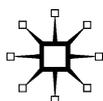


# Terrorism: A Philosophical Enquiry

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# Part I

## Defining 'Terrorism'

To approach the problem of terrorism from a philosophical perspective implies exploring two questions in particular: What is terrorism, and is it always morally wrong? In this first part of my book, I focus on the former question, in the second part, I attempt to answer the latter. To start with, I will briefly elaborate on the importance of the task of defining terrorism and, at the same time, point out the limits of such an undertaking.

Without doubt, terrorism is one of the most vehemently debated subjects in current political affairs as well as in academic discourse. Yet, although it constitutes an issue of general socio-political interest, neither in everyday language nor in professional (political, legal, or academic) contexts does there exist a generally accepted definition of terrorism. The question of how it should be defined has been answered countless times, with as much variety as quantity in the answers. In academic discourse, it is difficult to find two scholars who use the term 'terrorism' in the same way.

While it is impossible to formulate a definition which satisfies everyone, discussing the definition question is indispensable. The necessity to review existing definitions with a view to improving them is especially obvious in legal and political contexts. How terrorism is defined in these contexts has serious consequences, and if we lack clear definitions we run into problems. How can we have laws or take political measures against something we have not clearly defined? Without doubt, there exists a practical necessity for a definition in these fields.

It is important to have clear standards for defining terrorism. In my view, the definition should meet three basic criteria: first, it should cover those cases that we concurrently consider to be instances of

terrorism (such as the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in September 2001 or those on commuting trains in Madrid Atocha in March 2004). That is, ideally, our definition of terrorism remains close to uncontroversial usages of the term. Second, the definition should abstain from morally judging the act in question. Later I will say more about so called “moral” definitions of terrorism. For now, it suffices to say that defining an action and evaluating it are distinct tasks and should remain so. Third, the definition must identify characteristics that are specific to terrorism alone, characteristics which clearly distinguish it from other phenomena.

But beyond that, there also exists the genuinely philosophical problem of how terrorist acts are to be judged morally, a question which cannot be answered unless our terminology is unambiguous and our concepts are clearly defined. Obviously, an enquiry into the moral evaluation of terrorist acts is only promising if the definition itself is largely morally neutral. In the light of how morally charged the term ‘terrorism’ is, this task is challenging but therefore even more necessary.

# 1

## On the Current Debate on Defining Terrorism

The following observations on the current academic debate regarding the definition of terrorism are not meant to provide a complete overview of that debate. Instead, they serve to outline the character of this discourse: on the one hand, there exists a kind of core meaning of the term 'terrorism', while on the other, there exists profound disagreement on all features beyond this common denominator, particularly on three decisive characteristics which concern the terrorist method, the nature of the terrorist actor, and the nature of the victims of terrorism. Before turning to these characteristics, however, I shall draw more attention to the particularities of the term 'terrorism', which we have to be aware of when approaching definitional questions.

### **Particularities of the term 'terrorism'**

Clearly, the task of agreeing on a definition of terrorism is complicated by the strong negative connotation of the term. This negative connotation results from a comprehensible reaction of disapproval or even disgust at the violence involved in acts commonly referred to as terrorist. However, in some instances the term 'terrorism' seems to have become separated from its denotative content and is merely used to express one's moral disaffirmation. No matter what characteristics a special incident displays, labelling it terrorist occasionally expresses nothing more than the speaker's rejection of the incident or his desire to convince others of its moral abjection. There exists a tendency to apply the term 'terrorism' to a variety of incidents that do not actually have much in common apart from being disaffirmed. Such manipulative application leads to further conceptual vagueness.

Some may argue that instead of attempting to improve its definition, academic reflection on terrorism should merely point out that 'terrorism' is a highly manipulative term mainly used to condemn certain incidents or actors, with blurriness and negative connotation being its crucial characteristics. The problem with this approach is that it fails to acknowledge the denominative component of the term – it ignores the quite specific use of the term in legal and academic discourse – and it conflates evaluation and classification of acts.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the suggestion of abstaining from improving existing definitions is ignorant of the risk that such biased definitions bear when it comes to their practical application. As long as the term is used in order to condemn certain actors *ad hoc* politically as well as legally, should we not keep questioning its obviously partial application? The great variety of definitions of terrorism and their often arbitrary interpretation have grave consequences for our lives – terrorism-related legislation adopted in various Western democracies following the 9/11 terrorist attacks is only one example of this. It should be the academic's task to reflect critically and possibly amend these biased definitions. It does not suffice to claim that any application of the term by legal or political actors, body of rules, or body of legislation is exclusively manipulative or arbitrary. In fact, only the critical reflection of definition(s) of terrorism can effectively avert such propagandistic use of the term. Such critical reflection is the aim of this section.

Furthermore, it is not true that 'terrorism' is *always* used to *condemn* certain kinds of action. Not only do some academics use the term in a neutral or non-assessing way, there are even scholars who think that the employment of terrorism may sometimes be morally required.<sup>2</sup> This implies that they do not consider terrorism condemnable under all circumstances, but even advocate it. That the term is used in a manipulative way in politics might be due to the business of politics rather than the term itself.<sup>3</sup> In sum, there is more to the term 'terrorism' than its manipulative character, and it is important to distinguish the denominative and the evaluative component of the term 'terrorism'<sup>4</sup> even if this distinction is often blurred in both the public and the academic discourse.

Another particularity of the term that needs mentioning is that its meaning has undergone decisive alterations throughout the centuries.<sup>5</sup> Its first widespread application dates back to the Jacobins in the eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Their reign of terror after the French Revolution was not only labelled terrorist but also so called with positive connotations. 'Terrorism' only gained a negative connotation later and turned from a

neutral or even positively connoted concept into a catchword, or even a discursive weapon.<sup>7</sup>

As to the abusive resort to terrorism-rhetoric in the public discourse: It is precisely this abusive rhetoric that justifies and indeed requires a systematic and unbiased reflection of the term. It is hardly a secret that the prevailing conceptual vagueness is advantageous to some public agents. To take this even further: clearly the imprecise use of the term 'terrorism' in the public sphere is not entirely accidental; rather it often reflects a political calculus. As Tomis Kapitan puts it: "We must recognize the rhetoric of 'terror' is itself a political weapon."<sup>8</sup> Without doubt, the way the concept of terrorism is defined and used too often reflects political actors' own interests. The term's negative connotation is clearly not arbitrary: Obviously terrorism, or rather, acts commonly referred to as terrorism, constitute violations of criminal law. Yet, defining terrorism as a method solely employed by non-state actors, for instance, is clearly an advantage for state actors. It implies that whatever crimes state actors commit, it can – by definition – not be 'terrorism' and is therefore judged legally and morally in a different way. This implication is especially bizarre as the first actors ever called terrorists, the Jacobins, were state actors. As a consequence, while terrorism is unanimously condemned by political officials other violent strategies, such as war and humanitarian interventions, are judged more indulgently, even though terrorist violence has always been significantly less lethal and destructive than military violence.

Without doubt, frequent invocation to the threat of terrorism in the public discourse is sometimes abusive and irresponsible. By referring to any kind of unauthorized or illegal form of violence, regardless of the means employed, as terrorism, many politicians – and media outlets – in fact play into the hands of terrorists by putting and keeping the population in a state of alert. One could go further and claim that they sometimes avail themselves of the existence of terrorists and the potential threat to promote their own objectives. This mechanism has been illustrated by Jessica Wolfendale, who thinks that: "The fear of terrorism is as much a product of counterterrorism rhetoric as it is of terrorism itself."<sup>9</sup> Charles Townshend argues that the greatest accomplice to terrorism is collective alarmism.<sup>10</sup> Sometimes political rhetoric enhances the effects of terrorist acts. This is possible because of the vagueness of the term 'terrorism'.

Finally, states may exploit this fear of terrorism to expand their power and limit human rights. Elisabeth Symeonidou-Kastanidou has pointed out that the adoption of a definition of terrorism by the European

Council in 2002 did not constitute “an attempt to punish acts that would have otherwise been left unpunished, but, rather, to define a group of activities that are punishable anyway, with a view to developing novel measures of police and judicial cooperation among the European Union Member states.”<sup>11</sup> According to Symeonidou-Kastanidou, the EU member states make use of the symbolic power of criminal law by creating the illusion of potential safety, enhancing the states’ authority and promoting the “legalization of special anti-terrorist measures that are being planned or suggested or have already been put into effect and that have a negative impact on human rights.”<sup>12</sup> It is this manipulative use of terrorism for political objectives which makes the scrutiny and revision of the definition of terrorism both a delicate and an extremely pressing task. Consequently, the first part of this book is dedicated to establishing a definition of terrorism that is largely unbiased. It is also an attempt to separate evaluative and classificatory discourses which are thoroughly intermingled in this debate. As a starting point, let us look at the existing consensus regarding the definition of terrorism.

### **The lowest common denominator of terrorism definitions**

Despite grossly diverging notions of terrorism, there still appears to be some – extremely basic – agreement on the term ‘terrorism’, or on what should be understood by ‘terrorism’, in academic discourse. In the following, I will examine the content and limits of this consensus. It will become obvious that while a common denominator exists, it is still too vague.

There exist more than one hundred different academic definitions of terrorism,<sup>13</sup> most of which, despite their immense variety, share a certain core meaning. In 1985, Alex P. Schmid and Albert J. Jongman conducted a survey<sup>14</sup> among academics on definitions of terrorism. In response to their questionnaires, they received 109 definitions from which they extracted 22 definitional elements.<sup>15</sup> The notion of *violence or force* was the most frequent element and formed part of more than 80% of the definitions; 65% defined terrorism as something *political*; and 51% mentioned *fear* or emphasized *terror* as one of the most characteristic features of terrorism. Fewer than half of the definitions agreed on *threats* (47%) and *psychological effects and (anticipated) reactions* (41.5%) being important elements of terrorism.

