In a world of suffering, violence, death, inequality, and other displeasures, imagine a device that would allow any person to decouple from the often terrible realities of the world and experience constant, pure pleasure and enjoyment. Such a machine could stimulate your neural impulses in such a way that you would feel like “you were writing a great novel, or making a friend, or reading an interesting book.”⁸⁶ This world would be a complete fiction; merely a simulation of events which never occurred and had no external manifestation outside the artificially stimulated mind. While attached to the machine, one would know only the reality constructed therein and would have no conception of an external world where time and authentic experience continued. Yet, in this machine, an individual would experience his or her wildest dreams, pleasures, and events impossible in ordinary life or with the resources of a normal person. Despite the undeniable prima facie appeal of such a life, few who contemplate the true ramifications of the “experience machine” would voluntarily subjugate their reality to connect to its simulations.⁸⁷

Robert Nozick proposes this “experience machine” as a thought experiment questioning the validity of the hedonistic perspective on life’s purpose as simply the pursuit of pleasure.⁸⁸ Several millennia ago, the Greek Cyrenaics, Epicureans and more recently, 19th-century utilitarian philosophers Jeremy Bentham and John Stewart Mill among others promulgated the hedonistic belief that pleasure in life was the only true good. Yet, given the choice, most would reject pure pleasure for a life of authenticity, connectedness and transcendent meaning even if it inevitably portends some level of suffering, pain, and sadness. Nozick’s thought experiment reveals that there are things which matter to us more than simply having certain experiences or possessions. Nozick writes that, “we want to do certain things and not just have the experience of having done

⁸⁶ Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 42.

⁸⁷ Dan Weijers, “Nozick’s Experience Machine Is Dead, Long Live the Experience Machine!,” *Philosophical Psychology* 27, no. 4 (July 4, 2014): 515, doi:10.1080/09515089.2012.757889.

⁸⁸ Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 42–45.

them.”⁸⁹ Most importantly, we want to become a unique person, distinguished from all others. Nozick even implies that simply plugging in to the machine is akin to committing a form of “suicide.”⁹⁰ Even the use of video-games, the closest analog that exists to an actual “experience machine,” validate Nozick’s hypothesis with social, multiplayer games representing a preponderance of gaming activity.⁹¹ Humans want to be connected to a reality greater than our internal selves.

The meaning of life in general and, meaning-in-life and its attainment is a core philosophical theme in the western canon. Alongside the philosophical, the theological sources of meaning in the Christian and Jewish traditions also heavily influence its conception in the western world. From the Platonic ideal of knowledge and the Aristotelian ideal of virtue, to the hedonic utilitarians and Continental philosophy, meaning holds a central place in the thought across time and traditions. No story is more opposite the “experience machine” than that of Sisyphus. Banished to Hades by Zeus for keeping death away from all humanity,⁹² the Greek tragic hero Sisyphus, once the King of Corinth and the wisest of all mortals, was condemned to an eternity of pushing a boulder up a hill only to nearly reach to top and have it roll to the bottom again.⁹³ Yet, in Camus’ re-imagination of the myth, despite the absurdity of being perpetually doomed to the same impossible task, he rebels against his struggle with his full energy.⁹⁴ Sisyphus held his fate in his hands and attacked it, recognizing “there is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn.”⁹⁵ He was happy and lived a perpetually meaningful life because

⁸⁹ Ibid., 43.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ For the relative popularity of multiplayer games, see Vishag A. Badrinarayanan, Jeremy J. Sierra, and Kinnon M. Martin, “A Dual Identification Framework of Online Multiplayer Video Games: The Case of Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs),” *Journal of Business Research* 68, no. 5 (May 2015): 1045–52, doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2014.10.006; “Essential Facts about the Computer and Video Game Industry: 2015 Sales, Demographic and Usage Data” (Entertainment Software Association, 2015), <http://www.theesa.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/ESA-Essential-Facts-2015.pdf>.

⁹² Daniel C. Raffalovich, “The Deaths of Sisyphus: Structural Analysis of a Classical Myth,” *Anthropologica* 30, no. 1 (1988): 88, doi:10.2307/25605249.

⁹³ Thomas Bulfinch, *Bulfinch’s Mythology* (New York: Modern Library, 1993), 248.

⁹⁴ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O’Brien, 1st Vintage international ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 121.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

he fought against his masters (the gods). It was through continual struggle, trial and tribulation that Sisyphus himself, and himself alone, constructed his own meaning-in-life.

Perhaps no philosophical tradition focuses on meaning-in-life more than existentialism. What distinguishes existentialism within the western philosophical tradition is its focus on the individual and one's capability and responsibility to create the essence of one's own life. Though it is a retroactive categorization of a wide range of philosophers who mostly never described themselves as such, existentialism is now a core school of philosophical inquiry, as well as a cultural movement.⁹⁶ Counted among its adherents and exponents are Christians, Jews, and atheists alike.⁹⁷ Similar to Romanticism, the 19th century largely German movement that laid the intellectual foundations for existentialism, it represents a break from the rationalist philosophies that had come to dominate European thought during the enlightenment.⁹⁸ Counter to the fundamental precepts of the enlightenment, for the romantics not everything was measureable and prescribable to reason. Romanticism sought a return to subjectivity and spontaneity where emotions and passions matter and recognized a limit upon logic and reasoning's ability to explain the world.⁹⁹ Existentialism breaks from romanticism and builds upon it by looking beyond our nature to question the very meaning of our existence.

Though it has roots deep into ancient Greek philosophy, modern existentialism is generally considered to begin with ideas of the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855). Kierkegaard explored the philosophy of individual choice, anxiety, alienation and death from a perspective of deep Christian faith. Friedrich Nietzsche

⁹⁶ F. C. Copleston, "Existentialism," *Philosophy* 23, no. 84 (January 1948): 19, doi:10.1017/S0031819100065955; Walter Arnold Kaufmann, ed., *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky to Sartre*, Rev. and expanded (New York: New American Library, 1975), 11; See William McBride, "Existentialism as a Cultural Movement," in *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism*, ed. Steven Crowell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 50–69.

⁹⁷ William Barrett, *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy* (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1990), 17.

⁹⁸ Robert C. Solomon, *From Rationalism to Existentialism: The Existentialists and Their Nineteenth-Century Backgrounds* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 37.

⁹⁹ Robert C. Solomon, *The Passions: Emotions and the Meaning of Life* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1993), 15–16.

(1844–1900) is perhaps existentialism’s most influential progenitor. Running through the core of Nietzsche’s philosophy is the idea of individual life affirmation.¹⁰⁰ Familiar, but complex concepts like the *übermensch*, the will to power, eternal recurrence and *amor fati* all assert the individual’s power; a power of creation and overcoming. Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821–1881) and Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910) both wrote literature in the existential tradition examining the empowered individual. In the 20th century, Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) further developed existentialist thought and, in the case of Sartre, brought it into the popular imagination. Though, with the qualified exception of Sartre, none of these philosophers ever self-categorized themselves as existentialists, read together they each contribute to what we think of as existentialism today.

Just as with other philosophical schools of thought, philosophers in the existentialist tradition disagree on both details and fundamentals. It is neither the place, nor is there space in this work to outline the full depth and breadth of existentialist thought. Yet, it is possible to sketch a broad outline of existentialism’s theory of the meaning of life, its importance, its constituents, and development. Here, existentialism posits both a problem with finding meaning-in-life and a solution. It is from this dichotomy that we can gain the most insight on the existential drive and its relation to modern terrorism. Existentialist thought has long emphasized the potential occurrence of a moment where a person confronts the essential absurdity of the world and its lack of teleological meaning. These so-called, “existential crises” produce what philosophers have variously termed, angst, anxiety, dread, anguish, or nausea. A consequence of the individual’s realization of meaninglessness and the emptiness of the universe, without the traditional anchor of religion, existential angst is not just a fleeting state, but is in fact, a universal condition of human existence.¹⁰¹ Absent any teleology, humans have the essential freedom to create purpose in their own lives.

¹⁰⁰ Lawrence J. Hatab, “Nietzsche: Selfhood, Creativity, and Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism*, ed. Steven Crowell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 152.

¹⁰¹ Barrett, *Irrational Man*, 221.

Like the inquiry of this thesis, existentialism primarily explores the individual and the nature of being in the world.¹⁰² Individuals are important, separate from any categorization, and they can define their own world. Famously for Sartre, “man first exists; he materializes in the world, encounters himself, and only afterward defines himself.”¹⁰³ That is to say as Sartre puts it, “existence precedes essence” or more simply, that there is no “human nature.”¹⁰⁴ This contrasts strongly with the traditional Platonic and Aristotelian premise that essence precedes existence, whereby man is at birth endowed with a teleological purpose and an immutable nature.¹⁰⁵ Given its focus on the individual, existentialism heavily emphasizes action, freedom, and decision as fundamental to human existence. For Sartre, man is born without inherent purpose and is responsible for defining his or her own meaning of existence. However, beyond one’s responsibility for giving his or her life its own meaning is the responsibility to live it passionately and sincerely, or more accurately, authentically.¹⁰⁶

B. THE SCIENCE OF MEANING

Once confined merely to the realm of philosophers, modern sociology and social psychology recognize meaning’s centrality to human development and living a fulfilling life. Across the 20th century, existentialist thought slowly began to influence other fields in science and social science, but largely remained peripheral to other viewpoints. The exploration of meaning and its importance only truly entered the mainstream of psychology with the writings and theories of Rollo May and Viktor Frankl.¹⁰⁷ A survivor of Auschwitz and a trained psychotherapist, Frankl’s book *Man’s Search for Meaning*

¹⁰² Kaufmann, *Existentialism*, 11.

¹⁰³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, ed. John Kulka, trans. Carol Macomber (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 22.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Merold Westphal, “Existentialism and Religion,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism*, ed. Steven Crowell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 336.

¹⁰⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2012), 587.

¹⁰⁷ See Rollo May, “The Origins and Significance of the Existential Movement in Psychology,” in *Existence: A New Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology*, ed. R. May, E. Angel, and H. F. Ellenberger (New York: Basic Books, 1958), 3–36; Viktor E. Frankl, *The Will to Meaning: Foundations and Applications of Logotherapy*, Expanded (New York: Plume, 2014).

and the methods of psychotherapy he developed from his experiences in Auschwitz have had a profound influence on psychology in the latter half of the 20th century.¹⁰⁸ Echoing the ancient Stoics, Frankl argues that “everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”¹⁰⁹ Frankl later developed *logotherapy*, a practical application of existential philosophical concepts to treat psychological conditions. Today, existential psychology is a thriving branch of positive psychology and represents both a significant approach to the clinical practice of psychology and a research program on the sources of psychological well-being and meaning-in-life.

Because of its centrality to human nature and its subjectivity, meaning is a difficult concept to define. At its core, meaning is an integrating function that provides a person the ability to make sense of life, organize their place in the world, anchor themselves to relative to others, and plan for the future.¹¹⁰ More narrowly, Baumeister offers that meaning is a “mental representation of possible relationships among things, events, and relationships. Thus, meaning connects things.”¹¹¹ Having the capacity to process meaning gives humans the capability to both regulate and experience a wider range of emotions and categorize the world and its signals and patterns.¹¹² From this, meaning-in-life becomes a related concept that has its own constituents.

Baumeister further categorizes the needs into four main categories of meaning: purpose, value, efficacy, and self-worth.¹¹³ Purpose is a sense that one’s life is organized and directed toward the future, goals and possibilities.¹¹⁴ Having purpose allows

¹⁰⁸ Timothy E. Pytell, “Viktor Frankl and the Genesis of the Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy,” *The Psychoanalytic Review* 88, no. 2 (April 1, 2001): 490–91, doi:10.1521/prev.88.2.311.17672.

¹⁰⁹ Viktor E. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, 1st ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 66.

¹¹⁰ Michael F. Steger, “Meaning in Life,” in *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology (2nd Ed.)*, ed. S. J. Lopez and C. R. Snyder, Oxford Library of Psychology. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 680.

¹¹¹ Roy F. Baumeister, *Meanings of Life* (New York: Guilford Press, 1991), 15.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 18–19.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

individuals to understand their current state and relate it to the future and its possibilities. Purpose does not have to be goal oriented. It can be fulfilled by intrinsically satisfying activities as well as those that offer concrete, extrinsic results.¹¹⁵ The second category, value, relates to the sense that one's actions and life are being lived in the service of what is deemed normatively good and right.¹¹⁶ Efficacy is the human need to believe that one's life is under one's own control. It is not simply enough to have goals and to believe those goals are moral and justified, a person must also believe that the achievement of their purpose is feasible.¹¹⁷ Finally, meaning-in-life also requires positive self-worth.¹¹⁸

Those individuals possessing all four categories of meaning in their lives as outlined by Baumeister, generally report their lives are very meaningful. In contrast, a lack of any single factor can result in inadequate levels of subjective meaningfulness.¹¹⁹ In a more comprehensive framework, Reker and Wong identify twelve categories of sources of meaning:

(a) meeting such basic needs as food, shelter, and safety; (b) leisure activities or hobbies; (c) creative work; (d) personal achievement (education or career); (f) personal growth (wisdom or maturity); (g) social or political activism (e.g., the peace movement or anti-pollution campaigns); (h) altruism; (i) enduring values and ideals (truth, goodness, beauty and justice); (j) traditions and culture, including heritage or ethno-cultural associations; (k) legacy (leaving a mark for posterity); and (l) religion.¹²⁰

While the mix of needs may vary individually, these categories range from the basic needs that are fundamental to simply sustaining life to the transcendent and

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 33.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 36.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 41.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 44.

¹¹⁹ Roy F. Baumeister and Kathleen D. Vohs, "The Pursuit of Meaningfulness in Life," in *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, ed. C.R. Snyder and Shane J. Lopez (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 610.

¹²⁰ Marvin J. McDonald, Paul T. P. Wong, and Daniel T. Gingras, "Meaning-in-Life Measures and Development of a Brief Version of the Personal Meaning Profile," in *The Human Quest for Meaning: Theories, Research, and Applications*, ed. Paul T. P. Wong, 2nd ed, Personality and Clinical Psychology Series (New York: Routledge, 2012), 359.

spiritual. Simplified, meaning-in-life is a multifaceted concept that includes both a sense of fulfillment in one's current situation and purpose toward the future.¹²¹

Meaning can also be bifurcated it into two levels: global and situational.¹²² Global meaning addresses how individuals place their lives in larger context and attain purpose and coherence.¹²³ In other words, the "experience of meaning" revers to having order, purpose in existence and the resulting sense of fulfillment.¹²⁴ In contrast, situational meaning refers to how personal significance is created by specific events in one's life.¹²⁵ Simplified, it is the "meaning of experience."¹²⁶ While they are separate concepts, global and situational meaning operate together, with situational meaning functioning as the direct contributor to global meaning.

Global meaning is particularly important to overall well-being. Reker and Wong propose a triangular model of meaning with cognitive, motivational and affective components (see Figure 1). The cognitive component reflects that cultural, societal and temporal aspects of meaning that influence the selection of goals and actions. The motivational component reflects internal wants, needs and goals that help produce fulfillment and happiness in the affective component. The model also contains feedback loops that reflect the motivational and affective components' abilities to strengthen and validate the cognitive component, and promote the affective component's push toward goal attainment. At their acme, a person with high personal meaning should be comfortable in their worldview and beliefs, with purpose in life directing goals and

¹²¹ Steger, "Meaning-in-life," 680.

¹²² This is also variously termed as "situational and ultimate" or "situational and existential." See Paul T. P. Wong, "Introduction: A Roadmap for Meaning Research and Applications," in *The Human Quest for Meaning: Theories, Research, and Applications*, ed. Paul T. P. Wong, 2nd ed, Personality and Clinical Psychology Series (New York: Routledge, 2012), xxx.

¹²³ Gary T. Reker and Paul T. P. Wong, "Personal Meaning-in-life and Psychosocial Adaptation in the Later Years," in *The Human Quest for Meaning: Theories, Research, and Applications*, ed. Paul T. P. Wong, 2nd ed, Personality and Clinical Psychology Series (New York: Routledge, 2012), 433.

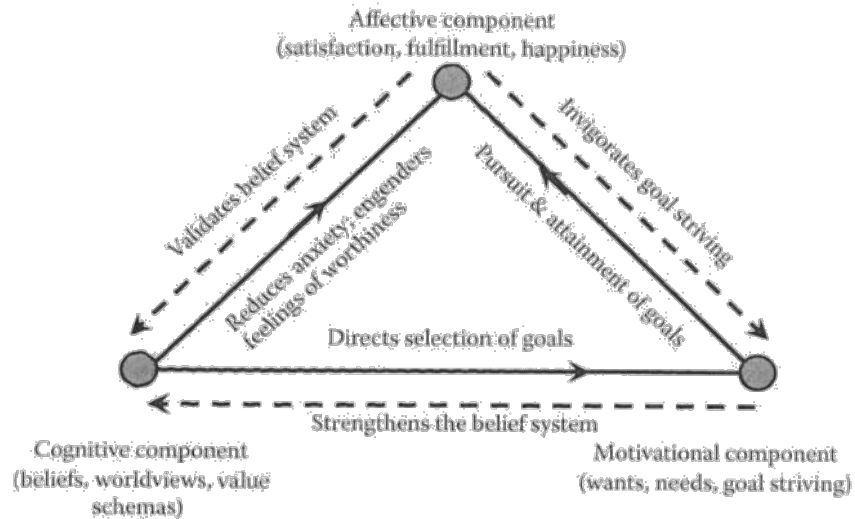
¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 434.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

action.¹²⁷ Each component is reliant on the others for the model to function, and thus personal meaning can breakdown if each is not being fulfilled.

