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A Critique of the Theory of Pacifism and Realism in the Ethics of War

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Abstracts

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War involves killings and the destruction of properties. So a strong reason is needed to justify the entrance into it. Rationality requires all to prevent war unless there is a good reason to establish the opposite. Three related theories are proposed in this paper: first, the theory of pacifism (or war avoidance) holds that since war generally leads to oppression and the infringement of others' rights, it should be avoided, and that it is morally wrong to wage war in any case without exception. The second theory is political realism which holds that while the state is the most powerful factor in the relations among states, it is autonomous and shows its power to others through its military forces. There are no universal principles that can guide all states' behavior. Realists employ two approaches: (a) individualism and (b) collectivism. According to individualism, states' exclusive rights cannot exceed the proven collective rights of each individual who lives in the society. The state must follow people's wants. According to collectivism, the state has an independent legal identity with a set of specific values which are different from individuals' values. States fight in wars not only for individual's lives but also for a kind of social life. The current paper discusses the problems with pacifism, individualism, and collectivism, and concludes by proposing another theory that takes into consideration the interests of both individuals and states.

Keywords

Ethics of war, pacifism, realism, individualism, collectivism, national interests.

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