

Why terrorism can not be justified?

1. Introduction

Having civilians as the main target, or terrorism, has become common in nowadays politics. The air crash led by Bin Laden on 9/11 causes great damage to the locals; and another similar case is HAMAS' attack on Israel while Israel's revenge on Palestine commons, which hurts both the military and the civilians. The case of the Palestine-Israel war mentioned above involves groups who were against each other, and none of the side can be seen as totally just. In those cases, some terrorists raise the flag of justice, seemingly moral, while there are groups that have the real positive purposes to benefit the world, though taking extreme actions that aim at civilians. However, people's evaluations over actions of attacking innocents are affected by consensus and conformity, which can be unconsciously affected by terrorists' propagandas. Under the situation, without knowing the reasons of why targeting innocents is wrong, people are easily persuaded to believe in the "justice" of those terror attacks, therefore overlook, support, or even praise terrorism.

Though most of the terror actions are claimed as preserving the security or rights of people by their initiators, there's no doubt that their actions of killing civilians are evil. This essay argues that targeting civilians is always unjustifiable and constitutes terrorism, regardless of cause, because it treats individuals as mere means according to the theory of Kant, destroys their freedom of choice, and undermines civilization.

2. Terrorism treats others as means

Terrorism instrumentalizes civilians, even though civilians are composed of individuals, each of whom possess attributes such as personality, ability, characteristics, and so on. Without declaring this point, it's easy to ignore what terrorism takes away from people's lives. My point here is that humans are rational agents. Rational agents generate all these attributes. How? According to Kant, "*The will is thought as a faculty of determining itself to action in accord with the representation of certain laws. And such a faculty can be there to be encountered only in rational beings.*" (p. 45). Here, Kant argues that the rational agent is the ultimate determiner of every action and thought. All these actions are reflections of those attributes, since the attributes stimulate people to act. For example, we are urged, or willing to say thanks because we think it is reasonable to say thanks in society to preserve and enhance the social bond with the person who gave you help. If we treat ourselves as rational agents, the ultimate determiners of our actions, we would do the behaviour that benefit us. These attributes represent the value of people, who should be seen as ends. Therefore, the elimination of the value of people that terrorism causes is evil.

What is special about rational agents, or individuals, that makes the attack on them by terrorists evil? As Kant (2002) said, "*The human being, however, is not a thing, hence not something that can be used merely as a means, but must in all his actions always*

be considered as an end in itself" (p. 47). In short, people shouldn't treat other people as means, since they are rational agents which is the end of every actions. Here is an example of using others as means: imagine a group calling for a better environment for citizens. To achieve the goal, the group assassinates a prominent politician who plays an important role in the environmental department of the government in order to expand and promote a policy that supports their goal. In this case, the group is using the politician as a means, but not as a rational agent who could have made decisions to help them. Instead of being treated as a means, people should be treated as ends. Therefore, any actions taken by people should serve human beings. For example, people need food to preserve the existence of themselves and others (humanity) but should not harm others to gain food. If a person's basic right is trampled, she or he is then disrespected. Even if the goal is just, forcing civilians to sacrifice without consent violates their dignity as ends-in-themselves.

Moreover, there's a special case where rational agents can be harmed by their own agreement to the harm. This case is morally right as civilians consenting to sacrifice. However, common excuses for actions by terrorists are often derived from the special case mentioned. For example, some terrorists assume the death of civilians is necessary sacrifice in order to gain further rights, so they forced the civilians to consent their sacrifice through violence. How does this relate to terrorism? Under the threats from the terrorists, civilians are forced to sacrifice, who are being used as a means for the political ends. Terrorists may cut down the supply of water, forcing the local civilians to join their military actions. At the same time, they may brainwash the civilians by religion and media, making them believe the "justice" of those military actions and ignoring the results that these actions brought. In short, terrorists try to eliminate the humanity in civilians to serve their goals, in which case civilians become means rather than ends.

No matter how the attackers praise the sacrifice of the civilians and their "sacred" goals, it's against Kant's philosophy on rational agents. When people become targets of attack, they are no longer seen as ends anymore, but as mere means. Even if their sacrifice serves the greater humanity, it's still morally wrong since they did not consent to it.

3. Terrorism kills the possibilities of choices

Terrorism not only uses civilians as a means, but also eliminates possibilities of choices in people's lives. In the following discussions, I will introduce the elimination of possibility by terrorism, and explain bad faith as the evil reason for terrorism.

