

# SOME ETHICAL ISSUES CONCERNING THE PROBLEM OF TERRORISM

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Terrorism can be defined as a struggle between two classes – the privileged and the under privileged, where the former is normally the state or the Government; found to exploit its citizens, especially those who are weak (the minority) and when the latter join hands to revolt against such an exploitation then they are termed as terrorists. But the problem is that their revolution is different from general revolutions as they (the terrorists) in order to bring a change in the political system target the citizens of a nation who are innocents. Terrorism can be further classified into State terrorism and Non-state terrorism. State terrorism is referred to the torture brought by the state upon its citizens and non-state terrorism is that where private parties or organizations revolt against the existing political power. But in both state as well as non-state terrorism the innocent civilians are affected. In this article we have dealt only with non-state terrorism, as the discussion of state terrorism would be more vivid in political arena.

The term “terrorism” originated during the “Reign of Terror” (1789 - 1794) in France when such tactics were employed in connection with the intimidating practices of the government in power. However, this meaning of “terrorism” has undergone major evolution.

In recent times the terrorism that we find is political in nature camouflaged by the mask of religion. Although Samuel P. Huntington in his book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*; says that the world is fighting today neither for religious cause, nor due to poverty, nor for power or rights but it is a clash of culture and civilization where the Conservatives fight against the Libertarians who create an immoral society.

It is time now that by different traditional ethical theories we try and see whether terrorism can be justified or considered as ethical in any way. Let us first start with Utilitarianism.

Utilitarianism is that traditional theory in ethics which states, that action is good / ethical which has utility, i.e., which serves maximum good of maximum number of people. In other words as per hedonistic theory of utilitarianism a good action gives maximum pleasure (absence of pain or suffering, if not happiness) to the maximum number in the society.<sup>1</sup>

Again ‘Utilitarianism’ can be divided into Act utilitarianism and Rule Utilitarianism (A.U. and R.U. respectively). A.U.<sup>2</sup> states, act according to that situation or circumstance which would promote maximum goodness / benefit to maximum people. It states that one should act in such a manner, so that under that circumstance or in that situation his action should bring some good amount of utility to people at large.

R.U.:<sup>3</sup> States that in order to achieve ethical actions people should abide by rules or maxims (which are pre-set or determined by its usage for a longtime or are determined by the commands of God).

Now let us observe whether terrorist activities, that is killing or slaughtering of innocent citizens in order to change the oppressive or corrupt government can be called “good” under the maxims of utilitarianism. If terrorism has to fulfill the criterion of utilitarianism then it should provide maximum goodness to maximum number in the society. The terrorists might retort that they are providing maximum goodness to the maximum number in the society by saving the laymen (citizens) from the exploitative government which through its corrupt and non-transparent measures is snatching away the common men’s rights, privileges, wealth and properties in order to serve their selfish political and personal interests and due to such “Collective Unconsciousness”<sup>4</sup> found in the society at a large scale, the Government gains more and more power to exploit the citizens. Thus the terrorists act as saviours, as they claim. But how is it that they are presenting the citizens with a transparent government by maiming the citizens themselves? If all citizens die in terrorist attacks then who would obtain the freedom from the fetters of an oppressive government? Thus the terrorists do not find to serve maximum benefits to maximum number as by their heinous acts they are only destroying the maximum number of the society.

Even if the terrorists state that they are acting as per the present situation and circumstance where even their demands of basic necessities are not taken care of, by the government and thus they try to change the government by force and coercion—then also A.U is not met by them as such an action does not seem to be fruitful enough or is not found to be utility based. By creating all kinds of devastation can they finally meet success of bringing a smooth and non-corrupt government?

They can in no way claim that they have abided by R.U. as no pre-set rules are found as such which would demand killing of innocents where women, children, physically and mentally crippled and where even infirm are not spared; in order to bring any kind of change in the political set-up. Rules are built by mankind for the benefit of them only--but such fatal rules cannot be beneficial, hence superfluous.

Again ‘hedonism’<sup>5</sup> which comes under utilitarianism, stating that action to be good which gives maximum pleasure (absence of suffering) to maximum number of people--would also not permit terrorism. As only sadistic pleasure of the perpetrators is witnessed in the process.

Now some might say for example, if five people rape one woman in a gang rape then here the theory of maximum benefit for maximum number is served--but this is not what utilitarianism meant. J.S. Mill in his book ‘*Utilitarianism*’ had further mentioned the nature of pleasure where sanctity has to be maintained. Pleasure, cannot, under normal circumstance, in normal human beings; come by torturing others - as such a pleasure does not abide by the sense of reason in normal human beings. Hence the above mentioned variety of irrational pleasure is not entailed in or entertained by the theory of utilitarianism.

