

**David Fisher**

*Morality and War: Can War be Just in the Twenty-first Century?*

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David Fisher's *Morality and War: Can War be Just in the Twenty-first Century?* is a lucid and valuable contribution to the literature on just war. What sets it apart, moreover, is its sustained and impressive examination of how society, and especially its military personnel and government officials '... need moral *education* so that they know and understand the principles of morality in general and those relating to the conduct of war in particular' (131). In this regard, Fisher advocates what he terms 'virtuous consequentialism.' Such a 'framework for moral reasoning' (22) entails a moral education steeped in the virtues and the formation of practical wisdom while remaining attuned to both the intentions and the consequences of one's actions—what Fisher refers to as 'all facets of moral agency' (63). Hence, Fisher promotes a deeper role and acceptance of morality in the public realm. Such a role would refuse to cede substantial territory to any Machiavellian claims of *realpolitik*. Ethicists, moral philosophers, and theologians may be tempted to rest here and be grateful for morality's promotion in a field which often marginalises and silences it.

And yet, as I will note further below, recognising this role for morality is only the first step. If morality is to be substantially present in such political discussions, a more comprehensive and integrated approach is demanded. Such an approach includes, but goes far beyond, whether a military action may be just or unjust depending on any moral criteria. It calls for a radical reformulation and restructuring of standard military and political worldviews, aims, methods, and procedures. It would also demand an honest examination of the historical role one's country or the international community played leading to various conflicts.

Fisher's work examines the contemporary relevance of just war theory through the integrated categories of *jus ad bellum*, *jus in bello*, and *jus post bellum*. The book is divided into two parts: Morality (seven chapters) and War (five chapters). Fisher wants first to outline what is morality, why it is such a crucial component of just war theory (and society more broadly), and how in a plural, secular, and (at-times) relativistic culture, one should and can still argue for a more concrete, specified morality. In advocating virtuous consequentialism, Fisher contends that many consequentialists pay little heed to moral formation and intention, while many advocates of the moral virtues focus inordinately on one's intention with less diligence afforded to the consequences of one's actions. Fisher argues that his combined approach, linked with deeper moral training within all the levels of school education and within military academies, can be a crucial component in establishing a more just world for all.

Addressing our post 9/11 context, Fisher also examines (and justly) condemns the use and advocacy of torture. Additionally, he includes a helpful analysis of the morality of humanitarian intervention in its complex and still nebulous and unsatisfactory state (especially if a reader reflects on the differing responses of the West to Libya, Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, North

Korea, Sudan, Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and so on). Where pertinent, Fisher provides historical examples and case studies from the ancient world up to the present times to illustrate many of his key points. He writes well and, often, passionately. The book should certainly be on undergraduate and graduate course outlines examining peace studies and the question of just war. Two areas of concern, however, need to be addressed.

As a former senior official in the Ministry of Defence, Foreign Office and Cabinet Office, Fisher's practical and hands-on experience and roles are both assets and distracting liabilities. While Fisher provides few autobiographical details in the work, one key statement complicates his analysis of whether the Second Gulf War was a legitimately just one. Fisher writes: 'As the senior defence official within the UK Cabinet Office in 1997–9, I was responsible, among other duties, for coordinating government policy on Iraq, with access to all the intelligence material and the UN weapons inspectors' reports. I believed Saddam had retained some chemical and biological weapons. So why did I, along with all other senior officials and politicians, believe this?' (200).

Fisher maintains that 'all the experts' were in agreement on this issue, from the intelligence analysts and academic commentators all the way to Hans Blix. Yet, he later concedes '... it is not clear that the high evidential standards of the just war criteria [for the Second Gulf War] were met' (206). Because of the rigorous claims of morality espoused throughout the book, questions arise about Fisher's own role and advocacy in the eventual decision of the UK government to support the war in Iraq. While such material is usually more relevant to a political memoir, it becomes a matter of grave importance here. If Fisher opposed the war, then further details should have been brought to life, not to exonerate him, but as a valid witness to what often happens when morality collides with power; and if Fisher did support the war, then the reader (and Fisher) would have benefitted from a deeper analysis of how this decision was made and what was learned from this mistake. Fisher, after all, concludes that the Second Gulf War did not meet the just war requirements (220) and criticises 'political leaders' who lacked 'statesmanship' in the 2003 decision: yet he leaves his own culpability (if any) ambiguous at best.

More importantly, while Fisher's advocating of moral education (especially for service personnel and government officials involved in decisions about war) is a lofty and laudable aim, such a radical hope and plan calls for an equally radical program and approach. Salient questions include the following: what will this moral education consist of? And how will history and memory, especially alternative histories and the positions of the poor and marginalised, play in this historical analysis and focus? Feminist, liberationist, and postcolonial perspectives, for example, would seem to be deeply needed to nurture, form, and revise the dominant educational and cultural worldviews that have often silenced or disavowed women, the destitute, the indigenous, and all those unjustly discriminated against—with catastrophic results. How would the inclusion of these voices, and especially the comprehensive doctrines of the world's faiths, challenge the status quo? Would not such an education more likely deem most, if not all, wars unjust? Stopping the Nazis, for example, was needed and just, but questions still remain of when and how the Nazis came to power in the first place.

Before a nation even deliberates upon whether a war is just, its civilian population and military and political leaders should have supported, formulated, and practiced a governmental policy that systematically opposes the possibility of such a war from the outset. This means examining the role one's nation has played historically in the conflict; in the global arms trade; in the backing of morally questionable regimes, armies, or tribes because they (supposedly) are better than the alternative; and consistently speaking the language of human rights, and not turning a blind eye where such violations occur outside areas of geopolitical and economic priorities. Some say this is where backroom trading and games, in a word, politics, must be allowed room and where morality must step aside. Sometimes, it is said, one must support a dictator for the greater good or end or because to gain an important concession in one area (from a less than morally scrupulous UN Member) may entail sacrificing or curtailing one's ideal hopes or goals elsewhere. If so, then all talk of the general compatibility of private and public morality is ultimately meaningless. There are also unaddressed concerns that humanitarian aid or just war thinking are often tools and pawns of military and political policies, as Eyal Weizman argues in *The Least of All Possible Evils: Humanitarian Violence from Arendt to Gaza*.

Ultimately, I welcome David Fisher's brave and timely calling for deeper moral education not only within society, but in governmental offices and military schools and academies. But who is doing the teaching and what is being taught? Is the aim to make a better, more moral soldier or to make soldiers and wars irrelevant? Both are moral and just projects, but it is the latter one that should always be the primary aim. Substantial educational resources should be used to help make that utopian notion more of a reality. Otherwise, any talk of morality, for all one's intentions and sincerity, remains mere lip service, if not an abettor of the violence and suffering it seeks to quell.

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