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This paper is a philosophical investigation into the meaning of terrorism. It explores the Hegelian notion of fight for recognition as bedrock to analyse the nature of the conflict between the terrorist self and the other without attributing this conflict to any particular phenomenological situation and culture. It draws a line of demarcation between two types of conflict: fight for recognition and annihilation. In both types of conflict the relationship between the self and the other is analysed. It is argued that in fight for recognition the existence of the other becomes necessary and for this reason it is not annihilated. Focusing on the dialectic of the master and slave, the victor keeps the vanquished alive as the master relies on the slave for recognition. By contrast, in a terrorist act the existence of the other is annihilated. A terrorist self confirms the objective certainty of its absolute freedom only by destroying the existence of the other.

The enigma of defining terrorism

For some time now, many scholars have been engaged with understanding and defining terrorism. This engagement is reflected in the considerable amount of literature produced by them on this topic. Although this body of literature discloses important aspects of terrorism, none of it discusses directly the ‘essence’ of terrorism. The definitions provided are based on the writers’ political discourse rather than their philosophical apprehension of terrorism. They think of terrorism as an act of threatening to destroy an intended target for a political end. Tony Coady has defined terrorism as ‘the organised use of violence to attack non-combatants (‘innocents” in a special sense) or their property for political purposes’.¹ Coady also calls his definition ‘tactical’ since the terrorist act is directed towards non-combatants.² He argues that a tactical definitional approach is beset with the difficulty that the concept of the non-combatant in the definition requires further clarification. But the difficulty with the tactical definition is the term ‘tactical’ itself. A terrorist act terrifies the victims, but not tactically. Terror or intimidation is not a device but a quality of a terrorist act. When terror is attributed to this act of violence as a tactic then one can think of terrorism without terror, because what is tactical is accidental. Hence, thinking of terrorism as a violent act that does not target non-
combatants might be a possibility, because terrifying the targeted non-combatants is only a tactic, which may be needed today and not tomorrow.

A violent act becomes an act of terror only if it intimidates and targets non-combatants. In this way, a tactical definition of terrorism becomes self-contradictory. Igor Primoratz defines terrorism as ‘intimidation with a purpose: the terror is meant to cause others to do things they would otherwise not do’. Robert Young’s definition of terrorism is not different from the previous ones. It also focuses on the use of violence directed against persons or property for the sake of political objectives. In Young’s definition, the concept of ‘persons’ is ambiguous. It does not indicate or specify whether ‘persons’ are combatants or not. Sue Ashford states that terrorism is ‘the use of violence—as a matter of policy—to cause terror in people usually so that those individuals will change their beliefs or allegiances’. According to James M. Lutz and Brenda J. Lutz, terrorism ‘in its usual usage has a connotation of evil, indiscriminate violence, or brutality’. Some Marxist thinkers debated terrorism after the October revolution. Karl Kautsky, a German socialist theoretician, was critical of the use of violence by the Bolsheviks in Russia. He considered this type of action as terrorism. Kautsky’s criticism of the Bolsheviks was grounded on the idea of preserving human life. This idea has a broad implication and is non-discriminatory. In a revolution, there is a distinction between the lives of those for whom the revolution is embarked on and those who oppose it. Unlike Kautsky, Leon Trotsky defends the use of violence by the Bolsheviks and finds it a necessary and proper method of making a revolution successful: ‘The revolution “logically” does not demand terrorism, just as “logically” it does not demand an armed insurrection. What a profound commonplace! But the revolution does require of the revolutionary class that it should attain its end by all methods at its disposal if necessary, by an armed rising; if required, by terrorism’.7

Trotsky’s argument against Kautsky is also based on the ambiguous character of the term ‘victims’ of violence. Kautsky made no clear distinction, for example, between the lives of the members of the police force in a repressive political system and the civilians. For Trotsky, this distinction is clear. The revolution protects the lives of the workers but not the lives of the White Guards. The term ‘terrorism’ was used long before the Marxists did, however. It was used for the first time to describe the radical and violent political attitude of the Jacobins during the French revolution and its aftermath.9

**Fight for recognition and terrorism**

To seek a philosophical path leading beyond our present and political analysis of terrorism, I will take Hegel’s interpretation of the conflict between the self and the other as the bedrock for my approach in understanding the meaning of terrorism. In the history of modern philosophy, Hegel was the first thinker to give a philosophical account of the rise of terror. He discussed this in a section of *The Phenomenology of Mind* while dealing with the development of free will into ‘Absolute Freedom’. The young Hegel admired the French Revolution and, with his two friends Hölderlin and
Schelling, who were students at the seminary in Tübingen, celebrated the French Revolution in 1789, and hoped for the same kind of socio-political change in Germany. Later, in 1805, Hegel gave a negative account of the French Revolution. He held the view that in 1794, following the reign of Robespierre, the Revolution was established as a repressive institution that turned into terror. He saw Napoleon as the embodiment of the world spirit to finish the ‘novel’ of revolution. According to him, terrorism was the outcome of the Enlightenment and took place after the French Revolution:

