Olek Yardas

Chris Lorrain

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*Bernard Gert and War*

    Bernards Gert’s philosophy would suggest a stance against what we commonly define as war, and agrees with some parts of “The Logic of War” by Michael Walzer, but disagrees with others. Gert’s moral rules state that one must not kill, cause pain, disable, deprive of freedom, or deprive of pleasure. For an act which violates one more of these rules to be considered moral, a rational, impartial bystander must be able to justify an exception to the moral rules the act violates. The inverse of rationality is irrationality, which Gert’s philosophy defines as when a person acts in a way that they know or believe will bring some sort of physical or mental harm upon another person or thing, without proper justification for acting as such. Impartiality is when one is not at all involved with the causes or consequences of the act. It is clear that wars violate all of Gert’s considerations, and so no rational impartial person can justify the act war.

    Aggression, as described by Walzer, is “the name we give to the crime of war” ( Walzer, p. 467). By “crime of war,” the author means that it is the actual act that is immoral about war. The author says it is immoral because those in the role of the aggressor “force men and women to risk their lives” (Walzer, p. 467). This is consistent with Gert’s philosophy, because if an act of aggression forces men and women to risk their lives, then that is certainly violating at least one of the five moral rules.

    The author takes the idea of individual rights and applies it to independent nations, mirroring our own domestic society, in order to equate the goings-on of war with crimes in a hypothetical “international society”. He says in the international society, aggression “is the only crime that states can commit against other states” (Walzer, p. 468). The laws that govern this state:

*1 - There exists and international society of independent states.*

*2 - This international society has a law that establishes the rights of its members--above all, the rights of territorial integrity and political sovereignty.*

*3 - Any use of force or imminent threat of force by one state against the political sovereignty or territorial integrity of another constitutes aggression and is a criminal act.*

*4 - Aggression justifies two kinds of violent response: a war of self-defence by the victim and a war of law enforcement by the victim and any other member of international society.*

*5 - Nothing but aggression can justify war.*

*6 - Once the aggressor state has been militarily repulsed, it can also be punished.*

This model is at odds with Gert’s philosophy. If this is indeed how the world works, then it is a very immoral place when it comes to war. First of all, the act of aggression is immoral, but to counter with more violence causes more evils than it prevents, and is immoral. The fifth and sixth rule are especially inconsistent with Gert’s definition of morality, as there is no general justification for aggression, and therefore no general justification for war. The sixth is the most out of line with Gert’s reasoning, as even if there were a valid justification by an impartial rational bystander, further punishment after the conclusion of a war brings unnecessary pains upon the victim, and is thus immoral.

    Preventative war is “fought to maintain the balance, to stop what is thought to be an even distribution of power from shifting into a relation of dominance and inferiority” (469), as described by the author. It is a war of fears, of speculation. The authors stance of preventive war is disapproval, and is explained by a utilitarian argument:

*1 - assuming the balance of power preserves the liberties of the people, and that it is worth defending.*

*2 - were preventative war not waged, the impending war would be longer, more deadly, and consume more resources.*

*3 - assuming the first clause is taken seriously, then a preventative war would break out any time a leader feels threatened, probably quite often, and there is nothing but wars all the time, and the “liberties” of the people are cast aside, so there is no justification to preserve the “balance” of power, as that will cause more problems that it will prevent.*

This is an argument that is in accordance with Gert’s philosophy, as the amount of evil being caused is much less than the evil being prevented. Seeing that the author thinks that the act of preventative war would inhibit the liberties of the people, Gert would agree, as the act would break moral rules.

    Gert’s philosophy states that those acts that are most moral bring the least amount of harm and the most amount of good to people. This is qualified by quantifying if the moral rules violated for any given act can be justified by certain exceptions. War is one of the most evil things ever to occur, therefore, according to Gert’s philosophy. War brings much more evil than good into the world, and should be avoided at all costs, in accordance with Gert’s philosophy.