

# Perspectives on War

## War, Pacifism, Just War Doctrine, and More

by Randy Schutt

### 1. War Proponents (“Militarists”)

- Embrace war as normal and natural.

#### A. Political Realists (Power Politics)

- Believe that all relationships are motivated by self-interest, particularly the desire for military and economic power, rather than by ideals or ethics.
- Believe that in this competitive dog-eat-dog world filled with aggressive bullies, it is sensible to fight however you can for your share. Otherwise, you just show that you are weak, which means you will be repeatedly crushed.
- Believe peace only comes when there is a balance of (military) power. But this balance is always precarious so one must always be prepared for war.

#### B. Crusaders

- Believe there is an epic conflict between the forces of good and evil. Violence and war are natural means for waging this conflict.
- Believe righteous people are responsible for aggressively punishing those in the wrong.
- Many believe the enemy is completely evil and unredeemable.
- Many believe any means are justifiable since the bad people deserve to die. So killing all the bad people is a reasonable (and effective) way to stop evil.
- Many come from a religious tradition.
- Examples include the Inquisition, the wars of the Reformation, the slaughter of American Indians, the Holocaust, and ethnic cleansing in the Balkans, Rwanda, and Sudan.

### 2. Reluctant Warriors

- Accept that self-interest and desires for economic and military power pushes many countries and peoples into conflict, but don’t believe this is acceptable or inevitable. Generally support diplomacy, negotiation, international peacekeeping organizations, democratic structures within countries, and social, cultural, and economic ties between countries/peoples to keep the peace.
- Oppose war and violence except when absolutely necessary (but some see those circumstances arising pretty often).
- Believe armed peacekeepers and police can be useful and effective (especially when dealing with people impaired by insanity, dementia, or drugs or dealing with armed militaristic regimes).
- Believe the ends can sometimes justify the means — when the ends are very good and the means are not too bad.

#### A. Proponents of “Just War” Doctrine

- Believe war is immoral, but may be necessary for self-defense or to overcome injustice.
- Believe the strong have a moral obligation to use whatever means necessary to protect the weak.
- Believe violence and war can be effective in stopping violence, war, and injustice.
- Believe war is only justifiable when the circumstances leading up to war meet specific criteria (“*jus ad bellum*”), when the war is fought in ethical ways (“*jus in bello*”), and when the war will end in an ethical way conducive to reconciliation (“*jus post bellum*”).
- Most are supportive of international institutions — like the United Nations and the International Criminal Court — set up to regulate the activity of nations and resolve conflicts.

#### B. Proponents of Nonviolent Action

- Oppose war and violence if there is any better possibility (and who can almost always see a better possibility), but would, occasionally, reluctantly support war.
- Believe nonviolent action is more ethical and effective than war and that, if enough people resist, war can be avoided and injustice halted.
- Believe in speaking truth to power, protesting, and demonstrating.
- Support civil disobedience to challenge bad laws, laws that uphold injustice, and militarism.
- Some believe it is effective to destroy property used for unethical purposes (i.e., pour blood on draft records, smash nuclear warheads).
- Most believe demonstrations are most ethical and effective when they participants are open and honest and they appeal to others’ highest ideals, but some believe it is more effective to be secretive and calculating and engage in strategic sabotage (not really “nonviolent”, but not grossly violent).

### 3. Pacifists

- Oppose all war and violence in all circumstances.
- Oppose the use of armed peacekeepers and police.
- Believe that good ends can never be justified by bad means.
- Believe bad means invariably lead to bad ends.
- Many oppose all kinds of violence including expressing anger at people.
- Many come from a religious tradition, especially the traditional Christian peace churches: Church of the Brethren, Anabaptist (comprising Mennonites, Amish, and Hutterites), and the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). Also, Old German Baptist Brethren, Old Order River Brethren, and others in the Anabaptist tradition, Doukhobors, Molokans, Bruderhof Communities, Schwenkfelders, Moravians, and Shakers as well as many Buddhists and many Catholics (Catholic Worker, Pax Christi). But also non-religious people like those in the War Resisters League.

#### A. Believers in Right Living

- Believe in acting as a living example of one's values by doing good deeds and being tolerant, loving, patient, kind, gentle, forgiving, and merciful to everyone.
- Believe they should not use violence of any sort to impose their will, defend themselves, or defend others. Most do not participate in any demonstration that might involve challenging the established order.
- Offer no resistance to evil whatsoever. Submit to all authority.
- Seek to change the world by being a good example.
- Many believe that war is inevitable, but refuse to participate in it or support it in any way including paying war taxes.

#### B. Nonviolent Resisters

- Believe in acting as a living example of one's values by doing good deeds and being loving, patient, kind, gentle, and merciful.
- Believe in speaking truth to power, protesting, and demonstrating.
- Believe they are morally required to disobey bad laws — civil disobedience — but it should always be public and well-mannered and they must take responsibility for what they do.
- Some believe it is moral to destroy property used for immoral purposes (i.e., pour blood on draft records, smash nuclear warheads).
- Most believe war is not inevitable if enough people resist.

### References

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