



The Trouble with Terror

Liberty, Security, and the Response
to Terrorism

TAMAR MEISELS



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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1 *Defining terrorism – a typology*

As the leaders of Western democracies and their security forces increasingly struggle with terrorism, their lawyers and philosophers continue to struggle with its definition. Several recent studies point to the inconsistencies and inadequacies of existing legal definitions, as well as to the contradictions among them.¹ C. A. J. Coady suggests that there are more than a hundred modern definitions of “terrorism.”² George Fletcher mentions only dozens, concluding that no one of them is definitive.³ Consequently, there is no globally agreed, unambiguous definition or description of terrorism – popular, academic, or legislative. Igor Primoratz complains that “Current ordinary usage of the word displays wide variety and considerable confusion; as a result, discussing terrorism and the array of moral, political and legal questions it raises is difficult and often frustrating.”⁴ Wilkins does not altogether exaggerate when he writes that the number of definitions of terrorism equals the number of works dedicated to the subject.⁵ By 1984, Alex Schmid had collected 109 different definitions of terrorism.⁶ Later, he states that he “cannot offer a true or correct definition of terrorism” and that “[t]errorism is an abstract phenomenon of which there can be

¹ Jeremy Waldron, “Terrorism and the Uses of Terror,” *The Journal of Ethics* 8 (2004), pp. 5–35; George Fletcher, “The Problem of Defining Terrorism,” paper presented at a conference on “Terrorism – Philosophical Perspectives,” at Tel-Aviv University (organized by the Department of Political Science and the Minerva Center for Human Rights, Tel-Aviv University Law Faculty), March 2004; and in George Fletcher, “The Indefinable Concept of Terrorism,” *Journal of International Criminal Justice* (2006), pp. 1–18.

² C. A. J. Coady, “Defining Terrorism,” in I. Primoratz (ed.), *Terrorism – The Philosophical Issues* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 3–14.

³ Fletcher, “The Problem of Defining,” p. 2. ⁴ Primoratz, *Terrorism*, p. xi.

⁵ Burleigh T. Wilkins, *Terrorism and Collective Responsibility* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 2.

⁶ Alex P. Schmid, *Political Terrorism: A Research Guide to Concepts, Theories, Data Bases and Literature* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing, 1984), pp. 119–58.

no essence which can be discovered or described,” commenting that “authors have spilt almost as much ink as the actors of terrorism have spilled blood.”⁷ Indeed, to date, academic standpoints remain diverse. When it comes to defining terrorism some, like Walter Laqueur, seem to forego analysis in favor of platitudes, in the belief that “[a]ll specific definitions of terrorism have their shortcomings simply because reality is always richer (or more complicated) than any generalization.”⁸

At least one reason for the disparity of definitions stems from the variety of objectives we have in defining terrorism. Lawyers desperately require definitions in order to prosecute and sanction “terrorists.” They must distinguish terrorism in precise legal terms from other forms of crime. Social scientists aim to describe this phenomenon in a way which will better our sociological and psychological understanding of it and enable us to face this modern challenge more successfully.⁹ Heads of state and politicians often adopt definitions that serve their national, political, or ideological agendas. Naturally, they usually define terrorism as a form of violence that is carried out exclusively by non-state groups. As Primoratz puts this: “Nobody applies the word to oneself or one’s actions, nor to those one has sympathy with or whose activities one supports.”¹⁰

Recently, both George Fletcher and Jeremy Waldron have questioned whether we should spend time worrying about definitional issues at all. Fletcher suggests that, “when it comes to terrorism, we know it when we see it – as Justice Stewart famously said about pornography.”¹¹ According to Fletcher, while people have strong intuitions about what is and what is not terrorism, no definition of terrorism can be filtered from a specification of necessary and sufficient conditions.¹² Specific forms of conduct, he claims, cannot be identified as terrorism by simply running a relevant test on them. Instead, he probes the relevance of eight variables on the contours of terrorism: violence, intention, the victims, the wrongdoers, just cause, organization, theater, and what he calls the “no guilt, no regrets” of the

⁷ Alex P. Schmid and Albert J. Jongman, *Political Terrorism: A Research Guide to Concepts, Theories, Data Bases and Literature*, 2nd edn. (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing, 1988), p. xiii.

⁸ Walter Z. Laqueur, *The Age of Terrorism* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1987), p. 145.

⁹ Waldron, “Terrorism,” p. 6. ¹⁰ Primoratz, *Terrorism*, p. xi.

¹¹ Fletcher, “The Problem of Defining,” p. 2; Waldron, “Terrorism,” p. 6.

¹² Fletcher, “The Problem of Defining,” p. 3; Fletcher, “The Indefinable Concept of Terrorism,” pp. 16, 18.

perpetrators.¹³ Drawing on Wittgenstein’s “relationships of family resemblance,” Fletcher argues that terrorist acts do not presuppose necessary and sufficient conditions. Instead, a given terrorist act may resemble a second terrorist act in some respect, and a third terrorist act in another. The features of the second and third terrorist acts that resemble one another may be different as well. There is, however, no common denominator for all acts of terrorism, apart, perhaps, from their theatrical nature.¹⁴

In “Terrorism and the Uses of Terror,” Waldron pursues some interesting distinctions among, for example, “terror,” “terrorism,” and “terrorization,” and reveals some psychological insights into the fearful elements of terror, but he concludes that no canonical definition emerges from these observations.¹⁵ In one such invaluable insight, Waldron ascribes the term “terrorization” to the type of action that induces desperate panic and overwhelms a person’s rational decision-making capability, and distinguishes it from coercion, which concerns actions that leave room for rational deliberation on the part of the victim.¹⁶ Nonetheless, he argues ultimately that defining “terrorism” is difficult and not an enterprise worth undertaking, except for specific legal purposes.¹⁷ While Fletcher and Waldron both expend the necessary effort in investigating this definitional question, they essentially concur that, in the end, “The quest for a canonical definition of terrorism is probably a waste of time.”¹⁸ This book argues, to the contrary, that a canonical and consistent definition of “terrorism” can and should be pursued, particularly by philosophers.

