

War, Peace, and Pacifism

1. War is morally permissible, i.e., there are conditions under which it is morally permissible, indeed, obligatory, to respond to violence (deadly force) or the threat of violence with violence. The ruling moral principle here is *reciprocity*: sometimes it is morally right to deal violently with those who initiate violence. It is, on the other hand, never morally permissible to initiate the use of violence.
2. The use of violence against those who initiate its use is constrained by the moral principle that we must seek to avoid harming the innocent and the harmless, even when pursuing morally required ends. It is, at the very least, always wrong to *intend* the death of the innocent or the harmless. But this does not imply that the chances of such harm must be *negligible* before we can justly respond to violence with violence.
3. The moral principles that constrain the use of deadly force by governments in war also constrain the use of their police powers against their own citizens. Therefore, what is often thought of as *pacifism* is at face value an unprincipled hybrid: the idea that it is *wrong* to respond with violence against armed foreigners who have initiated the use of violence, but within one's own country morally *right* to initiate its use against its own citizens who have not acted violently.
4. What's a Christian to make of these moral requirements? The connection between morality and the Christian faith is not simple. Christianity has implications for practice; some ways of acting make sense in light of the Gospel and others don't, but Christian practice is not the same as what morality requires, nor does Christian faith call for a "higher" morality. There is no obvious route from, e.g., "turn the other cheek" to conclusions about what public policies we should support. Christian faith might call upon us to do what is contrary to morality, but in any particular case the burden of proof falls to anyone who claims it does. For moral concern and God's concerns, which we seek to make our own when we put our faith in Christ, to a degree coincide: morality constrains how we treat human beings, and it's human beings that God cares about.

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8 November 2006