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**Fotion, Nicholas, Kashnikov, Boris, and Lekea, Joanne, K. (2007).  
Terrorism: The New World Disorder. Continuum International:  
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As much as it is a truism to point out that terrorism is an ever-present concern that appears to grow in significance daily for the lives of the world's inhabitants, it is perhaps equally well-known that such concerns are continually being exploited for political and personal gains. Hence we would welcome a book written on this topic by three philosophers that could seriously engage with this issue while not succumbing to the temptation to simply appeal to the lowest common denominator. Fortunately, in 2003, such a book was written by the Italian philosopher Giovanna Borradori, whose *Philosophy in a Time of Terror* coupled her own insights into the post-9/11 world with those of Jacques Derrida and Jürgen Habermas. If we can consider this book to have been the 'Continental' approach to terrorism, then we can ask if now, five years later, the 'Analytic' contribution—provided by Fotion, Kashnikov, and Lekea in their new work *Terrorism: The New World Disorder*—can stand beside its older sibling and possibly even help to move us closer to formulating a philosophically rich and yet strategically useful 'theory of terrorism' (xvi).

Following the inclusion of a helpful glossary of the many names and abbreviations associated with terrorism, the authors quickly survey the structure of the book in a surprisingly brief Preface and then move immediately to the question of how to define terrorism in Chapter 1. Their main concern here is to establish a space in the ongoing debate surrounding the problem of affixing borders to the conceptual landscape known as 'terrorism' (along with such cognates as 'terrorist,' 'terrorize,' etc.). And this they do by arguing instead for the need for 'fuzzy edges' (2), as they contend that a 'rough and broad characterization is all that is needed to discuss the various forms of terrorism' (3). This bold, though seemingly necessary, gesture is supported by providing a 'Paradigmatic scheme' (with four variations) that can illustrate both what

they consider to be the essential characteristics of terrorist activity and why this activity cannot be understood through too narrow of a definition. The scheme is as follows:

An attacking group (or individual) victimizes some group of people by harming or killing them. The attackers then escape either before, during or after the victimizing event. Others, seeing what has happened to the victim group become terrorized (frightened, anxious, etc.). We will call this the immediate effect or result of the process of creating victims. While in their state of terror, they pressure their government to change its political outlook in a way that satisfies the goals of the attackers and, most likely displeases the government and many of its people. This pressure and resulting changes count as the secondary effect or result of the victimization process. (4)

The four variants each involve altering a specific situational variable, such as exchanging 'pressure' for 'weakening,' 'outlook' for 'behaviour,' 'harming or killing' for 'threaten,' and 'escape' for 'become martyrs' (4-5). It is this setup that will be utilized throughout the book, as it allows the authors the flexibility to discuss 'escape' and 'martyr' terrorism (Chapter 2), compare historical cases of terrorism with those currently ongoing (Chapters 3-4), and to expand the discussion of terrorism to include what they refer to as both 'state' and 'non-state' types of terrorist activity (Chapters 5-7). The final three chapters are used to put this conceptual gymnastics to the test, as the authors try to fit this structure onto the theoretical framework of Just War Theory to defend, criticize, and finally 'deal with' terrorism.

However, it is this desire for comprehensive elasticity that ultimately stretches the authors' arguments to their breaking-point, and beyond. Whereas they rightly begin by pointing out that terrorism occurs in 'highly emotive settings,' and that this leads people to 'become linguistically complacent' when discussing these events, much as what tends to happen whenever we try to talk about 'death, violence, and war' (2), the authors themselves quickly become complicit in such complacency. As we have already seen, they describe the 'immediate effect' of terrorism as when victims 'become terrorized,' but what is meant by this is left ambiguous as their parenthetical elaboration merely indicates that this experience is something like feeling 'frightened, anxious, etc.' The impact of not trying to explore this experience any further than by referring to it as a 'state of terror' ripples throughout the arguments in this book as the authors tend to locate 'terrorism' wherever they find someone has been 'terrorized.' Accordingly, rather than insight, we are often left with strangely circular statements about how 'terrorism can terrorize' (81) or that 'the terrorizing effect of terrorism is only partly due to the act of terrorism itself' (162). And the culmination of this line of thought occurs in the following: 'On this view, individuals or groups become terrorists when their main tactic is terrorism. Of course, they are terrorists when they actually succeed in terrorizing. But, in an extended sense of 'terrorist', they are terrorists even when their serious attempts at terrorizing others fail' (176n).

Thus in Chapter 2, while investigating the tactic of ‘suicide/martyr’ terrorism, the authors indicate that this is a ‘growing phenomenon’ because it is ‘perceived by many to be the most effective of all forms of terrorism’ (18). In an effort to explain what makes this strategy so successful, they compare historical instances of its use to those found today. (As a side note, it should be pointed out that though this book otherwise appears to have been well-researched and refers throughout to many of the other studies in the field of terrorism, there are several instances where the authors have cited such paragons of scholarship as Wikipedia and the Complete Idiot’s Guide to the Middle East Conflict for their research into the history of terrorism.) Yet all that we learn from this comparison is that just as the Assassins were a ‘group [that] was much feared’ in the past because their ‘members did not fear death’ (17), today ‘people and governments tend to worry more about dealing with those terrorists who are not afraid to die’ (23). The authors’ explanation of this: ‘Perhaps they feel this way because they are uncertain how to deal with them’ (23).

