

BOOK REVIEW:

***The Ethics of War: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, Gregory M. Reichberg, Hendrik Syse and Endre Begby (eds.), Oxford et al: Blackwell Publishing, 2006, pp.1-693. ISBN Pb 1-4051-2378-8**

In no uncertain way have the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent attacks in Madrid and London, the War on Terror depicted by Afghanistan and the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the subsequent insurgency in Iraq, and the 2006 war in the Middle East moved matters of ethics and justice in war back to centre stage. How justifiable are the actions by the USA, Israel, Hezbollah and al Qaeda to go to war? If justified, how ethical are their actions in the execution of their version of warfare against their opponents? Subjective and nationalistic or ideological opinions even further complicate matters. In addition, the interstate profile of war collapsed into an intrastate phenomenon with a humanitarian crisis profile where the suffering of innocent victims, rather than soldiers, personifies the violence and destruction. If ever the boundaries of war needed to be reinstated and the conduct of war redirected by justice and ethics, the early 21st century presents a case in point.

The Ethics of War: Classic and Contemporary Readings brings to the fore an extensive array of fundamental Western thoughts and scripts on two primary domains of war: firstly, the righteousness of going to war against an opponent and secondly, the morality or justification of the ways and means employed during war. To these ends this publication by Reichberg, Syse and Begby (eds.) on the ethics of war follows a chronological-thematic line that depicts important contributors and sections of the original (translated) scripts from the Western debate. This extensive publication centres upon four fundamental questions formulated by the editors:

- Can human beings ever take part in war without seriously violating our moral obligations or destroying our moral character?
- When and under what conditions can war be rightly initiated?
- How can war be fought so that our most basic moral standards are not violated?
- What should be done to ensure a lasting peace once hostilities are over?

The scope of the publication comprises of five parts. It commences with ancient and early Christian thought and systematically explores the medieval, late scholastic and reformation periods before tending to the modern era and concludes with reviewing twentieth century thought.

Part One covers early Greek and Roman thought on topics such as war and power, war and peace, and civic matters that temper warfare. It covers a period from Thucydides (460BC - War and Power) to Augustine (354-430 - Just War in the Service of Peace). Greek and Roman thought of Plato, Aristotle and Cicero are augmented by Christian thought of the early church fathers that introduced matters of pacifism, innocence, just war and peace. Some sobering thoughts are distilled from the dominant debates of the time that raised the issue of the morality of war. It appears that even during these early times and amidst an era where war seemingly reigned supreme, matters of justice, virtue and the tempering of war had a following that can be traced back to texts of the time such as *Republic* by Plato, *Politics* by Aristotle and writings on just war in the service of peace by Augustine. As for the latter, it is argued that Augustine's writings foreshadowed the important *ius ad bellum* criteria: rightful authority, just cause and right intention.

Part Two covers the medieval era and in contrast to Part One, contains a dominant religious (Christian) profile of ethical thought on war. This section spans a period from medieval peace movements (*circa* first century after Christ) to the works of de Pizan and Fulgosius (1364-1427) on war, just war and public war. In addition to the difficulty of Holy War, the editors also introduce just cause and morality arguments into warfare, as well as the role of the church and clerics in war. Here the editors emphasize the notion that going to war does not imply a free reign on actions against opponents: the righteousness of different kinds of war (including holy wars) do not confer *carte blanche* on its conduct. One important work directing this discussion emanates from *Decretum Gratiani* by Gratian (*circa* 1140) and subsequent works drawing upon this influential publication. Much attention is paid to just war, sedition, and tyranny, matters now depicting internal wars of the early 21st century as well. However, even the righteousness of these causes remains constrained by moral and legal limitations.

Part Three widens the ethical debate by moving away from the strict Christian nexus and attending to the right of going to war, legitimacy of war, avoiding punitive war and that going to war involves more constructive and ethical matters than considered previously. The period covers Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536), on the right to make war to *The Prince* by Machiavelli (1469-1527)

and culminates in the authoritative work of Grotius (1583-1645) on the theory of just war. Part Three is nonetheless influenced by the Christian reformation and the views of reformists such as Luther and Calvin on legitimate war in reformed Christianity and that of de Vitoria (*De Indis*) on just war in the age of discovery. This third section of the publication holds a central tenet in that a more critical view is taken on the use and conduct of war. Much of this critical stance can be found in section of Grotius (*The theory of just war systematized*) that comprises the bulk of the scholastic and reformation debates covered in this section.

