The Morals of a Madman

July 22nd, 2011. Just before 3.30 PM Central European Time: Norwegian online News Papers reported that the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Oslo, the capital of Norway, had been hit by a bomb. Mere minutes passed before outcries swamped social media with curses on Muslims, the obvious culprit behind such an atrocious act. Shortly thereafter news spread of a gunman amok on Utøya, a small island about 20 miles from Oslo where the Norwegian Labor Party’s youth-summer-camp was held. The gunman was slaying children. The tone on the social media changed. A gut reaction told us that this was not the modus operandi of Muslim Jihadists. They might have orchestrated gruesome attacks worldwide in the near past, but they had never singled out political parties, or children. As the hours passed, it turned out that the culprit was a Christian, right wing conservative, and Caucasian Norwegian extremist. Disguised in a homemade police uniform he had traveled by public ferry from the main land to Utøya, with the excuse that he was going there to perform a routine briefing for the participants of the youth camp – young aspiring politicians – regarding the bombing of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Little did the teenagers know that this so-called policeman had in fact orchestrated the bombing as a diversion. When his feet touched dry land, he opened fire. A total of 77 people were slaughtered, 69 on the island, eight by the bomb.

Anders Behring Breivik, the cold blooded butcher behind the attack, may seem like an evil man, deprived of human emotion and moral fiber. However, I would argue that this man, on the contrary, does have a strong moral character. One might wonder how a sane man could ever perform such acts of terror, such cruelty? In the medical report of his mental

state the psychiatry specialists of the case, Doctors Torgeir Husby and Synne Sørheim, made it clear that Mr. Breivik “killed 77 people, with the intention of killing several hundreds. The reason for these murders is his paranoid psychotic delusion where he thinks himself to be in a civil war.” (Husby & Sørheim, 241) Mr. Breivik believes that what he did was for the greater good of the people of Europe. The psychiatrists believe that the butcher performed these atrocities because he suffers from a paranoid psychotic delusion. However, when we diagnose the murderer as insane, when we let him play the fool and be the jester, we excuse him of his actions. This man needs to be taken seriously, not brushed away as insane. I must note that the laws are different in Norway and The United States. In The States, lawyers strive to have their clients declared insane, since they cannot be prosecuted the same way sane clients would. In Norway, it is the other way around, there is no death – or life – punishment, so while a sane man can be sentenced to jail for mass-murder he will, according to law, be out after 30 years. An insane man executing the same atrocities can be locked up for life. The medical report states that Mr. Breivik suffers not only from paranoid psychotic delusion, but also from grandiose delusions. Many Norwegians feel that Doctors Husby and Sørheim might be wrong, some have even claimed that they made up their mind first, and wrote the report second. It was clear that the public’s trust in the report was weak, that Mr. Breivik might not be quite as sick as the medical report claims. As a result, a second report was recently finished, and the conclusion does not coincide with the first report. According to Doctors Aspaas and Tørrissen «The main conclusion of the experts is that the accused, Anders Behring Breivik, is considered to not be psychotic at the time of the crimes, July 22nd, 2011.” (Tørrissen & Aspaas, VGTV) In other words, we have two reports created by

respected doctors in psychiatry that makes radically different conclusions, and it will be up to the court to decide how to deal with them. It seems, though, that regardless of what the doctors conclude, we are talking about a madman. Yet labeling Mr. Breivik as insane seems intolerable. It is absolutely crucial that when we deal with people that commit crimes so gruesome that we cannot, and do not want to, understand, that we breathe deep, take a step back, and a close look. When you declare someone insane, you suggest that you do not need to engage with their principle ideas, you do not need to take them seriously. We do not listen to insane people. Mass-murderers are something we –the people– are not. We must learn what we can now that we are presented with the chance. Mr. Breivik has given us a 1500 page manifesto. He will be allowed to express his ideas in court. His lawyer Geir Lippestad, has warned us according to the News Paper VG, that not only will Mr. Breivik “…Defend his actions. He will apologize for not going further.” (Lippestad, VGTV) To any normal person it is hard to see what he can accomplish by this, yet we do know that he has a strong group of followers. Mr. Breivik claimed early in the process that as many as 7.5% of Norwegian males support his actions. This might seem like a large number, but I do not think that he would be too far off the mark if he claimed that 7.5% of Norwegian males sympathize with his cause. It is one thing to be a nationalist, or even a racist, seeking to rid your home of people from other nations and religions. It is something completely different to murder children in the name of your cause. In interviews with the police and psychiatrists he has even claimed that he did it out of love for his people. After following the foreplay to the trial in the media, we know more about Mr. Breivik, than we did shortly after July 22nd.

