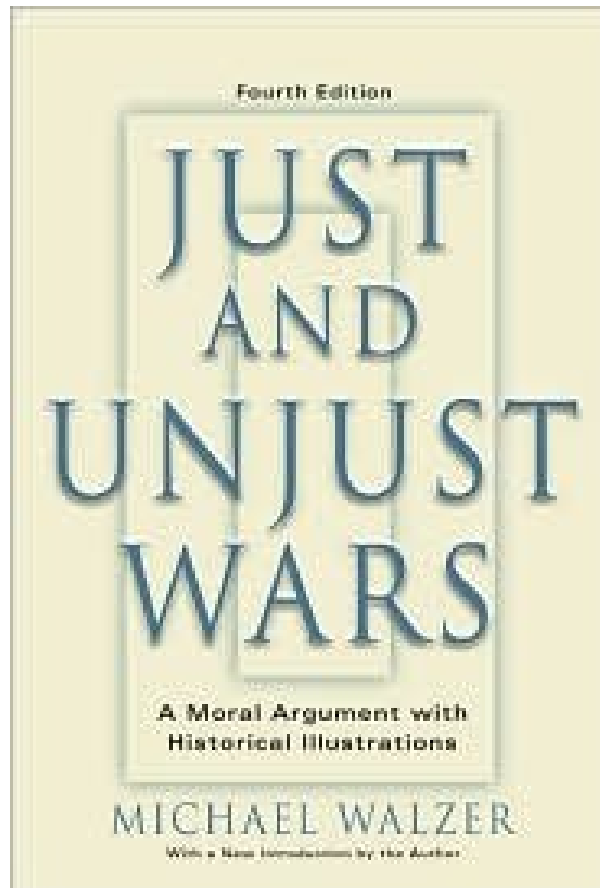
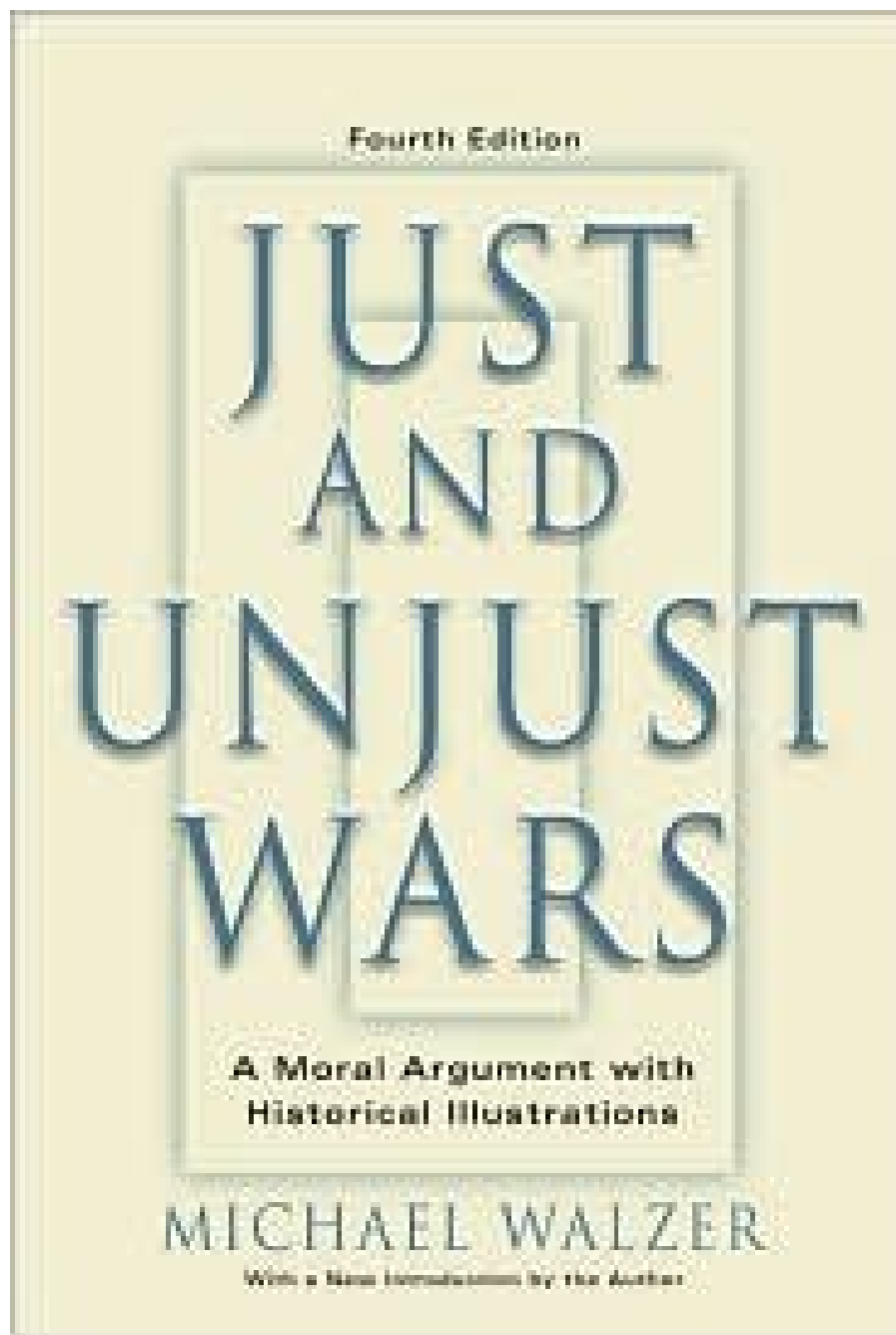


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- Sales Rank: #736280 in Books
- Published on: 2006
- Binding: Paperback

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The Morality of War.

