

The Case for Pacifism

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ABSTRACT *I present the case for pacifism by formulating what I take to be the most plausible version of the idea of respect for human life. This generates a very strong, though not necessarily absolute, moral presumption against killing, in war or any other situation. I then show how difficult it is for this presumption to be overridden, either by the considerations invoked in 'just war' theory, or by consequentialist claims about what can be achieved through war.*

Despite the strength of the moral case against war, people sometimes say that they have no choice but to fight. In the concluding section of the paper I attempt to identify the relevant sense in which this could be said, and I discuss briefly how this affects the case for pacifism.

The conclusion of this paper will not be an unqualified endorsement of pacifism. I nevertheless want to present the case for pacifism as strongly as I can, for I do not think that the plausibility of that case has been adequately recognised in the philosophical literature. An unconditional rejection of, say, abortion, or euthanasia, or the death penalty, or even the killing of animals, has been treated as a standard position in philosophical discussions, and as an appropriate point of reference for other, more nuanced positions. When it comes to the morality of war, however, pacifism—the unconditional rejection of war—has typically been treated as an eccentric or marginal position, with the implication that the important issues and arguments are to be found elsewhere [1]. I want to maintain, on the contrary, that pacifism is central to the arguments, and that other positions ought to define themselves primarily in relation to pacifism. To describe the position which eventually emerges in this paper I am inclined to adopt a recent suggestion and call it 'pacifist' rather than 'pacifist' [2]. I believe that the case for pacifism is very strong indeed, and I shall set out that case, but I shall also suggest that there are situations where people can properly say that, in a sense which I shall try to explain, they have no choice but to resort to war. I am inclined to think that, at least at the theoretical level, there is no way of resolving the ethical dilemma posed by war and pacifism. Nevertheless, en route to that rather unsatisfactory conclusion, I shall argue that the case for pacifism is stronger, and the standard justifications for war are weaker, than they are generally taken to be.

I define 'pacifism' as the view that it is always wrong to go to war. As such it is addressed to governments, and to political movements, especially those which aspire to be governments, since these are the bodies which, by definition, are capable of waging wars and therefore have to decide whether or not to do so. Violence or killing engaged in by individuals solely as individuals would not be war, whatever else it might be. However, as individuals we can, to a greater or lesser extent, influence governments, and we can either support or oppose the decisions of governments and political movements to resort to war. Pacifism, therefore, would require us as individuals to

oppose any resort to war. There remains the question what the individual should do if his or her government has in fact embarked on a war. Pacifism has normally been taken to require that even if one is unable to prevent one's own country going to war, one should still refuse to participate; this however raises further questions about the nature of political allegiance, which I shall not discuss. I shall focus on the initial, and logically primary, claim that it can never be right for governments or would-be governments to resort to war.

The absolutist formulation of that claim is crucial. The horrors of war are obvious, they increase with every advance in men's technical capacity to inflict death and destruction, and, reviewing the historical record, one might doubt whether any war could achieve sufficient good to counterbalance those horrors. One might then arrive at the position which Anne Seller has called 'unprincipled pacifism'. That phrase, however, is deliberately paradoxical. One thinks of pacifism as, par excellence, a principled position, not just a rule-of-thumb about probable consequences. The principle which underlies it is, I suggest, that of the wrongness of killing: war is morally unacceptable because it is the unjustified taking of human life. I am aware that pacifism is not always formulated in such terms. In particular, it is sometimes formulated as the view that it is always wrong to employ force, or to employ violence. These various formulations, in terms of force, or violence, or killing, will have importantly different implications, which I cannot explore here. I can only state dogmatically that the most plausible of the three versions seems to me to be that which is formulated in terms of the wrongness of killing. This does not mean that I want to dispense with the vocabulary of 'violence' and 'non-violence'. The phrase 'non-violent resistance' is well-entrenched as a way of referring to alternatives to war; it is the most convenient way of identifying an important tradition of thought and action, and in due course I shall myself use it in that way. Nevertheless I want to put the main weight of the ethical case for pacifism on the concept of 'killing' rather than the concept of 'violence'.

I do not want to maintain that the pacifist, as an absolutist about killing in war, needs to be an absolutist about the wrongness of killing in general, nor about the killing of human beings generally. That again would make pacifism less plausible than it needs to be. What I shall do is to offer an account of the wrongness of killing which is grounded in the attitude of respect for human life as such. I shall try to show how deeply rooted that attitude is in our moral thinking, and hence how difficult it is for the presumption against killing to be overridden. Although there are possible circumstances in which an exception could justifiably be made to the principle of not taking human life, the standard justifications for overriding that principle in war are, I shall suggest, inadequate; hence the strength of the case for pacifism.

