

PACIFISM WITHOUT RIGHT AND WRONG

Daniel Diederich Farmer

Moral philosophers generally regard pacifism with disdain. Forty years ago, Jan Narveson called it a “bizarre and vaguely ludicrous” doctrine,¹ and that assessment is, in some form or other, still common today. Few contemporary ethicists self-identify as pacifists, and in peace and war studies, just war theory is now the standard. That standard perpetuates the stereotype of pacifism as naïve and wrongheaded. The only way to make nonviolent commitments respectable under the prevailing view is by subsuming them under just war logic, as in John Lango’s recent appeal for nonviolent interventionism.² In brief, just war theory dominates the discourse. What makes this dominance problematic is that just war theory systematically misconstrues and caricatures the pacifist position. Pacifist commitments can only be properly understood when the lenses of just war theory are put aside. Only then is it possible to understand why pacifism appears ridiculous in the literature. Straw men usually do.

My aim in this article is to articulate the version of pacifism most pacifists in fact espouse. This will make it clear how standard renditions of the pacifist view are deficient. In my first section, I will distinguish three varieties of pacifism along the lines of the standard threefold division of moral theory. I will argue that standard depictions of pacifism in the literature identify pacifism with its weakest version, and show how that version terribly violates moral common sense. That will explain the marginalization of pacifism in mainstream moral philosophy. In my second section, I will articulate the key ideas and insights of a more robust form of pacifism—one which I take to be representative of actual pacifist commitments. This version of pacifism, I will argue, avoids the unpalatable conclusions that follow from the weak pacifism represented in the literature. In my third and final section, I will address the greatest and most common objection to pacifism, namely that, under any form, pacifism is hopelessly naïve because it is unrealistic.

In all this, I am motivated by the philosophical conviction that moral theories are best judged when first understood on their own terms. I am motivated also by the conviction that pacifism has not been well understood. The predominance of contemporary just war theory, I contend, actually functions to prevent such

understanding. With some luck, this article may contribute to the rectification of the situation.

I. THREE VARIETIES OF PACIFISM

Deontological, utilitarian, and virtue theories in ethics emphasize duty, outcomes, and character, respectively. While I do not want to presume that these various ethical outlooks are necessarily incommensurable, they nevertheless suggest three very different ways of framing pacifist commitments. Accordingly, we may speak of deontological, utilitarian, and virtue-ethical versions of pacifism.

Deontological pacifism is the view that violence and war are always and everywhere impermissible or wrong. There is a duty, on this view, not to act violently, either in interpersonal or in international affairs. This moral prescription might be grounded in the impossibility of universalizing a maxim prescribing that violent harm be done to another person, or perhaps in the alleged infinite worth of human persons.³

Utilitarian pacifism, oriented as it is toward the greatest good for the greatest number, opposes violence and war on the basis of their negative outcomes. As a general rule, violence breeds more violence. Even when deployed to the end of peace, violent solutions tend to exacerbate problems rather than resolve them. Therefore, the utilitarian pacifist's commitment to the greatest good prohibits him or her from using or recommending violent force. Incidentally, this kind of pacifism can make sense only to rule-utilitarians. Act-utilitarianism notoriously steers clear of definitive moral pronouncements formulated at too high a level of generality.

Finally, virtue pacifism is the commitment to becoming a peaceful person. Insofar as collectives can be agents, virtue pacifism also involves the commitment to making our institutions peaceful. The virtue of a virtue pacifism is peaceableness, which can be thought of as the mean between passivity and belligerence in social interactions. I will have more to say about this idea below.

The strongest of these views, I submit, is virtue pacifism. Before I give my argument for that claim, however, consider the other two views. Utilitarian pacifists such as Martin Benjamin and Ronald Santoni see the risks posed by modern wars as being far too great to satisfy the just war requirements of *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* (notice again the theory's dominance). "[T]he next world war," Benjamin says, "would in all likelihood be the last one—not because it would be the 'war to end war,' but because it would be the war to end all life on earth."⁴ "It follows," Santoni adds, "that the adoption of at least *nuclear* pacifism is the only morally appropriate response to the principles of discrimination, control and restraint in a nuclear age."⁵ Santoni goes even further, suggesting that the risk of nuclear omnicide "is a compelling moral reason against the justifiability of waging *any* modern war."⁶ Though I am sympathetic to this line of argument, it falls prey to

the objection that can be leveled against all such utilitarian arguments, namely that its predictions may be mistaken. I have no desire to make predictions about the outcomes of specific wars, or about the outcomes of war in general. Utilitarian reasoning is not the most promising route to justify pacifist commitments, and it represents a minority view among pacifists. For these reasons, I leave it aside.

