**Orend, Brian, "War", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2008 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.).**

War should be understood as an *actual, intentional* and *widespread* armed conflict between political communities. Thus, fisticuffs between individual persons do not count as a war, nor does a gang fight, nor does a feud on the order of the Hatfields versus the McCoys. War is a phenomenon which occurs *only* between political communities, defined as those entities which either are states or intend to become states (in order to allow for civil war). Classical war is international war, a war between different states, like the two World Wars. But just as frequent is war within a state between rival groups or communities, like the American Civil War. Certain political pressure groups, like terrorist organizations, might also be considered “political communities,” in that they are associations of people with a political purpose and, indeed, many of them aspire to statehood or to influence the development of statehood in certain lands.

…War is a violent way for determining who gets to say what goes on in a 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. War is the ultimate means for deciding these issues if a peaceful process or resolution can't be agreed upon.…War's violent nature, and controversial social effects, raise troubling moral questions for any thoughtful person. Is war always wrong? Might there be situations when it can be a justified, or even a smart, thing to do? …

**Just War Theory**

Just war theory is probably the most influential perspective on the ethics of war and peace. … Many credit Augustine with the founding of just war theory but this is incomplete. As Johnson notes, in its origins just war theory is a synthesis of classical Greco-Roman, as well as Christian, values. If we have to “name names”, the founders of just war theory are probably the triad of Aristotle, Cicero and Augustine. Many of the rules developed by the just war tradition have since been codified into contemporary international laws governing armed conflict, such as The United Nations Charter and The Hague and Geneva Conventions. The tradition has thus been doubly influential, dominating both moral and legal discourse surrounding war. It sets the tone, and the parameters, for the great debate.

Just war theory can be meaningfully divided into three parts, which in the literature are referred to, for the sake of convenience, in Latin. These parts are: 1) *jus ad bellum*, which concerns the justice of resorting to war in the first place; 2) *jus in bello*, which concerns the justice of conduct within war, after it has begun; and 3) *jus post bellum*, which concerns the justice of peace agreements and the termination phase of war. *{This excerpt includes only jus ad bellum.}*

***Jus ad bellum***

The rules of *jus ad bellum* are addressed, first and foremost, to heads of state. Since political leaders are the ones who inaugurate wars, setting their armed forces in motion, they are to be held accountable to *jus ad bellum* principles. If they fail in that responsibility, then they commit war crimes. … Just war theory contends that, for any resort to war to be justified, a political community, or state, must fulfill each and every one of the following six requirements:

**1. Just cause.** This is clearly the most important rule; it sets the tone for everything which follows. A state may launch a war only for the right reason. The just causes most frequently mentioned include: self-defense from external attack; the defense of others from such; the protection of innocents from brutal, aggressive regimes; and punishment for a grievous wrongdoing which remains uncorrected. …

The basic rights of two kinds of entity are involved here: those of states; and those of their individual citizens. International law affirms that states have many rights, notably those to political sovereignty and territorial integrity. It thus affirms that aggression involves the use of armed forces—armies, navies, air forces, marines, missiles—in violation of these rights. Classic cases would be Nazi Germany into Poland in 1939, and Iraq into Kuwait in 1990, wherein the aggressor used its armed forces to invade the territory of the victim, overthrow its government and establish a new regime in its place. Crucially, the commission of aggression causes the aggressor to forfeit its own state rights, thereby permitting violent resistance. *An aggressor has no right not to be warred against in defense*; indeed, it has the duty to stop its rights-violating aggression.

…An important issue in just cause is whether, to be justified in going to war, one must wait for the aggression *actually to happen*, or whether in some instances it is permissible to launch a pre-emptive strike against *anticipated* aggression. The tradition is severely split on this issue. Vitoria said you must wait, since it would be absurd to “punish someone for an offense they have yet to commit.” Others, like Walzer, strive to define the exceptional criteria, stressing: the seriousness of the anticipated aggression; the kind and quality of evidence required; the speed with which one must decide; and the issue of fairness and the duty to protect one's people. If one knows a terrible attack is coming soon, one owes it to one's people to shift from defense to offense. The best defense, as they say, is a good offense. Why let the aggressor have the upper hand of the first strike? But *that's the very issue*: can you attack first and not, thereby, yourself become the aggressor? Can *striking first* still be considered an act of *defense* from aggression? …

**2. Right intention.** A state must intend to fight the war only for the sake of its just cause. Having the right reason for launching a war is not enough: the actual motivation behind the resort to war must also be morally appropriate. Ulterior motives, such as a power or land grab, or irrational motives, such as revenge or ethnic hatred, are ruled out. …

**3. Proper authority and public declaration.** A state may go to war only if the decision has been made by the appropriate authorities, according to the proper process, and made public, notably to its own citizens and to the enemy state(s). The “appropriate authority” is usually specified in that country's constitution. States failing the requirements of minimal justice lack the legitimacy to go to war.

**4. Last Resort.** A state may resort to war only if it has exhausted all plausible, peaceful alternatives to resolving the conflict in question, in particular diplomatic negotiation. One wants to make sure something as momentous and serious as war is declared only when it seems the last practical and reasonable shot at effectively resisting aggression.

**5. Probability of Success.** A state may not resort to war if it can foresee that doing so will have no measurable impact on the situation. The aim here is to block mass violence which is going to be futile. International law does not include this requirement, as it is seen as biased against small, weaker states.

**6. Proportionality.** A state must, prior to initiating a war, weigh the *universal* goods expected to result from it, such as securing the just cause, against the *universal* evils expected to result, notably casualties. Only if the benefits are proportional to, or “worth”, the costs may the war action proceed. (The universal must be stressed, since often in war states only tally *their own* expected benefits and costs, radically discounting those accruing to the enemy and to any innocent third parties.)

Just war theory insists *all six* criteria must each be fulfilled for a particular declaration of war to be justified: it's all or no justification, so to speak. Just war theory is thus quite demanding, as of course it should be, given the gravity of its subject matter. It is important to note that the first three of these six rules are what we might call deontological requirements, otherwise known as duty-based requirements or first-principle requirements. For a war to be just, some core duty must be violated: in this case, the duty not to commit aggression. A war in punishment of this violated duty must itself respect further duties: it must be appropriately motivated, and must be publicly declared by (only) the proper authority for doing so. The next three requirements are consequentialist: given that these first principle requirements have been met, we must also consider the expected consequences of launching a war. Thus, just war theory attempts to provide a common-sensical combination of both deontology and consequentialism as applied to the issue of war.