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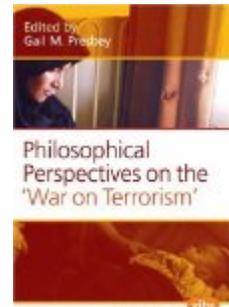


Gail M. Presbey, ed. *Philosophical Perspectives on the "War on Terrorism"*. Philosophy of Peace Series. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007. 511 pp. \$135.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-90-420-2196-9.

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Philosophers Interrogate the War on Terror

Philosophical Perspectives on the "War on Terrorism," assembled and edited by Gail M. Presbey, a collection of twenty original essays written by members of Concerned Philosophers for Peace, is the tenth in the Philosophy of Peace series from Rodopi's Value Inquiry Books. United in the belief that the current manifestation of the "war on terrorism" is both morally problematic and counter-productive to the pursuit of peace and justice, the authors of these essays offer a sustained and rigorous analysis of the "war on terrorism" in the same manner that philosophers have dissected such concepts as "just war," "domino theory," "collateral damage," "humanitarian intervention," and "just peace." The questions and issues that animate this book range from traditional topics in the ethics of war to questions about globalization, the meaning of democracy, and U.S. hegemony and empire.

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, many in the United States declared even the merest mention of the geopolitical and historical context for the attacks to be strictly taboo. Indeed, a philosophy professor told one of the review authors at the time that bringing up U.S. foreign policy so soon after the attacks was morally wrong. Though that stance has lessened over time, a related approach to shutting down open discussion of the attacks and the U.S. response to those attacks is still popular today, namely, to claim that anyone critical of U.S. foreign (or domestic) policy is promulgating "moral relativism." This charge was forcefully made early on in a

tract, *Defending Civilization: How Our Universities Are Failing America and What Can Be Done about It*, first distributed in November 2001 by Lynne Ann Vincent Cheney and Senator Joseph Isadore ("Joe") Lieberman's American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA).[1] The pamphlet provided many quotations from university professors in reference to the attacks of September 11, adding the commentary that "the message of many in academe was clear: BLAME AMERICA FIRST" –clearly, the pamphlet went on to say, "moral relativism has become a staple of academic life in this country" (pp. 3, 5). Some of the quotations from academics provided in ACTA's pamphlet were indeed extreme, but practically none of them showed any evidence of a basis in moral relativism. Indeed, many of the quotations provided in the tract clearly rested not on moral relativism but instead on the idea that the same moral standard applies to everyone, which is the disavowal of moral relativism. At any rate, if Presbey's collection is any measure of the academic response, then academia is anything but morally relativistic (if anything, the proclivity of the current administration and its apologists to apply an all-but explicit double standard speaks much more of relativism than the opposed demand for context, criticism, and care).

The collection's title, *Philosophical Perspectives on the "War on Terrorism,"* raises the question, what is a philosophical response to the "war on terrorism" in the first place? Certainly, a philosopher concerned with promot-

ing peace could write a letter to the editor, take part in an antiwar rally, or donate to assist doctors working in Iraq. But are these specifically philosophical responses? Most would say not. What, then, can the philosopher contribute as a philosopher? On the one hand, the discourse surrounding the “war on terrorism” operates on a shockingly rudimentary level, due in large part to the administration’s and the mass media’s tendency to frame discussion of the “war on terrorism” in ahistorical “good”/“evil,” “us”/“them” terms. With surprising nonchalance, government officials in the United States, for example, regularly refer to their critics not merely as “aiding and abetting the enemy,” but as “terrorists.”[2] Given this degraded discourse, practically any discussion of the “war on terrorism” and its presumed cause and effect—the attacks of September 11 and the occupation of Iraq—can be markedly improved simply by applying something as basic as the Golden Rule or pointing out the fallacy of false alternatives. On the other hand, precisely because of that concerted framing from above by the U.S. administration and the mass media, the efforts of those willing to contextualize the numerous issues involved are all the more necessary, and philosophers are particularly well equipped to do so.

