

Type the number of the topic AND the name of the author of the quotation here

2. Immanuel Kant

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“Now morally practical reason pronounces in us its irresistible veto: There is to be no war, neither between you and me in the state of nature nor war between us as states, which, although they are internally in a lawful condition, are still externally (in a relation to one another) in a lawless condition; for war is not the way in which everyone should seek their rights.”

Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals* (1795)

Kant’s quotation places a topic, indispensable of this present age. The reality of war in all its overt and covert forms is a subject of debate ever since humanity faced its ugliest manifestations in the twentieth century. As such, conflict is something no modern philosophy should try to shun. The aim of this essay will be to address the question “Should war be a part of international interaction?” using a theistic ethical framework.

1. The Origin of Moral

To ask the question “Should war be a part of international interaction?” is equal to asking “Is war morally right?” as “*should*” is always connected with the concept of “*right*”, which is the practical essence of the term “*moral*”. To give a satisfactory answer then, I will first examine the concept of morality as such and on that basis continue to build on.

It would not be wrong to say that morals is another of the hotly debated topics of “today”, much like war. Indeed, it is not wrong to say that war is so argued about precisely because its founded at the conception of morals, which is a fragile one. Ever since the end of the Middle ages, humanity has strived to escape from the idea of something external being placed as a yoke on one’s will.

A strikingly clear example of this would be Sartre's atheistic existentialism, placing moral judgement on nothing else than the subject's use of freedom. Indeed, he places much stress on the *aposteriority* of our morals, saying that every rational agent chooses what is moral and what is not, and the value of his choice and successive action is found in its dwelling in the obscure concept of freedom. Thus, morals are reduced to a human invention, designed to make one "*happy*". That is because it cannot be assumed that, if morals are really the product of human choice, anyone would choose freely something that would be contrary to his apparent well-being. As such, **this concept can easily be transformed in a universal justification, by finding an excuse for every single action.**

To give an example that would further clarify my point, one need not look further than our own states. The condition for every state's prosperity is the full implementation of just laws, equal in content and strength for every citizen. This "radical" idea is the concept behind the state's authority – the constitution. Thus, the very definition of state is based on that concept – state is the body that has the right to legitimate violence. And when should this political body use this right if not as a response to the breaking of such and such laws? Civil freedom then as citizens born into a country is not based on the ability to choose the constitution we are going to uphold for ourselves – it is in the right to break the already laid-out rules, regardless of the consequences that should ensue.

Note that this definition of civil freedom does not run contrary to the ability to vote against or for certain laws. It is a right of every citizen of a democratic country to help decide the course of his state. However, when a citizen votes, for example, he votes for a change in the universal state law, **the law that should be enforced on everyone.** As a civil entity, he does not possess the right to live "by his own rules", as Sartre's definition of rules and morals implies.

How then do can one step out of this vicious ethic that places moral on subjectivity? The answer is to be found nowhere else but in **universal moral law, a priori known for every rational agent** (in Kant's terms). This law then is not easily defined as objective and subjective, because it transcends these very same boundaries. It is objective in terms of its being *the same* for every rational agent, however it can be shown in a subjective frame as well – as a innate seed, sown internally. Thus, my choice is not a matter of choosing the law, choosing which action is good (that is, morally acceptable) and which is not, as that is *a priori* known. **My choice is in deciding whether or not I should act according to the a priori moral law itself.**

The next difficulty that should be surmounted, however, is the subjective origin of such an universal law. Kant clearly places it in our reason (also he even equates his "practical reason" with "will"). This concept of reason as the faculty from which law originates presents no small amount of difficulties. The drawback I shall address is this: it presupposes reason's ability to always reach, through its logical method, the moral standing of a certain action.

To assume that human reason possesses this quality (although a potential quality – a subtle difference I am not going to head into) is to virtually make our reason God. It crowns a human faculty, which exemplifies its fallibility when we are faced with its incapability of comprehending even itself, with a synoptic view, a view that few would argue is not needed in true righteous judgement. Thus, it seems highly *unrational* to promote it to such heights, and we are forced to give it a *supportive* function at most.

What then should take the place of our reason as the origin and legislator of the universal law? If we call on the Bible's authority and its three-dimensional view of the constitution of a human being (spirit, soul and body), we can easily find the answer to this puzzle – the originator of the moral law is the spirit, the part of us which gives us the opportunity to communicate with God. Thus, the moral law is nothing more than God's essence, placed as a seed in ourselves, to be nourished and nurtured if we so desire.

If **the moral law is a God-given spiritual seed we are free to act by or refute**, then our reason assumes its rightful place as a supporter of that seed, a conscious (rational) way of determining the moral value of an action, a way not infallible.