This undivided substance of absolute freedom puts itself on the throne of the world, without any power being able to offer effectual resistance. For since in every truth consciousness is alone the element which furnishes spiritual beings or powers with their substance, their entire system, which is organised and maintained through division into separate spheres and distinct wholes, has collapsed into a single whole, when once the individual consciousness conceives the objects as having no other nature than that of self-consciousness itself, or conceives it to be absolutely the notion.

The self, with the claim of having absolute freedom and values, denies the difference and becomes intolerant and aggressive towards the idea of difference or anything that is not in the domain of its single whole. It rejects anything outside itself or outside the single whole of its own absolute freedom and values.

It is worth mentioning that terrorism is not a post-modern political phenomenon. But since the events of 11 September, we have become preoccupied with understanding its meaning, and we have tried to grasp that meaning through an emphasis on the cultural production of terrorism. There are those who see such cultural production as a focal point of their political discourse, and depict the exhaustion of its intended target through the dogma of the polarisation of culture. The best example is Samuel Huntington’s analysis in The Clash of Civilizations. To understand the essence of terrorism philosophically, it is imperative not to attribute the aggressive impulses of terrorist acts to a particular type of culture or a political movement. Although the political definitions of terrorism focus on the use of violence, I would argue that the endorsement of violence does not reveal the essence of the terrorist act because violence, which is employed to induce intimidation, is a method rather than the essence of terrorism. The intimidation induced by violence is also the appearance of the phenomenon of terrorism rather than the essence of terrorism.

There is a distinction between phenomenon and appearing. Phenomenon is something that shows itself through its appearance. This showing is the way in which a phenomenon appears and is understood. The relationship between a phenomenon and its appearance can be better elucidated and understood in light of the relationship between a disease and its symptoms. The symptoms of flu, such as fever and pain, indicate a phenomenon that does not show itself without these symptoms. The illness announces itself through its symptoms or signs. Appearing is, therefore, not a phenomenon but an announcing of a phenomenon, and a
Political definitions of terrorism focus on the use of violence, but the endorsement of violence does not reveal the essence of the terrorist act.

Terrorism manifests itself and becomes actual through its symptoms, such as intimidation, but the symptoms do not define its essence. But ambiguity arises when the essence of terrorism is apprehended through the announcement of its symptoms. Nor is this ambiguity part of uncertainty of the danger. The ambiguity lies in our not understanding its essence. For whatever is not understood appropriately recedes to the abyss of ambiguity.

When intimidation is thought of as the ‘essence’ of terrorism, the difference between various types of acts that induce intimidation or cause fear diminishes. On which ground can the distinction between different kinds of actions that induce intimidation be established? In which way is an act that generates fear called a terrorist act? In order to clarify this point I will talk about two instances that both generate fear and end human life. The first instance is the case of violence by one self against another. The second instance is fear generated by a natural disaster. In the first instance, violence is used as a method to generate fear; and fear is not the end of the violent act itself but its consequence. In the second instance, the violent act is not employed by a conscious agent such as the self against the other but happens due to a particular natural circumstance without a pre‐given rational purpose. This difference in ‘intentionality’ of consciousness in using violence and generating fear is imperative for understanding the essence of terrorism. It makes terrorism a human act, in the sense that only human beings are capable of inducing intimidation intentionally. Terrorism is a characteristic of a being that undertakes terrorism as a project of its being. Nature, even after causing enormous damage to life and generating high levels of fear, is still not branded a terrorist. If we rely only on the phrase ‘the use of violence’ to define the essence of terrorism, then any force—whether due to a conscious self or to a natural phenomenon—that terrifies a large number of people can be considered an act of terrorism. But some may argue, particularly those who emphasise the political end in defining terrorism, that a natural disaster, unlike the act of a suicide bomber, does not have a political agenda. On this ground we need to make another distinction between intimidation induced by the self and fear generated by a natural disaster.
The terrorist self and the other

Terrorism should be understood in the matrix of conflict between the self and the other, in which the other is not clearly specified but targeted randomly. Human history is seen as a platform for this conflict. Hegel advocated the idea that the purpose of this conflict is ‘recognition’. This understanding of human history by Hegel, particularly in the dialectic of the master and the slave in *The Phenomenology of Mind*, is determined not by ‘power’ or ‘private ownership’ but by fear or intimidation induced in the other by the self. Fear, which is caused intentionally by the self against the other in this conflict for recognition, is the fear of death or total annihilation of one’s existence,

But again, shaping or forming the object has not only the positive significance that the bondsman becomes thereby aware of himself as factually and objectively self-existent; this type of consciousness has also a negative import, in contrast with its first moment, the element of fear.

