

Terrorism

To make its research readily available to a broad audience, the Center for Philosophy and Public Policy publishes a quarterly newsletter: *QQ—Report from the Center for Philosophy and Public Policy*. Named after the abbreviation for “questions,” *QQ* summarizes and supplements Center books and working papers and features other selected work on public policy questions. Articles in *QQ* are intended to advance philosophically informed debate on current policy choices; the views presented are not necessarily those of the Center or its sponsors.

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In Enniskillen, Ireland, a bomb explodes during a memorial service, fatally injuring 11 civilian mourners gathered to honor their dead. Explosives detonated in the crowded Rome and Vienna airports kill tourists heading home for the holidays. A cruise ship is held hostage in the Mediterranean, and an elderly, wheelchair-bound passenger slain. Ordinary people going about their ordinary business are subjected to violent assaults carried out not by any legal authority or warring army, but by secret groups motivated by some political grievance. This is terrorism.

Terrorism horrifies almost all of us, even, sometimes, its perpetrators: the IRA issued an apology after the Enniskillen bombing. International terrorism is “the cancer of the modern world,” says one commentator, “a dynamic organism which attacks the healthy flesh of the surrounding society.” The U.S. State Department calls terrorism “a criminal activity that no political cause can justify.” President Reagan has made the battle against terrorism a rhetorical cornerstone of his foreign policy.

Why does terrorism inspire such revulsion? Why do acts of terrorism horrify us more than other acts of political violence? Fewer than 200 Americans died in terrorist incidents abroad in all the years between 1973 and 1982; the CIA estimates that about 3300 people worldwide were victims of terrorism between 1968 and 1980. These figures pale by comparison with the 200,000 reported killed in East Timor by Indonesians between 1980 and 1984; the more than 30,000 killed in El