

5. Values on Defense

Christopher Simpson grew up in a Quaker family, learning from his parents from the earliest age that the most important values in life are honesty, integrity, simplicity, a concern for social justice and, above all, a tireless devotion to peace.

A passion for peaceful co-existence ran particularly deep in Christopher's family. Christopher's grandfather was a conscientious objector during the war in Vietnam and spent five years in a self-imposed exile in Canada. His grandmother was arrested during the 1968 Chicago riots and had, over the years, continued to participate in many anti-war protests. Likewise, his own parents were active in numerous organizations dedicated to the peaceful resolution of conflicts and had been deeply opposed to both of America's military interventions in Iraq.

Christopher graduated from Western Michigan University with a degree in computer science and—typical for his generation—more than \$35,000 worth of student debt he would now have to repay. His intention was to find a position with a nonprofit organization or a socially conscious business that could use his computer coding skills. He would then live simply and frugally, and in that way pay down his debt gradually. Above all, he was determined to support himself as quickly as possible and not be a further drain on his parent's limited resources.

For six difficult months, Christopher dutifully and energetically consulted with career counselors, attended networking events, showed up at job fairs, and scoured online and social media career sites. All together, he sent out more than 200 resumes. When he finally did receive an offer with a nonprofit organization in need of a new data base network, he took the job, in spite of the low salary. But it did not take long for him to realize he could not afford to pay back his student debt, let alone support himself, on such a low income, no matter how rewarding the work.

Several months later, Christopher was surprised and pleased to receive a job offer from a Fortune 1000 company—a multinational manufacturer with numerous business divisions and a breathtaking growth trajectory. The position was entry level, but came with ample opportunities for promotion. He would be working for a division focused on the creation of high-precision new digital components for small aircraft. The problem was, the company was one of the leading contractors for the U.S. Department of Defense. His work would probably also be used by the military.

Unlike his parents and grandparents, Christopher had always cultivated a mindset that was both principled and pragmatic. And so, after much soul-searching, he accepted the new job.

His plan was to work hard, rise fast, and earn as much as possible in the next three to five years. By then, he calculated, his student loans would be paid off, and he would be free to pursue work that was more closely aligned with his deepest values.

Study Questions for Values on Defense

1. Does the fact that a person has no or limited alternatives to performing some action change the moral rightness or wrongness of that action? Is this true of all actions, or only some?
2. Do the ends justify the means? ie. If Christopher's current work is used to support military operations, but he spends the rest of life working to oppose military operations, does that justify his current work?
3. What is the value of personal integrity? How does it compare to other moral values?