In his recent and provocative book, *What’s Wrong with Terrorism?* Robert Goodin humorously accuses political theorists, myself included (in a slightly different connection) of having “a limited range of tools in their intellectual toolkits. Presented with real world events, they rummage around to see what among their standard equipment best fits this occasion, rather than necessarily doing any first order philosophy on the situation at hand.”¹⁹ Goodin is probably right, and it is not

¹³ Fletcher, “The Indefinable Concept of Terrorism,” pp. 8–16; Fletcher, “The Problem of Defining” considers only the latter six of the eight variables mentioned above.

¹⁴ Fletcher, “The Problem of Defining,” throughout; Fletcher, “The Indefinable Concept of Terrorism,” esp. p. 18.

¹⁵ Waldron, “Terrorism,” esp. pp. 8–9, 11–12, 33. ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 33. ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁹ Robert Goodin, *What’s Wrong with Terrorism?* (Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2006), p. 170.

surprising then that we have in recent years witnessed a veritable slew of academic writing on the definition of terrorism. Political philosophers are rather fond of framing classifications and typologies, and categorizing and defining. Contra Waldron and Fletcher, however, I do not consider this a waste of time. If we are to fruitfully pursue the further moral issues regarding the changing character of modern war, we must first agree on a canonical definition of terrorism. As Coady observes, “There are two central philosophical questions about terrorism: What is it? And what, if anything, is wrong with it?” We must deal with the first question because of the importance of the second.²⁰

I have another piece of old equipment in my toolbox that I believe meets the occasion. Aristotle observed long ago that our definitional powers are essentially linked to our ability to distinguish good from evil. The gift of speech, Aristotle tells us, goes beyond the physical capacity to utter sounds and even the ability to recognize and name objects in the physical world. The essential attribute of human speech is captured by the ability to differentiate, categorize, and define a variety of incidents as belonging to a common genus, while excluding others. It is the capacity to distinguish and define which enables us to make ethical judgments.²¹ To bring this observation into the present, the twenty-first-century philosopher’s objective must be to define terrorism in order to identify its morally crucial features.

Aside from pure moral inquiry, there are also other, more practical, objectives to be served by a clear definition of terrorism. As I have said, lawyers require definitions in order to prosecute terrorists. Chapter 4 of this book looks at the legal status of irregular combatants. Chapters 5 to 7 contemplate the appropriate attitude on the part of the international community towards certain modes of combating terrorism and terrorists, specifically towards the practices of targeted assassination and investigative torture. In view of recent events, there is a great need to adapt international law to the reality of modern warfare. Legislation on terrorism, and the legitimate modes of combating it, is sorely lacking. Legally defining terrorism would be a very good place to start. An orderly definition would specify the category of persons we call terrorists for the purpose of both prosecuting and fighting them, and distinguish them from those who would categorically be immune from such repercussions. A definitive description of terrorism would enable us

²⁰ Coady, “Defining Terrorism,” p. 3.

²¹ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* (London: Penguin, 1976), pp. 75–6.

to consider policies designed to combat it, such as targeted killing, without lending our hand to related practices, such as the murder of political enemies, which we ardently condemn. An internationally agreed-upon definition of terrorism is a necessary first step in the right direction.

Why are Western theorists having such a hard time agreeing on a definition of terrorism? Israeli legal theorist Alon Harel suggests that the various conflicting definitions fall roughly into two categories, each with a distinct political agenda. One large group of contemporary definitions seeks to highlight a specific aspect of terrorism that is said to single it out as a particularly fiendish and condemnable practice. In contrast, a second group of definitions aims to blur the distinction between terrorism and other violent acts, suggesting that terrorism is no worse than many forms of state-employed violence.²² While Harel never names particular scholars in each of his categories, most authors on terrorism do indeed fall distinctly into one of the two groups.

Throughout this chapter, I pursue this distinction between two broad categories of definitions based loosely on their respective goals. I refer to them as the “inclusive” and the “restrictive” definitions respectively. In the next section, after pursuing several paradigmatic definitions of the inclusive category, I criticize this type of definition, suggesting that it is entirely politically motivated, misguided, and normatively unhelpful in understanding the modern phenomenon that is terrorism. While authors of these wide, inclusive definitions accuse their opponents of begging important moral questions – allegedly defining terrorism as unjustified – they themselves advance their political agenda by shaping definitions that suit them. Chapter 2 offers a more detailed refutation of such political agenda. This chapter, as well as the next, suggests that a satisfactory definition of terrorism must specify its uniqueness and distinguish it from other types of human activity, specifically from other types of violent action. If terminology is to contribute to ethical judgment, the definition itself ought to highlight the characteristic normative aspect of the category in question. The term “terrorism” is derogatory, at least in ordinary usage. That is why no one applies it to themselves and practically everyone nowadays attempts to apply it to his or

²² Alon Harel, “Is Terrorism a Moral Category?” paper delivered at a conference on “Terrorism – Philosophical Perspectives,” at Tel-Aviv University (organized by the department of Political Science and the Minerva Center for Human Rights), March 2004.

her enemies. Therefore, I argue here, the characterizing features we are looking for are bound to be at least objectionable if they are to bear any connection with ordinary speech. Finally, I conclude the present chapter by siding with what has been dubbed a “tactical definition” of terrorism; tactical in that it focuses on the specific problematic tactic of terrorism as an action category.²³ I do so without reference to the nature of the perpetrators of such a tactic or the justness of their goal and without rendering it morally and politically unjustifiable by definition. The following chapter looks more closely at political motivation and the question of justification.

Inclusive definitions

The *Oxford Student’s Dictionary for Hebrew Speakers* describes terrorism as merely the “use of violence and intimidation, especially for political purposes.”²⁴ Interestingly, this was also Leon Trotsky’s understanding of terrorism: as violence intended to intimidate and thereby achieve political objectives.²⁵ Quite obviously, many acts of conventional warfare can equally be described as violent and intimidating for political purposes. Several modern-day theorists adopt a variety of inclusive definitions of terrorism that blur, or deconstruct, the distinction between terrorism and other forms of political violence. This type of definition aims to obliterate the distinction between terrorism and other violent acts, with the clear implication that terrorism is, in and of itself, no worse than many other practiced forms of violence which are internationally sanctioned.

Many theorists believe that the very concept of terrorism, or at least its current usage, has been molded in a sinister way in order to serve the political interests of the stronger powers within the international community, specifically those of the United States. Hence, it is argued, the United States’ labeling of particular individuals, groups, states, and organizations as “terrorists” is biased and unjust.²⁶ There is nothing

²³ Coady, “Defining Terrorism,” pp. 3, 7. For Coady’s tactical definition, see also C. A. J. Coady, “Terrorism, Morality and Supreme Emergency,” in Primoratz, *Terrorism*, p. 80.