Respect for Human Life

What is wrong with taking human life? Two obvious answers are that to kill someone against their will is to override their autonomy, and the utilitarian answer that to kill someone normally causes great suffering and deprives the victim of possible happiness. An account composed exclusively of these two elements, however, seems to rule out the attitude of respect for human life as such, and hence the idea that killing is wrong just because it is the taking of life. There are familiar difficulties with that idea. Respect for human life as such seems to attribute value to the mere fact of being alive, even if in an irreversible coma. And if we respect human life, are we not being

arbitrarily 'speciesist' unless we extend the same respect to all life, including the bacteria which are killed by medicines, the weeds which are killed by any gardener, and the crops which are harvested for food?

To meet these difficulties, I want to defend the suggestion which has been made by James Rachels [3], that we should interpret the idea of respect for life as referring not to the merely biological condition of 'being alive', but to that of 'having a life'. We should think of human life as something which is *lived*, something in which a human being is actively engaged. Of course, in a weak sense any living thing 'lives' its own life, but I have in mind something stronger—the ability of a normal human being to give a distinctive shape to his or her life as a whole. We typically think of a human life as following a distinctive pattern, developing from birth, through childhood, youth and maturity to old age. These are the characteristic contours of human life. Within this framework, each person will live his or her own life in his or her own way, giving it a particular content and making something meaningful out of it. People do this in innumerable different ways: they may pursue a career, or devote themselves to a cause or a movement or a set of beliefs; their lives may revolve around a close relationship with another person, or around family relationships, around the process of growing up within a family and then raising the next generation. These possibilities are of course neither exclusive nor exhaustive, but I list them as typical ways in which people live their lives, shaping them and making something of them. They all illustrate what I mean when I speak of a human life as something which is actively lived.

I do not want to suggest that, to count as living his or her own life, a person must consciously think about his or her life as a whole in this sort of way. That would be an absurdly intellectualist understanding of what it is to live one's own life. Nevertheless my account does presuppose certain minimal abilities, those which are required if one is to be capable of acting in the sorts of ways which do, as a matter of fact, give a shape to a person's life. This means being able, at least to some extent, to reflect on one's past experiences, to feel satisfaction or regret concerning them and to act in the light of such reflections. Similarly it means being able to entertain hopes and aspirations for one's life which extend beyond the immediate future. These conditions remain exceedingly vague, and much more would need to be said about them. Nevertheless they serve to distinguish, for example, the muddled, the lazy, the unambitious, the bed-ridden, the neurotic or the psychotic, all of whom can (though their capacity for effective action is curtailed) uncontroversially be said to live their own lives, from the anencephalic or the permanently comatose, who cannot.

More worryingly, these conditions may seem to exclude infants. Here I want to say that the new-born child, though as yet it lacks a sense of its own past and future, has embarked on the process of learning, of interacting with its environment and forming relationships with others, and has thus taken its first steps in making a life. Again the idea of the shape of a life as a whole is important. A being whose activity remained always at the level of the new-born baby could not be said to live its own life in the sense I am proposing. The picture changes when we see those infant activities as the beginning of a process of development, as leading naturally into the more sophisticated activities which I have taken to be distinctive of 'living a life'. In a sense, then, I am employing a notion of 'potentiality'—but in a strong sense; I am referring not just to the baby's future capacities, but to what it is already doing, because 'what it is already doing' is the beginning of a continuing process, and it is in the light of the later stages in the process that we can see these initial stages also as 'the living of a life'.

This way of thinking about a human life leads us to a proper understanding of the

act of killing. We should think of killing, correspondingly, not just as the destruction of a biological condition but as depriving someone of the opportunity actively to live his or her own life. Understanding the wrongness of killing in this way then enables us to see why it is ethically fundamental. In particular—and this will be important for later stages of my argument—it enables us to see why respect for human life is more fundamental than the value of freedom or autonomy, and more fundamental than a utilitarian evaluation of consequences. Take first the point about autonomy. It will be apparent that my interpretation of respect for human life brings it close to the Kantian notion of ‘respect for persons’. This latter has, in turn, been assimilated by many recent philosophers to the idea of respect for people’s autonomy. The problem is then that the capacity for autonomy, in the full sense of the ability to make conscious choices and decisions about one’s own life, is a capacity which is not fully realised at birth but develops only slowly and gradually. Nevertheless, as I have indicated, even the new-born baby has embarked on the process of living its life, and as such is entitled to respect. Respect for persons, then, I take to mean respect for the uniqueness of each individual life and for the person who lives it. It will mean also respect for the conscious choices which the person makes in directing and shaping his or her own life, but this is derivative from the more general notion of respect for the life itself.

