



Animal Rights and Environmental Terrorism

by Steve Cooke

Abstract

Many paradigmatic forms of animal rights and environmental activism have been classed as terrorism both in popular discourse and in law. This paper argues that the labelling of many violent forms of direct action carried out in the name of animal rights or environmentalism as 'terrorism' is incorrect. Furthermore, the claim is also made that even those acts which are correctly termed as terrorism are not necessarily wrongful acts. The result of this analysis is to call into question the terms of public debate and the legitimacy of anti-terrorism laws targeting and punishing radical activism.

Key words: *terrorism, eco-terrorism, animal rights, environmental activism, direct action, animal rights and environmental extremism, single-issue terrorism*

In public discourse and in positive law many forms of illegal animal rights and environmental activism have come to be labelled as terrorism. However, analysis of the concept of terrorism, and of the actions of animal and environmental activists, reveals this to be in large part an error. Although there is a great deal of conceptual wrangling over the correct application of the term terrorism, it is often defined either in terms of the intentions of terrorist agents or by reference to the moral status of the victims of terrorist acts. I refer to these two conceptions of terrorism as the non-moralised and moralised accounts of terrorism respectively. Non-moralised accounts tend to focus on the intentions of agents carrying out violent acts to strike fear as a strategy for provoking political change. To establish that an act is terrorism does not require that one make an *a priori* judgement about the morality of those acts. Moralised conceptions, on the other hand, include the innocence of its victims as part of the definition of terrorism. Under both moralised and non-moralised conceptions of terrorism, most violent and illegal acts carried-out in the name of non-human animals or the environment should not be labelled as terrorism. The reason for this is that under the non-moralised account most illegal acts carried out by animal and environmental activists carry the wrong intentions to be classed as terrorism. And, under the moralised account, the innocence of the objects of so-called terrorist acts can be shown to be questionable. These conclusions challenge orthodox views of animal rights and environmental 'terrorism'. They also call into question the legitimacy of laws which target animal rights and environmental activism, particularly those which classify violent activism as terrorism,[1] and they should cause us to think again about the terms of public and political discourse. Beyond that, the conclusions also force us to reconsider whether violent animal rights and environmental activism can be classed as morally wrong as a class of acts.



In the United States the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act covers any intentional damage or interference with the operations of an animal enterprise regardless of whether those acts carry a political motivation or an intention to cause terror.(U.S. Government Printing Office, 2005) Similarly, the UK government (Travis, 2005), and the European Law Enforcement Agency, Europol (Europol, 2011a), all apply expansive classifications of terrorism which can include acts unmotivated by the first-order desire for political change or any terror-causing intent. The ascription of the term ‘terrorism’ to a wide variety of criminal acts carried out by animal rights and environmental activists is repeated in the rhetoric of state officials.(cf. Lewis, 2005, 2004) Meanwhile, media coverage of animal rights and environmental activists regularly portrays them as terrorists, emphasising the use of violence and failing to distinguish between different classes of acts and the intentions behind them.[2] Such mistakes are also repeated in the academic literature on terrorism where we see the conflation of a spectrum of illegal activities with terrorism, particularly where those activities involve violence against property or person. (cf. Hirschmann, 2000; Humphrey and Stears, 2006; Monaghan, 1999; Vanderheiden, 2005) For example, Kai Hirschmann, in a section devoted to AR and eco-terrorism, does not move beyond labelling ‘resort to threats, violence and destruction’ as terrorism, including a variety of ‘extremist tactics’ under the rubric of terrorism.(Hirschmann, 2000, p. 302) Similarly, Rachel Monaghan makes the sufficient conditions for classifying an act as terrorism overly broad by making philosophical convictions synonymous with political motives. She writes: “the activities of those groups willing to use violence against property and persons in the pursuit of animal rights can be viewed as a campaign incorporating the core characteristics of ‘terrorism’...those activists...can be seen to possess a political motive, namely a philosophical conviction that animals have rights”.(Monaghan, 1999, p. 166) As I go on to show, the conviction that non-human animals have rights can motivate violent acts carrying a variety of intentions and not necessarily including an overriding intention to bring political change. The problems identified so far in the orthodox understanding of animal rights and environmental ‘terrorism’ can be addressed by looking at the necessary and sufficient conditions of *terrorism* and establishing whether they are present in various types of activism. This latter aim is aided by a clear taxonomy of different classes of activism.