Deontological pacifism is the weakest form of pacifism, in the sense of being the least defensible. At the interpersonal level, deontological pacifism prohibits violence in self-defense and in defense of others. It entails that those who do act violently to save themselves or others are first and foremost wrongdoers. Likewise, at the international level, deontological pacifism prohibits war, suggesting that those who kill and those who command others to kill in such contexts are moral wrongdoers (rather than, say, heroes or liberators).

Early in 2010, in Phoenix, Arizona, a twenty-six-year-old man assaulted his ex-girlfriend in front of her home. While he was choking her, the woman's father came out of the house and shot her attacker once in the leg. The attacker let go of the woman and came after her father, who shot him again, this time in the abdomen. The attacker survived the gun wounds but was captured and subsequently charged with assault.⁷ The woman's father in this situation, precisely because he acted violently, saved his daughter's life. On a deontological pacifist view, however, we are required to view the father as a sinner of sorts, rather than as a hero. And likewise with all those who use violent force. It is difficult to take such assessments seriously.

The pacifism ridiculed by Jan Narveson and Tom Regan is of this deontological variety. It is "a principle of obligation binding on all rational, free beings,"⁸ entailing "absolute opposition to the use of force."⁹ Whatever else is said about fathers who defend their daughters through force, or about veterans of war, on a deontological pacifist view, such moral agents commit wrong. This is, we may judge, a *reductio ad absurdum* of the deontological pacifist view.¹⁰ Whereas the deontological pacifist is committed to saying that violent responses to injustice are morally deficient, moral common sense judges that the deficiency lies in not acting.

Utilitarian pacifism is problematic, and deontological pacifism is indefensible. Yet neither of these is the dominant view among pacifists, who see their commitments as being most at home in virtue theory.¹¹ What this means is that the pacifism ridiculed in the literature is not the pacifism defended by pacifists. Therefore, whatever problems pacifism might have, have not yet been identified and addressed by its critics, who have insisted on targeting only the most naïve form of pacifism possible—a caricature of the actual thing. As many people are deontological pacifists as affirm the correctness of Kant's absolute prohibition of lying.¹²

I do not think this systematic misconstrual is culpable or otherwise intentional. Rather it has arisen as a by-product of dominant frames in ethical theory. For instance, Michael Walzer suggests that just war theory should be seen as falling

between a (morally problematic) militarism (or so-called “realism”) and a (morally problematic) pacifism.¹³ By framing his own position in this way, Walzer implies that pacifism is first and foremost a position in ethical and political theory about the justifiability of violence and war. This reflects the larger emphasis in contemporary ethical theory on questions of moral permissibility and impermissibility. And while pacifists often *do* have something to say about violence and war, their nonviolent commitments do not originate from stances on the abstract justifiability of violence.

In what follows, I offer an exposition of the kind of pacifism pacifists are actually likely to defend. My aim is to show how virtue pacifism avoids the *reductio* to which deontological pacifism succumbs.

II. OUTLINES OF A VIRTUE PACIFISM

One of the hallmarks of virtue ethics is its emphasis on the good over the right. Morality, on the virtue ethicist’s view, is to be conceived of *thickly*, as being concerned with living fully and well (and not merely “ethically”). Advocates of virtue theory have accordingly emphasized rich and expansive moral vocabularies.¹⁴ Questions of right by contrast—questions of what is obligatory, permissible, impermissible and so forth—are put on the back burner.¹⁵ A dynamic picture of moral life is thereby generated. I may be somewhat courageous today, but with the proper training, and by emulating the right exemplars, I can be more courageous tomorrow. Since both my actions and my character, in a virtue-ethical framework, are evaluated not in terms of “right” and “wrong” but in terms of honesty, courage, kindness, craftiness, and integrity (and so on), we may naturally speak of an individual’s moral training and moral progress. The kind of pacifism I have called virtue pacifism then, may be thought of as a commitment to *becoming* a certain kind of person—a peaceable person.¹⁶

Virtue pacifism shares with utilitarian pacifism the conviction that violence is in itself undesirable and that it tends to breed more violence.¹⁷ Therefore it regards the ability of an agent to defuse volatile situations as an excellence of character. Peaceableness, in other words, is an interpersonal and political virtue. This type of excellence requires for its adequate characterization that we acknowledge (1) the central role of narrative in guiding human behavior, and (2) the judgment involved in mapping a particular experience onto the descriptive and prescriptive narrative best suited to it. Let me say a bit more about each point.

