

On the Justice of the Present War: Some Implications for Education

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In light of the events of September 11th, Ron Glass's essay represents an opportunity for deep and meaningful dialogue, dialogue which was scarce in the days following the tragedy. While many of us evaded public discourse dominated by nationalist sentiment, some of us also found our private conversations restricted by a vague sense of civic duty and justice. It proved easy as well to let one's private, ongoing grief stand as one's only response. However, to continue to do so may be to dismiss our roles as philosophers and educators. And, given our tendency to relish in the contested, just what those roles entail has itself become a perennial issue. In addition to drawing us more deeply into the world, Glass's essay serves to remind us that ethics, war, peace, justice, citizenship, and of course caring, are all part of the chosen terrain.

Through Glass's essay we are led to consider the relationship between these issues and our individual (and thus educational) moral responsibility. Given the scope of the essay, there is not enough room to investigate all of the points the author makes. I will simply comment then on a few of Glass's reflections. His essay considers the educational implications of differing discourses related to political turmoil that ensue or might ensue in the public sphere. Both of the discourses offered require an appropriate pedagogy that encourages and makes possible reflection on the ethical issues inherent to war. He elucidates the criteria for distinguishing just and unjust wars and the attractions of *strategic nonviolence* as examples of the topics of discussion citizens of a liberal democracy might engage in.

On each of the topics, Glass reveals the necessity for ethical "line drawing," invoked by specific notions of morality and citizenship. I regard his discussion as exemplary of the type of activity he would like to see philosophers and educators engaged in an attempt to, as he says, "make sense of the present situation" and determine "reality through the shroud of ideology" in order to enact "what justice demands." Our education should have prepared us to attend to the myriad minutia of moral concerns surrounding the present situation, and yet such tasks are, as Glass rightly charges, beyond the capability of ordinary citizens. Ultimately, I believe his suggestion is to promote moral judgment in the public realm by encouraging moral discourse in education including consideration of a possible "War Without Weapons."

The notion of a war without weapons is an important one and in itself could serve as the focus of such a rich reflection. Given the potentially profound effects of war without weapons, a moral ideal that deserves our fullest attention, it is not clear why Glass detracts us with consideration of just war theory. He argues for the moral superiority of war without weapons by arguing that: (1) it is consistent with an ethic of care, and (2) it is more consistent with "the deontological and

consequentialist ethics undergirding just war theory” than even just warfare. Glass’s contention is surely that war without weapons is morally preferable to conventional warfare regardless of the ethical theories it can be aligned with. At least, I understand this to be his central argument, and while it appears evident to many, his conclusion cannot be taken as universally accepted. Detailing just war theory must signal then that Glass has another purpose in mind.

In general, I am not sure that Glass’s attempt to make the moral alternative to war, namely strategic nonviolence, comparable to just war theory is necessary. However, although not explicitly stated, he appears to be making an appeal to those of a different moral stripe. All of the talk about just war theory (including invocation of the moral basis for the seven conditions for justifying war and the supposed similarity between this moral basis and the moral underpinnings of war without weapons) is meant to entice just war theorists and its supporters to consider the capacities necessary to discuss and make decisions regarding the morality of war. The point that just war theorists and those favoring strategic non-violence might agree on a set of moral dispositions and virtues gives reason for including moral education in the curriculum. This point, and I think Glass would agree, remains superfluous however to a superior reason for favoring war without weapons. That reason, as he puts it, is that “explicit recognition of the moral status of ally and enemy alike” might require that we not kill others. Even when talk of rights and duties is forgone, determining or at least discussing what constitutes respect and/or love for other beings and why we might be compelled to care about our actions toward them, could produce an even deeper commitment to the other than recognizing their status as a moral equal.

In order to strengthen the moral imperatives to not only seek but to wage peace, I believe there are additional reasons present that Glass might put to use. He fails to include two of war without weapons’s “additional advantages” as “moral strengths” or reasons. Not eliminating our foes, because of the possibility of error, seems to me to add to the case for morally preferring war without weapons to complete annihilation. There is ample reason to include deference to human fallibility as a criterion for moral actions with such permanent consequences. Glass also points out what truly is an “additional advantage,” that war without weapons can not be thwarted by the technological or economic superiority of our enemy. Later however, while claiming that there is an aspect of war without weapons that is more significant still, Glass glides over a notion that again may be more important (morally) than his treatment of it indicates.

Glass states, “its [war without weapons’s] power is impossible without the commitment of the people.” It seems that the necessity of communal endorsement, if not conviction, might have both public and private moral implications. This would seem to strengthen the case for more open and in-depth public discussion prior to declarations of war as well as contributing descriptively and ethically to an idea of individual civic duty. Glass may be onto a democratic argument that would, on the one hand, restrain governmental power and, on the other, would reinforce the need for the formation of just and reasoning citizens who understand their role as moral decision-makers. It is just this formation that he sees as the job of education.

One of the issues I find most intriguing and potentially vital to our coexistence is the thesis, borrowed from William James, that there needs to be a moral equivalent to war that invokes and educates individuals in the civic virtues. James's argument from "The Moral Equivalent of War" can be heard in Glass's suggestion that we wage peace. James, seeing war as immoral, also saw its ability to call forth certain virtues such as community—mindedness, self-sacrifice, and discipline. In order to insure that such virtues are cultivated in the wake of wars' extinction, James argues that there needs to be a social mission of the same intensity. Glass's formulation of James's point differs from the one stated above and may intimate a more profound reason for attempting to institute a moral equivalent to war. Glass states "dispositions and values that are fundamental to ethical life...must be incorporated into social life if an alternative to war is to be created," suggesting that educating individuals in specific values may, in fact, cause society to seek alternatives to war.

Along with consideration of whether James's and Glass's formulations represent distinct claims, the issues surrounding citizenship, individual and collective responsibility and the morality of war raise both philosophical and educational questions. The questions that might reasonably be asked include the following: Does the notion of citizenship precede the development of specific virtues or does it follow? What are the virtues necessary for citizenship? Is communal effort toward a specific goal the only way to enhance such virtues? Would a war without weapons as proposed by Glass evoke the kinds of virtues that he and James find "fundamental to ethical life?" And, finally, ought the requirements of citizenship shape the aims of schools?