

AUGUSTINE'S JUST WAR DOCTRINE

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

I. Constantine the Great (272 A.D.-337 A.D.)

- 306 A.D.: Ascended to the throne
- 312 A.D.: Battle of Milvian Bridge
 - o “*By this sign conquer*”
 - o *Crosses placed on battle standards; victory won*
- 313 A.D.: Edict of Milan
 - o Constantine announces the toleration of Christianity within the Roman empire
- 325 A.D.: Council of Nicaea
- 380 A.D.: Christianity recognized as the official religion of the Roman Empire

- Reign of Constantine terminated most, if not essentially all, of the Christian objections to laity serving as soldiers in the Army
 - o Roman peace and Christian peace now support each other
 - o Change that abrupt raises the question of whether the earlier “pacifism” had been as widespread and profound as many believe

II. Ambrose: Bishop of Milan (338 A.D.-397 A.D.)

- First philosopher/theologian to consider Cicero’s theory just war in the context of Christianity
- Defense of the empire coincided with defense of the faith
- Peace as ultimate objective
- Conduct *within* war must also be just (*jus in bello*)
 - o Merciful treatment of the vanquished enemy
- The taking of human life could be a *conditional good* as opposed to an intrinsic evil
- Martial courage and the spirit of love are not mutually exclusive
 - o Moved beyond “no Christians in military” tendency of many earlier Church fathers, while still insisting on the precepts of the Gospel
- “Duty” element to war:
 - o *When is there a duty to fight?*
 - For the Christian to engage in violent action in defense of others is not only permissible, but sometimes *morally obligatory*.
 - o *When is there a duty to be a “pacifist”?*
 - Christian pacifism relegated to the private and to the clerical sphere
 - *Watch how Augustine picks this up*
 - Justice and defense against violent action does *not* extend to self-defense
 - “I do not think that a Christian, a just and wise man, ought to save his life by the death of another; just as when he meets with an armed robber he cannot return his blows, lest in defending his life he should stain his love toward his neighbor. The verdict on this is

plain and clear in the books of the Gospel. 'Put up thy sword, for every one that taketh the sword shall perish with the sword.'"

- Unlike many earlier Church fathers, Ambrose interprets such verses as referring exclusively to *personal* engagement in violence and *not* to violent actions in general (to include war)

AUGUSTINE (354 A.D.- 430 A.D.):

I. Overview

- Known as the "father of the just war theory:"
 - The whole Western just-war tradition traces its roots not to Plato or Aristotle, nor even to the earlier Church Fathers, but rather to Augustine
 - Profound impact on subsequent generations- even Aquinas, in developing just war, starts by quoting Augustine
 - Impact becomes evidence as one examines the similarities between Augustine's statements on just war and contemporary statements on the same or similar issues
- Did not address "just war" in one systematic volume
 - Rather his theory is scattered throughout his writings over a 40+ year period
 - Wrote on just war from 388 A.D.- the year after his baptism- to 429 A.D.- the year before his death
 - But his thoughts were systematic in nature; expanding on Plato and Cicero and fusing Christianity throughout
 - We see glimpses of that system in various writings, usually addressing a pragmatic concern (the vandals/barbarians, etc.)

II. Background:

- ***Barbarian Invasion***
 - Augustine confronted the concrete situation of the barbarian invasion
 - Africa on verge of invasion by the Vandals and Visigoths
 - Augustine himself died in Hippo (either from starvation or exposure) as the Vandals were tearing down the walls (and as he was chanting penitential psalms!)
- ***Comparison to Cicero's Background:***
 - Cicero lived in the day of Rome's expansion; Augustine in the day of its decline approaching collapse
 - Roman state ceased to exist in 476 A.D.- just 46 years after Augustine's death
 - Cicero lived in a Roman empire that was officially and ideologically pagan; Augustine lived in a Roman empire that was ostensibly Christian