To conclude this part of the essay I shall sum up the main points I have argued:

- To ask the question of the rightness of war is to ask a moral question
- To base morals fully on the free choice of every agent is to denounce its substance and value
- To say that morals are *a priori* known structures, which I can choose to follow or not, is part of the definition of human freedom (the other dimensions of freedom are not relevant to the present essay)
- To give the spirit the rank of the legislator of the moral laws is to name reason a supporter of the law

2. War in the natural state

After surmounting the biggest obstacles in the way of deciphering Kant's citation, I will continue with the issue of war in human beings' natural state. It is wise to point out in the beginning that every theory on this subject can be looked upon with no more than the status of a thought experiment, as its pure existence is highly doubtful.

A natural state is most easily defined as a pre-social state-of-affairs, a temporal entity existing before the formation of the so-called "*social contract*" (a term widely connected with the names of Rousseau and Locke). As such, this state of being supposes the absence of any purely objective constitution pertaining to a certain group of individuals, from which we can derive that every human being is guided by no more than his own accepted (objective and subjective

in nature, as stated above) moral laws, or conversely – by his purely subjective desires and passions.

This state-of-affairs then gives us the opportunity to better define what each man *ought to do*, that is - each man ought to act on the basis of the moral law. To answer, however, the question of the “*oughtness*” of war in such a state is to examine the content of this law. If we follow the biblical standard (which is not fully necessary – the conclusion is apparent enough for it to be reached by a purely logical train of thought) we can deduce that the whole universal moral law is summed up in this (often problematic) term – *love* (according to Jesus, the biggest commandment is “love your God” and “love your neighbour as yourself”). So the question becomes “Is war part of the notion of love, or is it not?”. To any man, who has witnessed the destruction and loss inherent in every war, the answer to that question is clearly “No.”.

So we can conclude that in the state of nature war *should not* exist. Is it realistic, however that it won't? If it is so authentic today, in a society of prosperity, how can we imagine the natural state to be a peaceful one? That is not to say that it would be, as the concept of Hobbes, a state of war that all are against all, but it would surely be a war of someone against someone else. How do we reconcile that with our knowledge?

The answer to this riddle is hidden in the existence of a different kind of war – that is, war in ourselves, an internal conflict, which is ever-present in our lives. Maybe it can be defined using Augustine's concept of the two wills – one evil, and one good; no matter the exact linguistic formulation it suffices to say that every man not only possesses the moral law – every man possesses the desire to break it, to step outside the boundaries, if only out of curiosity. That is a rebellious desire, not in the sense with which Camus uses the term “rebellion”, as an act of defying the absurd, but with the meaning of the deep human (or un-human, if we define humanity by its ability to conform to the moral law) desire to “make my own laws”.

Thus, the state of nature is surely one in which war is present, as the manifestation of someone's desire to break the code of “love”.

3. War in the social state

To address the meaning and place of war in the social state behoves to rewrite the conception for the natural state on a wider scale. As Kant puts it in his quotation, the analogy is easily drawn between human relations and international relations – meaning that the same rules (moral laws) apply to either (it is noteworthy that the analogy between a certain society and a coherent body is nothing new – one of the oldest examples is the representation of the church as the “body of Christ”).

In his work “Toward Perpetual Peace”, Immanuel Kant strives to achieve that – the categorical imperatives which all states ought to obey, if there is to be world peace. These imperatives

are no different than the ones the moral law dictates to us in our private affairs. Which means that the pure (non-empirical) concept of a world, flourishing under perpetual peace (opposed to a truce between wars), is one in which all states are equally bound by the moral laws, which command them to never view aggression as a means to achieve an end.

However, giving humans' (who constitute states) innate desire to go against all moral, it would be wise to accept the fact that there will always be a man (or a state), who will break those laws. That would mean, that, as I should not be surprised if I got hit by a stranger, a country should not be surprised if it got invaded by another country. This last statement presupposes that man, and consequently states, should be *prepared* for the likely possibility of becoming the target of another's aggression.

Thus, it is my reasoning that people should possess weapons, that states should possess armies, however not as a weapon for attack, but as a precaution against others' will for power (to borrow a concept from Nietzsche, which I think fits beautifully with the present context). That this state-of-affairs is open to the possibility of misuse of the weapons (armies) is clear, however, one must agree that the possibility of only *one* person (state) possessing a weapon is far more grievous and troubling.

I reach than the possibility for the term of an "*ethical war*" – **a war, weighed with the aim of protecting one's own identity and sovereignty from the aggression of another**. Such a war is coherent with the moral law, as it is a form of "love for yourself".

4. Conclusion

To put this work under a common denominator of the moral poise of war, one must state that war ought not to be started, as it goes against the moral *a priori* laws that bind a human as much as a state, being a body of humans. However, a position on the subject must not come to a halt here, as the possibility of a political body to run contrary to the universal rule is ever present, given its natural weaknesses. As such, the subject hermeneutically becomes more complex and requires a further specification – it is not to be deemed unmoral to possess an army as a means to protect one's state and it is to be deemed ethically right (or moral) to use that army for such a purpose.