Granted, philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum, in a recent review of philosophers’ treatments of William Shakespeare, has expressed the concern that “to make any contribution worth caring about, a philosopher’s study of Shakespeare should ... really *do* philosophy, and not just allude to familiar philosophical ideas and positions. It should pursue tough questions and come up with something interesting and subtle—rather than just connecting Shakespeare to this or that idea from Philosophy 101.”[3] (Concerning the “war on terrorism,” it would be hard to find a better example of just such a simplistic philosophical mash-up than Roger Scruton’s *openDemocracy* essay, which contended that Immanuel Kant would have approved of the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq.[4]) But a similar concern with spending too much time in Philosophy 101 can be seen in contributor William C. Gay’s remark, at the outset of his second essay, that “if students submitted such highly fallacious work [as the National Security Strategy document] in an entry-level college course that stresses complying with basic principles of critical thinking, they would deserve a failing grade. Unfortunately, political documents, on which hinge the fate of the Earth, do not adhere to the standards of logic; so I will forego [such an undergraduate logic review]. Instead, I will turn to an assessment based on a comparison of the Bush Administration

with previous administrations” (p. 132). However much some might equate philosophy with theory for its own sake, the members of Concerned Philosophers for Peace—judging from the essays in the collection—do not. Consequently, the essays in the volume range from sustained metaethical analyses, such as Edward J. Grippe’s argument against a consequentialist “shootdown” policy for civilian passenger planes, to layered arguments that collect empirical evidence and draw connections between normally isolated dots, such as the editor’s detailed case against the idea that the occupation of Iraq contributes to a lessening of world terror and the “Terrorism Case Studies” that make up part 4 of the book.

To the extent that the “war on terrorism” is a “new kind of war,” the meaning of the “war on terrorism” is still largely undetermined. The authors of the essays in this volume understand that the framework, justification, meaning, and scope of any new reconceptualization of the nature of warfare must not be left to political and media elites, especially given that these elites are working hard to obscure the issues at hand. The attempt on the part of the George Walker Bush (Bush II) administration to articulate a new war discourse that both describes and justifies this new kind of war must be contested, not only in a democratic progress of political dialogue which is sadly deficient in our contemporary information age, but also by professional philosophers who wish to stress the normative value of peace and justice.

As the collection makes clear, rather than the familiar models of nation-states waging military action against another or regional liberation movements resisting occupation, the “war on terrorism” is a war against a tactic, a war with no clear understanding of what counts as victory, and a perhaps unending conflict which requires that the enemy remain indeterminate. The authors understand that it is imperative that philosophers use their particular skills of conceptual and logical analysis, and their ability to uncover hidden assumptions, contradictions, and double standards to help us understand more clearly what is at stake in this new kind of war.

The issues and themes that animate this book run throughout the collection’s sustained critique of the prosecution of the “war on terrorism” and that war’s underlying national security strategy. Nonetheless, five basic questions—which correspond very loosely to the collection’s main divisions—come to the fore. The first basic question turns on the language and rhetoric surrounding the “war on terrorism.” Gay’s opening essay begins the task of deconstructing the “official discourse” of the “war

on terrorism” and challenging the government’s “right of bestowing names” and the mass media’s uncritical adoption of this rhetoric (p. 24). Key terms in this official war discourse—“terror,” “democracy,” “freedom,” “WMD” (weapons of mass destruction), “rogue states,” etc.—have been subtly defined in narrow (or, sometimes, exceedingly loose) ways that are often disconnected from international consensus or historical precedent. Within this rhetorical regime, concerns about WMD manage to overlook cluster bombs, carpet bombing from B-52s, and ordinance manufactured from depleted uranium; likewise, nations that refuse to be bound by the Geneva conventions do not qualify as rogue states. James Kunkel observes that the designation of terrorism has been limited to armed actions by hostile forces, while Jennifer Eagan argues that key U.S. policy documents reduce democracy and freedom to global markets compliant to U.S. corporate interests. This rhetorical regime constructs a legitimation of militarily enforced conformity conceived in the binary categories of “us vs. them,” “freedom or tyranny,” and “order or chaos.”

