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# TERRORISM IS MEANINGLESS

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Terrorism is of course a means to an end, more often than not political and ideological. In its barest form, it is the imposition of one will over another. Given this imposition, therefore, it is essential we ask: is terrorism ever justified? Is it right to impose one will over another?

This leads us to the question of ethics. Thus, is terrorism an ethical act? In order to understand this complex question, we need to first of all contextualize our arguments in the thoughts of thinkers who have sought to formulate the contours of what constitutes ethical life. Thus, we shall first turn to the works of Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, and St. Thomas Aquinas.

Broadly speaking, idealists such as idealists such as Plato have contended that there is an absolute good to which human activities aspire. According to Plato, good is an essential element of reality. Evil does not exist in itself but is an imperfect reflection of the real, which is good. Saint Augustine, regarded as the founder of Christian theology, sought to integrate Platonic and Christian views of goodness.

On the other hand, Aristotle decided that the highest good for the individual is the complete exercise of the specifically human function of rationality. And Saint Thomas Aquinas reconciled Aristotelianism with the authority of the church by acknowledging the truth of sense experience, but only as complementary to faith. He used Aristotelian logic to support the Augustinian concepts of original sin and redemption through divine grace.

In the *Crito*, Socrates tells us that one should never willingly do wrong, and even after being wronged or injured it is still not right to do wrong or injure in return. In fact, Socrates rejects returning wrong for wrong and the breaking of agreements and covenants, and he refuses to injure his country and his friends.

Thus, terrorism loses its justification, because it seeks to return wrong for wrong, and willingly do injury.

In the *Euthyphro*, Socrates points out that perhaps the holy is holy because the gods approve it, or do they approve something because it is holy. By analogy he shows that things are loved because someone loves them, and not the reverse.

Socrates then asks him if all that is holy is just; but as reverence is only a part of fear, so holiness is only a part of justice. Terrorism is again denied justification, since it is not an act of justice, nor of love, but an act of fear, since justice and love are equated by Socrates.

In *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle sees the parallel between those who think they will perform good by mere theoretical knowledge and the patients who listen attentively and comprehend what the doctor says, but do not carry out his orders.

Aristotle considers that pleasure as such is the lowest good in certain sense. Aristotle yet

acknowledges that pleasure is something positive, and its effect is perfect the exercise of a faculty. Pleasure differs specifically according to the character of the activities to which they are attached, and the good man must be our standard as to what is truly pleasant and unpleasant to desire.

Terrorism, therefore, is an unpleasant desire that a good man must avoid.

Similarly, Augustine tells us that the purpose of life is to be happy. To be happy, you must achieve what you truly want. Here, terrorism may briefly find justification in that a terrorist seeks to do what he truly wants.

But a wise man desires only what he can obtain, and to be happy, one must know how to obtain it. The aim of a terrorist is unobtainable, since he seeks happiness in that which is perishable.

Augustine tells us that true happiness cannot come from a perishable thing since one must worry about the protection of the item, and worrying is incompatible with happiness. Since God is the only permanent thing, thus, God is the only true goal.

Knowing God requires divine grace, which has to be earned through humility and temperance. Again, terrorism contradicts the notion of humility and temperance, since it is the violent imposition of one will over another. This temperance is called wisdom.

One should love God above Self, Others, and Objects, because those would not bring true happiness. Thus, terrorism cannot be justified, because it is an extreme love of Self. Evil is not a positive force to Augustine, it is merely the absence of good.

Therefore, terrorism is evil, since good is absent, and good being the active pursuit of happiness, within the context of humility and temperance.

Aquinas bases his doctrine on the natural law, on his understanding of God and His relation to His creation. He grounds his theory of natural law in the notion of an eternal law (in God). Next,

Aquinas asks whether there is in us a natural law. The Natural Law, as applied to the case of human beings, requires greater precision because of the fact that we have reason and free will.

It is our nature humans to act freely (i.e. to be provident for ourselves and others) by being inclined toward our proper acts and end. That is, we human beings must exercise our natural reason to discover what is best for us in order to achieve the end to which their nature inclines.

Furthermore, we must exercise our freedom, by choosing what reason determines to be naturally suited to us, i.e. what is best for our nature. Thus, is terrorism an exercise in freedom? Yet, how can it be? Does it achieve a proper end, we must ask. It is certainly an act of free will, yet it is not part of reason.

The natural inclination of humans to achieve their proper end through reason and free will is the natural law. Formally defined, the Natural Law is humans' participation in the Eternal Law, through reason and will. Humans actively participate in the eternal law of God (the governance of the world) by using reason in conformity with the Natural Law to discern what is good and evil.

Therefore, terrorism can never participate in eternal law, for it stands outside it, opposite it. Aquinas distinguishes different levels of precepts or commands that the Natural Law entails.

The most universal is the command, "Good is to be done and pursued and evil avoided." Again, terrorism is denied justification since it does not obey the universal command to pursue and do good, and avoid evil.

These philosophers show us that terrorism cannot be justified because it seeks to return wrong for wrong; it is an act of fear, and not of justice or love; it is an unpleasant desire that a good man must avoid; it does not participate in humility and temperance, and thus it lacks grace; it is an evil act because good is absent from it; terrorism is unreasonable; and it does not obey the natural law in that it does not pursue and do good, and avoid evil.

***The photo shows, "The Bombing At the Cafe Terminus," an illustration from Le Petit Journal, February 26, 1894.***

