



New York:
Cambridge
University Press,
2010

329 pages

\$35.00

Confronting Evils: Terrorism, Torture, Genocide

by Claudia Card

Reviewed by Michael H. Hoffman, Associate Professor,
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Most readers view challenges of terrorism, torture, and genocide from a prevention oriented policy, operational, or legal perspective. This book offers an opportunity to look at these acts from a philosophical viewpoint. This reviewer began reading the book with doubts about its utility for his own work in genocide and mass atrocity prevention, not to mention doubts about his preparation to assess a book of philosophy. *Confronting Evils* is a useful text for readers possessing intellectual grit

who welcome opportunities to examine and reassess the assumptions guiding their ideas and work.

The book is presented in two parts. Part I explores the concept of evil and its various forms. Part II examines terrorism, counterterrorism, torture, and genocide. The book is presented as a sequential exploration and series of arguments, but each chapter holds up well as an individual essay that can be read with limited cross-reference to the rest of the text. Readers lacking education in philosophy will find this a well written and carefully presented study that helps them overcome this obstacle (except Chapter 2, where the ideas of Immanuel Kant come heavily into play.)

Part I usefully explores the concept of evil. As Professor Card defines them, “evils are reasonably foreseeable intolerable harms produced by inexcusable wrongs.” It will be of interest to some readers that she draws on the law of war (referred to in the book as international humanitarian law or IHL) as one source of insight on the nature of evil. Part I considers not only harms to individual human beings and individuals as perpetrators, but also institutions as a source of the evils explored in the book. In what may sometimes be a stretch for readers, she also examines “ecocide” as an evil based on wrongs done to the environment.

The greatest value of Part I is that it offers readers the chance to evaluate their own frame of reference for evil as a moral issue in international relations and national security. It might be wrong to say that Part I is intellectually clarifying—the whole book requires careful, patient reading—but it will lead a willing reader to attempt an objective examination of his or her operating assumptions. The most tangible benefit for the national security oriented reader comes in Part II.

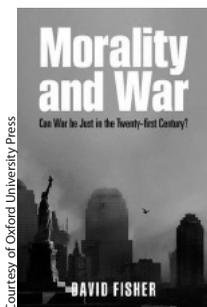
Professor Card usefully explores philosophical dimensions of terrorism, torture, and genocide in Part II. The book takes an unexpected turn with her consideration of “low profile terrorism” in Chapter 6. She argues that rape and domestic abuse meet criteria making them as much terrorism as attacks and

intimidation by terrorist organizations. This is an unusual take on the fact that we still lack a commonly agreed upon frame of reference for terrorism.

Her exploration of genocide as “social death” in Chapter 9, and genocide by forced impregnation in Chapter 10, is particularly useful for anyone concerned with prevention. Our existing definition of genocide from the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide is a departure point for these chapters. She finds that treaty and frame of reference inadequate, as events taken to destroy a group culturally and socially may constitute genocide even if the group is not physically destroyed.

Unfortunately, the book is occasionally afflicted by the need to single out the United States even where the criticism does not fit. To offer several examples, Professor Card suggests that US detention raids in Iraq were “military terrorism.” Whatever their shortcomings in retrospect, this is no more persuasive than a footnote reference offering the prospect of credibility to proponents of what we might call “the United States was behind 911” school of conspiracy theory. Such passages do not enhance the credibility of the book, but there is more than enough solid material to overcome this. More relevant, by contrast, is her treatment of counterterrorism methods in Chapter 5. So, is this a worthwhile book for the military and interagency community?

This reviewer fully concurs with Professor Card’s conclusion that “The question of a genocidal trajectory becomes important politically for those who might be obligated to intervene to stop the process before it is too late. Potential interveners who look only for intent to commit mass murder will miss many attempts to destroy a people.” That perspective informs these two chapters, and they alone are worth the price of the book. This book merits the attention of anyone engaged in national security practice and education if they are willing to overlook occasional dubious and sometimes absurd references to US military history and contemporary practice, such as engaging in periodic reassessment of their intellectual frame of reference, and are willing to commit to a thought provoking but slow, demanding read.



New York: Oxford University Press, 2011

303 pages

\$45.00

Morality and War: Can War Be Just in the Twenty-First Century?

by David Fisher

Reviewed by James H. Toner, Professor Emeritus of Leadership and Ethics, US Air War College, Author of *Morals Under the Gun*

Now visiting Senior Fellow at King’s College in London, David Fisher wrote this book as his doctoral dissertation at that institution. Fisher argues cogently that “There are no moral free zones” in international relations; relying upon Aristotle and Aquinas, he says that political and military leaders must be virtuous; and, disagreeing