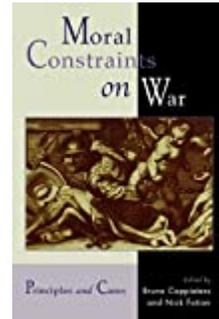




Bruno Coppieters, Nick Fotion, eds. *Moral Constraints on War: Principles and Cases*. Lanham and Oxford: Lexington Books, 2002. xvii + 321 pp. \$98.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7391-0436-1; \$32.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7391-0437-8.



Reviewed by Donna Yarri (Department of the Humanities, Alvernia College)

Published on H-War (January, 2004)

Just War Theory in the Real World

Just War Theory in the Real World

The issue of the moral constraints of war continues to be a timely topic in the modern world. Although a just war tradition has been in existence for hundreds of years, it is always prudent to reconsider it in light of contemporary international situations. This is precisely what the authors of this edited volume have succeeded in doing.

The authors' purpose in writing this book, as is indicated on the jacket, is to "offer a principle-by-principle presentation of the transcultural roots of the ethics of war in an age defined by the increasingly international nature of military intervention." Coppieters and Fotion address this by focusing in particular on just war theory, which is one of a few positions they delineate at the very beginning of the book (in addition to realism, militarism, and pacifism). The book is divided into three sections: Part One addresses *jus ad bellum*, the just war criteria that determine the conditions under which going to war is permissible; Part Two addresses *jus in bello*, the just war criteria that determine the principles to be followed once war is under way; finally, Part Three addresses concrete applications of just war theory by using case studies such

as the Gulf War, the Chechen War, the Kosovo Crisis, and the U.S. response to the September 11, 2001 attacks.

Although many volumes have been written over the years on the just war tradition, this book is exemplary for a number of reasons.[1] It provides a clear and concise introduction to the just war criteria, especially for a person not familiar with the tradition. A chapter is devoted to each of the criteria, in which the historical origin/development of the criterion is provided, along with historical examples that help to illustrate it. What is unique and interesting about this volume is the third section, in which contemporary military situations are analyzed in light of these principles. This has the effect of moving the theoretical to the practical, and also makes the discussion usefully contemporary. The authors do not minimize the difficulty inherent in such a move. They readily admit that it is possible for individuals using the same criteria in assessing the same situation to come to entirely different conclusions. For example, in the chapter on the Gulf War, when assessing whether or not the principle of last resort was followed, the author argues that on the one hand, there was suf-

ficient reason for believing that Saddam Hussein would not have backed down regardless of how much time went on, such that war was truly last resort. On the other hand, though, it is almost always possible to claim that perhaps other non-military interventions should have continued, such as economic sanctions.

Although the weaknesses pale in relation to the strengths, I will mention a few minor points. As with all edited volumes, there is sometimes an uneven quality among the chapters, in terms of style and sometimes even organization. In addition, while Part Two contained a useful historical overview for *jus in bello*, such an overview was missing from part 1 for *jus ad bellum*. It would have been helpful for the uninitiated reader to have had a brief discussion on both types of criteria. Second, I would take some issue with whether realism and the just war criteria are as distinct as the authors make out. For example, the authors cite Reinhold Neibuhr as an example of a realist (which he certainly was). However, while Neibuhr does not usually use the expression “just war tradition,” much of his writing against pacifism suggests that violence is necessary but must be mediated by the same kinds of restraints which are raised by the just war criteria. Finally, I think it would have been helpful to have the term “just war criteria” appear somewhere in the title because it is not clear from the title that the focus

is pretty much exclusively on this tradition.

Overall, for a reader who is looking for an interesting, concise, and well-organized book on the just war criteria, utilizing contemporary examples to demonstrate how they work, this volume is a must read. The book also provides a very helpful bibliography in the form of endnotes at the conclusion of each chapter. While not offering a lot of new information to the scholar already well-versed in military ethics, this work would provide a substantial, clear introduction to the novice in the field and could also work as a textbook for a course on war, for either undergraduate or graduate students.

Notes:

[1]. For example, Geoffrey Best, *Humanity in Warfare* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); Paul Ramsey, *The Just War* (Savage, Maryland: Littlefield Adams, 1968, 1983); and Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

Copyright (c) 2004 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For other uses contact the Reviews editorial staff: hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-war>

Citation: Donna Yarri. Review of Coppieters, Bruno; Fotion, Nick, eds., *Moral Constraints on War: Principles and Cases*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. January, 2004.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=8635>

Copyright © 2004 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.org.