Figure 1. Structure of Personal Meaning¹²⁸



Reker and Wong’s three-component model of the structure of personal meaning. The solid arrows represent the direction of influence and dashed arrows represent feedback.

Happiness and meaning-in-life are not synonymous concepts, but are still closely related. Happiness is largely situational and is generally conceived as a subjective state of being that has “a positive affective tone.”¹²⁹ It can come from individual experiences and can be the result of an accumulation of both positive and negative emotions that results in a sense of having a happy life. Happiness scholarship divides an individual’s sense of happiness into two categories.¹³⁰ The first is the affective component which refers to individual positive and negative feelings about discrete events. The second is a cognitive

¹²⁷ Ibid., 434–35.

¹²⁸ Source: Ibid., 435.

¹²⁹ Roy F. Baumeister et al., “Some Key Differences between a Happy Life and a Meaningful Life,” *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 8, no. 6 (November 1, 2013): 505, doi:10.1080/17439760.2013.830764.

¹³⁰ P. Alex Linley et al., “Measuring Happiness: The Higher Order Factor Structure of Subjective and Psychological Well-Being Measures,” *Personality and Individual Differences* 47, no. 8 (December 2009): 878, doi:10.1016/j.paid.2009.07.010.

component reflecting an individual's sense of life satisfaction. These two components represent both how happiness is created and how it is cognitively conceived within the mind of the individual.

There also exists a distinction between individual happiness and an individual's conception of a good life.¹³¹ Aristotle held that the ultimate aim in life was to strive to realize one's true potential, and through this struggle one could reach a state which he called "Eudaimonia," variously translated as "happiness" or more accurately "human flourishing." As philosopher Thomas Nagel notes, Eudaimonia operates along the "the full range of human life and action," and is achieved when one lives "in accordance with the broader excellences of moral virtue and practical wisdom."¹³² Modern psychologists have more closely explored Eudaimonia, searching for its components and sources. Maslow's well-known hierarchy of needs holds a close parallel to Eudaimonic conceptions of well-being.¹³³ From his typology and the work of other positive psychologists and happiness researchers, Carol Ryff developed a six-factor model of Eudaimonic well-being that accounts for the totality of factors that can produce "human flourishing."¹³⁴ Autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, purpose in life, environmental mastery and positive relations with others represent sub-components of well-being that contribute to the whole.¹³⁵ Later empirical research has explored the

¹³¹ Corey L. M. Keyes and Julia Annas, "Feeling Good and Functioning Well: Distinctive Concepts in Ancient Philosophy and Contemporary Science," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 4, no. 3 (May 1, 2009): 197, doi:10.1080/17439760902844228.

¹³² Thomas Nagel, "Aristotle on Eudaimonia," *Phronesis* 17, no. 3 (1972): 252, doi:10.2307/4181892.

¹³³ Alan S. Waterman, "Two Conceptions of Happiness: Contrasts of Personal Expressiveness (Eudaimonia) and Hedonic Enjoyment," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 64, no. 4 (1993): 678, doi:10.1037/0022-3514.64.4.678.

¹³⁴ Carol D. Ryff, "Happiness Is Everything, or Is It? Explorations on the Meaning of Psychological Well-Being.," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 57, no. 6 (December 1989): 1072, doi:10.1037/0022-3514.57.6.1069.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1073.

relative importance of each sub-factor,¹³⁶ finding “purpose in life” or meaning-in-life to be particularly significant, especially for youth.¹³⁷

Though methodologically difficult, a broader attempt to measure meaning-in-life has also been attempted both by adherents of Viktor Frankl’s logotherapy and social psychologists.¹³⁸ Beginning in the 1960s, several frameworks and scales have been developed to measure meaning-in-life at the individual level, of which the Purpose-in-Life Test, the Sense of Coherence scale, and Life Regard Index (LIR) are the most well regarded and utilized.¹³⁹ Though these measures rely on a self-report survey methodology, their results correlate closely with anxiety and other measures of overall health and psychological well-being, suggesting they hold some empirical validity.¹⁴⁰ The most recent and most comprehensive attempt at measuring meaning is the Personal Meaning Profile (PMP), a 57-item survey developed to measure the full breadth of potential sources of meaning in the surveyed individual’s life that categorizes meaning between five separate psychological functions: cognitive, motivational, affective, relational, and personal.¹⁴¹ Though skepticism about the cross-cultural transferability of these measurement systems is warranted, and research is largely limited to so-called

¹³⁶ See Corey L. M. Keyes, Dov Shmotkin, and Carol D. Ryff, “Optimizing Well-Being: The Empirical Encounter of Two Traditions.,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 82, no. 6 (June 2002): 1007–22, doi:10.1037/0022-3514.82.6.1007; and Carol D. Ryff and Burton H. Singer, “Know Thyself and Become What You Are: A Eudaimonic Approach to Psychological Well-Being,” *Journal of Happiness Studies* 9, no. 1 (2008): 13–39, doi:10.1007/s10902-006-9019-0.

¹³⁷ Carol D. Ryff and Corey Lee M. Keyes, “The Structure of Psychological Well-Being Revisited,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 69, no. 4 (1995): 722, doi:10.1037/0022-3514.69.4.719.

¹³⁸ Michael F. Steger et al., “The Meaning-in-life Questionnaire: Assessing the Presence of and Search for Meaning-in-life,” *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 53, no. 1 (2006): 81, doi:10.1037/0022-0167.53.1.80.

¹³⁹ Kerry Chamberlain and Sheryl Zika, “Measuring Meaning in Life: An Examination of Three Scales,” *Personality and Individual Differences* 9, no. 3 (January 1, 1988): 589–90, doi:10.1016/0191-8869(88)90157-2.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 590; Zika and Chamberlain, “On the Relation between Meaning-in-life and Psychological Well-Being,” 142.

¹⁴¹ McDonald, Wong, and Gingras, “Meaning-in-Life Measures and Development of a Brief Version of the Personal Meaning Profile,” 360–61.

WEIRD people,¹⁴² the LIR has proven to be cross-culturally valid in at least one study conducted in South Africa.¹⁴³

Regardless of its conception and measurement, it is nearly universally accepted that meaning-in-life is important to psychological well-being.¹⁴⁴ A significant number of empirical studies confirm the importance of global meaning toward reducing stress, overcoming life's challenges and in overall mental and physical well-being.¹⁴⁵ In particular, high scores in the PMP have been positively correlated with perceived well-being, hope, meaning of work and commitment and negatively correlated with depression, depressive symptoms, job stress and negative affect.¹⁴⁶ Meaning also functions to reduce stress during times of change and uncertainty and assists recovery from trauma and tragedy.¹⁴⁷ Far from being simply an ungrounded philosophical concept, there is significant evidence that the internal, individual concept of meaning-in-life has concrete external effects. Importantly, one of the most profound effects may be combining with the global, structural changes in society that characterize the modern age to motivate individuals toward violence and terrorism.

¹⁴² White, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic (WEIRD), the subjects of most psychological research. See Joseph Henrich, Steven J. Heine, and Ara Norenzayan, "The Weirdest People in the World?," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 33, no. 2–3 (June 2010): 61–83, doi:10.1017/S0140525X0999152X.

¹⁴³ Jeremias J. de Klerk, Adré B. Boshoff, and René van Wyk, "Measuring Meaning-in-life in South Africa: Validation of an Instrument Developed in the USA," *South African Journal of Psychology* 39, no. 3 (September 1, 2009): 321, doi:10.1177/008124630903900306.

¹⁴⁴ Ryff, "Happiness Is Everything, or Is It?," 1075; Crystal L. Park, "Making Sense of the Meaning Literature: An Integrative Review of Meaning Making and Its Effects on Adjustment to Stressful Life Events," *Psychological Bulletin* 136, no. 2 (2010): 257, doi:10.1037/a0018301.

¹⁴⁵ See Zika and Chamberlain, "On the Relation between Meaning-in-life and Psychological Well-Being"; Suzanne M. Johnson Vickberg et al., "Intrusive Thoughts and Psychological Distress among Breast Cancer Survivors: Global Meaning as a Possible Protective Factor," *Behavioral Medicine* 25, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 152–60; Michael D. Newcomb and L. L. Harlow, "Life Events and Substance Use among Adolescents: Mediating Effects of Perceived Loss of Control and Meaninglessness in Life.," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 51, no. 3 (September 1986): 564–77, doi:10.1037/0022-3514.51.3.564; Gary T. Reker, Edward J. Peacock, and Paul T. P. Wong, "Meaning and Purpose in Life and Well-Being: A Life-Span Perspective," *Journal of Gerontology* 42, no. 1 (January 1, 1987): 44–49, doi:10.1093/geronj/42.1.44; Ryff and Keyes, "The Structure of Psychological Well-Being Revisited"; Carol D. Ryff, "Psychological Well-Being in Adult Life," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 4, no. 4 (1995): 99–104, doi:10.1111/1467-8721.ep10772395.

¹⁴⁶ McDonald, Wong, and Gingras, "Meaning-in-Life Measures and Development of a Brief Version of the Personal Meaning Profile," 363.

¹⁴⁷ Park, "Making Sense of the Meaning Literature," 286–88.

C. MEANING IN MODERNITY

The arrival of existentialist thought and its forebears in the mid-19th century is no accident of history. William Barrett situates existentialism's rise within three great trends converging in the 19th and 20th centuries which fostered a new human "encounter with nothingness."¹⁴⁸ The decline of religion, the rise of a rationally ordered mass society and the impact of science's exploration of the world radically shifted the way people encountered the world and caused many to question their fundamental identity and its sources.¹⁴⁹ No longer was life statically centered on one's home and family. Religion in Europe and the West had long anchored identity and meaning to an individual's relationship to scripture, religious practice, and ultimately God. Instead, profound changes in religious organization, the rise of Protestantism, and the loss of a system that ordered everyday life from birth to death held massive implications for society as a whole. For Nietzsche, this meant that "God is dead,"¹⁵⁰ not in a literal sense, but in the more profound understanding that morality and human existence was no longer chained to a fixed, unquestioned set of rules, symbols, rituals, and concepts that flowed from the belief and faith in the divine and transcendent.

There has long been widespread recognition of a generalized lacuna in meaning that accompanied modernity's arrival. Francis Fukuyama ends his influential commentary "The End of History?" with a poignant coda to his analysis of the future of the post-Cold War international system:

The end of history will be a very sad time. The struggle for recognition, the willingness to risk one's life for a purely abstract goal, the worldwide ideological struggle that called forth daring, courage, imagination, and idealism, will be replaced by economic calculation, the endless solving of

¹⁴⁸ Barrett, *Irrational Man*, 23.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ From "The Gay Science" where Nietzsche wrote, "God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?" quoted in Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Arnold Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 95–96.

technical problems, environmental concerns, and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands.¹⁵¹

Fukuyama does not suggest that the “end of history” is inevitable and final. Indeed, he recognizes the “danger that we will be happy on one level, but still *dis*-satisfied with ourselves on another, and hence ready to drag the world back into history with all its wars, injustice and revolution”¹⁵² Fukuyama’s lament is not original; it is only echoing a critique and fear of modernity’s impact that has its roots in the philosophy, sociology and psychology of the 19th century.

Early sociologists and modern social science have affirmed the philosophers’ conceptions of meaning and its centrality to life. In the 19th century, Max Weber was possibly the first to recognize the profound psychological and sociological implications of modernity. Eighty-five years before *The End of History*, Max Weber postulated an “Iron Cage” that threatened to strip humanity of meaning in existence.

No one yet knows who will live in that shell (Gehäuse) in the future. Perhaps new prophets will, or powerful old ideas and ideal will be reborn as the end of this monstrous development. Or perhaps—if neither of these occurs—“Chinese” ossification, dressed up with a kind of desperate self-importance, will set in. Then, however, it might truly be said of the “last man” (letzten Menschen) in this cultural development: “specialists without spirit, hedonists without a heart, this nonentities imagine they have attained a stage of humanity (Menschentums) never before reached.”¹⁵³

Industrialization, the bureaucratization of society, and the expansion of the state have generated incredible human and material progress, yet this advancement may come at the costs of creativity, autonomy and individual identity.

Examining the causes of suicide in 19th century France, Durkheim adopted the term *anomie* from the philosophy of Jean-Marie Guyau and repurposed it to describe the effects of economic and social change. In Durkheim’s estimation, the rapid change in the values and norms of society caused by economic shifts and the reduction of organized

¹⁵¹ Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?,” *The National Interest*, no. 16 (1989): 3–4.

¹⁵² Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 312.

¹⁵³ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and The “spirit” of Capitalism and Other Writings*, trans. Peter R. Baehr and Gordon C. Wells (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 120.

religion's influence, led to the development of the alienation and purposelessness that characterized anomie.¹⁵⁴ In practice, anomie is characterized by “frenzy, impatience, restlessness, feverishness, disenchantment, fatigue, excessive excitement, agitation, distress, exasperation, misery and insatiability (among other similar psychological states).”¹⁵⁵ Anomic suicide, then, was the result of individuals becoming detached from society and the regulatory mechanisms it imposes on individual identity and the meaning of life.¹⁵⁶ Durkheim would also later argue that changes in the division of labor brought on by capitalism, market economics, and industrialization that “diminished the individual by reducing him to the role of machine” were also sources of anomie.¹⁵⁷ While Durkheim primarily recognized the dislocating effects of industrialization and capitalism, the shift in the fundamental social structure and organization of societies also has profound implications.

Modernity is especially different than all previous paradigm shifts in social organization because of the speed of changes, its wholesale replacement of tradition, and in particular, the global nature of its impact.¹⁵⁸ Running across the thought on modernity is its dislocating impact.¹⁵⁹ Some eke out a meager existence for their family today as for millennia before. Yet, others in the privileged classes, free from deprivation, want and care now find themselves on a search for identity and meaning. Among the keenest analysts of the modern condition, Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman describes humanity's current state as “liquid modernity.”¹⁶⁰ In all of human history until the eighteenth century, people were immersed in solid societies constrained by social norms which changed slowly, if at all. People could structure their lives by being members of

¹⁵⁴ Durkheim, *Suicide, a Study in Sociology*, 254–57.

¹⁵⁵ Stjepan G. Meštrović, “Durkheim's Concept of Anomie Considered as a ‘Total’ Social Fact,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 38, no. 4 (1987): 571, doi:10.2307/590917.

¹⁵⁶ Durkheim, *Suicide, a Study in Sociology*, 258.

¹⁵⁷ Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, trans. W. D. Halls (New York: Free Press, 1984), 306–7.

¹⁵⁸ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 1.

¹⁵⁹ Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, 17–19.

¹⁶⁰ Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 1–2.

their bounded and coherent society and could appraise their existence by measuring themselves against their society's norms. Technology, information, capitalism, and other changes have shifted modernity's emphasis from the group to the individual and have unmoored traditional sources of meaning. Lacking permanent bonds, the "liquid man," in Bauman's estimation, must now seek to manufacture his own meaning and purpose through his own skills and commitment.¹⁶¹

For all the sociological and philosophical discussion of the lacuna in meaning that characterizes modernity, its empirical measurement across place and time remains lacking. Given this deficiency, the best approximation for meaning-in-life is happiness, a field of considerable study in economics and sociology. Though, as discussed earlier, happiness and meaning-in-life are not perfectly synonymous, they have much in common. Additionally, of the components of meaning-in-life, happiness is the best and most comprehensively researched and measured. A common refrain is that "money cannot buy happiness." While psychological research on the refrain's underlying truth is contested and complex,¹⁶² there is significant evidence that having or acquiring things has a highly constrained ability to produce happiness.¹⁶³ In the consumerist society of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, increasing material wealth has not brought a corresponding increase in happiness or meaning to life.¹⁶⁴ First posited by Richard Easterlin in 1974, this confounding conclusion has become well known as the Easterlin paradox. In both Britain and the United States, happiness has declined over the last half-century, while the economies in both nations have grown considerably.¹⁶⁵ The Internet, ubiquitous smart phones, video games, limitless television and media accessible for

¹⁶¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds*, 1st ed. (Cambridge, UK : Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2003), vii.

¹⁶² See Caprariello and Reis, "To Do, to Have, or to Share?"; and Leonardo Nicolao, Julie R. Irwin, and Joseph K. Goodman, "Happiness for Sale: Do Experiential Purchases Make Consumers Happier than Material Purchases?," *Journal of Consumer Research* 36, no. 2 (August 1, 2009): 188–98, doi:10.1086/597049.