Non-moralised conceptions of terrorism, as I have outlined, usually describe terrorism in terms of the intentions of the putative terrorist to achieve political goals using intimidation and coercion through violence or its threat. In many cases the threat or use of violence is intended to influence a far wider community than merely the direct objects of that violence by making them fearful of the negative consequences of non-acquiescence to terrorist demands.[3] This broad definition allows us to distinguish between terrorists and terrorism, contains the paradigmatic features of terrorism found in ordinary language usage, and puts clear conceptual water between terrorism and other forms of political and non-political violence.(Anne Schwenkenbecher, 2012) The moralised conception of terrorism differs only in that the object of violence, threat, or fear is innocent.

The first consequence of applying the definition above to the case of animal and environmental activism is that it rules out non-violent acts from classification as terrorism. Many forms of activism, whilst illegal, do not at the same time involve real or intended violence. Following Bufacchi, I define violence as something which infringes upon the integrity of a thing or being.



That is, violence takes away something from its object ‘shattering the pre-existing psychological and/or physical unity that was in place before the violence took place’(Bufacchi, 2007). Violence thus applies to physical and psychological attacks directed at both property and living beings, and is distinguished from other senses of the term, such as that used when describing forceful acts like violently slamming a door or a violent verbal outburst. Bufacchi’s conception of violence has the benefit of cohering well with the sense usually meant in the context of terrorism and excluding inappropriate ordinary language usage of the term.

Illegal animal rights and environmental activism takes many forms. They include such acts as arson, splashing of paint on fur clothing, vandalism, graffiti, contaminating products, disrupting phone and email communications and hacking websites, assault, threats of violence, trespass, theft, causing nuisance, marches and protest gatherings, spiking trees,[4] sabotage of equipment, obstruction and picketing, and the public dissemination of private data. In one infamous UK case, the remains of the deceased grandmother of a farm owner who bred guinea pigs for supply to laboratories were stolen by activists.(Britten, n.d.) Each of these kinds of acts can be classified according to the intentions, their objects, and the methods used in them into the following taxonomy of radical activism: sabotage, civil disobedience, rescue, and terrorism.[5] The four taxa differ significantly and in ways which exclude most violent acts from being correctly categorised as terrorism. Each is outlined below.

Sabotage involves damage to property intended to prevent, hinder, and disrupt practices that harm non-human animals or damage the environment. Examples include those acts described in Edward Abbey’s novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. In *The Monkey Wrench Gang* the book’s protagonists damage construction vehicles, move survey stakes, and destroy equipment in order to prevent the building of an environmentally damaging dam.(Abbey, 2004) Whilst these kinds of acts may be violent in the sense that property damage infringes upon the integrity of a thing, the intention behind them is the prevention of wider harms or damage deemed more significant than that caused. Sabotage is directly aimed at its object; there is no indirect target or associated communicative aspect, and nor is there any intention to strike fear for the purpose of bringing about political change. Lacking an intention to cause terror and so change beliefs or policies, acts of sabotage intended to prevent particular wrongs should not be thought of as terrorism.

One problem revealed by beginning the taxonomy is that it relies upon knowing the intentions of activists. In the non-ideal world it is very often possible to infer or know the intentions behind the actions of animal rights and environmental activists not only because the actions speak for themselves, but also because activists issue statements explaining their reasons for action. Furthermore, many of activist groups are structured in line with their intentions, so that groups like the Animal Liberation Front operate clandestinely and according to a cell-structure, whereas those like the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society operate transparently. Thus, it is possible to go some way towards inferring intentions from an organisation's structure and historical approach to achieving their aims. Nevertheless, there remains a distinct possibility that third party observers will not know with certainty what the intentions behind an act are and so will be forced to rely upon imperfect knowledge in classifying an act. However, I do not think this represents a significant problem for assessing the moral and conceptual status of the forms of activism discussed here.



