

Princeton Philosophical Society: Background Reading on War

Definition: “War should be understood as an *actual, intentional* and *widespread* armed conflict between political communities.”¹

Three major ethical doctrines concerning war and peace: realism, pacifism, Just War Theory

- ▶ Realism: considerations of justice are meaningless in international relations; states should merely tend to their national interests
- ▶ Pacifism: war is always and everywhere wrong
- ▶ Just War Theory: war is sometimes justified, but only on grounds of justice

Two components of Just War Theory

- ▶ *Jus ad bellum*: six requirements that must *all* be met for a resort to war to be justified
 1. **Just cause**: “resistance of aggression”, with aggression being “the use of armed force in violation of someone else's basic rights”
 2. **Just intent**: “A state must intend to fight the war only for the sake of its just cause”
 3. **Proper authority and public declaration**: “the decision has been made by the appropriate authorities, according to the proper process, and made public, notably to its own citizens and to the enemy state(s)”
 4. **Last resort**: “it has exhausted all plausible, peaceful alternatives to resolving the conflict in question”
 5. **Probability of success**: “A state may not resort to war if it can foresee that doing so will have no measurable impact on the situation”
 6. **Proportionality**: “A state must, prior to initiating a war, weigh the *universal* goods expected to result from it, such as securing the just cause, against the *universal* evils expected to result, notably casualties. Only if the benefits are proportional to, or “worth”, the costs may the war action proceed.”
- ▶ *Jus in bello*: justice of conduct within war
 1. **Obey all international laws on weapons prohibition**
 2. **Minimize harm to non-combatants**
 3. **Proportionality of force to military end**
 4. **Humane treatment of prisoners of war**
 5. **No Means *Mala in Se***: “Soldiers may not use weapons or methods which are ‘evil in themselves.’”
 6. **No reprisals**: “A reprisal is when country A violates *jus in bello* in war with country B. Country B then retaliates with its own violation of *jus in bello*, seeking to chasten A into obeying the rules.”

A realist justification of war:

1. The only concern of the state should be to advance the nation’s material interests
2. War is an instrument of state policy
3. Therefore the state should use war as an instrument of policy when it advances the nation’s material interests and use it to the greatest effect

A subjectivist view of justified war:

1. The only concerns of the state are those that its people vest it with
2. War is an instrument of state policy
3. Therefore, the state should use war as an instrument of policy when it accords with the purposes and duties of the state as vested by the people, and use it in a way that also corresponds with said purposes and duties

¹ This quote and all of this paper up until “a realist justification of war” has been adapted from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/war/>