²⁴ A. S. Hornby, *Oxford Student’s Dictionary for Hebrew Speakers* (Tel-Aviv: Kernerman, 1991).

²⁵ Leon Trotsky, “A Defense of the Red Terror,” in Primoratz, *Terrorism*, pp. 31–43.

²⁶ Virginia Held, for example, “Terrorism, Rights, and Political Goals,” in Primoratz, *Terrorism*, p. 65–79.

distinct about this type of violence that has not already been employed far more extensively by the United States itself and some of its closest allies. Noam Chomsky, for example, clearly holds this view.²⁷ If so, perhaps the moral appraisal of any specific use of force relies ultimately on the justness of its cause rather than on the means employed in its pursuit.²⁸

In “Political Terrorism as a Weapon of the Politically Powerless,” Robert Young attempts to justify what he describes as terrorism in terms of “just cause.” While he recognizes that states as well as groups use terror tactics, he concentrates on the latter, arguing that “the most promising way, morally, to defend terrorism not carried out by states is as a weapon which those who lack conventional political power can use to fight the just causes they are otherwise prevented from promoting.”²⁹ He admits in advance that killing or injuring the innocent, as well as random or indiscriminate attacks – which are the features most commonly associated with terrorism – are rarely, if ever, justifiable.³⁰ Young’s self-professed political agenda – that of justifying terrorism by the politically powerless – is then squared with his difficulty in justifying the killing of innocents and random indiscriminate violence, by attempting to evade, and subsequently obscuring, the definitional question, which he claims to avoid.³¹ Instead, he lists those features which he believes provide a clear description of terrorism.³² These include causing fear, usually by non-state actors, and a broad range of political goals.³³ Finally, he rejects those definitions that associate terrorism with random indiscriminate violence, as well as with the targeting of non-combatants, as “moralized.” Recognizing that “many believe terrorism involves threatening to harm, or harming, non-combatants (which is code for ‘innocents’),”³⁴ thus violating the classic just-war theory

²⁷ Noam Chomsky, 9–11 (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2001), esp. pp. 23, 40–54, 57, 73–4, 90–1, as well as in his numerous other similar publications.

²⁸ This is pointed out by Alon Harel, “Is Terrorism a Moral Category,” and is exhibited in the work of Ted Honderich, *After the Terror* (Edinburgh University Press, 2003) esp. pp. 91–7, and at least implied by Jacques Derrida in G. Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror* (University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 85–136.

²⁹ Robert Young, “Political Terrorism as a Weapon of the Politically Powerless,” in Primoratz, *Terrorism*, pp. 55–64 (pp. 55–6).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 57. ³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 55. ³² *Ibid.*, pp. 56–7.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 56. ³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

principle of discrimination, Young points out, unoriginally, that civilian victims need not be “innocent” in the moral sense. They may be state officials, supporters of the government, or even heads of state, whose targeting is regarded by others as political assassination rather than terror.

Young’s argument here is somewhat circular, as well as fraught with error. For one thing, the term “non-combatant” as it functions within the just-war theory principle of discrimination is not code for “innocent” in any ordinary moral sense. On the contrary, talk of targeting the innocent is shorthand, or code, for “non-combatant” – non-threatening, unarmed personnel. The terminology of just-war theory does not refer to the normal moral or judicial sense of innocence as opposed to blameworthiness, but rather to “innocents” in terms of defenseless, or not immediately threatening, individuals as opposed to armed combatants. There is, therefore, nothing novel in Young’s suggestion that non-combatants may be implicated in the terrorist’s grievance. This is a well-known fact, and when they are highly implicated (as in the case of politicians) many regard their murder as an act of assassination rather than random terror. Thus, Young’s argument is also somewhat circular, as he defines assassination as a form of terror and then continues to argue that “terror” – though perhaps only against the guilty – can be justified.

Young continues to argue that not only does a definition which takes targeting the innocent as a defining characteristic of terrorism “beg the question of its moral justifiability, it is also unwarrantedly prescriptive about which acts of political violence may be considered acts of terrorism.”³⁵ This objection is curious. Definitions are intended precisely to determine what does, and what does not, fall into a particular category, and they would be of little use if they did not do so. Specifically as regards terrorism, Igor Primoratz points out “a conception of terrorism that lumps together the assassination of Reinhardt Heydrich, the Reichsprotektor of Bohemia, and the killing or wounding of a group of civilians traveling on an inter city bus can be of no use in moral thinking.”³⁶ Prescribing which acts of violence fall under the term “terrorism” and which do not is precisely what is warranted by any adequate definition. Instead, Young himself inclusively lumps together, under the joint heading of terrorism, sabotage, political assassination,

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 57. ³⁶ Primoratz, “What is Terrorism?,” in *Terrorism*, pp. 15–27 (p. 15).

and insurgent attacks on combatants, alongside random targeting of the innocent.

Nothing else Young has to say substantiates the claim that defining terrorism in terms of the just-war theory injunction against targeting non-combatants is unwarranted. His assertion that the common understanding of terrorism in terms of failing to uphold the distinction between combatants and non-combatants is “moralized” and question-begging is simply fallacious. As Coady points out, tying the widespread moral revulsion against terrorism to the fundamental moral prohibition in just-war theory against violating the rights of non-combatants actually avoids the pitfall of making terrorism immoral by definition, since its immorality needs to be established by argument for the acceptability of the principle of discrimination itself.³⁷ Young might do better, then, to confront the principle of discrimination directly rather than tamper with the definition of terrorism in a confusing and linguistically manipulative and inclusive manner. The inclusive definition enables Young to argue that “terrorism,” as he describes it, is often justified when employed by the politically powerless in a just cause, while at one and the same time admitting that killing innocents, which is usually associated with terrorism, is seldom justifiable.

