The Ethics of Terrorism

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Innovative Approaches from an International Perspective
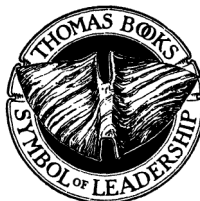
(17 Lectures)

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Preface

One nation's terrorist is another nation's freedom fighter.

This paradox represents a tiny window into the multiple dimensions that surround the word "terrorism." Unfortunately, the repetitive use of this word is far more common than agreement as to its meaning. This perplexity is only compounded by terrorism's heightened significance and relevance across the globe in the last several years.

This new book provides a unique and comprehensive examination of terrorism's origins, history, meaning and its numerous avenues of expression. Rarely does one find under one cover such broad and divergent perspectives from such a wide range of experts representing many disciplines. These authors address terrorism in both traditional and nontraditional explanations including the psychological aspects of abandonment, weakness and degradation.

In the literature about terrorism, ethics have received far less consideration than other issues. This new book innovates in that it brings ethics to the fore of the criminal justice, political and criminological debate about terrorism. Descriptive, normative and meta-ethics are central to the systematic study of the "ethics of terrorism."

It is instructive to find so many authors representing so many countries in such an encyclopedic, edifying volume. These nations include Australia, the Czech Republic, France, Greece, India, Israel, Latvia, Russia, Turkey and the United States. Furthermore, these authors not only represent the experiences and viewpoints of many countries, but perhaps even more importantly, they embrace a wide range of interdisciplinary approaches. These approaches include the empiricism of social science and the conceptual building blocks of philosophy and political theory.

The reader should be forewarned. Serious attention to the issue of terrorism does not lend itself to facile and simplistic explanations. Fortunately, it is to the reader's advantage that this book avoids these familiar routes offered in discussions elsewhere. For such an accomplishment, the editors should be roundly applauded. Instead, the current volume exhaustively and comprehensively addresses terrorism in all its complexities. The book's multifaceted exploration constitutes the basis for its consideration of intelligent and reasoned alternative responses to this phenomenon. Yet, what better way to prepare oneself for this thorny topic?

Eli B. Silverman

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Introduction

On the Ethics of Terrorism

Thomas Albert Gilly

At first glance, *The Ethics of Terrorism* is a highly provocative book title. The challenge lies in common misunderstanding of ethics inasmuch as ethics and morals are often confused. One possible reason for this academic problem is that ethics is often reduced to questions of morals, as presented in this book.

As long as this reductionism serves as paradigm for our understanding of "ethics of terrorism" it is neither possible to identify the moral relativism that surrounds the public and scientific debate about terrorism and to consider the latter as a topic that is central to the ethics of terrorism, nor is it possible to surmount the moral relativism and its normative supports, in ethics as well as in law. In the framework of ethics' reduction to morals, the moral relativism that surrounds the debate about terrorism can never be considered as a provocation for ethics.

This is not easy to understand. The situation in which ethics are reduced to morals is both complicated and difficult to understand. To better understand the issue's complexity further development is required. It is that understanding which leads us to the heart of *The Ethics of Terrorism*. Is there a better way to introduce our book?

Moral positions and moral statements may converge or differ. Moral debates are often animated by opposite moral statements or opposite moral positions. Moral statements about human behavior are always associated with the (moral) justice of the statements' performance. This is to say that they are always perceived as just by those who produce them, regardless of their content. The question whether the statement's content is just or not does not affect the justice of the performance (signifier). Hence, opposite moral statements are equivalent in regard to the correctness of their performance. Why then do people

who hold opposite moral positions or perform opposite moral statements claim the monopoly on the moral justice of their statements and of their positions? After all, moral equivalency can never be derived from the circumstance that the performance of a moral statement is always to be considered as just (correct). In other words, moral equivalency of opposite moral statements can never derive from the fact that the performance of opposite moral statements is always considered as just (correct). The answer to this question is: Moral statements grant people with moral qualities. The moral statement: "This man is doing evil" implies a judgment on human behavior. It is, as will be discussed later, neither true nor false. To be (perceived as) true this statement as all other moral statements must be associated with the justice (correctness) of the statements' performance. As moral statements only apply to human behavior, the performer of the moral statement itself is a moral subject, a subject who speaks per definition in a morally just way. Otherwise, the moral statement "This man is doing evil" would say the opposite. It is simply that the performer, if he were not a morally just performer, would speak in a morally unjust way about this man. He would be doing evil by saying "This man is doing evil."

