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### August 16, 2017: Moral, Historical and Legal Confusions over Charlottesville

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Title: Moral, Historical and Legal Confusions over Charlottesville

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8/16/2017—Just like you can be a violent anti-racist, you can be a peaceful pro-Nazi protestor. The Nazis in Skokie, Illinois back in 1978 planned a peaceful march. This distinction also distinguishes between the ideology of a group and its actions. So, in terms of violence, it is possible for Nazis and anti-racist to “both be at fault” if both groups incited and planned to incite violence. But, of course, there can be no moral equivalence between the ideologies of racist groups and the ideology of anti-racist groups. The Nazis planning the march in Skokie were morally loathsome, but peaceful. I really still cannot find out what actually happened in Charlottesville, but a condemnation of the far right groups for intending violence emerged from a most unlikely source—Christian Yingling, a far-right militia leader, who was there. The Post-Gazette has a very good story about him in today’s paper, which quotes him saying of the far-right groups, “They weren’t there to support southern heritage. They weren’t there to protect the statue. They were there to fight, and it didn’t take long.” OK. So the fault for violence lies with the right. The other problem with the reporting is the issue of this statue of Robert E. Lee itself. I admire Robert E. Lee, despite his slave-owning. It seems clear that he joined the Confederate army primarily to protect his State from invasion rather than to promote slavery. Most of us would fight to defend America from invasion even if its policies were morally wrong. In general, I detest the moral antiquarianism that is motivating these attacks on slave owners in US history. Slavery was always morally wrong. And some of these slave owners—Thomas Jefferson, for example—certainly knew it. But context matters. And US history should not be cleansed this way, as if slavery was the only matter that counts. One day, all of the major figures of our time will be criticized for killing sentient animals and eating them. Then as now, we all know on some level that this is a moral evil and some people act on that knowledge right now. The criticism will be serious and just. But it should not be used then to topple monuments to Martin Luther King, Jr. One more thing. There never was such a thing as a citizen’s militia acting independently of the government. There was a right of revolution, to take up arms against the government. But outside of that, gun toting citizens took orders from the Governor of their State. So, unless Christian Yingling was invited to Virginia by the Governor, he had no business there.