¹⁶³ Van Boven and Gilovich, "To Do or to Have?," 1199–1200.

¹⁶⁴ Richard A. Easterlin, "Will Raising the Incomes of All Increase the Happiness of All?," *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 27, no. 1 (June 1995): 35–36, doi:10.1016/0167-2681(95)00003-B.

¹⁶⁵ David G. Blanchflower and Andrew J. Oswald, "Well-Being over Time in Britain and the USA," *Journal of Public Economics* 88, no. 7–8 (July 2004): 1381, doi:10.1016/S0047-2727(02)00168-8.

consumption, and the availability of cheap imported consumer goods have had no discernable impact on the average happiness across western society.

The traditional explanation for the Easterlin paradox is centered around the relativity of impressions about personal conditions. As the material standards of a society improve, the judgments made of one's position remain relative to the position of others, not to the absolute change.¹⁶⁶ Money only contributes significantly to happiness in so far as one is wealthier than one's neighbors.¹⁶⁷ Colloquially known as the "keeping up with the Joneses" phenomena, it indicates that individuals judge and assess their material well-being not in an objective sense, but rather against that of their immediate neighbors and their social networks.¹⁶⁸ Across nations, the evidentiary link between material wealth and happiness is also mixed. Hedonic adaptation also portends that people will always rapidly regress to their mean happiness despite major improvements in standards of living and material wealth.¹⁶⁹ The preponderance of the evidence suggests it remains as true today as when Durkheim noted over a century ago, that "nothing is more doubtful" than the happiness of the average individual increasing as humanity progresses.¹⁷⁰

D. MANUFACTURING MEANING

Having established that meaning-in-life is both important and lacking in the modernity, it is necessary to explain the mechanisms through which it is manufactured. Experiences need not be violent or destructive to produce meaning. Activities as varied as quilting circles, parenting, extreme sports, high-stakes wall street trading, and enlistment in the military all serve to add meaning to lives. Psychotherapists have long noted the phenomenon of "Sonntagsneurose" whereby individuals whose meaning-in-life is

¹⁶⁶ Easterlin, "Will Raising the Incomes of All Increase the Happiness of All?," 44.

¹⁶⁷ Christopher J. Boyce, Gordon D. A. Brown, and Simon C. Moore, "Money and Happiness: Rank of Income, Not Income, Affects Life Satisfaction," *Psychological Science* 21, no. 4 (April 1, 2010): 474, doi:10.1177/0956797610362671.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ed Diener, Richard E. Lucas, and Christie Napa Scollon, "Beyond the Hedonic Treadmill: Revising the Adaptation Theory of Well-Being," *American Psychologist* 61, no. 4 (2006): 305, doi:10.1037/0003-066X.61.4.305.

¹⁷⁰ Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, 186.

fulfilled largely through their work, experience feelings of discontent, anxiety, and depression on Sunday after a day without work.¹⁷¹ At its most fundamental level, meaning-in-life is a personal construction constituted of a unique and shifting set of internal and external factors. Viktor Frankl suggests that the search for meaning is not “a ‘secondary rationalization’ of instinctual drives.”¹⁷² Humans have an internal drive Frankl describes as the “will to meaning” that is, above all else, the primary motivation in life.¹⁷³ Importantly, meaning can only be created and fulfilled in the mind of an individual. External factors matter, but the creation of meaning is fundamentally individually constructed.

In the Reker and Wong model, meaning creation exists in a pyramid with the most basic of human needs serving as the foundation and ultimate purpose forming the pinnacle (see Figure 2). Here, the production of meaning is both one of creation and discovery.¹⁷⁴ Individuals can create meaning through their own actions and decisions, and they also discover meaning through reflection upon their greater position in society, its values, culture, and history. Each level in the pyramid contains its own properties and abilities.¹⁷⁵ The foundational level of pleasure and comfort is essential, but it is also the least capable and least comprehensive of the sources of meaning. The top of the pyramid is formed by both service to others and to a cause greater to one’s self and to transcendence beyond the self. These sources, both created and discovered, produce the most profound and lasting meaning-in-life and contribute most significantly to global meaning. Importantly, this model has been demonstrated to hold empirical validity, as predicted by the foundational work of Viktor Frankl, whose ideas inspired its construction.¹⁷⁶ Those individuals who reported sources of meaning through altruistic

¹⁷¹ Patrick Luyten et al., “Self-Critical Perfectionism, Stress Generation, and Stress Sensitivity in Patients with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome: Relationship with Severity of Depression,” *Psychiatry* 74, no. 1 (March 1, 2011): 22, doi:10.1521/psyc.2011.74.1.21.

¹⁷² Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, 99.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

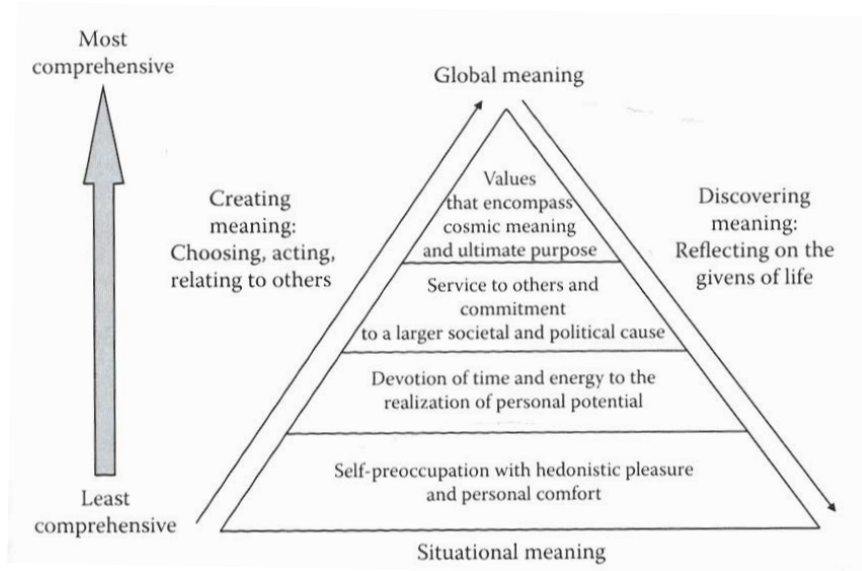
¹⁷⁴ Reker and Wong, “Personal Meaning in Life and Psychosocial Adaptation in the Later Years,” 437.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, 111.

service and self-transcendence, as opposed to lower sources, score significantly higher on measures of global meaning and life satisfaction.¹⁷⁷

Figure 2. A Model of Meaning's Sources¹⁷⁸



Within the processes that create meaning, experiences are among both the most effective means of meaning formation and are those most under the control of an individual. Philosophers, theologians, and sociologists have long understood this phenomenon. From Petrarch's "Ascent of Mont Ventoux" to George Simmel's "The Adventurer," the aesthetic encounter with adventure and its inherent power is a recurring

¹⁷⁷ Gary T. Reker, "Contextual and Thematic Analyses of Sources of Provisional Meaning: A Life-Span Perspective," in *Invited Symposium Presented at the International Society of the Study of Behavioral Development (ISSBD), Minneapolis, MN, 1991*; cited in Reker and Wong, "Personal Meaning in Life and Psychosocial Adaptation in the Later Years," 438.

¹⁷⁸ Source: Reker and Wong, "Personal Meaning in Life and Psychosocial Adaptation in the Later Years," 437.

theme in literature and philosophy.¹⁷⁹ Yet, the process of manufacturing meaning-in-life, and the unique ability of extraordinary experiences to do so, is not merely philosophical rhetoric. In contrast to the materialist theories of happiness, recent psychological research indicates that experiences produce a significantly higher return to happiness and life meaning than spending on material items.¹⁸⁰ Even simply delaying gratification for experiences accrues more benefits to individual happiness than waiting for a consumer purchase.¹⁸¹ Given the choice, most people want to have experiences rather than have things.

There a number of processes at work that enhance the effect of experiences over materialism for meaning. The testing of one's self in uncertain and difficult situations stimulates physical and mental arousal and amplifies intrinsic enjoyment.¹⁸² Csikszentmihalyi describes this experience as "flow" where the intersection of challenge and personal skills produces a situation where challenge, anxiety and stress are channeled such that they create intrinsic meaning and reward.¹⁸³ The more natural or authentic the experience is perceived to be, the more the situation has the capability to produce reward and meaning.¹⁸⁴ Gilovich and Kumar find that experiences provide enduring happiness and meaning by helping to build positive social relationships, limiting the possibility of encountering the "keeping up with the Joneses" phenomenon and most importantly, by

¹⁷⁹ See Francesco Petrarca, "The Ascent of Mont Ventoux," in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man: Petrarca, Valla, Ficino, Pico, Pomponazzi, Vives*, ed. Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall Jr (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 36–47, <http://homepages.gac.edu/~panciera/Petrarchletters.pdf>; Georg Simmel, "The Adventurer: 1911," in *The Sociology of Risk and Gambling Reader*, ed. James Cosgrave, trans. David Kettler, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 215–224, http://www.osea-cite.org/tourismworkshop/resources/Simmel_The_Adventurer.pdf.

¹⁸⁰ Thomas Gilovich and Amit Kumar, "We'll Always Have Paris: The Hedonic Payoff from Experiential and Material Investments," *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 1 (2015): 7; Van Boven and Gilovich, "To Do or to Have?," 1199.

¹⁸¹ Amit Kumar, Matthew A. Killingsworth, and Thomas Gilovich, "Waiting for Merlot: Anticipatory Consumption of Experiential and Material Purchases," *Psychological Science* 25, no. 10 (October 1, 2014): 1, 6, doi:10.1177/0956797614546556.

¹⁸² Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Play and Intrinsic Rewards," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 15, no. 3 (1975): 61, doi:10.1177/002216787501500306.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 54–55.

¹⁸⁴ Lori Holyfield, "Manufacturing Adventure: The Buying and Selling of Emotions," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 28, no. 1 (February 1, 1999): 4, doi:10.1177/089124199129023352.

entering and strengthening meaning-in-life.¹⁸⁵ Experiences can also be reflected upon later and are generally viewed upon more favorably as time passes.¹⁸⁶ They have an impact not just to our internal construction of meaning, but to its social development as well. Having the opportunity to talk about experiences to others solidifies and reinforces the meaning of such experiences and enhances that meaning compared to other sources.¹⁸⁷ Perhaps most critically, experiences are more central to our identity than possessions. In one study noted by Gilovich and Van Boven, given the choice between selecting a material item or an experience as a defining element in one's life history, 89% of respondents selected an experience.¹⁸⁸ Like Nozick's "experience machine" suggests, people value authentic, lived experiences above all others, and far above material possessions.

Importantly for the study of terrorism, young people tend to gain more happiness from extraordinary and uncommon experiences, but as people get older, they often gain more enjoyment from more ordinary experiences.¹⁸⁹ Additionally, extraordinary and risky activities are more likely to attract young men than women.¹⁹⁰ Bhattacharjee and Mogilner note that, "extraordinary experiences, which are rare and fall outside daily routines, capture people's attention and endure in memories, affording happiness at any stage of life."¹⁹¹ This suggests that not only are events uniquely capable of producing meaning as is suggested by the philosophical and aesthetic literature, but also that extraordinary experiences are the most likely to produce significant and lasting changes to an individual's global meaning, particularly for young men.

¹⁸⁵ Gilovich and Kumar, "We'll Always Have Paris," 180.

¹⁸⁶ Van Boven and Gilovich, "To Do or to Have?," 1200.

¹⁸⁷ Amit Kumar and Thomas Gilovich, "Some 'Thing' to Talk About? Differential Story Utility From Experiential and Material Purchases," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 41, no. 10 (October 1, 2015): 1329, doi:10.1177/0146167215594591.

¹⁸⁸ Van Boven and Gilovich, "To Do or to Have?," 1200.

¹⁸⁹ Amit Bhattacharjee and Cassie Mogilner, "Happiness from Ordinary and Extraordinary Experiences," *Journal of Consumer Research* 41, no. 1 (June 1, 2014): 12, doi:10.1086/674724.

¹⁹⁰ Stephen Lyng, "Edgework: A Social Psychological Analysis of Voluntary Risk Taking," *American Journal of Sociology* 95, no. 4 (1990): 872-73, doi:10.1086/229379.

¹⁹¹ Bhattacharjee and Mogilner, "Happiness from Ordinary and Extraordinary Experiences," 13.

This interaction of this process of meaning creation with modernity's individual and societal influences is at its most visible in the growing industry of extreme sports. Situated within the global lacuna in meaning and stagnating happiness levels in modernity, there appears to be a steep rise in the interest and participation in sensation seeking behaviors, voluntary risk taking and extreme experiences.¹⁹² Among the most interesting trends in recent years has been the popularity of military-style obstacle course or Special Operations-themed endurance and adventure sporting events where middle-class professionals, sometimes pay hundreds of dollars to escape their safe, routinized lives to race through a variety of difficult and dangerous obstacles modeled after war and military exercises.¹⁹³ Sociologists Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens have both observed that modern society appears to now organize itself most centrally to protect against risks in life.¹⁹⁴ In this situation, risk sports (alternatively termed adventure or extreme sports) have increased rapidly in popularity.¹⁹⁵ Unlike traditional team and individual sports common around the world, risk sports are generally practiced within highly industrialized societies.¹⁹⁶ Indeed, like many terrorists, practitioners of risk sports largely come from the middle and professional classes.¹⁹⁷

Also like terrorism, the pursuit of adventure and extreme sports has been attempted and failed to be explained through the psychological pathology, or personality traits of individuals.¹⁹⁸ More recent attempts at explaining the appeal of voluntary risk

¹⁹² Robert Fletcher, "Living on the Edge: The Appeal of Risk Sports for the Professional Middle Class," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 25, no. 3 (September 2008): 311, doi:10.4135/9781446263518.

¹⁹³ See Matthew D. Lamb and Cory Hillman, "Whiners Go Home: Tough Mudder, Conspicuous Consumption, and the Rhetorical Proof of 'Fitness,'" *Communication & Sport* 3, no. 1 (March 1, 2015): 81–99, doi:10.1177/2167479514521598; and Gavin Weedon, "Camaraderie Reincorporated: Tough Mudder and the Extended Distribution of the Social," *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 39, no. 6 (December 1, 2015): 431–54, doi:10.1177/0193723515570676.

¹⁹⁴ Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, 7; Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Toward a New Modernity*, Theory, Culture & Society (London ; Newbury Park, CA: SAGE, 1992).

¹⁹⁵ Lauren Etter, "Extreme Sports Are More Popular than Ever, Prompting Questions about Legal Liability," *ABA Journal*, June 1, 2014, http://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/extreme_sports_are_more_popular_than_ever_prompting_questions/.

¹⁹⁶ Fletcher, "Living on the Edge," 311.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 314–15.

have found a multi-part formulation to their appeal.¹⁹⁹ At a basic level, risk sports function through biological processes, activating hormones and other biological mechanisms that produce positive emotions, and in turn, happiness.²⁰⁰ They also function at a societal level, situating individuals in a social hierarchy by demonstrating prowess and fortitude.²⁰¹ Most importantly for our study, risk sports work at a cognitive level, producing meaning-in-life through unique experience, overcoming and transcending the self. In this aspect, participants are conducting what Stephen Lyng terms “edgework.” Edgework describes those voluntarily risky activities that take a person to the “edge” of life or death.²⁰² Activities typical of edgework include skydiving, free climbing, motorcycle racing, or professions like aerobatic pilot or combat soldier.²⁰³ Lyng notes that when conducting edgework, participants “claim that the experience produces a sense of ‘self-realization,’ ‘self-actualization,’ or ‘self-determination.’”²⁰⁴ It also produces a uniquely strong emotional response where fear “gives way to exhilaration and omnipotence.”²⁰⁵ As Csikszentmihalyi notes, “people are happy not because of what they do, but because of how they do it.”²⁰⁶ Successfully navigating the line between risky thrill and death is a uniquely powerful cognitive experience that is difficult, if not impossible to imitate through other means.

More fundamentally though, risk sports exist and flourish because of the condition of modernity and the changes it has foisted upon traditional sources of meaning. With the rational ordering of society to minimize risk, the routinization and

¹⁹⁹ Gunnar Breivik, “Trends in Adventure Sports in a Post-Modern Society,” *Sport in Society* 13, no. 2 (March 1, 2010): 260–73, doi:10.1080/17430430903522970.

²⁰⁰ Jonathan W. Roberti, “A Review of Behavioral and Biological Correlates of Sensation Seeking,” *Journal of Research in Personality* 38, no. 3 (June 2004): 273–74, doi:10.1016/S0092-6566(03)00067-9.

²⁰¹ Gunnar Breivik, “Dangerous Play With the Elements: Toward a Phenomenology of Risk Sports,” *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 5, no. 3 (August 1, 2011): 10–11, doi:10.1080/17511321.2011.602585.

