

# Just And Unjust Wars Chapter 3 Summary

Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*

## PART I – The Moral Reality of War

### Against the Amoralism of Realism

- **Realist position:** "war is hell" and as a consequence "all is fair" in war (even conduct that appears unfair) - there are no rules. Any "moral talk" is simply epiphenomenal of underlying interests.
- MW discusses the classic passage for such a position - *Thucydides's Melian Dialogue*: Contra the Athenian generals, MW argues the destruction of Athens was not inevitable if Melos was left alone, there was simply a *probability* that Athens would have been weakened (and a probability that this would have lead to its fall). Therefore, the destruction of Melos was not strictly *necessary*. There was the *freedom* to make a decision, and therefore room for moral debate. The position of the Athenian generals was a denial of that freedom, and a denial of the meaningfulness of moral argument. However, they were not the only actors. *The justice of the Melian decree was passionately debated in the Athenian assembly. Our position is that of the members of that discussion.* Morality in war is determined by the judgements of mankind, *not* the actions of soldiers.
- MW also rejects the realist claim that "moral talk" is a euphemistic form of "interest talk." He points out that *we understand moral talk, and to say an attack is unjust does not simply mean we don't like it . . . it means we don't like it for specific reasons.* Moral language can be used properly and when it is it expresses more than mere interest.

### Against Relativism

- There is a **common moral language** with respect to war.
- MW asserts "Even those soldiers and statesmen who don't feel the agony of a problematic decision generally know that they should feel it." p. 19
- The *hypocrite lies* precisely because *morality is real* -- people will judge him, and their judgements matter

### The Crime of War

- A key point to understanding the morality of war is that it is divided into two parts - *jus ad bellum* (the issue of whether the war is just) and *jus in bello* (the issue of whether it is being fought justly). These concepts are independent; you can fight a just war unjustly, and an unjust war justly.
  - ***Jus ad Bellum*** refers to justice in going to war. The question: is the war just or unjust?
    - The basic idea (though we shall complicate this later), is that it is a crime to initiate war - the *crime of aggression* (or as MW calls it "tyranny" over one's own people and those of the target state).
    - It is a crime because "war is hell" - the aggressor "force[s] men and women to risk their lives for the sake of their rights." (51)
    - Of course the kind of aristocratic wars of yesteryear where posh young men (all fully consenting) waged 'honorable' battle is not hell because no one is forced to fight. However, *the fact that professional soldiers 'consent' by joining the military, does not mean they are not forced to fight by an enemy's aggression.* "He is like a doctor who risks his life during an epidemic, using professional skills he chose to acquire but whose acquisition is not a sign that he hopes for epidemics." (27) The lives of soldiers are "nationalized . . . by the modern state" (35). Because of this, war is hell even when the rules are observed.

**Just and unjust wars chapter 3 summary** explores the complex ethical landscape surrounding the justification for military conflict. This chapter, part of a broader discussion on just war theory, delves into the criteria that distinguish just wars from unjust ones, the moral implications of war, and the real-world applications of these philosophical principles. Below, we provide a comprehensive summary of the key themes and arguments presented in this chapter.

## Introduction to Just War Theory

Just war theory is a philosophical framework that seeks to establish criteria for determining the morality of engaging in warfare. It has roots in ancient philosophy but was notably shaped by theologians such as Augustine and

Aquinas. Chapter 3 of this text emphasizes the importance of this theory in contemporary discussions about military ethics, especially in light of modern warfare's complexities.

## **Key Concepts of Just War Theory**

The chapter outlines several key principles that form the foundation of just war theory:

### **1. Just Cause**

A central tenet of just war theory is that a war must be waged for a just cause. This principle asserts that wars should only be fought to address wrongs or to secure a legitimate defense. Examples of just causes include:

- Self-defense against aggression
- Protection of innocent life
- Restoration of rights

### **2. Legitimate Authority**

According to the just war theory, only duly constituted authorities can declare a war. This principle underscores the significance of legal and political legitimacy in the decision to engage in warfare, asserting that wars declared by recognized states or leaders are more justifiable than those initiated by non-state actors.

### **3. Right Intention**

Even with a just cause, the intention behind the war must also be just. This means that the primary objective of the conflict should be to promote peace and justice, rather than to pursue revenge or self-interest. The chapter discusses how this principle can be particularly challenging to assess in practice.

### **4. Probability of Success**

The likelihood of achieving the intended outcomes must be considered. Engaging in a conflict with no realistic chance of success can lead to unnecessary suffering and loss of life, thereby rendering the war unjust.

### **5. Proportionality**

The principle of proportionality asserts that the anticipated benefits of engaging in war must outweigh the expected harms. This principle serves as a moral guideline to prevent excessive violence or brutality in warfare.

### **6. Last Resort**

War should only be undertaken after all non-violent alternatives have been

exhausted. This principle emphasizes diplomacy and peaceful conflict resolution as preferable means of addressing disputes.

## **Case Studies in Just and Unjust Wars**

In this chapter, the author presents several historical case studies to illustrate the application of just war theory in real-world scenarios. These examples provide insight into how the principles of just war can guide decision-making in military conflicts.