III. Augustine's Philosophical/Theological Assumptions that Form his Just War Doctrine

A. View of Man

- View of man more somber than that of many of the earlier Church Fathers
 - o *Lack of optimism* about the inclination of man to strive to comprehend ultimate verities, live in an orderly manner, and find his way back to God
 - Pessimistic in his view of human nature and the ability and willingness of humans to maintain themselves in order
 - *Libido domini*- the lust for domination drives man to act
- Yet peace is what every man naturally seeks:
 - o City of God: As different as the cities of God and man are, they have in common a striving for peace (“the tranquility of order”)
 - o Thus man, “aping God,” always wages war as a means to securing peace.
 - o “If there is no man who does not wish to be joyful, neither is there any one who does not wish to have peace. For even they who make war desire nothing but victory—desire, that is to say, to attain peace with glory...Peace is the end sought for in war.” (City of God)
 - Augustine describes that even in the case of sedition, peace is sought; same for conspirators, robbers, even savage animals

B. Nature of Peace

- As Augustine had abandoned any belief of Christian perfection on earth, so he abandoned any belief of peace on earth
- Swords had never been beaten into plowshares and never would
 - o War is presently unavoidable and peace, in its perfect manifestation, is presently unattainable.
- “On our earthly pilgrimage we pant after peace, yet are involved in constant strife- with the pagan, with the heretic, with the bad Catholic, and even with the brother in the same household, [within ourselves as] the flesh lusts against the spirit.”
- “Peace will not come until this corruptible puts on incorruption, and then only for the redeemed...Perfect peace is reserved for heaven.”

C. The Role of the State

- Just war is possible; just state is not
 - o When justice is found it appears as a characteristic of individuals and not of states.
 - o Men can justly engage in just wars, but the states under whose banner they fight can never claim perfect justice.
 - o *City of God*: Owing to human foibles- the inherited result of Man's fall from grace incident to Adam's transgression- the commonwealth which Cicero describes (i.e., a group of people bound by one consent of law for the common

good, and in possession of true justice) cannot exist among human beings. It can only exist in the City of God.

- *But* if the empire be Christian, then a possibility exists of justice in the state
- Christian states, or states with Christian rulers, have the capacity to be *just* and to fight a just war.
- Thus, regarding Rome:
 - o The empire stood for order against barbarian chaos
 - o The empire was Christian
 - o The Church was able to give guidance
 - o Some semblance of justice might be realized
 - o Therefore, the empire was to be defended and Christians might fight

D. Role of The Soldier

- *Applying the Gospel Teachings:*
 - o Right and wrong reside not in acts, but in attitudes (Beatitudes as “the inward disposition of the heart (Letters))
 - Self-defense prohibited (per the teachings of Christ)
 - Defense of others and soldiering permitted
- *Duty to Obey:*
 - o “Since, therefore, a righteous man, serving it may be under an ungodly king, may do the duty belonging to his position in the State by fighting in the order of his sovereign- for in some cases it is plainly the will of God that he should fight, and in others, where this is not so plain, it may be an unrighteous command on the part of the king, while the soldier is innocent, b/c his position makes *obedience a duty*- how much more must the man be blameless who carries on war on the authority of God.” (Against Faustus)
 - o Soldier must obey at all costs- regardless of the order (!), the soldier in obeying remains innocent:
 - The responsibility for determining when the sword may be used rests with the competent authority
 - *Meaning of “put away thy sword”*
 - The common soldier must leave the decision to his lord and obey even an infidel emperor
 - *What are the consequences of a soldier carrying out this proposition?*
 - *Can we be consistent- claiming that a soldier doesn’t have the right to determine which war to fight, yet still claiming that a soldier has a moral duty to weigh the orders of his commander to determine if they are right? How?*
- *Partnership With Holy Men?*
 - o To Roman general Boniface, who wished to become a monk and cease commanding the Roman legions in Africa:

- “You must be exercised in patience in your *calling*. The monks will pray for you against your invisible enemies. You must fight for them against the barbarians, their visible foes.”