Dianna Taylor argues that this war discourse was constructed in the “crisis of meaning” that followed the mass murders of September 11. The shock, fear, anxiety, and terror widely felt could not be properly articulated within the fading categories of international relations shaped by the previous geopolitical period. Policies of massive overkill and mutually assured destruction no longer seemed relevant to military planners or strangely reassuring to an uneasy public. The Bush II administration promptly began to respond to this crisis of meaning by crafting a rhetorical regime to both describe and justify what we now know as the “war on terrorism.” The Bush II administration framed the attacks and the subsequent “war on terrorism” with the patriotic sentiments of World War II as a new Pearl Harbor. Saddam Hussein was compared to Adolf Hitler, and, more recently, the now unending occupation of Iraq is being compared to the long-term American military presence in Germany, Japan, and Korea. These essays make clear that such politicized language of war undermines the language of peace—as well as reason, compassion, and sustainability.

The collection’s second basic question focuses on the possibility for democracy to act as a kind of remedy for terrorism or an aid to furthering human rights. Central to the rhetoric that defines and legitimates the “war on terrorism” is the claim that “democracy” is an effective remedy for terrorism. While the authors of these essays generally agree that democracy can be an antidote or remedy for terrorism, they typically argue that the current U.S.

strategy of promoting and understanding democracy is flawed on several grounds. Peter Amato points out that current U.S. policies tend to empower local elites and foster dependency at the expense of democracy; Eagan argues that the Bush II administration’s 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS) document, a blueprint for the “war on terrorism,” reconceptualizes “democracy” away from the traditional American understanding of democracy as understood in the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, i.e., away from the protection of individual rights of liberty and freedom and toward the primacy of unregulated markets. Current U.S. policies of rendition, secret prisons, and aggressive interrogation techniques widely understood to be torture and contrary to the Geneva convention promote no traditionally understood ideals of democracy; in fact, these policies undercut traditionally understood ideals of democracy as well as international efforts to bolster human rights. Amato suggests that the sort of democracy to best resist terrorism would be a democracy rooted in a citizens’ dialogue aimed at understanding the Good, while Eagan suggests a conception of democracy that replaces the primacy of individual self-interest with mutual respect and reciprocity.

The third basic question running through the collection asks, is the Bush II “war on terrorism” justified or effective? Gay’s second essay approaches the question by asking whether the “new kind of war” the United States is waging is so new after all. This essay (one of the collection’s especially clear texts) presents evidence that the presumably “unprecedented” Bush II preemption doctrine is, in fact, not a new policy, but rather (as the NSS admits) a long-standing “option of preemptive actions” (p. 132; NSS, p. 15). Indeed, an idea suggested a number of times in the collection is that any novelty in the Bush II doctrine is merely a difference in degree and scope, not kind; it is the old doctrine with less outsourcing and fewer scruples; the passages that seem to contradict this thesis are usually discussing differences in rhetoric and labeling rather than actual changes in policy. Harry van der Linden’s essay takes a different tack by asking whether the rule of preemption could be effectively universalized to all members of the United Nations (though his essay treats “preemptive” and “preventive” attacks as having different meanings, whereas elsewhere in the collection they are often treated as virtually synonymous). D. R. Koukal’s essay (discussed in more detail below) looks at both the question of legitimacy and the question of the effectiveness of the “war on terrorism.”

The collection’s fourth basic question asks, how does

the “war on terrorism” paradigm promote a misunderstanding of many regional conflicts from around the world and thus limit our ability to promote constructive solutions? Focusing on the current political violence in Chechnya, Palestine, Columbia, and Central Asia, several essays analyze how these conflicts have been misunderstood as a result of being reconceptualized within the parameters of the “war on terrorism.” Focusing on Chechnya, Oidinposha Imamkhodjaeva argues that by understanding these conflicts in terms of the tactics of terrorism, we fail to see that these conflicts are often rooted in a quest for national identity. Such misconceptualization results in the failure to offer constructive solutions. Instead, solutions to these conflicts flowing from the “war on terrorism” involve an artificially imposed alignment which only aggravates the quest for regional or national identity. To make matters worse, as Harry Anastasiou and Robert Gould point out, these conflicts have been conceptualized within an adversarial discourse of competing human rights and competing nationalisms. Not only is a Hobbesian framework a poor foundation for understanding social and political relations, but is, as Wendy C. Hamblet points out, an impediment to envisioning new and constructive solutions rooted in an understanding of social life as grounded in reciprocity and solidarity. An irony that results from this Hobbesianism is that, though current administration under Bush II increasingly packages the “war on terrorism” in the terms of the Second World War, its harsh “us”/“them” binaries generate a rhetoric strikingly reminiscent of Carl Schmitt’s well-known “friend”/“enemy” approach, brought to fruition under the Third Reich.

