

Let me briefly offer my perspective on the moral reality of war. I come from a Quaker background, i.e., the Society of Friends, which is one of the historic peace churches but also tolerates a wide range of views about war among its members. In college and divinity school, I read several works by Reinhold Niebuhr, a Christian realist, and I became convinced that war can sometimes be justified, but that it always requires justification. Then through reading various theological and philosophical writers, including Paul Ramsey and Michael Walzer, I came to appreciate more fully the moral limits on the conduct of war, which are recognized by the broad just-war tradition but largely ignored by Niebuhr.

I also came to the conclusion that pacifists and just warriors share an important starting point: a moral presumption against war because of the important individual and social duty not to kill others. Pacifists deny that this duty can ever be morally overridden; just warriors hold that it can be morally overridden, because, as fundamental as that duty is, it is only *prima facie* or presumptively binding and must sometimes yield to competing moral principles or values.<sup>1</sup>

I draw on the “historical deposit” of just-war criteria in the West to interpret the right to wage war (*jus ad bellum*) and rights or right conduct within war (*jus in bello*). As an ethicist it is not my task merely to repeat what has been held traditionally but also to think critically about moral traditions regarding war, thus respecting them as living, vibrant traditions that must be thought through again and again, especially in new contexts. And I have tried to reconstruct the traditional just-war criteria in what follows.

The *prima facie* duty not to kill binds societies as well as individuals, but not absolutely so. Killing always requires moral justification, and its justification must meet a heavy burden of proof. When killing is justified, the *prima facie* duty not to kill doesn’t just evaporate—it continues to exert moral pressure on our conduct and on our attitudes, leading to what St. Augustine called “a just and mournful war.”

When other important moral duties come into conflict with the duty not to kill—say, the duty to protect the innocent—then we do (and should) engage in a process of reasoning that includes traditional just-war criteria. These criteria were explicitly used in the public and military debates about the Gulf War. The criteria of the *jus ad bellum* (the right to go to war) include: legitimate authority to undertake the war; just cause, i.e., a serious and weighty competing *prima facie* duty; last resort or necessity, i.e., the exhaustion of reasonable alternatives to waging war; explanation and justification of one’s course of action to the enemy and to other parties (often expressed in a somewhat legalistic way as a