Why is it so important to Young to define terrorism in a way that obscures its most commonly objectionable features and more easily enables talk of justified terrorism? Perhaps the end of his essay is more telling than his thesis. Its last paragraph clearly takes on the Chomsky anti-American and anti-Israeli political line, which nearly always follows inclusionist definitions. Young remains hard-pressed to defend direct attacks against civilians. However, his wide definition of terrorism, which obscures this objectionable feature and includes political assassination as well as guerrilla attacks on soldiers, enables him to imply that terrorism is justified in terms of its cause; for example, when it is directed against certain US economic policies, as well as US support for “brutal” regimes in the Middle East, most notably (though not exclusively) Israel.³⁸

In his aforementioned thought-provoking *What's Wrong with Terrorism?*, Robert Goodin offers a particularly inclusive definition thereof. Goodin, unlike Young, carefully criticizes classic just-war

³⁷ Coady, “Defining Terrorism,” p. 8.

³⁸ Young, “Political Terrorism,” esp. pp. 61–2.

theory and argues against the common inclination to equate terrorism with unjust war and the killing of innocent civilians.³⁹ Essentially, he takes the somewhat technical line of argument whereby just-war theory applies only to states as the sole agents entitled to wage wars, and therefore cannot serve to define the objectionable character of terrorism, which is usually (though not exclusively) ascribed to non-state actors.⁴⁰ Goodin argues instead that terrorism's defining objectionable feature is "acting with the intention of instilling fear of violence for socio-political objectives."⁴¹ This enables him to suggest throughout that George W. Bush and Tony Blair are guilty of terrorism (though admittedly to a lesser degree than bin Laden), for intentionally frightening their publics by exaggerating the dangers of group terrorism in order to gain political advantages for themselves.⁴² Once again it appears that while defining terrorism in terms of targeting the "innocent" has been accused of being question-begging,⁴³ those offering wider, inclusive definitions have their own clear political agenda in mind.

Virginia Held, to take one further example, persistently accuses strict definitions of terrorism of begging the question of its justification. Subsequently, she deliberately steers away from defining the factors that turn political violence into terrorism, commenting only that "perhaps when either the intention to spread fear or the intention to harm non-combatants is primary, this is sufficient."⁴⁴ She argues that popular as well as academic speech has "frequently built a judgment of immorality, or non-justifiability into the definition of terrorism, making it impossible even to question whether given acts of terrorism might be justified."⁴⁵ And she holds up former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, alongside philosopher Burton Leiser and Michael Walzer, as paradigmatic culprits.⁴⁶ While she cites comments condemning terrorism and terrorists from each of the three authors to substantiate her claim, none of them in fact builds unjustifiability into an actual definition, as she accuses them of doing. Walzer is cited by Held as proclaiming that "every act of terrorism is a wrongful act,"⁴⁷ but his classic definition is neutral enough to enable him to consider whether various aerial bombings of civilians during the Second World War were

³⁹ Goodin, *What's Wrong with Terrorism?*, pp. 6–30. ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 63, 99, 105. ⁴² *Ibid.*, esp. pp. 179–80.

⁴³ Goodin clearly states this accusation in *ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴⁴ Held, "Terrorism, Rights, and Political Goals," p. 65. ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 65–6. ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

justified, though they fall clearly within his definition of terrorism.⁴⁸ As for Netanyahu, who certainly denounces terrorism, his theoretical understanding of it as a definable phenomenon essentially follows Walzer, whose *Just and Unjust Wars* he cites on various occasions.⁴⁹ Leiser, for his part, admittedly describes terrorism in exceptionally unflattering terms, equating it (as Netanyahu does) with piracy, referring to terrorists in several publications as “Enemies of Mankind,”⁵⁰ but he does not actually define the phenomenon in such terms at all.⁵¹ His actual definition, distinguishing terrorism from other acts of violence, in fact addresses the very two elements mentioned by Held herself – spreading fear and causing harm to civilians.⁵²

Following these inaccurate accusations, Held proceeds to argue that terrorism, undefined by her, can be justified, once again in terms of just cause. Terrorism can be justified when it is employed as the only resort to safeguarding the human rights of those whose rights are being disregarded.⁵³ While recognizing that terrorism itself violates rights, she suggests that it is justified, perhaps even called for, when it is aimed at members of a group that is violating the rights of others. If there are to be rights violations, she argues, justice requires that they be more equitably distributed among groups.⁵⁴ The Israeli–Palestinian example

⁴⁸ Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), pp. 197–203. For his discussion of the Second World War terror bombings, see pp. 106–9 and pp. 255–68. Coady accuses Walzer of building a pro-state bias into his analysis of “supreme emergency” which would exclude the possibility of its use by sub-state terrorists, thus rendering group terrorism unjustifiable and inexcusable in all cases. Coady, “Defining Terrorism,” pp. 88–91. This may indeed be Walzer’s view, as expressed in some of his comments. Both Held and Coady refer to Michael Walzer, “Terrorism: A Critique of Excuses,” in Steven Luper-Foy (ed.), *Problems of International Justice* (London: Westview Press, 1988). My point is that the unjustifiability of terrorism is not built into Walzer’s definition of terrorism.

⁴⁹ See his reference to Walzer, e.g. in Benjamin Netanyahu (ed.), *Terrorism: How the West Can Win* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1986), p. 132. Netanyahu defines terrorism as the “deliberate and systematic assault on civilians to inspire fear for political ends.” Netanyahu, *Fighting Terrorism*, p. xxi and p. 8; Also in Netanyahu, *Terrorism*, p. 9.

⁵⁰ Both in Burton M. Leiser, “The Catastrophe of September 11 and its Aftermath,” in Primoratz, *Terrorism*, pp. 192–208, which Held cites, and in Burton M. Leiser, “Enemies of Mankind,” in Netanyahu, *Terrorism*, pp. 155–7.

⁵¹ Leiser, “The Catastrophe of September 11,” pp. 192–208.

⁵² Leiser, “Enemies of Mankind,” p. 155.

⁵³ Held, “Terrorism, Rights, and Political Goals,” p. 75. ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 74–5.

is not far behind, suggesting that Palestinian terrorism against Israel is in fact justified in so far as it moves towards a more equitable distribution of rights violations between Israelis and Palestinians.⁵⁵

There are many other examples of politically motivated inclusive definitions of terrorism. Ted Honderich and Jacques Derrida put forward wide definitions that go further towards justifying specific acts of terrorism.⁵⁶ Both are discussed at length in the following chapter that addresses the justificatory issue. As we shall see, Honderich suggests, reasonably enough, that terrorism is a subset of politically motivated violence, which falls short of conventional war and is internationally illegal and (to say the least) morally questionable.⁵⁷ We cannot, however, leave things at that, as Honderich himself would have it, and “give up on the strict and careful idea of terrorism, and go on ... in our inquiry, with a more general idea of it.”⁵⁸ Here, more than anywhere, the devil is in the detail.

