

Pacifism as a Perspective: On the Inevitable Entanglement of Facts and Values¹

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Abstract

Pacifists and their opponents disagree not only about moral questions, but most often about factual questions as well (as is illustrated by the controversy surrounding the crisis in Kosovo in 1999). According to my reconstruction of pacifism, this is not surprising, since the pacifist, legitimately, looks at the facts *in the light of her system of values*. Her opponent, in turn, looks at the facts in the light of an *alternative* value system. And the quarrel between the two parties about supposedly descriptive matters never ceases, as there is no objective reality that could settle the issue. The pacifist's value-laden perspective on reality is informed by Christian charity and humility: a specific mixture of optimism (about human nature) and pessimism (about human powers).

Keywords

War, peace, pacifism, humanitarian intervention, consequentialism, utilitarianism, counterfactual, value, fact, entanglement of fact and value, regulative idea, hubris, optimism, Immanuel Kant, Hilary Putnam

1. This paper was delivered on 14 November 2015, at the conference *Politics of Pacifism: Commandment – Ideal – Impossibility? Theological Contributions to Peace Ethics*, Collegium Helveticum, Zurich. The current version brings my earlier attempts at formulating a pacifist position in closer vicinity to Christianity; it overlaps in many respects with its predecessor, which does not address pacifism from a Christian perspective: Olaf Müller, 'Reconstructing Pacifism: On Different Ways of Looking at Reality', in Georg Meggle (ed.), *Ethics of Humanitarian Interventions* (Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2004), pp. 57–80.
2. I am grateful to the participants of the discussion in Zurich as well as to critical audiences at the Departament de Filosofia, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and at the Military Academy of the German Armed Forces, Hamburg (Führungsakademie der Bundeswehr).

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Introduction

Quite often religious belief is assumed to yield arguments, or anyway considerations, in favour of pacifism. For non-believers who (like me) do not consider their own lack of faith a strength, but rather a weakness, it may well be the other way around: Could it not be the case that the very pacifism of religious authorities constitutes a good reason in favour of religious life? Although this question is beyond the scope of the present article, it is my main motivation for developing it; I take the pacifism I will advocate here to be in some aspects related to the moral world view of many Christians and Buddhists. (Of course I am aware that there are religious authorities and believers who are anything but pacifist—as well as pacifists who are anything but religious).

The main idea behind my version of pacifism stems from the metaethical insight that in many cases factual claims cannot be disentangled from claims about values.³ I want to apply this insight to what appear to be factual disagreements about war (such as the Western intervention in Kosovo). If I am right, the pacifist has a specific perspective on situations involving war. She looks at such situations *in the light of her system of values*: She is an optimist about human nature (even when considering her enemies or war criminals)—and she is pessimistic about her own abilities to both understand and control the mechanisms of martial violence. In religious notions, her optimism can be characterised as charity, while her pessimism comes close to Christian humility. These virtues guide not only human action, but also the interpretation of political events. If the pacifist employs them theoretically rather than practically, she arrives at descriptions that differ from those of her opponent (who judges in the light of a competing, perhaps less religious system of values).

None of the competing accounts of a situation, for example on the eve of war, have any legitimate claim to value-free objectivity. And if it is true that the proponents of war are neither more nor less realistic than their pacifist opponents, then the charge that the pacifist way of looking at things is an objective illusion loses much of its destructive appeal. In my view, it is impossible to overcome the limits of objectivity when characterising conflicts such as that in Kosovo. I find nothing alarming about this. Why do we always have to appeal to value-free objectivity in our debates about war and peace? Let us instead lead our moral lives consciously in the face of value-laden facts. Whether this is easier for the pacifist or for her opponent, I shall not try to decide.

Moral Disapproval of War: Some Varieties

To begin with, let us consider several versions of pacifism that appear misguided. The first version is fairly popular among Christian pacifists (which of course is not

Many thanks to Cynthia Myers and Emanuel Viebahn, who helped me to improve the English of the text—and to the editors for many helpful suggestions.

3. See Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 140–41; Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), pp. 22–23, 42; John McDowell, 'Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume LII (1978), pp. 12–29, at p. 21; Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 139–41; Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

to say that this position has not been tempting to some atheists or to people of other creeds as well):

Elitist Pacifism

For moral reasons *we* shall abstain from war; but alas, there have to be wars, which are, fortunately, carried out by others.