The same can be said of the relation between respect for life and utilitarian ethics. One of the notorious problems at the heart of utilitarianism is: why should we be concerned to promote the general happiness at all? Why does it matter? Utilitarians sometimes seem to suggest that this question can be answered by saying that happiness, in some abstract sense, ‘has value’ and therefore the more of it we create, the better. I must confess that I find this notion of happiness as some kind of free-floating ‘value’ quite unintelligible. Surely the reason why we are concerned to promote happiness is that we are concerned for the people who may be happy or unhappy. Many utilitarians talk as though what is logically prior is the requirement to maximise happiness, and as though we then need to make people happy because we need them to be the vehicles for this maximised happiness. The truth of the matter, however, is surely that happiness matters because people matter, not vice versa. And what I have been claiming about happiness goes also for all values, or at any rate for all human goods. If we value anything at all in people’s lives, it must be because we respect those lives as such, and that is why our sense of the wrongness of destroying human lives is morally fundamental.

Can we go further and say that the wrongness of killing is an absolute principle—that is, that the taking of human life can never be justified? I do not think that this follows, but the preceding considerations do serve to establish how difficult it is to defend the idea of sacrificing a human life for the sake of some supposed greater good. I have alluded briefly to the idea of the *uniqueness* of each individual human life. That idea is important, but the connection between ‘uniqueness’ and ‘value’ needs clarifying. The point is not that, being qualitatively unique, each individual life has a kind of scarcity value, like a signed artistic masterpiece—as though the lives of identical twins thereby became less valuable because there were two of them. Rather, it is connected with my previous point about human lives as the bearer or the focus of value. Things have value because of the part they play in people’s lives. Therefore, if one person’s life is destroyed, this cannot be compensated for by the promotion of values in other people’s lives. It cannot be compensated for, just because the values promoted for others will not compensate the person who has been killed. We could speak of the one

person's loss being cancelled out by the other people's gains only if values could be computed in some impersonal way, apart from the context of separate human lives; but this is just what I am denying. There is no group consciousness, no supra-individual being which can experience both the losses and the gains and accept the former as an acceptable price to pay for the latter.

Nevertheless the fact also remains that people's lives do, inescapably, conflict. There just *are* cases where one person's life can be preserved only by sacrificing someone else's life. Consider the classic example where A is threatening B, and B's life can be saved only by killing A. If one kills A, the loss is, in the sense I have tried to indicate, a total loss. It is the extinction of one individual life, one consciousness for which things have value and within which goods are experienced. No preservation of values within B's life can cancel out that loss. On the other hand, exactly the same is true if one fails to save B's life. That loss, too, is total. A choice therefore has to be made, not because of some spurious computation of an overall impersonal good, but simply because, either way, someone will be killed. The only way to maintain an absolute prohibition against killing in such cases would be to invoke a distinction between 'killing' and 'failing to save someone's life', or to invoke the doctrine of 'double effect'. One could then say that it is always and absolutely wrong intentionally to kill any human being, and that therefore it would be wrong to kill A in this example; though B would then die, this would be describable as a failure to save his life rather than an act of killing him, or as a foreseen but unintended consequence of the refusal to kill A, and so would not be a violation of an absolute prohibition against intentional killing. Since however I do not want to say either of these things or invoke either of these distinctions, I have to say that in the light of such examples the principle of not taking human life cannot be maintained as an absolute principle.

I want to make two other points about the example. Given that a choice has to be made between two lives, how is it to be made? Again, not on utilitarian grounds. It would not be a matter of deciding which of the two is likely to have the happier life and/or to do more good in the world and, on those grounds, opting for the death of the other. (Similarly, to change the example, it would not be right to kill C in order to provide a liver transplant for D and thereby save D's life on the grounds that it could do more good than C's.) The relevant consideration is surely that A is threatening B's life, and that therefore if the choice has to be made it is A's life that must be taken, since it is he who is responsible for the fact that one or the other life must be sacrificed. The second point to be stressed is that all of this would remain true if it were B himself who had to make the choice. If B's life were threatened by A, and B could preserve himself only by killing A, he would be justified in doing so. Again, however, he would not be entitled to do so merely on utilitarian grounds. I stress these two points because between them they spell out the idea of justified killing in self-defence, to which we shall return in due course.

So far I have allowed that the principle of not taking human life cannot be an absolute principle because there are cases where a choice has to be made between two lives. Having made that concession, I think it also has to be conceded that the wrongness of killing could in principle be overridden by other considerations. I have argued that respect for human life is more fundamental than the value of freedom and than utilitarian values, and, as such, carries greater weight. That, however, is not enough to show that, in order to prevent oppression or suffering on a very great scale, it might not be necessary to take human lives. Once again the judgement cannot be a purely utilitarian one, nor can it be simply a matter of calculating alternative levels of

freedom and oppression. The wrongness of killing carries an independent weight, and it weighs very heavily in the balance, but we cannot rule out the possibility that it might be outweighed by a sufficiently great prospect of the alleviation of oppression or suffering. Nor should we rule out the possibility that, in cases other than that of 'self-defence' in the narrow sense (as the defence of one's own life), it might be permissible to kill someone who has, through the wickedness of his own action, brought it upon himself. (An example might be killing in self-defence by a rape victim [4].) If anything is a candidate for being an absolute principle, then the principle of not taking human life is; but the trouble with any absolutism is that we simply cannot rule out, in advance, the possibility that considerations of one kind might come into conflict with considerations of any other kind and might, in some cases, be outweighed by them.

