Freedom and Terror

Reason and unreason in politics

Abraham Kaplan and Gabriel Weimann

Contemporary Terrorism Studies

Freedom and Terror

Reason and unreason in politics

Abraham Kaplan and Gabriel Weimann

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2011
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Typeset in Times by Wearset Ltd, Boldon, Tyne and Wear
Printed and bound in Great Britain by TJI Digital, Padstow, Cornwall

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record has been requested for this book

ISBN13: 978-0-415-60598-4 (hbk)
ISBN13: 978-0-203-83120-5 (ebk)

Freedom and Terror

This book examines reason and unreason in the legal and political responses to terrorism.

Terrorism is often perceived as sheer madness, unreasonable use of extreme violence and senseless, futile political action. These assertions are challenged by this book. Combining "traditional" thought (by Kaplan) on reason and unreason in terrorism with empirical explorations of postmodern terrorism and its use of communication platforms (by Weimann), the work uses interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary dimensions to provide a multidimensional picture of critical issues in current politics and a deeper examination of their implications than previously available.

The book looks at various aspects of modern politics, from terrorism to protest, from decision-making to political discourse, applying the perspective of philosophical thought. To do so, political issues and actions are examined by using concepts such as reason, emotions, madness, magic, morality, absolutism, extremism, psychopathology, rationality and others. The analysis is rooted in theories and concepts derived from history, philosophy, religion, art, sociology, psychology and political science.

This book, which was mostly written by the late Abraham Kaplan, an American philosopher, and edited and updated by Gabriel Weimann, will be of much interest to students of political violence/terrorism, philosophy, war and conflict studies, and political science in general.

Abraham Kaplan (1918–1993) was a leading American philosopher and author of six books.

Gabriel Weimann is a Professor of Communication at the Department of Communication at Haifa University, Israel, and the School of International Service (SIS) at the American University, Washington, DC.

Series: Contemporary Terrorism Studies

Understanding Terrorist Innovation
Technology, tactics and global trends
Adam Dolnik

The Strategy of Terrorism
How it works, why it fails
Peter Neumann and M.L.R. Smith

Female Terrorism and Militancy
Agency, utility and organization
Edited by Cindy D. Ness

Women and Terrorism
Female activity in domestic and international terror groups
Margaret Gonzalez-Perez

The Psychology of Strategic Terrorism
Public and government responses to attack
Ben Sheppard

The De-Radicalization of Jihadists
Transforming armed Islamist movements
Omar Ashour

Targeting Terrorist Financing
International cooperation and new regimes
Arabinda Acharya

Managing Terrorism and Insurgency
Regeneration, recruitment and attrition
Cameron I. Crouch

Religion and Political Violence
Sacred protest in the modern world
Jennifer L. Jefferis

International Terrorism Post 9/11
Comparative dynamics and responses
Edited by Asaf Siniver

Talking to Terrorists
Making concessions to armed groups
Carolin Goerzig

Freedom and Terror
Reason and unreason in politics
Abraham Kaplan and Gabriel Weimann

Acknowledgments

This book could not have been published without the contributions of many individuals. First is my late co-author and colleague, Professor Abraham Kaplan. As his former student Professor Carl Cohen described him:

> Kaplan was an extraordinary man. He was a penetrating thinker and a superb teacher whose breadth of learning was truly awesome. His rich command of the history of philosophy, of drama and poetry and biography, of the scriptures of the great religions, and of the methods and achievements of the sciences too, was nothing short of stunning. Reflections of that very great learning are to be found throughout his writing, as also in the book now in hand.

It was Dr. Iona Kaplan who brought me that pile of papers, written by her late husband; she knew already then, I believe, that I would be magnetized by the content, its depth and richness. Then, her daughter, Jessica Kaplan, followed: she trusted me and my work, knowing that I would do my best to honor her father's work and ideas.

I was assisted, both at the University of Haifa, Israel, and the School of International Affairs (SIS) of the American University, Washington, DC, by numerous colleagues. Many of these colleagues and friends are to be thanked for their support, advice, and encouragement. I will name only a few: Professor Louis Goodman (Dean, SIS), Professor Nanette Levinson (Director of the International Communication Program at SIS), Professor Bruce Hoffman from Georgetown University, Professor Elliott Milstein, Professor Yoram Peri, Josephine and Rami Levi, Gail and Yash Shirazi, and many others.