First, we make sense of our lived experience through narrative. We tell stories about events and people to connect them to larger cultural pools of shared generic plots and characters. This provides our lives with a modicum of intelligibility. Philosophers generally recognize the point nowadays, but it nevertheless bears emphasizing. Alasdair MacIntyre drives the point home as follows:

I am standing waiting for a bus and the young man standing next to me suddenly says: “The name of the common wild duck is *Histrionicus histrionicus histrionicus*.” There is no problem as to the meaning of the sentence he uttered: the problem is, how to answer the question, what was he doing in uttering it? Suppose he just uttered such sentences at random intervals; this would be one possible form of madness. We would render his action of utterance intelligible if one of the following turned out to be true. He has mistaken me for someone who yesterday had approached him in the library and asked: “Do you by any chance know the Latin name of the common wild duck?” Or he has just come from a session with his psychotherapist who has urged him to break down his shyness by talking to strangers. “But what shall I say?” “Oh, anything at all.” Or he is a Soviet spy waiting at a prearranged rendezvous and uttering the ill-chosen code sentence which will identify him to his contact. In each case the act of utterance become intelligible by finding its place in a narrative.¹⁸

The world, insofar as it is a *world* and not a frazzling set of disconnected and unintelligible “events,” appears to us in narrative form. If traffic is unusually slow, I am confused and frustrated until I realize that it is rush hour, or see that there is construction work being done up ahead, or that there has been an accident. The same can be said for all intelligible sequences of events.¹⁹

Of central importance, narrative logic governs not only how we make sense of the past, but also how we imagine the future. Narratives provide action guidance. If I know that my friend has had one too many drinks and I see him headed toward his car, I say to myself, *This cannot end well*. (Perhaps the newspaper headline “Drunk driver kills three” flashes through my mind.) Hence, I intervene. If I wake up to the sound of breaking glass and observe a shadowy figure climbing through my neighbors’ window, I say to myself, *The neighbors are being burglarized*. So I call the police.²⁰

The second point follows naturally. To put it simply, the world does not narrate itself to me. Rather, I narrate the world. As Mark Johnson puts it, “The situations in which we find ourselves and in which we must decide how to act do not come with their one and only proper descriptions attached. We have to conceptualize them in a certain way.”²¹ That is, we are the ones who must identify *this* real-life circumstance with *that* idealized narrative. We have to identify *this* real-life person with *that* idealized character. So while there may be reason to analyze the obligations we have toward a *Villainous Aggressor*, an *Innocent Aggressor*, or an *Innocent Threat*, as Jonathan Quong does in his recent article “Killing in Self-Defense,” that is only *half* of the action-guiding work.²² These are characters that have their home in highly schematized moral narratives. We must take the further step of becoming skilled employers of those narratives. Thus, the virtue of peaceableness is best characterized as the skill of bringing the right narrative to bear on situations of conflict.²³ Where others see violence as the only option, “the pacifist,” Stanley Hauerwas explains, “does not accept

descriptions of situations as constant.”²⁴ She instead creatively and imaginatively acts from narratives in which the character of the wrongdoer is not fixed, and in which violence is not inevitable.

In February 2008, a thirty-one-year-old man by the name of Julio Diaz was approached at a train stop in the Bronx by a teenager wielding a knife. The teen demanded his money. (He was playing, we might say, the role of a *Villainous Thief*.) Diaz handed the teenager his wallet, and then offered him his coat. When the teenager was confused, Diaz pressed on and invited his mugger to dinner. He accepted. Because he offered to pay for dinner, the teen gave Diaz back his wallet, and also relinquished his knife upon request.²⁵ The man acted this way, I submit, because he saw the teen not as a *Villainous Thief*, but as a *Redeemable Thief*. The mugger, on the other hand, had probably seen him as merely a *Hapless Victim*. But Julio Diaz proved himself to be a *Considerate Stranger*.

Terry Dobson was a young American studying aikido in Tokyo, Japan, in the early 1960s. On his train commute home one spring afternoon, a large, drunk, and dirty man in laborer’s clothing staggered into the car, cursing, screaming, and striking at people. He was looking for trouble. Before Dobson could intervene (violently), however, a diminutive old man called to the laborer in a singsong voice and engaged him in conversation. The drunkard, as it turned out, was a recent widower who had lost his job. As the old man spoke with him, the laborer confessed his deep-seated feelings of shame and collapsed tearfully into the old man’s lap. Whereas Dobson framed the situation in a closed (deterministic) way and was prepared to act on that framing (perhaps imagining glorious headlines of “American subdues belligerent drunk on train”), the old man clearly had a more empathetic and imaginative take on the laborer’s behavior.²⁶ Peaceableness is this ability to creatively defuse and transform social situations in which violence, or more violence, seems otherwise inevitable.

A virtue is an excellence of character, often lying as a mean between two extremes. On Aristotle’s view, for example, courage is a mean between rashness and cowardice.²⁷ At first pass, and as I suggested earlier, we might judge that the virtue a pacifist strives to acquire is peaceableness, construed as the mean between passivity and belligerence in social interactions. Some Christian pacifists have spoken of their commitments in this way.²⁸ On this view, passivity in social interactions involves the refusal to stand up to wrongdoers (for oneself or for others). One occasionally hears enraging stories of assault in public places where bystanders do nothing. On this account, such bystanders are viciously passive. The opposite extreme of belligerence in social interactions is exemplified in the vigilante’s violent and overeager responses to perceived threats or insults. Road rage provides another apt example.