Fear, which discloses something fearful, is a characteristic of human existence. We are afraid of something that threatens our own being. Fear of death emerges as a dominant feature of this conflict. Meanwhile death and the realisation of it, which generates fear, make an individual fully aware of the value of life. This value at the time of death emerges as something absolute and peerless. Its negation becomes an absolute devaluation and destruction of one’s own existence.

The fear of death determines the existential destiny of the rivals. The self and the other employ violence to intimidate one another. They do not realise the worth or value of anything outside of themselves. The self who seeks recognition from the other does not accept the reality of the other as something independent and different. Meanwhile, the other as another self has a similar claim because the existence of the other is the ‘same’ as his/hers. The other is another self-conscious being seeking recognition, and hence threatens the independence of the self and causes limitation to its freedom. To negate this limitation the fight to death becomes imperative. Through the fear of death and realising the value of life, the self and the other, as two rivals, emerge at the end of the fight with new existential status and non-mutual recognition or the recognition of one side will be attained. The recognised self transcends beyond the biological desire to live and fights valiantly and becomes the master. The recognising self who is under the sway of the fear of death and realisation of the value of life cannot rise above the desire to live. It loses the prestige of being independent and is reduced from a conscious and independent being to a ‘thing’, and eventually becomes a slave.

The fight for recognition, as we see, keeps the recognising self alive and does not aim at destroying its existence. It is only an act of negating the autonomy or independence of the recognising self. Destroying the recognising self gives an end to witness from whom recognition is necessarily sought. As a consequence of this, recognition is rendered impossible. When the recognising self is destroyed, the purpose of the fight is doomed to failure, because a corpse is unable to provide
recognition. For this reason, the recognised self does not kill the vanquished but keeps it alive, subjugated and working for the recognised self. The recognising self is not able to transcend its animal desire by risking life for freedom. It prefers servitude to death and hence is determined by biological needs. Accordingly, the self obtains recognition by negating the freedom of the other. This non-mutual recognition analysed by Hegel in *The Phenomenology of Mind* is at the same time the alienation (*Entfremdung*) of the other from his/her human essence because freedom is negated.\(^{18}\)

An individual’s desire for recognition acts as a necessary impulse in history. It provides objective certainty for one’s own independence. The existence of the other becomes essential for the objective certainty of independence, as the self needs the other for recognition. The other is also a threat because it imposes limitation on the independence of the self. Recognising someone as another human being—the ‘same’ as me—is an acknowledgement that this human being has the desire to desire me and seeks my recognition. This significant characteristic of the other applies to both: escape from and challenge me. The other, therefore, unlike other entities in the world, has a unique existence and a different type of relationship with the self.

At the end of the fight the self and the other are transformed into two unequal social beings with a new type of social status and relationship, having different kinds of rights and duties. The recognised self becomes a master and the recognising desire a slave. The master is a being for himself. He owns Being as well as the being of the slave. He becomes idle and does nothing but gets everything. By contrast, the slave is a being for the master, produces for the master and owns nothing.\(^{19}\) The recognition of the master by the slave enables the master to self-consciously acknowledge his/her own objective certainty and freedom.

**The essence of a terrorist act**

From this perspective of understanding history as the battlefield for recognition, I shall proceed to give a more carefully nuanced exposition of the philosophical account of terrorism. We should be mindful of an important aspect: giving a philosophical account of the essence of terrorism and addressing this essence avoids any definition, which is temporally variable. It is worth mentioning that a question about the ‘essence’ of terrorism is an inquiry about the ‘being’ of this phenomenon. When we ask about the essence of terrorism, we simply want to know what it means for terrorism ‘to be’. Here an inquiry into the essence of terrorism is an investigation into the ‘whatness’ of terrorism or what makes an act terrorist and another not terrorist.\(^{20}\) By essence we mean the ‘what of it is to be’; the term is originally Latin essentia from esse (‘to be’). It is that by which something is what it is. It also refers to the most permanent aspect of a thing in contrast to its accidents. Philosophers, from Plato to Husserl in the West, and from Ibn Sina to Suhrawardi in the Muslim world, have defined essence differently. For Plato the essence of something was found in its universal form that pre-existed in the transcendent ideal world. Ibn Sina believed that with the exception of God’s existence, whose essence and existence were one and
Terrorism aims at the destruction of the non-identical other, mentally as well as materially identical, everything else was the combination of essence and existence. Suhrawardi came with the idea that only essence is real, on which the existence of everything relies. In this case, if there is a violent act known as terrorism, we need to recognise its essence. In order to do this we must deal with the aspect by which terrorism exists and is understood.

