A Defense of Pacifism¹

TOM REGAN, North Carolina State University

The title of this paper is misleading. I do not intend to defend pacifism against those who would contend that it is false. In point of fact. I agree that pacifism is false, and profoundly so, if any moral belief is. Yet pacifism's critics sometimes believe it is false for inadequate reasons, and it is important to make the inadequacy of these reasons apparent whenever possible. Otherwise pacifism's apologists are apt to suppose that they have overcome their critic's strongest objections, when, in fact, in exposing the inadequacy of the grounds of certain objections, they have succeeded only in meeting the weaker ones. What I intend to defend, then, is not the truth of pacifism, but the very different claim that pacifism is not necessarily false. This objection to pacifism, which, if sound, would silence the debate over its possible merits, and which, therefore, if sound, would be a strong objection indeed, is set forth by Jan Narveson in his paper on pacifism.² I hope to show that this objection is unfounded, and I shall, accordingly. direct my argument principally against Narveson's. And yet it is with a certain degree of reluctance that I do so, since Narveson, himself, suggests that "most people" whose opinion he has solicited would agree with me that pacifism, although false, is not necessarily so.3 One runs a risk, in such a situation, of pouring old wine into new bottles. Still, the only published critique of his view to which Narveson has replied—namely, a short note by M. Jay Whitman4—has met with what, for reasons I shall indicate

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Narveson, Jan. "Pacifism: A Philosophical Analysis," Ethics, Vol. 75 (1965), pp. 259-271. Reprinted in War and Morality, edited by Richard A. Wasserstrom, Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc.: Belmont, California, 1970, pp. 63-77. Page references are to the Wasserstrom edition.

³ Narveson, Jan. "Is Pacifism Consistent?," Ethics, Vol. 78 (1968), p. 148.

⁴ Whitman, M. J. "Is Pacifism Self-Contradictory?," Ethics, Vol. 76 (1966), pp. 307-08.

directly, I take to be an incisive rejoiner. And the only other published critique of his analysis, with which I am familiar, fails, I think,⁵ to make a reasonable case against it. Perhaps it is not altogether unfitting, therefore, to speak out in print for the otherwise silent majority.

In his paper Narveson argues that pacifism, when understood as a "moral doctrine"—that is, when understood as setting forth a principle of obligation binding on all rational, free beings, and not as the expression of, say, a mere strategy for social change or a passionate dislike of violence—when understood in this way, Narveson argues pacifism can be shown to be logically untenable because self-contradictory. He holds this position for what appear to be two different but related reasons; first, because he thinks the pacifist, in order to be consistent with his assumptions, must admit that there are cases where the use of force would be justified, an admission which, Narveson argues, is in-

Miller's argument will not stand careful examination. Narveson's argument does not lead to the conclusion that "any moral principle that asserts that an action is wrong is self-contradictory." When Miller's interpretation of Narveson's argument is applied to principles of prima facie duty, for example, these principles do not emerge as self-contradictory, despite the fact that it is "logically possible that in order to prevent any given (prima facie) wrongful act we may have to do that act itself." Our prima facie duty not to lie, for example, may always be overridden, but the assertion expressing this duty is not self-contradictory simply because it is conceivable that in order to prevent future lies, we may have to tell one now. Miller, therefore, is rash to suppose that Narveson's argument has the consequences he attributes to it.

In response to this, Miller might say that what he means by "any moral principle" is "any absolute moral principle. . ."—i.e., "any principle declaring of an identifiable action that it is always, without exception wrong." But this, even if it is what Miller means, exposes his argument to two further objections. For now Miller's claim that the belief that all such principles are self-contradictory is "patently absurb" is gratuitous and question-begging. What we want to know is if there are such principles that are not self-contradictory, especially since, as Miller concedes, "it is always logically possible that in order to prevent a given wrongful act that we may have to do that act itself." The question is, "In such a case, ought we to do the wrongful act?" And what we want is some well thought out answer to this question, not a begging leave of it. My argument in the sequel, I think, goes some way toward satisfying this demand.

