

2. Immanuel Kant

France vs. Germany, USA vs. Japan, Britain vs. Ireland and so on – history has provided us with numerous examples for war between different states. Are they just? Can war even be just? Or isn't there a morally practical law forbidding war and violence of all types for all times? These are the questions this essay seeks to discuss.

A first spontaneous response would be that war is unjust. Always. And there are certain arguments to support this point of view. In almost all cultures and religions children are taught to treat others the way they would want to be treated. Philosophically this corresponds to Kant's moral thesis for us to act in a way that if everyone acted the same way everything would be fine.

Now I certainly don't want war to be between us, neither between you and me nor between your country and my country. As I don't want the houses of my town to be bombed, I must act accordingly and not bomb any other house. Easy enough for me, as a single person, because the thought of bombing anotherone's house has never even crossed my mind. But doesn't the same law apply to countries? Governments are meant to act on behalf of the people of their country, enacting what the majority feels to be right. We can safely assume that the majority of each and every country doesn't want their houses to be bombed and consequently following this idea and implementing Kant's thesis – this time for a collective of people – this would mean for every country to stop bombing other countries. The end of all wars.

Politics, however, suggests otherwise. Every now and then there is an upcry to be heard from human rights activists because yet another war crime has been committed. This is very important for our philosophical train of thought, because the word war crime indicates that war itself is not a crime. Why? If war was seen as a crime, we wouldn't need to use the word *war crime* because the word war would state that itself. For example, we don't say *rape crime*, because rape alone brings the message.

The states of our world have agreed upon a certain set of war crimes, therefor indicating that war itself is not a crime as long as you stick to certain rules. Morally practical we need to disagree in light of the above, because war strongly breaks with Kant's thesis of treating others like it is best for all.

Crossing philosophical borders and turning towards the Christian religion, we can find a good example. In the early days of this religion, Christians refused to fight for the Roman army because they viewed war and violence as unethical. It took the rise of the Christian religion to the Roman state religion, for church fathers and emperors to search for loopholes of this ethic principle. The theory of just war was introduced, stating that war can be allowed if a legitimated leader agrees and more lives are saved than destroyed – it didn't take long till the crussades drove this principle ad absurdum. Whichever other religion we turn to, we will notice that war and peace are at the very core of them. And while in one way or another they all condemn war, they also leave room for people to interpret them radically by following the "an eye for an eye"-principle or declaring war upon all people of other religions.

Although all ethical, philosophical and religious principles seem to tell us otherwise, wars have been fought in all times and all regions of our world throughout the history of humanity. How can this even be possible since both religion and philosophy, largely opposed to war, have been existing at least since the times of the ancient Greeks?

It is not only the huge discrepancy between ethic principles and real life but as well the clashing of ethic principles with one another. A word in this context that has been and remains to be a key vocabulary is justice. Justice has been promoted in both philosophy and religions, as well as throughout our history in politics.

Justice partly signifies that we should be punished for doing something wrong and compensated if wrong has been done on us. In most countries a judicial system of courts and judges takes care of that. But when we turn towards entire states, the situation turns a lot more difficult. There is no working system for judging right issues between states. Furthermore, it remains unclear and debateable if people can be punished for the crimes of their states. Though – in democratic states – the decisions of the government ought to be supported by a broad majority of people, others might have been strongly opposed to the actions of their government. Are they to be blamed for what has happened? Others might have been too young or not even been born in times of the crime. Is it just to punish them for the crimes of their state which they didn't even live with, just because they have been born into that state? On the other hand, if justice isn't implemented by police and courts, people tend to take matters into their own hands. What may lead to the hunt down of a local thief in the small, may result into war when thinking bigger (in interaction between states).

Just like some people take punishing others into their own hands if the judicial system isn't working and they feel offended, so do states or politicians. If they feel that the honour of their state is insulted by politicians of other countries, if they feel not treated in the right way, they view war as a solution to punish the insulters, reinstall their countries honour and show the world their strength.

So we can sum up that war is to be seen as morally practical unjust and attempts to undermine this theory by "fighting a war out of the right motives to achieve a morally correct aim (therefore just)" have not only cost thousands of millions of lives but also broken the moral codex. Though of course, this is the critical point where diverse philosophical movements come to disagree. War itself is unjust, but if it is fought out of the right motives – for example to stop terrorism, receive justice, or others –, can it then still be just, because though the path may not be ethical, the aim is? Or is it rather the other way, that war is unjust, fighting and killing are unjust and therefore there are no motives whatsoever to justify them? Philosophers couldn't disagree more.