But this analysis, while somewhat helpful, must be transcended. Because it situates the virtue of peaceableness on a single continuum between two obviously undesirable extremes, it is committed to the blunt judgment, shared with the deon-

tological pacifist, that violent interveners are morally deficient. And while pacifism must necessarily make some kind of critical judgment about violent responses to injustice, a more plausible pacifism requires that a more fine-grained judgment be made—lest virtue pacifism succumb to its own *reductio ad absurdum*.

A more nuanced analysis can be given, I submit, by focusing on the question of nonviolence. If peaceableness were simply a mean between the extremes of passivity and belligerence, we might wrongly judge it to be compatible with “moderate” or “measured” uses of violent or even lethal force (anything “non-excessive”). Instead of a single axis then, we need to plot pacifist commitments on two axes. First, we may speak of an individual’s relative passivity or activity in social interactions (is she engaged or disengaged?); second, we may speak of the *mode* of that individual’s activity, if she is in fact active. Pacifists encourage nonviolent activity, like the activity of the man who was mugged, or that of the old man on the train. The violent intervener, on this model, is closer to the desired virtue than the coward. For the coward must be taught first to engage, and second, how to engage, whereas the violent person need only be corrected in his or her mode of intervention. This explains why Mohandas Gandhi said, “Between violence and cowardly flight, I can only prefer violence to cowardice. I can no more preach nonviolence to a coward than I can tempt a blind man to enjoy healthy scenes.”²⁹

It is in this way that virtue pacifism avoids the *reductio* to which deontological pacifism succumbs. Because violence and war are always and everywhere wrong, on the deontological pacifist view, violent interveners, no matter the cause they serve, are wrongdoers before they are anything else. By contrast, on the virtue pacifist account, violent interveners are praiseworthy *qua* interveners. Given that most of us fail on this count, those who take it upon themselves to bring an end to injustice are rightly judged to be morally laudable. However, virtue pacifism also involves the more fine-grained judgment that paths to nonviolent resolution of conflict and injustice are sometimes available to virtuously creative individuals. Unlike deontological pacifism then, virtue pacifism does not systematically judge violent interveners to be wrongdoers (though the label *may* apply). In many cases, violent interveners may simply be sadly, or even tragically, uncreative.³⁰

III. PACIFISM IS A HUMANISM

I have argued that pacifism appears implausible and ridiculous in the literature, largely as a result of being associated with its least defensible formulation. That association in turn flows from the centrality of questions of moral right (of permissibility and impermissibility) in ethics and in peace and war studies. I have suggested that the association is mistaken, however, and that most pacifists in fact espouse what might be called “virtue pacifism”—that is, the commitment to becoming peaceable persons. As I have defined it, peaceableness is an excellence

of character, manifest in social interaction, which makes possible nonviolent resolutions of conflict by insistently and creatively exploring alternative ways of framing and narrating social exchanges and the roles played in those exchanges by moral agents. The virtue pacifist is committed to acquiring this virtue for herself and to encouraging other individuals as well as institutions to acquire it. But what is missing from this account is the motivation for being a pacifist in the first place. Even if virtue pacifism, because of its more fine-grained vocabulary, is *more* defensible than deontological pacifism, aren't all forms of pacifism still profoundly naïve, or at least motivated by ill-conceived metaphysical doctrines? Isn't pacifism unrealistic?

This objection, as I understand it, is an attempt to take seriously the challenges of the world we live in. But I can think of nothing that better does justice to the "real world" than the acknowledgment that violence is dreadful and should be avoided whenever possible. Violence has the power of destroying meaning in our lives by unnaturally shortening the lives of our loved ones, by eradicating whatever sense of security we may have, and by turning those of us who use it into less than fully human beings. And while Gandhian pacifists admittedly have the monistic metaphysical apparatus of Hinduism, and Christians pacifists, the expectation of a future peace-filled Kingdom of God, pacifism as such requires neither. As I understand them then, pacifist commitments flow simply and naturally from the desirability of a world without violence.