The remainder of this chapter looks at some strict, or restrictive, definitions of terrorism. Following Coady, I refer to them as “tactical” in that they define terrorism in terms of the specific tactic employed, rather than with reference to the nature of their perpetrator or the justness of their cause. I suggest that, whatever the personal politics of their authors, such definitions are in fact far less question-begging and agenda-based than their inclusionist counterparts. Perhaps more importantly, only a definition that aspires to isolate terrorism from other forms of violence and identify its objectionable features can be normatively illuminating. As in all other spheres of life, the object of definitions is to distinguish the particular from seemingly similar phenomena. We do not define trees (to borrow from Aristotle’s examples) by equating them with bushes or shrubbery, and those philosophers who followed Aristotle in seeking the defining characteristic of humanity did so with reference to those features (such as speech or the supposedly related capacity for moral judgment) which characterize humans as opposed to (other) animals. This is no more than stating the obvious.

Approaching the topic in hand, we cannot reach an adequate definition of murder by obscuring the difference between it and manslaughter or negligence, nor do we beg any important questions of justification by

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 76.

⁵⁶ Honderich, *After the Terror*; Jacques Derrida in Borradori, *Philosophy*.

⁵⁷ Honderich, *After the Terror*, pp. 98–9. ⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 98.

defining it in terms of what is wrong about it – intentionally killing another human being – though I assume we all take that feature of murder to be negative. On the contrary, any adequate definition must specify precisely the wrong involved in it. Whether we then regard murder as justifiable under certain circumstances is entirely beside the point. The same goes for other morally dubious practices, such as torture. Any morally useful definition must isolate the phenomenon of torture, properly so called, from related painful practices – such as unpleasant medical procedures – and associate the former with at least *prima facie* evil-doing. Any definition that refrains from doing so is unhelpful and in fact makes a mockery of common language. This, however, need not, or should not, beg any questions of justification. One may still regard torture, or murder, as justifiable under certain circumstances (say, in self-defense, or on the utilitarian grounds of avoiding greater pain for the many).

The same obviously goes for terrorism. Terrorism is undoubtedly a derogatory term and we need not set out with a neutral, or objective, attitude towards it in order to avoid bias. An adequate definition of murder, theft, or torture ought to highlight these particular wrongdoings, and need not assume an attitude of moral neutrality towards their practice. Wrongdoings, however, can at times be justified, or excused, and such possibilities ought not to be excluded terminologically, thus entirely precluding further moral reflection. An adequate definition of terrorism, if it is to have any connection with common usage, must describe at least a *prima facie* wrong and seek to further our understanding of this term by bringing out what it is that makes terrorism morally repugnant to most of us.⁵⁹ It ought not, however, as the inclusionists argue, beg the further moral question of its possible justification.

Furthermore, the inclusionists have at least one more point in their favor, as most theorists would concede. Definitions ought not specify the nature of the terrorist perpetrator.⁶⁰ Non-state terrorism is probably no worse than certain forms of state-employed violence, which may themselves be regarded as terrorism, or something perhaps worse than

⁵⁹ This is also Igor Primoratz's goal in "What is Terrorism?," in *Terrorism*, pp. 15–27.

⁶⁰ For example, to name just those who have been cited thus far, Walzer, Coady, Primoratz, Held.

terrorism (e.g. genocide, mass murder, deportations, ethnic cleansing). I write these lines as Israel bombs civilian residential areas in Lebanon as part of its war against Hizbullah and Hamas. I do not regard this as terrorism, for reasons that will become apparent once the definitional issue is clarified. However, considering the possibility that states, such as Israel, commit acts of terror against civilians ought not to be precluded by definition. Quite aside from avoiding political bias in favor of states, the definition of terrorism, if it is to be helpful in assessing a contemporary moral (at least *prima facie*) wrong, and hopefully contribute to avoiding it, ought to describe an action category rather than narrowing the linguistic possibility of applying it to certain actors, such as states.

Restrictive definitions

What is terrorism, strictly defined as an action category, or a specific violent tactic? Michael Walzer's understanding of terrorism in *Just and Unjust Wars* forms the classic example of the stringent definition and has become the term of reference for practically every discussion of terrorism. According to Walzer, "terrorism" (as distinct from guerrilla warfare and political assassination) is a particular form of political violence: it is the intentional random murder of defenseless non-combatants (some of whom, Walzer's account implies, must be considered innocent even by the assailants' own standards, e.g. infants, children, the elderly and infirm, and foreign nationals), with the intent of spreading fear of mortal danger amidst a civilian population as a strategy designed to advance political ends.⁶¹

Walzer's understanding of terrorism as distinguished from other forms of violence, described derogatively as the ideologically motivated random targeting of non-combatants, is echoed in many modern works. Paul Berman's *Terror and Liberalism* describes contemporary terrorism as opposed to other forms of political violence in terms strikingly similar to those of Walzer.⁶² The clear distinction of terrorism from all other military and paramilitary activity, along with the negative normative implications that attach to this singular category, have recently been

⁶¹ Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, pp. 197, 203.

⁶² Paul Berman, *Terror and Liberalism* (New York and London: Norton, 2003), pp. 35–6.

restated by Jürgen Habermas in his post-September 11 reflections on terror.⁶³ Not surprisingly, this is the common Israeli approach to terrorism amongst politicians and academics (left and right) alike. It was no coincidence on Held's part to mention Michael Walzer and Benjamin Netanyahu in the same breath in this connection. Like Walzer, Netanyahu defines terrorism as "the deliberate and systematic assault on civilians to inspire fear for political ends."⁶⁴ And he regards the essence of terrorism as "the purposeful attack on the innocent, those who are *hors de combat*, outside the field of legitimate conflict."⁶⁵

Primoratz also regards "violence against non-combatants, civilians, the innocent, as the central defining trait of terrorism,"⁶⁶ and Saul Smilansky (following Tony Coady) describes the ethically significant feature of terrorism as the intentional targeting of non-combatants.⁶⁷ I have already suggested that terrorism must be distinguished from other forms of political violence if this term is to be of use in any moral context. It remains to be seen whether this particular line of definitions is sufficiently descriptive. As we saw in the previous section, the strict definition of terrorism as the random targeting of "innocents" is widely resisted. Walzer's definition in particular is often criticized on several grounds relating to the randomness of victims and their alleged innocence. I will argue briefly that such accusations are unfounded.