Finally, the fifth question of the collection asks how philosophical thinking on the ethics of war might help guide us to a more just and sustainable response to global terrorism. The authors typically express a sustained skepticism about both secular and religious justifications for the series of wars of humanitarian intervention following the end of the Cold War. Although these humanitarian interventions are often justified as the liberation of an oppressed people, these wars all too often impose new conditions of dependency on the liberated countries by integrating them into the capitalistic world order. Such liberation and integration are often justified by a doctrine of human rights conceived as timeless moral ideals resulting from the intrinsic value of free individuals pursuing their own self interests at the expense of others. The result is an imposition of a neoliberal world order that is often in conflict with the values of the “liberated peoples.” Richard Peterson argues that if any such humani-

tarian intervention and the inevitable “neo-colonial tutelage” that goes with it can be justified, it must be rooted in a new conception of human rights that moves away from understanding rights as ahistorical, metaphysical, and moral absolutes and toward a shared understanding of minimal standards of moral behavior developed by an open dialogue within a community of nations (p. 379). Peterson envisions the possibility of a “democratic tutelage” supporting a cosmopolitan globalism rooted in a “post colonial reciprocity” (p. 384). The great challenge of our times, both in relation to the “war on terrorism” and the project of conceptualizing a more humane and just global future, lies in moving away from the grounding of moral, political, and economic ideals in self-interested egoism. Although it may be true that our naturally self-interested egoism is inherently violent, the promise of humanity has always been rooted in the possibility of transcendence guided by a sense of justice that inevitably asked us to overcome our natural egoism. Hamblet’s concluding essay, for example, argues that human beings can rise above this natural egoism by first recognizing the violence in all of us and becoming open to our own guilt and complicity. In a similar way, Eagan and Mar Peter-Raoul look to ways in which love can serve as both a guiding ideal and living motivator for social justice and prudent policy.

Which philosophical figures do the authors in the collection turn to most? Some essays draw from a number of thinkers to accomplish their task or are not particularly concerned with utilizing any particular philosopher, whereas others settle in to work with one or two main thinkers. The philosophers or theorists who receive more sustained attention in the collection include Hannah Arendt, Benjamin R. Barber, Hegel, Samuel Huntington, Luce Irigaray, Kant, Emmanuel Levinas, Martin Luther King Jr., John Locke, Plato, Samuel Scheffler, and Bernard August Owen Williams. In addition, John David Geib’s essay provides a sustained consideration of the pacifist roots of the Christian tradition. Given the cold calculation and promotion of fear that reigns in so much of the United States’ prosecution of its global “war on terrorism,” however, one thinker in particular haunts the collection like a ghost—Thomas Hobbes. It is only fitting that Koukal brings this shadow to the surface by devoting his essay to examining the “war on terrorism” through the lens of Hobbes’s *Leviathan* (1651), and argues that the “Leviathanism” of present U.S. policy ultimately cannot succeed. Understandably, one of the texts to which the collection most often turns is not a classic of philosophy, but rather the scripture of the Bush II administration’s

2002 NSS document.[5]

What, then, is our judgment of Presbey's *Philosophical Perspectives on the "War on Terrorism"*? The collection does suffer from some omissions. Since September 11, a number of publications have appeared that bring philosophy to bear on war, terrorism, and the "war on terrorism." [6] Though it is clear that the makeup of Presbey's collection was largely determined by contributions to a conference held by Concerned Philosophers for Peace, it would have been helpful if Presbey had commissioned a survey essay to deal with this growing body of literature; alternatively, she might have prepared an annotated bibliography. On the one hand, though the collection deals with many thinkers, a surprising omission is any sustained discussion of philosopher Giorgio Agamben's writings on the fate of the political subject in an increasingly globalized world—one figure whose thought would have fit especially well in this book on the self-professedly "global" war on terror. Indeed, his early thoughts on the suspension of the law are especially prescient in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, and accordingly he has since worked to expand on those ideas. On the other hand, one of Agamben's main sources of inspiration, Arendt, does receive repeated attention, though not in those aspects that Agamben particularly takes up. Likewise, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (authors of the widely discussed book, *Empire* [2000]) appear in the notes to one essay but do not appear in the index or receive sustained treatment. Some of these absences, however, may have less to do with avoidable oversights and more to do with what might be called the intentionally "practical" orientation of the collection. There are more typos and missing words than one would wish, but no more than one usually encounters now that most publishers have cut back on or almost abandoned the use of copyeditors.