To this I add three further considerations. First, pacifists are moral anti-essentialists. That is, our ontology does not include "good people" and "bad people." The character of a moral agent is never fixed. Certain character traits may be better entrenched than others, to be sure, but change is always possible. Another way of saying the same thing is that pacifists insist on the distinction between particular persons and the roles they happen to be playing. That he is (presently) a *Villainous X* is never the final truth about any particular moral agent. And whatever the case may be about the world as investigated in the physical sciences, our *lived* world is indeterministic. We cannot be certain about the outcome of any human interaction.³¹ This epistemic limitation is, for the pacifist, an open door to hope.³² Thus, the pacifist eschews all determinisms according to which violence "must" be used.³³

Second, pacifists take seriously the power of the interpersonal. As primatologist Frans de Waal puts it, "If man is wolf to man, he is so in every sense, not just the negative one."³⁴ That is, we are social and empathetic animals through and through. It is the legacy of our evolution. Accordingly, pacifism is not a blanket prescription for human beings that is content to leave the world untouched (and in fact it is not a blanket prescription). Because we care best for others in certain types of situations (as a result of the biological history of our species), pacifists are committed to critiquing the social and political structures that make care and empathy harder than they need to be. To be committed to peace is to be commit-

ted to making social and political structures more conducive to peace, by being more conducive to empathy and care.³⁵ This is what Fiona Robinson has called a critical, politicized ethics of care.³⁶ She says,

An ethics of care must not only be about reflecting upon and promoting relations which motivate and encourage the moral qualities of attentiveness and communication among moral agents. It must also reflect critically on why certain global structures inhibit the creation and development of such relations, and on whether patterns of “community-making,” and hence exclusion, serve to undermine the ability of moral agents to identify and understand others as “real” individuals—with real, special, unique lives.³⁷

The pacifist, who is committed to developing peaceableness in herself, is therefore not a quietist. Her commitment comes with a critical politics.³⁸ Though pacifists insist that violence is never inevitable, we are not so blind as to claim that it is always easy to avoid. We therefore have an interest in restructuring our societies and economies in ways that make visible our interdependence.³⁹

Third and finally, pacifists (like everyone else) must acknowledge the risk involved in all moral living. There will be times, and there have been times, when turning the other cheek does not work. Unfortunately, we cannot know which times those will be, ahead of time. Thus there is a radical vulnerability that accompanies any pacifist commitment. I must commit to becoming a peaceable person, in the hope that my contribution to social reality will in fact make the world a more peaceful place, all while realizing that my efforts may turn out to be futile. However, that radical vulnerability is nothing more than the human condition. One may reject pacifist commitments as naïve, arm oneself to the teeth, and yet break one’s neck after slipping in the shower. And that is just as true of individuals as of nation-states.⁴⁰ In these three ways, the pacifist does justice to the way the world “really is.” In these three ways then, the pacifist is also a realist.⁴¹

John Paul Lederach suggests that “[t]ranscending violence is forged by the capacity to generate, mobilize, and build the moral imagination [which] requires the capacity to imagine ourselves in a web of relationships that includes our enemies . . . and the acceptance of the inherent risk of stepping into the mystery of the unknown that lies beyond the far too familiar landscape of violence.”⁴² As Lederach’s words show, and as I have repeatedly emphasized, the pacifism of pacifists is not the pacifism of philosophers—at least, not if we are to judge by critiques of pacifism in the literature.⁴³ Though I have bracketed concerns of permissible and impermissible behavior for the sake of drawing out that disconnect, I now conclude this article with a brief reflection on what a pacifist might say about such matters.

We must distinguish, I submit, between the refusal to blame violent interveners for their deeds, on the one hand, and the acceptance of future violent intervention, on the other. Because pacifism—by which I of course mean virtue pacifism—entails a dynamic vision of the moral order, it is comfortable with a

certain asymmetry in moral judgment. That is, I may as a pacifist judge that the gun-toting father mentioned above did the “right” thing, in the sense that it was permissible and even good.⁴⁴ He intervened where a wrong was being done and defended his innocent daughter against her attacker. However, this backward-looking judgment, which refuses to blame the father in any strong sense for his violent intervention, need not be seen as an endorsement of his strategy for all times and places. It need not be seen as the application of a principle to be taken as action-guiding for the future. Because virtues are excellences of character that must be painstakingly acquired, virtuous (peaceable) behavior cannot be expected of everyone. But the ideal of peaceableness, in a forward-looking sense, favors nonviolent approaches to conflict resolution. The father shot his daughter’s attacker, which could have resulted in the attacker dying, though he in fact did not. The attacker, though his actions were abhorrent, was someone’s son (perhaps also someone’s father), and his life was valuable as well. On a pacifist view then, what would have been *better* than just “good” or “right” would have been a form of engagement that was not potentially lethal (and imagining just what that might have been is of course the role of the moral imagination⁴⁵).