²⁰² Lyng, “Edgework,” 857.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 860.

²⁰⁵ Stephen Lyng, “Existential Transcendence in Late Modernity: Edgework and Hermeneutic Reflexivity,” *Human Studies* 35, no. 3 (August 2012): 860, doi:10.1007/s10746-012-9242-0.

²⁰⁶ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, “If We Are so Rich, Why Aren’t We Happy?,” *American Psychologist* 54, no. 10 (1999): 826, doi:10.1037/0003-066X.54.10.821.

bureaucratization of industrialized and post-industrial society and the “liquid” nature of social structure, individuals have become unmoored from traditional sources of meaning-in-life. Risk sports and “edgework” offer their practitioners the ability to escape the monotony and uncertainty of modern life for the risky certainty of the “experience of ‘transcendence.’”²⁰⁷ This function, combined with the manner through meaning is constructed, offers insight into both the processes pulling individuals to terrorism who should not necessarily be predicted to do so by classical models, and the function of terrorism in their lives as they attempt to create meaning in a changing, liquid world.

E. MEANING THROUGH TERRORISM

If violence were the sole or even primary method to achieve meaning-in-life, it would be a much more present phenomenon. Yet, war and violence have a unique ability to produce extraordinary experiences and change people and the world around them. In many ways, war and armed struggle are the ultimate experience. At the core of both existentialist philosophy and positive psychology is the theory that meaning can and must be created by the individual for his or her own life through experience and action. Ernst Jünger, philosopher and veteran of combat in the trenches of World War One, wrote of battle as an “inner experience.”²⁰⁸ For Jünger, it is war that “has made people and their times what they are.”²⁰⁹ Reaffirming the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus views, Jünger writes that “war is the father of all things, including of us.”²¹⁰

Jünger rejects that notion that society should be rationally organized toward universal security, writing that “under such circumstances life would be intolerably boring.”²¹¹ Evoking the young “who, in the foggy dark of night, left their parental home to pursue danger in America, on the sea, or in the French Foreign Legion,” he suggests

²⁰⁷ Lyng, “Existential Transcendence in Late Modernity,” 411.

²⁰⁸ Ernst Jünger, *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis* (Berlin: ES Mittler, 1926), <https://archive.org/details/DerKampfAlsInneresErlebnis>.

²⁰⁹ Quoted in Oliver Kohns, “An Aesthetics of the Unbearable. The Cult of Masculinity and the Sublime in Ernst Jünger’s ‘Der Kampf Als Inneres Erlebnis’ (Battle as an Inner Experience),” *Image & Narrative* 14, no. 3 (November 11, 2013): 143.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ Ernst Jünger, “On Danger,” *New German Critique*, no. 59 (1993): 29, doi:10.2307/488221.

that any “profitable life” will “depart for the distances symbolized by strange lands, intoxication or death.”²¹² In another work, Jünger too rejects the modern attempts to eliminate pain,²¹³ finding suffering to be at the heart of the human condition.²¹⁴ The true measure and meaning of life is one’s ability to withstand suffering and pain. Friedrich Nietzsche noted over 130 years ago that suffering can be its own reward and with it, meaning-in-life can form.²¹⁵ The most moral man of the past was he who suffered the most in service to the group or family.²¹⁶ For Nietzsche, no act proffered a person more gratification or feeling of power than the practice of cruelty.²¹⁷ The desire of individuals to attain self-meaning in modernity is a uniquely strong motivator toward terrorism. Suffering, struggle, and self-overcoming through violence are the means through which terrorists achieve existential meaning in their lives. In this sense, terrorism and violence are the ultimate risk sports.

As Lyng notes, “the same society that offers us so much in the way of material ‘quality of life’ also propels many of us to the limits of our mortal existence in search of ourselves and our humanity.”²¹⁸ More so than any other activity, terrorism produces an extraordinary experience, pushes the terrorist to the limits of risk and danger, attempts to serve a higher purpose, and produces meaning-in-life. Like skydiving, surfing, and other high risk activities, as Stranger put it in his discussion of the experience of surfing, terrorism involves an “experience of self-transcendence that is shared via the interaction of local participants and mediated through the global dissemination of images of the

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ By which, Jünger means broadly “loss, suffering and death”. See Russell A. Berman, “Preface to the Telos Press Edition,” in *On Pain*, by Ernst Jünger (New York: Telos Press, 2008), iix–ix.

²¹⁴ Ernst Jünger, *On Pain* (New York: Telos Press, 2008), 13.

²¹⁵ A theme that runs throughout the early pages of his compendium *Daybreak*. See Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, ed. Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

²¹⁶ Ibid., 11.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 17.

²¹⁸ Lyng, “Edgework,” 882.

sublime,” fulfilling both altruistic service to others and self-transcendence.²¹⁹ In other words, terrorism transfers meaning as both a shared social experience and one that has permanence beyond the fleeting self—an ability almost no other activity can replicate.

Having established the existence of the existential drive and its mechanisms, it is now critical to situate the implications of the existential model in the paths of actual individuals toward terrorism and the activities of the organizations they form. The following case studies will examine terrorists and terrorist organizations in historical context and illuminate how they might be better explained and understood through the existential model.

²¹⁹ Mark Stranger, “The Aesthetics of Risk: A Study of Surfing,” *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 34, no. 3 (September 1, 1999): 273, doi:10.1177/101269099034003003.

IV. CASE STUDIES

From the rise of what we now think of as modern terrorism in the 1870s to the present, terrorism has neither been a consistent in intensity or ideological source. Not only has the magnitude of terrorism ebbed and flowed with global events, its ideological bases have shifted dramatically. What originated in modernity as atheist, anarchist terrorism has given way to a form that looks to a major world religion for its inspiration. Looking a back at the previous century of terrorist violence, David Rapoport proposes that terrorism is a phenomena that occurs in “waves”: cycles of activity that expand and contract, each composed of groups organized around similar principles or guiding “energy.”²²⁰ As the anarchists began the first wave of modern terror in Russia in the late-19th century, other groups around the world emulated both their tactics and their underlying ideology. Across a human generation, the anarchist wave grew and contracted, only ending with the calamitous upheaval brought by the First World War. Out of the shadow of the World Wars arose a second wave, this time anti-colonial in inspiration and spanning the 1940s through the 1970s. The rise of international communism spawned the “new left” third wave of terror the end of which would only come with the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. Finally, the fourth wave, religious terrorism, began in 1979 with the Iranian Revolution and continues with no signs of abating.

Some have criticized the wave theory of terrorism by suggesting that it is possible to trace each wave back further than Rapoport notes and by questioning the utility of its categorizations.²²¹ However, there is significant empirical evidence for the wave theory’s fundamental assumptions about ideological coherence within a wave and conclusions about the dynamics of the waves themselves.²²² Importantly, while the organizations

²²⁰ Rapoport, “The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism,” 47.

²²¹ Tom Parker and Nick Sitter, “The Four Horsemen of Terrorism: It’s Not Waves, It’s Strains,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 28, no. 2 (March 14, 2016): 198, doi:10.1080/09546553.2015.1112277; Charles Townshend, “Wave and Strain,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 28, no. 2 (March 14, 2016): 227, doi:10.1080/09546553.2015.1112280.

²²² Rasler and Thompson, “Looking for Waves of Terrorism,” 39.

within the waves are largely local, the wave in which they exist is global, fostering co-evolution across terrorist organizations and developing a common language, inspiration and character.²²³ Selecting a case from each of the waves offers diversity in the nature of the terrorism, its motivations, time and culture.

Underlying the rational model is the assumption that terrorists maintain an objective function for the desired political payoff of their actions and evaluate the cost and benefits. This objective function serves to direct their activities in the most effective and instrumental fashion to achieve their goals. Terrorists hold ordered preferences about the political changes they seek to achieve; preferring one outcome more than another. A further imbedded assumption is that the benefits of any political changes generated by terrorist actions should accrue, at least in part, to the terrorists themselves. That is to say, in the rational model, individuals are motivated to become terrorists and to act through grievances and deprivation and by the possibility of alleviating these grievances through political change. Finally, there is an expectation that failure as a terrorist or for a terrorist group has a penalty, both personally and collectively. Failed terrorists often end up in prison or dead, while failed terrorist movements can generate a backlash and wave of oppression that only enhances the grievances that spawned the group's very existence.²²⁴ Though in many cases, the predictions of the rational model hold true, there are a startling number of terrorists and terrorist behaviors for which it offers little explanatory value.

Finally, the rational model suggests that the actions by individual terrorists and the groups they form should reflect a strategic or instrumental approach toward the achievement of their ultimate goals. The rational model suggests that groups should pursue the most effective path to achieving their goals. Targets should be selected for their ability to harm the state or other adversaries and should be targeted with the most effective tactics that both harm the enemies, while preserving the strength of the group.

²²³ Jeffrey Kaplan, "A Strained Criticism of Wave Theory," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 28, no. 2 (March 14, 2016): 229, doi:10.1080/09546553.2015.1112279.

²²⁴ Gordon H. McCormick and Frank Giordano, "Things Come Together: Symbolic Violence and Guerrilla Mobilisation," *Third World Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (March 1, 2007): 299, doi:10.1080/01436590601153705.

Yet, in group after group, leaders often personally involve themselves in attacks and utilize means that significantly risk their continued survival, even though superior alternatives exist. Even allowing for less-strict modified definitions of rationality leaves many common strategic decisions made by terror groups inexplicable. Instead, many terror organizations persist long after achieving many of their goals, or after failure is clear.²²⁵ A mismatch between the strategy and the tactics utilized by terror groups and individual terrorists and their stated goals could provide some insight into the less classically rational elements of their decision making, motivated more by the experience of doing terrorism rather than the desired outcomes. Where the rational model fails here, the existential model may be able to offer a supplement.

To be sure, no individual terrorist or terrorist group is purely motivated by the existential drive. Even the most nihilistic or narcissistic terrorist receives some measure of motivation from the external world. The existential drive exists along a spectrum of importance from it being a predominant factor to of little importance. However, if present and functioning as theorized by this thesis, its influence should be found at varying levels across characteristics common to all terrorists. No matter how robust the case selection, the emergence and continued presence of the existential drive toward terrorism cannot be proven through even the most detailed case studies and process tracing through an ex post analysis of historical and current terrorists. Doing so will instead require careful psychological research, personal interviews of terrorists and potential recruits and investigation at both the individual and organizational level across time and place. However, historical case studies can help illuminate the historical evidence that supports the existence of the existential drive and how it has manifested in various ways in both individuals and in group dynamics. Each case study will illustrate the incongruence between the rational model and reality, suggest possible explanations through the existential model, and detail their implications in historical practice. More importantly, the potential individual manifestations of the existential drive toward terrorism and their implications are identified and examined in detail. Finally, these cases will offer guidance for future research into contemporary terrorist organizations and individuals.

²²⁵ Abrahms, "What Terrorists Really Want," 92–93.

A. THE RUSSIAN ANARCHISTS

On April 4th 1866, the modern age of terrorism literally began with a bang. Dimitrii Karakozov, a young man of little remark, brandished a pistol, fired, and missed just as Tsar Alexander II emerged onto the street from the monarch's St. Petersburg's Summer Garden. When questioned by the Tsar himself about what he wanted from the assassination, Karakozov responded tersely, "Nothing."²²⁶ In so doing, he became, arguably, the first modern terrorist,²²⁷ and perhaps the first existential terrorist whose motivations arose more from his internal struggles and search for self than the rational grievances he espoused.²²⁸ Failing in his assassination attempt, Karakozov was captured, leading to an investigation and trial that probed the depths of his mind and the events of his life leading up to the event. Though sentenced to death for his crime, he would inspire the protagonist Raskolnikov in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, and he would influence a generation of Russian artists, intellectuals, and radicals. Though 150 years stand between today and Karakozov's attempted tsaricide, his case remains one of the best documented looks into the mindset and motivations of an individual terrorist.

Karakozov's path to terrorism is one of many contradictions that are impossible to retroactively reconcile. A sickly young man from a background of minor nobility who failed out of two law schools,²²⁹ he is easy to dismiss as an outlier or little significance in the wider study of terrorism for which we have so many other, perhaps more relevant cases. Marked in his time as deranged, sick, insane, and suicidal,²³⁰ he also developed a compelling case against the Tsar's rule. He would also develop his own political strategy he termed "factual propaganda,"²³¹ a primitive version of "propaganda of the deed," a

²²⁶ Claudia Verhoeven, *The Odd Man Karakozov: Imperial Russia, Modernity, and the Birth of Terrorism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 178.

²²⁷ Defining the "first modern terrorist" hinges heavily on what it means to be modern and to be a terrorist. It is difficult to separate Karakozov's failed attempt from John Wilkes Booth's successful assassination of Abraham Lincoln just one year before.

²²⁸ Verhoeven, *The Odd Man Karakozov*, 6–7.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 5, 45.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 140.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 146–47.

concept that would not be formally introduced until 1877.²³² Though there is no doubt that the Russian monarchy produced significant, and well justified grievances, Karakozov appears to have had little regard for the political consequences of his dramatic actions.²³³ Karakozov took great care in selecting his clothing for the day of the attempted assassination, choosing them for their distinctiveness from his typical wardrobe, their plainness and their ability to serve as “urban camouflage.”²³⁴ He also carried a vial of prussic acid that would disfigure his face and obfuscate his identity. At the same time, Karakozov was clearly bored and devoid of purpose in his life, yet yearning for meaning.²³⁵ His actions that April 4th asserted a radical, new kind of freedom to sacrifice one’s self, take action and change the world. He stands as a unique individual, straddling the instrumental and the existential, and defining his path through self-sacrifice, struggle and action.

The birth of modern terrorism in Russia is intimately intertwined with the onset of modernity—the economic, cultural, social, and political changes occurring in Russia and across the western world. The idea that a single individual, acting completely alone and of his own free will, could change the course of history was an idea with little precedent. Modernity and all of its trappings help to ensure that an act of terrorism has meaning and that it will become known around the world.²³⁶ Though it would take many years from Karakozov’s 1866 act for it to reach global awareness and impact, the ensuing anarchist wave of bombings and assassination would lead to the first global war against terrorism, not wholly unlike today’s war against Islamist terrorism.²³⁷ In fact, anarchism took much wider hold across social class and geography than today’s jihadist terror could ever hope

²³² Marie Fleming, “Propaganda by the Deed: Terrorism and Anarchist Theory in Late Nineteenth - century Europe,” *Terrorism* 4, no. 1–4 (January 1, 1980): 4, doi:10.1080/10576108008435483.

²³³ Verhoeven, *The Odd Man Karakozov*, 178.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 120.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 139–40, 146.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

²³⁷ Richard Bach Jensen, “The International Campaign Against Anarchist Terrorism, 1880–1930s,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21, no. 1 (January 5, 2009): 91–94, doi:10.1080/09546550802544862; Richard Bach Jensen, “Nineteenth Century Anarchist Terrorism: How Comparable to the Terrorism of Al-Qaeda?,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 4 (September 18, 2008): 595, doi:10.1080/09546550802257333.

to reach. Anarchism counted 60,000 active adherents in Spain alone.²³⁸ The United States, France, Italy, Germany, and many other European states also saw thousands of their citizens joining anarchist movements and subscribing to anarchist publications.²³⁹ Interestingly, anarchist violence around the world had almost no central direction or motivation.²⁴⁰ Instead, the wave of violence began and persisted as a spontaneous phenomenon divorced from any sense of a coherent movement or ideology.²⁴¹

In practice, assassination was the preferred tactic of anarchist terrorists across the first wave of terrorism.²⁴² The year 1878 saw attempts on both the German Kaiser and Italian King and the already marked Tsar Alexander II was assassinated in 1881. The next decades saw no slowdown in violence, with frequent bombings across Europe and the United States and the assassinations of Empress Elizabeth of Austria, King Humbert of Italy and President William McKinley of the United States.²⁴³ In all, over 220 people died and more than 750 were injured in anarchist violence between the years 1878 and 1914.²⁴⁴ The specter of anarchist violence was so great that it led to global changes in laws, the first international counter-terrorism conference and some of the first international cooperative policing and intelligence sharing efforts.²⁴⁵

Often associated most closely with nihilism, the Russian anarchists, are in Claudia Verhoeven's estimation, more accurately described as terrorists in search of their identity in a changing world—a direct reflection of modernity.²⁴⁶ Russian anarchism in particular

²³⁸ Richard Bach Jensen, "Daggers, Rifles and Dynamite: Anarchist Terrorism in Nineteenth Century Europe," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16, no. 1 (January 1, 2004): 120, doi:10.1080/0954655049046.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Jensen, "The International Campaign Against Anarchist Terrorism, 1880–1930s," 91.

²⁴¹ Anna Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill: Revolutionary Terrorism in Russia, 1894 - 1917*, Princeton Paperbacks (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 133–34.

²⁴² Ibid., 130.