Hedonists, Mill and Bentham although diverge in their opinions regarding the nature of pleasure as to the former the ‘quality’ of pleasure is what matters but to the latter the ‘quantity’ (i.e. its intensity, duration) etc. would matter the most – still both would unanimously admit that killing innocents can in no way bring pleasure to human beings with healthy mind. Even if his selfish interest (i.e. toppling the existing power and coming to power) can be met by killing innocents, but the pleasure which would be gained thereby would be found with an admixture of guilt. As this pleasure is not found in course of nature of a human being, as he is rational too.

Thus utilitarianism can in no way support terrorism.

Now, the theory of Utilitarianism comes under the Teleological theory of Ethics which states an action to be good if its “telos” or “End” is good or Ethical. Now it is clearly perceived that since terrorism brings no goodness, no utility or fruitfulness or pleasure (absence of pain) to the common men--rather it takes away the peace and pleasure of common men--hence no good end is found to be served by this “ism”.

No proportionality is maintained by terrorists in their brutal means and end found thereby. So no rate of success is even found in contemporary terrorism. Even though success was noticed in terrorism during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century which removed despots or tyrannical government or which terrorized people to remove anarchy. But contemporary terrorism is nothing but a “Power Struggle” or “Religious Dogmatism”---which brings no good end, serves no good to the society or humanity at large. Thus neither its end nor its means (Killing innocents) can be justified.

Mackenzie in ‘*A Manual of Ethics*’ while determining the object of moral judgment stated that neither motive, nor consequence, nor means of an action should be taken separately to see whether an action is ethical or not. Now if we take the three together then we see that terrorist-acts cannot be justified. Although we can justify it by its motive alone (i.e. liberation from corrupt Government); again by taking its ‘means’ we can also justify terrorism as they would say killing the units (i.e. the citizens) of the Government, could actually shaken up the Government who otherwise was not giving a hearing to the basic needs of the so-called terrorists. Moreover they would retort that the citizens whom they are killing are not innocents as they are forming such a corrupt government and doing nothing to change as they are the privileged class, hence unaffected. Again if we take their end separately--that is, formation of a transparent, political system; then this end of theirs can also be justified. But instead of seeing the scenario in pieces now if we join the bits of the puzzle then actually the whole picture is obtained by us. Motive + Means + Consequence finally lead to intention as Mackenzie mentions. In reality what we see is that the intention of the terrorists is not to save us from the corrupt Government but to clear us all so that there would be no odds to prevent them come to power illegally and rule the nation.

But the contradiction lies here, that is whom would they rule if we are killed. This proves that they want ‘us’ to perish so that only ‘they’ can carry on in this world. But what is this ‘us’ and ‘they’ business? They would state that ‘they’ are the deprived class and ‘we’ are the privileged class who are perhaps taken care of, by the Government. Thus their intention is to wipe off not only the ruling machinery but also the class which is supported by the ruling machinery. Is it a class-struggle then? But the profounder of class-struggle Karl Marx proposed a revolution, not terrorism to bring a just and equal Government. And the basic difference between the two is that revolution never targets to kill innocents to shaken up the system, rather it talks of joining hands for equal distribution. Thus their basic intention cannot be supported.

To the virtue ethicists, it is not ‘intention’ but the ‘character’ of humans; which determines the object of moral judgment. According to Aristotle--the father of virtue Ethics; the traits, propensities, characteristics and tendencies within an individual determine the goodness of his action. And it has to be remembered that no human being would have all or only good habits. Thus the terrorists are no exception. But to go towards ultimate virtue, we should constantly strive to eradicate our vices (or those traits which harm both us as well as the society at large, directly or indirectly). But no such mood of self rectification is found amidst the terrorists. Actually either they are not aware that they are doing any crime as they are psychologically challenged (as some of them have perhaps seen how their family members were sacrificed, thus they became psychologically diffused to take revenge) ; or they do such things intentionally to come into power as democracy or the policy of Election would not help them; as they do no good to the society--hence they choose short-cuts; to be prominent. And this cannot be called virtue.

