



Response Is Different From An Answer, by Ariel Burger

The current moment calls for moral ferocity. We should not sleep well at night when we know others are suffering. Ferocity itself, though, holds danger. Let's not forget that some of the worst perpetrators of evil have often claimed to act in the name of the good, or God, or the national interest, or a future utopia. By claiming the moral high ground, and labeling our opponents misguided, we run the risk of doing great harm in the name of good.

I suggest that we balance our moral ferocity with humility and tenderness. First, we need the humility of consistent self-examination. This requires us to do something very countercultural: Celebrate questions even when we do not have answers.

Our culture rewards certainty, confidence, and definitive answers. By celebrating questions, we increase the likelihood of identifying the potential harm we might do in the name of our values. [...]

But what of the student who asks: Questions alone aren't enough! After all, we need to know what to do, how to behave, and how best to address practical challenges.

This is an important challenge to an approach that emphasizes questioning and humility. These moments often call for bold and creative responses. It is not enough to repeat the stories of the past; we must also write new ones. We must step off the page into our own situation, which is unmapped and unknown.

But there is a critical difference between an answer and a response. An answer is definitive and closes down conversation. Further, if my answer is opposed to yours, then the possibility of conflict becomes great. We live in a time of many answers, very little clarity, and increasing disconnection between people.

Unlike an answer, a response is an action. A response is defined by a question and provides meaning. It allows me to transform the urgency I feel about an issue into action. We need more responses to human suffering, and fewer definitive answers.Â