In summary, what I want to say about the principle of not taking human life is this. It is not an absolute principle, but it is a fundamental one and it carries very great weight. It can in principle be overridden, but only in special cases, and it cannot be overridden on the basis of a purely utilitarian calculation. This may look like a regrettably untidy and vague position. It is, however, a position of a recognisable kind in ethics. It is, for example, what many philosophers have wanted to say about the concept of basic moral rights. I am myself unenthusiastic about the concept of moral rights, finding it more confusing than helpful. Those who are more attached to the concept might nevertheless like to reformulate my discussion as a defence of a very strong right to life which, although it is not inviolable and although it can perhaps be forfeited in special cases, is more basic than any other moral right and more basic than utilitarian considerations.

To conclude this section I want to comment briefly on the relation between the *principle* of the wrongness of killing and the *attitude* of respect for human life. Pacifism, I have said, is a principled position, and the relevant principle to which it appeals is the principle of not taking human life. That, however, is not just an abstract principle whose validity is self-evident. The principle matters because it articulates the moral implications of the underlying basic response of a human being confronted with another human life. That is why the case for pacifism is made most powerfully not by rational arguments such as I am presenting in this paper, but by the portrayal of that basic response in works of imaginative literature. In war poems and novels and autobiographies one experience stands out: that of the soldier who kills an enemy and then confronts the fact that the person whom he has killed is not just an enemy but another human being like himself [5]. Through the direct personal encounter with the dying man—perhaps talking to him as he dies, perhaps looking through his personal documents—the killer comes face to face with the uniqueness of the individual human life which he has destroyed, with the enormity of what he has done, and with the fact that this is what war requires people to do. And this sense of the inviolability of another human life is what I refer to as the attitude of respect.

It may be said that a rational moral position cannot be founded on the emotional responses which people may or may not happen to feel on this or that occasion. I am not suggesting, however, that our moral commitments are the direct expression of felt emotional responses. The picture which I would offer is a more complex one. Our most fundamental, shared responses are embodied and expressed in the concepts of our shared moral vocabulary. It is in terms of this common vocabulary that we attempt to make sense of our moral world and to formulate the settled moral beliefs and principles with which we assess our actions. Ultimately, however, those beliefs and principles derive their force from the natural human responses on which they rest; and

one example of this is the relation between the principle of the wrongness of killing and the underlying attitude of respect.

This, then, is the basis on which I shall build the case for pacifism. Respect for human life establishes a very strong presumption against killing, in war or in any other circumstances. What I now want to do is to show how difficult it is for this presumption to be overridden by the sorts of considerations which are normally thought to justify killing in war. I want to look at two kinds of justification which are standardly offered: first, those which feature in the tradition of 'just war' theory, and secondly, justifications couched in consequentialist terms.

'Just War' and Aggression

'Just war' theory is a complex body of doctrine, in an evolving tradition. I want to focus on the two points which have become central in recent discussions, and which are the twin pillars of the most recent extended defence of 'just war' theory, Michael Walzer's book *Just and Unjust Wars*. Walzer adopts the traditional distinction between *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*; the former provides the account of what justifies resort to war, the latter provides the account of what are just and unjust ways of fighting a war. According to Walzer the central principles of each are, respectively, that going to war is justified when it is the defence of a political community against aggression, and that a war is fought justly only if the immunity of non-combatants is respected.

Consider first, then, the suggestion that war can be justified as a response to aggression. Walzer defends this idea by reference to a morality of *rights*. "Individual rights (to life and liberty)", he says, "underlie the most important judgements that we make about war . . . States' rights are simply their collective form" [6]. The comparison between individual rights and states' rights is then spelled out as follows.

Over a long period of time, shared experiences and cooperative activity of many different kinds shape a common life. "Contract" is a metaphor for a process of association and mutuality, the on-going character of which the state claims to protect against external encroachment. The protection extends not only to the lives and liberties of individuals, but also to their shared life and liberty, the independent community they have made, for which individuals are sometimes sacrificed . . . Given a genuine "contract," it makes sense to say that territorial integrity and political sovereignty can be defended in exactly the same way as individual life and liberty [7].

Walzer's case depends, then, on this analogy between a state's rights to territorial integrity and political sovereignty on the one hand and an individual's right to life and liberty on the other. Certainly there is something in this analogy. One can see a resemblance between the death of an individual and the destruction of the life of a political community when it is invaded and conquered; and between the oppression of an individual and the oppression of a community when its sovereign independence is violated. I want to say, however, that this analogy cannot do what is required of it for the argument. It is at best an imperfect analogy. And it is no more than an analogy; it does not show that the territorial integrity of a community has the *same* fundamental ethical status as the lives of human beings.

