

On The Justification Of War

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The notion of a just war is discussed throughout Christian theological history and most theologians assert that there is such a thing and a few assert that there is not.

The ones who assert that there is not any justification for war do so from a point of view which is entirely justified but cannot be shared by the majority of the population. The point of view which deplores war for any reason is that of recluses and mendicants, who are entirely justified in holding this point of view. From their fully *adwaithin* (non-dualistic) point of view, all is God's will and so there is no reason to fight. This point of view cannot be falsified. It is the truth. However, it is not a widely-shared point of view and so should not be taken as applying absolutely to everyone in all cases. However, the legitimacy of this point of view is recognized by our government when it makes provision for conscientious objection status in the draft laws and procedures. There are people who legitimately hold this point of view -- by legitimately one means that they truly experience it -- and so the law makes provision to allow their sincere belief as a supported minority opinion.

The majority opinion, however, and one also held by *adwaithins* and other seekers of spirit, is that war is justified and even necessary in certain circumstances, which circumstances theologians have been at pains to identify and support.

Rama and Krishna both engage in war and Jesus uses physical force, including lethal physical force, to accomplish purposes He has in mind. And these figures are all *adwaitins*. So we know that there certainly is justification for war from the highest authorities. Theologians have been at pains to itemize what that justification exactly comprises.

Augustine developed a list of specifics and Bahá'u'lláh describes world unity in terms that include procedures for dealing with tyrants, those who disrupt the peace of God. In his customary way, Augustine was thorough on this topic. Bernard of Clairvaux expounded Christian theological principles relating to war most effectively in his *Liber ad milites Templi: De laude novae militiae* (In Praise of the New Knighthood). This treatise was written in the early 12th Century for Bernard's kinsman Hugh de Payens, one of the founders of The Knights Templar.

The general drift of the theologians' work is to detail the limits of the three phases of war:

- * The prelude to war.
- * The conduct of war.
- * The postlude of war.

The assumption of the theologians is that there is always and everywhere the moral base line to which all humanity is required to measure up and stand to support. This is a given of the entire analysis. If this given is not present, then war is merely bullies pushing one another around for no other reason than ego-gratification and specifically the love of cruelty. The assumption of the universal moral base line (Sanskrit [*dharmā*](#), Righteousness) is what makes the discussion of justified war possible at all. Since that base line exists and always and everywhere equally, the discussion is not only possible, it is mandatory.

Sathya Sai Baba mentions that there are three occasions for war and that, whatever else is happening, the actual occasion of any war is one or more of these three. They are: Women, Wealth and Dominion. Consider that.

Ramayana involves war for a woman but the fundamental motivator is jealous for dominion. The fact that nations will fight for a woman or several women is rarely understood, but it happens frequently. In the Hebrew literature we have King David obtaining his wife Bathsheba by putting her husband in a war where he gets killed. Men fight for women and women fight against men and women and cause men to fight as surrogates for them against women or men. The "war of the sexes" is often just that. War *for* the genders -- for example, to eliminate misogyny -- is also a phenomenon. In fact, war to eliminate misogyny is humanity's central motivator and goal at the dawning of the 21st Century.

The prelude to war theologians want limited to the extent that all other means of solving whatever the problem is have been exhausted first by being seen through to failure. An old adage is that the generals have to take over after the diplomats have failed. This is the truth. And theologians want everyone to be patient to let the diplomats entirely exhaust their resources before the generals are called in. This is appropriate.

War is the final arbitrator of disputes. It should be a forum of last resort, say the theologians. However, they also point out that once the crucible of war is appealed to for settling a dispute, the war must be allowed to run its full course and its outcome must be taken by all sides as the proper resolution of the dispute. This is an important point. Theologians assert that war, while undesirable at first but justified if no other course for conflict resolution remains, is in fact an effective means of ascertaining the Will of God regarding a dispute and that war's outcome, therefore, must be taken as not only final but also just. This is an important point. A war settles an issue. It does yield a dharmic result in all cases. Consider this.

