

Ethics of War

By

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It's impossible to deny that even though Webster defines ethics as what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation; a set of moral principles or values; a theory or system of moral values; the principles of conduct governing an individual or a group; and a guiding philosophy, each individual in this world has their own interpretation of ethics both personally and professionally (www.webster.com, 2005). Interestingly enough some individuals even live their lives applying different ethics to each dimension of their life. One extremely debatable issue dealing with ethics is war. Is it just, necessary, ethical in the right form, or just plain wrong to resort to violence or harming another human being?

As many definitions that exist for ethics, there are just as many if not more definitions for war. From one individual to another, or from country to country, war means different things and affects people in various ways. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, war should be understood as an actual, intentional, and widespread armed conflict between political communities. Thus, fisticuffs, between individual persons do not count as war, nor does a gang fight, nor does the feud on the order of the Hatfields versus the McCoys. War is a violent way for determining who gets to say what goes on in any given territory, for example, regarding: who gets power, who gets wealth and resources, whose ideals prevail, who is a member and who is not, which laws get made, what gets taught in schools, where the border rests, how much tax is levied and so on. (plato.Stanford.edu, 2005).

So what is your definition of war? Is it all about violence and territories or is there something deeper countries or states are trying to achieve and no matter what the desire, is it moral and ethical?

Let's face it war is expensive, it's ugly and it's violent. It can last days or years and can create the loss of human life. Nonetheless is it just, moral or ethical?

There are several theories in which to consider when deciding or debating the issue of war and ethics but the just war theory is probably the most influential perspective on the ethics of war and peace. It can be divided into three parts: *jus ad bellum*, which concerns the justice of resorting to war in the first place, *jus in bello*, which concerns the justice of conduct within war after its begun, and *jus post bellum*, which concerns the justice of peace agreements and termination phase of war. (plato.Stanford.edu, 2005)

The first of these parts is of course the most important. Why do we consider or enter into war? Is it just cause? It's these decisions among others that set the pace for the possibility of war and war itself. In addition, you are not only questioning or debating your ethics, morals and values, but now you are questioning the reasons to start this political possibly violent process. Will your decisions and your answers to those questions justify going to war? According to the just war theory, six criteria must be fulfilled for a particular declaration of war to be justified; it's all or no justification. They include just cause, right intention, proper authority and public declaration, last resort, probability of success, and proportionality (plato.stanford.edu, 2005). These criteria may be a good place for all of us to start before declaring that war is ethical or unethical.

In addition to those criteria, the third part of the theory possesses terms and thoughts as well that must be taken into consideration when discussing ethics on war. They include proportionality and publicity, rights vindication, discrimination, punishment #1, punishment #2, compensation, and rehabilitation (plato.Stanford.edu, 2005). Essentially what this part of the just

war theory discusses are thoughts having to do with the end of war. This part wants to ensure that the termination of the war is done with justice and most importantly to ease the transition from war back to peace.

Clearly, there are several thoughts to consider when discussing ethics. Whether it's a personal decision or a professional one, ethics play a major role in all of our decisions. War is no different. From different reasons, benefits, costs, and analysis, there are many unique opinions and research done on war and on ethics. Even though war generally involves political communities, we are all still human and therefore interpret ethics in our own unique way. Ultimately there will always be this component in the world and maybe the answer is to embrace and respect the different interpretations of ethics without sacrificing our own.

Work Cited

Merriam Webster Online, Dictionary, (2005), Retrieved October 9, 2005, on the World Wide Web at www.webster.com

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, (2005), Retrieved October 17 & 18, 2005, on the World Wide Web at <http://plato.stanford.edu>