Unlike sabotage, civilly disobedient acts are conscientious acts intended to bring about political change or express a viewpoint through deliberate breach of law as a means of communicating moral beliefs and strength of conviction.(Brownlee, 2004) Whether one thinks civil disobedience is by definition non-violent or not, it can be distinguished from terrorism by the absence of any intention induce of fear as the means to bring about political change.[6] Many types of animal and environmental activism are aimed at bringing about political change though illegal, communicative means of protest: marches, sit-down protests, the chaining of activists to railings, graffiti, computer hacking, etc., but in each of these cases the intention is to highlight perceived injustice and communicate strength of conviction. As such, even if we do not exclude violent acts from the definition of civil disobedience these kinds of communicative acts should still not be defined as terrorist.

The communicative aspect of civil disobedience may serve to distinguish civilly disobedient acts from sabotage, rescue, and terrorism in more than purely conceptual terms. Forms of civil disobedience may also express aspects of particular social movements which differentiate them from clandestine forms of radical activism. Although taking this fact into account does not help with conceptualising terrorism, since terrorist acts are not defined by the doctrines or dispositions of the actors performing them, it may nevertheless provide clues as to the intentions of agents and so assist with addressing the epistemic problem discussed above. Having made this point, it would be a mistake to think that acts of rescue and sabotage never carry a communicative aspect with them; activists often film their activities and issue statements in order to make a wider political point. However, when they do so the communicative act should be thought of as secondary to the primary intention of harm prevention.

Along the same lines as sabotage; rescue acts carried out to free animals from laboratories or farms, or obstructive acts intended to prevent environmental damage,[7] have harm prevention as the intention behind them. When activists rescue puppies from vivisection it is not their intention to do so as a means of communicating their convictions or changing beliefs, but for the sake of the individual animal that they rescue. Similarly, when groups such as the charity Sea Shepherd Conservation Society disrupt whaling activities, it is in order to conserve endangered species and not as a means of communicating conviction, striking terror, or affecting political change. Nor is it the case that rescue acts need involve violence of any sort to achieve success. Labelling acts that not only may not be violent, but have harm prevention as their central aim as terrorist acts would constitute a perverse stretching of the concept of terrorism.

One potential response to some of the claims above might be to suggest that what matters is whether illegal violent acts have the consequence of spreading fear or terror regardless of whether that fear was intended as part of the act. So, even if care is taken to avoid harm to persons during an act of sabotage, one might still expect certain kinds of act to generate fear regardless of the intention behind them. For example, when in 2001 members of the Earth Liberation Front burned down the offices of the Superior Logging company in Glendale, Oregon USA, they did so taking care not to cause any harm to humans in the process.(Curry and Cullman, 2011) Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that, even if activists took care to avoid harm to persons and carried out the act with the sole intention of preventing logging, those faced with the threat of arson would have



become fearful as a result. Similarly, when the Earth Liberation Front spiked trees in the Robinson-Scott timber harvest site in Oregon in 1997, they placed the spikes high to prevent loggers hitting them and marked trees to identify them as spiked to loggers. Such actions warn loggers that it is dangerous to harvest a tree and reduce their economic value, (Coombs, 2008) but there is no direct intention to cause bodily harm – indeed, clear steps are taken to avoid it. However, given that an earlier tree-spiking in 1987 is believed to have resulted in the accidental serious injury of a mill worker when his saw hit the spike and shattered, one might reasonably think such activities likely to spread fear as a side effect. (Bari, 1994, p. 264–270) Indeed, this is true even though some investigations have pointed the finger at poor safety measures at the mill site where the injury occurred rather than the spike itself; the belief that tree-spiking was the cause of the injury, even if that belief is false or out of proportion to the real risk, means that any acts of tree-spiking following the incident are still likely to cause fear.

