## The analytic utility of distinguishing fighting from dying

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Abstract

Fighting and dying, or what Whitehouse calls “out-group hostil- ity” and “extreme self-sacrifice,” are not conceptually overlap- ping, but in fact are highly distinguishable, both theoretically and empirically. I present empirical evidence from a reanalysis of Ginges et al. ([2009](#_bookmark207), Study 4), demonstrating the potentially inverse relationship between “parochial hostility” – fighting and “sacrificial altruism” – dying.

As promising as Whitehouse’s fusion theory is, he often refer- ences “extreme self-sacrifice” and “out-group hostility” (even “murderous” inclinations, sect. 1, para. 1) as if conceptually over- lapping. This muddies the theory’s utility for understanding the subjects of his inquiry. For example, Whitehouse uses the phrase “fight and die” 12 times. Fighting, of the “murderous” killing kind at least, is not the same as dying. Admittedly, this linkage is not unprecedented. Killing and dying are typically conjoined in highly vulnerable military operations, as Whitehouse notes regarding the risks undergone by those awarded Britain’s Victoria Cross medal (sect. 2, para. 9). They are also conjoined in violent martyrdom operations (Ginges et al. [2009](#_bookmark207)).

It is possible to separate killing from dying, however. For example, one can risk, or even practically guarantee, dying for a morally aspirational cause, and do so without killing. Such moral heroism often occurs in grassroots civilian rescue opera- tions against genocide (Doughty & Ntambara [2005](#_bookmark148); Liphshiz [2018](#_bookmark309); Samaha [2015](#_bookmark424)) and various other forms of nonviolent resist- ance, to civil wars (Ouellet [2013](#_bookmark373)), to colonial oppression (Easwaran [1999](#_bookmark160)), to kleptocratic national corruption under dicta- tors (Farrell [2011](#_bookmark168)), and to diplomatic outrages (Schwartz & Jones [2018](#_bookmark430)). Complementarily, it is possible to kill without risking death, as with targeted assassinations using weaponized drones (Enemark [2017](#_bookmark161)) and soldiers firing live ammunition into crowds of predominantly nonviolent protestors (Da Silva [2018](#_bookmark135); Lusher [2017](#_bookmark316)). Therefore, a separation between willing martyrdom and willing murderousness is theoretically conceivable and existen- tially demonstrable. Is it also empirically likely?

Whitehouse (sect. 2, para. 5) references Ginges and colleagues ([2009](#_bookmark207)), specifically their finding that Palestinian Muslims attend- ing mosques are more likely to support suicide attacks. However, that article’s focus is not primarily Muslims or mosques, but rather how, across a variety of religious contexts, the less religious



Figure 1. (Hansen) Odds of rejecting parochial hostility as predicted by sacrificial altruism, in the six subsamples analyzed by Ginges et al. ([2009](#_bookmark203), Study 4).

aspects of religiosity (attending religious services) predict support for suicide attacks, and the more religious aspects (regular prayer) do not. Most relevant to the question at hand, Ginges and collea- gues’ Study 4 examines how prayer and religious attendance pre- dicted “parochial altruism,” a compound construct measuring the simultaneous endorsement of two separate measures: “I would die for my God/beliefs” (sacrificial altruism), and “I blame people of other religions for much of the trouble in this world” (parochial hostility). As Ginges and colleagues note, “The suicide attack can be thought of as belonging to an extreme subset of parochial altruism” (p. 224).

The data from Ginges and colleagues’ Study 4 (the “Ginges sample”) offer an opportunity for investigating the relationship between sacrificial altruism (SA) and parochial hostility (PH) as separable inclinations. [Figure 1](#_bookmark9) illustrates the results of a new ana- lysis of the relation between SA and rejection of PH in the Ginges sample.

[Figure 1](#_bookmark9) suggests that, although the relationship varied some- what from subgroup to subgroup, SA manifested distinctly anti- hostile tendencies in the full Ginges sample. This finding may reflect sacrificial altruism being a core feature of religiosity, specif- ically embodying the “commitment” aspect identified by Atran and Norenzayan ([2004](#_bookmark48)).