The morally just nature of the performance (signifier) derives from the morality of the performer. Hence, the act that states that the performance of a moral statement is just itself is performed at the level of meta-language and refers always to a genuinely positive understanding of morals. That is why people who hold opposite moral positions or perform opposite moral statements claim the monopoly on the moral justice of their statements and of their positions. Moral debates are often animated by opposite moral statements or opposite moral positions resulting in

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moral equivalency. In a moral equivalency, opposite moral statements and opposite moral positions are predisposed towards reciprocal substitution and exchange. This methodology then results in dead-end discussions.

When we speak in everyday life about morals, we usually talk about an issue that we value highly and generally hold in high respect.

We are likely to admit that people who behave in a moral way behave in a good or desirable manner. This positive understanding of morals is the paradigmatic understanding of morals. The statement about morals consists in an act of positive evaluation (appreciation/approval), not of descriptive proposals. As far as we understand by "ethics of terrorism" a system, a doctrine or a simple assembly of statements on the morals of terrorism, our understanding of terrorism ethics is a positive understanding – at the condition that the paradigmatic sense of morals serves as reference for our understanding of terrorism ethics. The paradox is then that such a positive connotation of terrorism ethics is relevant to both who state the immorality of terrorism and who state the morality of terrorism. For those of us who state terrorism's immorality, it is relevant inasmuch as "ethics of terrorism" is synonymous with "morals of anti-terrorism," and for those who state terrorism's morality inasmuch as "ethics of terrorism" holds for "morals of the fight for freedom and of emancipation." In either, "morals" is "good morals."

This said, a book that is presented under the title *The Ethics of Terrorism* is likely to provide the convictions and moral consciousness of both camps. The challenge is double-faceted and it works in two opposite ways.

A book that is entitled *The Ethics of Terrorism* may be suspected of terrorism's morally styled promotion, accidentally of complicity with the terrorists. Terrorism's moralization provokes the moral consciousness of those who believe that terror and terrorism is evil. On the other hand, *The Ethics of Terrorism* may be suspected to engage in a morally styled campaign that is aimed at the "demoralization" of terrorism, it is then suspected of antiterrorism's morally styled promotion. Terrorism's demoralization or to say it in other words, anti-terrorism's moralization provokes the convictions and consciousness of those who believe in terrorism's moral legitimacy.

In the first of the two cases, terrorism represents negative morals, whereas it is considered as morally acceptable in the latter case. For those who hold the opinion that terrorism is evil, who perform statements on the immorality of terrorism, "ethics of terrorism" is a provocation in that terrorism's ethics consists of the doctrine, the system or the assembly of all imaginable moral judgments and statements by which the issue of terrorism is denoted positively, as morally desirable or an appreciated issue. In turn certain defenders of terrorism's morality and the strong or weak moral and intellectual apologizers of terrorism are likely to consider the "ethics of terrorism" as a provocation in that the doctrine or the system or the assembly of statements about terrorism's immorality do not fit in with terrorism's morality and justice.

Each of these options are involved in ethics of terrorism and each of these positions or convictions are, for the reason I have already spotlighted at the beginning of this introduction, morally just in the eyes of the two camps. And finally, each of these options are based on the positive understanding of morals' paradigmatic use inasmuch as terrorism's negative moral representation fits in with the positive morals of anti-terrorism, and terrorism's positive moral representation fits in with the positive morals of the fight for freedom and emancipation.

It follows, however revolting such a consequence is, that the statement: "Terrorism is immoral/evil" and the statement "Terrorism is moral/just" are morally equivalent statements.

To review, this is because both, the statements on terrorism's immorality and the statements on terrorism's morality imply the morally just nature of the statements' performance and performer. And each is in the eyes of the other immoral. This is why the controversy and why the possibility to perform opposite moral statements on terrorism can hardly be considered as of "Terrorism Ethics" semantic potential; rather is it a case of pragmatics (in the semiotic sense of the term). The following observation comes as support: Moral statements, either positive or negative, on acts or behavior are always paralleled by the act, by which the morally just performance of the statement is denoted. This circumstance precludes semantic contradiction.

