

Discussion Questions

Douglas P. Lackey, "Pacifism"

1. Could the "live and let live" private pacifism that Lackey dismisses¹ be elevated into a bona fide moral principle? (Consider virtue ethics, and ethic by example. Couldn't the "live and let live" pacifist defend his or her "personal life-style" as setting an example (recall the moral exemplar argument, discussed in p. 460)?)
 2. Is the "sacredness of life" criticism a straw-man maneuver? In other words, is Lackey's claim: "If life is sacred, life, including one's own life, must be preserved at all cost." (Vaughn 459) warranted? Suppose one were to define "life" as experienced in terms of an inner quality akin to *Satyagraha* (equanimity of soul—i.e. Gandhi's pacifism he later criticism).
 3. *Must* the Gandhian pacifist "explain why psychological pressure is permissible if physical pressure is forbidden [?]" (462) Is this a fair characterization of *ahimsa*? Gandhi spoke of a proactive *struggle* for justice, but shunned physical violence.
 4. Lackey characterizes Gandhi's notion of "development of moral purity as the supreme human good" as something completely separate from "other goods, like the preservation of human life, or progress in the arts and sciences" (462). Is this however a false dichotomization? (though Gandhi spoke of simplifying the latter in service to the former, i.e. attainment of supreme moral purity)
 5. Overall, do you think Lackey makes a convincing case for anti-war pacifism as the strongest of all the four positions? (Private/exemplary [Augustine/Tolstoy], non-violent [Gandhi], Sacredness of life [Schweitzer])? Also, do you think these latter four categories accurately partition the notion of pacifism, or can you think of other renditions?
 6. Is Lackey convincing in arguing that consensus-based regulations that involve risk to life (i.e. setting the speed limit at 55 mph) are disanalogous to the risk a civilian faces during wartime, given that his or her government is the aggressor? Granted, it may be a 'strained and uncharitable' (467) claim to argue that a citizen could always flee his or her country, nevertheless are such citizens *completely* immune from consensus based risk?
 7. Consider his final (and somewhat startling) assessment of WWII (468). Do you consider this a question-begging maneuver?
-

¹ "[L]ive and let live' pacifism does not constitute a moral point of view...If a person says that A is morally wrong but that it doesn't matter if other people do A, then that person is either being inconsistent or doesn't know what the word 'moral' means." (Vaughn 456)

Class Discussion

Regarding question 5. above, there were some who felt that Lackey's four distinctions were either poorly characterized in an excessively rigid manner or that they were insufficient in fully characterizing pacifism. (**Erin Coco §0207, Kyle Lucas §0203**) For instance, **Erin** suggested that the *Golden Rule*² could underwrite all the above four forms of pacifism in such a manner that would tone down some of the *rigidity* entailed by Lackey's facile overtures to consistency.³ That is to say, adopting the Golden Rule would call forth a *provisional pacifism*: In other words, in any of the above senses if the Golden Rule underlies them, then in practicing such a pacifism one would enter into situations in which one adopts a pacifist stance by default. However (hearkening to the "provisional" aspect) should one be met with unprovoked aggression, then (according to the Golden Rule) it would not be inconsistent to deviate from the default stance and act in accord to self-defense, which *may* include violent acts. Should one think of this as somehow self-contradictory, recall Sterba's "just war pacifism," which accommodates easily acts of self-defense. Others (**Zina Makar §0207, Douglas Weithoner §0207**) echoed the general sentiment that a rigid or principled pacifism is unworkable, and that a provisional pacifism appears to be a more realistic strategy.

