

The 'Just War' Theory

The idea that war must follow rules is probably almost as old as war itself. Some of the oldest written records of ancient cultures refer to the honour of conducting oneself properly in war, and of the shame of having broken the rules of combat. But it wasn't until the 13th century CE that Thomas Aquinas gave the theory of just war the form in which we find it today.

The Just War theory says that

- a) before going to war a nation must have a morally valid reason, and
- b) war must be fought according to rules that minimize suffering and destruction.

Justice On The Way To War:

Before war can be declared all of the following requirements must be met.

- Proper Authority:
The decision to use force must be made by legitimate leaders.
- Just Cause:
The reason for going to war must qualify as a 'just cause'. Causes frequently seen as 'just' are self-defence, and retrieving stolen territory.
- Peaceful Intention:
The purpose of the war must be to achieve a lasting peace. Armed force is justified only if it is used to restrain and minimize violence.
- Last Resort:
Every peaceful alternative must have been tried and exhausted before deciding to go to war.
- Hope of Success:
There must be a reasonable chance of being able to achieve a stable peace before the decision is made to go to war.

Justice in the Conduct of War:

In fighting a war the following principles must be observed and practiced:

- Balance and Proportion:
Violence must be kept to a minimum. The suffering and destruction caused by the war must not be greater than required to achieve the objectives of the war.
 - Civilian Immunity:
The methods of warfare must make a distinction between soldiers and the general population. Civilians must be considered non-combatants.
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