Terrorism induces intimidation, as long as it is a terrorist act, through the use of violence. Terrorism maintains itself in its essence only if it keeps or overtakes the terror level it has attained. The level of the terror attained by inducing intimidation is not for the sake of recognition, like in the case of the fight between the master and the slave in Hegel’s *The Phenomenology of Mind*. A terrorist self does not intend to subjugate the other for the sake of objective recognition and certainty of its own independence. It does not seek or need recognition because it is certain about its own absolute freedom and values. But it intends to confirm the objective certainty of its absolute freedom by destroying the existence of the other, which is ‘same’ like the self but not identical to it.

According to this analysis, the essence of terrorism is ‘annihilation’. The aim of terrorism is not to subjugate but to annihilate the other. Annihilation is the negation of the independence of the other as well as total destruction of its existence. It is an action through which the other is not reduced to a ‘thing’ but transformed from the state of existence to non-existence. The recognised self reduces the recognising self to a mere object, while a terrorist self reduces this other to ‘nothing’.

The sole and only work and deed accomplished by universal freedom is, therefore, death, a death that achieves nothing, embraces nothing within its grasp; for what is negated is the unachieved, unfulfilled punctual entity of the absolutely free self. It is thus the most cold-blooded and meaningless death of all, with no more significance than cleaving a head of cabbage or swallowing a draught of water.

Terrorism is the negation of the other not as a self-conscious independent being but as a living being, which results in blotting it out of existence. What terrorism aims at is the destruction of the non-identical other, mentally as well as materially. This other also has an ambiguous meaning. It includes the combatant and non-combatant other. This other can be any kind of non-identical being to the terrorist self, regardless of its engagement in the conflict with the self. For this reason the intended other is not necessarily a combatant rival of the self. It is simply the different other from the self. This notion of the other, which is same and different at the same time, is grounded on the conviction that nothing outside the domain of absolute subjectivity and freedom of the terrorist self exists or has a reality.

Intimidation (fear of death) plays a decisive role in both kinds of conflict between the self and the other, whether the self seeks recognition from or intends to annihilate the other. In the fight for recognition, the other experiences intimidation without been able to surmount the desire to live. By giving recognition to the self, the
fear of death in the other recedes to the background and is concealed. By contrast, intimidation induced by the terrorist self does not conclude with surrender or recognition of the terrorist self by the other. A terrorist self aims at total annihilation of the target. If terrorism stalls at a level where the annihilation of the other is not intended or realised, it will remain without its essence. An act is disclosed as a terrorist act when it annihilates the being of the other. It is a conscious and intentional act of annihilation for a realised end. The self, in a terrorist act, assigns to itself and its conflict with the other a new ‘essence’. On one side, the self transforms itself into a subject with absolute freedom and values and gives itself unrestricted power to take life away and bring about the total annihilation of the other. On the other side, the conflict loses its dialectical character because it obliterates its opposite or the other. In dialectic movement the opposite is not destroyed but superseded (Aufhebung), preserved in its essential being and incorporated at a higher sphere of being. In terrorism, with the claim of the terrorist self of absolute freedom and value, the opposite (antithesis) is eliminated. The ‘sameness’ of the other is not acknowledged. A terrorist self seeks abstract identity, an identity in which all contradictions and differences become extinct.23

As we see, for Hegel, terrorism is the outcome of the Enlightenment and the progeny of the dialectic development of the self during that era. Since the dialectic movement of the self proceeds necessarily, we conclude the rise of terrorism at this stage of the historical development of the self to be necessary. Besides, every new dialectic moment is more progressive than the previous moment. Can we say that terrorism is a historical necessity? Is it a moment more progressive than its previous moment?