### **Example 1: World War II**

World War II is frequently cited as an example of a just war. The conflict was largely seen as a response to the aggressive expansion of Axis powers, with many nations united in a just cause of self-defense and the liberation of oppressed nations. Key considerations included:

- Defending against tyranny
- Restoring peace and order in Europe

### **Example 2: The Vietnam War**

Conversely, the Vietnam War is often viewed as an unjust conflict. Critics argue that the war did not meet several criteria of just war theory. Key points include:

- Questionable just cause: The war was framed as a fight against communism, but many viewed it as an imperialistic endeavor.
- Lack of legitimate authority: Critics argue that the U.S. involvement lacked the backing of the international community.
- High civilian casualties: The principle of proportionality was notably violated.

## **Challenges in Defining Just and Unjust Wars**

While just war theory provides a framework for evaluating the morality of war, the chapter highlights several challenges that complicate its application:

### **1. Subjectivity of Justification**

The criteria for just war can be interpreted differently by various stakeholders. What one group sees as a just cause, another may view as unjust aggression. This subjectivity can lead to conflicting narratives about the legitimacy of a war.

### **2. Evolving Nature of Warfare**

Modern warfare has evolved significantly, with new technologies and tactics that challenge traditional just war principles. Issues such as cyber warfare,

drone strikes, and asymmetric warfare complicate the assessment of just and unjust actions in military contexts.

### **3. Humanitarian Interventions**

The chapter discusses the morally ambiguous nature of humanitarian interventions, where military force is used to prevent human rights abuses. While these actions may align with just war principles, they often raise questions about sovereignty and the legitimacy of foreign intervention.

## **The Role of International Law**

International law plays a crucial role in the discourse on just and unjust wars. The chapter outlines how treaties and conventions, such as the Geneva Conventions, seek to establish legal frameworks that govern the conduct of war and protect civilian populations.

### **1. Just War Theory and International Law**

While just war theory is a philosophical framework, international law provides specific legal standards that states are expected to adhere to during conflicts. The intersection of these two domains raises important questions about accountability and the enforcement of humanitarian standards.

### **2. The Responsibility to Protect (R2P)**

The R2P doctrine has emerged as a significant development in international law, asserting that the international community has a responsibility to intervene in cases of mass atrocities. The chapter discusses how this principle aligns with just war theory and the moral imperatives behind military interventions for humanitarian purposes.

## **Conclusion**

Chapter 3 of the text on just and unjust wars provides a nuanced exploration of the principles of just war theory and its application in historical and contemporary contexts. By examining various case studies, the chapter illustrates the complexities involved in determining the morality of warfare. It highlights the importance of a structured ethical framework in navigating the challenges posed by modern conflicts, the subjectivity of justifications, and the evolving nature of warfare. Ultimately, the chapter calls for a deeper understanding of the moral implications of war, urging policymakers and military leaders to apply just war principles thoughtfully in their decisions.

As societies grapple with the consequences of conflict, the discussions presented in this chapter remain crucial for fostering a more just and humane approach to warfare, ensuring that the principles of justice and morality guide the actions of nations in times of crisis.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What are the main themes discussed in Chapter 3 of 'Just and Unjust Wars'?**

Chapter 3 explores the moral justifications for war, examining concepts such as self-defense, humanitarian intervention, and the ethical implications of wartime actions.

### **How does Walzer define a 'just war' in this chapter?**

Walzer defines a 'just war' as one that meets certain criteria, including just cause, legitimate authority, and proportionality in the use of force.

### **What examples does Walzer use to illustrate just and unjust wars in this chapter?**

Walzer discusses historical examples such as World War II to illustrate just wars, while contrasting them with wars of aggression like Vietnam, which he categorizes as unjust.

### **What role does the concept of 'moral equality of soldiers' play in Chapter 3?**

Walzer argues that the moral equality of soldiers means that combatants on both sides of a conflict are equally entitled to rights and protections under the laws of war, regardless of the justice of their cause.

### **How does Chapter 3 address the issue of civilian casualties?**

The chapter emphasizes the principle of distinction, which mandates that combatants must distinguish between military targets and civilians to minimize harm to non-combatants.

### **What is the significance of 'just cause' in the context of this chapter?**

'Just cause' is significant as it serves as the foundational reason for engaging in war, requiring that intervention is warranted to protect human rights or prevent atrocities.

### **Does Walzer discuss the concept of preemptive war in Chapter 3?**

Yes, Walzer examines the notion of preemptive war, debating its ethical implications and whether it can be justified as a response to imminent threats.

### **What philosophical influences does Walzer draw upon in this chapter?**

Walzer references various philosophical traditions, including just war theory, to frame his arguments about the morality of warfare and the

conditions that render wars just or unjust.

## How does Chapter 3 conclude regarding the nature of just wars?

The chapter concludes by asserting that just wars are rare and must adhere strictly to ethical guidelines that prioritize justice and moral responsibility in the conduct of war.

## What criticisms does Walzer address concerning the just war theory?

Walzer addresses criticisms that just war theory can be manipulated to justify any military action, arguing instead for a rigorous application of its principles to truly assess the justice of a war.

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