

It seems that in America today we have a new mass murder every month; and each time there's lots of blame to spread around in all directions. The most recent murderer, of the month, Elliot Rodger wrote in his 141-page rambling journal how he narrowly missed being found out when deputies knocked on his door last month. So why didn't they just take his guns away before he committed this horrible crime? Hindsight is always 20/20. Foresight is much more difficult.

In his angry <sup>video</sup> ~~diatribe~~ Mr. Rodger <sup>said</sup> ~~wrote~~ that he felt cheated because he had been rejected by girls and was still a virgin at age 22. He was angry that his short life had not endowed him with lots of money and sex; angry that beautiful girls had not adored him and paid more attention to other males; angry enough to kill. ~~Not getting what he wanted, he did kill.~~ <sup>last week</sup> He stabbed three dorm mates to death then went on a shooting spree <sup>3 more</sup> and killed and wounded others before <sup>now</sup> finally turned <sup>upon</sup> one of his ~~own~~ guns on himself.

~~Some are blaming his therapist.~~

How can we make sense of such reckless hate? Does it explain anything to say he was mentally ill? Could it help us prevent similar future tragedies to know more about his mental illness? I think not. Many young men are as mentally ill as Elliot Rodger, and they have not harmed anyone. ~~Perhaps~~ Mental illness is a necessary, but not a sufficient explanation for a crime of murderous mayhem.

John Steinbeck in his novel Cannery Row spins a bawdy tale of drinking, friendship and social realism. Mack is one lazy, conniving-but-good drunk who wants to throw a party for his friend, Doc. The party goes awry and many of Doc's things get busted. As a result, Mack and his friends become outcasts.

'Socially Mack and the boys were beyond the pale. <sup>SBP</sup> ~~Sam Malloy did not speak to them as they went by the boiler.~~ They drew into themselves and no one could foresee how they would come out of the cloud. For there are two possible reactions to social ostracism—either a man emerges determined to be better, purer, and kindlier or he goes bad, challenges the world and does even worse things. This last is by far the commonest reaction to stigma.

~~“Mack and the boys balanced on the scales of good and evil.” (87-88)~~

Elliot Rodger fell into evil and it devoured him—taking far too many young people with him.

When rejected we can humble ourselves and learn: using our disappointment as an opportunity to grow 'better, purer and kindlier.' Or, we can go bad and do even worse things. Like Mack and the boys our lives often hang in the balance between good and evil. ~~Steinbeck was a stark realist with regard to human nature: the commonest reaction to being stigmatized is to do worse things.~~ But not everyone turns to the worse things. That is why violence in human beings is so difficult to predict. You can give a mentally ill person a diagnosis; you can even give them a gun—which I think is ~~very~~ stupid—but you can not predict who will pull the trigger and who will not, who will prove murderous and who will not. ~~I for one would gladly surrender my gun if everyone else would—I am not a lover of guns and think America's obsession with guns displays a wicked obsession. But even if we did surrender all our guns we would not be safe. The human heart, so capable of love and compassion, can also become dark and sinister. No one can understand what is in it until the actions reveal the deeper reality of what's inside. Then, it is sometimes too late.~~ So, until the human heart can be <sup>turned toward</sup> ~~fully~~ understood, we ~~can~~ <sup>will</sup> not be completely safe.

compassion.

This has been Dan Price for Community Comment