First, Walzer has been criticized for arguing that terrorists choose their victims at random, or indiscriminately. He places great importance on this feature, stating with regard to terrorism that,

its method is the random murder of innocent people. Randomness is the crucial feature of terrorist activity. If one wishes fear to spread and intensify over time, it is not desirable to kill specific people identified in some particular way with a regime, a party, or a policy. Death must come by chance to individual Frenchman, Germans, to Irish Protestants or Jews, simply because they are Frenchmen or Germans, Protestants or Jews, until

⁶³ Borradori, *Philosophy*, pp. 33, 56.

⁶⁴ Netanyahu, *Fighting Terrorism*, p. xxi and p. 8. See also, Netanyahu, *Terrorism*, p. 9.

⁶⁵ Netanyahu, *Fighting Terrorism*, p. 8.

⁶⁶ Primoratz, *Terrorism*, p. xii and pp. 15–30.

⁶⁷ Saul Smilansky, "Terrorism, Justification, and Illusion", *Ethics* 114 (4) (July 2004), p. 790. C.A.J. Coady, "Terrorism," in Lawrence C. Becker and Charlotte B. Becker, eds., *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, 2nd edn. (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 1697. See also Coady, "Defining Terrorism," pp. 3–14.

they feel themselves fatally exposed and demand that their governments negotiate for their safety.⁶⁸

It has been pointed out more than once, both by opponents of this definition and by its defenders, that terrorists do not choose their victims at random, striking altogether blindly and pointlessly, but rather choose their target carefully in view of their objectives.⁶⁹ George Fletcher argues, against Walzer, that describing terrorism as random contradicts its definition as politically purposeful. The key to understanding terrorism, he argues, cannot be that it is both random and intentional at one and the same time.⁷⁰

Terrorists are not indiscriminate in their choice of victim in the sense of acting irrationally or in a random manner.⁷¹ Clearly, they put much thought into the choice of their target. September 11 is a case in point. The twin towers were not chosen at random, out of a hat, as it were; this was no “shot in the dark.” The target was chosen intentionally as a symbol of American financial might. Objections to Walzer’s definition, which emphasizes the random, or indiscriminate, choice of victims on the grounds that terrorists choose their targets rationally, build a straw man only to be knocked down by this artificial objection. Clearly, as both Primoratz and Coady explain almost unnecessarily, “random” or “indiscriminate” in this type of definition does not stand for “irrational” or “arbitrary.” Instead, these terms refer to a particular lack of discrimination, that between combatants and civilians, which is assumed to be morally valuable and is enshrined in just-war theory,⁷² alongside a disregard for the particular identity of the victim. Bin Laden clearly chose his target with care, but he did so with disregard for the rules of war, alongside his indifference to the personal identities of those who showed up for work in the twin towers on that fateful morning. The first point is captured in Netanyahu’s reference to the purposeful attack on those who are “*hors de combat*, outside the field of legitimate conflict.”⁷³ The second is depicted perfectly in Paul Berman’s retelling of a previous terrorist incident in New York. In 1920, a member of the Luigi Galleani

⁶⁸ Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, p. 197. ⁶⁹ Primoratz, “What is Terrorism?,” p. 17.

⁷⁰ Fletcher, “The Problem of Defining Terrorism,” p. 2. See also Fletcher, “The Indefinable Concept of Terrorism,” p. 8.

⁷¹ Coady, “Defining Terrorism,” p. 7.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 7; Primoratz, “What is Terrorism?,” p. 18.

⁷³ Netanyahu, *Fighting Terrorism*, p. 8.

anarchist group planted a bomb on Wall Street. In general, the group opposed the injustice of capitalism and exploitation. More particularly, the bomb was intended to avenge the arrest of Sacco and Vanzetti: “The bomb killed a random crowd of thirty-three people ... Why detonate an explosive on Wall Street? For symbolic reasons, of course. And why kill those thirty-three people in particular? For no reason. Because they happened to be walking by.”⁷⁴

Randomness in this double sense, as Walzer clearly intended it, is indeed descriptive of terrorism. It disregards the principle of discrimination (which can admittedly be questioned) and it is blind to the particular identities of its victims. For Walzer, this is a crucial point about terrorism: it is not aimed at particular people. Furthermore, as Primoratz points out, terrorism is indiscriminate in the further sense that it is difficult to avoid. This is a defining factor of this tactic, as it is what makes it so fearful and effective: “One can never count on keeping clear of the terrorist by not doing the things the terrorist objects to, by not joining the army or the police, or by avoiding political office. One can never know whether, at any time and in any place, one will become a target of a terrorist attack.”⁷⁵ This is precisely because the terrorist strikes at random, in the sense specified. In fact, as Netanyahu, points out, “the more removed the target of the attack from any connection to the grievance enunciated by the terrorists, the greater the terror.”⁷⁶

Do terrorists target the innocent in particular? This close relative of the non-random objection is a further source of criticism aimed at the Walzer-type definition. Victims of terrorism are not, it has been argued, necessarily innocent. Perhaps terrorists do not aim to target the innocent at all, as Walzer and others accuse them of doing by definition. Honderich, for example, more than implies that adult Israelis at large, as well as Americans, most notably those associated with Manhattan’s center of finance, are not innocent of complicity in the grievances confronted by Islamic terrorists.⁷⁷ Alternatively, it has been suggested

⁷⁴ Berman, *Terror and Liberalism*, pp. 35–6.

⁷⁵ Primoratz, “What is Terrorism?”, p. 19.

⁷⁶ Netanyahu, *Fighting Terrorism*, p. 8.

