



Just War Theory

For Mains: Just War Theory and Related issues

What is Just War Theory?

- **Origin:**
 - The principles of a Just War **originated with classical Greek and Roman philosophers** like Plato and Cicero and were added to by Christian theologians like Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.
- **About:**
 - The just war theory is a largely **Christian philosophy that attempts to reconcile three things:**
 - taking human life is seriously wrong
 - states have a duty to defend their citizens, and defend justice
 - protecting innocent human life and defending important moral values sometimes requires willingness to use force and violence
 - The **theory specifies conditions for judging if it is just to go to war**, and conditions for how the war should be fought.
 - Although it was extensively developed by Christian theologians, it can be used by people of every faith and none.
 - According to the Just War theory, **war perhaps at times is morally right**. No war, however, is praiseworthy for being strategic, prudent, or bold. Occasionally, war represents an ethically appropriate use of mass political violence.
 - World War II, on the Allied side, is often cited as the definitive example of a just and good war.

What are the Elements of Just War Theory?

- Just war theory is divided into three parts that have Latin names. These parts are:
 - **Jus Ad Bellum:** About the justice of resorting to war in the first place.
 - **Jus in Bello:** It is about justice of conduct within war.
 - **Jus Post Bellum:** This is about the justice of peace agreements and the termination phase of the war.

What is the Purpose of Just War Theory?

- The aim is to **provide a guide to the right way for states to act in potential conflict situations.**
 - It **only applies to states, and not to individuals** (although an individual can use the theory to help them decide whether it is morally right to take part in a particular war).
- The theory **provides a useful framework for individuals** and political groups to use for their discussions of possible wars.
- The theory is **not intended to justify wars but to prevent them**, by showing that going to war except in certain limited circumstances is wrong and thus motivates states to find other ways of

resolving conflicts.

What are the Arguments against Just War Theory?

- **No Place in Ethical Theory:**
 - All war is unjust and has no place in any ethical theory:
 - Morality must always oppose deliberate violence.
 - Rather than limiting violence, just war ideas encourage it.
- **Disrupts Normal Rules of Society:**
 - As a result of war, the **normal rules of society are disrupted and morality goes out the window.**
- **Unrealistic Theory:**
 - The just war theory is unrealistic and pointless
 - In a conflict "the strong do what they will, and the weak do what they must".
 - The decision to wage war is governed by realism and relative strength, not ethics.
 - Morality thus has no use in war.

Way Forward

- The overriding aim of war **should be to achieve victory as quickly and cheaply as possible.**
 - If the cause is just, then no restrictions should be placed on achieving it.
 - The rules of conduct of war are mere camouflage because they are always over-ruled by 'military necessity'.
- Terrorists are inherently uninterested in morality, so following any ethical theory of war handicaps those whom terrorists attack - thus a different approach is needed.

[Source: BBC](#)

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