This research project was carried out with the help of several Research Assistants. One of them, who worked with me at SIS for almost two years on this project, deserves my appreciation for his contribution and involvement: Mr. Jonathan Kennedy, a devoted, resourceful, and bright young scholar. The manuscript benefitted from the skillful work of Liz Fauteux. I also wish to express my appreciation and gratitude to the anonymous reviewers for their excellent suggestions and comments, and to Andrew Humphrys, my editor at Routledge, and Rebecca Brennan, his Senior Editorial Assistant.

Finally, to my family, Nava, Oren, and Dana, who provided encouragement and support to a husband and parent who was at times more attentive to his research than to them.

Contents

Acknowledgments ix

Introduction 1
GABRIEL WEIMANN

1 The age of madness 6

2 Knowledge and political action 22

3 Politics, law and behavioral sciences 36

4 Historical interpretation 45

5 The politics of protest 55

6 The ethics of terror 66

7 The psychodynamics of terror 77

8 The theater of terror: modern terrorism and the mass media 90

9 Moral responsibilities and political realities 98

10 The ethics of power 113

11 The politics of prejudice 125

12 In defense of freedom 136

13 The limits of reason 157

Notes 176
Key works 185
Index 187

Introduction

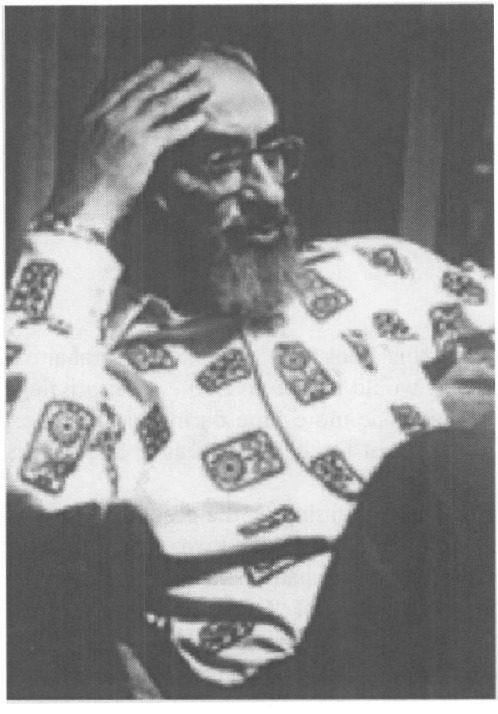
Gabriel Weimann

By the time I started working on this book, my co-author, Abraham (Abe) Kaplan, sadly, was no longer alive. I would not be given the great privilege and opportunity of collaborating with him one more time during his lifetime. This book is therefore a tribute to Abe, a great teacher, a colleague and a treasured friend.

The first time I saw Abe Kaplan, he was sitting on the desk, in the classroom at my university (University of Haifa, Israel, in 1972). I was then a fresh graduate student and he was the new professor who had just arrived from the United States crowned with the *Time* magazine's title of "One of the top ten professors in the USA."[1] We entered the class and he was there, sitting on the desk, his long legs in purple pants folded under him, wearing golden chains under his long white beard. He started teaching us in what he believed was Hebrew but was in fact a mixture of Yiddish, English and some Biblical Hebrew. His lectures in the course "Methods of Social Inquiry" were thoroughly unstructured and free-floating, following Abe's mind, current events and students' questions. While he lost some of the students, others including me were mesmerized by the richness of his knowledge, by the breadth of his intellectual sources and by his brilliance. Some years later I joined his department at the university, I became his colleague and then neighbor and friend. And then, suddenly, this great man passed away.

Some years after his death, his wife, Iona, knocked on our door. Dr. Iona Kaplan, a child psychologist, lived with us in the same apartment building on the slope of Mount Carmel, Haifa, Israel, overlooking the blue Mediterranean. She came to us at night, carrying a pile of yellowish papers, printed on an old typewriter. "These are some texts Abe wrote," she said, "I think you might find them interesting since they deal with terrorism." The texts were Abe at his best. Drawing from so many intellectual sources, combining so many disciplines, bridging art and politics, terrorism and philosophy, violence and ethics – it was the unique, ingenious and inspiring way of Kaplan.

