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Thinking war in the 21st century: Introducing non-state actors in Just war theory

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New York, May 7, 2016

Acknowledgements

War is destructive and the consequences of war can be immensely tragic. People suffer and die in awful ways on a massive scale. In the face of this dreadful fact, how sensible is it to talk about regulating war? Why do we permit particular deaths? During the process of writing, I asked myself these questions numerous times, because war and killing seem intolerable. However, the regulation of war has been a topic of philosophical debate for centuries and the dreadfulness of war demands constraints. Despite war's destructiveness, just war theory intends to limit destruction. In this sense, there are deep relations between war and philosophical principles aimed at regulating war. At the same time, however, philosophy of war cannot be grounded solely on the moral ideal to which it aspires because—to have an impact on the practice of war—it has to compromise with military and political realities.

In my thesis, I explored possibilities for restraining war while maintaining a pragmatic eye. I took up the task of developing a theory of war because I believe it relates to one of the most interesting and serious matters addressed by philosophers: the taking of a human life. By focusing on restraining wars with non-state actors, such as so-called 'terrorists' and 'freedom fighters', I made my project even more challenging. That there should be a philosophy of war for non-state actors, and thus, some permissible form of non-state violence, is to many an unacceptable idea. I believe that rebutting this critique is crucial for addressing conflicts with non-state actors.

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