Richard Mouw has suggested that just war theory be thought of on analogy with a hypothetical “just adultery” doctrine. He says,

Suppose that a German Christian male had the opportunity during Hitler’s reign to form an adulterous relationship with Eva Braun, Hitler’s mistress, and thereby gain important information which might well lead to the downfall of the Third Reich. It is at least conceivable, I believe, that this might constitute a case of Just Adultery. . . . Such a doctrine on my hypothesis might very well be legitimate and proper. But suppose that this doctrine also created a tendency toward unjustified adultery—merely by officially acknowledging the fact that under certain conditions adultery might be morally justified. Suppose further that people were then trained to commit adultery in the event that their services might become necessary. Suppose also that special medals of honor were awarded to outstanding adulterers.⁴⁶

The point, as Mouw sees it, is that “some doctrines, however true and appropriate they might be in application to rare cases, become dangerous when they are propagated and institutionalized.”⁴⁷ I see here a slightly different lesson. “Just adultery,” like “just war,” is (or ought to be) really about retrospective *excusability*. There is no point in resenting or blaming violent interveners when they have exercised a modicum of good judgment and restraint in a difficult situation. But there is a world of difference between excusing violent behavior as “justifiable” and recommending it for all moral agents (in circumstances judged to be “similar”) in the future.⁴⁸ On a pacifist view, moral agents should be encouraged to become pacifists, not “just” warriors or “just” adulterers. To recommend the latter is to capitulate to unimaginativeness.⁴⁹ It is to lose hope.⁵⁰

I began this article with the claim that discussions of pacifism in moral and

political philosophy reduce pacifism to its least defensible form (viz., a deontological pacifism according to which violence and war are always and everywhere impermissible). That reduction flows from the theoretical-juridical preoccupations of contemporary ethical thought, both in analytic philosophy broadly construed and in peace and war studies, more specifically. To that straw man, I have opposed a virtue-ethical pacifism that better represents the commitments of actual pacifists. Virtue pacifism takes seriously the authorship of social reality shared between moral agents, and identifies the ability to peaceably “out-narrate” potentially or actually violent wrongdoers as an excellence of character. To the charge that pacifism is unrealistic, I have replied that pacifism is quite realistic in its refusal to be deterministic, its acknowledgment of the need for social change, and its concession of the “fragility of goodness.”⁵¹ Finally, I have suggested that we distinguish between permissibility or justifiability as excusability and permissibility or justifiability as endorsability for action guidance. The pacifist’s perspective differs from that of the just war theorist’s only with respect to the latter.

As I understand it, pacifism involves the threefold commitment (1) to becoming peaceable; (2) to encouraging others, individuals and institutions, to become peaceable; and (3) to evaluating social and political structures in light of how they make empathy and care for others possible or impossible. About this form of pacifism, little has been said.

Marquette University

NOTES

I am deeply grateful to Kevin Gibson for his encouragement and for his insightful feedback on an earlier draft of this article. Thanks also to an anonymous referee for *Public Affairs Quarterly* for her or his helpful comments.

1. Jan Narveson, “Is Pacifism Consistent?,” *Ethics*, vol. 78, no. 2 (1968), p. 148.
2. See John W. Lango, “Before Military Force, Nonviolent Action: An Application of a Generalized Just War Principle of Last Resort,” *Public Affairs Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 2 (2009), pp. 115–133. Lango argues, “The last resort principle establishes a moral obligation to resort to nonviolent action rather than military force, whenever it is reasonable to do so” (p. 119).
3. Alternatively, a more attractive type of deontological pacifism might find a foothold in the individual’s “right to life.” Seth Lazar’s analysis of war’s justifiability in light of such a right is helpful; see Lazar, “The Responsibility Dilemma for *Killing in War*: A Review Essay,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, vol. 38, no. 2 (2010), pp. 180–213. Though not unuseful, rights-talk cannot ultimately *justify* pacifist commitments, on my view.
4. Martin Benjamin, “Pacifism for Pragmatists,” *Ethics*, vol. 83, no. 3 (1973), pp. 196–213; p. 199.

5. Ronald E. Santoni, "Just War, Pacifism, and the Myth of Controllability," *Journal for Peace and Justice Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1988), pp. 13–21; p. 19.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

7. "Man Choking His Ex-girlfriend Shot by Her Dad," on *KTAR.com* (March 17, 2010), <http://ktar.com/?nid=6&sid=1275203>. This story was linked from *The Armed Citizen* blog, which has as its self-announced mission to "[i]llustrate the right and need for self-defense by telling the stories of those saved by using guns, and to convince every human being that self-defense is a human right that must always be preserved." <http://www.thearmedcitizen.com/>.

8. Tom Regan, "A Defense of Pacifism," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1972), pp. 73–86; p. 74.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

10. Benjamin likewise rejects any "principled or absolute pacifism" according to which "the infliction of bodily harm to resist or prevent bodily harm or some other evil is wrong *as such*" (Benjamin, "Pacifism for Pragmatists," p. 196).

