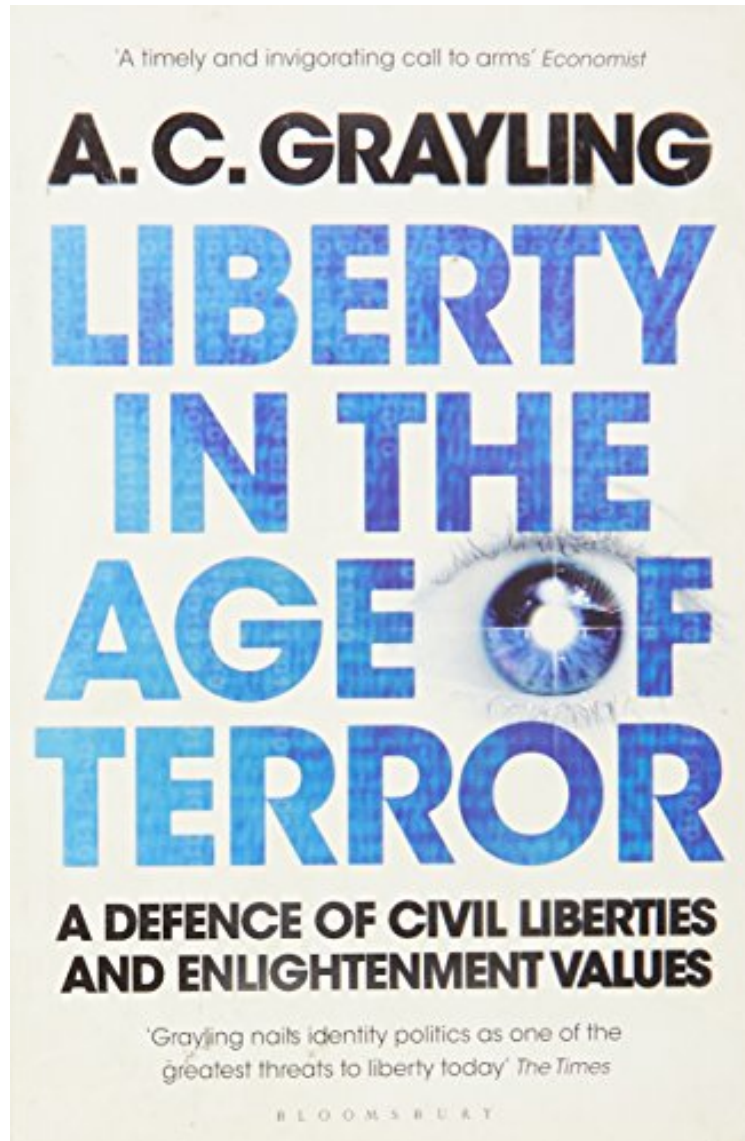


Liberty in the Age of Terror: A Defence of Civil Liberties and Enlightenment Values

A. C. Grayling

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A. C. Grayling : Liberty in the Age of Terror: A Defence of Civil Liberties and Enlightenment Values before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Liberty in the Age of Terror: A Defence of Civil Liberties and Enlightenment Values:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Putting the cart in front of the horse By Niklas Anderberg This book is about the undermining of civil liberties in the West. In the guise of War on Terror the British and US governments

are working fast to restrict these hard-won rights. From Grayling's viewpoint the misnamed War on Terror should more appropriately be called a War on Civil Liberties. Consequently, he talks about a purposeful destruction of civil liberties. In "Towards the Light" from 2007, Grayling provides the historical background for the struggle between the forces of Enlightenment and its foes, between liberalism and conservatism. He warns us not to be complacent and take our civil liberties for granted. In the UK there isn't even a written constitution guaranteeing basic liberties. It is now for example legal to detain anyone for 28 days without charges. Gordon Brown recently proposed to expand this to 42 days. The Magna Carta from 1215 allows for no more than 48 HOURS. Think about it. Grayling presents his arguments with seeming ease and simplicity. He keeps his philosophical learning in the background which makes "Liberty in the Age of Terror" eminently readable without sounding superficial. Part I, which takes up more than half of the book, deals mainly with the assault on civil liberties and human rights in the light of terror and immigration, while Part II consists of "debates" with contemporary commentators. Taking the Enlightenment as starting point, he then moves from Isaiah Berlin and Ronald Dworkin to Tzvetan Todorov. He turns a critical eye towards Roger Scruton, Slavoj Zizek, John Ralston Saul, and John Gray. The latter merits a particularly sharp dissection, causing his whole cardboard construction to come tumbling down. The clear-eyed dismantling of Gray's anti-humanist views makes one wonder how on earth anyone could have taken them seriously in the first place. Grayling also takes note of the fashionable rejection of the idea of progress and anything utopian. It's a cheap point to assert that it's hopeless to strive for a perfect society. Admittedly, there are those "blue-print utopians" (Jacoby) who envisage such an airtight world, but seeking a social life with more justice, emancipation, and equity doesn't mean you harbour totalitarian ideas. There is a clear distinction between meliorism and utopianism, between improvement and perfectibility. This line of thought has also been pursued recently by among others Susan Neiman, Tzvetan Todorov, and Russel Jacoby. No believer of the Clash of Civilizations, Grayling rather seeks a solution to the threat of terrorism in a dialogue with the majority of moderates both in the West and East. According to him the most important matter in the end is that terrorism happened in part because people "perceive themselves as ignored, contemned, slighted and unjustly treated" (95). But by curbing people's civil liberties instead of encouraging an open discussion - including dissent as a vital part of any real democracy - governments are putting the cart in front of the horse. By creating a society of insecurity and suspicion we in fact do the work for the terrorists. As Benjamin Franklin said: "Those who would sacrifice liberty for security deserve neither" (109). In the appendixes Grayling reprints the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (also included in "Towards the Light"), the European Convention of Human Rights, the Human Rights Act, plus laws and measurements that have reduced liberties in the UK and US in recent years. Here the reader is presented with a bird's-eye view of the impairment of the civil liberties we take, or perhaps rather took, for granted.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Congent and urgent warnings about the threats to liberties