Similarly in Chapter 3, when trying to defend their expansion of the concept of terrorism to cover certain activities of nations during wartime, it is the effect of the act on its ‘victims’ that is used to determine whether or not a state could be accused of terrorism. The authors focus on blockades in World War I and bombing raids in World War II to demonstrate that terrorism should not be limited solely to the tactics of ‘non-state’ groups. With regards to the First World War, they argue that while the German blockades could be classified as terroristic, the British blockades cannot. The basis for this distinction is that whereas ‘the passive nature of the [British] blockade seems to preclude thinking of it as a campaign of terrorism though it had a terrible effect on the German population,’ in the case of the German version, ‘the massive number of sinkings (the victims in our characterization) terrorized, and intimidated others not to take the risk of delivering any kind of goods to Britain’ (34). Likewise, in the Second World War, it is claimed that the ‘night-time bombing policies’ (37) employed by the British Royal Air Force (RAF) ‘represented state terrorism against another state on a massive scale’ (38), just as the Japanese kamikaze attacks on the Allies are found to have a ‘terrorist aspect’ because ‘military commanders were in shock as to what was happening,’ it ‘affected the morale of the sailors,’ and it ‘induced terror on a large scale’ (40-41).

In terrorism (esp. suicide/martyr terrorism) then we find the most extreme set of reactions to the fear of death existing simultaneously. Though human finitude is one of the perennial philosophical problems that has stretched from Stoicism to Existentialism, in this book we find this issue passed over repeatedly with seemingly little interest. While there are those who would argue that this is a ‘problem’ only for Continental philosophy, or is at least a ‘metaphysical’ concern that should be kept separate from more ‘practical’ matters, the authors of this book, presumably against their own interests, actually clarify why this issue is of central importance to

understanding terrorism. This can be seen most clearly if we look at Chapter 10, where they recommend ‘dealing with terrorism’ by having the public become better educated about its effects. They write, ‘Terrorism today is not hugely destructive in terms of injury or loss of life. [...] Terrorism just seems more destructive because of its (planned) dramatic effect. If people educate themselves not to overreact to present-day terrorism, they should be able to live with it’ (163). But could such a strategy possibly work? Are the authors not simply paraphrasing the Stoic mantra that ‘death is nothing to us’ and thus we should not worry ourselves over it? For if, since at least the time of Epicurus, we have not yet learned how to calm ourselves in the face of death, can the authors’ merely asserting that we can really make it so?

Moreover, I would argue that it is the authors’ willingness to pass over these complexities of human experience that prevents them from ever approaching the heart of what terrorism means. As they point out, ‘An account of what leads individuals to become terrorists often moves away from talk about motives to talk about irrationality. Terrorists, it is said, are irrational or crazy’ (96). And yet, though the authors discuss the ‘mindset’ of terrorists and what ‘motivates’ their activity, there still seems to be something important missing from their accounts that explains why we are so tempted to think terrorists are insane. Instead we are told that ‘one thinks’ (100), ‘one wonders’ (101), ‘one wants to ask’ (101), and ‘one cannot help but wonder’ (102) if these terrorists are rather ‘disaffected to the extreme’ (102), ‘humiliated by the enemy’ (103), ‘have a sense of inferiority’ (103), or a ‘strong sense of resentment’ (103), which causes them to kill and be killed.

Beyond such speculation though, we can find the core of this problem in the authors’ ethical consideration of terrorism. With regards to the French and Algerian War, they criticize the Algerians ‘who treated those French citizens who had settled in Algeria as ‘occupiers’ since the settlers were ‘neither a long-term nor a short-term (military threat)’ and should thus have been seen as ‘civilians pure and simple’ (149). It is exactly this sort of misunderstanding that led Frantz Fanon, in his *The Wretched of the Earth*, to describe the ‘atmosphere of violence’ that persisted in Algeria and created a situation where every non-Algerian was not a ‘military threat’ but a psychological and existential threat. But the true lack of comprehension can be found in the authors’ attempts to both defend and criticize the logic of terrorist justification by role reversal. Thus they argue in the first instance that ‘if the West would have just cause on its side were it under attack from stronger Islamic nations, then these nations have just cause when they are under similar attacks from stronger Western nations’ (124), and second that ‘roughly speaking, both sides are equally good and equally bad, and so it becomes morally impossible for terrorists to defend their own people while butchering those of their enemies’ (153). Yet, is it not the very incommensurability that exists between the ‘Western nations’ and the ‘Islamic nations’ which prevents us from truly understanding terrorism from their perspective? To be able to die for what one believes in is what

separates our two worlds, for while we see their spirituality as 'extremism' they take ours as non-existent. And until we can begin to explore the meaning of this ever-expanding distance between us how can any serious discussion of terrorism ever take place?