

# Psychology of Fanaticism: Prevention and Healing

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## Abstract

**Description:** A detailed mapping of the inner system of social orientation in persons who think and behave as in Prejudice, Fanaticism, Racism, Ethnocentrism, Xenophobia, Extremism and any other term used to describe war/conflict orientation.

**Methodology:** Direct Causation Approach. It won't ask "What are the causes for the 9/11 attack", because the causes became immediately obvious: they did it because they wanted to, believed that in doing it they do the most justified, noble, godly thing.

**Research Question:** *"How exactly do normal people manage to justify in their own eyes even the most obviously erroneous ideas about other humans; and the most inhuman acts of mass-destruction - without running into an intolerable Cognitive Dissonance with their own highest values of Sanity, Truth, Virtue, Justice?"*

**Research Method:** Analyzing conflict related texts in Israeli public media over 20 years. Comparing results with patterns of reasoning and moral self-justification in other war and conflict arenas past and present.

**Results: A major Discovery:** The mental mechanism of conflict-orientation (fanaticism, prejudice) is Blind Areas. Prejudiced persons are mentally blind to see realities that do not conform to their dehumanized orientation, like the facts that "We" and "Them" are human individuals, that "We" are liable to error and crimes as any human, and that "Them" are in reality individuals with varied human characteristics and qualities same as we.

**The analytical and diagnostic tool to work with:** The *Dehumanization Syndrome*, a list of symptoms of dehumanized orientation. It makes the condition of racism or ethnocentrism identifiable operationally and definable by clear criteria in any specific expression, including one's own.

**Application in personal and political discourse:** The meta-goal is bringing Blind Areas to awareness. Without Blind Areas prejudice and Dehumanization would be impossible to maintain in normal persons.

- Responding to dehumanized expressions by asking open questions about realities covered by Blind Areas. – Guided to look at realities covered by Blind Areas, dehumanized persons get an opportunity to

fill the human void on the conceptual maps of their social orientation.

**Application in Political Science:** Analyzing texts about wars and social conflicts for identifying symptoms of Dehumanization. Informing the public about rates, characteristics and changes in dehumanized behavior of media sources and political leaders. Predicting, with superior accuracy, the strategy to be chosen in conflict by political leaders who had been diagnosed as dehumanized.

**Application in Education:** Learners should be alerted to the danger that we could become unfair and evil when we judge, hate, condemn and fight other people, and taught to identify the symptoms of Dehumanization in order to prevent Fanaticism from taking root in their mind.

**Prognosis:** Bringing Blind Areas to awareness effectively undermines the dehumanized self-justification system. As politically motivated behavior must be self-justified, bringing Blind Areas to individual and public awareness will have a healing effect on society, unlike other existing methods that touch indirect causes and could have only prevention or mental-sanitation effect.

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