By tvtv3

I haven't read a great amount of books on military history or books about the ethics of war. However, I would be willing to wager that Michael Walzer's Just and Unjust Wars is the penultimate book about the morality of war. War is hell. It is a very messy business and leaders of nations don't always think things through thoroughly when faced with the possibility of an armed conflict and many times they do not even have the option of thinking things thoroughly. But what exactly makes a war a just war? Why are some conflicts that appear very similar actually quite different, with one being just and the other unjust? Why does it seem that America's involvement in Vietnam was unjust, but if the outcome or circumstances had been slightly different it would have been a just war? What's the big deal about the U.S. involvement in Iraq and why is there even a controversy about it? Many times people don't think about questions like these and often when they do their responses are rather shallow and unjustified.

Walzer has spent a great deal of time thinking about these issues and thoroughly explains how and why some wars are just and why others are not. The limit of consent, the war convention, the doctrine of double effect, intention, the nature of necessity, nuclear deterrence, and other ideas are examined and discussed in this book and each idea that is presented is backed up with examples from history (usually at least two). Walzer is a scholar, but the book is written in such a way that an average reader who has a foundation in logical thinking can grasp what Walzer means. War, unfortunately, seems to be a part of life (not peace). Each generation is presented with its own set of problems and possible conflicts. Though we cannot always prevent these conflicts, we should have a decent understanding of the morality of the wars in which our countries are engaged. Just and Unjust Wars is a great place to start.

4 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

Fascinating and Thought-Provoking

By Catch22

If you've ever found yourself questioning not only the justification for war, but the method by which wars are fought, then don't hesitate to give this book a read. Walzer offers a very comprehensive just war theory that can, despite what other reviewers have stated, be understood with ease by those without experience in philosophical texts. While Walzer does incorporate some key philosophical principles (self-determination, utilitarianism, ends/means conflict, etc.), these can be grasped with minimal outside reference and reading. In

fact, the entire first chapter of the book can, for all intensive purposes, be largely ignored as it's concerned chiefly with establishing a reason for even considering a just war theory. As such, it simply argues against those realists who believe "all's fair in love and war" and that there's no room for a discussion of morality in war. Suffice to say, I believe that most people today would consider such an argument unnecessary. So, laymen shouldn't be discouraged when they begin by reading about the moral/political pragmatism of Hobbes and Thucydides -- just skip ahead to the second chapter if need be, as this is where the just war theory truly begins.

Essentially, Walzer divides his theory into two parts: (1) jus ad bellum (justice of war) and (2) jus in bello (justice in war). While the former pertains to the justification of waging war, the latter concerns justified conduct in war. Afterwards, Walzer offers a breadth of issues that may pose a dilemma for both his theory, and just war theory in general.

Among the topics covered by Walzer:

- the true crime of war (not just death and killing)
- war of aggression vs. war of self-defense
- rights of international states
- self-determination of political communities
- intervention & nonintervention policy
- wars of anticipation (preemptive vs. preventative)
- neutrality
- post-bellum punishment
- utility & proportionality in military action
- necessity of military actions
- rights of civilians & noncombatants in war
- emergency situations (does the end ever justify the means?)
- the morality of nuclear weapons
- responsibility of unjust acts (are soldiers responsible for following orders?)

While certainly not exhaustive, I believe the preceding list comprises the key issues Walzer discusses. In such discussions, he provides a wealth of historical examples to illustrate his principles - so that his just war theory also becomes a sort of history lesson in world affairs. Although readers are not going to find a clear, straight-forward answer to every question concerning warfare, I believe Walzer's work does provide, at the very least, a solid foundation for exploring any such question.

Some gripes w/ other reviewers:

Contrary to what another reviewer maintains, I don't believe Walzer focuses merely on Western conflicts. Both World Wars figure prominently in his book, and he includes a variety of events from just about every conceivable time and place. In fact, I'd say just the opposite is true - that Western conflicts play a minor role in his use of historical examples.

Some reviewers have pointed out the lack of attention Walzer gives to terrorism, or even the current Iraq war. First of all - pay attention to the copyright. Walzer first wrote this book in the 70's in response to the Vietnam War and it was last revised in 2000. Second, Walzer's treatment of terrorism is simple - terrorism kills indiscriminately, hence it's morally unjustified. His theory of jus in bello clearly argues against the killing of civilians and noncombatants unless such action is unavoidable in accomplishing a necessary military goal. Therefore, Islam offers no more relevance to any discussion of terrorism.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Great quality!

By Violet Victoria

I bought this book used, and I don't think a single page of it had ever been turned before. Great quality!

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