From a moral point of view, this is a dubious position; it posits a moral difference between its proponents and all others—without providing any reason for why there should be such a difference. Elitist Pacifism cannot be universalised and, thus, cannot claim to be a moral position at all.⁴ If we extend the pacifist ban on war so as to address everyone, not only the pacifist elite, we obtain a position far stronger than Elitist Pacifism:

Pacifist Rigorism

Participation in any war is, *eo ipso*, morally wrong.

This position has two shortcomings. First, it can be maintained without taking into account any facts; pacifist rigorists do not need to be informed about atrocities, torture, mass deportations and other crimes against humanity—they can and will say ‘no to war’, no matter what. And second, Pacifist Rigorism forbids too much. It goes against a conviction which most of us do not want to relinquish. Most Europeans are strongly convinced that at least one war in history was morally justified: the Allied war against Nazi Germany. And even if you do not happen to share this conviction (perhaps because you find that too many lives were sacrificed in the course of that war), you will nevertheless have to find a convincing response to the following thought experiment.

Let us imagine a counterfactual course of events from 1939 to 1945 in which Germans committed the same crimes against humanity as they did in actual history, but in which the Allied military action against Nazi Germany resulted in *far fewer* victims (on both sides). Would you insist that even this hypothetical war is morally wrong—simply because of its being a war? And would you hold on to this verdict even in the limiting case of an Allied military action producing almost no victims while at the same time putting an end to the human catastrophe which Nazi Germany inflicted upon Poland, millions of Jews and the rest of Europe?

You leave the grounds of Pacifist Rigorism as soon as you admit that morally justified wars are conceivable at least in theory. Of course, even then it can be maintained that there are no real cases where the theoretical possibility (of *bellum iustum*) becomes actual. Nevertheless, it does not suffice to simply modify the Pacifist Rigorist’s position and call all *actual* warfare morally wrong without further ado. We want to be told what it is that forbids all actual (but not all conceivable) war. This challenge cannot easily be met *tout court*; it must be met by looking at the individual characteristics of actual cases.

4. For a classic approach to universalisability in ethics see Richard M. Hare, *Freedom and Reason*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 92–102.

If this is right, pacifism can be understood as generalising about individual, actual cases, paying special attention to the priority of each particular case. This version of pacifism is grounded in:

Case-by-Case Pacifism

Given the facts about the particular case at issue, this or that specific war is morally wrong.

And it proceeds from there to generalisations such as:

Pacifism of Our Times

Due to its actual characteristics, modern war is morally wrong. (But it is theoretically conceivable that even in modern times a just war might occur).

Of course, pacifism can be extended much further so as to cover, for example, all war from ancient times onwards; it would go beyond this article to look at the historical details of such options. Note that Pacifism of Our Times can also be restricted somewhat without losing the title of pacifism; for example, we could restrict it to all wars from 1900 up to our day, with the exception of the war against Hitler's Germany.

As it stands, my characterisation of Case-by-Case Pacifism (and its various generalisations) is not complete. We still have to provide a criterion that tells us when a war is wrong. For this there are several feasible alternatives; I want to mention only two of them.

Criterion 1 (from a point of view in which consequentialist and humanitarian elements are essential)

A particular war is morally wrong if it is not intended to put an end to crimes against humanity; and even if it is intended to do this, it is still morally wrong if it risks sacrifices of such and such dimension.

Criterion 2 (from a utilitarian point of view)

A particular war is morally wrong if it is likely to produce greater harm than its peaceable alternatives.

With respect to Criterion 2 you may object: Is it not a little odd to speak of pacifism if nothing more is involved than good old utilitarianism? Couldn't the utilitarian be in favour of war now and then?

If what I have said so far is right, then the answer to this is that pacifism can be understood to consist of *two* claims—an evaluative claim and a factual claim. The pacifist's evaluative claim is the very criterion that differentiates between just and unjust war, for example the criterion of utilitarianism. And the pacifist's factual claim states, in addition, that non-military alternatives produce less harm than the war under consideration (Case-by-Case Pacifism); or than any recent war (Pacifism of Our Times); or than any war from ancient times onwards; or than any actual war whatsoever. (And of course, a similar list

can be produced by abandoning utilitarianism and appealing to other criteria for an unjust war, such as Criterion 1).

Due to such factual claims, pacifism can no longer be accused of being silent about the facts. Our latest versions of pacifism are committed to certain factual claims; therefore they are vulnerable to empirical criticism and open to rational discussion. We have found options for the pacifist that are less dogmatic and, thus, more attractive than Elitist Pacifism or Pacifist Rigorism.