This heterogeneity of definitions of terrorism is confirmed by the results of a more recent survey on definitions of terrorism conducted by Leonard Weinberg, Ami Pedahzur and Sivan Hirsch-Hoefler in 2004.<sup>16</sup> In

contrast to the Schmid/Jongman survey, they compared 73 definitions gathered from 55<sup>17</sup> journal articles on terrorism<sup>18</sup> that were published between 1977 and 2000. The most frequent definitional element was still *violence / force* (71%), followed by *political* (60%) and *threat* (41%). Only for 22% of the scholars did the term imply *terror* or *fear*.

Weinberg, Pedahzur and Hirsch-Hoefler conclude from the results of their analysis that there has been a significant change in what is understood by terrorism. Yet, it seems that the three core features, *violence/force*, *political*, and *threat*, were central to the majority of definitions throughout. Meanwhile, the notion of terrorism necessarily encompassing *terror* or *fear* was much less frequent in the later survey but formed part of more than half of the definitions in the earlier survey. Moreover, when analysing a variety of terrorism definitions frequently referred to in the academic debate,<sup>19</sup> I noticed that, although not always explicitly, most scholars considered terrorism a *tactic* or a *strategy* rather than an ideology.<sup>20</sup> Therewith they implicitly agree that terrorism is *goal-oriented*, that is, not arbitrary. Let us have a closer look at these characteristics and their application in the definitions of terrorism.

**Violence:** The notion of violence in most of the definitions refers to direct physical violence against human beings, sometimes including the menace of physical violence. Some scholars also mention violence against property. Structural violence against human beings is normally not taken into consideration.

**Political:** Many scholars define terrorism as a political phenomenon, thereby distinguishing it from other violent strategies, with good reason: the goals of terrorism render it distinctly political, in contrast to criminal strategies. The possibility of religious terrorism is not ruled out, but it is largely assumed that it is the political dimension of religion which drives people to employ terrorism in the name of a religion. In this sense, even religious terrorism is understood as a genuinely *political* strategy.

**Tactic, Strategy, Method:** Many scholars concur in defining terrorism as a strategy or a tactic, a means to an end or a method, but not an ideology, like communism or fascism. Although these concepts are not equivalent, they reflect the same idea, namely that terrorism is a means of achieving a further goal but is neither a goal in itself nor a belief system, nor a *Weltanschauung*. This implies that terrorism is considered goal-oriented as opposed to random and arbitrary.<sup>21</sup>

**Terror or Fear:** Scholars who consider the generation of fear or terror a characteristic of terrorism usually hold that terrorism genuinely seeks to

exploit fear to reach further objectives, in contrast to violent strategies which cause fear as a side effect.<sup>22</sup> Yet, given that this feature occurs in fewer than half of the academic definitions, it cannot be considered a part of the core meaning of terrorism in this discourse. However, I will argue that it should form part of a definition of terrorism.

Thus, the existing definitions' lowest common denominator is:

*Terrorism is a **strategy** or a **tactic** that employs **violence** or **force** in order to reach **political objectives**.*

This lowest common denominator covers certain paradigmatic instances of what we consider terrorism, such as the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York. It also does not yet include a moral assessment of the act in question. However, though meeting two of the aforementioned three conditions a definition of terrorism should fulfil, this formula is far from unmistakably determining terrorism and does not yet enable us to clearly distinguish it from other strategies. Evidently, a more specific definition containing additional characteristics is required. Yet, all other features that form parts of the definition of terrorism are usually the subject of great controversy.

Most scholars disagree on few, but enormously important, characteristics. These characteristics concern *the terrorist method* in general, as well as *the nature of the terrorist actors*, or *the victims of the terrorist acts*. Hence, the following questions must be considered the most controversial in this discourse on defining terrorism:

Should terrorism be defined as:

- (1) *Generating fear and exploiting it for further objectives?*
- (2) *Committed by non-state actors only?*
- (3) *Always directed against so-called 'innocents'?*

Let me briefly specify these questions. (1) refers to questions on the terrorist method and the terrorist calculus. These include the following: What means of achieving one's goals can be considered genuinely terrorist? What is special about the use of violence as part of a terrorist act in comparison to other ways of using violence? Should the exploitation of terror or fear form part of the definition of terrorism – namely, is it a substantial characteristic of terrorism? (2) Some scholars claim that terrorism is a strategy exclusively employed by non-state actors, while similar strategies adopted by other actors must be called something else.<sup>23</sup> My discussion of this position will also include the question

of whether or not terrorism should be defined with regard to some particular kind of objective. (3) Many scholars argue that the decisive and distinctive characteristic of terrorism is that it is an act of violence committed against innocents.<sup>24</sup>

According to the positions scholars adopt regarding these questions, David Rodin<sup>25</sup> distinguishes between *tactical & operational*, *teleological*, *agent-focused*, and *object-focused* definitions. The tactical and operational definitions, according to Rodin, are those which focus on the means and methods employed, such as defining terrorism as “the use of bomb attacks.”<sup>26</sup> A teleological definition focuses on the objectives of terrorist violence. Definitions which concentrate on the nature of the terrorist actor are agent-focused, and those which concentrate on their victims are object-focused. However, it is important to note that these definitions do not constitute entirely distinctive types of definitions, but rather aspects of definitions. Rodin eventually argues for a moral, object-focused definition of terrorism that is he seeks to include a confinement regarding the victims of terrorism but prefers no such constraint with regard to the agents, goals or methods. I will come back to David Rodin’s definition later. For now, it suffices to say that, unlike him, I will eventually endorse a definition which is both tactical in that it explicitly refers to a particular method and, to some extent, teleological in that it explicitly refers to a certain kind of objectives. Moreover, I will strongly object to definitions of terrorism which are agent-focused, object-focused or moral in nature. Hence, we should proceed to answering the aforementioned questions. Should terrorism be defined as

- (1) *Generating fear and exploiting it for further objectives?*
- (2) *Committed by non-state actors only?*
- (3) *Always directed against so-called innocents?*

These questions will be answered exhaustively in the following sections.

## **The terrorist method**

In the following, I will try to answer the question of whether terrorism should be defined as generating and exploiting fear for further objectives and other questions related to the terrorist method. Etymologically, ‘terrorism’ derives from the word ‘terror’, meaning ‘extreme anxiety and fear’. It is often described as a method inducing fear through the use of violence, in order to influence an audience for political objectives. Recall

that in Schmid's and Jongman's survey, more than 50% of the scholars included the notion of terror or fear in the definition of terrorism. And indeed, as Robert Goodin points out,

It would be etymologically odd (to say the least) for the analysis of 'terrorism' to lose track of its root, and fail to analyse 'terrorism' first and foremost in terms of 'terror'.<sup>27</sup>

Yet one may ask in what way fear induced by violence may actually influence an audience in a way that serves the political objectives of the violent actor. Simon Keller has pointed out three ways in which a terrorist actor might attempt to achieve his political goal by terrorizing a particular community:

1. [H]e may want that community or its government to perform some act or to adopt some policy.... The terrorist does not try to influence the target community by changing its members' minds about what is the best or proper thing to do, nor does he try in the straightforward sense to force the community to do what he wants. Rather, he sets out to create a situation in which members of the community believe that until and unless they do as the terrorist desires, they will live in fear.
2. A second use that the terrorist may find for terror is that of gaining attention for his political cause.
3. [T]he terrorist may try to cause terror amongst one group of people in order to galvanize or otherwise influence another. By provoking an aggressive response from the terrorized community, the terrorist may succeed in creating resentment against it; by terrorizing a community that is seen as invincible, the terrorist may inspire others to take up the fight.<sup>28</sup>

It seems that this very apt description of possible strategies for instilling and exploiting fear for political purposes needs no further addendum. It indicates that generating fear or terror is most plausibly understood as being instrumental to the terrorist actor. Otherwise, anyone seeking to frighten another person for no other objective than to cause terror *per se* would have to be considered a terrorist. As I have indicated before, terrorist acts are mostly considered those acts which are being undertaken to reach some further goal, in fact a political goal, beyond the violence or the fear employed. Hence, instilling terror for the terror's sake, or to derive enjoyment from creating terror, should not be

considered an act of terrorism. Georg Meggle captures this difference in the distinction between what he calls a terror act and an act of terrorism (a *t-act* according to his nomenclature). While both provoke terror, only the *t-act* employs terror to reach a further objective. Only the *t-act* has this 'terror calculus' and thus is a form of terrorism.<sup>29</sup> Some political scientists, in contrast, use the terms 'terror' and 'terrorism' to distinguish state from non-state terrorism. I will explain in the following section on state and non-state terrorism why I believe that we should not lavish our terminology on these minor distinctions, not to mention the partiality of such denominations. In fact, to consider terror a means of terrorism instead of a different category of political violence is justified both etymologically and conceptually.