I worked on the text for over two years. It needed updating, referencing, checking citations, adding material and more. Very often I found myself trying to "think like Abe," guessing what he meant in a broken sentence or in a missing paragraph. And then I added some of my own work, omitted some outdated texts and inserted new material, trying all the time to consult with my late co-author.



Professor Abraham (Abe) Kaplan

Terrorism is often perceived as sheer madness, an unreasonable use of extreme violence and senseless, futile political action. These assertions are challenged by the present book. The book combines philosophical thought on reason and unreason in politics and terrorism with empirical explorations of post-modern terrorism and its use of communication platforms. To do so, political extremism and terrorism are examined by concepts such as reason, emotions, madness, magic, morality, absolutism, psychopathology, rationality and others. The analysis is rooted in theories and concepts derived from history, philosophy, religion, art, sociology, psychology, communication and political science, using interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary dimensions on a scale currently unavailable in textbooks on terrorism or political action.

The first chapter highlights the use psychopathology to study political behavior, psychological needs in the service of political interests, absolutism in political discourse, and the magic of symbols and unreason in extreme politics. A key concept presented in this chapter is *subjectivism*: madness itself has been construed as no more than a subjective category. The subjectivist position is that each society is free to define madness as it chooses since there is no objective criterion of sanity. "The age of madness" is often related to the

growing threat of modern terrorism. Madness and political fundamentalism are often used to explain the terrorist state of mind. Modern terrorism may seem particularly senseless, with chains of command often unclear, factions often bewilderingly numerous, and violence often inflicted on civilians. It is easier to conclude that such violence is essentially chaotic and mindless. However, as this chapter concludes, terrorism should be regarded as a rational kind of madness. A more sophisticated understanding of contemporary terrorism looks at the role of this "irrational" violence in a complicated array of political processes. Terror, to paraphrase von Clausewitz, may be a continuation of rational thinking by other means.

The second chapter examines the problems of applying science and values when analyzing politics, especially extreme politics and political violence. Thus, it highlights issues such as values and knowledge in political science, the objective relativism of pragmatic value theory, the misconception of objectivity and how we can validate our findings in political science. The power of values in political thought is demonstrated in the struggle for semantic power: terrorists, for example, may call themselves "freedom fighters" and often enjoy positive labels used by the media such as "liberators," "people's army" or "national front." Recognition of the human dimension of political action does not make the act of knowing subjective, but just the opposite. As this chapter concludes, there is nothing unreasonable in studying irrationality; reason may demand it. In the same vein, Chapter 3 examines the impact of behavioral sciences on the law and changing social policies on "preventive politics." It also describes the contribution of social sciences to decision-making and understanding hidden agendas in politics, suggesting how law can be a beneficiary of behavioral sciences (e.g., in the domains of capital punishment or obscenity).

Historical interpretation, the subject of Chapter 4, is another source of understanding politics, extremism and terrorism. This chapter examines history as a discipline and the problems associated with forms of historical analysis (e.g., narrative as giving significance to past events, historical laws as distinct from laws of behavioral science, purposive interpretation of historical events, speculative philosophies of history and the role of imagination in understanding history and the limits of historical account). Chapter 5 leads us to the domain of political protest. It examines the causes of protest, forms of political protest, civil disobedience and political resistance, and the roads from protest to action, to revolution and to terrorism. Chapter 6 explores political violence and its causes, the glorification of violence, terrorism as a political label, the characteristics of guerrilla warfare and terror, and the distinction between terror's targets and victims. The justifications for using terrorism lead our discussion to the moral assessment of terrorism. What are the moral principles by which such an assessment can be made? The notion of audiences, highlighted in this chapter, is related to our discussion in Chapter 8 (on mass-mediated terrorism), since in terrorist events the victim is destroyed (or threatened), the target is terrorized and the audience is impressed. Producing the impression is a major aim of the act of terror and it relies on the use of modern media.

