Consider two views about terrorism. The first, the conventional view, is that terrorism is an outrage. It involves, typically, the kidnapping, killing, and intimidation of innocent people who simply happen to be in the wrong place. Terrorists are fanatics, thugs, criminals, deranged individuals, who are gripped by an ideology and willing to do anything to further it. They violate the basic constraints of civilized society. While they may sometimes have just grievances, the means they use are morally impermissible and entirely ineffective. They put on shows for media attention which waste lives for no achievable end. As such, terrorism—in Paul Johnson's phrase "the cancer of the modern world"—cannot be justified, and must be zealously combated.

The other, heterodox view, is more forgiving. Some acts of terrorism may be justified or, at least, sympathetically understood. They are motivated by opposition to poverty, oppression, and exploitation. They protest grave injustices by the only means capable of getting the attention of the comfortable and privileged. Violence, besides, is everywhere. It undergirds legitimate state coercion and is a standard response of states to internal riot and foreign
resistance. Injury to innocents, moreover, is the effect of much legitimate enterprise, such as selling tobacco and polluting the air and water. Unexpected and sudden death by accident, natural catastrophe, or crime is a risk unavoidable in normal life. Terrorism only negligibly raises its probability. Further, the categories needed to condemn terrorism and distinguish it from justified warfare—the guilty and the innocent, soldiers and civilians—are arbitrary, and used hypocritically by governments willing to bomb Dresden, Hiroshima, and Baghdad. As the platitude says, "one man's terrorist is another's freedom fighter."

This anthology is a set of papers, most of which were delivered at a conference on violence, terrorism, and justice at Bowling Green University. Over half—those by Thomas Schelling, Annette Baier, Virginia Held, Loren Lomasky, Jan Narveson, Alan Ryan, and Jonathan Glover—address the nature and justifiability of terrorism. This set of papers has two prime virtues. First, those inclined toward the conventional view go far beyond assuming its obvious validity. They give it careful exploration and defense. Second, the unorthodox view gets a sympathetic hearing. The two most interesting papers on this issue are Baier's "Violent Demonstrations" and Lomasky's "The Political Significance of Terrorism." Both argue that terrorism is misunderstood if judged solely on grounds of its efficacy in achieving the terrorist's stated ends. Terrorists aim, rather, to demonstrate support for and call attention to a cause. Demonstration of support, even when it is unlikely to advance a cause, is a normal human phenomenon, as evidenced by bumper stickers and fans cheering on their team. Terrorists, in this way, are like the rest of us.

Fans, however, show their support peaceably, while terrorists use other people violently. Here Baier notes the violence prevalent in the human species: "The important moral questions have always been 'Whom or what may I assault and kill and when and how may I kill it?' not 'May I assault and kill?' " (p. 40). Much of our violence is authorized by a state, but what makes state-sanctioned violence more legitimate than the self-authorized violence of the terrorist protesting outrageous injustice? As Baier notes, and the recent history of Eastern Europe unfortunately confirms, "the authority to raise an army, to issue licenses to kill, is highly contested, jealously competed for, and fiercely fought for" (p. 41). As a consequence, Baier finds it "no harder . . . to forgive the terrorist who sincerely believes that he has no other effective way to make his seriously aggrieved group's case . . . than to forgive the glory-seeking or super-security seeking national leader in whose war one dies as a conscript, or as a civilian victim" (p. 46).

Lomasky counters that there is an important difference between terrorist and state violence: "The political order, whatever else it may be, is an order" and "necessarily embodies socially recognized distinctions between citizen and alien, licit and illicit actions, states of peace and war" (p. 97). Where there is no order there is the Hobbesian war of all against all. Order is important to all ideologies. Thus the terrorist, with random violence against ordinary people going about their routine activities, "disdains the institutions of civil society" (p. 100) and expresses "virulent and unregulated opposition to the preconditions of successful civility" (p. 105). The same point is argued by Ryan, who gives qualified support to Hannah Arendt's distinction between power and violence. Both Lomasky and Ryan admit, even insist, that there is no shortage
of state terrorism in the world (a phenomenon further examined in Glover's "State Terrorism"). But they claim that terrorist violence—whether by individuals or the state—is importantly different and morally worse than the state's typical (even when mistaken) use of violence. Terrorism rejects the restraint fundamental to civility.

This disagreement about the difference between state coercion and the "private" violence of terrorism is central in my view to a thoughtful assessment of terrorism. Baier and Lomasky (and Ryan) frame the issue well, and other papers in the group I mentioned extend their insights and arguments. There are four other essays, less central to the main issue. Thomas Hill develops a Kantian perspective on the legitimacy of responses to terrorism which endanger innocent lives. Onora O'Neill offers a contextual account of "offers you can't refuse." Gregory Kavka argues that nuclear deterrence is not a form of terror. And Claudia Card portrays "Rape as a Terrorist Institution." Collected conference papers do not always make good books, but this one is a serious contribution toward the understanding of an emotionally wrenching moral issue.

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