I would like to focus very briefly on one of the elements forming part of the definitions of terrorism suggested by Uwe Steinhoff and Igor Primoratz,<sup>30</sup> namely the (at least) two separate target groups of the terrorist strategy. Primoratz defines terrorism as

[T]he deliberate use of violence, or threat of its use, against innocent people – against their life and limb, or against their property – with the aim of intimidating some other people into a course of action they otherwise would not take.<sup>31</sup>

Steinhoff defines terrorism in the following way:

Terrorism is a strategy of influencing the behaviour, perceptions, beliefs or attitudes of others than the immediate victims or targets of its violence by the threat, made credible by a corresponding act or series of acts, of the repeated killing or severe harming of innocents or the repeated destruction or severe harming of their property. Terrorist acts are such severe attacks on innocents or their property that are part of such a strategy.<sup>32</sup>

Both scholars point out that terrorism is an indirect, twofold strategy.<sup>33</sup> At the first level, terrorism seeks to provoke fear through the employment of violence. At the second level, it seeks to provoke certain reactions to the threat or fear spread by the violent acts. Correspondingly, there are at least two groups. The first group (immediate target) are the people against whom violence is directed: these immediate victims of the violent attacks are strategically the secondary targets. The second group (final target) are those whose attitudes or perceptions are meant to be influenced by the violence against the immediate victims, who are to

be coerced into a certain action. These are the primary addressees of the terrorist act or strategy. It is important to note that both scholars cited above think that mere threats can be terrorist in nature as well.<sup>34</sup>

Both Primoratz' and Steinhoff's definitions capture very precisely the characteristics of a certain type of violence. My only objections to these definitions is that they contain the notion that terrorism is always directed against innocents, a position that I will challenge later in the section on innocent victims; and that they lack the element of 'fear' which I consider essential to a definition of terrorism. However, as shall be shown, Igor Primoratz does consider fear the essential characteristic of terrorism, even though it does not form part of his definition.

To define terrorism as a twofold strategy which generates and exploits fear leads to a much more specific definition of terrorism than the lowest common denominator of definitions our discussion started from: that "terrorism is a *strategy* or a *tactic* that employs *violence* or *force* in order to reach *political objectives*." Integrating these characteristics in our definitional formula makes it possible to distinguish thus-defined terrorism from other violent strategies while still matching certain standard examples of what we have called terrorism so far, such as the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center or the Madrid-Atocha bomb attacks in March 2004. Thus, at this point, terrorism can be defined as a strategy or tactic that

- *employs violence or force (or the threat of its use) against one group of people (direct target) to create fear;*
- *is meant to intimidate, coerce, influence another group of people (indirect target); and*
- *is employed in order to reach further (political) objectives.*

One may object that acts of war also create fear, and intimidate by the threat of violence or its use.<sup>35</sup> As with terrorism, the fear created is not an end in itself, but is employed to reach a further goal: for example, to scare off the enemy soldiers, intimidate the commanders and win a war. Exploiting fear in order to intimidate and to reach further objectives is, then, not an exclusive trait of terrorist violence as defined above. However, Igor Primoratz rightly points out that

there is an important difference between the sort of violence most of us would want to call terrorist and other kinds of violence, where the fear caused is either a less important objective, or not an objective at

all, but merely a welcome by-product. In terrorism proper, causing fear and coercion through fear are the objective.<sup>36</sup>

Obviously, in war it favours a warring party's objectives to create fear among its enemies, but it can hardly be said that fear is the prevailing method of warfare in general. This is not to assert, however, that terrorist strategies cannot form part of wars. Surely, this leaves open the possibility of terrorist means being combined with methods of conventional warfare. Nevertheless, though it is true that warfare is to a certain extent psychological in nature, one must acknowledge that it also clearly shows a physical dimension which terrorism lacks. There are many different war tactics. However, violence against soldiers in a war is usually not employed merely to frighten them and their comrades or to intimidate the army command: it is used to physically defeat armed forces and remove them from more or less well-defined physical terrain or at least to convince the enemy of his likely defeat in the near future, displaying one's military power until he withdraws. Other tactics normally used in belligerent conflicts might resemble terrorism to a greater extent, as they aim more at the psychological condition than at the physical. In general, though, war has a physical presence that terrorism lacks almost completely, apart from the comparably lesser violence against its immediate targets. This is likely to be the reason why terrorism is sometimes considered a strategy of communication, as opposed to a strategy of combat.<sup>37</sup> Some scholars even go as far as to consider terrorist violence symbolic.<sup>38</sup> Certainly there is *something* symbolic about acts of terrorist violence, in the sense that they are representations of, for example, possible future attacks.<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless, the following objection may emerge: if creating fear is an essential characteristic of terrorism, whether or not a certain incident may be called terrorist seems to depend on the victim's own fearfulness that is on whether she actually is frightened or not. Imagine two otherwise identical acts of violence which display only one difference: in the course of one, those confronted by the violent act actually experience fear, but in the course of the other, those confronted by the violent act do not experience fear. Should the first incident be called an act of terrorism, but not the other? This is not a satisfactory conclusion. Given that some people are more prone to fear than others, the same act of violence might frighten one group of people while only worrying another. I hold that for a violent act to qualify as terrorism, it is decisive that the act be carried out with the *intention* of causing fear (amongst other features). If an act with this intention has no such effect, it is an unsuccessful act of terrorism.

But perhaps there could be terrorism without intention? Imagine that a person A uses violence or force upon a group B and by so doing, without intending to, frightens group C to the extent of influencing their behaviour in a way beneficial to A's political objectives. Should we call this terrorism? I do not think that what is described above should be considered terrorism. It only makes sense to speak of terrorism if an act of violence is carried out with the corresponding intention to exploit fear for political objectives. Hence, in contrast to David Rodin, I hold that there is no terrorism without intention. Rodin argues: "Some harms inflicted unintentionally on noncombatants – so called collateral damage – may indeed be properly categorized as terrorist." He comes to this conclusion because, to him, terrorism is essentially a moral category, and the harm to "those who should not have force used against them"<sup>40</sup> is its distinctive feature. Consequently, he argues that harm inflicted unintentionally, but negligently or recklessly, does not differ morally from intentional harm. However, my objective is to elaborate a definition of terrorism which does not yet imply a moral evaluation. Furthermore, I am wary of defining terrorism as always harming non-combatants or so-called innocents. And while I agree with Rodin that negligence is morally significant, I do not think it is a good idea to conflate our concepts – in this case, our notion of terrorism – with assumptions on the agents *mens rea*. That the agent's *mens rea* is important for the *moral evaluation* of terrorist acts will be shown in [Chapter 6](#). However, the central feature of a *definition* of terrorism, in my view, should be its particular method or strategy.

Another argument against the inclusion of the 'fear' element in a definition of terrorism is that acts commonly referred to as terrorist may also produce feelings of admiration and enthusiasm among an audience, and not only fear. Obviously, in most of the cases commonly referred to as terrorism, a variety of emotions and reactions apart from fear are provoked. However, there are good reasons for limiting the meaning of the term 'terrorism' to strategies that mainly aim at exploiting fear, although they might provoke different reactions as well. If we extend the definition of terrorism so that acts which are *merely* aimed at provoking admiration and approval are also covered, this would be greatly at odds with the notion of 'terror' the term 'terrorism' derives from. Hence, strategies which seek to provoke approval and admiration only, but which do not exploit fear, should not count as terrorist as this would render the term irretrievably vague.

There is one last issue to mention: some scholars claim that, on certain occasions, violence against property may also constitute an

instance of terrorism.<sup>41</sup> In fact, it seems perfectly logical to call strategies 'terrorism' when they employ violent acts against property in order to create fear, intimidate and coerce. Naturally, this is only the case when the corresponding property is significant to the affected group.

Other features sometimes considered to be characteristic of terrorism are a certain unexpectedness and the clandestineness of the terrorist actor. These characteristics are, however, not substantial to the terrorist method. They will be discussed in the following section in connection with the debate on state and non-state terrorism.

In summary, for an act to qualify as terrorist, it must be carried out with the objective of exploiting fear, intimidating and coercing for political objectives, yet it need not be successful in doing so. It is the actor's intention to exploit fear, and not the actual generating of fear, which is decisive, since it should not be a matter of the individual reception of such violent acts, whether they classify as terrorism or not. Otherwise, whether or not something is terrorism would depend on whether or not the target audience perceives it as such.

## **State and non-state terrorism**

Another key issue of the definition debate is whether terrorism should be considered a method employed by non-state actors only. The discourse on terrorism in philosophy and political science, and presumably in other academic disciplines as well, focuses predominantly on terrorism employed by non-state actors. While some scholars hold that states may well engage in terrorism,<sup>42</sup> terrorist actors have been, and still are, often defined exclusively as non-state actors.<sup>43</sup> These definitions mostly derive from the context of political institutions, governmental or meta-governmental, and social or political science; in philosophical discourse, there is usually no such constraint. In this section, arguments for both positions will be presented. Finally, I will argue that terrorism should be understood as a method employed by non-state actors as well as by state actors. Partly, this debate exemplifies how the definition of the term 'terrorism' is manipulated for political purposes. Obviously, if defined as a method employed solely by non-state actors, the engagement of state actors in terrorism is ruled out from the start.

Before turning to the question of whether terrorism should be considered a method of non-state actors only, a few distinctions should be made. Usually, when speaking of non-state terrorist actors, scholars

refer to groups which do not act on behalf of a government, namely groups which act against a certain political or social order, such as revolutionary, nationalistic, separatist or religious associations. In contrast, the term 'state terrorism' is used to refer to at least two different kinds of state involvement in terrorism:

- (a) When governments or regimes employ terrorist methods or support terrorist groups either abroad or inland and do so *occasionally* and *for certain purposes*, as with various South American regimes when implementing Operation Condor,<sup>44</sup> or the U.S. government when supporting the Contras<sup>45</sup> in Nicaragua or dictatorships like the Pinochet regime in Chile, or the paramilitary AUC<sup>46</sup> in Colombia which used to be supported by the Colombian government. Another example would be the GAL implemented in Spain during the government of Felipe Gonzalez.<sup>47</sup> Occasionally, certain acts of war, such as the bombing of the Dresden, Hiroshima and Nagasaki are also considered terrorist.<sup>48</sup> All of these forms constitute an *occasional* engagement in terrorism.<sup>49</sup>
- (b) When regimes are sustained by the use of terror. According to Igor Primoratz, totalitarian regimes constitute instances of state terrorism.<sup>50</sup> Examples include the Soviet Union during the Stalin era, or the Nazi regime in Germany. In contrast to (a), the examples in (b) are characterized by a *substantial* use of terrorism.