First, then, it is an imperfect analogy. Foreign conquest and domination may, in a loose sense, be construed as 'the death of a nation', but it rarely amounts to the complete destruction of a community. The shared way of life usually continues, in an

attenuated form. Overall political control may be in the hands of the conqueror, but many other institutions, cultural and economic and religious, are likely to continue, and to embody at least some of the 'shared experiences and cooperative activity' which, as Walzer says, 'shape a common life'. Even in the minority of cases where the conquering power does aim at eliminating entirely the indigenous culture, it may well find it difficult to do so. The communal life may go underground, traditions may be preserved in secret, or in exile. I do not say that this is a happy state of affairs, but it is not the death of a community in the full sense which would make it entirely analogous to the death of an individual human being.

Suppose, however, that the analogy is complete, and that a whole way of life really is wiped out for ever. Then indeed a great wrong has been done, but it is still not a wrong of the same order as the taking of human lives. It may be analogous, but it is *only* analogous, it is not ethically equivalent. Even if their community has completely disintegrated, individuals live on. They may perhaps eventually create a new identity for themselves within the conquering society, or as refugees they may find a place in the life of some other community. Where this is not so, where the individual lives do not continue, we are no longer talking about the crime of aggression, we are talking about genocide, and we have then gone beyond Walzer's analogy altogether.

It may be objected that my position undervalues the importance which shared experiences and a common life have for individuals. Indeed, that objection might be held to carry particular weight since it seems to be supported by other features of my argument. My account of respect for life invoked a richer notion of a human life as more than a mere biological existence; but the relevant capacity to make sense of and give significance to their lives is something which individuals can acquire only through their participation in shared traditions and ways of life. Subtract from a human life everything which derives from the community and one is indeed left with a purely biological existence. Doesn't it follow, then, that the common way of life will be as valuable as life itself, and won't the principle of self-defence then have to embrace the defence of the community as well as the defence of the individual lives?

The starting-point of this objection is one which I would certainly accept. The capacity to live a meaningful life is a capacity derived from one's participation in a human community. However, I also want to reiterate that that capacity, once acquired, can survive the destruction of a particular community. Why is this? First, because there are many kinds and levels of community. A war of defence against aggression is normally thought of as a war in defence of one kind of community, a nation-state, identified by its territorial boundaries. The destruction of the nation-state, however, can leave intact many other overlapping communities, smaller and larger. There remain families and localities and networks of friendship. There remain intellectual, moral, religious, political or artistic movements and traditions, and though some of these may have been defining features of a particular nation, they are not necessarily destroyed when the nation loses its independence.

The second reason is the simple fact that the human capacities derived from participation in a community can be realised only in individual lives. This takes us, I think, to the element of truth in individualism. The philosophical conflict between individualism and communitarianism cannot be resolved by the simple vindication of one side. The truth of communitarianism is that distinctively human activities are made possible by participation in a community. The truth of individualism is the uniqueness and irreplaceability of each individual consciousness. If a community is destroyed, individuals retain the ability to speak the language and engage in the

practices which they learned in that community, and they may be able, even under conditions of extreme hardship and persecution, to exercise that ability. When a human being dies, the value of that individual life is gone for good; in the sense I have tried to indicate, the life is irreplaceable and the loss is total. Tragic though the destruction of a community may be, the destruction of individual human lives is of a different order again.

I submit, then, that the analogy between individuals' rights and states' rights fails to establish that the need to resist aggression is a sufficient justification for resort to war. Given that there is a very strong presumption against the wholesale taking of life which war involves, the analogy is too weak to show that military resistance to aggression has sufficient ethical weight to override the presumption. There remains the possibility that resistance to genocide might be sufficient to justify waging war, and we shall have to return to that.

'Just War' and Non-combatant Immunity

The second principle of 'just war' theory which I want to consider is the principle of non-combatant immunity. This principle might at first be thought irrelevant to our present concerns, since its purpose is not to identify a possible justification for waging war, but to impose a further moral constraint which must limit the actions even of those who are justified in waging war. Nevertheless the principle does constitute an important point of disagreement with pacifism, and we can see this if we remind ourselves that the 'just war' theorist says about the killing of non-combatants what the pacifist says about all killing in war: that it must not be done, even as a means of resistance against aggression. This implies that, for the 'just war' theorist, there is something about the status of combatants which makes it permissible to kill them in resistance to aggression; and that is what the pacifist denies [8].

What are we to make of this suggestion? Why should there be an ethically significant distinction between combatants and non-combatants which makes it permissible to kill the one but not the other? The standard explanation is that the killing of non-combatants is wrong even in a justified war because it would be a case of killing the innocent. What contrast is implied here? If non-combatants are innocent, what are combatants? 'Guilty' is the contrast one would expect, but this immediately takes us to the heart of the problem, for it is difficult to find any convincing sense in which the ordinary combatant in war is guilty. In what sense, then, can non-combatants be called 'innocent', and what is the nature of the contrast with combatants?