Terror is brought by taking lives; but life has a definite importance to human beings because it contains the freedom of choice. As Jean-Paul Sartre (1956) said, "*Freedom is really the void which is made-to-be at the heart of man and which forces human-reality to make itself instead of to be*" (p. 440). Human beings have freedom to choose what they tend to like to do and believe. Because of this, life becomes

important. Life allows people to be important for different reasons. People are important for what surroundings bring to them, and what they bring to the community. They might be friends of others, leaders of groups, and family members, while being attacked randomly by terrorists. The possibility that may occur in people's lives is deprived by terrorists that they will no longer enjoy the basic services from society. In other words, the death of a person caused by terrorism means that she or he has no means to reach the reality anymore.

The random attack by terrorists is serious. To be specific, some might lose their jobs due to the disturbance, while others might miss the opportunity to save their families. These possible situations can happen at any time, in any region, in any cultural group, since everyone in the world has the same freedom to pursue the possibilities of their lives, but terrorism kills them all.

What those attackers are actually doing is in a bad faith, as Sartre (1956) mentioned. Bad faith means cheating ourselves, laziness in thinking, and disrespect for the freedom of choice of others and ours (p. 86). "*Man is condemned to be free*" (Sartre, 2007), so a man must be responsible for choosing his behaviors. But bad faith denies the freedom of choice of civilians since attackers and their supporters believe their targets can only be evil because the major told them to, even though the targets have the freedom to choose not to be evil. The freedom that every individuals on the earth has can be discovered through looking at their own identity, and therefore understands others' freedom of choice. To be more specific, people can see their freedom of choice by making their choices to become their current position as a teacher, father, competitor or more. However, terrorists violate the freedom of choice on civilians, which indicates that they do not consider the civilians equal to themselves, since both of them should have the same freedom of choices as human beings. The attack on civilians by terrorists destroys the freedom of choices, because terrorists oversimplify humanity of civilians by using the term of "enemy", and this oversimplification is a representation of bad faith. Moreover, attackers form ideology that deprives their supporters of the ability to think rationally, spreading the bad faith that kills possibility. Their supporters and participants attribute their contributions as the told "destiny" or "responsibility" by the terrorists who lead them. As told, a man is responsible for their freedom of choice, so these supporters are actually escaping their responsibility to behave with an independent mind. In short, bad faith not only kills the possibilities of the victims, but also serves as the escape for attackers from their responsibility to choose. The bad faith of those attackers is evil and unreasonable to all human beings, finally leading to terrorism.

4. Better solutions

After demonstrating that terrorism destroys the possibility of choices, it's important to indicate there are always more high-efficient and civilized solutions than terrorism.

Terrorism does not benefit humans. Terrorists harm and kill civilians to preserve their

power, which damages the preservation of their power in long term. Under the reign of the terrorists, it is hard to keep stable: other countries intervene in the actions of terrorists for humanity; and the civilians under the control of the terror group may have rebellions which shake the domination of terrorists. If the terrorists want to stabilize their country, terrorism is not the good solution because residents fight for better solutions which are not possible under a reign of terror. Governments founded through terrorism are unstable, and the nationalism that they spread cannot be rooted deeply in residents' mind.

There are already examples which use better solutions. Justice can be preserved through wars that civilians aren't targeted. For example, Martin Luther King expressed his ideas instead of leading violence on civilians. He led people to rebel, but not in a violence way. He used his actions to call for equality, which is much more civilized than terrorism which causes damages.

All the actions taken by a public organization must serve civilians. A government following terrorism is driven by the leaders' desire and emotion, which is opposing civilization. In such cases, the leaders lose their autonomy to regulate themselves, as mentioned by Kant, and the society will turn back into savagery. The efforts to build a society go in vain.

5. Conclusion

Civilians are innocents, and targeting innocents is terrorism. Terrorism cannot be justified regardless of due to terrorists' purpose or not. When civilians become the targets, attackers are using them as means, but not treating them as ends, which is evil from the view of Kant's philosophy. At the same time, terrorism destroys people's ability to make choices and kills the possibilities of lives. Terrorism is the worst solution to any problem at any time, as it is low-efficient and a disaster for civilization. Therefore, targeting civilians is an act of terrorism and a form of evil that can never be justified by any other reasons.

Reference

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