Scholars critical of the existence or the possibility of state terrorism usually adopt one of the following positions. (1) They either claim that no method employed by a state, whether occasional or substantial, may ever be terrorist: that is neither (a) nor (b) should ever be considered terrorism. These are what Peter Sproat calls the 'rejectionists', who claim that "the nature of 'the state' (and/or the concept of 'terrorism') means that the state cannot commit acts of terrorism."<sup>51</sup> (2) The second position scholars take with regard to state terrorism is to reject outright the idea that the substantial use of terror by states (b) falls in the category of terrorism. They hold that acts as described in (b) form a category apart. Let me briefly comment on the first position and then focus in more detail on the second.

(1) It is not plausible to claim that states may never be terrorist actors, in the sense of not even occasionally being engaged in terrorist tactics as described so far in (a). There exists abundant evidence that state actors have promoted, initiated or implemented groups who

employed the kinds of violent tactics referred to as terrorism when used by non-state actors. If this is so, why not call these groups and the states that made – or are still making – use of them terrorist actors in relation to these special occasions? According to Grand Wardlaw, there exists an

unwillingness of many to acknowledge that terrorism, whatever the definition may be, is as much a tool of states and governments as of revolutionaries and political extremists.<sup>52</sup>

Igor Primoratz alleges political interests behind this ‘unwillingness’:

Terrorism is often presented as a method employed solely by rebels and revolutionaries, and state terrorism is thus defined out of existence. This may be good propaganda, but it is poor analysis.<sup>53</sup>

It is not far-fetched to allege that state agents act in their own interest by denying any possibility of state involvement in occasional terrorist practices described in (a), that is in either implementing terrorism directly or supporting existing terrorist groups that act in the state actor’s interest. When such actors apply to their own methods different terminology than to non-state actors’ practices, it is plausible to ascribe propagandistic or publicity motives to them. With or without such alleged political interests, scholars who, without further elaboration, follow this praxis and define terrorism as a method exclusively employed by non-state actors<sup>54</sup> draw a distinction that is to some extent arbitrary, conceptually unnecessary and potentially misleading.<sup>55</sup>

(2) Since it is fairly obvious that states have engaged in occasional terrorism as described in (a), I will hence turn to the more challenging question of whether the substantial use of terror by states should fall into the category of terrorism. Some scholars insist on categorically distinguishing terrorism from what they call ‘state terror’ (b), meaning the substantial use of terror by oppressive regimes.<sup>56</sup> There are many reasons for distinguishing substantial state terror (b) from terrorism (meaning occasional terrorism by state actors and terrorism by non-state actors) at first glance, and it may not be merely for propagandistic reasons that this distinction is often maintained. Indeed, they seem to function differently. What arguments are being raised to justify this distinction between ‘state terror’ and terrorism, and what arguments challenge this view? There are basically three arguments brought forward to support

the conceptual separation of state terror from terrorism, identifying substantial differences concerning:

- (i) *the agents;*
- (ii) *the objectives; and*
- (iii) *the methods.*

Before turning to these arguments, it should be noted that there is a strong argument for a wider understanding of terrorism – an account which also covers the substantial use of terror by state actors – namely the origin of the term ‘terrorism’. The term has been used to denominate very different incidents within the past 250 years and was originally applied to the substantial use of terror by state actors. It was first used to describe the Jacobin regime of terror after the French Revolution. Later, ‘terrorism’ served to label different tactics and methods employed by various types of actors. Hence, from a historical and etymological point of view, the ‘terrorism’ label is not restricted to occasional state terrorism or non-state terrorism.

In the following, I will discuss some arguments in favour of this restriction and eventually will argue that the substantial use of terror by states should be considered a form of terrorism rather than a category apart. I will show why it is preferable to subsume both in one category even though the methods differ in some respects.

There are two kinds of arguments in favour of a conceptual separation of state terror and terrorism which I believe insufficient *per se*, namely the argument that both violent strategies are employed by different actors and that they have different objectives. I will argue in the following that these considerations do not get to the core of the matter, because what ultimately must be shown is that state terror and terrorism are different methods in nature.

(i) It is often claimed that terrorism is a form of violence employed by weak actors<sup>57</sup> who resort to this kind of unconventional warfare because they have no better means at their disposal. States, in contrast, would be powerful agents and do not need to employ terrorism. I hold, however, that if a state employs exactly the same violent strategy as a non-state actor, both strategies should be called by the same name. The nature of the agent alone should not determine the classification of the violent act. It does not seem right that the ascription of the characteristic ‘terrorist’ should be relative to who employs it. Distinguishing otherwise equivalent strategies of political violence according to their respective protagonists appears to be an illicit attempt to dissociate

actions accomplished by states from the negative connotations of terrorism. I therefore suggest that the definition of terrorism be agent-neutral.<sup>58</sup>

(ii) Sometimes authors take the view that state terror is always aimed at maintaining a certain political order,<sup>59</sup> while terrorism, in contrast, is always aimed at undermining an existing political order, trying to implement change or even revolution. But again, it would be arbitrary to distinguish both strategies merely on the grounds of their different political objectives. The nature of an act does not necessarily change when the objective changes, given that we are still dealing with political objectives. Hence, if terrorism is roughly understood as the exploitation of fear induced by violence or the threat thereof for political objectives, this would be so independently of who employs such measures, or the particular political objective for which they are employed. In summary, neither the agent nor the objective alone, but rather the nature of the act, should be decisive for its denomination. By themselves, the different actors and objectives are not convincing indicators for a categorical separation of state terror and non-state terrorism.<sup>60</sup>

(iii) Finally, the question remains whether the nature of state terror does indeed differ substantially from the nature of terrorism. Laqueur holds that the lines between both forms should not be blurred, as they differ in their function and manifestations: in contrast to non-state terrorism, state terror typically involves mass arrests, mass executions and concentration camps.<sup>61</sup> Laqueur makes an important point here. Even though terrorist groups have accomplished executions, such as the killing of the president of the German Employers' Association Hanns Martin Schleyer by the Red Army Faction in 1977, and even arrests, such as the Tupamaros in Uruguay, who in the early 1970s operated so-called 'People's Prisons' (Cárceles del Pueblo), where they hid kidnapped persons, these measures do not compare to the above-mentioned characteristics of terror regimes.

Another attempt to draw a line between state and non-state terror practices has been made by Thomas Thornton. He distinguishes between agitational terror employed by incumbents and enforcement terror employed by (state) authorities:

I would distinguish two general types of terror. The first is, roughly, the activity of insurgents who wish to disrupt the existing order and achieve power; the second is the activity of the incumbents who wish to suppress a challenge to their authority... We must... use

new terms: enforcement terror to describe terror (or counterterror) launched by those in power and agitational terror to describe terrorist acts by those aspiring to power. The difference is between terror perpetrated by incumbents in power as an extreme means of enforcing their authority... and by insurgents out of power with a view to provoking certain reactions from the incumbents or an otherwise apathetic population.<sup>62</sup>

Thornton makes an important point in distinguishing between these different kinds of terror. However, his approach is not entirely convincing, as it seems to imply that incumbents cannot engage in agitational terror, which is obviously not true. State actors have been involved in acts of agitational terror, even though usually in foreign countries rather than their own. Moreover, Thornton seems to assume that non-state actors may only ever engage in agitational terror, but not in enforcement terror, which is not necessarily true either. It is thus not the distinction between agitational and enforcement terror which is problematic, but their strict attribution to certain actors and to certain objectives. According to Thornton, the oppressive measures of the Basque ETA against their own compatriots would not constitute acts of terrorism, which they certainly are. Similarly, the strategies pursued by the Colombian FARC, some of which are clearly repressive in character, do not fit his scheme either. Many more examples could be found for enforcement terror carried out by non-state actors who, furthermore, are not necessarily insurgents. I therefore hold that while maintaining the rough distinction between enforcement and agitational terror with regard to a particular campaign's objectives is useful, the strict attribution of these strategies to particular agents cannot be upheld.

Another argument in favour of the conceptual separation of state terror and terrorism has been indicated by Peter Waldmann: he argues that while terrorism relies strongly on large-scale media attention, state terror merely requires a whispering campaign.<sup>63</sup> Unfortunately, Waldmann does not go into further detail here. Arguably, while non-state terrorism attempts to elicit the greatest possible media reaction, state terrorism is being conducted silently, undercover and subsurface. And some have it that state employment of terror is usually carried out clandestinely, attempting not to provoke any national or international media response. In contrast to sub-state actors, state actors would fear the forfeiture of legitimacy or possible damage to their reputation abroad if such incidents become public. Non-state actors, by contrast, would often seek broad media attention, because

they benefit from it. From this one might conclude that state terror and terrorism are two different methods which belong into different categories.

However, state terror, in many cases, has been a subject of great public awareness. Neither during the Third Reich nor during the times of the Great Terror in the Soviet Union was the civilian population unaware of the oppression of public opinion or the deportations of millions of their compatriots. There were also public show trials against political opponents and massive political propaganda. None of this was happening covertly. The same could be said of the Terror stage-managed by the Jacobins in France. Hence, it can hardly be maintained that the substantial use of terror by state actors is always entirely clandestine. Yet, it is certainly true that some acts of state terror are not characterized by a similar public display of the violence employed as most acts of non-state terrorism. During the Third Reich in Germany, many repressive measures, such as the discrimination of the Jewish people or the public condemnation of non-conformist intellectuals, took place in public, while massive and systematic murder in concentration camps was not displayed. Yet, although the concentration camps were not publicly talked about, most people would have felt a constant threat of becoming a victim of violence, made sufficiently credible by the presence of the secret state police (Gestapo), frequent raids and detentions and an atmosphere of denunciation.

