

Why I'm Not A Pacifist

Peace At All Costs ... Abjuring Killing ... I Have a Problem ...

The reason I have reservations about pacifism has nothing to do with Christian theological arguments for the acceptance of a "just war", rather, my own instincts tell me, not that there's something right (in such cases) with war, but, rather, that there's something wrong with pacifism itself. Don't misunderstand me, it's not just the conduct, demeanour – and arguments – of the actual pacifists, except that some of their positions have led me to think hard about what their stance involves (for example, the conviction that many traditional strongholds of pacifism (such as the Quakers, or Amnesty International) are populated by people whose position is hypocritical).

They are opposed to killing in war, or torturing potential terrorists in a bid to gain information to prevent mass killing of innocent people (and, perhaps, opposed to executing convicted murderers), but many are quite happy to support (perhaps actively) the mass destruction of human life inherent in the abortion megaholocaust, which annually destroys far more than all the wars and pogroms and death camps put together. The tendency of pacifists to be compliant with this slaughter is not an argument against pacifism: *individual* Quakers, AI members, etc., may indeed be opposed to such compliance, and truly believe in the value, and valuing, of human life; and surely some are.

What is more worrying is the possibility that, as it seems to me, a pacifist *can* be a person who is ultimately concerned with *self*, with the moral implications of their possible violent actions, with the ethical state of a person who kills. Suppose I'm a pacifist, and a violent terrorist comes into the room intent on killing a defenceless, innocent person - you.

You've got your hands full of – let's say, a baby – but I'm able to grab his weapon, kill him, and save you from death. But suppose I refuse to do this, because of my pacifism, and the anxiety that the purity of my moral state would be corrupted if I killed the terrorist. Basically, I'd be saying that my moral purity - my "virgo intacta" moral state, if you like - is really much more important than your life, because things to do with me (say, my relationship with God; I might be a Christian pacifist) are what ultimately matters (it might, after all, have eternal consequences).

That's why I personally could not be a pacifist, when such situations might occur; I have no right to put any considerations related to myself before other peoples' lives. Better to do wrong, save the other person's life (such as yours - God might have a plan to do great works by way of *you*, or your baby, in the future), and rely on God's forgiveness in the fullness of time.

It might be objected that it is ultimately a betrayal of everyone and everything if I negate, or refuse to respond to, my own moral choices (which may include the choice to refrain from killing terrorists and anyone else), and moral chaos could result; but this betrayal would be very much in the abstract, and largely academic, for you, about to die. Equally, the choice to kill the terrorist – a moral choice – could be made on the basis that killing the terrorist, though wrong in itself, is less wrong than allowing him to kill his innocent victim (you).

The insistence on a pacifist response (ie. no response, in this scenario) could be called an absolutist moral stance, opposing a pragmatic one (the choice between lesser and greater evils, between the murderous terrorist and you). The pragmatist could here be accused of “situation ethics”, raising the spectre of what Pope Benedict (when Cardinal Ratzinger) rightly called the “Tyranny of Relativism”; but equally (I’m no relativist!), for my moral choice to kill the terrorist, and save you, I could claim to have an *absolute* belief in the right of the innocent to live, against the intentions of the evil.

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