⁷⁷ Throughout *After the Terror*, Honderich places a great deal of blame on ordinary citizens of Western democracies, particularly the US and UK, for the ills of developing nations. Aside from which he specifically holds Israeli civilians responsible for their government’s actions vis-à-vis the Palestinians, e.g. Honderich, *After the Terror*, p. 151.

that if terrorism targets the innocent specifically, it is not so indiscriminate and random after all.⁷⁸

First, it must be restated that ‘innocent’ in this context stands for civilians or non-combatants. Terrorism, is, by this account, the indiscriminate targeting of those who in classic just-war theory ought to be immune from attack. This still leaves ample room to argue about the normative distinction drawn by such theory between civilians and soldiers, as well as its applicability to modern conflicts and revolutionary warfare, in which the line drawn between civilians and combatants is far less obvious than it was on the medieval battlefield.⁷⁹ Classifying terrorism in this way – as essentially harming non-combatants – thus remains neutral in that it leaves open the question of justification, which in turn hinges largely on the moral validity of the debatable principle of discrimination.⁸⁰ There is also room to argue over who are and who are not properly defined as ‘non-combatants’ within specific contemporary conflicts. The boundaries in this case, however, are less fuzzy than is sometimes assumed. It is quite clear, for example, that 3,000 inhabitants of commercial office buildings are ‘non-combatants’, whatever the extent of moral blameworthiness attributed to them by the terrorists for compliance with American capitalism. On the other hand, talk of terrorism as *random* violence against non-combatants clearly excludes the deliberate targeting of particular agents of state as well as of particular terrorists themselves.⁸¹

Second, and obviously, while terrorism is defined here as the deliberate targeting of non-combatants, terrorists have no qualms about harming combatants and non-combatants within a single operation. As Primoratz observes, when terrorists bomb a civilian commuter bus, “if a couple of soldiers get on ... they will not see that as a fly in the ointment” but rather as an added bonus.⁸² Terrorism is indiscriminate in this sense

⁷⁸ Primoratz, *Terrorism*, pp. 19–20, cites Walter Laqueur claiming that “if it is claimed that terrorist violence is random, then it cannot also be claimed that it is directed solely against the innocent.” This is obviously not what is claimed by such definitions, as Primoratz makes clear. Rather it is claimed that terrorists fail to distinguish between the innocent and the guilty, exhibiting a disregard for innocent life.

⁷⁹ Coady in Primoratz, *Terrorism*, p. 9.

⁸⁰ Arguing for the rights of insurrectionists, Palestinian historian Karma Nabulsi, for instance, rejects the stark distinctions drawn by modern laws of war between civilians and combatants. Karma Nabulsi, *Traditions of War* (Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁸¹ Thus Walzer distinguishes terrorism from political assassination, pp. 197–203.

⁸² Primoratz, *Terrorism*, p. 20.

as well. However, it is essential to regarding an act as terrorism that its primary target be civilian rather than military. As Primoratz argues, “The defining feature of terrorism, and the reason many of us find it extremely morally repugnant, is its failure to discriminate between the innocent and the guilty, and its consequent failure to respect the immunity of the former and to concentrate exclusively on the latter.”⁸³

In *After the Terror*, Ted Honderich attempts an appeal to the doctrine of double effect, arguing in essence that terrorists do not aim at the innocent but rather incur innocent casualties in the course of pursuing legitimate objectives, just as regular armies do in the course of just wars. He suggests that the common Western excuse as regards civilian casualties incurred in war applies equally to such terrorists as the killers of September 11. In both cases, he claims, “their deaths were not the first intention of their killers, but necessary in the carrying out of another intention, a justified one.”⁸⁴ This point of similarity, however, even if conceded, has limited implications. Perhaps bin Laden’s first intention was not to kill Americans, and perhaps the first intention of Palestinian suicide bombers and their organizations is not to kill Israelis (though this is by no means a foregone conclusion).⁸⁵ Their very first intention may indeed be, as Honderich suggests, achieving their political ends. If this is true, it is admittedly a feature of their action that they share with the unintentional killers of innocent non-combatants in war. It is not, however, the only, or primarily relevant, feature of their action. It remains the case that some forms of political violence are characterized by the intentional and deliberate slaying of non-combatants, rather than the accidental, or even negligent, killing of innocents that occurs in all wars. I have already pointed out that targeted civilians may include those who are innocent even on the terrorists’ own account (children, for example), though they need not be in order for the act to count as terrorist. The essential point about terrorism, described well by Primoratz, is that “Terrorists do not take on the army or the police, nor do they attempt to kill a political official, but choose, say, to plant a bomb in a city bus, either because that is so much easier or, perhaps, that will better serve their cause.”⁸⁶ Others argue that in some cases such

⁸³ Primoratz, “What is Terrorism?”, p. 20. ⁸⁴ Honderich, *After the Terror*, p. 103.

⁸⁵ Paul Berman argues persuasively that in both these cases death is in fact the primary goal. Berman, *Terror and Liberalism*, esp. pp. 132–3.

⁸⁶ Primoratz, “What is Terrorism?”, p. 20.

tactics may be a last resort, the sole remaining option for the representatives of an oppressed group, or an emergency measure. I deliberately leave all questions of justification open here. Be that as it may, targeting civilians is the essential trait of terrorism,⁸⁷ whether ultimately justifiable or not. This point appears to me so obvious that it hardly needs restating at all, let alone arguing for, were it not for the voluminous academic literature, a sampling of which we saw in the previous section, aimed at discrediting the significance of this defining feature.

What else, if anything, is definitive of terrorism? It seems obvious to suggest, as Walzer does, that fear is a key element as it is tied at the most basic philological level to the term itself, as well as describing a seemingly basic feature of the phenomenon – its frightening intention and result. Consequently, most authors include this feature – literal terrorization – within their definition or description. This element appears to cut across political lines and is included in the widest variety of discussions on terrorism.⁸⁸ A minority, however, argue that fear is not an essential element of terrorism. Naturally, those who refrain from defining terrorism at all, or at least from distinguishing it strictly from other forms of violence, point out that fear is not unique to any particular type of violent political act.⁸⁹ More interesting is the fact that Coady, who supplies a strict definition of terrorism, makes a similar argument for excluding the element of fear. His tactical approach, defended here throughout, defines terrorism as “The tactic of intentionally directing violent attacks at non-combatants with lethal or severe violence for political purposes.”⁹⁰ As for omitting the element of fear, he argues that, while it describes a frequent sociological effect of terrorism, it is not definitive of it since all uses of political violence generate some

⁸⁷ Primoratz, “What is Terrorism?”, p. 20.