IV. Augustine’s Just War Theory

A. Overview

- The code of Plato and Cicero, with Christian additions
 - *What similarities with Plato and Cicero do we see in Augustine? What differences? What additions?*
- Love should be the motive in war
- Justice must lie on one side only
 - To Augustine it was simple- the cause of Rome was just, that of the barbarians (the invaders!) was unjust
 - Barbarians committed injuries to property, life and honor
 - Barbarians disrupted the order maintained by the empire
 - *What does this mean about the possibility of both sides fighting a just war at the same time?*
 - *What about the state that did not enter the war for just reasons- violated jus ad bellum- are they exempt from jus in bello?*
 - *If they employ jus in bello, how does that effect their jus ad bellum?*

B. Jus ad Bellum

1) Just Cause

Avenge Injuries:

- “Those wars may be defined as just which avenge injuries.”
 - *Just Cause: to vindicate justice*
 - **Question:** *But what sort of injuries?*
 - Recall that Cicero said that the state may defend its **safety and honor**.
 - Augustine points out that the two may conflict-those who preserve their honor at the expense of their national existence
 - Honor is preferred, but divine law permits self-defense to states.

Punish Evildoers

- The **State** Actor:
 - “The just war is the punishment imposed upon a state and upon its rulers when their behavior is so aggressive or avaricious that it violates even the norms of temporal justice.”
- The **Non-State** Actor:

- “As a rule, just wars are defined as those which avenge injuries, *if some nation or state against whom one is waging war has neglected to punish a wrong committed by its own citizens*, or to return something that was wrongfully taken.” (Questions on the Heptateuch)
 - Perhaps Augustine’s most interesting remarks regarding just war!
 - Augustine here declares a mandate of punishing evildoers if the evildoers’ own state neglects to do so
 - *Have we seen war waged in modern times waged under this criteria?*
 - *Does this criteria still belong within JW? Does it belong more than ever? What type of “wrongdoing” would mandate punishment?*
 - *What does this suggest about the state that harbors the bad guys? The state that merely tolerates the bad guys? The state that is to anemic to punish the bad guys, even if they want to do so?*

Duty Element:

- “It is the other side’s wrongdoing that compels the wise man to wage just wars.” (City of God)
 - *Suggestion of a duty element to the punishment of evildoers?*
 - *Does it make a difference whether the evildoer is a state or a group of individuals within the state? What is the difference? Why should it matter? Why not?*

2) Right Intention

- A war fought with the right intention is one that is “waged by the good in order that, by bringing under the yoke the unbridled lusts of men, those vices might be abolished which ought, under a just government, to be either extirpated or suppressed.” (City of God)
 - *The interior of the “just cause” exterior?*
- Christian love must be the disposition of a just war
 - “What is important to attend to but this: who were on the side of truth, and who were on the side of iniquity; who acted from a desire to injure, and who from a desire to correct what was amiss?” (Letter 93.8)
- Even if all the other conditions exist to merit a just war, a wrong intention can invalidate the pursuit
- As we saw with individual soldiers, so also with the sovereign in his intention:
 - Love is not incompatible with killing, because love and non-resistance are inward dispositions
 - Note that this is a much different interpretation than that of the earlier Church fathers
 - “If it is supposed that God could not enjoin warfare because in after times it was said by the Lord Jesus Christ, ‘I say unto you, Resist not evil...’ the answer is that what is here required is *not a bodily action, but an inward disposition*...Love of enemies does not exclude wars of mercy waged by the good.”
 - What might he mean by “wars of mercy”?