One of the best discussions of this problem is Jeffrie Murphy's paper 'The Killing of the Innocent', and I shall consider that paper as an example of the attempt to make ethical sense of the 'combatant'/'non-combatant' distinction [9]. Murphy first points out that the 'innocence' of non-combatants can hardly be taken to mean moral innocence in a general sense. Military action against civilians, such as the bombing of a city, may kill all sorts of disreputable characters. Nor can 'innocence' mean moral innocence *of the war*. "Consider", says Murphy, "the octogenarian civilian in Dresden who is an avid supporter of Hitler's war effort . . . and contrast his case with that of the poor, frightened, pacifist frontline soldier who is only where he is because of duress . . ." [10]. The former is uncontroversially more responsible for the war than the latter. The relevant distinction, according to Murphy, is this: combatants are "all those of whom it is reasonable to believe that they are engaged in an attempt at your destruction" [11]. This includes not only soldiers but their military and political

leaders, and others who contribute directly to the war effort such as, perhaps, workers in munitions factories. Because they are engaged in an attempt to destroy you, it is permissible to kill them. Non-combatants are not directly engaged in such an attempt, and in that sense they are 'innocent'.

The problem now shifts. Such a contrast can indeed be drawn, but why should it carry this ethical significance? If 'innocence' does not mean 'moral innocence', why should it determine who may be killed and who may not? There are two main elements in Murphy's answer. In general terms he appeals to a theory of rights. Normally, he says, to kill someone is to violate his right against interference. However, "when a person uses his freedom to invade the rights of others, he forfeits certain of his own rights and renders interference by others legitimate" [12]. This is why, when combatants are engaged in an attempt to destroy you, they forfeit their right not to be killed by you. However, if Murphy is going to talk about 'forfeiting one's rights', he surely needs to employ precisely those notions of moral guilt and innocence which he has shown to be unavailable in this context. One does not forfeit one's rights merely because one is, objectively, a danger to others. It must be the case that one is *morally guilty* of attempting to destroy others. We are then back with the fact that vast numbers of combatants, even if they are fighting an aggressive war, are not themselves morally responsible for the aggression, or at any rate are much less responsible than their leaders. Therefore they have not forfeited their rights, and killing them cannot be justified by claiming that they have done so.

Murphy also appeals more specifically to the idea of 'self-defence' to fill out his theory of rights. He says: "If one believes (as I do) that the only even remotely plausible justification for war is self-defence, then one must in waging war confine one's hostility to those against whom one is defending oneself . . ." [13]. And those against whom one is defending oneself are, he says, the combatants who are engaged in an attempt to destroy you and have thereby forfeited their rights.

Here we need to recall the problems with the idea of 'resistance to aggression'. A war of 'self-defence' is typically taken to mean a war to defend a nation's territorial integrity against an aggressive invader. I have argued that this justification for war is unconvincing. Murphy has his own doubts about it. He says:

. . . with respect to nations, the whole idea of self-defence is strongly in need of analysis. What, for example, is it for a state to die or be threatened with death?

. . . I am sceptical that the "self" to be legitimately defended must always be the nation or state. It is at least worth considering the possibility that the only moral problems arising in war are the oldest and most common and most important—namely, are human beings being hurt and killed, who are they, and why are they? [14]

And when he goes on to link the idea of self-defence with that of rights, he takes as his example the case of individual self-defence [15].

There are, of course, plenty of situations in war where the question of individual self-defence does arise. The combatant who is actually engaged in fighting is likely to find himself in situations where, unless he kills the person who is about to fire on him, he will himself be killed. But if that is the only killing which the 'combatant'/'non-combatant' distinction can justify, it is a great deal less than the theory is intended to justify. The theory is supposed to justify combatants killing enemy combatants in order to win; in fact it will only justify killing combatants in order to survive.

At this point we are, I think, forced back to the conclusion that the most that 'just war' theory can justify is a war against genocide. I suggested earlier that the first component of the theory, the principle of resistance to aggression, is plausible only if it goes beyond a mere analogy between 'territorial integrity' and 'the right to life'; it will justify resistance to aggression only if the aggression is *literally* an attempt to destroy the lives of the members of the community. Similarly the 'combatant'/'non-combatant' distinction, if it amounts to no more than a principle of self-defence, will justify a community only in fighting to defend the lives of its members. And note that even a principle of self-defence will still have to employ notions of moral responsibility, of moral guilt and innocence. I may not kill just anyone whose death would help to preserve my life or the life of another, but only someone who is morally responsible for the threat to that life. (Recall my earlier example of killing someone because you need a liver transplant.) So even if a community is justified in killing to defend itself against genocide, its resistance must be directed against those who are responsible for the threat of genocide. And if, as is likely, that means not the enemy combatants but their political leaders, then what will be justified will be something rather different from war—a campaign of assassination, perhaps.