However, even if it is "patently absurd" to believe that all principles that assert that a given action is wrong are self-contradictory, Miller fails to show that Narveson is guilty of this particular absurdity. At the very most Narveson's analysis can be generalized to apply, not to all moral principles of the type in question, but to those only according to which (a) a given action, A, is declared to be absolutely wrong, and (b) actions of type A are thought to be wrong because of the consequences of performing them—namely, because they lead to greater evil, and, in particular, to greater A-ing, in the future, than would result from not A-ing. Now, it is consistent with the belief that not all absolute moral prohibitions are self-contradictory, that all absolute moral prohibitions satisfying conditions (a) and (b) are. Accordingly, even if we were to concede the former belief to Miller, nothing whatever would follow concerning the "absurdity" of the latter one. And since it is this latter belief which Narveson's argument against pacifism, when generalized, can be argued to imply, conceding Miller the former belief could go no way toward exposing the "absurdity" of Narveson's analysis.

⁵ Miller, Ronald B. "Violence, Force and Coercion," in Violence, "Award Winning Essays in the Council for Philosophical Studies Competition." Edited by Jerome A. Shaffer, David McKay Company, Inc.: New York, 1971, pp. 11-44, especially pp. 41-44. Miller attempts to show that Narveson's objections against pacifism can be raised against "any moral principle that asserts that an action is wrong," (p. 143). According to Miller, since it is true, not only in the case of pacifism, as Narveson argues, but in any case in which an act is declared wrong, that "it is always logically possible that in order to prevent any given wrongful act we may have to do that act itself" (p. 44), it follows that Narveson's line of argument, when generalized, shows not that pacifism alone is self-contradictory, but that "any moral principle that asserts that an action is wrong is self-contradictory." And this, Miller concludes, is "patently absurb." (Ibid).

consistent with the pacifist's absolute prohibition against the use of force; and, second, because he thinks the pacifist is inconsistent in affirming, on the one hand, our right not to have others inflict harm or suffering on us by the use of force, while denying, on the other, our right to use force to resist such attacks. In what follows I shall concern myself almost exclusively with the former of Narveson's arguments and try to show that it is unsuccessful. I do not consider his second argument in detail because I think that, if pacifism can be defended against the first line of argument, it can also be defended against the second. If, that is, the pacifist's fundamental moral outlook can be shown to be logically consistent, then I believe his account of human rights, as these are qualified by this moral outlook, also can be shown to be logically consistent.

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Before the consistency of pacifism can be determined, the position, itself, must be characterized, at least in some general way. For present purposes, Narveson's characterization can be accepted, although it is not exhaustive; there are, that is, recognizable versions of pacifism which his characterization fails to take into account. In large measure this is due to Narveson's tendency to treat the concepts of force and violence interchangeably, so that he is led to suppose that anyone who prohibits the use of force must also prohibit the use of violence, and vice versa. In fact, however, these two concepts are logically distinct,6 and it is both conceivable and has actually been the case that recognized pacifists consistently have spoken out against the use of violence while at the same time sanctioning certain uses of force. According to Narveson's characterization, however, the pacifist is categorically opposed, not only to violence, but also to the use of force, both when force is used to attack harmless, undefended or innocent persons, as well as when it is used by any such person when attacked by another. As such, the pacifist is not opposed merely to the aggressive use of force or violence. He must be understood as opposing their defensive use as well. As Narveson writes:7

⁶ Cf., e.g., Miller's essay, as well as Robert Audi's "On the Meaning and Justification of Violence," also in Shaffer's Violence, op. cit. One might choose, of course, to limit the usage of "pacifism" so that it applies only to those who oppose violence, but not to those who oppose both violence and force; or to those only who oppose a particular form of violence—namely, war; etc. Ordinary usage provides no sharp guidelines, but Narveson seems to me to have captured adequately one way in which the term 'pacifism' is ordinarily used.

⁷ Narveson (in Wasserstrom), op. cit., p. 69.

... [T]o hold the pacifist position as a genuine, full-blooded moral principle is to hold that nobody has a right to fight back when attacked, that fighting back is inherently evil, as such.

Pacifism, then, as Narveson understands it, and as I shall defend it, can be characterized as the view that no one is ever justified in using force or, alternatively, that the use of force is always wrong. If my defense of what might aptly be termed "extreme pacifism" is sound, then defenses similar to mine of less extreme forms can easily be constructed.

