What's Wrong with the Valuation System in a Terrorist Brain?

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ABSTRACT

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According to standard decision theory, making a choice can be reduced to first assigning values to available options and then selecting the option with the highest value. During the last decade, neuroscience has identified a brain system that signals option values in a variety of choice situations implemented in the lab. In this framework, any decision follows from subjective valuation: a terrorist must act upon the belief that he/she is doing the right thing.

Therefore, there would be nothing wrong in a terrorist brain at the time of killing; it is the construction of values elaborated beforehand that needs to be understood. An alternative is that action selection could be directly specified from other persons, bypassing the brain valuation system. This might resemble what happens in hypnotic suggestion or in pathological situations such as auto- activation deficit. These two possibilities – subjective valuation being either deviated or bypassed – are open for discussion.

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