Many in all three sections seemed to view (as I did) Lackey's article as suffering the same defects as Primoratz's article: He spends too much time characterizing (or caricaturing) what he considers are alternate and inferior positions, and not enough in developing more fully his own. Certainly, as Leland Saunders already alluded to in lecture (April 23), Lackey's understand of history in his discussion of WWII is (no pun intended!) lacking. I bring this up in my complaint expressed in question 7 above, in which it seems that Lackey's possible world scenario depicting a Axis victory downplays the total loss of life that undoubtedly would have occurred in an ensuing broader genocide, to say the least. In this regard, many considered Sterba in a manner similar to Bedau: Bedau and Sterba both seem to develop more explicit and linear arguments throughout their essays.

Nevertheless, Sterba was not uncritically endorsed by some in the discussion sections. Specifically, **Daniel Loveland §0203** considered Sterba to appeal too much to individualistic rhetoric, which characterizes much of the romance of individualism one encounters all too often in American culture.⁴ **Daniel** was referring to the right of self-defense that Sterba invokes to scale up (in some of his eight scenarios⁵) to a position of "just war pacifism;" that he contends both the anti-war pacifist as well as the just war theorist would supposedly find favor in.

*My chief complaint against Sterba has to do with his raising the bar of *jus in bello* (in the sense that collateral damage in the form of deaths of innocent bystanders may only be *forseen*, but not *intended*) to the point where he openly admits that only *two* recent military actions⁶ could*

² As popularly expressed (from the King James version of *The New Testament*, in The Gospel of Matthew 7:12) "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." (-*Matt. 7: 12*) However, according to more recent scholarly translations (from the *New Revised Standard Version*, [or *NRSV*], The Society of Biblical Literature, Division of Christian Education, *Harper Collins Publishers*, 1989) the Golden Rule reads: "In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law of the prophets." For further commentary and exposition of the Golden Rule, see Vaughn, p. 102: "Sizing Up the Golden Rule."

³ Recall footnote 1 above as an example.

⁴ Despite all its flaws, recall John Hardwig's article (in the Euthanasia section of the course), concerning his criticism of the "Myth of Individualism."

⁵ With the exception of scenarios 3 and 8.

⁶ The Tanzanian incursion into Angola to thwart Idi Amin's abuses of power, as well as the Indian incursion into Bangladesh to thwart the Pakistani army's abuses. (Vaughn, p. 476)

pass muster in his characterization of just war pacifism. But *then*, he goes on to say (conveniently disguised in a footnote) that:

Of course, anti-war pacifists are right to point out that virtually all wars that have been fought have led to unforeseen harms and have been fought with less and less discrimination as the wars. Obviously, these are considerations that in just war theory must weigh heavily against going to war. (n. 10, p. 477)

So Sterba admits here how the issue of the 'fog of war' provides ample reason why anti-war pacifists (like Lackey) argue (along utilitarian lines) that the negative consequences of war *always* outweigh any possibly or actually beneficial consequences thereon. But the reader is left wondering therefore: *How effectively did Sterba prove his case here? Perhaps in the end all he showed was that the anti-war pacifist and the just war theorist might agree on some reasons for declaring war, i.e. they might agree with respect to issues concerning jus ad bellum, but once the war is being fought, perhaps there is no way to reconcile the viewpoints.*

To put the matter in another way: An anti-war pacifist might give a charitable presentation of just war theory by agreeing the s/he shares common ground(s) in the issue of *jus ad bellum*. But once wars are declared, the pacifist would argue that there is absolutely no way of implementing any *just in bello* procedures, no matter how modest. And this is precisely what makes wars so terrible and therefore absolutely morally impermissible: the fog of war becomes ubiquitous in any protracted or prolonged conflict. So exactly *how* has Sterba shown that anti-war pacifism and just war theory can be reconciled in any workable way? After all, the main issue becomes what to do once the *actual* conflict has begun. But here Sterba hedges his points (in footnotes 10 and 11) to the extent that the pacifist may respond: "You're right, Sterba. That's what we have been saying all along: *No wars* are just, insofar as *none of them are ever fought in a just manner*, no matter how lofty the ideals were in the wars' initial declaration." So in this sense Sterba's points seem to collapse to anti-war pacifism.