Given moral equivalence, the question "Who is right or wrong, who is moral or immoral?" cannot be answered. It is that both are equally right/moral or wrong/immoral proposals.

Obviously "ethics of terrorism" provocation works as long as the moral equivalence does not receive consideration, and as long as it is of no concern.

Given our initial statement that the challenge is rooted in the restrictive understanding of ethics that lives on the confusion of ethics and morals, it follows logically that such a reductive conception of ethics precludes moral equivalence and prompts provocation. Why?

From the semantic-logical viewpoint the moral equivalence of opposite moral statements explains as follows: Moral statements are based on evaluation, approval or disapproval of human act and behavior. The opposite are descriptive proposals. By descriptive proposals we understand proposals that are based on the description or the explanation of the empirical world. The semantic-logical difference between both is outlined in the maxim that it is impossible to decide on the validity of evaluative (appreciation or depreciation) and/or prescriptive proposals. The dominant opinion is that it is impossible to provide for rational assessments about the question whether appreciative and/or prescriptive proposals are true or not true. Closely connected with this opinion is the precept, developed first by Hume and Kant and later by Poincaré, that claims the absolute necessity to separate "what is" from "what ought to be," and highlights the impossibility to deduce norms and values from facts.

It follows that:

1. descriptive proposals/statements only are verifiable/falsifiable. It follows furthermore that;
2. the issue of ethics in general, and the issue of terrorism ethics in particular are susceptible to be subjected to validation (to be denoted as right or wrong/false), at the condition that the (terrorism) ethics is the subject of descriptive proposals.

Therefore, moral statements themselves – proposals that approve or disapprove behavior can neither be true nor can they be false. But as far as such statements are susceptible to be described (to be denoted/interpreted/explained), descriptive proposals on moral statements can be thought of as right or wrong. This is the case when "ethics of terrorism" holds for the moral relativism, as it is involved in the equivalency of opposite moral statements. For argument's sake, the statements about terrorism's moral-

ity/immorality, the proposals that approve or that disapprove terrorism are neither wrong nor right. In contrast, the statement that points the equivalence of the two opposite moral statements and that acknowledges the moral relativism is either wrong or right. It is because it is right not only in that slogans, such as "What *we* do is *anti-terrorism*, what the *other* does is *terrorism*" or "one's *terrorist is the other's freedom fighter*," are observable social facts (they are inherent parts of the public and of the scientific debate about terrorism), but it is right also in that such proposals are correctly denoted when they are interpreted as moral relativism.

The important point here is that "ethics" holds for the system or the assembly of descriptive proposals about observable facts, i.e., the equivalence and the relativity of moral statements/positions about terrorism as they are materialized in slogans that are characteristic of terrorism speech and as they are documented by the public and scientific debate on the morals of terrorism. Accordingly, we understand by the term "ethics of terrorism" basically the system or the assembly of proposals by which opposite moral statements about terrorism are denoted in terms of moral equivalence and of moral relativism. We do not understand by ethics of terrorism the system or the assembly of (moral) statements that approve or disapprove terrorism. The latter understanding derives from terrorism ethics' reduction to moral questions. More specifically, we understand by ethics of terrorism this particular part of empirical sciences (sciences of observation) which is dealing with the moral relativism as it is materialized in the way we talk and write about terrorism and study the topic. It is clear that ethics of terrorism, to be understood, developed and implemented as empirically rooted science that is dealing with terrorism's moral relativism, must be in prior constituted as the system of proposals by which opposite moral statements about terrorism are denoted as morally equivalent proposals and as of moral relativism. These are the two basic pillars of the foundation of the ethics of terrorism.

It is the shift from moral statements on terrorism (object–language) towards statements on the nature of the performance and performers of moral statements (meta-language) that is at the heart of ethics' foundation as a distinguished topic in regard to morals. Through lack of such shift, we never leave the subjective dimension of opponents claiming the