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Moral Problems

Reading Questions for February 25

These questions cover a reading by Lawrence A. Alexander called "Self-Defense and the Killing of Noncombatants: A Reply to Fullinwider." The answers do not have to be turned in. You will probably have to read more than once to get the answers.

Background:

> We are now looking at debates regarding killing in war. As with a lot of the debates, we're going to be looking at two people who disagree, but who hold positions somewhat in the middle of the spectrum. In particular, both of the people we read are going to say that sometimes it's ok to kill during a war. But they disagree about whom it's ok to kill. Alexander, the person we're reading for today, is going to argue that it's sometimes morally ok to kill noncombatants.

Questions:

1. Alexander says on page 408 that he does not intend to deny the widely held view that morally innocent persons may be intentionally killed in self-defense. What do you think of this view? Is it correct? Why or why not?

2. On pages 409-10, Alexander suggests that Fullinwider's case is irrelevant to the issue Fullinwider is supposed to be addressing. Why does he think it is irrelevant? Is he right? Alexander modifies the case to try to make it more relevant. How does he modify it? What does he think about the modified case? Do you agree?

3. On pages 411-2, Alexander proposes what he takes to be the correct formulation of the Principle of Self-Defense. What is the best counter-example you can think of to this principle? How can the principle be modified to get around the counterexample?

4. On pages 412-5, Alexander considers two possible explanations for what he takes to be Fullinwider's error. What are the explanations? What do you think about what Alexander says here?