**Introduction.** The purpose of this page is to provide a very general level of familiarity with Just War Theory. Although others worked on this topic before him, the first significant just war theory was developed by Saint Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century. Most accounts that have been developed since then are based, either directly or indirectly, on Aquinas's theory. All just war theories (contemporary and historical) take the form of a series of conditions that the just participant(s) in a war should abide by. The conditions that are most frequently included are listed below. These are divided into the conditions that justify going to war (*jus ad bellum*), and the conditions that should be followed while engaged in war (*jus in bello*). When thinking about these conditions, it is important to keep in mind that (1) these are moral rules, some of them have been reproduced in international law, some have not, and (2) what is described below lacks specificity and interpretations of these conditions vary greatly.

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**The Jus ad Bellum** (law to war)

1. There must be a **competent public authority** to order the war for a public purpose (cf. civil and revolutionary wars).

2. There must be a **just cause**. This condition is composed of the following (the first two are *just cause* itself):
   - The substance of the just cause: the ends must be sufficiently just. Childress (1978) suggests the following: (a) to protect the innocent from unjust attack, (b) to restore rights wrongfully denied, (c) to re-establish a just order.
   - Forms of pursuing just cause: offensive, defensive wars (typically offensive requires more justification).
   - Requirement of **proportionality** of ends and means: (a) the ends must be sufficiently good, (b) the probable outcome of the war must be weighted against the destruction war will cause, (c) there must be a reasonable chance of success.
   - All peaceful alternatives must have been exhausted (**last resort**).

3. The war must be entered into with the **right intention**. Note the difference between having a just cause and having a morally appropriate motive. Among other things, the just belligerent must have the goal of a just and lasting peace; enemies must suppress natural animosity and hatred.

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**The Jus in Bello** (law in war)

1. **The Principle of Proportionality**. There should be proportionality between the military means and the political and military goals. One concept sometimes used here is “reasonableness” (in domestic law what a reasonable person could be expected to do is often taken into account; in war the point of reference is the reasonable commander).

2. **The Principle of Discrimination**: prohibits direct, intentional attacks on noncombatants and nonmilitary targets. This principle is difficult to uphold. Typically a distinction is made between what was intended and what was foreseen, but not intended (the latter being collateral damage). There are also, in many instances, problems distinguishing military and non-military targets (e.g., all of the following are “intertwined” with the military: support efforts, sources of war production, the psychological effects that come from attacking non-combatants—for example, the aerial bombing of cities).

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**Other resources**

- BBC Ethics of War: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/war/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/war/). This site has very short articles on a variety of issues related to waging war, including a series about just war theory.
- The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Just War Theory: [http://www.iep.utm.edu/j/justwar.htm](http://www.iep.utm.edu/j/justwar.htm)) and the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (War: [http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/war/](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/war/)) both have good, although somewhat long, entries on just war theory.
- Excerpt from The Fog of War: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fu-V0Xk8beU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fu-V0Xk8beU). I often show this excerpt when I am teaching Just War Theory so that everyone has the same reference point when thinking about activities that occur in war.
- James E. White (Ed.), *Contemporary Moral Problems: War and Terrorism*. This is a short book that includes articles on just war theory, pacifism, and terrorism.

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