Unfortunately, this achievement has a negative aspect. If you cease to be silent about the facts you can still be blind to the facts: it may well be the case that the factual claims in our latest versions of pacifism turn out to be *false*. And it seems risky to be committed to factual claims of the sort I have mentioned. In the next section, we will take a first look at the risks and dangers involved in the pacifist's factual claims. Later we will see that it has been misleading to compartmentalise the pacifist position into an evaluative and a factual component. My point will be that these two supposed components cannot be disentangled—neither in the pacifist's position nor in that of her opponent.

A Problem Concerning Facts: The Case of Kosovo

Let us restrict our attention to Case-by-Case Pacifism. (Should it turn out that the difficulties concerning factual claims are already insuperable when Case-by-Case Pacifism is at issue, then the situation would be worse for its more ambitious cousins, such as Pacifism of Our Times). Here is a representative statement the pacifist must defend when applying Case-by-Case Pacifism to the case of Kosovo:

(* If the Western countries had not bombed targets in Serbia and Kosovo, fewer Albanians and Serbs would have been killed, injured or have lost their homes.⁵

Is this claim about recent history true? When you look at the furious disputes that question has triggered again and again, it seems hard to imagine an uncontroversial way of answering it. Why is this so?

Perhaps because of propaganda—truth is the first victim of war, says a well-known proverb. It is tempting to maintain that with a little intellectual honesty and discipline it should be possible to free ourselves of the biases stemming from our own side's propaganda. This leads to the proposal of withholding judgement about controversial facts. Even then, some (undisputed) facts will remain in the game; couldn't we derive

5. I call this a *representative* statement because different versions of Case-by-Case Pacifism may employ different criteria for unjust war; see Criterion 1 and 2 above. The statement in the main text derives from Criterion 2 (utilitarianism), but it can be taken to represent similar statements that enter the game when the Case-by-Case Pacifist chooses to ground her position in alternative criteria. Most (if not all) criteria of unjust war embrace at least consequentialist *elements*. (In Criterion 2 consequentialist considerations do the whole job—whereas in Criterion 1 they do part of the job with additional appeal to humanitarian *intentions*).

our moral verdict on the grounds of these? Sometimes this can be done. It may happen that one party can win the quarrel by appealing to facts that the other side does not dispute.

In the quarrel over Kosovo, however, as in most other actual cases, we would not have come to any decision at all if we had suspended judgement on all controversial issues. And this is true not only from an *ex ante* perspective (the perspective we had to take during the process of Western decision making). It is also true from an *ex post* perspective.

To see this, let us turn to the historical record. We now know that the greatest Serbian crimes against humanity in Kosovo—atrocities, mass deportations, destruction of whole villages and so forth—were mainly committed *after* the NATO had begun dropping bombs. Here is what we read in the official report by the Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM):

*'Further escalation after 24 March 1999. Summary and arbitrary killing became a generalized phenomenon throughout Kosovo with the beginning of the NATO air campaign.'*⁶

*'Once the OSCE-KVM left on 20 March 1999 and in particular after the start of the NATO bombing of the FRY [i.e., Yugoslavia] on 24 March, Serbian police and/or VJ [i.e., the army of Yugoslavia], often accompanied by paramilitaries, went from village to village and, in the towns, from area to area threatening and expelling the Kosovo Albanian population.'*⁷

Whereas all this is more or less uncontroversial, we still do not know what *would* have happened if the NATO had tried peaceable alternatives. Critics of the war claimed that the increase in brutality on the Serbian side was a *causal* consequence of the NATO intervention, while their opponents claimed that the actual course of events proved what the Serbian authorities had been planning all along, and also what the Serbian people were willing to do.

Who is to decide what is true in this dispute? Is this really a dispute that can be settled objectively, at least in principle? And if so, why are we unable to reach a consensus?

I submit that the lack of consensus we are facing here is not only to be blamed on propaganda and lack of knowledge about remote facts. The reasons for the disagreement are deeper: they are connected to the very nature of the contested claim, which (it will be recalled) is the following counterfactual:

(* If the Western countries had not bombed targets in Serbia and Kosovo, fewer Albanians and Serbs would have been killed, injured or have lost their homes.

In the next section, I want to convince you that there is no objective, value-free reality corresponding to such claims.