- The key is that the sovereign must not *delight* in killing- otherwise he does not have right intention

3) Competent Authority:

- No war is just unless undertaken by the state sovereign
- Human governments are ordained by God, thus only those in public authority may take life
 - The private citizen may not *defend himself* because he cannot do so without passion and a loss of love
 - I.e., *no self-defense! Only the state may take the life of another through war OR through defense of others*
 - *Defense of Others:*
 - “As to killing others to defend one’s own life I do not approve of this, unless one happen to be a *soldier* or a *public functionary* acting not for himself, but in *defense of others or of the city* in which he resides.”
- “It makes a difference for what reasons and under whose authority men undertake wars that are to be waged. The planning of it rests with the chief of state.” (Against Faustus)

4) Last Resort:

- “Preventing war through persuasion and seeking or attaining peace through peaceful means rather than through war are more glorious things than slaying men with the sword.” (Letter 229.2)
 - *For Augustine, what makes peace more glorious than war? A more theological response than Cicero on this subject, though both would agree to this statement.*
- “Beyond doubt it is greater felicity to have a good neighbor at peace, than to conquer a bad one by making war.” (City of God)
- *Marrying up of killing and love- killing as a positive good? A favor in some cases?*

5) Peace as the Ultimate Objective:

- A just war must be fought with the ultimate goal of securing the peace (even though, as we saw earlier, perfect peace in this work is not possible)
 - War should never be an end in itself
 - *Who have we heard say this before Augustine?*
- “Peace should be the object of your desire. War should be waged only as a necessity and waged only that through it God may deliver men from that necessity and preserve them in peace. For peace is not to be sought in order to kindle war, but war is to be waged in order to obtain peace. Therefore even in the course of war you should cherish the spirit of a peace maker...Even those who fight seek peace through blood.” (To Boniface)
 - *What other JW criteria do we see here? (right intention?)*

- *From City of God:*
 - o “Hence it is an established fact that peace is the desired end of war. For every man is in quest of peace, even in waging war, whereas no one is in quest of war when making peace.”
- “Just Peace”?
 - o What Augustine appears to have meant by “secure the peace” was “secure *just* peace.” There is a difference between “unjust” and “just” peace, in the same way that there is a difference between just and unjust war:
 - “Pride in its perversity apes God. It abhors equality with other men under Him; but, instead of His rule, it seeks to impose a rule of its own upon its equals. It abhors, that is to say, the *just peace* of God, and loves its own *unjust peace*.” (*City of God*)

C. *Jus in Bello*

- Thoughts in this arena are not as well-developed as his *jus ad bellum*, but nevertheless provides a base upon which later just war theorists would build
- For a war to be just, it must not only be entered into, but also fought in a just manner
 - o A “just manner” requires abiding by the doctrine of “military necessity.”
- “Let necessity, therefore, and not your will, slay the enemy who fights against you.” (Letter 189.6)
- Taking of lives (even enemy soldier lives!) must be minimized to the greatest extent possible:
 - o “For he whose aim is to kill is not careful how he wounds, but he whose aim it is to *cure* is cautious with his lancet; for the one seeks to destroy what is sound, the other that *which is decaying*.”
 - *How does this play out in battle? Can it? How does it effect targeting decisions, etc.?*
 - *What other criteria of just war do we see here? What do we learn about Augustine’s view of the state (particularly of Rome)? What does this remind you of from Scripture?*
- *Perfidy (Deception):*
 - o Remember that Cicero forbade perfidy-- Augustine does not!
 - **CICERO FORBIDS DECEPTIONS OF THE KIND THAT ARISE WHEN TRUCES, ETC., ARE USED IN A DISHONEST WAY**
 - **AUGUSTINE SHARES WITH CICERO THIS EMPHASIS ON INTENT AS IT APPLIES TO MAINTAINING GOOD FAITH WITH THE ENEMY—HOWEVER, AUGUSTINE IS WILLING TO ALLOW THE PROPRIETY OF DELIBERATELY DECEPTIVE PRACTICES IN A WAY THAT CICERO SEEMS TO REFUSE.**

V. Conclusion: Significance of Augustine

- Augustine's position contains to this day in all essentials the ethic of the Roman Catholic Church and the major Protestant bodies
- Augustine the Christian philosopher achieves a full synthesis of the Roman and Christian values associated with war in a way that recognizes war as a legitimate instrument of national policy which, although inferior to the perfect ideals of Christianity, is one which Christians cannot altogether avoid and with which they must in some sense make their peace.