Nonviolence, Peace, and Justice-A Philosophical Introduc-tion. By Kit R. Christensen. (Calgary: Broadview Press, 2009). 224p. Hardcopy, ISBN 0195183223

This book provides a philosophical approach to questions concerning violence, war, and justice in human affairs. It offers a broad introduction to underlying assumptions, values, concepts, theories, and the historical contexts informing much of the current discussion worldwide regarding these morally crucial topics. It gives brief summaries and analyses of a wide range of relevant brief systems, philosophical positions, and policy problems. It is clearly oriented throughout by the ethical preference for nonviolence strategies in the achievement of human ends and a belief in the viability of a socially just --and thus peaceful--human future. It also maintains a consistently skeptical stance toward the all-too-easily accepted apologies, past and present, for violence, war, and the continuation of injustice. The author proceeds in a way contrary to the philosopher's usual tendency to go into more depth on a narrower subject, and instead emphasizes breadth in order to provide an explicitly philosophical introduction to the value judgments and other assumptions underlying an agenda of peacemaking and social justice. The author puts into historical context, since in one form or another they have been sources of debate for centuries if not millennia. He clarifies the cultural contexts within which many of these questions have been addressed in the past, showing how that understanding can be useful in making sense of our multicultural and globally interconnected present. That is, identifying differences and similarities in historical circumstances and cultural norms puts us in a better position to see why some people in the contemporary world respond to conflict the way they do by seeking revenge for perceived wrongs done, by being willing to die for what they believe is a righteous cause, or by interpreting their social environment in terms of "Us versus Them."

Chapter 1 is a summary of the different aspects of ethical evaluation and decision-making as follows: 1) A description of the kinds of situations where ethical evaluation becomes relevant; 2) the nature of moral responsibility in such situations as well as whose interests have to be taken into account; 3) an explanation of the preliminary choice between ethical (or moral) relativism and universalism which we all have to make in deciding what is ethically/morally right or wrong, good or bad; 4) some of the more historically influential moral principles.

Chapter 2 addresses the nature of violence itself and discusses the nature of nonviolence primarily as a strategy of conflict resolution, as well as particular tactics and policies that have been used successfully by nonviolent social activists over the years. In order to stay on task in the exploration of nonviolent, peace-enhancing approaches to living socially and resolving conflict, the author applies a fairly simple definition of violence. Violence is the direct or indirect infliction of injury on someone or something by some agent.

Chapter 3 discusses answers to an age-old question: is human nature itself a major obstacle to people living nonviolent, peaceful, and socially

just lives? How we decide this issue of course will influence what we believe is achievable regarding widespread social change and moral progress along these lines. The author summarizes some relevant views on human nature from a representative sample of famous philosophers in the distant and recent past, organized in terms of their agreement that 1) Humans are basically good but corruptible; 2) humans are basically evil but controllable; or 3) humans are basically neither good nor evil, but educable. The author concludes with a brief discussion of how human nature looks from the current standpoint of the biological sciences, and why that matters. What people think about the acceptability of violence is based on the value and meaning they attach to life and death, which in turn informs their view of the proper goals in life, and what sort of relationships they think should obtain between humans and some supernatural or divine power, between fellow humans, and between humans and the rest of the natural world. For the author, rational reflect about human nature is relevant to the extent that it helps us decide what kind of realistic chance there is that people can create a social world in the foreseeable future which is characterized by nonviolence, meaningful and sustainable peace, and true social justice.

Chapter 4 offers an overview of a number of religious and secular belief systems, focusing on what their adherents typically would say about these topics as they relate specifically to the morality of violence. The author includes an account of religious fundamentalism, and a summary of the religiously grounded nonviolentism of Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. The author offers summaries of a number of historically influential systems of thought, both religious and secular, which provide different answers to these perennial human questions about life, death, and the viability of relations with others.

Chapter 5 deals with the ethical problems of war and peace, by describing basically what war is apart from all euphemism and romanticizing distortion, as well as identifying different kinds of war. The author shows that war is the kind of activity that at the very least can be assessed morally, in contrast to the time-honored and unfortunately still common view often called realism, which treats war as an amoral phenomenon not susceptible to such evolution. Some may be surprised that the book doesn't provide a separate analysis of "war against terrorism" here, but terrorism is more accurately understood as one type of "unconventional" strategy employed both by governments and by non-governmental groups (and sometimes by isolated individuals) whether or not there is an actual war going on. Thus, it can be evaluated like any other violent tactic used for political ends such as torturing prisoners, bombing civilian targets, or the systematic raping of females associated with an identified "enemy" group. The author also looks at three general positions on the morality of war: Realism, Just War Theory and Pacifism. Arguments for and against all three are explicated, though the author tries to clarify why he is more in agreement with the pacifist ethical approach than with the other two. The author explains differences between negative and positive peace as two distinct but related goals in peacemaking, and the connection of the latter

especially with social justice. As communication technology has advanced dramatically in the last two centuries, more people can be reached more quickly by those who want to influence public opinion for or against war making, or by those who just want to sell products by preying on people's fears and their fascination with violence.

Chapter 6 points out some of the problems peacemakers face in contemporary societies where most of the population is regularly bombard with violent imagery, and with as much disinformation as actual information about who or what is to be feared "out there"; all of which can have the effect of encouraging more violence or at least the passive acceptance of it as an unchangeable part of life like the weather. These problems include the power of propaganda and ideological conditioning, violence in entertainment, the attraction of vengeance, and the need for reconciliation in situations where people want to move forward with their lives after they have experienced violent conflict and suffering.

Chapter 7 brings the book to a close on a less than completely optimistic note. Always emphasizing the relationship between local conditions and our global connectedness, the author first identifies some of the major challenges yet to be overcome in interpersonal, inter-group, and international arenas of moral choice. The author concludes by focusing on two continuing dilemmas in people's struggles for social justice in many different countries: 1) the problem of means and ends, that is, whether only nonviolent means can bring about truly peaceful ends; 2) how do people who have suffered massive abuses and oppression in the past, or who are still being similarly victimized, keep up their hopes and their efforts at nonviolent liberation and social transformation, without finally giving up in despair or giving in to the temptation to "fight fire with fire"? The book serves as a source of stimulation to pursue some of these life and death questions further, and as a provocation to study the world with a more critical eye. Choices of action may be extremely limited for some people weighed down with their own suffering or past injury, or quite expanded for others living fairly comfortable, educated lives free of disability. But whether we as moral agents focus on interpersonal, inter-group, or international relations, it seems safe to say that the injustice for more people is to choose to do nothing significant in one's life to change all this for the better.

To sum up, this book is inspiring. It is profound enough for the professionals, and also understandable for many of the lay readers.

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