11. For example, Stanley Hauerwas argues that "pacifism is much closer to an ethics of virtue than to those positions that tend to limit ethics to questions concerning the justification of decisions." Hauerwas, "Pacifism: Some Philosophical Considerations," *Faith and Philosophy*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1985), pp. 99–104; p. 102. G. Simon Harak explicitly characterizes nonviolence as a virtue and explores the passions that accompany it in *Virtuous Passions: The Formation of Christian Character* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), esp. pp. 129–132; and Walter Wink insists that "[v]iolence is not an absolute evil to be avoided at all costs," in *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), p. 83, though he advocates for sustained nonviolent training: "Nonviolent training needs to become a regular and repetitive component of every change-oriented group's life" (p. 88).

12. The wrongfulness of lying, as Rosalind Hursthouse points out, lies primarily in its being "dishonest, and dishonesty is a vice." Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 6.

13. A just war theorist, on Walzer's account, holds "that war is sometimes justifiable and that the conduct of war is always subject to moral criticism. The first of these propositions is denied by pacifists, who believe that war is a criminal act; and the second is denied by realists, for whom 'all's fair in love and war.' . . . So just war theorists set themselves in opposition to pacifists and realists." Michael Walzer, *Arguing about War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), p. ix.

14. Many examples could be given. One of them is Edmund Pincoffs, *Quandaries and Virtues: Against Reductivism in Ethics* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1986).

15. The reductive emphasis on right and wrong (or "permissible" and "impermissible"), though it might at times have its uses, tends to portray morality as a compact and codifiable set of obligations. Margaret Urban Walker has called this the "theoretical-judicial model" of ethics. The view has its problems. See Walker, *Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study in Ethics*, 2nd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

16. Speaking of "peaceableness" rather than "peacefulness" emphasizes a kind of activity rather than a state.

17. Violence is admittedly a nebulous concept, which I have not endeavored to define. I do not think the vagueness of the concept affects anything I say in this article, however. I also deal exclusively with the question of interpersonal and international violence without taking up the question of how human beings relate to nonhuman animals. Though articulating and defending this claim in any great detail would take me too far afield, I do not see any principled way of limiting the scope of peaceableness to how we treat other *Homo sapiens*.

18. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd edition (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), p. 210.

19. Although I focus here on the *narrative* framing of human action, much valuable work has also been done on the *semantic* framing of human action, largely as a result of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's work on conceptual metaphor; see Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). "Semantic frames," in Johnson's words, "do not simply mirror some objective reality or category. Rather they define that reality by means of imaginative structure." Mark Johnson, *Moral Imagination: Implications of Cognitive Science for Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 192. Thus our understanding of any situation emerges from the meshing of our various semantic and/or narrative frames with what we see, feel, and hear. I take *semantic* framing to be a matter of describing states (e.g., "they were drunk" vs. "they were in high spirits") and *narrative* framing to be a matter of describing sequences of events (e.g., "the man behind me is probably going to try to pick my pockets" vs. "the man behind me is probably in a hurry to get home"). The two categories obviously bleed into each other, and so I will not try to be precise about distinguishing them in the article.

20. Of course, narrative logic governs our behavior even when we do not *consciously* describe the situation to ourselves. The claim here is just that, to the extent that sequences of events are intelligible, it is because they have found their place in some sort of narrative ordering. And that ordering in turn is what makes it possible for us to respond meaningfully to events.

21. Johnson, *Moral Imagination*, p. 192.

22. Jonathan Quong, "Killing in Self-Defense," *Ethics*, vol. 119, no. 3 (2009), pp. 507–537. He borrows the characters from Judith Jarvis Thomson, "Self-Defense," *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, vol. 20, no. 4 (1991), pp. 283–310.

23. By "the right narrative," understand any narrative that makes a just peace possible (there may be more than one).

24. Hauerwas, "Pacifism," p. 102.

25. "A Victim Treats His Mugger Right," on *Morning Edition*, National Public Radio (March 28, 2008), <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=89164759>.

26. Adapted from Terry Dobson, "The Art of Reconciliation," in *What Would You Do? A Serious Answer to a Standard Question*, ed. John Howard Yoder, expanded edition (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992), pp. 104–107. The story nicely illustrates MacIntyre's claim. He says, "There is no such thing as 'behavior,' to be identified prior to and independently of intentions, beliefs and settings" (MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 208).

27. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 1107b1–5.

28. Wink, for example, suggests that pacifist commitments make possible responses

to threats that are a “third way” between the twin extremes of fight and flight. See his *Jesus and Nonviolence*, esp. chap. 2.

29. Mohandas K. Gandhi, quoted in the BBC’s online ethics guide entry on “Nonviolence,” at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/war/against/nonviolence.shtml> (accessed May 15, 2010). Benjamin makes a similar point when he says,

Misled by etymological similarities, many people identify pacifism with passivity; they think that to be against military means of defense is to be against any form of defense. But a moment’s reflection will show that many of those whose names have been most closely connected with pacifistic means in recent years—Gandhi, A. J. Muste, Martin Luther King, Jr., Cesar Chavez, Danilo Dolci—can hardly be said to have been passive in the face of those whom they have opposed. The choice before us, then, need not be between resistance and capitulation; rather it may well be between continued reliance on traditional military means of defense and reliance on nonmilitary means of defense. (Benjamin, “Pacifism for Pragmatists,” p. 197)

30. In the context of war, this judgment applies primarily to the politicians responsible for war, though it may also secondarily apply to military commanders and soldiers.

