

The More Who Die, the Less We Care: Psychic Numbing and Genocide

A defining element of catastrophes is the magnitude of their harmful consequences. To help society to prevent or mitigate damage from catastrophes, immense effort and technological sophistication are often employed to assess and communicate the size and scope of potential or actual losses. This effort assumes that people can understand the resulting numbers and act on them appropriately. However, recent research casts doubt on this fundamental assumption. Large numbers have been found to lack meaning and to be underweighted in decisions unless they convey *affect* (feeling).

We respond strongly to aid a single individual in need, but often ignore mass tragedies such as genocide or fail to take appropriate measures to reduce potential losses from natural disasters. This occurs, in part, because as numbers get larger we become insensitive; numbers fail to trigger the emotion or feeling necessary to motivate action. Possible psychological, legal, and institutional remedies for this insensitivity will be presented.



Paul Slovic, Ph.D.

President of Decision Research and a professor of psychology at the University of Oregon.

- Honorary doctorates from the Stockholm School of Economics and the University of East Anglia.
- Ph.D. and M.A. degrees from the University of Michigan,
- B.A. Stanford University

~COLLOQUIUM~

Friday, June 4, 2010

3:00 p.m. in BEC 155, COCC Campus

Presented by **Dr. Paul Slovic**

Professor of Psychology,

University of Oregon