He has stated that he dreaded the oncoming execution on the island and he has confessed to taking steroids in order to subdue his emotions.

There is plenty of discourse about morals in the scholarly world. One groundbreaker of research on morals in modern psychology is Jonathan Haidt, Professor in Social Psychology with the Department of Psychology at the University of Virginia. He has after careful study launched the idea that there are “six clusters of moral concerns - harm/care, fairness/cheating, liberty/oppression, loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, and sanctity/degradation – upon which… all political cultures and movements base their moral appeals.” (Haidt, 1) These six systems represent the unique moral foundations of humans. They make up the spheres where people make their moral decisions. And according to Dr. Haidt, we need to try to understand the other party to better get our opinions delivered, to improve the discourse with our opponents, we need to appreciate differences. Haidt, together with Jesse Graham, Assistant Professor at the University of South California, state in another paper, “When Morality Opposes Justice: Conservatives Have Moral Intuitions that Liberals may not Recognize.” that:

“The ‘principles’ of principled conservatism go beyond fairness to include principles that liberals do not acknowledge to be moral principles, such as unconditional loyalty to one’s group, respect for one’s superiors, and the avoidance of carnal pleasures.”(Haidt & Graham, 4)

They argue that there are fundamental differences between the moral foundation of liberals and conservatives, these differences are based on the priority of the moral spheres. Where liberals mostly use the foundations harm/care and fairness/cheating, in making up their decisions, conservatives use all six, and the importance of one moral foundation is

approximately equal that of the others. I assume that this theory is correct and wish to apply it to the ongoing case in Norway.

Kevin Forts, a 23 year old American student in Massachusetts, says in an interview with the Norwegian online TV-station VGTV, when prompted why he supports Mr. Breivik’s actions: “I believe that it demonstrates a sense of nationalism and a moral conscience.” (Peters, Mosveen, VGTV) Notice how Mr. Forts immediately jumps to the “moral conscience” of the murderer when asked about the attack. On question about whether his friends and relatives have the same political view as he does, Mr. Forts answers: “No, their political ideas align much closer to that of the labor party.” (Peters, Mosveen, VGTV) Mr. Forts says that his political conviction is located to the right of that of his family and friends. What I find interesting, and what coincides with the findings of Professor Haidt, is that people in support of Mr. Breivik, people like Mr. Forts, use moral conscience to defend the slaughter of children. According to this though, the responsibility each one has toward the group, and to divine powers, vastly overshadows the responsibility we have to each other. When asked by the journalist how he can defend murder of small children, Mr Forts answers: “Because I believe that he used it as an unprecedented attack, I do not believe that it should happen again, but I believe it was atrocious but necessary.” (VGTV) Atrocious but necessary, Mr. Forts makes it seem like we are talking about putting a dog to sleep, or killing a rabbit to survive. Mr. Breivik has many supporters around the world. Allegedly he has, while in prison, become a pen pal with people from 20 countries. These pen pals support his ideology. They find his cause so important that Mr. Breivik can be excused for killing children. As we see in the interview with Mr. Forts, what these people have in common is

their political point of view. They are often conscious about race, religion and morals, or as Haidt would have said it: in-group loyalty and sanctity.

In Mr. Breivik’s manifesto “2083 – A European Declaration of Independence”, the word moral is used excessively. Mr. Breivik does not apply the epithet terrorist to himself. It is commonly used world-wide to describe him, but not unanimously embraced in Norway. Ever since the attack, there have been arguments on whether or not this attack was an act performed by a fundamentalist. Mr. Breivik actually mentions this in his manifesto, where he uses other peoples’ fight for their respective rights, to fuel his argument:

“We are no more terrorists than Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse or Chief Gall who fought for their people against the imperialist General Armstrong Custer. Our struggle will be a lot easier if European nationalist (indigenous rights activists) use smart and defusing arguments instead of using supremacist arguments which can be efficiently squashed through psychological warfare propaganda or by anti-Nazi policies.” (Breivik, 668)