31. A nice exploration of this point is MacIntyre’s chapter on “The Character of Generalizations in Social Science and Their Lack of Predictive Power” in *After Virtue* (pp. 88–108). See esp. pp. 95–96.

32. See Margaret Urban Walker, *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations after Wrongdoing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). As Walker notes, “Hopeful trust may sometimes . . . draw out trustworthiness in people where it was not there before; if they are not entirely hardened or malicious, they may be moved to live up to one’s trust in the form of acting responsibly” (*Moral Repair*, p. 70).

33. There may strictly speaking be two separate points here. The first is metaphysical: that no moral agent’s character is unchangeably fixed; the second is epistemological: that we can never know with certainty the content of another agent’s moral character. I am willing to defend both claims.

34. Frans de Waal, *The Age of Empathy: Nature’s Lessons for a Kinder Society* (New York: Random House, 2009), p. 7.

35. I take it this is de Waal’s point in *The Age of Empathy*. A more “scholarly” substantiation for his evolutionary claims is Frans de Waal, *Good Natured: The Origins of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

36. Fiona Robinson, *Globalizing Care: Ethics, Feminist Theory, and International Relations* (Boulder: Westview, 1999). See esp. pp. 42–50.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

38. The kind of pacifism worth emulating has always been of the politically active sort. As Mary Calkins wrote during the First World War, “the militant pacifist [sic], in season and out of season, preaches his fighting gospel of a war against obdurate nature-evils, against floods and fires, famine and disease; and, even more insistently, he urges the necessity of organized and tireless war against human error and human selfishness in individual hearts and in social customs and institutions.” Mary Whiton Calkins, “Militant Pacifism,” *International Journal of Ethics*, vol. 28, no. 1 (1917), pp. 70–79; p. 77.

39. Emphasizing and making visible the interdependence of human societies may be necessary not simply for peace, but also for the continued existence of our species on this planet. See Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York: Penguin, 2005), esp. chap. 16.

40. The pacifist, in other words, notes an incommensurability of life-paths that make us good *violent* responders to the vagaries of life (or international affairs) on the one hand, and good *nonviolent* responders on the other. She opts for the latter.

41. This acknowledgement of vulnerability points to the need not only for communities of peace but also for communities of *healing*. Training for peacemaking is incomplete without training for addressing internalized violence and the trauma it entails. On this theme, from a Christian pacifist perspective, see Cynthia Hess, *Sites of Violence, Sites of Grace: Christian Nonviolence and the Traumatized Self* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2009).

42. John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 5.

43. To clarify, this is not to say no philosophers have been or are pacifists (that claim is false). It is to say that many *critiques* of pacifism in the philosophical literature take aim only at its most naïve deontological formulations.

44. Of course, all talk of “right” and “wrong” requires a significant degree of abstraction. I would prefer to say that a particular act of violent intervention may have been “good” *under the circumstances* (which include both the circumstances external to the moral agent and that moral agent’s own character). But the circumstances themselves (and in particular the character of the moral agent) are not exempt from scrutiny. Thus to be content with calling something “right,” or even “good,” need not mean there might not have been a “better” available to a more virtuous agent, or even to the selfsame agent.

45. “As in a game of chess or a jazz quintet, the more refined one’s imagination (a function of relevant habits), the richer the fund of germane possibilities and the more reliable one’s valuations.” Steven Fesmire, *John Dewey and Moral Imagination* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 71.

46. Richard J. Mouw, “Christianity and Pacifism,” *Faith and Philosophy*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1985), pp. 105–111; p. 108.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

48. On Walzer’s view, the “just” in “just war” is a term of art; “it means justifiable, defensible, even morally necessary (given the alternatives)—and that is all that it means” (Walzer, *Arguing About War*, p. x). That judgment of “necessary given the alternatives” betrays, a pacifist might say, a failure of the imagination (in many, though perhaps not in all cases).

49. And, as Fesmire says so eloquently, “The great moral vice is not failure to universalize motives or calculate pleasurable consequences; it is obtuseness” (Fesmire, *John Dewey*, p. 114).

50. Here it should be apparent that I agree with John Dewey when he says, “imagination is the chief instrument of the good. . . . [A]rt is more moral than moralities. For the latter either are, or tend to become, consecrations of the status quo. . . . The moral prophets of humanity have always been poets even though they spoke in free verse or by

parable.” John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Capricorn, 1958), p. 348, as cited in Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 69.

51. The phrase is from Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).