The aim of the Enlightenment, as understood by Hegel, was the rational realisation of the world by the self (consciousness) in order to govern it. This is possible only when the world is transformed dialectically to something not different and is turned into a rational world, which is same as the self. The self and the world are united and at the same time different, because every dialectic moment and truth is an example of this unity in diversity.24 The attempt of the self to grasp the world rationally is in order to de-alienate this external reality from the self,

This insight, being the self grasping itself, completes the stage of culture. It takes up nothing but the self, and everything as the self, i.e. it comprehends everything, extinguishes all objectiveness, and converts everything implicit into something explicit, everything which has a being in itself into what is for itself.25

Another characteristic of the Enlightenment, as described by Hegel, is that in which the world becomes a rational property of the self, which brings about ‘absolute freedom’ for the self. This is a stage where the self is in itself and for itself. The self leaves behind its duality with the external world. The self also experiences a transition from consciousness to self-consciousness or a return to the essence of its own because the objectivity of the estranged world is dissolved into the subjectivity of the self.
Conclusion

As I understand, Hegel’s interpretation of the Enlightenment is a potential ground for the rise of terrorism. The self of the Enlightenment has transformed the being of another into its own subjectivity, the other into non-other, and proclaims absolute freedom for itself. But it should be remembered that dialectic logic does not sanction total annihilation of the otherness (antithesis). The synthesis of the opposites in each dialectical triad as the negation of negation (or double negation) is a unity in diversity or identity in difference. It is a unity in which opposites remain as opposites, and which holds them together. Every synthesis is the revelation of the togetherness of the opposites. It lets this togetherness manifest itself or be apprehended as something new. By contrast, the terrorist self that emerged with the Enlightenment does not correspond to this dialectical principle. It achieves absolute freedom and subjectivity not through transformation of the objectivity of the other into its own subjectivity but simply by destroying it. It does not accept the ‘sameness’ of the other because sameness includes difference. Heidegger, in describing Hegel’s notion of identity, holds the view that ‘... the same is not the merely identical. In the merely identical, the difference disappears. In the same the difference appears, and appears all the more pressingly, the more resolutely thinking is concerned with the same matter in this way’.26

Terrorism is a breach of the irreversible movement of the dialectic progression in which the negation of negation supersedes all contradictions between the opposites rather than annihilating them. In this way, terrorism was bred in the ground of the Enlightenment but violates the dialectic principle of progress. Since the terrorist self does not allow the negation of negation to be submerged, its self-identity remains non-dialectical. It is not enriched with the element of difference; therefore, it stands as an impediment to the progress of human history: it ‘... produces neither a positive achievement nor a deed; there is left for it only negative action; it is merely the rage and fury of destruction’.27 In the end, terrorism, when understood dialectically or in light of Hegel’s logic, does not appear to be graspable in the context of the clash between modern and pre-modern forces. It is not a struggle to progress but an act to appropriate and transform the being of the other by destroying it.
Endnotes

16. The sameness of the other does not signify that the other is identical to the self. Sameness and identity are different in meaning; two entities are the same in some respects but not identical. By identity we mean that two entities have likeness in all respects. Heidegger states that throughout the history of western philosophy, identity is taken as unity. The notion of identity originally came from Parmenides’ fragment, ‘thinking and Being belong together in the same by virtue of this same’. Heidegger also interprets ‘Sameness’ (Das Selbe) to mean ‘belonging together’. See: Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, translated with an introduction by Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University Press, 1969), pp. 25–8.
18. The objective certainty of the master at the end of the fight is at jeopardy because the master is not recognised by another self-conscious being like him/herself. The master is recognised by a slave who is reduced to a ‘thing’. I have discussed this matter in my book on Hegel’s anthropology in detail. See: Muhammad Kamal, *Toward Hegel’s Anthropology* (Karachi: Karachi University Press, 1992), p. 56.
20. Heidegger argues that every question about the essence of an entity has twofold. On one side it is a question about the being of that entity, and second is about the way that thing is. See: Martin Heidegger, ‘What is Metaphysics?’, in David Farrell Krell (ed.), *Basic Writings of Martin Heidegger* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 93–4.
23. Abstract identity is expressed in the law or principle of identity, which asserts that if any proposition is true, then it is true. Abstract identity is different from the dialectical principle of ‘identity in difference’. It is the negation of all differences in order to maintain absolute identity while the principle of identity in difference establishes identity on the ground of difference or otherwise.
26. Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, translated with an introduction by Joan Tambaugh (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2002), p. 27. Heidegger is also critical of Hegel’s notion of the ‘same’. In his essay ‘The Onto-Theo-Logical constitution of Metaphysics’ he states that for Hegel the matter of thinking is Being with respect to beings is thought as absolute thinking. By contrast, the matter of thinking for Heidegger is the ‘same’, which is Being, but with respect to its difference from beings, ‘For us, formulated in a preliminary fashion, the matter of thinking is the difference as difference’ (Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, p. 47). See also: Martin Heidegger, *Four Seminars*, translated by Andrew Mitchell and Francois Raffoul, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), pp. 4–5.