Although at first strongly supporting it, the reason I finally opposed the war in Vietnam and always deplored how Korea turned out after MacArthur was relieved was because in both cases political parties made a decision to not fight the war, to not settle the issue under dispute, but to keep men and women in combat conditions indefinitely on the irrational theory that the enemy would agree to the arrangement and would accept to stay politely behind certain survey lines the State Department (Dean Rusk, George Kennan and certain members of Yale's Skull and Bones fraternity, to include Averill Harriman and the Bundy brothers) had chosen to demarcate our comfort zones. In other words, a war that got nowhere and settled nothing, deliberately.

This no theologian can tolerate because it violates the fundamental purpose of life, which is to settle disputes and thus bring peace and prosperity to the community. Rusk and Kennan and the Bonesmen and their Yale/Emory/Harvard cabals wanted perpetual conflict, for personal aggrandizement and from fear of consequences driven by the arrogance of their feeling of indomitable power. They were wicked people. This desire of theirs was entirely off the universal moral base line and so I opposed their handiwork which arose from this desire. How many lives they wasted! How much of resources they squandered. Kennan's so-called "Doctrine of Containment" was the efficient "policy" culprit, supporting certain Bonesmen's desire to use United States Armed Forces as private police forces. In my estimate Kennan is an individual more evil than Hitler, Stalin and Pol Pat. He destroyed more, through his obscene, insensible "doctrine." (*Docta* is a Greek word which means "learning.")

Once the diplomats fail and a decision is made to submit an issue to the arbitration of war, the diplomats have to step aside and let the military leadership do their job. Neither diplomats nor clergy have any station on a field of battle or commanding one. If they try to have such a station they are off the universal moral base line and become murders. This fact

explains why when Harvard diplomat Daniel Ellsberg tried to embarrass the military leadership by shifting blame for the trauma of Vietnam to them from where it belonged -- at the State Department with Rusk, Kennan and Ellsberg -- by stealing documents, his action was sensational but not salutary. When war is decided upon, only military personnel belong on a field of battle and to the office of commanding one.

When the diplomats fail, the Generals and Admirals have to take over, and once they do, diplomats, in view of their failure as representatives of the nation's security and welfare, are in no position to offer much less demand oversight of developments.

The conduct of war theologians implicitly trust to Generals and Admirals, as fellow professionals, and they also want war limited to the extent of two specific considerations:



hostilities are directed only at combatants, and



hostilities are directed at the enemy's capacity for belligerence, not at the enemy *per se*.

In the Vedas there is a third limit on the conduct of war, namely, that there shall be no pursuit off a field of battle. This limitation appears to allow a wounded enemy to regain strength and return to battle rather than permitting the commonsense course of precluding their ability to again cause discord. However, this is not the case. The proscription of hot pursuit is in the context of an understanding that a combatant who quits a battle field will not return to that or any other field of battle because they are defeated. Once defeated, a combatant's cause is considered defunct and so they have no cause to prepare for battle. The limitation on hot pursuit, therefore, is actually the standard soldierly morality -- and universal moral base line -- of protecting the fallen enemy from harm.

MacArthur practiced these limitations scrupulously and that practice largely contributed to his immense success. For example, by attacking only the enemy's capacity for belligerence, he attacked "where the enemy wasn't" rather than frontally and thus not only saved casualties on both sides but also significantly shortened the duration of operations, thus saving money and other resources as well as life and collateral destruction.

Great Captains never attack frontally -- that is, at the enemy *per se*. Great Captains always attack the enemy's supply line, in flank and rear -- that is, at the enemy's capacity for belligerence.

Thus, the theologians' strictures regarding the conduct of war are in fact sound military strategy. This is a felicitous congruence: theology and warfare obtaining the same end by employing the same principles.

Military and theological professionals implicitly trust one another and on fundamental ontological grounds.

On the question of combating only combatants these considerations are paramount from a theological point of view:

- The assumption of the universal moral base line (*dharma*) is essential to the analysis;
- The problem of laying fire on noncombatants arises -- or should arise -- only in the case where the enemy is not engaging on the basis of the universal moral base line's proscription of fire on noncombatants; i.e., the enemy is using noncombatants as shields;
- Thus, in the case where an enemy employs noncombatants on the field of battle, it is a given and self-evident that the enemy is off the universal moral base line

and, therefore, in need of having that base line reestablished in their midst; and all theologians assert that it is the absolute duty of armies to accomplish that reestablishment with the greatest speed and economy; nature and humanity abhor anything off the universal moral base line;

- ☑ In other words, an enemy's employment of noncombatants on a field of battle is certain evidence of the need to destroy that enemy's capacity for belligerence; noncombatants on a field of battle are certain evidence of the immorality of the enemy's cause; and those who support immorality must have their capacity for belligerence destroyed;
- ☑ Therefore, noncombatants on a field of battle must be treated as combatants -- which in fact they are -- and operations must be conducted without reference to the appearance -- and that is all it is, an appearance -- that these individuals are noncombatants.