In this way, state terror works just like non-state terror, but in a more comprehensive and efficient manner. Usually, both state terror and terrorism are seen to exploit fear in order to achieve (political) goals. They require an audience to shock, intimidate and coerce. However, non-state actors apparently obtain this by a big, often exaggerated, media reaction to their violent attacks. State terror, in contrast, achieves this result by creating an atmosphere of threat which is both comprehensive and credible. State employment of terror also requires an audience, but the 'show' is not public. Acts of violence committed in secrecy also generate fear if the threat of violence is made sufficiently credible to the members of the target group. State actors usually cannot afford to reveal their secret terrorist activities, because they need to maintain a benevolent façade. Terror regimes have more often than not presented themselves as superior systems and morally justified regimes; the violent oppression of large parts of the population had to be hidden because it did not match this image. Furthermore, in contrast to clandestine terrorist groups, state actors are easier to track down: avoiding or minimizing the risk of international sanctions or even interventions

could be a reason for contemporary state actors to make an effort to maintain a positive image with the international community.

It seems that substantial terror and non-substantial terror create fear and display violence in different ways and that these differences are due to the specific limitations of the violent agents. The state actor cannot overtly display the death toll of his regime without losing credibility and legitimacy. The non-state actor cannot act on a massive scale, owing to his limited resources. However, both agents essentially employ the same method, namely to exploit fear by the use of violent acts, or the threat thereof, for political purposes. Hence, the argument to distinguish state terror from terrorism for their different levels of publicity fails to convince.

Let me look at one more objection though. Peter Waldmann and Walter Laqueur have raised the following argument: State terror and non-state terrorism differ substantially in their dimensions.<sup>64</sup> State terror, Waldmann argues, takes a much heavier toll on human lives. He believes this is because state actors risk less when engaging in violent strategies: they need not fear being charged for their crimes and hence are less scrupulous. Consequently, Waldmann holds state terror to be more comprehensive than non-state terrorism, whose capacities are restrained. The difference between them is not only quantitative, but also qualitative, according to Waldmann. However, he acknowledges that both methods basically function in the same way via the spread of fear and terror.

I think that these observations are right and that they justify a differentiation between substantial state terror and non-substantial terror, but not a categorical separation. As Waldmann acknowledges, both state terror and terrorism employ essentially the same method. Thus, they only differ in terms of their dimensions and actors. But whether an incident is a terrorist act or not should not depend on quantitative aspects, such as the number of its victims, but on the nature of the act. Take the issue of war: although war is at least as difficult to define as terrorism, most people would agree that an armed conflict between two states with the violent confrontation accomplished by the armies of the respective states in the form of a series of battles is an instance of war. Whether or not such a conflict is labelled 'war' does not merely depend on the number of soldiers dying in that war. Similarly, the claim that state terror and non-state terrorism cause different amounts of damage is not sufficient for drawing a fundamental conceptual line between them.

One could also argue that state terror lacks the feature of suddenness and unexpectedness that is characteristic of terrorist attacks and

contributes greatly to the shock they cause. This is certainly a correct observation if one compares systems of state terror, such as the Soviet Union during the Stalin era, with the 9/11 attacks. From the claim that state terror is more foreseeable, one could assume that people for whom subjection to any form of state terror or continuous threat becomes an everyday experience become either accustomed or immune to it to the extent that the terror loses its effectiveness. While state terror gains its power from the continual suppression of certain forms of behaviour, criticism or the like, to control a certain population over an extended period of time, the latter influences the targeted population only sporadically. One may claim that this is a fundamental difference between the substantial use of terror by states and the non-substantial use of terror in terrorism, and therefore one should be distinguished from the other.

However, this argument ignores the fact that what causes people to react so strongly to terrorist violence is not only the single act of violence itself, but also the anticipation of future acts. In a state terrorist system, the probability of being affected by violence in the future is much higher than in the case of non-state terrorist violence. In fact, state terror is likely to cause an even greater amount of fear, given that it is institutionalized and omnipresent. State terror and non-state terrorism, I hold, do not differ fundamentally, but only gradually. The corresponding acts may or may not display the feature of shocking suddenness. Whether or not they do so does not appear to essentially influence the way in which they work.

So far, I have rejected all arguments for drawing a sharp line between substantial state terror and terrorism (either occasionally employed by state actors or employed by non-state actors) but have argued instead for distinguishing both forms within the category of terrorism itself. The necessity for such a distinction becomes apparent if we imagine a typical case of state involvement in terror practice, such as the Gulag system in the Soviet Union, and a typical case of a non-state terrorist act, such as the Madrid bomb attacks on 11 March 2004. Clearly, there are great differences between those two incidents. How can a political regime which exploits systematic practices of deportation, forced labour under inhuman and degrading conditions and the fear of those practices to suppress its own compatriots on the one hand, and a random, single act of violence like a bomb attack on the other, be the same thing? The answer is that they certainly do differ. However, both constitute uses of the same method which differ in degree but not in nature. Both are methods which seek to exploit fear and terror and the threat

thereof for political objectives: the state actor simply goes much further. Non-state terrorism or sub-state terrorism (a) is a non-institutionalized terror method or strategy, while totalitarian states perfect terror in the system as an instrument of power (b). Thus, the terrorist state could be considered the more sophisticated form of terrorism.

Although these forms differ to some extent, there lies an undeniable advantage in speaking of 'state terrorism' instead of 'state terror'. It helps to compare the dimensions of non-state and sub-state terrorism to those of state terrorism, in the sense of the substantial use of terror by a state. It makes obvious that, in contrast to what the Western political mainstream and media tell us, non-state terrorism is generally by far less lethal, smaller in dimension and morally less repellent than state terrorism. Though calling both of them terrorism, it is useful to maintain a distinction between institutionalized state terrorism, namely substantial terrorism, on the one hand, and non-state or sub-state terrorism, or non-substantial terrorism, on the other. In this book, however, I will focus only on non-substantial terrorism.

### **Innocent victims?**

Many philosophical definitions contain the notion that terrorism is violence directed against non-combatants, innocents, civilians, the 'non-harmful', or 'those who should not be attacked'. Although these terms are not equivalent, one can easily see what is meant by them. The claim is that terrorist violence is directed against people who do not expect to be targets of attack, and with good reason. This may be because they do not participate in the business of violence, as soldiers or policemen do, or simply because they do not constitute a threat to any other person's life.<sup>65</sup>

To illustrate this point, many scholars draw a parallel between the innocent victims of terrorist attacks and non-combatants in war. Under war conditions, these persons would be immune from aggression and protected, as they are not contributing to the act of war. One of the authors who represent this argumentation is Tony Coady.<sup>66</sup> He defines terrorism as the "organized use of violence to attack non-combatants ('innocents' in a special sense) or their property for political purposes."<sup>67</sup>

The annotation in brackets shows that Coady is aware of the fact that the term 'non-combatants' is somewhat awkward in this context. Indeed, the notion of non-combatants as the targets of terrorist violence is problematic, deriving as it does from the concept of war. In wars, it is

relatively easy to draw a line between participants and non-participants. But terrorism cannot be compared to war in this respect. Terrorist acts are often clandestine. The front lines are not visible. One cannot easily adopt the distinction between non-combatants and combatants, which is embedded in the war context, for the terrorism discourse. Therefore, neither the concept of 'non-combatants' nor the concept of 'civilians' should form part of a definition of terrorism. Coady is aware of these problems and, in order to avoid them, introduces the qualification 'innocents in a special sense'. The political scientist Michael Walzer also prefers to call the victims of terrorism 'innocent': "Terrorism is the random killing of innocent people, in the hope of creating pervasive fear."<sup>68</sup> The philosopher Igor Primoratz considers the innocence of the victims the crucial characteristic of terrorist violence: "Terrorism is the deliberate use of violence, or the threat of its use, against innocent people."<sup>69</sup>

For the reasons given above, I will henceforth use to the term 'innocents' or 'so-called innocents', meaning people who should be immune from attack. This is usually combined with the idea that there are other people who are not absolutely immune from attack, namely soldiers, policemen or military officials. A detailed account of what the concepts of innocents and non-innocents imply will be given in [Chapter 3](#).

The question of whether or not terrorism should be understood as a practice of always directly targeting so-called innocents is one of the most contested issues especially in the philosophical discourse on defining terrorism. Some scholars<sup>70</sup> claim this to be *the* distinctive feature of terrorism in contrast to other forms of collective violence, and thus opt for a so-called narrow definition of terrorism. According to a narrow definition, when so-called combatants or people who are not absolutely immune from attack are the direct targets of violence, a violent attack can no longer be considered terrorism. Others share the view that the direct targeting of 'innocents' is very often an element of terrorist violence, but not a necessary one,<sup>71</sup> and thus prefer a wider definition of terrorism.