²⁴³ Whitney Kassel, "Terrorism and the International Anarchist Movement of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32, no. 3 (March 24, 2009): 237, doi:10.1080/10576100802671009.

²⁴⁴ Richard Bach Jensen, *The Battle against Anarchist Terrorism: An International History, 1878-1934*, Reprint (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 36.

²⁴⁵ Jensen, "The International Campaign Against Anarchist Terrorism, 1880–1930s," 91–94.

²⁴⁶ Verhoeven, *The Odd Man Karakozov*, 7.

took on an almost religious character that emphasized sacrifice and salvation.²⁴⁷ Though most anarchists were avowed atheists, they adopted both the language of religion and its practices and adapted them for their own purposes and to fill the gap that could not be served by the Russian Orthodox Church.²⁴⁸ There is a significant link between violence and religious rituals as mechanisms of costly commitment and the development of social solidarity.²⁴⁹ For the individuals who were attracted to anarchist terrorism, they found the solidarity, ritual, and transcendence customarily offered by traditional religion through membership in the group and service to its common cause.

The writings and communiques issued by anarchists would bear a stark resemblance to the sermons heard in church or those of the Christian Bible. One atheist anarchist, Ekaterina Breshkovskaia, extolled the transcendent virtues of battle and proclaimed that, “those of you who suffer or die in the struggle for justice and freedom will be called saints.”²⁵⁰ Others would appropriate apocalyptic language of the bible.²⁵¹ Indeed, the concept of the revolution and struggle and suffering in its cause would come to be the defining identity of the Russian anarchists.²⁵² In one organization’s philosophy, “the act of killing must at the same time be an act of self-sacrifice.”²⁵³ Self-sacrifice and death were elevated to the highest of planes where all other identities were shed. Only then would terrorism have transcendent meaning.

The case of Mariia Spiridonova illustrates the juxtaposition of identity, struggle and self-sacrifice common in the Russian anarchists. Born into an upper class background with a difficult, sickly adolescence, Spiridonova would become the most famous female

²⁴⁷ Anna Geifman, *Death Orders: The Vanguard of Modern Terrorism in Revolutionary Russia* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 2010), 140.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 139.

²⁴⁹ Scott Atran, *Talking to the Enemy: Violent Extremism, Sacred Values, and What It Means to Be Human* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), 414.

²⁵⁰ Geifman, *Death Orders*, 140.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 140–41.

²⁵² Sally A. Boniece, “The Spiridonova Case, 1906: Terror, Myth, and Martyrdom,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 4, no. 3 (2003): 581, doi:10.1353/kri.2003.0034.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

terrorist in Russia,²⁵⁴ where her “youth, beauty, chastity, and upper-class origin” uniquely made her a powerful symbol.²⁵⁵ Yet, it appears that like Karakozov, Siridonovoa had little interest in the political outcomes of actions.²⁵⁶ Instead, her turn to terrorism was more intertwined with the forces of modernity confronting Russia at the time than any grievances against the Tsarist regime. As Boniace finds, “had she not been living in a society wracked by the conflicting forces of modernization and autocracy, she might not have sought to subsume her private trauma in an underground struggle against the collectively inflicted injustices of the government.”²⁵⁷ Like so many others, Spiridonova would find radicalism, and through its struggles and travails, her identity too.

The rise of anarchist terrorism in the 1870s and its persistence until the 1930s is no accident of history, but part and parcel of the changes undergoing the world at the time. Mass communication, advancing technology, and increasing global awareness made individuals aware of their potential for power while shifting their traditional sources of meaning and purpose.²⁵⁸ The anarchists were not merely lower class industrial workers or peasants, but middle and upper class intellectuals who were both politically and globally aware in a way dissimilar from any group before. From the earliest days of modern terrorism, the existential motive held powerful salience, altering the nature of an entire movement and shaping its course. Largely autonomous in nature, anarchist violence would be more about the “development of the individual,” than any instrumental outcome.²⁵⁹ Though the anarchist wave of terror would be extinguished by the changes in the wake of the First World War and Great Depression, it would foreshadow many of the features of the next three waves, and its lessons remain salient today.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 605.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 588.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 605.

²⁵⁸ Verhoeven, *The Odd Man Karakozov*, 7.

²⁵⁹ Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 133.

B. THE BASQUE NATIONALISTS

One of the most isolated cultural and linguistic groups in the world, the Basque nation has long existed as a region with a strong, stable cultural identity and history surrounded by shifting polities, cultures and borders. Basque Country, or as it is known in the Basque language, “Euskal Herria,” is nestled in the mountainous north-eastern corner of Spain and straddles across the border into France. Its people are thought to be the remnants of the original Paleolithic inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula, speaking a language, Euskadi, unrelated to any other extant in the world. For centuries, the Basque were known around the world as a seafaring people heavily involved in global trade. With the traders, the Basque diaspora spread widely across North and South America. Today, the Basque region holds significant autonomy from the Spanish government in Madrid and controls its own taxation, education, language policy and even has its own independent police force.²⁶⁰ Far from an oppressed, economically backwards backwoods, the Basque state is a center for manufacturing and technology and has a gross domestic product that significantly exceeds the average across Spain.²⁶¹ Undeniably, the Basque state, like its fellow autonomous region Catalonia, has a privileged position among the constituent parts of the Spanish state and enjoys many benefits not available to the non-autonomous regions. However, it has not always been so.

As a unique ethno-linguistic group embedded as a minority in the Spanish state and with the fascist government led by military dictator Francisco Franco instituting a total ban on symbols of Basque nationalism, the basis for the formation of a separatist movement was already in place when the second wave of terrorism began to sweep the world in the wake of World War II.²⁶² The first Basque nationalist groups gained their inspiration from the Cypriot and Irish rebellions as well as the Algerian insurgency against France.²⁶³ Basque identity and language was forced underground as the Francoist

²⁶⁰ Teresa Whitfield, *Endgame for ETA: Elusive Peace in the Basque Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 23.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² Benjamín Tejerina, “Protest Cycle, Political Violence and Social Movements in the Basque Country,” *Nations and Nationalism* 7, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 41, doi:10.1111/1469-8219.00003.

²⁶³ Whitfield, *Endgame for ETA*, 41.

government banned all symbols of Basque national identity as its fascist rule was increasingly threatened from all corners of the Spanish state.²⁶⁴ Observing the global wave of decolonization and separatism, the nascent nationalist-separatist groups were inspired by third-world nationalist movements to develop a political program that would lead to independence.²⁶⁵ Yet it would not be until the oppression of the Francoist government turned violent beginning in 1963, that the nationalist groups would be inspired toward violent insurrection.²⁶⁶ Oppressive laws and global conditions were not the only precipitating causes of the rise of Basque nationalism. Despite the strong position of the Basque region's economy, taxation and industrial policy set in Madrid would have a disproportionately strong impact for Basque workers.²⁶⁷ Franco's industrial policy would place the Basque province at the center of his poorly considered efforts, causing an influx of non-Basque migration to the region, increasing unemployment and causing political upheaval.²⁶⁸ Economic and political challenges would strain the Basque population and oppression would give legitimacy to the cause of nationalism, making the Basque region a fertile ground for the development of a separatist movement.

An evolution of earlier Basque nationalist groups, the ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna [Basque Country and Freedom]) was formed in 1959 out of a breakaway group of the Basque nationalist political party in a dispute over tactics.²⁶⁹ Its original goals lay in the desire to seek independence for the seven provinces in Spain and France in which the Basques live and for the promotion of Basque linguistic and cultural identity. The ETA's political vision took years to coalesce around central issues, with

²⁶⁴ Omar G. Encarnación, *Spanish Politics: Democracy After Dictatorship* (Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2008), 96.

²⁶⁵ Gurutz Jauregui, "National Identity and Political Violence in the Basque Country," *European Journal of Political Research* 14, no. 5–6 (November 1, 1986): 595–96, doi:10.1111/j.1475-6765.1986.tb00851.x.

²⁶⁶ Robert P. Clark, *The Basque Insurgents: ETA, 1952-1980* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 38–39.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 18–19.

²⁶⁹ Carlos Pestana Barros and Luis A. Gil Alana, "ETA: A Persistent Phenomenon," *Defence and Peace Economics* 17, no. 2 (April 1, 2006): 53, doi:10.1080/10242690500464214.

disputes centered on tactics, strategy and desired political goals.²⁷⁰ The Basque language would come to define “Basqueness” and cooperation and collaboration outside the Basque nationality would come to be seen as undesirable and even treasonous, bounding the potential membership of the group. Across the final years of the fascist Franco government and the transition to democracy, the ETA managed to persist despite changes in the source of grievances and public support. 1979 and 1980 would see the passage of referenda on Basque autonomy, giving the region significant self-governing authority and ensuring the survival of the Basque language through a locally controlled education system.²⁷¹ The ETA’s perseverance was not without contest and the group endured several splits over the use of violent means or legitimate political processes.²⁷² Owing to the change in political environment, the ETA’s cause has since evolved. Most recently articulated in their 1995 communique entitled the “Democratic Alternative,” the later forms of the ETA sought a five point set of objectives centered upon the democratic rights of self-determination for the people of the Basque region.²⁷³ With their legitimacy largely stripped by the high level of autonomy now provided and tactical miscalculations harming the group’s profile, the ETA has largely ceased to exist as an active terrorist group, announcing an enduring ceasefire in 2011.

Across its existence as the longest-lasting European terrorist organization,²⁷⁴ the ETA has been implicated in over 800 deaths.²⁷⁵ The ETA has been a particularly prolific terrorist organization, perpetrating an average of over 500 acts of terrorism per year from 1987–2005.²⁷⁶ Uniquely, the ETA’s terrorism has largely occurred in the post-Franco era under democratic rule and in an environment of high autonomy and little state oppression

²⁷⁰ Clark, *The Basque Insurgents*, 32–34.

²⁷¹ Whitfield, *Endgame for ETA*, 50.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁷⁴ Barros and Gil Alana, “ETA: A Persistent Phenomenon,” 95.

²⁷⁵ John Sullivan, “Forty Years of ETA,” *History Today* 49, no. 4 (April 1999): 34.

²⁷⁶ Barros and Gil Alana, “ETA: A Persistent Phenomenon,” 98.

in the Basque region.²⁷⁷ In the last 20 years, the number of ETA terrorist acts resulting in deaths has decreased markedly.²⁷⁸ However, the volume of attacks remained high due to a tactical evolution where the ETA transitioned to specialized assassination and urban guerilla street fighting, known in Basque as “kale borroka.”²⁷⁹ If there is any group where the existential motive should be least likely to appear or drive terrorist decision making, it should be in an ostensibly ethno-linguistically homogenous nationalist-separatist group motivated against a clear enemy and with a legitimate grievance. Yet, little about the ETA conforms to what should be predicted by the rational model of terrorism. There is much we can still learn from their history and trajectory.

During the first generation of the ETA’s existence, its membership was comprised heavily of those not be likely to be the most enthusiastic about the Basque cause. Robert Clark’s 1983 study of ETA members and their backgrounds offers a number of interesting observations about the origins and motivations of the early core Basque terrorists. Collecting and analyzing 48 detailed cases, supplemented by data from Spanish prisons, Clark was able to outline the ETA’s demographics and ascertain patterns across the sample. Most of his results are unsurprising: the ETA is largely composed of young males with an average age of 24.²⁸⁰ Like most other terrorist groups, the ETA’s members and leadership were disproportionately university educated and from the middle and upper economic classes, though the ETA had a heavy representation from the working class as well.²⁸¹ Almost no members of the ETA were drawn from those that were unemployed prior to joining, suggesting individual economic grievances were not strong motivators toward terrorism. In all, the ETA’s demographics are close to what should be expected for a terrorist organization.

²⁷⁷ Rogelio Alonso and Javier Díaz Bada, “What Role Have Former ETA Terrorists Played in Counterterrorism and Counterradicalization Initiatives in Spain?,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, February 16, 2016, 2, doi:10.1080/1057610X.2016.1154365.

²⁷⁸ Barros and Gil Alana, “ETA: A Persistent Phenomenon,” 98.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Robert P. Clark, “Patterns in the Lives of ETA Members,” *Terrorism* 6, no. 3 (January 1, 1983): 427, doi:10.1080/10576108308435541.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 428.

More revealing is Clark's examination of the role of ethnic identity in the motivation toward joining the ETA. In the highly homogenous Basque region, only 8% of all marriages were intra-ethnic between Spaniards and Basques. Despite this, Clark found that 40% of sampled ETA members came from intra-ethnic households.²⁸² Perhaps even more surprisingly, 12% of ETA members had no Basque heritage at all.²⁸³ This suggests that a significant number of those that joined the ETA did so for reasons other than the rational choice grievances. Non-Basques and half-Basques should be less likely to join the ETA, not more.

Importantly, almost all future ETA terrorists did not personally suffer from any personal grievance or have any harm caused against them by the Spanish government. Surprisingly, Clark could find only one person in this sample that personally suffered directly from the oppression of the Spanish government. Clark writes that

only Inaki Orbeta (whose father spent four years in prison for his pro-nationalist sentiments) and an anonymous *etarra* I interviewed in France in 1973 (whose father died in combat in the Spanish Civil War) could be said to be seeking revenge for something done to their fathers. In the great majority of cases, the oppression felt by *etarras* was experienced by Basques generally, and was not something peculiar to their specific families.²⁸⁴

Clark also references the case of Andoni Bengoa, a half-Basque who "grew up in a family setting where Spanish was spoken, but where Basque nationalism was ardently espoused and was the topic of dinner table conversation on numerous occasions."²⁸⁵ For others, such as that of Jose Luis Alvarez Enparantza "Txillardegui,"

not only was the family not particularly self-conscious about its ethnicity, but the boy himself was not able to learn Basque until he was 17, and then it had to be done almost by himself, with little open encouragement or support. In a few cases, such as that of Jon Paredes Manot "Txiki," we see the son of two non-Basque parents completely reject his non-Basque

²⁸² Ibid., 431.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 432.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 433.

ancestry and even change his name (from the Spanish, Juan, to the Basque equivalent, Jon) to fit into a pro-Basque peer group.²⁸⁶

Despite drawing a relatively narrow level of support from the Basque population, the ETA was able to recruit a significant number of individuals for whom the Basque cause should have had little salience. While the rational model of terrorism fails to explain the disproportionate draw of the ETA for those with limited or no personal grievances and of questionable “Basqueness” by the ETA’s own definition, the existential model offers an alternative explanation. Looking back at Clark’s study, Jerrold Post suggests that those with less than full Basque ancestry are attempting to “out Basque the Basques” and demonstrate their authenticity and prove their place within the Basque identity.²⁸⁷ The ETA represented a way to resolve internal contradictions in these individuals’ sense of coherence and sources of meaning. Stuck between two worlds and two identities, the half-Basques were disproportionately pulled to ETA to construct their own meaning-in-life through an authentic experience of social solidarity and self-transcendence afforded by terrorism in the service of an identity-based cause.

With joining the ETA so often motivated by the need for individuals lacking a firm identity to develop one, the ETA’s unique tactics and techniques offered ample opportunity for those individuals to do so through action and experience. Up to the 1990s, the targets of the ETA were by and large symbols of the coercive power of Spanish state—its police and military forces. Though many civilians were killed as the result of collateral damage in bombings, only civilian transgressors against the ETA and those who refused to pay its taxes were directly targeted.²⁸⁸ As the ETA lost public support and the history of legitimate grievances grew further in the past, it began a radicalization in its strategy to target more political and civilian targets to attempt to gain a renewed notoriety and inspire others to action.²⁸⁹ In its period of greatest activity and support from 1977 to

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Post, “Terrorist Psycho-Logic: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Psychological Forces,” 29.

²⁸⁸ Hans-Peter van den Broek, “Labelling and Legitimization: Justifying Political Violence in the Basque Country,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, July 22, 2015, 1, doi:10.1080/09546553.2014.995788.

²⁸⁹ Jérôme Ferret, “Young Radical Nationalists: Prisoners of Their Own Myth? The Case of the Kale Borroka in the Spanish Basque Country,” *Current Sociology* 62, no. 7 (November 1, 2014): 1018, doi:10.1177/0011392114549892; Broek, “Labelling and Legitimization,” 1.

1992, only 2.6% of ETA targets were non-military or police officials of the Spanish state. As the ETA became more insular and changed its strategy, state officials and politicians rose to become 21.7% of targets—polarizing the population and deliberately “socializing the suffering” largely fictively felt by the ETA to the wider population.²⁹⁰ This would portend a significant change in the character of ETA violence and cause a substantial number of individuals opposed to the ETA to flee the region for their safety.²⁹¹

If it was the search for identity that drew young men to the ETA, then it would be street violence that would help them forge it. Known in the Basque Language as “kale borroka,” street violence took its place alongside assassination as the primary tactical practice of the ETA. In the two years approaching the 1992 Olympic Games held in Barcelona, street violence began a sharp rise that would eventually result in over 4,736 acts attributed to the ETA from 1990 to 1999.²⁹² Notably though, street violence in the Basque region rarely escalated to murder. Instead, the types of street violence ranged from arson against political party offices and the vehicles of politicians to the destruction of ATM machines and graffiti,²⁹³ and became largely inwardly directed against Basques who did not support ETA ideology and political goals.²⁹⁴ Street fighting in the ETA occurred almost exclusively in the Basque region, but would influence actions across the Spanish state and would be covered by international media.