The problem with classifying acts which generate unintended fear as terrorism is that it makes the correct ascription of the term *terrorism* dependent upon the emotional response of the object of an act. If two people were the victims of an otherwise identical act, and one felt no fear, whilst the other became fearful, then we would be forced to conclude that the first action was not terrorism but the second one was. Furthermore, even if both acts were intended to cause fear through violence, we would find ourselves in the strange position of declaring that the one that failed to terrify its victim was not terrorism. This same rule would have to apply to acts intended to be terrorism, but which somehow failed, or succeeded but were mistakenly attributed to natural or accidental causes. Such a conception of terrorism would be unable to match ordinary language usage or our intuitions about terrorism. What is more, acts such as making a horror film, which terrify as a matter of intention but are not at the same time meant to bring political change as a result, would also have to be classified as terrorism. Definitions of terrorism that rely upon the emotional effect of the victim, and do not make reference to the intentions of the subject of an act are, as we can see, highly problematic. Nevertheless, the determined critic might reply that acts that use violence as a means of bringing political change, and that can reasonably be expected to cause fear in most people as an unintended side effect should be considered terrorism. This approach would deal with the problem of the particularly brave victim above by relying upon a probability-based impartial assessment. Such a definition might exclude tree-spiking and arson as a means of sabotage from the definition because they are not motivated by the desire for political change, but it would make civil disobedience involving property damage, and that made onlookers fearful, into terrorism.

However, such a conception of terrorism continues to carry undesirable consequences with it. For one thing, it would make all soldiers fighting in wars into terrorists. After all, it is reasonable to think that soldiers shooting at one another strike fear, and that they fight for a political cause using violence as their means. To escape this problem requires making implausible claims such as that armed agents of the state cannot be terrorists, or that soldiers cannot commit terrorist acts against one another. Rather than adopting these kinds of implausible conceptions of terrorism and relying on *ad hoc* modifications to address the problems they throw up, it may be better to consider the Doctrine of Double Effect when assessing the status of an act. Thus, if a putative act of environmental or animal rights terrorism causes foreseeable terror in its victims or the wider public,

but this terror is an unintended although known consequence of the act, we should classify the act according to its primary intentions rather than its expected or actual consequences.(cf. Hadley, 2009)

As we can see, many paradigmatic forms of animal and environmental ‘extremism’, of the sorts carried out by groups such as the Earth Liberation Front, Earth First, the Animal Liberation Front, and Justice Department, do not fall within the definition of terrorism. This is because they carry the wrong intentions, or they lack other essential features of terrorism such as a communicative aspect or the use of violence and terror. Nevertheless, there remain a range of activities which can potentially be classed as animal rights or environmental terrorism. Threats of kidnap or violence, intimidating protests outside of laboratory workers’ homes, contamination of products, arson attacks, car bombs etc., could all be intended as a form of fear-inducing coercive technique involving violence and aimed at bringing political and behavioural change. For example, in 2010 there were 24 arson attacks using incendiary or explosive devices connected with animal and environmental groups in the EU.[8] Animal rights groups also used blackmail, sent messages to workers connected with animal research threatening their person, families, and property ((Europol, 2011b)). In 2007 the Animal Rights Militia claimed to have contaminated Salvon antiseptic ((Batty, 2007)), and in 1997 the Animal Liberation Front plotted to contaminate Lucozade drinks ((Eichel, 1991)). In what follows, I demonstrate that under a moralised conception of terrorism, where the victims of terrorist acts are considered innocent by definition, many if not most of these acts should not be considered as terrorism. As an up-shot of this it turns out that there is also a substantial justification for animal and environmental terrorism under a non-moralised account. This is because there are reasons to question the innocence of victims of animal rights and environmental activism connected with their blameworthiness and complicity in harming others.

Moralised conceptions of terrorism include judgements about the victims of terrorist acts. These conceptions define terrorism as acts of the sort described by the non-moralised account, but carried out against innocent targets.(Coady, 1985; Narveson, 1991; Primoratz, 1990; Rodin, 2004; Walzer, 2006) Under the moralised conception, the victims of terrorist acts are innocent because they pose no threat, are non-combatants, or because they do not participate in violence.(Anne Schwenkenbecher, 2012) Because they are innocent, agents are rendered immune from attack. For animal rights and environmental activism to be a form of terrorism it would therefore have to be established that the targets of their threats and violence are innocent. In the case of animal rights extremism, it is certainly true that those targeted pose no threat to activists. However, it is not the case that the innocence of victims of terrorism is established by whether they pose a direct threat to the terrorist themselves, but rather whether they pose a threat to someone or some group the terrorist claims to represent. To say than agent is lacks innocence in the sense above is to say that the agent is morally responsible for wrongdoing. Thus, the animal rights activist can claim that those who harm animals in certain practices are not only acting wrongly but are doing so as moral agents with knowledge of the consequences and the ability to have acted otherwise than they did. Under this standard definition of moral responsibility, an agent who performs a wrongful act is deserving of blame for their actions and liable, *ceteris paribus*, to loss of certain immunities. Whether those immunities include physical harm is discussed below.