Deontologically<sup>6</sup> also terrorism cannot be supported. ‘Deon’ means duty. Thus the deontological theory of Ethics states, that action to be a good one where the actor performs his duty. Here the ‘End’ of an action, or the circumstance under which the action is performed--are not taken into consideration for its moral

judgment. What matters here is the sense of duty which is guided by pure reason and goodwill. In every individual such a sense is existent but not always manifested either due to the irrational or emotional propensities present in him or due to the environment or circumstances which he is subject to. Immanuel Kant believed in strict Deontology. He believed that in a situation where a mother is at sick bed, losing his son in a battle--there also the mother enquiring about her son should be intimated with the truth of her son's death; without thinking of the hard consequence that she too might die after hearing such news. Our duty is to tell the truth no matter what the situation demands or what the end / consequence of that truth would be. But can we at the same breath claim that it is also our duty to kill common citizens to change the Government? Can taking of innocent lives be ever our duty?

The terrorists can claim that as they are violating their duty towards preserving human dignity by slaughtering men ruthlessly; similarly the citizens and finally the Government are violating their duties by not letting them (the terrorists) enjoy all their rights and privileges . If the government had performed its duties correctly towards them, then perhaps today the tribals of Chhattisgarh would not have been found clothless, shelterless and found to eat insects in their diets--even after 70 years of independence of a nation. We should at least for once give our reflection on this issue.

Kant further states that the actions which are determined by our sense of duty must be capable of being a Universal law or Categorical Imperative<sup>7</sup> (unconditional command). Can the terrorists will that their maxim becomes a universal law? Kant stated that if a law is universal then it should be applicable to individual instance too. In that case he conjoins the two propositions (one individual and one universal of the same act) to see whether the conjunction is true or false. If it is found to be false then such an act can neither be a universal law; nor can it be applicable to individual instance.

For example if the terrorists hold the maxim that:

The innocents should be killed in order to change the Government.

It when applied to individual level, then it becomes –

I should kill innocents of the society to change the government.

While conjoining the personal and universal maxim we get : -

I should kill the innocents of the society to change the Government and everyone should kill the innocents of the society to change the Government.

But such a conjunction is false as what would be the purpose of such a Government if the innocents are all killed?

While discussing such a deontological theory we must talk of Act Deontology and Rule Deontology,<sup>8</sup> where Act Deontology or AD states that a particular situation teaches us what duty to perform for an action to be a moral one, on the contrary Rule Deontology or R.D. states that when our duty is specifically dictated by certain pre- fixed rules of society or rules commanded by God then that action ought to be good or right.

But no 'situation' of A.D., dictates innocent killing as our duty and no 'rule' of R.D., dictates mass slaughtering as moral.

Thus killing innocents to bring about whatever and however much a good change in the society can never be a 'duty' of a rational human being. Hence terrorism is not permissible by the Deontological theory of ethics too.

The Divine Command theory<sup>9</sup> of Ethics, another important formulation coming under the Deontological theory upholds God's will as the detriment of our duties. The Divine Command theory is said to be the ultimate standard of morality. But the problem is that the Gods of different religions make different commands, in that case the morality or code of conduct also gets changed. Morality is supposed to be objective and not subjective in any sense. Christ says "Do not Murder" (although in the Old Testament of Bible, a lot of killing is found especially killing of the unethical) but for Mohammad 'Slay the Pagans' and for Moses it goes as 'kill the Canaanites'. Again Lord Krishna would say 'the sinner should be punished after a certain stage of mercy if he does not rectify'. So which one should we believe in?

The terrorists are blasphemed because they kill the innocents, now who are these innocents?

Seumas Miller, in his book *Terrorism and Counter Terrorism* states such 'innocents' are the non-military, non-combatant, non-despotic ordinary people who are not even involved in the policy making of the Government thus they are not causing harm to the terrorists directly. Since they are non-military as well as non-combatants they cannot even defend themselves. From this perspective the citizens are not innocents as they might be non-combatant and non-despotic but they are politically unaware and vote for a corrupt Government.

To the terrorists, innocents are children (below 18 years), physically and mentally challenged or old and infirm. But the question is, are they spared in terrorist attacks? The answer is in negation. The terrorists would state that it is a case of collateral damage which is often found in wars. But the final answer which would defeat all their arguments would be this that wars do not target innocent citizens, but terrorism does. Thus neither utility (maximum benefit to maximum number) of Utilitarianism, nor successful end of Teleology, nor duty of Deontology, or pleasure of Hedonistic theories of traditional Ethics can be met by terrorism. Moreover it is also not the last resort as they claim as no evidence of them to try out others resorts are found by the terrorists ever. Thus ethically terrorism cannot be justified.

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