

# Global ethical issues

Philosophy



Just War Theory COLLEGE Just War Theory Just war theory, as described by Barbara MacKinnon, is essentially the idea that wars which are just or which have a good reason for being fought are acceptable while others are not. One specific aspect of just war theory is the idea of Jus Ad Bellum, which is Latin for “right to wage war.” This aspect is based on consequentialist moral reasoning, or a decision-making process based on the moral consequences of actions. This is because it seeks to define just wars not by how they waged but by why they are waged, or, in other words, what moral considerations bring about the decision to initiate a war.

Just war theory is a philosophy which seeks to determine when wars are morally valid to fight and also seeks to establish the principles for waging them. There are two parts of just war theory, “Jus Ad Bellum” and “Jus In Bello” (MacKinnon, 2012, pp. 243-244). The first of these tries to establish when causes are just, and the second tries to establish how exactly wars should be fought in a just way. Both of these are extremely important for waging just wars, as “even if a war were fought for a just cause, with the prospect of achieving more good than harm, as a last resort only, and with the proper intention, it still would not be fully just if it were not conducted justly or in accordance with certain principles or moral guidelines” (MacKinnon, 2012, p244).

“Jus Ad Bellum,” or the right to wage war, seeks to establish when it is morally valid to initiate a war. The simplest possible way of describing this part of just war theory is that unless you have a reason to initiate a war that is itself morally valid, there is no way the war will be morally valid. A few of the common criteria for just wars are “having just cause, being a last resort, being declared by a proper authority, possessing right intention, having a

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reasonable chance of success, and the end being proportional to the means used” (Mosely, 2009). If all of these criteria are met, then it may be just to wage a war, although it is worth noting that “ the lack of a strict ethical framework means that the principles themselves are open to broad interpretations” (Mosely, 2009).

Regardless of how strictly warring nations follow the Jus Ad Bellum principles, it is clear that they are informed largely by theories of consequentialist moral reasoning. This is the kind of reasoning which is not concerned so much with how something is carried out as it is with why. That is, “ we should only be concerned about our actions in terms of their consequences” (MacKinnon, 2012, p. 85). Therefore, since Jus Ad Bellum does not worry about how we declare war, or how we wage a war, but is only concerned with that declaration as a consequence of our actions, clearly fits into consequentialist theories. Of course, just because Jus Ad Bellum is consequentialist, it does not mean the entire just war theory is. Indeed, Jus In Bellum, which describes how war should be waged, seems to fit in more with nonconsequentialist concerns.

## References

MacKinnon, B. (2012). *Ethics: Theory and contemporary issues*, concise edition. Belmont, Calif: Wadsworth/Cengage Learning.

Mosely, Alexander (2009). Just war theory. In *The internet encyclopedia of philosophy*. Retrieved from [http://www. iep. utm. edu/justwar/#H2](http://www.iep.utm.edu/justwar/#H2)