Whilst much of the analysis of radical activism under the non-moralised conception of terrorism was focused on the intentions of agents, in the case of moralised conceptions it hinges on potential justifications offered. In some ways this restricts the scope of this latter half of the paper for, whilst it may be relatively straightforward to infer motivations and intentions for paradigm animal rights and environmental ‘extremism,’ the justifications offered by activists are necessarily complex, varied, and dependent on agents’ background political and comprehensive doctrines. For this reason, the arguments in this section of the paper are restricted to the ideal. Instead, I consider whether putative acts of terrorism a) are terrorism at all and, b) whether they can be justified if the argument for animal rights is sound. One complaint might be that this approach has the weakness of not addressing the praxis of radical activists. However, in response I would make the point that asking whether, and under what circumstances, an act might be justified can be as valuable (if not moreso) than asking whether the justifications offered for specific acts are good ones. At the very least this approach creates a standard against which real-world justifications can be measured. Furthermore, it has the added advantage of making the defence of so-called animal rights or eco-terrorism free-standing from any argument for greater moral consideration for non-human animals or the environment.

Presumably, the case for labelling animal rights activists ‘terrorists’ hinges on the assumption that the targets of potential terrorism pose no threat to human beings. But why should it just be the case that only harms or threats to humans count for the purpose of establishing innocence? We would not consider a person who cruelly kicks a dog for pleasure to be innocent? Indeed, it is likely that we think the dog kicker to be non-innocent because the harms done to the dog are bad for the sake of the dog itself, and not because they illustrate poor character or make the dog-kicker more likely to harm humans. (For a fuller discussion on this issue see Cooke, 2011) The animal rights activist acts on the basis that non-human animals, like humans, have moral rights that place constraints on what it is permissible to do to them in the name of promoting some good. If the argument for animal rights is sound,[9] then those who violate their rights are not innocent and can, in some circumstances, be said to have forfeited their own right to immunity from attack. It is therefore open to activists to challenge the innocence of their targets by reference to their direct blameworthiness or complicity in harms done to non-human animals.[10] In the case of the dog-kicker the loss of immunity to attack springs from the right of a third party to intervene to protect an innocent from urgent and imminent threat. In other cases – where such a threat is not urgent or imminent – the apt response to a rights violation is likely to be quite different. In such cases the literature on just war theory is more relevant than that on self- or other-defence.

The targets of animal rights activism are governments, private individuals (such as people who wear fur), those who cause harm directly (farmers, scientists, breeders), and those with economic interests in systems of animal abuse: company shareholders, suppliers, employees, directors and owners. In each of these cases, a causal link can be established between harms done and the targets of activism. Nevertheless, it is inevitable that ostensibly innocent people will have (or have had) their interests or property harmed by activism. The permissibility of causing harms to these people may be strengthened if complicity in harms to non-human animals can be shown. Comparing the number of people who are vegan or vegetarian (or even conscientious omnivores) to those happy to



consume animal products and enjoy the benefits of animal research, and inferring from the present state of animal protection legislation, indicates that most people approve of harmful, but legal, practices towards non-human animals. Furthermore, they regularly contribute money to receive those benefits and resist proposals for radical change. The numbers of potentially illegitimate victims of harms caused by activism in protest against harms to non-human animals could thus be fairly low, and the majority or targets can be shown to be responsible to some degree for the harms protested against.[11] However, in the case of environmental activism it is hard to see how those who cause ecological damage can be considered to be harming the environment in the morally relevant sense contained within definitions of terrorism. We might think of terrorist actions as carrying justifications couched in terms of rights violations, and whilst it is possible to construct a case for ascribing rights to non-human animals,[12] it is hard to show that the environment or an ecosystem has interests or is valuable for its own sake in a way that might ground rights. Nevertheless, there might be cases where environmental destruction threatens humans or other animals in some way. Examples could include rising sea levels caused by harmful emissions, which threaten inhabitants of small islands, or the destruction of tribal lands in forest clearance activities. In such cases the environmental activist could point to the indirect threat to others caused by environmental damage and so cast doubt upon the innocence of their targets.