Returning to the idea that war is unjust and morally practical wrong, we have also already stated that religion and certain philosophical movements justify it in certain situations. If war, however, is unjust then it should be avoided. Or, as Kant says: "war is not the way in which everyone should seek his rights." Though philosophy is always under quiet criticism for being unpractical not to say unworldly or worldly innocent, it must have some approaches to resolve this dilemma.

War between you and me is handled in courtrooms (in extreme cases), leaving no way for violence. War between you and me in less extreme cases, let's just pick a fight between friends as an example, is handled without violence but can result in broken hearts and spirits or the end of an friendship (in our example). These wars between you and me can of course be avoided by treating the other one correctly, not just by law but as well by the code of ethics of our own culture. We can now transfer this example from you and me to another world, to the war between us as states. It seems pretty obvious, but governments would need to act according to Kant's law, so that if everyone would act the same the world would be a better place.

Wars, however, are a complex issue with diverse triggers. Wars can break out over belongings – in the case of states: borders, seas, territory, natural resources – because we feel that the other one has more of something than we do, although he doesn't deserve it. The feeling that we could use the resources better because we are smarter, or worse: that we are allowed to claim the territory from others because we are supreme to them, is very dangerous. Wars have been raged for less.

One of the problems with implementing Kant's law, is that for many it doesn't apply for their enemies because they view their enemies as enemies rather than as humans. This

process called “demonisation” is critical – people distance themselves from others, emphasising the differences between them and in the end putting themselves above the others, firmly believing themselves to be better than the others, which allows them to use all sorts of normally unethical methods in the fight against this enemy.

The practical problem of implementing the philosophically relatively clear thesis that war is unjust and should be avoided, is that we leave ourselves out to often. It’s the “I agree that eating much meat is bad for the environment and the animals, but I am used to eating it” and the “cheating on your girl/boyfriend is horrible, but this case is special, it’s different”. In this case the problem is not agreeing on what is right but rather implementing it for ourselves. Just like we know that cheating on a girl/boyfriend is unethical and us doing it anyway because we feel it is a special case out of certain reasons, just like that the North Korean government might also agree that war is morally unjust but that their situation leaves them no room but to prepare for it. The problem is that when we’re in the philosophical birds-eye perspective, we know exactly what to do and what not to do and that war is always unjust and that the world would be a better place if nobody fought, but back in the mouse perspective we feel that we have reasons and rights to fight this war. War is unjust, but this war, our war, isn’t.

The problem with this approach is that *your war isn’t different*. Whichever war is fought – people advocating it will always feel that there are reasons for it. And there might as well be reasons for each and every one of them, but that doesn’t mean that war is the right solution. Just like killing someone because he verbally offended you is neither the right solution or ethical, nor will it go unpunished by the court, just like that war is never ethical. There might be reasons to act, like in the small when somebody harasses you, but these reasons don’t force you (as a state) to declare war. And if you are in a leading position in a state and involved in deciding whether to start a war or not and feel that you have special reasons, in respect of all the lives that will be lost in the conflict, you at least need to take a step back and ask yourself if you can with both heart and reason declare that your war is that special, and that different from others that it needs to be fought despite of the general principle.

Having given so much thought to a topic, which has been declared as unjust in the first paragraph if not in the impulse quote itself, makes me want to move on to the most important aspect related to it. The opposite of war is peace, is what every child is going to say. But for me, peace is more than that, more than just the absence of war. We say “we have made peace with ourselves on a certain topic” not when we stop hating ourselves for a bad decision, but rather when we have come to accept it. Peace therefore is not the state of not attacking neighbouring states but keeping your army ready to attack any minute. Peace is about not wanting to fight the other one and trusting them to do the same. Peace is about having peace at mind, because you don’t have to think

about war. Peace is not only the absence of war, it is the state in which war is utterly unrealistic. At least ideal peace is.

Throughout history, war has always been more important than peace. Numerous examples can be given to support this statement. Not only did Heraclit declare war “the father of all things”, but also do largest parts of history evolve around war rather than peace. While peace might create security, war creates jobs. But at what price? What is the matter with us humans and the human race that we have agreed on war being unethical since almost the beginning of times, and yet we have not only spent more time making war than making peace but also have we spent more time talking about war not peace.

It can be said that the whole concept of war is nothing short of crazy. Although we all agree that war in general is morally unjust and although almost every single person will prefer not to fight a war, war has been and will most likely always be fought. What a contradiction!