

ETHICS OF TERRORISM & COUNTER-TERRORISM

International Conference

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Scientific Organisation

GEORG MEGGLE (Leipzig) & SEUMAS MILLER (CAPPE, Canberra)

Summary

This conference will provide a) a substantive moral critique of terrorism in the light of theories about justice in war and international relations; and b) a theory about what responses to terrorism are just and appropriate.

Aims

The overall aims of the conference are to provide a sound moral basis for an assessment of terrorism and for an account of how nations and international institutions ought to respond to terrorist attacks. The more specific aims are as follows.

1. To provide a definition of terrorism which makes possible a substantive and comprehensive critique – that is, a characterisation that doesn't condemn terrorist acts by definition or determine a priori that only organisations of certain kinds can be terrorist.
2. To assess terrorist acts and organisations in the light of changes in world society and the nature of armed conflict, taking into account conflicting views about the nature and significance of those changes and about the nature of international justice.
3. To assess critically traditional views about just war and justice in war that have sometimes been used to condemn terrorism and to determine whether these views are applicable to contemporary conflicts, methods of war, ideas about legitimate authority and collective responsibility.
4. To use the results of #1, #2 and #3 to arrive at a view about justice and politically motivated violence that is able to distinguish terrorism from other acts of war or political violence, to explain why terrorism is open to moral condemnation, and to determine whether terrorist acts can ever be justified.
5. To arrive at a view about the just way of dealing with terrorism and terrorists: about who has the authority to act against terrorism or to put on trial those responsible; what is allowable in a 'war against terrorism', and whether pacifist ideas about responses to violence can be plausibly applied to conflicts that involve terrorism.
6. To stimulate a more comprehensive and fruitful discussion about terrorism and responses to terror among philosophers, political leaders, and a wider public.

Significance

The idea that the events of September 11 completely changed the world now seems exaggerated. However, terrorist attacks on targets in the US and the later attack on the Indian Parliament by Moslem extremists brought to people's consciousness dangers that experts have long been warning about. Modern societies are extremely vulnerable to terrorist attack and terrorist organisations are capable of acquiring and using means of mass destruction. Threats of terrorist attack are likely to have an increasing impact on people's lives and the politics of states and international institutions. In some places, for example, Sri Lanka or Israel/Palestine, terrorist attacks are or have been almost an everyday event with resulting fear, insecurity, and loss of life.

Terrorism is widely condemned, and the US and its allies, including Germany and Australia, are now engaged in a 'war against terrorism', the extent and implications of which are difficult to foresee. Responses to terrorism raise issues which not only require discussion but a well developed moral position from which judgments can be made about terrorist acts and appropriate responses to them.

Applications via

Philosophy Institute, University of Leipzig
Prof. Dr. Georg Meggle

Universität Leipzig, Burgstraße 21, D-04109 Leipzig

☎ (0341) 97 35810/11

FAX (0341) 97 35819

e-mail: meggle@uni-leipzig.de

www.uni-leipzig.de/~philos/meggle.htm