However, there may be a concern that some sensitivity to the degree of complicity held by an individual needs to feature strongly in any consideration in order to prevent the range of targets for terrorist attack from being overly expansive. One might credibly think that merely standing by in the face of injustice, or simply signalling assent to a wrongful act, is insufficient to constitute a forfeiture of rights against bodily or psychological harm. Borrowing from the literatures on just war, self-defence/other-defence, and punishment theory; the strong *prima facie* wrongness of violence requires that perpetrators not only establish liability, but also act in a way that is proportionate. Proportionality, in this case refers not only to whether the level of force is proportionate in the sense that it is the minimum necessary to achieve the desired outcome, but also that it is sensitive to the degree of harm caused, or threat posed, by the target of violence. Making use of such considerations would restrict the strongest forms of violence to those directly engaged in unjust acts. Thus, we might draw an analogy between an unjust war and the treatment of non-human animals. In an unjust war, targets for lethal violence are standardly[13] thought to be combatants and perhaps also those who directly contribute by producing munitions in support of it.(cf. Anscombe, 1961) In the animals case, this would make vivisectionists, farmers, those who work in abattoirs, circus trainers etc. potentially legitimate targets, but would rule out those who merely support harms to animals by voting for particular political parties or enjoying the benefits resulting from those harms. In the environmental case, it would make those who directly pollute or destroy the environment liable to more significant harms than those who merely purchase products created by polluting companies. Additionally, we might ask if those engaged in harmful practices can offer convincing justifications or excuses that would render them non-culpable for their actions. If it is true that non-human animals should be considered rights-bearers, then justifications for rights-violations based on good consequences for humans will be insufficient for this.



One worry here is that the process of establishing liability for harms requires, as in just war theory, that there be a legitimate authority to make judgements of liability. If animals do possess moral rights, then the issue hinges upon whether individual agents are morally permitted to make extra-institutional judgements of liability to harm in cases of non-compliance with the requirements of morality and in the absence of a just legitimate authority. As already discussed, in cases where threats are urgent and immanent, we commonly think that agents are permitted to intervene to prevent harm, but where this is not the case the question remains open. This is a wider question on the limits of duties to bring about a just society and the issue of political violence than the narrow issue of animal rights and ecological protection and cannot be adequately addressed here.

Before concluding, it is worth re-iterating and clarifying the point that the establishment of responsibility for wrong-doing does not lead automatically to the forfeiture of rights against harm. Whether an agent is liable to violence because of wrong-doing depends very-much on features of a particular case. In cases where political reform is the aim the strong *prima facie* case against the use of violence requires that other avenues be exhausted first and that any force used is proportionate and necessary. If we examine the tactics of animal rights and environmental activists, it is clear that they do persistently pursue other, non-violent means of attempting political change. The success of these methods has been limited, and there are reasons to believe that procedural unfairness can make, or has made, democratic channels a dead-end for animal rights activists.(cf. Garner, 1993, p. 230 and 237; Carter, 1998; Nestle, 2007) Furthermore, we can see that the level of force used so far by environmental and animal rights activists has largely been confined to property damage and threat of violence rather than actual violence.