From the beginning, terrorism has carried a major psychological element: the word "terror" comes from the Latin "terrere," meaning "to frighten" or "to scare." In Chapter 7 we examine the psychological impact of terrorism, psychological causes of terrorism, personal motives of terrorists, terrorists and the repudiation of individuality, and terrorism and the magic of violence. If psychology can be used to explain terrorism, how can psychology be used to counter terrorism and lessen its impact? Since most terrorist events are "mediated" to huge audiences by the modern mass media, Chapter 8 explores the use of theatrical production and performance for conceptualizing modern terror. The chapter argues that "Terrorism is aimed at the people watching, not at the actual victims. Terrorism is a theater." We look at terrorist campaigns, media-wise terrorists, and the use of the Internet platforms by terrorists (including websites, chatrooms, online virtual communities using Facebook, YouTube, MySpace, Twitter and more). The notion of "media events" is discussed in this chapter since some terrorist events may have attributes of media events and exert similar effects on the audience, the actors and the institutions of society (e.g., the 9/11 attacks). As shown, terrorist media events share many of the attributes of the "classic" varieties of media events, but also constitute a distinct category of media event (the "coercive" type).

In Chapter 9 we examine the issue of responsibilities in politics, raising the questions of the locus of responsibility, responsibility in aristocracy and in democracy, division of responsibilities in democracy, deflecting responsibility, and responsibility in terrorism. The chapter suggests basic propositions about responsibility: the axiom of differences; the axiom of realism; the axiom of objectivity; and the axiom of factuality. Chapter 10 starts with a discussion on the widespread contempt for politicians and the reasons for that contempt, and continues by looking at politics and amorality and the politicization of morality. Questions examined in this chapter are: what are the recipes for morality in the political arena? And how true is the convention "power corrupts?"

Modern terrorism is often motivated and fueled by social and political discrimination and prejudicial attitudes. Chapter 11 examines prejudicial attitudes, the roots of prejudice and rationalizations of prejudice. It discusses "closed nationalism" and "open nationalism," pluralism and false ecumenism, the confusion between modernization and Westernization, forms of victimization by prejudice, and prejudicial stereotypes and realism. Terrorism and violent political actions are threatening not only to lives and normality; they may provoke countermeasures that, in turn, may carry heavy prices in terms of liberty, democracy and freedom. In Chapter 12 we discuss misconceptions of freedom, freedom and determinism, the prices of human freedom, and distinguishing freedom from liberty. Then this chapter describes the circumstances when liberties are threatened, constitutionalism of liberties, and concludes with the issues of the constraints of freedom of speech and the dangers democracy faces from such measures. However, freedom is not absolute, and Chapter 13 is an attempt to suggest various options for rational decision-making in politics. Rational thought involves, as this chapter explains, disciplines like statistics, theory of probability,

theory of games, utility theory, decision theory, and the like. It explores the shortcomings of statistical probability when applied to rational decision-making and concludes that rationality rests on a real magnitude which we can seldom claim to be able to measure with any exactitude. It is possible for reasonable people to disagree with one another. Indeed, the failure to recognize this possibility is a conspicuous mark of irrationality. Perhaps it is this more than anything else that makes our time the age of madness.

This book starts with madness and ends with rationality, attempting to suggest solutions to challenges such as political extremism, terrorism and madness. As the book's last chapter concludes, today reason is stifled, or else transmogrified, by rampant orthodoxies which understand only the language of power. The irrationality of reactionary fanaticism and mindless terror should not lead us to despair and passivity. If we are tired of waking every day to new problems, imposing the daily responsibility of finding new solutions, we are tired of life itself.

1 The age of madness

At a time like this, says a character of modern drama,

> reason staggers through the streets with its head to the ground and its legs in the air. Gradually we've got into a state when it's no longer possible to tell the true from the false, the dark from the light, the sun from the moon. And so common sense is taken for madness.[1]

Madness, in turn, is being taken for common sense.