At first glance, whether or not terrorism is defined as the deliberate targeting of innocents appears to be the crucial question for judging terrorism morally. It clearly is one of the most, if not *the* most, reproachable feature of terrorism. Hence, some scholars claim that including the notion of innocent victims in the definition would make terrorism unjustifiable by definition.<sup>72</sup> Robert Young holds that:

many believe that terrorism necessarily involves threatening to harm, or harming non-combatants (which is code for 'innocents'),

and so fails to preserve vital distinctions that have been developed through reflection on the morality of violence in war, like that between combatants and non-combatants. I reject this sort of moralized definition. Not only does this form beg the question of the moral justifiability of terrorism, it is also unwarrantedly prescriptive about which acts of political violence may be considered acts of terrorism.<sup>73</sup>

Young gives two reasons for his rejection of the narrow definition of terrorism. I disagree with the first argument that such a definition would beg the question of the moral evaluation of terrorism. David Rodin is undoubtedly right when pointing out that even if terrorism were to be understood as always deliberately and directly targeting innocents,

it is still an open question whether there exist cases in which the act so defined may be justified or excused (e.g., because of overwhelming consequentialist considerations).<sup>74</sup>

However, I agree with Young's second notion that a narrow definition is unwarrantedly prescriptive about which acts of political violence should count as terrorism, and I hope to show here why and how. In the following examination, I will present a variety of arguments for and against the inclusion of the innocent-victims element in a definition of terrorism and, eventually, opt for the latter.

Some philosophers who defend a narrow definition argue that a philosophical definition of terrorism should capture its morally distinctive feature. Terrorism, so they claim, is morally repugnant, and it is so because of its deliberate targeting of those who should not be targets of attack. A narrow definition of terrorism – according to this view – is preferable because it focuses on what is philosophically important and challenging about terrorism, namely its moral evaluation and because it singles out a particularly reproachable feature of a certain group of acts. According to this line of reasoning, terrorism is distinct from other forms of violence because it crosses this moral threshold of the prohibition against killing innocents.

Even though this view has something to it, and it surely makes sense to focus on particularly morally challenging practices in a study of applied ethics, I do not want to frame terrorism in that way. Terrorism, I argue, is not only morally challenging when directed against innocents. Violence, especially lethal violence, against non-innocents is also highly problematic, and whether or not it may be justified remains an

open question. Given that terrorism takes place outside a framework of historical and legal norms to which military violence or police violence can refer, its evaluation is extremely challenging for a moral philosophy even when the victims are not so-called innocents. Furthermore, if one distinguishes terrorism against innocents from terrorism against non-innocents, as I do, one can handle the particular moral implications of each separately without having to exclude one or the other.

One adherent to a narrow definition of terrorism is Igor Primoratz. According to him, terrorism is:

the deliberate use of violence or threat of its use, against innocent people, with the aim of intimidating some other people into a course of action they would otherwise not take.<sup>75</sup>

Like Rodin,<sup>76</sup> Primoratz considers it a crucial and distinctive feature of terrorism to target innocents or non-combatants. Furthermore, to Primoratz, terrorism bears a distinctive obscenity which consists in the terrorists' moral attitude towards the victims of their violence. A terrorist actor either (1) consciously and willingly attacks people he or she knows have done nothing to deserve this; (2) sticks to an unjustifiable notion of collective moral responsibility; or (3) does not care about the moral status of the victims at all.<sup>77</sup> To Primoratz, the essential difference between terrorism and certain tactics of war that also include harming, intimidating and coercing people is thus the different moral status of the victims as assessable from the terrorist actor's standard of knowledge.

However, in most wars many victims of violence may also be considered innocents, non-combatants as well as combatants. Primoratz does not hesitate in admitting that belligerent violence against non-combatants with the purpose of intimidating and coercing should be called terrorism, too.<sup>78</sup> But what about violence that in structure resembles terrorist violence, yet is directed against combatants?

In most wars, the combatants, especially if they are conscripts, or, even worse, child soldiers, are in no way responsible for their country's belligerent actions, and should thus count as innocents. Hence, should the definition of terrorism, "the deliberate use of violence or threat of its use, against innocent people, with the aim of intimidating some other people into a course of action they would otherwise not take", not apply to certain acts of war directed against combatants? From Primoratz' perspective, this clearly would not be the case, because combatants usually could not count as innocents in the sense of not harming

or being absolutely not responsible for the true or alleged injustice a terrorist actor may be fighting.<sup>79</sup> However, according to Primoratz, the essential difference between terrorism and certain tactics of war that are similar in structure is the different moral status of the victims as assessable from the terrorist actor's standard of knowledge, and the fact that the terrorist actor, not the act itself, trespasses a specific moral threshold. Such a narrow definition of 'terrorism' can surely be advantageous for the purposes of moral philosophy, given that it captures the morally crucial feature of many incidents commonly considered terrorism. I nevertheless want to opt here for a wider understanding of terrorism, one which may be applied not only to moral philosophy, but also to philosophy and political science in general, satisfying the needs of both disciplines. I want to suggest a wider, mere 'technical' definition of terrorism, which does not reduce terrorist acts to the ones directed against civilians and does not refer to the moral particularity of such acts. I agree with Primoratz' claim that "it is doubtful that 'terrorism' can be defined in some morally untainted way."<sup>80</sup> But I find it unconvincing to justify an element of the definition of terrorism by resorting to moral judgments on terrorism, which is the term we have yet to define.

Moreover, some narrow definitions rely too heavily on the targeting of innocents being an essential feature of terrorism and thus have some confusing implications, such as the definition by Rodin. According to Rodin, "...terrorism is the deliberate, negligent, or reckless use of force against noncombatants, by state or nonstate actors for ideological ends and in the absence of a substantively just legal process."<sup>81</sup> Consider the following problem: If it is above all the fact that the violence is directed against innocents which makes a certain kind of act a terrorist act, then, if people are being killed by accident, an act which was not meant to kill anybody (an act of sabotage, for example) can suddenly become terrorism. For example, the Basque organization ETA normally issues warnings to public authorities or the media before an attack to give everyone the opportunity to leave the danger zone. According to Rodin's definition, such acts of violence may or may not be considered terrorism, depending on (1) whether or not innocents were killed despite the warning, and, if so, (2) whether or not ETA acted negligently or recklessly in carrying out the attack after issuing the warning. If no innocents are killed (or harmed), the very same act by ETA is not terrorism, according to Rodin's definition. It is not even terrorism if ETA gives no warning at all and, by pure luck, no innocent person is killed (or harmed). Also, if a violent act is intended to harm non-innocents – for

example, ETA targeting members of the paramilitary Guardia Civil during the time of the Franco dictatorship in Spain – this could not count as terrorist according to Rodin's definition, unless it brings about the unintended death of innocents: in that case, the same violent act would suddenly become an act of terrorism. Unintended harm to innocents – if resulting from negligence or recklessness – changes an 'ordinary' attack into a terrorist attack. This is indeed the position Rodin<sup>82</sup> takes and which I object to. A distinction between terrorist and non-terrorist acts thus understood does – in my view – cause confusion. 'Terrorism' thus framed is an evaluative term. Before being in the position to classify any violent act that employed violence against innocents for ideological reasons as terrorist, one would need to establish whether or not the actors acted deliberately, negligently or recklessly. However, at least for the two latter categories, one would have to make a moral judgement. On Rodin's terms, 'terrorism' is an evaluative category to classify certain violent acts according to the agents' consideration of innocents' well-being and the carefulness with which they attempt to avoid harm to those. I agree that such standards of due care are a relevant aspect for the moral evaluation of any actions that bear foreseeable danger to others, such as acts of (political) violence. And I agree that the moral evaluation of these acts is likely to differ substantially, depending on the kind of harm they cause. Yet, one can easily focus on these differences *after* defining 'terrorism' as neutrally as possible.

Furthermore, narrow definitions – more generally – appear to neglect another, superior, distinction by failing to single out strategies which exploit fear induced by violence for political objectives in general. However, a wide definition of terrorism may run the risk of being too wide, and allowing that a broad range of acts, whether part of a war or a guerrilla strategy, can be called terrorism. Are the critics of a wide definition correct in that the "innocence-feature" is necessary to distinguish terrorism from other violent strategies? Some might argue that such acts of terrorism against non-innocents should be called 'political assassination' or 'tyrannicide' instead. However, my claim is that there is still a difference between political assassination or tyrannicide and killing in the course of an act of terrorism against non-innocents. Both strategies employ violence against non-innocent persons, but only the latter seeks to generate and exploit fear by the use of violence in order to reach political goals. There are many cases of politically motivated violence against non-innocents which are better described as terrorism against non-innocents than political assassination. A good historic example is the *Tupamaros* of Uruguay, whose actions were mainly directed against

politicians or other persons representing the existing order. Their objective was to discredit the government by showing its impotence. They also followed a strategy of selective killing of policemen in order to intimidate the country's security forces. Their method was clearly terrorist, although directly targeting non-innocents.

Another example is the Zionist organization *Irgun*, which launched attacks against British security forces in the 1940s as part of a terrorist strategy with the aim of undermining the British authority in Palestine and enforcing the creation of a Jewish state.<sup>83</sup> The Argentinean organization *Montoneros* is a further example of terrorism against non-innocents. In the 1970s, they especially targeted people representing foreign commercial interests in Argentina, as well as members of the Argentine government and administration, in order to force political change.<sup>84</sup> Between 1975 and 1985, the *Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide (JCAG)* engaged mainly in attacks on Turkish government officials to assert a change in politics towards an independent Armenian state.<sup>85</sup> Most of their attacks constituted acts of terrorism as described above, though not directly targeting innocents. These examples illustrate the plausibility of including violence against non-innocents in a definition of terrorism, even if with a wide definition, the line between terrorism against non-innocents and political assassination may sometimes be hard to draw. I will go into more detail on the differences between political assassination and terrorist killing of non-innocents in [Chapter 2](#).