Kale borroka was not simply a form of petty criminal activity and vandalism that persisted without significant costs. Instead, ETA violence in the ‘90s and 2000s had wide-reaching economic and social effects. One assessment of the cost of ETA’s actions found that the gross domestic product (GDP) of the Basque region was depressed by 20%

²⁹⁰ Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca, “Explaining Temporal Variation in the Lethality of ETA,” *Revista Internacional de Sociología* 67, no. 3 (2009): 609–10.

²⁹¹ Broek, “Labelling and Legitimization,” 2.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 717–18.

²⁹³ Broek, “BORROKA—The Legitimation of Street Violence in the Political Discourse of Radical Basque Nationalists,” 720; Javier Martín-Peña et al., “Strategies of psychological terrorism perpetrated by ETA’s network: Delimitation and classification,” *Psicothema* 22, no. Número 1 (December 31, 2010): 113.

²⁹⁴ Luis De La Calle Robles, “Fighting for Local Control: Street Violence in the Basque Country,” *International Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (June 1, 2007): 451–52, doi:10.1111/j.1468-2478.2007.00458.x.

due to terrorism.²⁹⁵ The volume of attacks caused an economic toll largely paid by the region's taxpayers, with damage to public transportation alone exceeding 2.5 million Euros in one year.²⁹⁶

The rhetoric surrounding street violence was heavily instrumental in nature, attempting to legitimate the use of violence in the service of the ETA cause.²⁹⁷ For the ETA's leadership promoting the use of the tactics, *kale borroka* was not just street violence, but also a fundamental part of political struggle. It is clear that street fighting began as a deliberate strategy to "intensify" the salience of the ETA's cause and to bring the Basque population closer to the ETA through a destabilization of the status quo that would force greater support for political change.²⁹⁸ It was also a strategy of propaganda of the deed that would bring the ETA's cause to the forefront in the media after a long period of having been largely ignored by both local and national journalists.²⁹⁹ In De La Calle Robles' appraisal, street violence's guiding purpose was to punish and seek the compliance of non-radical Basques while keeping the cause of Basque nationalism highly visible in the public eye.³⁰⁰

While street fighting had political direction from above, and some political purpose for those involved, it also had significant ritualistic elements. Radicalism became a way of life for many youth that enabled them to affirm their identity, prove their authenticity, and assert their freedom.³⁰¹ Though developed as a deliberate strategy, street fighting often became disconnected from its original direction from above and took on a spontaneous quality. A report commissioned by the Basque government found that,

²⁹⁵ Broek, "Labelling and Legitimization," 2.

²⁹⁶ De La Calle Robles, "Fighting for Local Control," 431.

²⁹⁷ Broek, "BORROKA—The Legitimation of Street Violence in the Political Discourse of Radical Basque Nationalists," 716–17.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 721.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁰ De La Calle Robles, "Fighting for Local Control," 433.

³⁰¹ Raquel Bartolomé-Gutiérrez and Cristina Rechea-Alberola, "Violent Youth Groups in Spain," *Young* 14, no. 4 (November 1, 2006): 329, doi:10.1177/1103308806068547.

“these violent youths themselves are victims of the totalitarian strategy they serve.” The motives of juveniles resorting to violent action are being depoliticized: “many young people participate [in acts of violence] without any arguments nor political intention, even moved by a pitiful ludic conception of violence.”³⁰²

Despite the suggestion common by Basque and Spanish authorities that the perpetrators of street violence had little awareness of the ETA cause and interest in its aims, many youth interviewed about their participation dispute the claim that they lacked political awareness.³⁰³ There are three traditional explanations found across ETA scholarship for the prevalence and persistence of *kale borroka*.³⁰⁴ First, some youth were drawn to street violence as an alternative to other forms of radicalism and rebellion against the mainstream of society.³⁰⁵ The second common explanation centers upon the ritualistic nature of the violence and its often spontaneous nature.³⁰⁶ The final explanation is the rational choice school, where street violence is a deliberate, controlled strategy managed by the leadership of the ETA that exploits vulnerable youth and directs them in the service of the organization’s cause.³⁰⁷ Undeniably, the selection of targets and distribution of violence perpetrated through street violence is anything but random.³⁰⁸ The level of polarization within a town for or against the ETA is the strongest predictor of the level of street violence, suggesting a strong rational element in the acts.³⁰⁹

However, the existential and rational perspectives are not mutually exclusive. Public support declined significantly in the years following the end of the Franco dictatorship, and after significant tactical missteps leading to collateral damage eroded

³⁰² Broek, “BORROKA—The Legitimation of Street Violence in the Political Discourse of Radical Basque Nationalists,” 717.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 725.

³⁰⁴ Ferret, “Young Radical Nationalists,” 1019.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁸ De La Calle Robles, “Fighting for Local Control,” 451.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

the ETA's reputation. The ETA needed to change both its tactics and strategy if it were to persist following the success of the referendums leading to Basque autonomy. There is significant evidence for the existential perspective that street violence was both extrinsically instrumental for the group and intrinsically instrumental for the individuals participating in it as a means through which meaning was created. Broek notes this duality in the ETA's writings on the desired effect of a strategy of street violence where, "not only was political consciousness expected to motivate people's participation in the struggle, but at the same time it was believed that a person's direct implication in actions would boost his or her ideological maturity and lead to growing identification with the movement."³¹⁰ Research on ETA youth has also documented the Basque region's remarkable lack of other radical elements like "skinheads" or "punk hooligans" common elsewhere in Spain.³¹¹ Basque youth already predisposed to extremism were subsumed into the ETA ranks. This suggests an inelastic supply of potential radicals from which to recruit and offers evidence for the unique power of violence and extraordinary experience to attract those seeking meaning-in-life as predicted by the existential model. Here, it is radicalism that has acquired an ETA character, pulling individuals to it, rather than a purely instrumental push to action. Fun, adventure and risk through *kale borroka* were the means through which youth would manufacture their meaning-in-life.³¹² Whether it was by design or simply chance is unclear, but without the ritualized and performative aspects of street fighting, the ETA would have been unlikely to attract nearly the same level of active support or maintain the volume of terrorism in the '90s. Existential attractions were indispensable.

Though inspired and organized around clear, legitimate grievances, the ETA offers a strong case of the aesthetics of terrorism's ability to motivate terrorists and direct the activities of an organization. There does not appear to be a rational process that determined that street fighting was an effective way to draw young men to the ETA's

³¹⁰ Broek, "BORROKA—The Legitimation of Street Violence in the Political Discourse of Radical Basque Nationalists," 722.

³¹¹ De La Calle Robles, "Fighting for Local Control," 435; Ferret, "Young Radical Nationalists," 1019.

³¹² Bartolomé-Gutiérrez and Rechea-Alberola, "Violent Youth Groups in Spain," 334.

cause, rather it appears that it developed organically as a kind of contagion where it slowly attracted individuals who were predisposed to seeking radical activities to the ETA's cause. Instead, street violence within Basque territory and often targeting co-ethnic Basques became the organizing principle of the group. The Basque case illustrates that instrumental motives can and do co-exist with the existential, emergently changing the nature of a movement. The cause remained, but violence served twin purposes – one of inspiration, ritual, social solidarity and opportunity for extraordinary experience, and another toward the service of a political cause.

C. THE EUROPEAN NEW LEFT

Given the volume and level of media attention afforded terrorism since the September 11th 2001 attacks on America, one could be forgiven for assuming that current levels of terrorist attacks and foiled plots within Europe were unprecedented. However, the terrorism inflicted by the new left wave of terrorism in the 1970s through the early 1990s remains significantly more intense and prolific than any terrorism seen in Europe since.³¹³ Among the most prolific and high-profile of the new left terrorist organizations in Europe, the Rote Armee Fraktion [Red Army Faction (RAF)], commonly known as the Baader-Meinhof Gang after the last names of two of its founders, remains one of the more unique and well-studied groups of the era.³¹⁴

The RAF's continued prominence in both terrorism scholarship and in the popular imagination can largely be linked to the public notoriety and personae of its founding leadership. The original core of the RAF was formed by four individuals of strikingly different backgrounds: Horst Mahler, Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin and Ulrike Meinhof. Of the original core, it was Ulrike Meinhof who had the longest history with leftist politics and the most contact with other radicals. As a respected journalist for the well-read leftist publication "Konkret," Meinhof had long adopted a leftist worldview and

³¹³ Jan Oskar Engene, "Five Decades of Terrorism in Europe: The TWEED Dataset," *Journal of Peace Research* 44, no. 1 (January 1, 2007): 117, doi:10.1177/0022343307071497.

³¹⁴ Moritz von Stetten, "Recent Literature on the Red Army Faction in Germany: A Critical Overview," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 2, no. 3 (November 16, 2009): 547, doi:10.1080/17539150903306279.

held strong, considered views on political and social questions.³¹⁵ Though Meinhof was often the public face of the RAF and remains its most studied member, Gudrun Ensslin is considered, in retrospect, to be the strategic leader of the RAF. Ensslin was born into a religious family where her father served as the pastor of a local evangelical church.³¹⁶ Growing up by all accounts with a happy childhood, she would perform well at school and would later study at the University of Tübingen, one of West Germany's top colleges.³¹⁷ Her turn to radicalism came via her sister's marriage to a Marxist poet, but she would not turn violent until her partnership with Andreas Baader beginning in 1967.³¹⁸ The other core members had less history with the intellectual and political forms of radicalism. Horst Mahler and Andreas Baader are both better described as "bad boys" and common criminals than ideologues. Horst Mahler would later be rejected by the RAF, drastically change his ideological outlook, and join the National Democratic Party, the successor to the Nazi Party where he remains active today despite serving a twelve-year prison sentence for Holocaust denial.

Though the early members had long been associated and active together, as a formal organization, the RAF was formed on 14 May 1970 as a part of the wave of global instability and largely out of anti-Vietnam and anti-imperialist sentiment. The precipitating event for the radicalization of the core members of the RAF was the death of Benno Ohnesorg at the hands of the West German police during a protest against the Shah of Iran.³¹⁹ His death would be a radicalizing factor for a number of groups and would even serve as the basis for the name for the June 2nd movement. In the days between the RAF's founding on 14 May 1970 and the group's announcement of their disbanding on 20 April 1998, they were responsible for 34 deaths and over 230 injuries

³¹⁵ Colvin, *Ulrike Meinhof and West German Terrorism*, 4–6.

³¹⁶ Stefan Aust, *Baader-Meinhof: The inside Story of the R.A.F.*, trans. Anthea Bell (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 15.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

through their actions.³²⁰ Across the three decades of RAF activity, they caused damage greater than \$500 million Deutschmarks (DM), and were implicated in the theft of \$7 million DM across 31 bank robberies.³²¹ In that same time, thousands joined and left the RAF across its three distinct generations, with German courts convicting 517 individuals for membership in a terrorist organization and another 917 for material support.³²² Though the RAF's volume of attacks, damage and death toll was exceeded by their fellow German terrorist group the Revolutionäre Zellen [Revolutionary Cells] and the Italian Brigade Rosse [Red Brigade] across the same time period of existence, the RAF uniquely retains a central place in the cultural history of Germany during the Cold War and in the minds of Germans today.³²³

Not unlike the other left-wing terrorist organizations of the time, the RAF was constituted of members with high educational achievement. Of the known members, 39% had a university-level education, significantly higher than the average for Germans at the time.³²⁴ Humanities, the law and the social sciences dominated the fields of study of the RAF.³²⁵ Many of the RAF's members across all generations had successful careers before their move underground, and many had families and children. Unique among almost all historical terrorist groups, the RAF achieved near gender-parity in its membership.³²⁶ Women were not merely members or companions to the men in the RAF. Instead, they held the highest leadership roles and guided the decision making of the group.³²⁷ As a whole, they were from the middle and upper classes of German society

³²⁰ Assaf Moghadam, "Failure and Disengagement in the Red Army Faction," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 35, no. 2 (February 1, 2012): 157, doi:10.1080/1057610X.2012.639062.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 158.

³²² *Ibid.*

³²³ J. Smith, André Moncourt, and Ward Churchill, *The Red Army Faction, A Documentary History: Dancing with Imperialism*, 1st ed., vol. 2 (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2013), XVIII; Karrin Hanshew, "'Sympathy for the Devil?' The West German Left and the Challenge of Terrorism," *Contemporary European History* 21, no. 4 (November 2012): 531, doi:10.1017/S0960777312000355.

³²⁴ Diego Gambetta and Steffen Hertog, *Engineers of Jihad: The Curious Connection between Violent Extremism and Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 102.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*

³²⁶ Patricia Melzer, *Death in the Shape of a Young Girl: Women's Political Violence in the Red Army Faction*, Gender and Political Violence Series (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 3.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*

and had little personal experience with oppression or deprivation. These were not impoverished outcasts, but people with high social status and seemingly much for which to live.

Strategically, the decisions made and the means utilized by the RAF in the service of terrorism defy easy explanation by the rational model. While most terrorist organizations begin around a small group of activists, typically they evolve to organize in a classic division of labor where group leadership offers strategic guidance and material support to foot soldiers who then carry out the attacks.³²⁸ In contrast, the RAF's first generation leadership maintained a highly personal role in all of its activities. Additionally, despite substantial means, including some level of foreign sponsorship and their operation in an open, democratic society, the RAF pursued a strategy focused upon assassination through largely personalized direct action tactics. Ulrike Meinhof herself participated in direct action terrorist actions, directly resulting in the death of civilians in the May 1972 bombing campaign,³²⁹ and even led a bank robbery in 1972.³³⁰ The other founders would be no less involved in active terrorism: setting fires, planting bombs, robbing banks, and assisting in a jailbreak.³³¹

Terrorism is already a costly exercise when compared to other methods of seeking political change.³³² Rationally, individuals and groups should not seek to increase its costs by utilizing sub-optimal, unnecessarily risky tactics. Just one year into the group's existence, fourteen of its members were either dead, in hiding, or in prison, leaving only eight active members remaining.³³³ Later generations would fare no better. Despite never counting more than 30 core members and 200 active supporters at any one time during

³²⁸ McCormick and Giordano, "Things Come Together," 295.

³²⁹ Colvin, *Ulrike Meinhof and West German Terrorism*, 5.

³³⁰ Karin Bauer, "In Search of Ulrike Meinhof," in *Everybody Talks about the Weather-- We Don't: The Writings of Ulrike Meinhof*, ed. Karin Bauer, 1st ed (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2008), 66–67.

³³¹ J. Smith et al., *The Red Army Faction, A Documentary History: Projectiles for the People*, 1st ed., vol. 1 (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2009), 584–91.

³³² Max Abrahms, "The Credibility Paradox: Violence as a Double-Edged Sword in International Politics," *International Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (December 1, 2013): 662, doi:10.1111/isqu.12098.

³³³ Jillian Becker, *Hitler's Children: The Story of the Baader-Meinhof Terrorist Gang* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2014), 227–28.

the RAF's three generations,³³⁴ more than 1,400 were arrested and convicted for their involvement.³³⁵ This suggests that the RAF practiced uniquely poor operational security measures and had little regard for the typically important techniques of group survival used by most terrorist organizations.

The RAF also formed alliances with groups whose motivations and professed goals were antithetical or at the very least incompatible with the ideologies of the RAF. In June 1970, twenty-four RAF members traveled together to the Levant where they would train with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). The PLO, skeptical of the RAF's motives and abilities, arranged a schedule that was more "revolutionary tourism" than practical military training.³³⁶ Demands for mixed-sex accommodations and the low quality of food would immediately place the RAF visitors at odds with their conservative PLO hosts.³³⁷ Though some took the training seriously, others treated it like a vacation, sunbathing naked and preferring to play the part of "urban guerilla" without actually preparing for its requirements. Ultimately and unsurprisingly, irreconcilable cultural and strategic differences would lead to the PLO tiring of the RAF visitors and cancelling their training.³³⁸ Despite the outcome of the training camp visit and their fundamental differences, an uneasy and curious relationship with the PLO and other Middle Eastern terrorist organization would continue across the early years of the RAF's existence. PLO terrorists would even join with the RAF to hijack a Lufthansa flight in 1977 in a last ditch effort to free Gudrun Ensslin, Andreas Baader and Jan-Carl Raspe from prison. The successful raid and freeing of the hostages by the German counterterror police unit Grenzschutzgruppe 9 der Bundespolizei (or GSG9) in Mogadishu, Somalia

³³⁴ Hans Josef Horchem, "The Decline of the Red Army Faction," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 3, no. 2 (June 1, 1991): 66, doi:10.1080/09546559108427104; Stefan M. Aubrey, *The New Dimension of International Terrorism*, Strategie Und Konfliktforschung (Zürich: vdf Hochschulverlag an der ETH, 2004), 37.