These are prophetic lines, written a few months before the end of the nineteenth century by a precursor of the theater of the absurd (Georges Courteline, in *The Commissioner*). The theme had been announced some thirty years earlier in Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, which includes a scene in a madhouse whose inmates have taken over, locking in their keepers. "Reason died last night at eleven o'clock," says the director of the asylum. "People who've all been mad as loons became quite sane last night at eleven conforming to Reason's latest phase. And from this standpoint, it's even more clear that, at that identical hour, the so-called sane lost their faculties." Nowadays the theater of the absurd is scarcely distinguishable from realistic drama; we waken into nightmares. When reason does find a voice today, it often articulates not rationality but rationalizations, uttered on behalf of propagandists, terrorists, zealots and fanatics. Our time has been called, in contemporary book titles, the age of post-modernity, of the giant corporations and of the masses; the age of complexity, of transition and of discontinuity; the age of anxiety, of insecurity and of uncertainty; the age of suspicion, of controversy and of crisis. Most comprehensively, it is the Age of Madness.

Reason cautions that we may be condemning as mad only what we do not understand or what we dislike. The new world is usually absurd in the eyes of the old. A time of rapid change continually confronts the older generation with absurdities that the younger generation finds quite sensible. But change is not always the attainment of new values and new truths; there is, after all, such a thing as decadence and decay. The histories of both science and art provide many instances of misunderstood and unappreciated creativity. In both science and art, however, radical departures are less often the works of genius than the products of cranks, fools, scoundrels or madmen. In politics, genius is even rarer

than it is in science or art. Reason also warns that the charge of madness may be no more than name-calling. This is a proverbial political tactic: "give a dog a bad name and hang him." Mental deterioration caused by unmentionable disease has been attributed not only to dictators like Adolf Hitler and Uganda's Idi Amin, but also to democratic leaders like Franklin Roosevelt and Menachem Begin. The politics of unreason, however, deserves the bad name given to it.

Men seldom live as reason dictates, said Spinoza, and Schopenhauer lamented that at all times fools have been the immense majority. The predicament of the present is defined by irrationalities beyond mere folly. We are increasingly at the mercy of criminals, fanatics and crazies, and it is increasingly difficult to distinguish which is which. The need of the day is not only for wisdom and prudence but for simple sanity. The sin that crouches at the door looks in upon us with the glittering eyes of madness. Theodore Roosevelt spoke of the lunatic fringe to be found in all reform movements. That is, tautologically, only a fringe phenomenon. Today, lunacy has been woven into the fabric of political life. Decisions are coolly made and executed which outrage reason. It is said that the Israeli Prime Minister Ben Gurion practiced yoga, spending fifteen minutes each day standing on his head, so that he could view Middle-Eastern politics in proper perspective. Nowadays, it seems, even that would not help.

Countless analysts have pointed to the pathologies at work in racism, anti-Semitism and other forms of the politics of hate. That personal needs may find expression in the political arena has been increasingly recognized. The displacement of private affects onto public objects has become a matter of serious interest to political scientists, an interest expressed in such seminal books as Harold Lasswell's *Psychopathology and Politics*[2] and *World Politics and Personal Insecurity*,[3] as well as Erich Fromm's *Escape from Freedom*,[4] Erik Erikson's *Gandhi's Truth*[5] and others. Psychohistory is now a recognized academic discipline. A professional association and a journal devoted to political psychology were founded.[6] Psychological categories are as relevant to political behavior as they are to any other forms of conduct.

The madness of our time is in part a response to the quandaries with which our time confronts us. In a paper on psychopathic characters on the stage, Freud quotes from an unnamed German author, "He who does not lose his reason under certain provocations has no reason to lose." Today we are given provocation enough. Folk humor, parodying Kipling, concludes that if you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs, you just don't know what's going on.

One of the roots of psychopathology is the feeling of helplessness in the presence of great danger. The modern poet Alfred Housman, asks, "And how am I to face the odds of man's bedevilment and God's? I, a stranger and afraid in a world I never made."[7] Irrationality is one way of facing the odds. The method in madness is to replace the unbearable real world by another world of our own making, one remolded nearer to the heart's desire, with the odds all in our favor. The retreat into the psyche may represent a familiar failure of nerve in the face of an unnerving world. Madness allies itself with the unreason that makes the