Let me consider one last objection to a wide definition similar to an argument which emerged in the context of discussing state and non-state terrorism. One might argue that randomness is a typical feature of terrorist violence<sup>86</sup> which serves to create the biggest possible quantity of fear. One could then claim that if terrorism were directed against members of a certain group, such as combatants or policemen, or politicians, it would not be as effective and frightening. However, as I mentioned before, it may not be the unpredictability of violence that most effectively creates enormous fear, as Tony Dardis suggests:

The difficulty is that it is the very unpredictability of a type of occurrence which tends to prevent it from being an object of fear or terror. Few of us live in a state of continual fear and terror in case we might be struck down by lightning.<sup>87</sup>

Moreover, even if violent acts in which combatants or non-innocents are targeted inflict less fear than those targeting innocents, both should

be called by the same name if they function in the same way. Hence, it appears to be a slightly arbitrary move to insist that only attacks against so-called innocents may ever be called terrorist. Violent attacks on persons not considered innocents may have the same effect as attacks against innocents. They may also spread fear and intimidate, especially within the targeted group but possibly also in an untargeted civilian population. So why not call these structurally equivalent acts terrorism, too?

All things considered, the objections to a wide definition of 'terrorism' can be rebutted. There may be cases, however, in which an act of violence classifies both as war/political assassination *and* terrorism. This, however, is not a fundamental problem. One and the same event may well combine characteristics of different strategies which are nevertheless conceptually distinct. Surely, a definition of 'terrorism' should be narrow enough to be distinct from a definition of 'war'. However, this should not be achieved by limiting terrorism per definition to a strategy which employs violence only against so-called innocents.

# 2

## What Is Terrorism?

### Defining terrorism

As a result of the previous discussion I suggest to understand terrorism as:

*an indirect strategy of using fear or terror induced by violent attacks or force (or the threat of its use) against one group of people (direct target) or their property as a means to intimidate and coerce another group of people (indirect target) and influence their actions in order to reach further political objectives. Terrorist acts are the violent acts that form part of such a strategy.*

The notion that terrorism may be employed by state *and* non-state actors does not form part of the definition, while its political character does. According to this definition, the credible threat of violence can also constitute an instance of terrorism. The advantage of this kind of definition,<sup>1</sup> compared to many others, is that both 'terrorism' and 'terrorist acts' are defined, and their relation is clarified. In the following, I will also use the term 'terrorist campaign' meaning a violent campaign which uses terrorism as a strategy and which consists of various terrorist acts. Moreover, the definition I suggest satisfies all three previously established criteria: first, it covers paradigmatic instances of what we have so far considered terrorism. Second, it is largely morally neutral. Third, it singles out a certain group of actions and enables us to clearly distinguish terrorism from other violent methods as shall be shown in detail. Another advantage of this kind of definition is that it reveals the calculus behind a terrorist strategy. By exposing this calculus, it provides an indication of effective post-attack countermeasures.

If terrorism is to be understood as the influencing, intimidating and coercing of groups of people through fear induced by violence, then the measures taken against it cannot be military in nature. Thus, a 'war on terror' – as declared in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon – does not make sense.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, a strategy of limiting the horrifying effects of the attack, as well as focusing on possible political goals that might have been pursued by the terrorist actors, may better support the objective of preventing the strategy from bearing fruit or from being repeated. The aim of the actors may be to demonstrate the vulnerability of the attacked state, system or government. If they furthermore attempt to discredit a certain government, that government then serves the terrorists' purpose when reacting in an aggressive, indiscriminate way. It also serves the terrorists' purpose when stoking fears instead of containing them. Admittedly, in the case of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the call for revenge appeared to unite the vast majority of U.S. citizens and thus strengthen the government. However, from a mid- or long-term perspective, U.S. politics have led to an increase in anti-American resentments and have rendered future terrorist attacks more likely. While it clearly categorizes a particular strategy as terrorist, the definition does not include a reference to any specific political goal of terrorist actors and can thus – in principle – be accepted by agents with different political agendas. It also does not specify any particular weapons. These aspects are not relevant for classifying an act as terrorism.

One disadvantage of my definition proposal may be that it is still rather complex and that it does not entirely reproduce an everyday understanding of terrorism. However, our everyday usage of the term 'terrorism' is rather blurry and thus not suited to the needs of academic research and public policy. Therefore, it might be worth the effort to modify our present usage of the term in favour of a more consistent one. It may result that identifying an act of violence as a terrorist act with the suggested definition is not as easy as one might hope. With this definition, in fact, a certain amount of background information is needed to clearly determine whether an incident is a terrorist act or not. This, however, is not necessarily a disadvantage as it would force people to first investigate the background of violence acts before deciding whether or not they are facing an act of terrorism. It would help to avoid precipitant decisions which are all too often made in favour of overly harsh countermeasures or abusive campaigns of fear. Hence, the fact that sometimes it might not be possible to clearly determine whether a given incident is part of

a terrorist strategy, due to a lack of information, can turn into a practical advantage. It may also force people to focus more on the reasons for the employment of violence instead of quickly dismissing them as outright evil and beyond comprehension – a reaction to terrorism that can often be observed and that is intellectually poor and in its practical consequences highly questionable.

By defining terrorism as a strategy for pursuing political objectives one implicitly excludes uses of terror tactics for different motives – such as economic advantages or other non-political motives – from being terrorism. The objection that religious terrorism should not be neglected can be answered by asserting that all contemporary religious terrorism is, to a significant degree, socio-political. Apart from their political motives, terrorists may have other reasons for resorting to violence too. They may sometimes pretend to be fighting for a certain political cause, while in reality they are motivated by hatred, lust for revenge or similar personal motives which have nothing to do with the political objective they claim to advocate. However, the terrorist actors' personal motivation for engaging in political violence is not subject to examination here and is irrelevant for deciding whether an act is terrorist or not. Violent agents may have all sorts of motives, but our concern should be with the declared political objectives when we are trying to find out whether a particular violent act is an act of terrorism. If a terrorist actor has a plausible reason to engage in violent struggle, such as the fight against an unjust regime, it is very likely that he will have strong feelings of resentment against this regime, and perhaps even hatred and lust for revenge if he has been wronged by that regime. Apart from that, the 'real' motivation of a violent agent is usually hard to detect and even harder to prove. Usually, we will only be able to guess at whether a terrorist actor is self-interested or motivated by altruistic concerns. Furthermore, it is important to distinguish between a single terrorist actor's motivation and the terrorist group's declared intentions and objectives. While as a group terrorists may decide to implement a particular strategy for certain collectively determined purposes, single group members may have personal motivations – such as hatred, revenge, frustration or sadism – in joining the terrorist group as well as in carrying out the attacks. I hold that the group's manifest objective should be decisive for judging a particular violent campaign and deciding on whether it is politically motivated and thus potentially a terrorist campaign.

For simplicity's sake, in this book, I will often speak of the terrorist actor as if it were a single person. However, most times, terrorist actors

are collective agents. When speaking of the actor's goals or objectives here, I am hence actually referring to the objectives of a group. Terrorist groups act in order to reach certain objectives which constitute collective goals. To achieve these goals is the terrorist actors' intention when carrying out acts of terrorism.

In the following, I seek to distinguish terrorism from other forms of collective violence it is often compared to, such as war, guerrilla, genocide and political assassination.

## War, guerrilla and political assassination

Obviously, with the definition I endorse, war and terrorism are not mutually exclusive. Yet, that the line between them is sometimes difficult to draw is not only due to the wide definition of terrorism I endorse, but also to the ambiguity with which we use the term 'war'. Clearly, it is very difficult to define 'war', as it is applied to a great variety of incidents and is often used in a metaphorical way. From the previous discussion, we can say that warfare is a physical military strategy to force an enemy, while terrorism aims at people's beliefs, perceptions and actions, thus rather being a psychological strategy. Terrorism can form part of a war. According to the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*:

War should be understood as an *actual, intentional and widespread* armed conflict between political communities. ... it seems that *all warfare is precisely, and ultimately about governance*. War is a violent way for determining who gets to say what goes on in a given territory, for example, regarding: who gets power, who gets wealth and resources... War is the ultimate means for deciding these issues if a peaceful process or resolution can't be agreed upon.... The conflict of arms must be actual, and not merely latent, for it to count as war.... The onset of war requires a conscious commitment, and a significant mobilization, on the part of the belligerents in question. There's no real war, so to speak, until the fighters intend to go to war and until they do so with a heavy quantum of force.<sup>3</sup>

Provided that this is a convincing account of how war should be defined, how does war then differ from terrorism as I defined it? According to my definition, terrorism is not an armed conflict. It is not a conflict at all, but a strategy to resolve, create or react to a conflict. Terrorism may also be latent, it does not have to be actual: a credible threat can be terrorism, but it cannot be war. Furthermore, in terrorism there must

be a conscious commitment from the terrorist actors' side, but there is usually none from the other side: Terrorism is – most of the time – not reciprocal. War requires (at least) two parties to fight each other; for terrorism, only one 'fighting' party is required. No heavy quantum of force is necessary to constitute terrorism. War, as I have asserted, is essentially a military strategy, while terrorism is not. Terrorism is a low-intensity (absolutely measured) medium- to long-term strategy.