Now, Narveson rightly points out that this concept of "using force" is very vague, and it may be that any attempt to make it very precise will have an air of arbitrariness about it. How this concept should be analysed, however, is not a question that must be settled prior to defending pacifism against Narveson's attack, since his attack is meant to apply to pacifism, no matter how the concept of "the use of force" is understood. I propose, therefore, to treat the concept at an intuitive level. Pushing, punching, kicking, scratching, tackling and biting people involve the use of physical force. As such, and with Narveson's own understanding of pacifism serving as a precedent, I shall assume that a pacifist would hold that we ought never to do them, whether we do them to someone who has not attacked us, or in self-defense against someone who has. (I believe, in fact, that a pacifist could consistently distinguish between those cases of, say, pushing he denounces, and those he does not; but to explore this problem would be to take me well outside the limited objectives of this paper.)

A further question, by way of clarification, concerns how the pacifist's prohibition against the use of force might fit into a more general moral outlook. Here I shall follow some of the suggestions of Whitman. The pacifist's prohibition against the use of force, he suggests, has the status of a "priority rule"; that is, this prohibition, in the eyes of the pacifist, must always take priority over any rule of prima facie obligation, in the sense that if or as this prohibition conflicts with any other rule, the rule against the use of force must always be honored at the expense of the other(s). Furthermore, by characterizing the prohibition against the use of force as a "priority rule," Whitman implies, what Narveson accepts, that this prohibition need not be thought of as occupying the status of the supreme or fundamental moral principle within the structure of the pacifist's thought. What is

Whitman, op. cit., p. 307.

fundamental, Whitman suggests,⁹ is the principle, "One ought never to do evil . . . or, if we must choose between evils, never to choose the greater." Thus, in saying that the rule against the use of force has the status of a priority rule, in the sense indicated above, one is saying, what both Whitman and Narveson accept, that, for the pacifist, the greatest evil is to use force, either aggressively or defensively. In summary, therefore, the relevant features of the pacifist's outlook, are the following.

There is:

- (1) A supreme principle: "Never do what is evil or, if we must choose between evils, never choose the greater."
- (2) A priority rule, or a rule which (a) specifies which among those things that are evil is the greatest; (b) declares that, as such, and in view of the supreme moral principle, no person can be justified in doing it (the greatest evil); so that (c) when this rule conflicts with any other rule or rules concerning what is evil, the priority rule always is to take precedence. For the pacifist, this is the rule: "One ought never to use force."

and

(3) A set of other rules, which we might call "secondary rules," which specify those things other than the use of force which are evil and which constitute a subclass of our prima facie obligations.

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Narveson's argument against pacifism consists essentially in his pointing out that it is conceivable that the pacifist's priority-rule can come into conflict with the pacifist's supreme principle; it consists, that is to say, in his arguing that it is conceivable that, in order to avoid doing the greatest evil, we might have to choose to use force. The question then becomes: "Which will the pacifist give up: his supreme principle or his priority-rule? He cannot have both." In summarizing this argument in his reply to Whitman, Narveson writes: 10

... [A]s I was trying to make clear in my paper ..., no use of a priority 'rule as such can escape the kind of contradiction I was claiming the pacifist is committed to. It seems to me logically true, on any moral theory whatever, that the lesser evil must be preferred to the greater. If the use of force by me, now, is necessary to avoid the use of more physical force (by

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¹⁰ Narveson, Ethics, Vol. 78 (1968), p. 148.

others, perhaps) later, then to say that physical force is the supreme (kind of) evil is precisely to say that under these circumstances I am committed to the use of physical force.

Now, in response to this line of argument, a pacifist might maintain that the use of force never does, as a matter of fact, lead to a reduction of evil, including a reduction of force. Whitman, in fact, openly espouses just this interpretation. "[T]he use of force," he writes,¹¹ "is (for the pacifist) itself a substantive evil and inevitably leads to greater substantive evil than any other immoral act." But this reply, Narveson argues, is not adequate. Whether the use of force in any given case will lead to a reduction of evil is a factual question, and one, therefore, that cannot be settled a priori. "It cannot be maintained," he writes,¹²

that it is logically impossible for a given violent act to prevent more violence. . . . And the question I was discussing . . . is what the pacifist would say to the question whether he would agree that the use of force would be justified if it were necessary to prevent what the pacifist himself regards as the greatest of evils. Whitman doesn't seem to have addressed himself to this crucial question.

I believe Narveson's reply is sound. Whitman does not address himself to this "crucial question," and, by failing to do so, he fails to make it clear whether the pacifist can answer it without making an exception to either his supreme principle or his priority rule. I want to argue that he can.