6. OSCE (ed.), *Kosovo / Kosova as Seen, as Told: An Analysis of the Human Rights Findings of the OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission. October 1998 to June 1999* (<http://www.osce.org/odihr/17772?download=true>; accessed 31 March 2017), chapter 5, p. 5 (original emphasis).

7. OSCE (ed.), *Kosovo / Kosova as Seen, as Told*, chapter 14, pp. 1–2 (my emphasis).

Counterfactuals

Let us observe, first, that it is misleading to say that the pacifist's claim (*) is factual rather than evaluative. The claim is not about the facts; it is a *counterfactual*—and in recent philosophical debates some authors have argued that counterfactuals typically do not have value-free content.⁸

Let me elaborate. When proponents of the NATO intervention in Kosovo repudiate the pacifist's counterfactual (*), they often appeal to general claims concerning Serbian or human nature. They say, for example, that the Serbian crimes against humanity committed during the NATO attacks reveal an alarming readiness for brutality and cruelty; and they interpret such cruelty as a constant (or anyway, long-term) disposition of the Serbian population in pre-war Kosovo.

But you cannot establish Serbian brutality (already present prior to the Western intervention) by looking at the *actual* course of events. On the contrary, those who speak that way about the Serbian people express an interpretation or evaluation. For example, their claim might derive from looking at the actual course of events in the light of anti-Serbian resentment.

Proponents of the Western intervention in Kosovo do not necessarily have to be prejudiced against the Serbian people to arrive at the belief that in the spring of 1999 the Serbs were prepared to act monstrously. Anti-Serbian resentment is perhaps the simplest but certainly not the only perspective that could have led the war's proponents to believe in the Serbian readiness for cruelty against the Albanians. Another perspective to the same effect may be grounded, more generally, in pessimism about human nature. The perspective I have in mind flatters itself for being realistic, but of course it cannot be meant to constitute a branch of realism resting on all and only hard, objective facts. Rather it is a negative *evaluation* of these facts, presumably deriving from a one-sided and simplified view of human history. According to a typical nuance of this negative perspective, we should expect the worst from our fellow-humans—unless they are controlled by brute force.

I admit that I may be exaggerating in my characterisation of the evaluations that I attribute to proponents of the NATO intervention, in order to explain their dissent from the pacifist's counterfactual (*). Suffice it to say that, for the sake of clarity, I am characterising a position at an extreme end of a scale that allows for less extreme positions similar in kind.

It is high time for another *caveat*. I have pointed to evaluations as one source of what made the war's proponent dissent from the pacifist's counterfactual—but not in order to

8. See, for example, Hilary Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 54–55. If Putnam's value-laden interpretation of counterfactuals is feasible, then of course all standard versions of utilitarianism and consequentialism lose their main feature, viz. the idea that values enter moral deliberation only in axiology. It is beyond the scope of the present article to explore whether we can formulate a version of consequentialism in which values play *two* independent roles: firstly, the epistemic role of determining the truth values of counterfactuals; secondly, the axiological role of evaluating states of affairs as named in the then-clauses of the counterfactuals in question.

criticise the proponent of war. On the contrary, I have no objection to the impact of values when discussing counterfactuals such as (*). I merely wish to insist that we cannot establish the counterfactual's truth value independently of genuine evaluation. If this is right, then the opponent of NATO's war in Kosovo must be committed to certain values as well—when she argues *in favour* of her counterfactual:

(*) If the Western countries had not bombed targets in Serbia and Kosovo, fewer Albanians and Serbs would have been killed, injured or have lost their homes.

What values could lead the pacifist to defend this counterfactual? One possibility—which I only wish to mention before setting it aside—is anti-American, anti-Western, anti-Albanian or pro-Serbian prejudice. This sort of evaluation becomes irrelevant as soon as the pacifist not only criticises Western military action in Kosovo, but extends her position into something more general, such as Pacifism of Our Times.

A more relevant type of evaluation that may be involved in the pacifist's counterfactual (*) is optimism about human nature—the very mirror-image of the bellicose pessimism I sketched a short while ago.

But isn't this preposterous? How should we keep an optimistic attitude about human nature when considering the bloodshed of ethnic conflicts such as that in Kosovo? Here is my answer to this objection: the pacifist can stabilise her optimism by adopting a one-sided and simplified view (analogous, but contrary to the pessimistic attitude I have ascribed to the pacifist's opponent). From the optimistic perspective, the ethnic conflict in Kosovo is another example of an eruption of violence that *could have been avoided non-violently*. According to this view, it is, sadly, true that violence leads to still more violence (that much seems a proven fact from the war in Kosovo); but it is also true that the bloody circle of violence and counter-violence can be interrupted—at any moment! And of course the pacifist can cite *well-chosen* examples from history in favour of her view.