³³⁵ Moghadam, "Failure and Disengagement in the Red Army Faction," 158.

³³⁶ Aust, *Baader-Meinhof*, 67.

³³⁷ One young woman from the RAF would even demand the installation of a Coca-Cola machine in the PLO camp. Ibid.

³³⁸ Ibid., 71–72.

would be the precipitating event for the suicides of the remaining RAF core members in the Stammheim prison.

For all the discontinuity between the actions, words and strategy of the RAF with the rational model's predictions, the existential model offers an alternative that may better explain their behavior. One explanation for the tactical decisions of the RAF might be the influence of Carlos Marighella's *Mini-Manual of the Urban Guerilla* that heavily informed the writing of the RAF's *Urban Guerilla Concept*.³³⁹ Marighella's manual emphasizes direct action and the use of personal arms over other tactics. The mini-manual details not only the common tactics of assaults, raids, ambushes, kidnapping, assassination and other means of terrorism adopted by the RAF, but also the role of ideology and popular support in achieving instrumental political change. The RAF appear to have internalized the tactics and techniques of the mini-manual throughout the group, utilizing "urban guerilla" style tactics almost exclusively throughout the group's 28 years of existence.

In the case of the RAF and of Marighella's mini-manual, the instrumental and existential perspectives are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Indeed, there is significant evidence for existential motives in the actions the RAF, other leftist German terrorist organizations and their members. Marighella's "urban guerrilla" is not simply an actor or a cog in a machine. To be an "urban guerilla" is an identity and a way of life, not just a set of tactics and techniques. The mini-manual emphasize the aesthetic and personal qualities of the urban guerilla as much as the technical and tactical aspects. For him, the central reason for the urban guerilla's "existence" was his or her "shot."³⁴⁰ Also for Marighella, it took the direct participation of the leaders of terrorist movements to truly catalyze change and inspire others.

Being a terrorist in the RAF was about performance as much, or even more, than it was ideology. In a nod to the importance of the performative nature of their actions, the

³³⁹ The Red Army Faction, *The Urban Guerilla Concept*, trans. Andre Moncourt, 2nd ed. (Kersplebedeb, 2014).

³⁴⁰ Carlos Marighella, "Minimanual of the Urban Guerilla," in *Terror and Urban Guerrillas; a Study of Tactics and Documents*, ed. Jay Mallin (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1971), 79.

group would even restyle itself 1972 as an “avant-garde” movement, rather than a simple resistance movement.³⁴¹ The RAF’s focus following the capture of the early core leaders demonstrates an unusual transition from an external enemy to an organization inwardly concentrated on self-preservation. From 1973–1977, nearly all of the energy of the RAF was oriented on freeing imprisoned members of its group.³⁴² The second and third generations would become even more violent and less ideological.³⁴³ Though the first generation of the RAF was involved with some killing, it would be the second generation that would bring assassination and wider violence to the RAF’s repertoire. For these new members, their actions were as much about the goal of springing the imprisoned founders from jail as it was about impressing others in the movement and the performance of being RAF terrorists.³⁴⁴ In the rational model, this approach fits poorly with what should be predicted. However, in the existential model, it is easily understandable.

It is not just the actions of the RAF that suggest existentialist motives, their own words portray individuals who not only utilize terrorist actions for instrumental purposes, but also place terrorism and the practice of terrorism at the core of their identity and use it to construct meaning in their lives. Existentialist language runs through the writings of the core leadership of the RAF from the very beginning of the group’s association. In an act of stark strategic miscalculation that would lead to their jailing for arson, Andreas Baader and Gudrun Ensslin set fire to a department store. Though Baader would retroactively boast of the arson’s anti-Vietnam war motives, Gudrun Ensslin spoke of the act as a way “to set herself free.”³⁴⁵ Baader would also suggest that the arson was a way

³⁴¹ Karin Bauer, “‘From Protest to Resistance:’ Ulrike Meinhof and the Transatlantic Movement of Ideas,” in *Changing the World, Changing Oneself: Political Protest and Collective Identities in West Germany and the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s*, ed. Belinda Davis, 1st ed, Protest, Culture and Society, v. 3 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 184.

³⁴² Dennis A. Pluchinsky, “Germany’s Red Army Faction: An Obituary,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 16, no. 2 (January 1, 1993): 138, doi:10.1080/10576109308435925.

³⁴³ Stetten, “Recent Literature on the Red Army Faction in Germany,” 550.

³⁴⁴ Bernd Weisbrod, “Terrorism as Performance: The Assassinations of Walther Rathenau and Hanns-Martin Schleyer,” in *Control of Violence*, ed. Wilhelm Heitmeyer et al. (Springer, 2011), 378, http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-4419-0383-9_15.

³⁴⁵ Becker, *Hitler’s Children*, 93–96.

to “celebrate their marriage.”³⁴⁶ From the beginning, terrorism was about the act as much as it was the message.

For the core members of the RAF, fighting became their primary identity—their source of meaning-in-life. From prison in October 1974, Ulrike Meinhof wrote “if fighting is your identity...we can’t be oppressed, as long as we don’t stop thinking and fighting.”³⁴⁷ For Meinhof, ideology became less important than action, writing that “the battle...is precisely not about being right—never—but about doing what one does, wants to do, has to do in the right way.”³⁴⁸ Gudrun Ensslin adopts similar language in her writings remarking that the suffering was the highest form of being and that “there can be no greater certainty, than the certainty of our experience.”³⁴⁹ Even the crude, unschooled Andreas Baader espoused existential motives in his actions, having told his associates in the RAF of his desire to achieve immortality through his actions.³⁵⁰ Remarkably, the most famous existentialist of the time, Jean-Paul Sartre, even visited Andreas Baader in Stammheim prison in 1976, a trip he for which he would later express regret.³⁵¹ In prison, the founders of the RAF and Meinhof in particular would undergo a further transformation of identity to that of struggling victims.³⁵² Holger Meins sought martyrdom in his 1972 Stammheim prison hunger strike where he took on the identity of a Nazi concentration camp victim, dressing in a white silk gown and “sacrificing himself for the fight against injustice.”³⁵³ Ulrike Meinhof would also adopt the Holocaust narrative, juxtaposing their treatment in jail against that of the Jewish victims of the Nazi

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 96.

³⁴⁷ Colvin, *Ulrike Meinhof and West German Terrorism*, 149.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 169.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 171.

³⁵⁰ Aust, *Baader-Meinhof*, xii.

³⁵¹ Sartre would famously describe Baader as a “jerk” after meeting him at Stammheim. Meir Seidler, “The Beauty and the Beast: Jean-Paul Sartre and the Baader-Meinhof Gang,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 25, no. 4 (September 1, 2013): 598, doi:10.1080/09546553.2013.814501.

³⁵² Bauer, “‘From Protest to Resistance:’ Ulrike Meinhof and the Transatlantic Movement of Ideas,” 185.

³⁵³ Ibid.

“final solution.”³⁵⁴ When the ability to hold that identity was finally lost after the failure of the joint RAF-PLO hijacking plot designed to ransom them from prison, Baader, Ensslin and Jan-Carl Raspe would commit suicide the very next day. For each of the core members of the RAF, their only assertion of their self, identity, and by extension, their meaning-in-life, was achieved in “self-sacrifice.”³⁵⁵

Existentialist language and motivations in German new-left terrorism are not limited just to the Red Army Faction. They also sit at the core of the writings of the German left-wing terrorist, and founder of the Movement 2 June, a group affiliated with the RAF,³⁵⁶ Michael “Bommi” Baumann. In his memoir *Terror or Love?*, Baumann describes his transformation from a young working class apprentice to “urban guerilla.” Unlike the well-educated and philosophically aware Ulrike Meinhof,³⁵⁷ he never encountered the writings of Sartre, Camus or any other existentialist in his youth. Yet, he finds himself growing up without purpose in a cold, industrial Berlin suburb and slowly encounters others like himself, as well as the writings of Sartre. Cottee and Hayward also find Baumann to be motivated by existential desires, observing that in the first chapter of his memoir “Baumann is seized by the impulse to run.”³⁵⁸ Baumann writes that,

on the ride to the construction site, it suddenly hit me: you’re gonna be doing this for fifty years, there’s no escaping it. The scare of that just stuck in my bones. I had to look for ways to get out.³⁵⁹

Unable to find meaning in his life as a construction worker, finding it devoid of the authentic craftsmanship that fulfilled his master craftsman mentor, Baumann is drawn to find something else.³⁶⁰ Writing floridly about the experience of terror, Baumann

³⁵⁴ Colvin, *Ulrike Meinhof and West German Terrorism*, 44.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 229.

³⁵⁶ Becker, *Hitler’s Children*, 9.

³⁵⁷ Indeed, the only item in Meinhof’s cell noted in the investigative report on her suicide was a copy of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Grammar* open to pages 84-85. Colvin, *Ulrike Meinhof and West German Terrorism*, 3.

³⁵⁸ Cottee and Hayward, “Terrorist (E)motives,” 972.

³⁵⁹ Michael Baumann, *Terror or Love?: Bommi Baumann’s Own Story of His Life as a West German Urban Guerrilla*, 1st ed. (New York: Grove Press, 1979), 20.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

explains how he overcame his “fear of freedom” and took action to set the path of his own life.³⁶¹ Page after page, he describes the “energy” and “high” of being an “urban guerilla.”³⁶² Baumann’s own words suggest that he is not pushed to join the “Movement 2 June”, through a process of identifying grievances and a desire to achieve a political change as would be predicted by the rational model. Rather, it is clear that the draw of terrorism and the experience of being a terrorist pulled him though the possibility of excitement, fun and transcendence divorced from their effect as suggested by the existential model.

Operating in a western, open democracy with foreign sponsorship, motivated by a powerful ideology and holding significant public support, the Red Army Faction was in a strong position to both conduct a significant number of effective terrorist actions against the German state and its American supporters and to achieve significant political change from these attacks.³⁶³ It is also clear that leftist ideology and desire for political change were important to the members of the RAF. Yet, the RAF completely failed in achieving its objectives. Additionally, there are significant incongruences between the RAF’s ideology and strategy and their manifestations through the actions of the RAF. The rational model poorly explains why the RAF pursued the paths it did. However, if the RAF and its activities are viewed through an existential lens, their actions become more explicable. When the practice of being a terrorist is more important than achieving any particular outcome, an inward focus and sub-optimal tactics make more sense. For some, seeking the experience of terrorism and its uniquely transformational abilities overrules any rational, strategic calculations.

³⁶¹ Ibid., 115.

³⁶² Ibid., 41,91,105-106.

³⁶³ For evidence of the link between East German intelligence and the RAF, see John Schmeidel, “My Enemy’s Enemy: Twenty Years of Cooperation between West Germany’s Red Army Faction and the GDR Ministry for State Security,” *Intelligence and National Security* 8, no. 4 (October 1, 1993): 59–72, doi:10.1080/02684529308432225.

D. THE ISLAMIC STATE

On August 19th 2014, a video released on the Internet depicted a young American man dressed in an orange jumpsuit and kneeling next to a masked man dressed in black brandishing a large knife. The man, identified as captured journalist James Foley, recites a prepared speech outlining the grievances of his captors and casting blame upon the United States for the forthcoming act. The executioner then uses the knife in an edited sequence to behead James Foley. This video is not unique. Rather, it is but one of dozens of such videos produced and disseminated by the Islamic State since its rise to prominence in 2013. Like other IS-produced visual media, the execution videos have a powerful aesthetic quality, juxtaposing the practice of extreme, primitive cruelty against slick, modern production values and the power of the internet to reach diverse global audiences. Unique among modern terrorist organizations, the Islamic State has made brutality and cruelty its trademark practice.³⁶⁴ Despite the plain cruelty and barbarism displayed in the video of James Foley's beheading, the executioner was not some uneducated religious zealot, unexposed to the world or to western, liberal values. Instead, the executioner seen in the video speaks with a British accent and was quickly given the moniker "Jihadi John" by western journalists. Intelligence agencies later identified "Jihadi John" as Mohammed Emwazi, a Kuwaiti born Arab who moved to the United Kingdom at the age of six. By all accounts, he had a normal childhood, replete with friends and the typical insecurities of youth.³⁶⁵ Emwazi received a quality education, graduating from a good British public school and matriculating to the University of Westminster, where he would later earn a degree in Computer Science.³⁶⁶ Certainly, the social-networks in which Emwazi would become entangled would play a role. Yet, they cannot alone explain how a seemingly average British immigrant could suddenly become the face of savagery for one of the world's most brutal terrorist organizations.

³⁶⁴ Stern and Berger, *ISIS*, 2.

³⁶⁵ Randeep Ramesh and Ian Cobain, "Mohammed Emwazi: The 'Tall, Quiet Kid' Who Became a Monster," *The Guardian*, November 13, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/nov/13/the-tall-quiet-kid-who-became-a-monster>.

³⁶⁶ Dominic Casciani, "Islamic State: Profile of Mohammed Emwazi Aka 'Jihadi John,'" *BBC News*, (November 13, 2015), <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-31641569>.

The Islamic State as we know it today is not a purely new group. Its roots draw back deep to the Afghan-Soviet War of the 1980s. More directly, the Islamic State is a byproduct of the 2003 Iraq War and a direct descendant of the Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) branch founded by the late Mohammed Al-Zarqawi.³⁶⁷ Despite its long roots, the Islamic State has a number of characteristics that distinguish it from earlier iterations and other groups of similar ideological composition and strategic objectives. Perhaps its greatest value as a case study comes from its unique ability to draw large numbers of foreign fighters from around the world. Not since the mujahedeen of the 1979–1989 Soviet-Afghan war has the world seen such high levels of foreign fighters flocking to a conflict and no group of foreign volunteers has drawn from such a diverse background since the Spanish Civil War. Estimates for the number of foreign fighters who have traveled to Syria since 2011 range from 10,000 to 16,000, with as many as 3,400 of those coming from the Europe, Australia, Canada and the United States.³⁶⁸

Like that of the ETA and the RAF, the demographics of the Islamic State are not what should be predicted by the rational model. At the macroscopic level, economic deprivation and poverty are not correlated with participation in ISIS by foreign fighters. In fact, the opposite is true. The number of ISIS foreign fighters correlates positively with GDP per capita and with their ranking in the World Bank’s more holistic Human Development Index (HDI).³⁶⁹ Political characteristics, as measured by the Freedom House’s index of “Political Rights” also have no correlation to the volume of foreign fighter flow from a particular country.³⁷⁰ German demographic and immigration numbers and trends also have little correlation with the foreign fighter flow. A 2014 study by the

³⁶⁷ William Faizi McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State*, 1st ed. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2015), 146–47.

³⁶⁸ David Malet, “Foreign Fighter Mobilization and Persistence in a Global Context,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 27, no. 3 (May 27, 2015): 463, doi:10.1080/09546553.2015.1032151; Nicholas J. Rasmussen, *Countering Violent Islamist Extremism: The Urgent Threat of Foreign Fighters and Homegrown Terror* (Washington D.C., 2015), sec. House Committee on Homeland Security 1, <https://http://docs.house.gov/meetings/HM/HM00/20150211/102901/HHRG-114-HM00-Wstate-RasmussenN-20150211.pdf>.

³⁶⁹ Efraim Benmelech and Esteban F. Klor, “What Explains the Flow of Foreign Fighters to ISIS?,” Working Paper (National Bureau of Economic Research, April 2016), 2, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w22190>.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz) of Germans traveling to fight in Syria found that 61% of German foreign fighters were born in Germany and 37% held only German citizenship.³⁷¹ The majority of European foreign fighters are second generation immigrants born in Europe with the next largest group being converts.³⁷² Even though other studies have found a strong positive connection between Muslim immigrants obtaining citizenship and integration, holding German Citizenship does not decrease the likelihood that individuals would travel to Syria.³⁷³ This pattern repeats across Europe where foreign fighters are leaving even the most comfortable lives in generous Scandinavian welfare states for the struggle and suffering inevitable in the Islamic State's nascent "caliphate" under siege by the United States, Russia, the Syrian government, and even fellow jihadi terrorist organizations.

As Daniel Byman notes, the ideological endstate of the Islamic State is highly instrumental: the (re)establishment of an Islamic caliphate in the Middle East.³⁷⁴ Yet, despite the instrumental nature of the IS' strategy, its foreign adherents and supporters stand to benefit little from its success. At the organizational level, the Islamic State appears to implicitly understand the existential attractions of terrorism and is using them to recruit and attract adherents from around the world. At another level, the attraction of the Islamic State is an emergent phenomenon where the imagery and mythology

³⁷¹ "Analyse der den deutschen Sicherheitsbehörden vorliegenden Informationen über die Radikalisierungshintergründe und -verläufe der Personen, die aus islamistischer Motivation aus Deutschland in Richtung Syrien ausgereist sind [An analysis of the information available to the German security agency about the radicalization background and development of people who traveled from Germany in the direction of Syria out of islamist motivation]" (Cologne, Germany: Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz [National Office for the Protection of the Constitution], January 12, 2014), 9–10, http://www.innenministerkonferenz.de/IMK/DE/termine/to-beschluesse/14-12-11_12/anlage-analyse.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=2.

