**The Morality of War: A Debate**

A possible critique of just war theory is that it provides a moral argument for the attitude we should have towards warfare, but that it doesn’t tell us what to do in specific situations. Realism and pacifism are much more helpful in terms of making particular moral decision.

* According to the realist doctrine—espoused by thinkers like Machiavelli and Clausewitz—the overarching goal of war is a victory for one’s country. Anything instrumental towards this goal is justified by the very nature of war, which is an inescapable part of human affairs, no matter how hard we might try to mollify this reality. The moral language we use in peacetime is thus not applicable to war. In particular situations, we must do whatever it takes to win the war, even if our actions seem gruesome and inhumane, or would be considered immoral in peacetime.
* According to the pacifist doctrine—Kant and Gandhi being exemplars—our moral codes in peacetime apply equally in war. In war, peaceable actions are moral imperatives, even if the expense of peace seems high. In particular situations, we must thus act peaceably no matter what.

***The debate:***On June 28, 2005, a U.S. Navy Seal named Lt. Murphy and his fellow troops faced the difficult decision of whether to kill three Afghan goat herders that they captured. The soldiers knew that there was a risk that the goat herders, if released, would warn the Taliban about their presence. The soldiers had to weigh this possibility against the moral implications of killing three noncombatants.

However, Article 27 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, written after the Second World War in response to the Nazi atrocities in Europe, specifically protects “civilian persons in times of war,” stating that they “are entitled, in all circumstances, to respect for their persons...They shall at all times be humanely treated, and shall be protected especially against all acts of violence or threats thereof.”

The Fourth Geneva Convention prohibition against killing noncombatants would seem to be challenged by the practical possibility of having the goat herders inform the Taliban of the whereabouts of the Navy Seals. This raises our question for today’s debate:

***In war, is it categorically immoral to kill noncombatants?***

***Procedure:*** As with our last debate, your main job is to develop a coherent, logical moral argument that everyone on your side is going to rally around. Each team is expected to evenly distribute the responsibility for speaking across all team members; no single person should dominate a group’s participation. The debate will proceed (roughly) as follows:

*1. Development of positions and opening statements*

Take 15 minutes to decide on your specific position and to come up with a 1-2 minute opening statement. Each side will choose one person to present. (During this time, you should choose someone to listen carefully during the debate and come up with a closing statement.)

*2. Responses and rebuttals*

I will ask each side two questions, alternating between each side. The other side will have an opportunity to respond, and the initial group with have the opportunity to put forth a rebuttal. You should focus on pointing out any logical flaws that you see in your opponents’ arguments, or shortcomings of their initial assumptions.

*3. Closing statements*

In the closing statement, focus on responding to the points that have been raised in the debate, not merely restating your opening statement.