Perhaps a word is in order for those who look down on optimism as they take it to imply blindness, carelessness or some other sort of neglect. Against this, let me point out that there are many people whom we describe as optimists without blaming them of carelessness. To be sure, it is difficult to explicate optimism in terms of sufficient and necessary conditions, but in our dialectical situation we can continue without a full-blown conceptual analysis, simply because the following is an open question: 'She is an optimist—but is she careless, blind or negligent?' Especially in a religious context, optimism cannot and should not be dismissed too quickly.⁹ Be that as it may, it will soon become apparent that the pacifist's opponents are also optimistic—which shows that in the present dialectical situation our understanding of optimism should not be too negative.

9. In my view there is an intimate connexion between religious faith and optimism of a certain kind; and the pessimism of both atheists and agnostics should be resisted for the sake of a flourishing life. See my critique of Ernst Tugendhat's metaphysical pessimism: Olaf Müller, 'Misstrauen oder Hoffnung? Protestnote gegen ein pessimistisches Prinzip von Ernst Tugendhat', *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 63.1 (2009), pp. 5–32.

Facts in the Light of Values

Where do we stand? The situation between the pacifist and her opponent seems symmetrical. Neither side can ground their verdict about the counterfactual (*) on objective, value-free facts. The facts about human nature are too complicated and indecisive to permit an objective verdict on the counterfactual; only in the light of values will we be able to simplify and decide the matter. As the values are controversial between pacifists and their critics, the counterfactual itself will remain so, too.

Couldn't we leave the facts as complicated as they are, avoiding simplification in either direction, pessimist or optimist? We might, but we should not. If we tried to look at the facts without evaluation and simplification, we would have to suspend judgement about all (or at least nearly all) counterfactuals relevant to our moral decision about war. But typically we cannot suspend our decision; if we do nothing we have made a decision as well. (Note that almost all moral criteria for war involve consequentialist elements and, thus, are committed to counterfactual reasoning).

Then what? I urge that we learn to lead our moral lives in the presence of value-laden counterfactuals—particularly when we are dealing with war and peace. As soon as we become fully aware of the values that inform our judgements on the relevant counterfactuals, we will be able to make a conscious decision about the very values we *want* to employ for playing this role. And it may well be that the values behind the pacifist's counterfactuals are more attractive than those of her opponent; perhaps they belong, for example, to an appealing form of Christianity?

You may suspect that this leads us back to where we started; you may ask: when the pacifist decides to opt for values that support counterfactuals such as (*)—won't this be tantamount to a decision in favour of Pacifist Rigorism?

Not at all; the Pacifist Rigorist does not have to look at reality at all when she thinks about war; she can close her eyes and say: *No to war*, period. Such dogmatism does not seem attractive. And so we developed a position more sensitive to the facts. This was the juncture where Case-by-Case Pacifism and its generalisations (grounded, for example, in utilitarianism) entered the discussion. But these attempts went too far in the direction of the facts. They became hostage to so-called facts that were beyond reach. To put it more perspicuously, the mistake in these attempts was to divide the pacifist position into an evaluative component and an unreachable factual component—two components separated by a canyon.

Now we see that there is a third option for the pacifist. Instead of *overlooking* the facts altogether, and instead of *overloading* her boat with facts totally independent of and, as it were, foreign to her values, she can adopt a value-laden perspective. For a change of metaphor we may also say: When the pacifist follows my suggestion she must be in close contact with the facts—although this will be a different kind of contact than the one we know from the empirical sciences.

Of course, looking at reality in the light of controversial values need not only lead to controversial counterfactuals such as claim (*); the phenomenon extends to other sorts of claims, which are also relevant to moral decisions about war. If I am right, we can characterise the way pacifists look at reality by saying that they follow certain epistemic imperatives or guiding principles. Thus far I have discussed:

The Epistemic Imperative concerning Human Nature

Do not demonise the other side; always try to understand the case from their point of view.

If the pacifist obeys the Epistemic Imperative concerning Human Nature, she might not abandon claims such as the following too easily:

It is not yet proven that Milosevic is a monster.