Central to Narveson's argument is the claim that "the lesser evil must be preferred to the greater." Now, these expressions, "greater and lesser evil," are ambiguous, and Narveson uses them in at least two distinguishable ways. (I shall shortly distinguish a third.) There is, first, a quantitative sense. Sometimes when people speak about evil they speak about how much of it there is, and how one amount is greater (exceeds) the other (the lesser). It is in its quantitative sense that Narveson asks whether force might not be necessary to prevent more (a greater quantity or amount of) force or evil in the future. Second, there is a qualitative sense, in which to speak of one evil as being greater or lesser than another is not to say that the quantity of evil is greater or lesser in amount, but, instead, that it is inherently or intrinsically more or less evil. It is in this sense that philosophers have distinguished between kinds of evil and ranked them as greater or less, considered as kinds of evil; and it is in this sense that Narveson

¹¹ Whitman, op. cit., p. 307.

¹² Narveson, Ethics, Vol. 78 (1968), p. 149.

understands the pacifist's contention that physical force is the supreme (kind of) evil.

With these distinctions in mind, we can, I think, reformulate Narveson's argument with some gain in precision. When reformulated it reads:

- 1. The lesser evil must be preferred to the greater.
- 2. Therefore, a lesser quantity of qualitatively equivalent evils must be preferred to a greater quantity of qualitatively equivalent evils.
- 3. The use of force is a substantive evil.
- 4. Therefore, a lesser quantity of force must be preferred to a greater quantity of force.
- 5. If any given action, A, is necessary to bring about a lesser rather than a greater quantity of qualitatively equivalent evil, then one's obligation is to do A.
- 6. Therefore, if any given action, F, is necessary to bring about a lesser rather than a greater quantity of force, then one's obligation is to do F.
- 7. Therefore, if the use of force is necessary to bring about a lesser rather than a greater quantity of force, then one's obligation is to use force.

Thus, if the pacifist accepts (1), as he does; and if he views the use of force as a substantive ("the greatest") evil, as he does; then he must concede that there are conceivable situations in which force should be used. He must, therefore, qualify his priority rule, and the only way he could escape this conclusion is by qualifying his supreme principle.

I find this argument unconvincing. Narveson assumes, without argument, that the pacifist must accept premise (2) above—the premise, namely, "A lesser quantity of qualitatively equivalent evils must be preferred to a greater quantity of qualitatively equivalent evils." And he assumes that the pacifist must accept this because he assumes that the pacifist would accept both the claim, (1) "The lesser evil must be preferred to the greater," and the claim, (2) "A lesser quantity of qualitatively equivalent evils is a lesser evil than a greater quantity of qualitatively equivalent evils." It is this latter assumption of Narveson's I want to question.

To do this, a third sense of "greater or lesser evil" needs to be distinguished. It is what I shall call its "resultant sense." It is distinct from, but related to both its quantitative and qualitative senses. It is in this sense that we would speak of various combinations of qualitatively equivalent or non-equivalent evils, com-

bined in various quantities, qua combinations, as being greater or lesser evils. For example, even if we were to agree that a certain evil, P, was qualitatively greater than another evil, Q, we might want to ask which would be the greater resultant evil—a given quantity, M, of Q or a lesser quantity, M minus N, of P. And which would be the greater resultant evil would not be simply a matter of determining which was lesser in the quantitative or qualitative sense of "lesser evil."

One sense, then, in which the claim, "The lesser evil must be preferred to the greater," can be understood, is in its resultant sense—i.e., "The lesser resultant evil must be preferred to the greater resultant evil." And it is in this sense that we must understand Narveson's second premise (above). What he assumes, on the part of the pacifist, in other words, is, "A lesser quantity of qualitatively equivalent evils is a lesser resultant evil than a greater quantity of qualitatively equivalent evils." And the question to be raised is, "Why should it be thought that the pacifist must accept this? Why must he have just this view of resultant evils?" Narveson gives no reason for believing that he must, and I, myself, cannot think of any, except, perhaps, the initial intuitive plausibility of this interpretation, together with the fact that many pacifists would seem, as a matter of fact, to believe something like this. In fact, however, I believe there is an alternative to this interpretation available to the pacifist, one that indicates that how one brings about force or evil in the future makes a decisive difference to the greatness of the resultant evil in any given case. This would be

(2') The resultant evil of a given combination, X, is greater than the resultant evil of any other combination, Y, if X is caused by force, while Y is not.