Remember that Ravana set a female guarding the gate of Lanka -- on the assumption that no soldier would hurt a woman. He, too, used the human shield and even the female shield in battle. And how did Hanuman treat this "appearance?" He gave her a lethal wallop and proceeded in. He did not get taken in by the appearance of noncombatant or female status. The female was a combatant and so he treated her as such. He did not fall for Ravana's ruse, his pretense, his appeal to suppression of the soldierly duty of discerning (Sanskrit, *viveka*) the truth.

The underlying analysis is that Ravana's regime was not on the universal moral base line -- as evidenced by his abduction of Sita, another man's wife, if by nothing else -- and so Rama and his brother Lakshmana and

Vanaras (Monkeys) and Bears came to restore the universal moral base line to that area of the globe, whose nature is to adhere to the universal moral base line.

Nature is Godly, True and Righteous. Wars are for correcting situations where this fact, this nature of Nature, is not stood to, not supported.

The case where an enemy uses one's friends as shields -- friendly civilians, POWs, cats (an army once overwhelmed Egyptians, who revered cats, merely by advancing on them while holding cats), etc. -- requires further elucidation.

The analysis emerges from the nature of war itself. War is fire in a crucible. Fire is indiscriminate: it consumes every combustible. The purpose of war is to consume the dross of immoral behavior in the fire of combat, leaving the pure metal of the universal moral base line -- which is immutable -- clearly in view, unadulterated, so that humanity may draw comfort and prosperity from the universal moral base line by enthusiastically conforming behavior to it. The nature of war is to fire everything on the field of combat and see what remains, just as the nature of refining is to fire everything in the crucible and thus obtain the pure residue (metal), the grandeur and effulgence of pure character (virtue). Thus, everyone on a field of battle is a combatant, no matter how they came to be on that field.

An illustration is needed. When Lee was sent with a detachment of Marines to free Harper's Ferry, which had been overrun by partisans, he found John Brown holding hostages and barricaded inside one of the buildings. Lee ordered Brown to surrender or face fire. Brown pointed out that fire from Lee would hit hostages. At this point the voice of a hostage inside the building came to Lee and the Marines saying, "Don't mind us. Go ahead and shoot!"

Lee recognized the voice and knew the man, a veteran of the Revolutionary War and a Virginian of station. He commented to those standing near, "The old blood does tell." Lee desired not to harm the hostages, but he accepted the principle enunciated by the old veteran that anyone on a field of battle must accept the consequences of their condition regardless of how they got there. War is fire and the nature of fire is to burn indiscriminately.

The time to discriminate, to conduct "surgical" operations, is during the diplomatic phase, before war is resolved upon. Once diplomats have failed to adjust differences and war is resolved upon as the means for obtaining peaceful agreement, war's nature must be accepted and its conduct entrusted to professionals, to the military command structure.

In the case where an enemy uses members of their own group as shields -- their women or children, for example -- fire must be laid down on them. In the case where an enemy uses one's friends as shields, fire can be laid down on them but does not have to be. Ordinary discretion available to the command structure may be used to minimize or even to avoid damage to friendly shields so long as such use occasions insignificant expense to the command. Lee's actions at Harper's Ferry illustrate an appropriate use of command discretion in the context of an enemy using friendly shields. And on a much larger scale the actions of General of the Army MacArthur in retaking the old walled City of Manila illustrate the same usage in the same context.

However, the always-governing principle is that anyone on a field of combat is a combatant and subject to fire. This is the universal moral base line for all cases including that of an enemy using one's friends as shields.

The object of war (strategy) as well as of combat operations (tactics) is the enemy's capacity for belligerence, not the enemy. This point theologians desire that all understand and adhere to scrupulously. The reason for war

is immoral behavior in the human community. The object of war is to reestablish moral behavior in the human community. The humans are not the issue. Their behavior is. This discernment (*viveka*) is essential. Without it politicians and armies become mere marauding brigands and society mere despotic anarchy. Without adherence to the universal moral base line, the entire human enterprise collapses -- as in Africa.