⁸⁸ For descriptions that include fear or intimidation, see, all along the political spectrum: Walzer, Waldron, Fletcher, Primoratz, Goodin, Netanyahu, Held, Trotsky, and many others, such as C. Wellman, “On Terrorism Itself,” *Journal of Value Inquiry* 13 (1979), pp. 250–2.

⁸⁹ Waldron, “Terrorism,” esp. pp. 8–9, 11–12, 33, discusses fear but refrains from defining terrorism, as does Fletcher in “The Problem of Defining Terrorism.” Honderich, *After the Terror*, pp. 98–9, and Derrida in Borradori, *Philosophy*, pp. 102–3, define terrorism only inclusively together with other forms of violence, including those employed by the state.

⁹⁰ Coady, “Defining Terrorism,” p. 7.

degree of fear.⁹¹ Primoratz, following Walzer, argues to the contrary that coercion through intimidation plays a central role in terrorism and that this deliberate intimidation is an additional ground, alongside targeting the innocent, for the moral condemnation of terrorism.⁹² It would seem, leaving linguistics aside, that fear plays a rather essential role in what we normally take terrorism to mean. Fear is, if not the ultimate end of terrorism, at least an interim objective of this tactic, a means deliberately used in order to achieve some ultimate political goal. Fear would appear to be part of the very tactic that is terrorism.

As for political goals, there is little dispute, if any, that terrorism, whatever else it is, is violence carried out for political purposes, with “political” taken here in the widest possible sense of the term to include religious, social, and economic ends, as well as political goals in the narrow sense. In the margins of the definitional dispute we find questions such as whether targeting civilian property ought or ought not to be regarded as terrorism properly so called,⁹³ and whether a threat of terrorist violence, without a resulting action, should in itself count as an instance of terrorism.⁹⁴

To summarize, I set out by arguing that terrorism ought to be defined rather than obscured. The previous section argued that wide and indeterminate definitions are insufficient and, moreover, that they are politically biased and agenda-based. This section looked at, and defended, the central attempts to define terrorism restrictively, as distinct from other forms of political violence. I refuted some basic critiques and pointed out minor differences amongst the variety of such strict definitions. Essentially, they all define terrorism as the deliberate violent

⁹¹ Coady, “Defining Terrorism,” p. 6. Elsewhere, his definition appears as the “organized use of violence to attack non-combatants (‘innocents’ in a special sense) or their property for political purposes.” Coady, “Terrorism, Morality and Supreme Emergency,” in Primoratz, *Terrorism*, p. 80.

⁹² Primoratz, “What is Terrorism?,” p. 22.

⁹³ Coady, “Defining Terrorism,” p. 7, holds that harming essential civilian property ought to count as terrorism. Primoratz agrees only so long as the property in question is vital to the actual survival, or livelihood, of non-combatants, p. 21. Otherwise, he argues, it is unlikely to cause the type of fear, or even fury, that characterizes terrorism. Coady himself admits that harm to property of innocents is less severe and also different in kind than bodily harming of the innocent, and that the former is at times justifiable. See Coady, “Terrorism, Morality and Supreme Emergency,” p. 81.

⁹⁴ Coady is inclined to think that it should not, arguing plausibly that in general a threat to do X does not amount to the crime of doing X, “Defining Terrorism,” p. 5.

targeting of non-combatants and civilian objectives, ignoring civilian immunity and the just-war theory principle of discrimination, with the intent of achieving some form of “political” objective. Most agree that this tactic necessarily involves instilling widespread fear amongst a civilian population in order to achieve the desired end. Such definitions are tactical, in that they isolate a particular action category – the violent strategy we call terrorism – with no reference to its agent or cause. Stringent definitions single out the objectionable traits which characterize terrorism. It is their strength, rather than weakness, that they do so, as terrorism (like murder or theft) is a derogatory term. They do not, however, settle by definition the question of justifiability. Tactical definitions are thus far less question-begging than the allegedly neutral and objective inclusive definitions.

The strict definition of terrorism, in its various versions, relies on the just-war theory principle of discrimination and its applicability to modern warfare. Thus, the negative normative weight imparted to terrorism by these definitions hinges ultimately on the validity of this principle, which is not itself immune from attack. Furthermore, even if the principle is upheld as valid and applicable, there still remains a variety of justificatory arguments available to those who would, and do, defend terrorism. Even if terrorism is judged *prima facie* to be wrong, it could conceivably still be justified under certain circumstances.⁹⁵ Terrorism, strictly defined, may still be defended as the only means to gain political power for those who lack it, as Young would have us believe, or to more justly redistribute rights violations, as Held would have it.⁹⁶ Terrorism can be argued for in terms of last resort or extreme emergency, or as a morally problematic means towards achieving a worthy end. And it may be argued for as a reaction to state terrorism.⁹⁷ Terrorism may be justified on purely utilitarian grounds – achieving a greater good for a greater number. Honderich argues that it is justified as a means to attain better lives for more people. In the next chapter I reject such arguments for a variety of reasons. But the point is that they are not settled by defining terrorism stringently and even derogatively. An analytical

⁹⁵ Primoratz lists this possibility as an advantage of the tactical definition, “What is Terrorism?”, p. 24.

⁹⁶ Young, “Political Terrorism as a Weapon of the Politically Powerless”; Held, “Terrorism, Rights, and Political Goals”.

⁹⁷ Honderich, *After the Terror*.

distinguishing definition is required in order even to approach the justificatory question appropriately.

Concluding remarks

Terrorism ought to be strictly defined. It is too central a concept to the moral understanding of our contemporary world to remain obscure. Attempts to avoid its definition in terms of targeting non-combatants are terminologically evasive and unhelpful in understanding the phenomenon, and they quickly lose touch with common usage and intuitions. Terrorism is, roughly, the intentional random murder of defenseless non-combatants, with the intent of instilling fear of mortal danger amidst a civilian population as a strategy designed to advance political ends. This basic understanding (which admittedly allows for some variation and has some fuzzy edges), ought not to be obscured. Those who adopt wide and inclusive definitions claim neutrality for themselves, and accuse those who define terrorism strictly of political bias. The inclusionists, however, have their own obvious political agenda, but they also have some valid points. Terrorism ought not to be defined in terms of its agent, or presuppose the unjustifiability of its practice under all circumstances. The question of possible justification ought to be left out of the definitional question and remain unsettled by it. The following chapter considers the possibility of justifying terrorism and refutes the basic arguments offered in its defense.