Consequentialist Justifications

I turn now from 'just war' theory to consequentialist considerations, that is, to the suggestion that wars can be justified by what they achieve. As I have said, something more is needed here than simply a utilitarian calculation. The fact that a war involves the taking of vast numbers of human lives must itself carry a very great independent weight, quite apart from the obvious disutilities of war such as the human grief and suffering, the massive destruction of resources and the dislocation of civil life. A consequentialist justification of war would have to show, in any particular case, that all of this can be outweighed by the good that waging war can achieve, or rather, by the even greater evils which it can prevent or eliminate. Can this be done?

There are strong reasons for doubting it. We might first look at the historical record. What is striking here is the way in which each war, in its outcome, sows the seeds of a future military conflict. Take the case of the Second World War. If ever any war has been justified by its aims and its results, then surely this war was. Of course it achieved its results at an immense cost, involving millions of deaths and appalling suffering, but by such means it brought about the overthrow of Nazism. At this point, however, we should remember that the purpose for which Britain declared war on Germany was not the defeat of Nazism as a political system, and that most of those who fought against it did so in complete ignorance of the concentration camps and the other distinctive features of Nazism. The occasion for Britain's entry into the war was the commitment to the independence of Poland, and it is at least debatable whether in 1945 this had been fully achieved. This should remind us that what the war did produce, as its direct consequence, was the division of Europe into two military power blocs, posing the danger of an even more destructive war, a nuclear war which would destroy European civilisation and perhaps even eliminate the human race altogether. If we then consider the possibility that Nazism could have been overthrown in other ways, without war, as Spanish fascism was eventually overcome, we may seriously wonder whether the achievements of the Second World War were as positive as they are usually thought to have been. And just as our present perilous situation is the outcome of that war, so also the ground for that war was laid by the Treaty of Versailles at the end of the First

World War; the First World War was in turn a product, in part, of the settlement at the end of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1; and so on.

That then is an example of the historical record, and of the way in which the outcome of one war becomes the cause for the next war. Nor should this surprise us. The settlement reached at the end of any war is, almost by definition, imposed by the military force of the victors, and as such it is bound to breed resentment and a smouldering desire for revenge. Pacifists would say that this illustrates a basic truth of human psychology: that violence breeds violence. It may be somewhat hazardous to infer from the facts of interpersonal behaviour to a conclusion about the political behaviour of states, but the inference does seem to be backed by historical experience. Of course causal claims about historical events are themselves notoriously conjectural. We can but guess at what might have happened if Nazism had not been resisted by military means, and at whether it could eventually have been overthrown without recourse to war. But this scepticism about predicting the consequences of waging or not waging war can itself be turned to account by pacifism. It is very difficult to tell whether fighting a war will achieve anything positive, and what its long-term consequences will be. We do know however, with very much greater certainty, that it will involve immense suffering and great loss of life. Therefore, weighing the certainty of suffering and death against the mere possibility of long-term good consequences, we may well conclude that war is never worth the risk.

Now scepticism about the positive achievements of war does not by itself entail pacifism. Nor does scepticism about ‘just war’ theory. Nor does respect for human life. What I have been claiming is that respect for human life sets up a very strong presumption against the justifiability of killing in war. Doubts about ‘just war’ theory, and doubts about the positive achievements of war, make it very difficult to see how that presumption could be overridden. That is the case for pacifism, and it is a very strong case.

Having No Choice

‘And yet . . .’ Those words of hesitation are inevitable, I think. Though I recognise the strength of the case, I still hesitate to accept it, and many people feel the same. Why is this? How is it that, though pacifism seems to be ethically compelling, doubts arise as soon as we start to think about actually applying it?

Those doubts are typically articulated by saying that, however ethically appalling it may be to contemplate fighting a war, there are situations in which people have no choice. I suggest that if we can pin down the sense of the statement ‘We have no choice’, we may be in a position to understand why pacifism remains difficult to accept.

Now of course it will never be the case literally and without qualification that one has no choice. One can always refuse to fight. But when people say that one sometimes has no choice, what they mean, I think, is that by refusing to fight, say, against aggression, or indeed against internal oppression, one is acquiescing in a very great evil, and by acquiescing in it one is tacitly endorsing it. Morally speaking, faced with that evil, we have no choice but to resist it, and if the only way to resist it is to fight, then we have no choice but to fight.

Now this reading of the situation might be challenged. Suppose that this country had been overrun by a Nazi invasion in 1940, and suppose that one had refused to fight against it. One might say: ‘I have not acquiesced in Nazism. I refuse to engage in

military resistance to it, because that too would be ethically indefensible, but that does not mean that I accept Nazism. I reject it wholeheartedly, I will give no support to it, and if the Nazis order me to cooperate with their crimes I shall disobey even though I may be shot." One might say all this, and one might act accordingly.