As (2') makes clear, that a given combination of evils (or goods!) was caused by force, is a sufficient condition of its being resultantly a greater evil than any other combination not caused by force. Or, to put this same point differently, (2') involves the supposition that in calling the use of force the greatest evil, the pacifist may mean that it, unlike any other evil, is irredeemably evil—an evil, that is, that makes any combination of which it is the cause resultantly a greater evil than any other combination of evils that might be brought into existence by any other means. As such, then, no future state of affairs that could be achieved by the use of force could be morally preferable to any other state of affairs, achieved by other means, no matter how evil the latter might be. It is a greater evil to use force than to make additional force

possible by refusing to use it, which is to say, no one ought ever to use force. And this, once again, is precisely what the pacifist is presumed to maintain.

For the pacifist to conceive of the use of force as an irredeemable evil, is, I believe, sufficient as a response to Narveson's recurrent objection. "I agree entirely," he writes, 13

with the pacifist who would maintain that violence is never justified merely in order to bring about good. But is it ever justified in order to avoid evil, namely, the evil of more violence? Given that it is violence as such, rather than violence as employed by the pacifist himself, which is being held to be supremely evil, then it would seem that the only way to avoid inconsistency here would be to deny that the quantity of violence prevented by a given act of violence was ever greater than the quantity of violence inherent in the act aimed at preventing it.

Granted, this may seem to be "the only way to avoid inconsistency"; nevertheless, it is not. For if how future evil is avoided can make a decisive difference to how great is the resultant evil involved in avoiding it, then the greater resultant evil is not always simply a question of how much of what kind of evil is caused or avoided.

By viewing the use of force as an irredeemable evil. moreover, the pacifist has a basis for disputing Narveson's second line of argument-namely, that he (the pacifist) is inconsistent in affirming, on the one hand, our right not to have others use force against us, while denying, on the other, our right to fight back if attacked. What the pacifist could concede to Narveson is his claim that "a right just is a status justifying preventive action,"14 so that it would be, as Narveson contends, selfcontradictory to say "You have a right to X, but you are never justified in preventing people from depriving you of it." What does not follow from this, however, is that we are justified in using force against those who use force against us. The pacifist could insist that we would be justified in using our ability to persuade people, by rational, nonviolent means, to desist from attacking us; he could insist, that is, that we are justified in using some means to prevent people from violating our right not to have them use force against us. But he could consistently deny that this right entitles us to make use of means involving force to remedy infringements upon it. For what means we would be justified in using would be a function of what, in general, we would be justified in doing. And if to use

¹³ Ibid, (my italics).

Narveson, (in Wasserstrom), op. cit., p. 72.

force is always an irredeemable evil, then it remains an irredeemable evil when resorted to in the name of defending our rights. As such, therefore, no person could be justified in resorting to it.

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Now, this defense of pacifism is, I think, consistent with the most general claims made about it, both by Narveson and Whitman. Verbally, at least, the same supreme principle is recognized, as is the same priority-rule. Where my interpretation of pacifism differs from theirs is in the content given to the supreme principle and to the priority-rule. They interpret "greater" or "greatest evil" in one way; I interpret them in another. And perhaps their interpretation is closer to what actual pacifists believe than is mine. Perhaps no self-avowed pacifist believes that the use of force is an irredeemable evil. The issue is unclear at best. But before turning to this question, two possible objections of Narveson's can be anticipated and rejected. The first concedes that the position I have defended is a recognizable, legitimate version of pacifism but argues that it is, nonetheless, susceptible to the same line of argument Narveson advances against the version of pacifism he examines. The second is to the effect that the position I have defended is not a pacifistic one, which, if true, would put an end to the need to search for any further reason for rejecting my defense of it. I shall consider each objection briefly before articulating the consequences of my analysis.

"Your defense is vulnerable for the same old reason," Narveson might contend. "Rather than asking, as I did, whether the consequences of not using force might be worse than the consequences of using it, we can ask of your pacifist whether it is not possible that he might have to choose between just two alternatives, A and B, the latter of which would involve in its performance the use of more force than the former. This is a conceivable state of affairs, and the question then is: 'Which ought to be done—A or B?' Surely any morally sensitive pacifist would agree that A ought to be done. And just as surely this puts him on record as sanctioning the use of force in conceivable circumstances. Once again, thereforce, the pacifist, to be consistent, must concede that the prohibition against the use of force is not absolute. Your defense, accordingly, is no defense at all."