Overall, however, the collection has much to offer. Among its strengths is the lengthy, detailed index, which, though it does have some lacunae, provides the reader with over sixty pages to help navigate the text. In addition, Presbey's own contribution (one of the longer essays in the collection) provides a very useful overview—almost a timeline—of the policy decisions and justifications made during and after the buildup to the war in Iraq, the presumed "heart" of the "war on terrorism."

A clear message that emerges from these essays is the idea that if we are to continue or recover the guiding message of the Enlightenment—that human culture and social life can be guided toward a more peaceful and humane

future by the use of human reason—the skills and dispositions of philosophers are much needed. *Philosophical Perspectives on the "War on Terrorism"* takes up the task of restoring philosophical reflection as an integral part of public discourse traditionally valued by democratic societies. The essays in this book demonstrate that professional philosophy need not be merely an academic pursuit written for a specialized audience but can demonstrate and model the skills needed for responsible and engaged citizenship. This book helps restore the social and political role of philosophers. The essays here not only model how to ask the right questions, uncover unnoticed assumptions, and expose the contradictions between stated values and actual practices, but also point to alternative understandings of democracy, human rights, and intercultural dialogue. If the themes and ideas articulated in this book can help to shape a public (and not a merely academic) reflection on these issues, this book will accomplish more than being simply a welcome addition to philosophy of peace studies.

Notes

[1]. American Council of Trustees and Alumni, *Defending Civilization: How Our Universities Are Failing America and What Can Be Done about It*, <http://www.goacta.org/publications/Reports/defciv.pdf> (accessed May 24, 2008 via a www.archive.org cache from May 3, 2007). This is a revised version from February 2002; the original was made public on November 11, 2001.

[2]. For example, in 2004 Education Secretary Rod Paige denounced the National Education Association as a "terrorist organization." See John King, "Paige Calls NEA 'Terrorist Organization,'" *CNN.com*, February 23, 2004, <http://www.cnn.com/2004/EDUCATION/02/23/paige.terrorist.nea/> (accessed June 4, 2008). More recently, in 2006, Lurita Alexis Doan, the administrator of the U.S. General Services Administration, claimed that the agency's inspector general and his staff were carrying out domestic "terrorism" for attempting to carry out their oversight duties. See Scott Higham and Robert O'Harrow Jr., "GSA Chief Seeks to Cut Budget for Audits: Contract Oversight Would Be Reduced," *Washington Post*, December 2, 2006, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/01/AR2006120101645.html> (accessed June 4, 2008). Such declarations are no laughing matter under a de facto suspension of habeas corpus enabled precisely by an appeal to the threat of terrorism.

[3]. Martha C. Nussbaum, "Stages of Thought," *The*

New Republic, May 7, 2008, <http://www.tnr.com/politics/story.html?~id=e1bd6ffa-c648-4d40-8efd-40dd1b31b444> (accessed May 24, 2008).

[4]. Roger Scruton, "Immanuel Kant and the Iraq War," *openDemocracy*, February 19, 2004, http://www.opendemocracy.net/faith-iraqwarphiloshophy/article_1749.jsp (accessed June 3, 2008).

[5]. *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, September 17, 2002, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html>.

[6]. Numerous books on the topic have appeared, such as inter alia Trudy Govier, *A Delicate Balance: What*

Philosophy Can Tell Us about Terrorism (Boulder: Westview Press, 2002); J. Angelo Corlett, *Terrorism: A Philosophical Analysis* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003); and Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Juergen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). Examples of special issues of philosophy journals and magazines include *Social Philosophy Today* 20 (2004), a special issue on "War and Terrorism"; *The Philosophical Forum* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2005), an issue of "New Essays on War, Peace, and International Ethics"; and *The Philosopher's Magazine* 34 (2006), which contains a thirty-five-page forum on "Liberty and Security."

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