Indeed, Hansen et al. ([2018](#_bookmark230)), referencing Atran and Norenza- yan’s ([2004](#_bookmark48)) taxonomy of religious features, includes sacrificial altru- ism in their index of religiosity (α = .72). This index also includes belief in God, attendance at religious services, belief in the afterlife, and regular prayer (Hansen et al. [2018](#_bookmark230), pp. 380–81). Among coun- tries of comparable human development, this index was (a) posi- tively related to Freedom House ratings of national protection of political rights and civil liberties and (b) negatively related to the number of refugees fleeing the country – the latter being an indica- tor not only of lack of liberty but also of violent conflict (Hansen et al. [2018](#_bookmark230)). This finding provides indirect evidence that religiosity

– possibly including SA – is a potentially *anti*-hostile inclination and corroborates the finding in [Figure 1](#_bookmark9).

To address this question more directly, [Table 1](#_bookmark10) outlines how the remaining variance in SA, independent of the four other reli- gious index items, independently predicted PH in the Ginges sample. Supporting the hypothesis of SA as inherently antihostile, [Table 1](#_bookmark10) shows SA was *negatively* related to PH even when control- ling the other four indices of religiosity, which themselves were all

Table 1. (Hansen) Odds of blaming people of other religions for the world’s problems ( parochial hostility) as predicted by sacrificial altruism and other religiosity measures

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Predictor | Model | Odds ratio | 95% CI | Wald | Odds of supporting parochial hostility, given affirmative response to predictor |
| Sacrificial altruism | Zero order | 0.67 | 0.58–0.77 | 33.35\*\*\* | 1.50:1 against |
| Independent | 0.82 | 0.69–0.96 | 6.10\* | 1.23:1 against |
| Belief in God | Zero order | 0.54 | 0.45–0.64 | 47.07\*\*\* | 1.87:1 against |
| Independent | 0.72 | 0.59–0.88 | 10.16\*\* | 1.39:1 against |
| Regular prayer | Zero order | 0.53 | 0.46–0.61 | 83.82\*\*\* | 1.89:1 against |
| Independent | 0.54 | 0.45–0.64 | 49.76\*\*\* | 1.86:1 against |
| Afterlife belief | Zero order | 0.91 | 0.79–1.04 | 1.88 | 1.10:1 against |
| Independent | 0.98 | 0.85–1.13 | 0.09 | 1.02:1 against |
| Regular religious attendance | Zero order | 0.88 | 0.77–1.01 | 3.38† | 1.14:1 against |
| Independent | 1.41 | 1.19–1.67 | 15.77\*\*\* | 1.41:1 for |

†*p* < .10. \**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01. \*\*\**p* < .001.

nominally or significantly negatively related to PH zero order. The independent relations of prayer and belief in God to PH remained negative in binary logistic regression, though religious attendance became positively related, and belief in the afterlife remained unrelated. Controlling for the demographic variables previously controlled by Ginges and colleagues did not change these relationships.

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This negative relationship between SA and PH is also evident

in reanalyses of data from Hansen et al. ([2018](#_bookmark230)), as well as two add- itional data sets measuring SA’s relationship to other forms of PH. These analyses (Hansen, [in preparation](#_bookmark231), Study 3) confirm that SA, like basic religiosity in general, negatively predicts Freedom House-rated oppression in a country and the number of refugees fleeing that country. The analyses also confirm that SA is nega- tively related to support for killing religious others and “the wicked,” at least when “coalitional rigidity” variables (Hansen & Ryder [2016](#_bookmark232)) are controlled.

To understand phenomena conjoining killing and dying (like violent martyrdom operations), step one should be to address the inherent tension between them, specifically the poten- tially inverse relationship between SA and PH. Whitehouse’s fusion theory might yet prove relevant to identifying processes that can modulate this tension, but first the tension itself needs acknowledgment. I am concerned that Whitehouse’s fusion theory, which neglects this tension, applies more readily to iden- tifying antecedents of SA than of PH, particularly given his claim that Gandhi’s hunger strikes followed the “logic” of Jewish zealots and Ismaili assassins (sect. 5, next-to-last paragraph). What makes this concerning is the potential for increased governmental interest in discerning emergent signs of fusion in certain social and political groups. If fusion theory proves influential to, say, strategists at SRI International, the Human Resources Research Organization, and the Office of Naval Research, will the possibly vast amounts of money and manpower directed to profiling and targeting “fusers” be most effective at preventing (a) mass murder or (b) the courageous risk of life and limb to rescue others from it?

There was an error in the abstract to the commentary by Hansen in the original online version. It has been corrected and an erratum has been published.

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