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On Obligation

“The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think is right.” This quote, by Henry David Thoreau, a transcendentalist, is foolish. Throughout history, decisions have been made based on personal views. Many people followed the belief they thought to be right, and these actions led to tragic events in history, and impacted many lives, with the only justification being they believed it to be right. The obligation in which one has the right to assume, should not be to do what they think is right.

If this quote were coming from another source, the general opinion towards it might change to be extremely negative. For example, if this quote was attributed to Adolf Hitler, people would despise it, because of the awful things he did. That change in opinion would be because he was somebody who actually lived to do what he believed was right, even though it was a horrible thing to do, and caused “the mass murder of some 6 million European Jews by the German Nazi regime during the Second World War.” (History.com) The only reason this quote is given the time of day is because Henry David Thoreau didn’t do anything to become infamous. He was an enlightenment thinker, hoping to actually change the world, but not all of their ideas can pan out.

Another example of doing as they thought was right, but doing horrible things because of it, are the Japanese. After V-E Day, where Europe was finally liberated, the Japanese still

continued to fight their neighbor countries and the U.S. because they believed they had a right from birth to rule over those neighbors. The Japanese were a group of hard working individuals with a sense of honor, but what caused them to continue the war until they were bombed *twice*, was a twisted belief that they were inherently better than those neighbors. That belief led to an attack on U.S. soil “On December 7, 1941, 360 Japanese aircraft attacked the major U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, taking the Americans completely by surprise and claiming the lives of more than 2,300 troops.” (History.com) If this quote was from a Japanese leader at the time, people would again view it as empty words from a terrible belief.

As history goes on, these horrible things continue to happen, backed by the belief that somebody was right. Recently, on September 11, 2001, 19 Islamic terrorists hijacked four airliners with the goal of destroying the World Trade Center in New York City, and the Pentagon in Arlington County, Virginia. In doing this, they killed many people, “The total loss of life on 9/11 was nearly 3,000, including the 19 hijackers. It was the worst loss of life due to a terrorist incident on US soil.” (bbc.co.uk) These hijackers were so sure of their actions being right by God, that they were willing to face death just to complete their goal. These people believed they were right, and went ahead with their actions to commit a terrorist attack on U.S. soil.

There is always at least one side that believes it is right about an issue, and it is the people who believe they are so right that they are willing to go to extremes. This quote, which talks about an obligation at any time, is inherently wrong, and if I were to say it was right, then me and the author would both be wrong. In war, even the people on the wrong side of an issue are so convinced that they are on the right side, that they are willing to kill others for their belief. This

quote applies directly to the actions of a bad entity justifying its wrongs. For that reason, this quote cannot stand.

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