One could hold that modern warfare increasingly resembles terrorism as I define it. Current wars very often no longer consist of direct confrontations between adversaries visible to each other. And indeed, the line between terrorism and war is sometimes hard to draw.<sup>4</sup> When looking at certain violent attacks separately, it may be difficult to determine their character and to ascertain whether an attack is meant to cause terror as a main objective or just as a welcome side effect and, thus, whether or not the attack is genuinely terrorist. However, there will always be cases which clearly belong in one of the categories, as there will be some cases which show characteristics of both. I do not consider this a major problem. Warfare, it can be said, is a physical, military method of forcing an enemy. Terrorism aims at people's beliefs, perceptions and actions and is, thus, a fundamentally psychological strategy. Terrorism can form part of a war.<sup>5</sup>

Let me have a look at one more variation of the claim that a wide definition of terrorism makes a clear distinction between war and terrorism difficult. Peter Sproat argues:

Without differentiating between the nature of the victims [legitimate and illegitimate targets, A.S.] in this way it would be very difficult to distinguish between 'war' and 'terrorism', for one of the purposes of an act (or even threat) of war is simultaneously to instil terror into one's victims and their leaders in order to destroy the will of each to fight. As such, an act of war would also fit this latest version of the terrorism equation in that an act of war involves politically motivated violence carried out by an organisation with the intention of modifying the behaviour of those who are not the immediate target, that is its leaders (although the other simultaneous aim of an act of war is to destroy the enemy's physical capability to fight – that is, its armed forces). Therefore the crucial difference between acts of war and acts of terrorism is that the first is considered acceptable (to all but the pacifist) because the victim is a combatant, while terrorism is unacceptable because the victim is a non-combatant.<sup>6</sup>

First of all, Sproat conflates two issues in the above quoted passage, namely descriptive and evaluative components. I hold that definitional questions should be separated from evaluative questions. When Sproat claims that war differs from terrorism in that the former is considered acceptable because the victims are combatants, he fails to separate these two aspects. Furthermore he actually names an important difference between war and terrorism that is independent from the status of the victims. He claims that one of the objectives in war is to destroy the enemy's physical capability to fight. Sproat makes a very important point here, which I think he does not fully acknowledge: Terrorism, in contrast to war, is not a strategy aimed at destroying the enemy's physical capability to fight.

A further objection suggests that my definition is too wide, as it renders all kinds of psychological warfare, or psychological operations in war, terrorism. I understand psychological warfare roughly as war propaganda techniques used to influence the enemy combatants' as well as enemy non-combatants' beliefs, value systems, emotions, reasoning and behaviour. Such techniques are aimed at discouraging or demoralizing the enemy party for one's own military advantage. This description does bear certain similarities to terrorism as defined here. But there are also important differences. First, in a war, such psychological operations go together with military operations. There is an actual military force backing up the threat. There is no such force behind a terrorist threat or behind a terrorist attack. The terrorists may be able to carry out single attacks, but not a military strike. Even though terrorism is usually extremely disconcerting, in contrast to war it could not possibly eradicate the opponent's party. As such, terrorism completely relies on the psychological effect of its violent acts. The second difference is that psychological operations are usually not conducted in the way terrorism is described here, namely as implementing fear in a certain group by employing violence against another in order to exploit this fear for political purposes. Psychological warfare usually means massive propaganda, but not the intentional targeting of civilians. However, if civilians or non-combatants are targeted as a means of psychological warfare with the aim of implementing fear among the civilian population and demoralizing it, this constitutes terrorism.

A similar argument is that war, or rather armed combat, induces fear in soldiers and that all violent acts of war also aim at demoralizing the enemy and convincing him to surrender. But we cannot consider such inducement of fear terrorism, which I defined as an indirect strategy of fear created by violent attacks or force (or the threat of its use) against

one group of people (direct target) as a means to intimidate and coerce another group of people (indirect target) and influence their actions in order to reach further political objectives. Obviously, every kind of hostile treatment has or can have a deterrent effect. Yet, a deterrent effect is not the same as a violent strategy aiming to exploit fear. It would be far-fetched to claim that a belligerent party aims to exploit its opponent's combatants' fear when launching attacks against them. This claim appears especially odd when bearing in mind that soldiers are trained to fight in battles, to employ violence and, to some extent, to cope with situations in which they become targets of violence. It is inaccurate to claim that employing violence against professional combatants has the objective of scaring them off. Charles Townshend writes that terrorism and war are closely related as both cause extreme fear in humans.<sup>7</sup> Yet, he continues, while war is essentially defined as "fight"<sup>8</sup>, terrorism is essentially the rejection of an open fight. Terrorists attack in a way that constrains or even impedes self-defence.<sup>9</sup> I think Townshend is right in drawing this distinction. Terrorists refuse to engage in an open conflict. As to contemporary warfare, it is this aspect of remote operations from a safe distance so typical of current armed conflicts which approximates them to terrorism in the view of many.

In summary, it can be said that war and terrorism are usually sufficiently discrete strategies, even though the line between them may sometimes be difficult to draw. Terrorism can form part of a war, but is essentially a non-military strategy which seeks to avoid open confrontation.

I will comment on guerrilla tactics only very briefly. At first glance, guerrilla warfare appears to be a violent strategy very similar to terrorism. Common characteristics are the clandestine nature of the actors, random and often surprising attacks and lack of official legitimisation. However, the differences are more substantial when properly examined. The word 'guerrilla' is of Spanish origin and means 'small war' (from 'guerra' = war). This already indicates that 'guerrilla' is a military strategy rather than a terrorist one. Franz Wördemann captured the main difference between them as follows: "Guerrilla aims at occupying territory, while the terrorist aims at occupying the thinking."<sup>10</sup> Just like war and unlike terrorism, guerrilla strategy is spatially extended, territorial in nature. As with war, terrorism can form part of a guerrilla strategy.<sup>11</sup>

It is important to distinguish killing non-innocents in the course of terrorism from political assassination. In general, political assassination and tyrannicide aim directly at eliminating one particular person or

group of persons considered to hold responsibility for a certain politics, whose death will result in an abolition of these politics. It is thus, unlike terrorism, not an indirect strategy. Attacks on non-innocent, hence responsible, persons may also count as terrorist in certain cases, if aimed at exploiting fear for political purposes. If forming part of a strategy of intimidating and coercing a group different from the victims of direct violence, it is a case of terrorism. It is possible that a particular act of violence pursues both objectives. In such a case, it is an act of political assassination *and* a terrorist act.

An example of an act of political assassination that was not a terrorist act according to my view is the attempt on Carrero Blanco's life made by the Basque organization ETA in December 1973. Carrero Blanco, then Prime Minister of Spain and one of the most powerful persons in the state, was known for his right-wing political ideas and close relationship to the ultra-conservative Catholic organization Opus Dei, and was the Spanish dictator Franco's designated successor. By eliminating him, ETA most likely contributed to the end of the dictatorship in Spain and the start of democratic reform. As the main objective was apparently to eliminate Carrero Blanco, I would not consider this an instance of terrorism against non-innocents but clearly an act of political assassination.

### **Terrorism as a philosophical problem**

To conclude, I want to make a few general remarks on my approach to the problem of terrorism. The Part I of my book was dedicated to the first of the two genuinely philosophical questions in the reflection on terrorism – the clarification of the term 'terrorism' and the moral evaluation of acts of terrorism. My definition proposal meets the requirements laid out at the beginning of the argument: it is relatively close to our common usage of the term 'terrorism' and covers paradigmatic cases, it is largely unbiased, and it enables us to distinguish terrorist acts from other violent acts. However, there may be other definitions that also do so. Furthermore, others may consider different definitional requirements appropriate and hence reach a different conclusion. I tried to show that if we consider the three above-mentioned conditions (covering paradigmatic cases, moral neutrality, and distinctness) important, and if we aspire to be consistent in our usage of terminology, we will need a definition such as the one I have brought forward.

Defining a term always entails making decisions about the term's extension, shifting, limiting, or amplifying it. Redefining terms that

are already part of our vocabulary<sup>12</sup> – such as terrorism – may appear arbitrary and high-handed. There could be two methodological objections to my approach of redefining terrorism. The first has been mentioned before: it is the claim that the actual usage of a term constitutes its meaning. So then, ‘terrorism’ would mean anything people are using it for. The range of applications of the term is broad nowadays, ranging from suicide attacks, to kidnappings, to bomb threats, to noise made by children on a neighbourhood street, who also ‘terrorize’ me. ‘Terrorism’ is also the invisible enemy, the constant threat many of our politicians evoke in their public statements and which they claim to combat by restricting civil liberties for our own safety. One may hold that language in a sense cannot be wrong about how a certain term is used. Nevertheless, most people would probably agree that neither academic reflection nor public policy is likely to succeed in analysing and dealing with the problems arising from many of these forms of terrorism without narrowing the focus. Clearly, the children in the street and the suicide attacker constitute very different problems. I am not interested in the metaphoric use of ‘terrorism’ when applied to noisy children or to a reckless boss who harasses her employee. While I am not saying that the way we use the term in everyday language is wrong, I do, however, claim that it is prohibitively ambiguous. As such, it is reasonable to focus on a certain group of incidents called ‘terrorism’ which are of socio-political relevance, and to examine this sort of incident only.

The second objection to stipulating the meaning of ‘terrorism’ by elaborating a definition as I have done is that meanings of words evolve over the course of time. In particular, the meaning of the term ‘terrorism’ has changed tremendously over the last 200 years. Indeed, my definition proposal is an attempt to categorize *current* violent acts and strategies. A century ago, the term ‘terrorism’ was used differently from how it is used today. For example, the Russian anarchists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries were called terrorist, although they would be considered political assassins nowadays. The extension of the term has evolved over time. When defining terrorism here, I do so for the purpose of confronting current challenges.

The second philosophical task in the reflection on terrorism is clearly its moral evaluation. According to the definition, terrorism comprises a number of morally objectionable activities: creating fear or horror, employing or threatening to employ violence or force, intimidating and coercing. The Part II of this book will focus on the morally most objectionable of these practices: it will examine the moral implications of

killing people in the course of acts of terrorism. Though not being the only repugnant and morally challenging feature of terrorism, limiting the focus to lethal terrorist violence is justified: if it can be shown that killing in the course of terrorist acts can be justified, it is safe to say that terrorist acts – and therewith terrorism – can in principle be justified.