The result of this analysis is not only to show that should we avoid labelling many forms of paradigmatic animal rights and environmental extremism as terrorism, but also to provide a partial justification for them. Of course, many other supporting reasons would need to be given in all things considered justification. Other such factors might include: whether acts are proportionate responses; whether they have a chance of succeeding in their aims; whether the threat they seek to avert is urgent and immanent; whether non-violent methods have been exhausted; and so forth. Thus, whilst the strong *prima facie* case against violent activism or terrorism is maintained, it is not ruled out *a priori*. The importance of reassessing the moral and legal status of the more extreme forms of animal rights and environmental activism is high. The consequences of infelicitous use the terms 'terrorism' or 'terrorist' can be very grave indeed. As John Hadley points out, terrorists face harsher penalties and longer sentences than criminals convicted of comparably violent non-political offences, and in addition such labelling carries de-legitimising stigma for an ideological movement and social censure for its advocates.(Hadley, 2009) When considering our responses to paradigmatic forms of animal rights and environmental extremism care must be taken in how we describe activists and their acts, and in how the law responds to them. To call all violent activism 'terrorism' is not only often incorrect, but can also, given the consequences of doing so, count as a wrong done against those who engage in radical activism.

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Notes

[1] Examples include the decision to classify animal rights and environmental activism as terrorism by the FBI in the USA (“Animal Rights Extremism and Ecoterrorism,” n.d.), the UK government ((Travis, 2005)), and the European law enforcement agency, Europol ((Europol, 2011a)).

[2] For a full discussion the problems associated with mainstream discourses surrounding animal rights activism see (Sorenson, 2009).

[3] (Anne Schwenkenbecher, 2012; J. Angelo Corlett, 2003) Schwenkenbecher considers acts intended to change behaviour or carried out for purely ideological reasons as a subset of intentions to bring about political change. This is because the use of coercion implies that terrorists consider compliance with their demands to be morally required, and sufficient to permit the use of force to punish or ensure compliance. This separates terrorist claims about the status of their demands from supererogatory acts or morally obligatory acts that are not a matter of political morality.

[4] The act of spiking involves hammering a long nail into a tree destined to be cut down. When a logger or millworker’s chain- or band-saw meets the nail the saw breaks with potentially dangerous consequences for the operator.

[5] Although I have separated kinds of activity for conceptual clarity it is clear that some acts will have multiple purposes. A raid on a laboratory to rescue animals might be filmed for the purpose of communicating a moral message, and files might be stolen for the purpose of committing a terrorist act or sabotaging research. Individual cases will need to be assessed according to the different intentions and methods present.

[6] One reason not to separate violent communicative acts of conviction aimed at bringing about political change from non-violent ones is that there doesn’t seem to be any fitting term to describe the former kind of act so as to distinguish it from both non-violent and non-communicative acts. The term ‘direct action’ might be used to describe all types of illegal acts of conviction, but we still need appropriate terms to classify kinds of direct action: sabotage, rescue, civil disobedience etc.

[7] This includes acts such as chaining oneself to a tree to prevent logging, or sit-down protests to prevent road building.

[8] Whilst reports such as those referenced below often fail to distinguish between intentions behind the planting of such devices it is necessary to consider whether they were planted in order to cause damage, strike fear, or communicate conviction before they can be correctly described as terrorist.

[9] For reasons of space and scope I will not present a full defence of animal rights here; see instead: (Cochrane, 2010; DeGrazia, 2002; Donaldson and Kymlicka, 2010; Francione, 2008; Garner, 2002; Regan, 2004; Rowlands, 2002). Whilst this paper sits within a rights-based moral framework, many groups involved in environmental and animal liberationist activities offer non-rights based justifications and ethical frameworks for their actions. See, for example, (Donovan and Adams 2007; Warren 1990; Adams 2010; Bat-Ami Bar On and Ferguson 1998; Callicott 1989; Sessions 1995; Foreman 1991). Many of the arguments I present should also hold, with perhaps minor modifications, if grounded in these alternative approaches.

[10] See, (Hadley, 2009) Consider also that non-human animals, lacking moral agency, could be considered to be a paradigm case of innocent victims themselves.

[11] Indeed, there may be some forms of extremism, such as the contamination of meat products that by nature requires that a target demonstrates their complicity in the harms activists campaign against.

[12] See the interest-bases theories of Joel Feinberg or Alasdair Cochrane for example: (Cochrane, 2010; Feinberg, 1986)

[13] Although not without contestation; see, for example: (Frowe, 2011)



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