By Todd Bartholomew

The increasing intrusion of surveillance in our post-9/11 world has alarmed civil libertarians in the United States and elsewhere. With "Liberty in the Age of Terror" Professor Grayling seeks to raise the threat level by examining the pervasiveness of that surveillance in British society and the corrosive effect it has. Grayling clearly seeks to uphold the values of Western society that derive from the Enlightenment, particularly freedom of speech, which he holds as the foundation for all other freedoms. Grayling rails against the willingness of the public and the media to give up freedom in exchange for security, an inequitable trade if ever there was one. Taking on the commonly heard refrain of "why worry if I have nothing to hide" argument Grayling warns persuasively of the potential for 'mission creep' where surveillance can be used to target political enemies, as during the Nixon Administration. That argument is most convincing particularly because it has happened in the past and is likely to happen again in even seemingly non-authoritarian 'democracies'. Readers should be reminded of the warning by Benjamin Franklin that "They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety." More to the point, once freedoms are given up they are almost never easily reinstated. Unfortunately it appears few people are listening to the warning of civil libertarians such as Dr. Grayling, no matter how timely, compelling and cogent their arguments may be. You could argue that Grayling isn't exaggerating the threats to freedom and liberty but if anything is understating the dangers to them. In the United Kingdom the Law Lords have stopped a number of laws that would have eroded civil liberties further, such as the national identification register and extended detention periods for terror suspects, but elsewhere much in the way of liberties and freedoms are being willingly sacrificed in the name of national security. Hopefully people will read this and wake up to the new reality threatening our rights. Better that than future generations wondering why we failed to heed the warnings Grayling provided.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. read the second half

By MVI found the first half to be redundant--yes, civil liberties should be protected and fear should not get in the way of that. The second part is more compelling. Grayling looks at several thinkers' views of enlightenment, democracy and humanism (not really civil liberties directly though) including Dworkin, Todorov (best chapter I thought), Saul and Gray. Some he agrees with (Dworkin, Todorov), some he doesn't. One problem I had was that the ones he disagreed with I wasn't sure if they were respected thinkers because their arguments, as presented by Grayling, didn't seem particularly compelling. So, they seemed to be straw men, but that may just be my ignorance on British thinkers. The book's title does not seem to capture Grayling's text which seems more interested in convincing readers that humanism's values are our best hope.

"The means of defence against foreign danger historically have become the instruments of tyranny at home." James Madison
Our societies, says Anthony Grayling, are under attack not only from the threat of terrorism, but also from our governments' attempts to fight that threat by reducing freedom in our own societies - think the 42-day detention controversy, CCTV surveillance, increasing invasion of privacy, ID Cards, not to mention Abu Ghraib, rendition, Guantanamo As Grayling says: 'There should be a special place for political irony in the catalogues of human folly. Starting a war 'to promote freedom and democracy' could in certain though rare circumstances be a justified act; but in the case of the Second Gulf War that began in 2003, which involved reacting to criminals hiding in one country (Al Qaeda in Afghanistan or Pakistan) by invading another country (Iraq), one of the main fronts has, dismayingly, been the home front, where the War on Terror takes the form of a War on Civil Liberties in the spurious name of security. To defend 'freedom and democracy', Western governments attack and diminish freedom and democracy in their own country. By this logic, someone will eventually have to invade the US and UK to restore freedom and democracy to them.' In this lucid and timely book, Grayling sets out what's at risk, engages with the arguments for and against examining the cases made by Isaiah Berlin and Ronald Dworkin on the one hand, and Roger Scruton and John Gray on the other, and finally proposes a different way to respond that makes defending the civil liberties on which western society is founded the cornerstone for defeating terrorism.

Praise for *Towards the Light* 'A rollicking defence of Freedom and Enlightenment in the style of Tom Paine or William Godwin' *Spectator* 'The even-handed tone of philosophy professor AC Grayling's latest book does not lessen the intensity of its polemical content ... Grayling underlines the seriousness of today's threats to our liberties' *Metro*
About the Author A.C. Grayling is Professor of Philosophy at Birkbeck College, University of London, and a multi-talented author. He believes that philosophy should take an active, useful role in society. He has been a regular contributor to *The Times*, *Financial Times*, *Observer*, *Independent on Sunday*, *Economist*, *Literary*, *New Statesman* and *Prospect*, and is a frequent and popular contributor to radio and television programs, including *Newsnight*, *Today*, *In Our Time*, *Start the Week* and *CNN* news. He is a Fellow of the World Economic Forum at Davos, and advises on many committees ranging from Drug Testing at Work to human rights groups.