In Part Four more secular, but influential thought on war, humanity and peace are traced. This period includes Hobbes (1586-1679) on eternal war to Marx (1818-1883) on war as a means for emancipation. The state, man, rights and war form the nexus of modern thought and bring together the inevitability of war, war as an instrument of emancipation and the rights of man amidst regulating and softening the impact of war. In this discussion the pathway of war sheds even more of its religious intent or character in favour of a more utilitarian approach. Works and contributions of prominent theorists and philosophers such as Locke, Montesque, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel and Mill inform this section. The emergent trend in Part Four reflects a spectrum that reaches from a pessimism that states cannot take care of peace, to a greater belief that a system of states is not doomed to go to war. The alternative perspective is the belief that the use of war can be regulated by a number of factors such as the rights of man, as well as the responsibilities to avoid war through arrangements above the state and non-intervention as contained in the thoughts of Rousseau, Kant and Mill.

The last section, Part Five, deals with twentieth century thought from Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924) and the vision of a League of Nations to Kofi Annan (b.1936) and his redefinition of sovereignty in the interest of people. Collective arrangements and dealing with total destruction threatened by nuclear warfare form prominent features of this part. Here some of the earlier thoughts are presented within a new context. A league of nations, nuclear weapons, terrorism and new thought on sovereignty are juxtaposed to that of pacifism, moral duties, contemporary just war and legitimate defence. An important contribution is that on international law by Kelsen (1881-1973) that ties in with the idea of a league of nations and the prevention of the immorality of nuclear war. Theme Five tends to drift between arguments on the prevention of war and criticism of these arguments by introducing particular strands of war that blur the desired clarity of just war and justice in war. One important religious tenet is acknowledged: the stance of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (1983 and 1993) against nuclear war by rejecting just war and replacing it with comparative justice. This part is concluded

with a most difficult issue of contemporary times – wars within states and the clash between the rights of states and that of people. Intrinsically this debate attempts to limit the rights of governments through sovereignty and expand peoples' rights and the use of military force in a righteous manner to protect the rights of people.

The value of this publication resides in its timely reintroduction of ethics and the rule of law as the security of people has shifted back to centre stage. This shift posed a question mark over the question: How to go to war in a world where the legitimacy, morality and justice of military coercion is frowned upon now more than ever. As a matter open to different interpretations and regularly contested, *The Ethics of War: Classic and Contemporary Readings* represents an anthology of important texts on ethics and war. War is addressed from several angles with both the legal and ethical questions being viewed in their historic, as well as contemporary contexts. To this end the selection and presentation of original texts in English within a single publication is a major contribution. Furthermore, the historic-contemporary time-span of the publication affords researchers a comprehensive view of primary works on the ethics of war. In addition, good references direct further research towards those sources from which the excerpts originate. Well-placed inserts and comments by the editors guide the reader through the fifty-eight original texts that comprise different thoughts over an extended period of time. The publication is a good reference work that also leads the reader to further primary works on the ethics of war.

It should be noted that the publication falls within the Western Christian tradition. This Western approach is questioned in a world where non-Western views compete and play an increasing role as to what the ethics on war should comprise. The publication could therefore be viewed as biased. Fortunately, the editors acknowledge this void and they do not claim to present a multicultural view. Certain matters keep recurring which results from the evolving line of thought that refines earlier ideas through adjustment or reinterpretation to explain or address later events and conditions. Nonetheless, this latter criticism should be viewed also as a result of the religious-secular divide that entered later thought as is exemplified in Parts Four and Five. At 693 pages the publication is quite voluminous and therefore quite challenging to comprehend in its entirety. However, although it does not read easily at all times, it should rather be judged as a good reference work or selective reader for novices and definitely for post-graduate students working in the field of ethics, international law, security as well as strategy.

In conclusion, conflict, war and violence did not fade at the end of the Cold War and neither with the arrival of the 21st century. Wars rather mutated into

new forms that continue to challenge traditional understanding of its use and regulation. The growing diversity of war and warfare and grounding it in ethics and justice is now perhaps more important than ever. In this regard, *The Ethics of War: Classic and Contemporary Readings* informs students, theorists, analysts and decision-makers on very important concepts, theories and thoughts that should direct the ethical use of armed coercion now and in future.

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