What the Serbian security forces were doing (prior to the NATO attacks) may still be explained without saying that they are hateful racists.

No human being is a monster, that is to say, morally degenerate through and through; it is always possible to understand a person from inside, as if that person were me.

How much evil has to happen before a revision of pacifist claims such as these becomes inevitable? My answer is that it never exactly becomes *inevitable*. It is a matter of personal decision, or evaluation, at what point you feel forced to revise such claims. The pacifist will resist the pressure to revise her claims more persistently than her opponents. But she does not have to resist at any price.¹⁰

The pacifist does not recommend sticking to these statements blindly. She recommends opening our eyes when evil seems present—and trying to see the human being beneath the monstrous surface.¹¹ Sometimes this is difficult, but it can be done. Call it a ‘focus imaginarius’, if you will.¹² You could also call it love.

Non-Violent Alternatives

In the preceding section we saw that the pacifist’s perspective on the facts can be understood as optimistic obedience to an Epistemic Imperative concerning Human Nature. In the present section, I want to name one more epistemic imperative that may also be taken to guide the pacifist’s investigation of reality.¹³ Now she aims, pessimistically, at sharpening our view for what may happen when we wage war. The imperative in question is:

10. The situation might be compared to Kant’s regulative principles in the sciences; see Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan, 1933), pp. 532–33. I say more about this parallel between pacifism and Kant’s epistemology in Müller ‘Reconstructing Pacifism’, pp. 66–69.

11. This is a very special example of the perception of *aspects* which Wittgenstein was the first to philosophise about. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, ‘Philosophische Untersuchungen’, in idem, *Werkausgabe Band 1* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1984), pp. 225–618, at pp. 518–33 (part II, section xi).

12. This Kantian expression was, of course, originally meant to apply to regulative principles in the sciences; see Kant, *Critique*, p. 533.

13. For more such imperatives see Müller, ‘Reconstructing Pacifism’, pp. 69–71.

The Epistemic Imperative concerning Uncontrolled Escalation

Hone your senses to the uncontrolled, irreversible side effects of military action, particularly to the danger of military escalation leading to another world war.

The pacifist's fear of *uncontrolled* escalation may appear hysterical to people with good nerves. It may remind them of Cassandra—tragically old-fashioned.¹⁴ And indeed, doesn't the actual course of history, for example in Kosovo, provide an objective refutation of the pessimistic pacifist, who predicted the danger of a third world war?¹⁵

Not quite. True, the NATO intervention did not lead to another major war in Europe; this much is objectively proven. But that does not tell us anything about the risk with which the NATO was gambling. A danger can exist even if it does not become actualised. (Think of a tiger sneaking into and out of your children's room while they are playing in the bathroom). Again, it is a matter of personal attitude, or evaluation, a matter of the quality of nerves (if you prefer), at what point a situation is interpreted as being dangerous. Even if objective probabilities are given (which they are not, in the case of war), even if we know the likelihood of a particular evil happening, it is still not an objective matter whether a real danger in fact lurks. Pacifists are pacifists because they find the prospects of another world war so disturbing that they see this danger earlier than others.

In the case of Kosovo they saw the danger alarmingly present during the night of 6–7 May 1999, when the Chinese embassy in Belgrade was bombed mistakenly. Another dangerous confrontation, between Russia and the West, lurked when their troops met at a surprising moment at the airport in Pristina, which had been captured by Russian troops on 12 June 1999, without prior consultation with NATO.

How safe was all this, the pacifist wants to know, and this again is not a question concerning facts only—but a question connected to attitudes, evaluations and quality of nerves. *All's well that ends well*, the pacifist's opponents will reply, thus expressing *their* personal perspective: a perspective that the pacifist finds preposterous when the danger

14. I say more about Cassandra's pessimism concerning atomic war in Olaf Müller, 'Benign Blackmail: Cassandra's Plan, or What is Terrorism?', in Georg Meggle (ed.), *Ethics of Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism* (Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2005), pp. 39–50.

15. In this article, I am restricting my attention to the danger of escalation to another world war because this is the worst danger I can think of. (I do not mean to indicate that the intervention in Kosovo did not carry the potential for any other escalation). By the way, not only pacifists were afraid of escalation to catastrophe. Even the conservative Minister President of Bavaria, Edmund Stoiber, referred to such a danger when he warned the West against sending ground troops to Kosovo: 'The deployment of Western ground troops would lead to an escalation that could provoke the third world war' (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 13 April 1999, p. 7; translation by Emanuel Viebahn; here the German original: 'Der Einsatz westlicher Bodentruppen würde zu einer Eskalation führen, die den dritten Weltkrieg heraufbeschwören könnte').