³⁷² Olivier Roy, "What Is the Driving Force behind Jihadist Terrorism? – A Scientific Perspective on the Causes/circumstances of Joining the Scene" (Speech, International Terrorism: How can prevention and repression keep pace?, BKA Autumn Conference, November 18, 2015), 6, <https://life.eui.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/OLIVIER-ROY-what-is-a-radical-islamist.pdf>.

³⁷³ Angel Rabasa and Cheryl Benard, *Eurojihad: Patterns of Islamist Radicalization and Terrorism in Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 12; "Analyse der den deutschen Sicherheitsbehörden," 10.

³⁷⁴ Daniel Byman, "Understanding the Islamic State—A Review Essay," *International Security* 40, no. 4 (April 1, 2016): 136, doi:10.1162/ISEC_r_00235.

promoted by the “caliphate” is inspiring a desire for the experience of being there and being a part of the group. Petter Nesser also identifies a class of jihadi in Europe composed of those he terms the “drifter.”³⁷⁵ Drifters come to terrorism without specific reasons and motivations and seek social rewards, rather than political change from their involvement in political violence. In different times and circumstances, drifters may have been attracted to an alternative phenomenon like communism or anarchism. Today, it is Islamist terror, by virtue of its prominence which gains their attention in a search for identity and meaning.³⁷⁶

Olivier Roy has recently noted evidence for similar phenomena within recent Islamist terrorism in Europe and among Europeans serving as foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. In Roy’s estimation, it is not that some parts of Islam have become radical, as is commonly assumed, rather it is radicalism itself that has taken on an Islamic character in the fourth wave of terrorism.³⁷⁷ Few traveling to Syria have more than the most basic of understandings of Islamic theology and the Koran.³⁷⁸ A close study of the backgrounds of fourteen German foreign fighters found that only two were motivated by group grievances against themselves, or their real or fictive kin.³⁷⁹ Instead, the most common factor among the studied terrorists was a dislocating event that threatened their identity, meaning-in-life, and place within their social networks.³⁸⁰ They turned to radicalism to fill the newly formed gap in meaning and actively affirm an identity.

Though of starkly different backgrounds, white Canadian convert Andre Poulin and the French-born son of Moroccan immigrants Brahim Abdelsalem both illustrate the phenomenon described by Olivier Roy well. In earlier years, each may have become anarchists or leftists. Each singularly lacked even the shallowest connection to the cause

³⁷⁵ Petter Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe: A History* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 16.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

³⁷⁷ Roy, “What Is the Driving Force behind Jihadist Terrorism? – A Scientific Perspective on the Causes/circumstances of Joining the Scene,” 4–5.

³⁷⁸ McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*, 150.

³⁷⁹ Dorle Hellmuth, “Of Alienation, Association, and Adventure: Why German Fighters Join ISIL,” *Journal for Deradicalization*, no. 6 (March 29, 2016): 39.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

of the Islamic State, or even more than a basic knowledge of the Islamic faith and its teachings. Running a bar connected to drug trafficking and previously arrested for low-level burglary, Abdelsalem went from living a life nearly perfectly antithetical to that espoused at the proper path by either the Koran or the radical ideology of the Islamic State to becoming a suicide bomber in the service of the cause of the Islamic State.³⁸¹

Standing in sharp contrast to Abdelsalem, Andre Poulin was a white convert to Islam that traveled to Syria in 2012 to join the cause of the Islamic State.³⁸² Killed in combat in 2013, Poulin would later be featured in a slick recruiting video replete with footage of Canada where he described his path to joining ISIS. Describing his life back in Canada as having been good and rejecting being typecast as a social outcast by noting that he had friends and money, Poulin extolled the virtues of traveling to Syria to westerners.³⁸³ Though it goes largely unmentioned in the video, Poulin's background is not as clean as he would suggest. Before turning to Islam, he had brushes with communism and anarchism and spent time in jail for threatening another man with a box cutter. Yet, he is little different than thousands of other young Canadian men who did not travel to fight for ISIS in Syria.

Neither outcasts, nor a people with a settled identity, Abdelsalem, Roy, and others like them are self-seekers, inspired by the ideas and the actions of the group.³⁸⁴ As Roy terms them, they are “rebels without a cause” who are primed to find one and then to be instrumentalized by a terrorist organization toward its goals.³⁸⁵ Lacking a strong connection to the central strategic aim of the Islamic State, a legitimate personal grievance or even an articulated goal or end state, Poulin and Abdelsalem's actions are

³⁸¹ Alicia Parlapiano et al., “Unraveling the Connections Among the Paris Attackers,” *The New York Times*, November 15, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/11/15/world/europe/manhunt-for-paris-attackers.html>.

³⁸² Stern and Berger, *ISIS*, 86.

³⁸³ Michael S. Schmidt, “ISIS Uses Andre Poulin, a Convert to Islam, in Recruitment Video,” *The New York Times*, July 15, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/16/world/middleeast/isis-uses-andre-poulin-a-canadian-convert-to-islam-in-recruitment-video.html>.

³⁸⁴ Sara Reardon, “Looking for the Roots of Terrorism,” *Nature*, January 15, 2015, doi:10.1038/nature.2015.16732.

³⁸⁵ Roy, “What Is the Driving Force behind Jihadist Terrorism? – A Scientific Perspective on the Causes/circumstances of Joining the Scene,” 5.

more about the means than the end. The Islamic State offers them a path to the enduring and profound and it presents the means for producing meaning in the most durable and exceptional manner. Struggle and violence have a power of their own, disconnected from any changes they may cause.

The practice of viewing “unrefined” or “cruel” practices of warfare as barbarous, savage, and lacking value and purpose has a long tradition in the West dating to the times of the Greeks and Herodotus.³⁸⁶ Yet, brutality for the Islamic State has an instrumental purpose and undeniable strategic value. Groups use beheadings, assassinations and other such practices as costly signals to build group loyalty and identify the most committed of adherents. Much like poorly written and implausible Nigerian e-mail scams help screen out all but the most gullible,³⁸⁷ the brutal practices, imagery and reputation cultivated and broadcasted by the Islamic State help to recruit only those who are most likely to be committed and fanatical in the service of their cause. Beheadings in particular have been used by a number of Islamist terror groups for a variety of other strategic objectives including provocation, revenge, financing, evoking fear and demonstrating group commitment.³⁸⁸ It also serves the purposes of the “cosmic war” being waged by IS, galvanizing its own fighters and setting a dramatic contrast between themselves and their sectarian adversaries.³⁸⁹

Beyond the rational objective of the practice of cruelty, is its aesthetic appeal and emotional experience. Islamic state recruitment and propaganda materials reveal a deep sense of their grasp of the existential attractions of terrorism. It is no accident that the propaganda of the Islamic State is produced at such a high quality and aimed at Western

³⁸⁶ Coker, *Waging War without Warriors?*, 88–91.

³⁸⁷ Cormac Herley, “Why Do Nigerian Scammers Say They Are from Nigeria?,” *WEIS*, 2012, 11–12, <http://research.microsoft.com/apps/pubs/default.aspx?id=167719>.

³⁸⁸ Pete Lentini and Muhammad Bakashmar, “Jihadist Beheading: A Convergence of Technology, Theology, and Teleology?,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30, no. 4 (March 20, 2007): 320, doi:10.1080/10576100701200140; Lisa J. Campbell, “The Use of Beheadings by Fundamentalist Islam,” *Global Crime* 7, no. 3–4 (August 1, 2006): 604–6, doi:10.1080/17440570601073384.

³⁸⁹ Mark Juergensmeyer, “Sacrifice and Cosmic War,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 3, no. 3 (September 1, 1991): 108, doi:10.1080/09546559108427118.

audiences.³⁹⁰ The pictures of cruelty and brutality so vividly transmitted around the world via the internet has both purpose and effect. The religious imagery of the propaganda is in part a ritualistic reenactment of the “cosmic war” declared by IS.³⁹¹ This too is instrumental in a sense, but focused on shifting factors internal to the individual. The slick production values offer a small taste of the experience of *being there* and entice the young and alienated to join and gain the authentic experience of doing. *Being there* produces what Durkheim called, collective effervescence, a force that makes individuals feel bigger and more powerful than ever before.³⁹² For Durkheim, this was the source of the “sacred” in every religion and held a uniquely transformative and renewing quality.³⁹³ The Islamic State’s rise has also seen the introduction of a particular popular aesthetic that has come to be known as “Jihadi cool.” In one sense, “Jihadi cool” is a way of combining western popular culture with the ideology of jihad and a sense of adventure to forge a new identity and settle one’s self within a social hierarchy.³⁹⁴ In another, it is a deliberate construction of the Islamic State and other Islamist groups to prey upon celebrity-obsessed western youth to demonstrate how they too can become famous and celebrated.³⁹⁵ The Islamic State, both organically and as a part of a deliberate strategy as Abu Bakr Naji’s influential manuscript “The Management of Savagery” makes clear, has mastered the manipulation of the existential qualities of both being a jihadi and doing jihad.³⁹⁶

³⁹⁰ McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*, 148.

³⁹¹ Juergensmeyer, “Sacrifice and Cosmic War,” 110.

³⁹² Oskar Verkaaik, “Fun and Violence. Ethnocide and the Effervescence of Collective Aggression,” *Social Anthropology* 11, no. 1 (February 1, 2003): 17, doi:10.1111/j.1469-8676.2003.tb00069.x.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁴ Caroline Joan S. Picart, “‘Jihad Cool/Jihad Chic’: The Roles of the Internet and Imagined Relations in the Self-Radicalization of Colleen LaRose (Jihad Jane),” *Societies* 5, no. 2 (April 22, 2015): 362–63, doi:10.3390/soc5020354.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 363.

³⁹⁶ Naji recommends, “to motivate crowds drawn from the masses to fly to the regions which we manage, particularly the youth... [For] the youth of the nation are closer to the innate nature [of humans] on account of the rebelliousness within them.” See Abu Bakr Naji, “The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Umma Will Pass,” trans. William Faizi McCants (Olin Institute for Strategic Studies, Harvard University, May 23, 2006), 52.

Writing one-hundred and thirty years ago, Friedrich Nietzsche knew the power of cruelty and brutality as “one of the oldest joys of mankind,” where it held a unique ability to stir human passions and reach the “highest gratification of the feeling of power.”³⁹⁷ Nietzsche also wrote of the power of ritual and tradition where “any custom is better than no custom.”³⁹⁸ These twin powers, largely forgotten in the West, and downplayed in the rational model of terrorism, have conspired to pull thousands of young men and women from comfortable, modern lives to the atavistic world of the Islamic State. Here, the experience of being a terrorist is first and foremost a way of becoming someone, rather than achieving something for others. Characters as different as Mohammed Emwazi, Brahim Abdelsalem, and Andre Poulin each came to the Islamic State searching for themselves and for meaning in their lives. They will not be the last to do so.

³⁹⁷ Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 16.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

V. CONCLUSION

In one of the few acknowledgements of the existential drive's role in terrorism, Jerrold Post astutely notes that "terrorists whose only sense of significance comes from being terrorists cannot be forced to give up terrorism, for to do so would be to lose their very reason for being."³⁹⁹ It certainly cannot be denied that grievances, deprivation, sacred values, and oppression are each key drivers of terrorism. Yet, none, either individually or together are necessary or sufficient causes to explain the path to terrorism. In many circumstances, the causal path toward terrorism will be clear. A clear grievance, aligns with ideology and a radicalizing event to lead an individual to a "crime of reason." Still, in many other circumstances, terrorism appears to have been done for its own sake, divorced from any rational, instrumental goal—a true "crime of passion." Most often, terrorism is both a crime of reason and of passion. Yet, the undeniable role of passionate, existential motivations in terrorism has long been under-studied, if not totally ignored.

Camus' crimes of passion matter in terrorism. Understanding the importance of meaning-in-life is not simply an exercise in academic philosophy. Instead, we know it is central to health human development and psychological wellbeing. Having value in one's existence, purpose-in-life, a sense of control and positive self-worth is essential for meaning-in-life.⁴⁰⁰ In the absence of any one of these factors, individuals seek to construct their own meaning-in-life and find extraordinary experiences the most effective means of doing so. From this, it is clear that the experience of being a terrorist and a practitioner of violence is as important as the justifications and ostensible motivations behind the acts. The recent terrorist attack in San Bernardino that killed fourteen people was perpetrated by educated, middle class individuals with only fictive personal grievances and no clear motive.⁴⁰¹ Despite pledging allegiance to the cause of the Islamic State and holding substantial means of violence, the shooters Syed Rizwan Farook, and

³⁹⁹ Post, "Terrorist Psycho-Logic: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Psychological Forces," 38.

⁴⁰⁰ Baumeister, *Meanings of Life*, 29.

⁴⁰¹ Michael S. Schmidt et al., "San Bernardino Suspects Left Trail of Clues, but No Clear Motive," *The New York Times*, December 3, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/04/us/san-bernardino-shooting.html>.

his wife Tashfeen Malik, selected a marginal objective of no significant external importance in a region full of soft, high profile targets.⁴⁰² Instead of attacking the instruments of the state currently threatening their associated terrorist organization, Syed Farook selected his own office holiday party as the first target. This suggests that their motivation, even if inspired by the Islamic State, arose from factors internal to their mind, their identity, and the way in which they constructed meaning-in-life. If true, there is little to nothing that current national or local policy or programs could have done to dissuade them and others like them from pursuing terrorism.

Counter-violent extremism programs, particularly in Western democracies, operate on a set of common premises that are empirically weak, and based on a flawed ethnocentric, secular, liberal view of humanity where all actions must have instrumental and rational antecedents.⁴⁰³ The strong presence in the Islamic State and other Islamic terrorist groups of educated, prosperous individuals from loving homes and comfortable upbringings with little religious education or piety belies the notion that educational, religious, and counter-messaging efforts will have a significant impact on the flow of western foreign fighters. The same is true of other historical terrorist organizations from the Russian anarchists to today. Terrorism is as often the province of the rich and privileged as it is the poor and oppressed. The Basque case suggests that if even if all grievances and oppression were somehow alleviated, terrorism would not simply cease to be an issue. Violence, suffering and struggle still have a unique ability to produce transcendent meaning not yet replicable by other sources.

Developing a full understanding of both the role of meaning-in-life and the existential will to meaning, along with their respective functions in terrorists, requires

⁴⁰² “Everything We Know about the San Bernardino Terror Attack Investigation so Far,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 14, 2015, sec. Local / California, <http://www.latimes.com/local/california/la-me-san-bernardino-shooting-terror-investigation-htlmstory.html>.

⁴⁰³ William Faizi McCants and Clinton Watts, “US Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism: An Assessment,” E-Notes (Philadelphia, PA: Foreign Policy Research Institute, December 2012), 4–5, http://mercury.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/162046/ipublicationdocument_singledocument/4d6924b3-d722-47c1-8aea-e1d093d7f7ec/en/McCants_Watts_-_Countering_Violent_Extremism.pdf; Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, “Violent Radicalization in Europe: What We Know and What We Do Not Know,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33, no. 9 (August 16, 2010): 810–11, doi:10.1080/1057610X.2010.501423; Atran, *Talking to the Enemy*, 332–33.

significant additional research. Though we know that meaning is of critical importance for both physical and psychological well-being, we know little of its change over time and of its presence and difference across countries and regions. To truly understand the influence of a theorized decline in meaning in modernity on terrorism's appeal, form and volume, greater cross-cultural and time-sectional analysis of the indicators of meaning and purpose in life are needed. At a microscopic level, terrorism scholars must take the role of meaning-in-life seriously as they consider the drivers of terrorism for individual terrorists. Interviews and psychological profiles of returned and captured foreign fighters should include measures of personal meaning and utilize tools such as the Personal Meaning Profile or others to locate predictors of predisposition toward terrorism. Such tools should also be applied more widely to identify vulnerable populations and develop alternative CVE programs that might better address existential motivations along with traditional levers.

Perhaps the greatest weakness of the existential model is its inability, like all other models of individual radicalization toward terrorism, to explain the extreme equifinality in the process. It remains impossible to predict why one individual becomes a terrorist while another does not, even if they share nearly all the same demographic and circumstantial characteristics. Recognizing the existence and potential power of a need for meaning-in-life does not require abandoning other theories of terrorism and radicalization. The existential drive may not be a primary or even secondary motivation for some, yet it likely exists at varying levels for all. Like other causes, it exists on a spectrum. In this sense, the extrinsic, instrumental, strategic objectives and intrinsic, existential rewards are a false dichotomy. However, a rebalance is needed—where the extrinsic and intrinsic hold equal footing. Only then can terrorism studies contend with the full complexity of the still unanswered question: “what causes a person to become a terrorist?”

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