This line of argument, given Narveson's predilections, is natural enough. It calls forth various responses, two of which deserve mention. First, it is worth noting that this argument is impotent

to demonstrate, even assuming that the pacifist could choose only between A and B, that he must, to be consistent, choose A. A pacifist could believe that the wrongness involved in using force is not proportionate to the amount of force used. A pacifist could believe, in other words, that no act of using force is more or less wrong than any other. Accordingly, even assuming that a pacifist could choose only between A and B, it would not follow that he must choose A. One might profoundly hope that he would, indeed, but that is a different matter.

More fundamental as a response, however, is the following. The state of affairs alleged to be "conceivable" in the above simply is not. That B might involve the use of more force than A is, of course, conceivable, but is not the point at issue. What is at issue is the conceivability of a situation in which an agent can choose only between doing an action of type A or one of type B. Any conceivable state of affairs in which a person can choose between actions of these types must also include in it the possibility of the agent's choosing to do neither. And because it must include this possibility, it becomes quite academic to pursue the question of which one, A or B, a pacifist would sanction choosing. The short answer, given my interpretation, is: "Neither."

Granted this, Narveson might still go on to suggest the following kind of case. "It is conceivable," he could maintain, "that your pacifist might have to choose between doing some action, C, which would involve his using a modest amount of force, or not doing C, which would give rise to someone else's using a vast amount of force. A desert island case where, say, the pacifist has the choice of either breaking a small child's arm or, choosing not to do this, of seeing his captor, a mad tyrant, destroy the pacifist's homeland, is a graphic if fantastic example of the type of case I have in mind. Now, surely any morally sensitive person would opt for C. And just as surely any morally sensitive pacifist who would do so would be on record as having sanctioned the use of force in conceivable circumstances. There is no saving pacifism, therefore, from the kind of latent inconsistency I claimed is indigenous to it."

I do not believe this argument fares any better than the former one. If we postpone, for the moment, any discussion of the "moral sensitivity" of the pacifist, as I have defended him, and concentrate on the alleged inconsistency of his position, I believe we shall see that the "desert island" argument confuses the questions, "Morally speaking, what do we think the pacifist (or anyone else) ought to choose in such cases?," and "Logically speaking, what

can the pacifist claim ought to be chosen?" If the pacifist believes that the use of force is an irredeemable evil, then, not only is it consistent with his position, it is required by it, that he choose not to do actions of type C; for the description of actions of this type, ex hypothesi, includes the expression "involves the use of force," whereas the choice not to do actions of type C, since it is the choice not to do some action, cannot itself be described as "a choice to do an action," let alone an action that could be described as "involving the use of force." That we might have well grounded moral objections to someone who would advocate such inaction in such circumstances is logically distinct from, and should not be confused with, the fact that a pacifist could consistently advocate it. The only merit the present argument has over the previous one, therefore, is that the state of affairs it hypothesizes is conceivable. But this is a necessary and not a sufficient condition of mounting a successful attack against the pacifist.

There is, then, no reason to believe that pacifism, as I have defended it, is vulnerable to the type of argument Narveson raises against pacifism, as he understands it. Yet this very fact suggests a second line of criticism he might well develop—namely, that the view I have set forth is not pacifism. How much this issue, if it were raised, would turn out to be merely verbal, it is difficult to say. However, it does seem to me that what grounds one might have for opposing absolutely the use of force is a distinct question from whether one does oppose it, and it does seem to me that what is definite of pacifism is that it is the absolute opposition to the use of force, and not that pacifism necessarily involves such opposition for one or another type reason. To limit the usage of 'pacifist' to those who oppose force on the grounds that it leads to evil consequences, therefore, seems to me to confuse the conceptual question, "What is pacifism?," with the factual question. "How is it always (or most often) defended?" Thus, even if no self-avowed pacifist would accept my defense of the consistency of his position, it would not follow that my defense could not be a defense of pacifism; for it might be that no selfavowed pacifist would be satisfied with the grounds that my defense requires him to accept,15 and not that we are looking for grounds for two quite different moral positions. Part of the problem one encounters in discussing pacifism, as Narveson would agree.

¹⁵ This is somewhat misleading. The point is that a pacifist needn't have grounds for his belief, in the sense that he must infer his opposition to the use of force from the presumed truth of some other proposition. It is open to him to claim to intuit its truth, rather than to infer it. In the jargon of moral theory, pacifism can be either "teleological" or "deontological."

is to discover just what it is that a pacifist does believe and why, and part of this consists, I think, in finding out how a pacifist could answer Narveson's question¹⁶

If force is the only way to prevent violence in a given case, is its use justified in that case?