16. And to support her pessimism she will urge the optimist to study the transcripts of the presidential recordings of what the US government was discussing, and risking, in the course of the Cuban Missile Crisis (John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, President's Office Files, Presidential Recordings, Transcripts, Cuban Missile Crisis Meetings, 27 October 1962). These transcripts are partly published in Bernd Greiner, *Kuba-Krise. 13 Tage im Oktober: Analysen, Dokumente, Zeitzeugen* (Nördlingen: Greno, 1988), pp. 335–79, 383–91.

of atomic confrontation is in the game.¹⁶ In more religious terms, she'll diagnose hubris in her opponent's perspective. By contrast, her own perspective is held together by humility. She does not want to overestimate her epistemic and technical powers to fight evil; she hopes for the power of love.

Conclusion

I have tried to reconstruct the pacifist perspective by appealing to two epistemic imperatives: an optimistic imperative concerning human nature and a pessimistic imperative concerning uncontrolled escalation. If you follow these imperatives, you may be said to look at reality in the light of the pacifist system of values. If you do not follow these imperatives, you do not simply disagree about the so-called hard facts, but you also reveal your commitment to a system of values, albeit quite a different one.

Admittedly, it often appears as if pacifists and their opponents disagree about factual claims. But if my diagnosis is right, these appearances may be misleading—often the disagreement about supposedly factual claims has its roots in controversial values. Following the Epistemic Imperative concerning Human Nature, the pacifist will keep trying much longer to find non-monstrous interpretations for enemy behaviour than her opponent; the pacifist will resist longer supposed factual claims such as:

This is a government full of racists and murderers.

And following the Epistemic Imperative concerning Uncontrolled Escalation, the pacifist will be much more sensitive than her opponent to the slightest signs of escalation towards catastrophe; she will resist longer supposed factual claims such as:

Everything is under control; we have calculated all possible consequences of our military action, and although there will be some collateral damage, we can surely prevent the worst.

Twice I have said now that the pacifist will resist certain claims longer than her opponent. How, and in particular, how long does the pacifist have to resist these claims?

To the first part of this question I reply that the pacifist shouldn't resist with closed eyes. If she wants to avoid blind dogmatism, her negative reaction to the two bellicose claims should not come out like the conditioned reflex of Pavlov's dog. ('Whenever anyone says something in favour of war, say no!') Rather, she should try to look for good evidence against the two bellicose claims. My two epistemic imperatives are supposed to guide her scrutiny of reality; they give direction to the pacifist's search for evidence in favour of peace—a search that would not make much sense if it were not pursued under the assumption that the desired evidence can be found. When it comes to the worst, the assumption may fail. It may happen that without betraying reason, the pacifist can no longer follow the two epistemic imperatives. In such a desperate case she will have to give up her resistance against the war in question (and also, of course, her resistance against her former opponent's claims).

How bad does a state of affairs have to become before the pacifist despairs of her position and ceases to follow the epistemic imperatives? I cannot provide a general answer to this question; I cannot give criteria, or a decision procedure, or an algorithm that could lift the question off the pacifist's shoulders. The only advice I can give is to use good judgement: the pacifist should follow the two imperatives persistently but not crazily. The overall goal is to bring facts and values into harmonious balance; we view the facts of war from an evaluative perspective, and we assess our values partly in light of the facts.

I have argued that in questions of war and peace we cannot avoid looking at reality in the light of some system of values or other. Different systems will yield controversial claims about the war in question. In this, I claimed, there is nothing irrational. Does this mean that the pacifist's perspective and the perspective of her opponent are equally good? Of course not. We can still compare the two opposing views to find out which is better. For this, we have to see whether the pacifist system (which consists of general claims, concrete claims about actual cases, epistemic imperatives, criteria of unjust war, rules of non-violent conduct and, perhaps, spiritual experiences) will lead to a decent moral life—that is, to a moral life more attractive, more honest, and yes, truer to our best emotions than that resulting from opposing perspectives. Owing to lack of space we cannot even begin to engage ourselves in the details of such a comparison. Suffice it to say that this enterprise calls for being in close contact with both reality and ourselves—and perhaps with God as well.