

Notes from Steinhoff Paper (2015)

Uwe Steinhoff is a German ethicist who argues that people have a right to self-defense if they are under imminent attack. They may take an action that would usually be morally impermissible, if it is out of necessity and proportional to the attack, even if it is not the mildest means available. But what does that mean?

Definition

Example

Necessity. An action satisfies the necessity requirement if it is guaranteed to achieve a safe, instant, and conclusive end to the attack. Otherwise, the action that offers the best possible defensive results would be permissible.

Imminence. Even if an attack is not ongoing, a defender can exercise self-defense if an attack is imminent. An attack can be imminent even if the harm is not.

Mildest Means. If two methods of self-defense have the same effectiveness, the defender must use the milder of the two. However, if the milder method puts the defender at an even slightly greater level of risk, they may use it, but are not required to use it.

Proportionality. A defensive action must be in proportion to the imminent threat.