With this discernment between the humans and their behavior, we are able to go to war and still love the enemy we fight, as well we should. In the heat of combat that love may get out of view, but it is the responsibility of the political authorities and the theatre commanders as well as the entire officer corps to keep the love of the enemy clearly in view and experience at all times and to communicate this love to the enlisted ranks and, as occasion permits, to the enemy. It is not the enemy one hates but their behavior. This fact is confirmed by the morality of soldiers in the postlude to battle: we uphold the defeated enemy and actually help them get fully back on their feet as happy folks. That is, love is there as the constant ground from start to finish and forever and forever.

So theologians are at pains to demonstrate and to insist that wars must be fought with a minimum of casualty and destruction on *both* sides. An army is responsible for minimizing damage to the enemy just as much as it is responsible for minimizing damage to itself. This is a great principle that Great Captains adhere to not only because it is moral behavior -- which Great Captains adhere to by personal nature -- but also because it is the best way to conduct combat operations and to secure the peace enabled by those operations.

Theologians point out that morality and war necessity congrue. Think on this. It is a great comfort. The enemy is a nation's or a group's capacity for belligerence, not the people comprising that nation or that group. The application of this principle in war strategy and combat tactics satisfies not

only morality but also the needs of military art and science. This is a wonderful fact.

The postlude of war theologians want limited to the extent that the loser renounces belligerency on the cause just submitted to the crucible, the decision of war and the winner renounces hot pursuit or recrimination on the loser. In other words, positive peace is to obtain on all sides. The loser is not to sulk or plot a comeback and the victor is not to overbear the loser and is in fact to help the loser regain their welfare but on the basis of the universal moral base line, not on the basis of the immorality which caused the loser to just lose the war.

Soldiers are responsible for the welfare of people they best in war and for people who surrender to them during war. This is part of the universal moral base line. General MacArthur put this principle into effect in Japan and the State Department put it into practice ham-handedly in Europe after WWII. We see the US Army putting this principle into practice wherever that organization wins a war. It is the very nature of this great instrument and cynosure of our national life.

Following WWI there was the Treaty (so-called) of Versailles. By this Treaty, whose harsh terms President Wilson tried to mitigate, the French and British imposed on Germany immoral terms which caused the rise of Nazism in that country. The Treaty represented hot pursuit and recrimination of a conquered enemy, both activities theologians proscribe because the universal moral base line proscribes them. The Treaty of Versailles was a monstrous immorality which, because of its nature, spawned one of history's truly demonic movements, National Socialism (Nazism). When the universal moral base line is not adhered to, all suffer needlessly in ways and to extents that cannot be measured for their enormity.

So theologians are at pains to stress the responsibility victors have for the welfare of the vanquished and soldiers by nature support this attitude. General MacArthur's behavior with Japan is the perfect example of adherence to the universal moral base line during the postlude of war. The Occupation of Japan following WWII is, so far, history's sole example of a successful military occupation of a defeated country.

Well, these are some itemizations of theologians' discussion of the justification of war. I have not covered the entire discussion, which becomes detailed with respect to both principle and practice, but this provides concepts to help with the analysis at hand.

The general principle I would like to highlight is that the efforts of theologians with respect to the justification of war treat the subject in each of its three phases -- prelude, conduct and postlude -- and treat of limitations or proscriptions on behavior primarily and by direction and commendations or prescriptions of behavior secondarily or by implication.

Mostly, theologians, while recognizing the justification of battle blood and the glory of the eye's battle light, desire that these superb experiences drive towards reestablishing the universal moral base line where that has been gone off and enhancing adherence to the universal moral base line where that is in process of being adhered to.

War has three phases, prelude, conduct and postlude, and the soldier is necessarily involved in all three phases. The soldier's *dharma* or Profession, Calling comprises proscriptions and prescriptions for each of these three phases of war. Theologians and Great Captains such as Lee and MacArthur -- and all Great Captains are great theologians -- have tried to itemize and illuminate the principles supporting and the practices implementing those proscriptions and prescriptions.

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