Would Epicurus Say That It Is Better to Suffer Harm Than to Harm?

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 21, 2022 at 5:54 PM

This brings up the ethics of war -- discovered "just war theory":

> Quote
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> For millennia, philosophers and Christian theologians have worked on a framework for guiding the ethical prosecution of wars. Just war theory—the most influential source of objective guidance for the ethical prosecution of wars—is traditionally attributed to Ambrose (ca. 339-397 CE) and Augustine (354-430 CE). Nine hundred years later, Thomas Aquinas established the theological, systematic conscience-based foundations under which a war could be justified. Aquinas’s views became the model for later scholars, who universalized just war theory beyond its Christian foundations, recasting it in terms of what is allowed or forbidden in wars between modern nation-states.
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> The absence of an ethics of conflict termination hinders the civic polity’s ability to judge whether a conflict should be over. This omission vitiates a founding tenet of democracy: civilian control of the military.
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> Contemporary just war theory has branched into two schools—traditionalist and revisionist. The traditionalist camp is best represented by Michael Walzer’s seminal 1977 book *Just and Unjust Wars,* which defended a non-religious justification of national self-defense, combatant equality, and civilian immunity. In the last decade or so, a revisionist camp, spearheaded by Jeff McMahan’s work, questioned these tenets of traditional just war theory. McMahan’s book, *Killing in War* (2009), revolutionized the philosophical discussion on the ethics of war by questioning the moral standing of states and the justification of national self-defense as a just cause for war, problematizing the notion of civilian immunity, and systematically attacking Walzer’s argument regarding the moral equality of combatants—instead, McMahan contended that combatants fighting for an unjust cause have no right to kill.
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> Historically, just war theorists distinguished between just two stages of conflict: *jus ad bellum*, the limitations on the resort to war, and *jus in bello*, the restrictions on the conduct in war. In the past twenty years philosophers in both camps—traditionalists and revisionists—have argued for adding *jus post bellum* as a third branch of just war theory as a way to provide guidance on what is owed *after* a conflict has ended. The construction of peace treaties and the reconstruction of states, for example, raise difficult questions about retribution and vengeance and what can be demanded of the

defeated.

Now, only more recently have philosophers started to address the gap between *jus in bello* and *jus post bellum*. As Cecile Fabre notes, “there is hardly any work on the transition from war to peace, and more specifically on the ethics of war termination.” As such, philosophers have begun arguing that the moral principles governing the end of armed conflicts require a new regime in just war theory, called either *jus ex bello* (Darrel Moellendorf’s terminology), or *jus terminatio* (David Rodin’s terminology). (The U.S. Military Academy at West Point is holding a conference on these subjects, called “How to End a War: Peace, Justice, and Repair,” just next week.) As Rodin puts it, such a framework should be a “fourth and independent component of the morality of war standing alongside *jus ad bellum*, *jus in bello*, and *jus post bellum*.”

Defining a framework for guiding the termination of wars, however, is not a straightforward task. You might start, for example, by just continually checking the conditions required to start a war. (*Jus ad bellum* requires meeting six distinct criteria.) Once the reasons that justified resorting to force do not apply any more, that framework would say, the war needs to be terminated. Yet this view simplifies the task at hand too much. First, the very fact that the war *has* begun has changed the moral situation. For example, there are those who already died in the war, new atrocities planned by the enemy could be discovered, or new, unpredictable costs, as well as termination costs, might emerge. Mechanical applications of the *ad bellum* principles could lead to morally perverse situations, since circumstances alter cases.

Second, and crucially, *ad bellum* conditions are not themselves the groundwork of the morality of war. They are the *application* of moral principles to specific situations, in which the two competing aims—to allow the victim to use defensive force while minimizing the harm of war—are balanced. To paraphrase Amartya Sen in his *The Idea of Justice* (2011), the task of a moral theory of ending wars is in “the prevention of manifest injustice in the world, rather than seeking the perfectly just.” To achieve progress in developing such a theory, we must recognize that there are differences in the moral evaluation between resorting to force and ending the use of force.

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