I do not know how every self-avowed pacifist would answer this question, but I do believe a person could answer this question negatively, which is the answer the pacifist's priority rule seems to require, without thereby making an exception to the pacifist's supreme principle. If he believes that the use of force is an irredeemable evil. in the sense that to use it is a sufficient condition of producing a greater resultant evil than any that could result from not using gorce, then a person could consistently maintain both that one ought always to do the lesser rather than the greater evil and that one ought never to use force, not even when using it would reduce the amount of force in the future. Such a person, I believe, satisfies the conditions for the application of the term "pacifist." whether or not anyone who claims to be one would also happen to accept my account of why he might and how he can consistently believe what he does. For my thesis concerns not simply how pacifists have, as a matter of fact, attempted to defend their belief, an issue which is, as I mentioned earlier, unclear at best, and one which, in the case of celebrated pacifists such as Ghandi, say, calls for extended and careful elucidation,17 rather than perfunctory pronouncements; my thesis concerns. instead, how pacifism can be defended. At the very most, therefore, Narveson's argument could show that it is inconsistent to ground pacifism on considerations of negative utility—i.e., on the grounds that using force leads to more evil than abstaining from doing so-and, at the same time, to believe that, should the use of force lead to a reduction of evil, we ought not to use it.18 Even if we were to grant this much to Narveson, however, it would not follow that pacifism is therefore self-contradictory. For the con-

¹⁶ Narveson, (in Wasserstrom), op. cit., p. 73.

¹⁷ In this connection, see Arne Naess' "A Systematization of Ghandian Ethics of Conflict Resolution," in Conflict Resolution, Volume II, Number 2, 1958, pp. 140-155.

Even this is to concede to Narveson more than his argument shows. The question he discusses is whether any person could ever be justified in using force. To argue that a person could be because it is conceivable that the use of force might reduce evil is surely inadequate. What is required in addition to this is an argument to show that people sometimes can know, as a matter of fact, that the use of force will reduce evil. Narveson does not even begin to argue for this position, and yet a pacifist could agree that, conceivably, the use of force could reduce evil, and yet deny that we can ever know, in advance, that it will. Such a pacifist could, it would seem, consistently maintain that no person ought ever to use force. A full scale inquiry into the credentials of pacifism would require a careful examination of this alternative.

cept is broader than any particular basis that might be invoked to justify the pacifist's belief.

Two consequences of my defense deserve mention. First, no pacifist who would accept it can indulge in the practice of appealing to the presumed evil consequences of the use of force as grounds for why force should not be used. For if the use of force is thought to be an irredeemable evil, then it is an irredeemable evil no matter what are its consequences; and if it is an irredeemable evil, no matter what are its consequences, then what its consequences are, either in a particular case, in most cases or, following Whitman, "inevitably," is logically irrelevant to the prohibition against using it. To accept my defense, on the one hand, and, on the other, to attempt to justify the prohibition against using force by appealing to the consequences that allegedly flow from its use, is inconsistent.

Secondly, and paradoxically, my defense of pacifism, if sound, and if it represents what one needs to believe in order to avoid Narveson's charge of inconsistency, confirms the view of "the majority" to whom Narveson makes reference, who believe that pacifism is "bizarre and vaguely ludicrous, but nevertheless not unintelligible."19 To regard the use of force as irredeemably evil does, I believe, save pacifism from the charge of inconsistency. But any view that would require that we judge, say, a woman who uses what physical power she has to attempt to free herself from an aspiring rapist, as having done, not, what might sometimes be the case, a foolish thing, but instead, and necessarily, an irredeemably evil act, must, I believe, shock and offend the moral sensibilities of rational men. There is, to the sure, a certain antiseptic cleanness involved in dismissing a moral position on purely logical grounds: such a procedure does not require us to stain our analytical hands with the guts of a moral judgment. It remains true, nonetheless, that the strongest objections to an extreme pacifism of the kind discussed are moral, not logical ones. A person committed to an extreme pacifism, though he need make no logical mistake, yet lacks a fully developed moral sensitivity to the vagaries and complexities of human existence. To regard the pacifist's belief as 'bizarre and vaguely ludicrous" is, perhaps, to put it mildly.

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¹⁹ Narveson, Ethics, Vol. 78 (1968), p. 148.