Nevertheless, even if many people had thought and acted thus, it could remain true that, in an important sense, Nazism had not been resisted. This is because resistance to a social phenomenon such as aggression or oppression must, if it is really to count as resistance, take a socially identifiable form. It is here that the communitarian perspective may properly come into play. 'Aggression' or 'oppression' are constituted as such by the overall social meaning of innumerable individual human actions. Therefore one cannot resist them simply in virtue of one's own interpretation of one's own action—not because one will not be effective but because action does not count as 'resistance' unless it is socially understood as such. What forms of resistance are available will therefore depend upon the institutions and traditions of the community; and if the only recognised and organisable form of resistance is military resistance, then not fighting will mean not resisting. This, I think, is the significant sense in which people could say 'We have no choice but to fight'.

What also follows, however, is that what forms of resistance are socially available is itself something that can be changed, over time, by social action. In particular, institutional procedures for settling disputes without recourse to war, and traditions of non-violent resistance to invasion and oppression, can be gradually built up. And if they *can* be, they *should* be; for the stronger such traditions become, the less likely it is that people will find themselves in a situation where they have to say 'We have no choice but to fight.'

At the theoretical level, I find insoluble the dilemma posed by pacifism: that fighting in war is ethically indefensible, but is also sometimes the only thing that people can do. The interplay between individualist and communitarian perspectives, which has been a thread running through this paper, may perhaps help us to explain why the dilemma seems irresolvable. I have said that the truth of individualism is the irreplaceability of individual human lives. When we think in those terms the overwhelming fact of war is the loss of vast numbers of individual lives, and it is difficult to see how anything else can have a countervailing moral weight. But when we think in communitarian terms, we see war as a conflict between different social institutions or movements, and if the only socially recognised form of resistance to evil social practices is military resistance, then war may seem morally inescapable. The best conclusion I can offer, therefore, is this possibility of a solution at the practical level: that by building up a tradition of non-violent resistance to aggression and oppression, we can bring it about that people do have a choice and are not faced with an impossible ethical dilemma. It might then be possible to be unhesitatingly a pacifist [16].

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NOTES

- [1] A notable exception is JENNY TEICHMAN (1986) *Pacifism and the Just War* (Oxford, Blackwell) and her earlier article 'Pacifism' in *Philosophical Investigations*, 5 (1982).
- [2] MARTIN CEADEL (1987) *Thinking About Peace and War* (Oxford, Oxford University Press). Ceadel's typology of positions in the war-and-peace debate follows the sequence from 'militarism', through

'crusading', 'defencism', and 'pacific-ism', to 'pacifism'. He derives from A. J. P. Taylor the distinction between 'pacific-ism' and 'pacifism'.

- [3] JAMES RACHELS (1986) *The End of Life* (Oxford, Oxford University Press), especially Chapter 2.
- [4] Note, however, that such cases are controversial and that, even if it is accepted that they involve a right to kill, it is severely limited. Consider the recent legal case where a woman was acquitted of murder after killing a man who had raped her. "Judge Hazan warned that his ruling was not to be regarded in any way as a charter for victims of serious crimes—even rape—to kill their attackers. 'Revenge killings are unlawful and, depending on the circumstances, amount to murder or manslaughter,' he said. 'It is only killing in lawful self-defence that is justified.'" (*The Guardian*, 1.10.87.) Note also that the woman had told the police: "I didn't mean to kill him, I only meant to get him off me—I was so frightened".
- [5] Classic examples are Wilfred Owen's poem 'Strange Meeting', and chapter IX of Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*.
- [6] MICHAEL WALZER (1980) *Just and Unjust Wars* (London, Penguin), p. 54.
- [7] *Ibid.*
- [8] This conflict between pacifism and 'just war' theory is exemplified in G. E. M. ANSCOMBE (1961) War and murder. Anscombe suggests that "pacifism teaches people to make no distinction between the shedding of innocent blood and the shedding of any human blood. And in this way pacifism has corrupted enormous numbers of people who will not act according to its tenets". The paper first appeared in: WALTER STEIN (Ed.) *Nuclear Weapons: a Catholic response* (London, Merlin Press), and has been reprinted in various places including Anscombe's (1981) *Collected Papers*, III (Oxford, Blackwell).
- [9] JEFFRIE MURPHY (1973) The killing of the innocent, *The Monist*, 57.
- [10] *Ibid.*, p. 531.
- [11] *Ibid.*, p. 536.
- [12] *Ibid.*, pp. 546–7. Cf. Walzer's linking of non-combatant immunity and rights, *op. cit.*, p. 135.
- [13] *Ibid.*, p. 538.
- [14] *Ibid.*, p. 539.
- [15] *Ibid.*, p. 547.
- [16] Many thanks for helpful comments from Tony Skillen, Karen Jones, Anne Seller, the *Journal of Applied Philosophy* referee, and philosophers at the University of Bristol and the Open University.