Mr. Breivik compares his cause to that of freedom fighters. He genuinely believes that Norway is under siege by the Muslim people, and he uses the history of native people to justify his cause, claiming that he too belongs to a native people. This is, of course, wrong. Norwegians are not considered a native people to Norway, the Saami population is. The manifesto is filled with statement, cut ’n’ paste and quotes. Whether one agrees with his rhetoric or not, he has an interesting way of appealing to his followers. He uses the same techniques as Adolf Hitler did to obtain power in Germany in the late 1920’s. Although the, at times, pompous phrasing sometimes makes it hard to take him seriously, he allures to those already sympathetic to his cause. He has tried to tone down the religious motive in interviews with the police, but we must not be fooled. In the manifesto, he states that the first thing needed to be done in order to create the Europe he wants, is to create student

organizations “Attempting to unite Christians, anti-Eurabians, nationalists and other types of cultural conservatives.” (Breivik, 652) It is crucial to Mr. Breivik to unite Europeans through the brain-storming centers of universities. In order to stand strong against his cultural Marxists: media, politicians and other people that support society as it is today. This leads me to my point in this argument. Mr. Breivik is a self-confessed religious man. He has stated that he is anti-Islam and that his political views are far right wing. Through the actions that this man have performed, it seems clear that he is in fact much farther right, and willing to go a lot further in his actions than most people who share his view. It is plausible that he is, in fact, much farther right of the conservatives in Mr. Haidt’s research, which again makes it plausible that If Mr. Haidt was to conduct his tests on Mr. Breivik; we would see that the moral foundations liberty/oppression, loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion and sanctity/degradation are more important to him than harm/care and fairness/cheating. This supports the second psychological report concluded on Mr. Breiviks mental health. Doctors Aspaas and Tørrissen have not only had access to the same material as Doctors Husby and Sørheim, but they have also performed more interviews with Mr. Breivik and had the luxury of seeing the aftermath of what happened. Report number two does not support that Mr. Breivik is paranoid schizophrenic. It states clearly that he is not, and was not, psychotic. However, he does seem to have a dissocial, narcissist disorder, which makes it possible for Mr. Breivik to be considered sane in a court of law, but yet so caught up in his own scheme, that everyone else become of lesser importance. Both teams of psychiatrists agree that it is highly likely that he will harm someone again if he is ever set free.

In lieu of the actions performed by Mr. Breivik and the extreme amount of attention this case has received world-wide, I find it fascinating that no-one seem to care much about

his personal history. I do not by any means wish to blame his youth and childhood for what happened, though I note that Mr. Breivik comes from a broken home with a father who’s had four wives, who is currently residing in France, and a mother who seems to have lived a quiet life in Oslo. Mr. Breivik provides an old-fashioned, typically conservative, view on family, and especially the role of women in the family. The importance of this becomes clear when we look at the fact that his father spent his adult life as a diplomat for Norway, working for the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the very ministry that Mr. Breivik bombed. Subsequently, Mr. Breivik admitted according to journalist at Trønder-Avisa that the plan for the bomb was for the “building to collapse completely.”(Lorentzen, T-A.no) I do not dare to speculate in reasons and motive, but I do find it interesting that nobody seem interested in really taking a deep breath, and a close look. It is, as I have mentioned, imperative that we do no stamp this man insane. We should rather take a look at the man behind the actions.

The reason why the mental state of the murderer is important in this case, is that someone with severe mental illness cannot be held responsible for their actions. Some philosophers even argue that they do not act out of free will; rather they are compelled to do whatever it is that they do, by their disease. In other words, if the murderer was insane, it would be hard to place upon him a set of morals. As I have argued, it seems that Mr. Breivik, madman as I might be, is relatively sane, and that the moral foundations of conservatives are far more important to him than those of liberals. This leads me to conclude that the murderer does indeed have moral fiber. It leads me to conclude that the moral notions of liberty, loyalty, authority and sanctity are much more important to him, than to most people, other conservatives included. I said earlier that I would argue that these atrocities

were in fact the actions of a man with strong moral fiber. After careful research it seems that not only does Mr. Breivik have strong moral fiber, but I am convinced that without this conviction that he was doing the right thing, it would be much harder, maybe even impossible, for Mr. Breivik to see it through. I argue that without a conviction rooted in an extremely strong moral foundation, it is virtually impossible to perform such an act of cruelty against humanity.

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