

The Moral Case for Just War: A Critique of Pacifism by C.S. Lewis

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Categories: Literature Review

In essay "Why I'm Not a Pacifist," C.S. Lewis presents a compelling argument against pacifism and in favor of the moral case for just war. Lewis, a renowned Christian apologist and author, articulates his views on the ethical implications of warfare and the necessity of engaging in conflict under certain circumstances. This essay critically examines Lewis's position on just war theory and pacifism, analyzing the moral and philosophical considerations that underpin his argument.

Just War Theory

Central to Lewis's critique of pacifism is the concept of just war theory, which provides a framework for evaluating the morality of engaging in armed conflict. According to just war theory, a war is justified if it meets certain criteria, including the presence of a just cause, legitimate authority, right intention, probability of success, proportionality, and last resort. Lewis contends that these criteria serve as moral guidelines for determining when it is permissible to wage war, thereby rejecting the absolutist stance of pacifism.

The Problem of Evil

One of Lewis's primary arguments against pacifism is rooted in his theological perspective on the problem of evil. As a Christian thinker, Lewis acknowledges the existence of evil in the world and the moral imperative to resist and confront it. He asserts that pacifism fails to address the reality of evil and the necessity of taking a stand against injustice and oppression. For Lewis, the refusal to use force in the face of evil is morally untenable and ultimately perpetuates suffering and tyranny.

Ethical Responsibility

Furthermore, Lewis emphasizes the ethical responsibility of individuals and nations to protect the innocent and uphold justice. He contends that pacifism, by advocating non-resistance in the face of aggression, abdicates this responsibility and undermines the moral imperative to defend the vulnerable. Lewis asserts that the moral duty to intervene in conflicts and confront malevolence necessitates the use of force when all other means have been exhausted, aligning with the principles of just war theory.

The Role of Government

In addition to individual ethical obligations, Lewis addresses the role of government in upholding justice and maintaining order. He argues that pacifism undermines the authority and legitimacy of the state to protect its citizens and preserve the common good. According to Lewis, the state has a moral obligation to safeguard its people from external threats and internal turmoil, which may require the use of force in accordance with just war principles. Thus, pacifism is deemed impractical and naive in the face of real-world geopolitical challenges.

Critique of Pacifism

While Lewis presents a compelling case for the moral justification of just war, his critique of pacifism is not without its limitations. Critics of Lewis's position argue that just war theory itself is subject to interpretation and manipulation, leading to the potential misuse of armed conflict for political or ideological ends. Moreover, the historical reality of warfare raises questions about the efficacy of military intervention in achieving lasting peace and justice. Pacifists contend that nonviolent resistance and conflict resolution can offer viable alternatives to war, challenging the necessity of armed aggression.

Conclusion

C.S. Lewis's critique of pacifism and advocacy for the moral case for just war reflects his nuanced understanding of the complexities of moral decision-making in the context of conflict. By appealing to just war theory, the problem of evil, ethical responsibility, and the role of government, Lewis presents a robust defense of the legitimacy of armed intervention under certain conditions. However, the debate between pacifism and just war theory continues to provoke ethical, philosophical, and practical considerations that warrant further reflection and dialogue.