



John Locke Global Essay Prize 2025 Prompts Breakdown
Philosophy Category - Recommended Readings



Philosophy Q3

"When civilians are the main target, there's no need to consider the cause. That's terrorism; it's evil." Is this correct?

Recommended Readings

Classical and Enlightenment Perspectives

1. John Locke - "Second Treatise of Government" (1689)

Argues legitimate political power cannot include arbitrary power to harm citizens

Maintains that natural rights (life, liberty, property) cannot be violated even for political ends

While defending right to revolution against tyranny, suggests resistance must respect fundamental rights

Would condemn civilian targeting as violating the natural law that governs even pre-political society

Key insight: Political actions must respect fundamental natural rights regardless of cause

2. Thomas Hobbes - "Leviathan" (1651)

Views sovereign's primary duty as protecting citizens from harm and violent death

Considers indiscriminate violence a return to the chaotic "state of nature"

Would condemn targeting civilians as undermining social order and the sovereignty contract

Key insight: Security of civilians is the fundamental purpose of political society

3. Immanuel Kant - "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals" (1785)

Categorical imperative prohibits using persons merely as means to ends

Targeting civilians treats them purely instrumentally, violating human dignity

Rejects consequentialist justifications for immoral acts

Key insight: Good ends cannot justify evil means; human dignity is inviolable



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4. Just War Theory - Augustine and Thomas Aquinas

Establishes principle of non-combatant immunity

Requires proportionality and discrimination in use of force

Distinguishes between jus ad bellum (just cause) and jus in bello (just methods)

Key insight: Even justified wars must follow moral rules about civilian protection

5. Hannah Arendt - "On Violence" (1970) and "Eichmann in Jerusalem" (1963)

Distinguishes between power (legitimate) and violence (destructive)

Examines how violence ultimately undermines political objectives

Analyzes "banality of evil" when violence becomes bureaucratized

Key insight: Violence against civilians destroys the political realm rather than creates it

6. Frantz Fanon - "The Wretched of the Earth" (1961)

Examines colonial violence and resistance in liberation movements

Discusses psychological trauma that leads to violent resistance

While supporting liberation, doesn't endorse all tactical approaches

Key insight: Structural violence precedes and contextualizes terrorist acts

Contemporary Sources

1. Michael Walzer - "Just and Unjust Wars" (1977)

Maintains strict separation between justice of cause and justice in conduct

Argues civilian immunity is fundamental to war ethics

Introduces controversial "supreme emergency" exemption for existential threats



Key insight: Targeting civilians violates war convention regardless of cause, with possible extreme exceptions

2. Jean Bethke Elshtain - "Just War Against Terror" (2003)

Applies just war principles to terrorism evaluation

Argues civilians must never be deliberately targeted

Examines how religious justifications for terrorism fail

Key insight: Terrorism fundamentally violates just war principles

3. Igor Primoratz - "Terrorism: A Philosophical Investigation" (2013)

Defines terrorism specifically as targeting non-combatants for political purposes

Rejects consequentialist justifications for terrorism

Evaluates different definitions of terrorism

Key insight: Targeting civilians for intimidation is the defining feature of terrorism

4. Virginia Held - "How Terrorism is Wrong" (2008)

Provides feminist critique of both terrorism and counterterrorism

Examines care ethics in relation to political violence

Considers how gendered perspectives influence terrorism discourse

Key insight: Violence against civilians violates fundamentals of care and relationship

5. C.A.J. Coady - "Morality and Political Violence" (2008)

Distinguishes between various forms of political violence

Examines whether terrorism is distinctively wrong compared to other violence

Questions conventional moral asymmetries between state and non-state violence

Key insight: Civilian targeting is wrong but definitions of terrorism often politically selective



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6. Uwe Steinhoff - "On the Ethics of War and Terrorism" (2007)

Challenges conventional moral asymmetry between state and non-state violence

Questions whether terrorism is always worse than conventional warfare

Examines how "civilian" status is defined and applied in conflicts

Key insight: Moral evaluation should apply consistently to both state and non-state actors

7. Ted Honderich - "After the Terror" (2002)

Examines root causes that lead to terrorist activities

Questions whether Western policies create conditions for terrorism

Does not justify terrorism but complicates moral evaluation

Key insight: Understanding causes doesn't justify methods but is necessary for full analysis

8. Noam Chomsky - "9-11" (2001) and "Pirates and Emperors" (1986)

Critiques how terrorism is defined to exclude state violence

Examines double standards in terrorism discourse

Argues state terrorism often exceeds non-state terrorism in scale

Key insight: Definition of terrorism often applied selectively based on power relations

9. David Rodin - "War and Self-Defense" (2002)

Analyzes when collective violence can be justified through self-defense

Questions whether non-state actors can claim right to use violence

Examines relationship between individual and collective rights

Key insight: Self-defense has moral limits that prohibit targeting uninvolved parties

10. Jeff McMahan - "Killing in War" (2009)

Challenges traditional separation between jus ad bellum and jus in bello



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Argues moral status of combatants depends partly on justice of their cause

Maintains stronger constraints against harming civilians than combatants

Key insight: Justice of cause does affect moral evaluation but doesn't justify civilian targeting

11. UN Security Council Resolution 1566 (2004)

Defines terrorism as criminal acts against civilians to intimidate or compel

Declares such acts "unjustifiable regardless of political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious considerations"

Provides international legal framework for prohibition

Key insight: International consensus holds civilian targeting cannot be justified by cause

12. Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols (1949/1977)

Establishes legal protection for civilians in armed conflict

Prohibits making civilians the object of attack in all circumstances

Distinguishes between combatants and non-combatants

Key insight: International humanitarian law considers civilian targeting illegal regardless of context