

# Introduction: Thinking Ethically about the Use of Force

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The articles gathered in this special section are the products of two years of discussion among the contributing authors, but also the result of an extended conversation between the authors and the wider community of scholars working on matters pertaining to the ethics of war. In June 2011, I wrote to the authors in question, inviting them to participate in a panel discussion on the theme of what I then called “The Just War Tradition and its Critics.” It was quickly agreed that we would gather at the following year’s International Studies Association (ISA) convention to reflect upon what we, as scholars of the just war tradition, have to learn from its critics. Our aim was to broker a meaningful conversation between (to borrow Professor James Turner Johnson’s phrase) “the friends and enemies of the just war tradition.” This, we hoped, would supplant the dialogue of the deaf that had hitherto defined relations between these two camps.

Rather predictably, the conversation took on a life of its own almost as soon as it began. The exchange of ideas that occurred in an ISA conference room in San Diego in April 2012 was not so much concerned with whether and how scholars of the just war tradition should listen to their external critics; instead, it focused on the arguably trickier question of whether and how scholars of the rival schools within the just war tradition should engage with one another. Our contributing authors evaluated the merits of competing approaches to the ethics of war, and offered their reflections upon the character of the shared enterprise that these various schools address. This gave rise to a lively debate about what it actually means to think ethically about the use of force, and what this vocation demands of us both as individual scholars and as a scholarly community. These are matters that speak directly to the readership of *Ethics & International Affairs*.

What does it mean to think ethically about the use of force? This beguilingly simple question is difficult to address. It challenges scholars to reflect upon the assumptions that underpin their craft, as well as the purposes that guide it. Perhaps more subtly, it also provokes scholars to think seriously about the disagreements that this question elicits between those who we might otherwise assume plough the same furrow. The four articles gathered here treat this question in a manner that reflects a very interesting thematic division. My article and those of James Turner Johnson and John Kelsay focus sharply upon what it means to *think ethically* about the use of force, while the co-authored contribution from Daniel Brunstetter and Megan Braun interrogates what we mean by *the use of force* in the first place.

Johnson argues that thinking ethically about war should be conceived of as a practical art, rather than a science. Countering the contemporary trend that presents just war thinking almost exclusively in terms of universal rules, he argues for a more expansive conception of ethics that accords with the Greek understanding of *areté*, or excellence achieved through practice. I pick up on and develop a theme suggested by Johnson, namely, the possibility that the greatest danger to the enduring vitality and coherence of the just war tradition emanates not from its critics but from its proponents. Focusing my analysis on the historical approach to the ethics of war, I ask whether this particular mode of inquiry still has merit despite the numerous critiques to which it has been subjected.

Kelsay, in turn, responds to some of my remarks regarding Michael Walzer's notion of the "triumph" of just war theory. He argues strongly against framing the debate about the utility (and purpose) of just war thinking in relation to its ubiquity. Instead, he proposes that we conceive of just war argument as a "social practice" that occupies a particular niche in policy debates about the use of force. In so doing, he offers a penetrating analysis of what thinking ethically about war requires. Brunstetter and Braun conclude the special section by directing our attention to the question of what we mean by the use of force in the first instance. They contend that the trend in modern warfare toward small-scale applications of force (exemplified by drone strikes and often known as *jus ad vim*, or acts short of war) is not amenable to moral evaluation via the familiar *jus ad bellum* categories. They proffer an original *jus ad vim* framework to meet this challenge.

Viewed together, these articles commend that, prior to engaging with its external critics, scholars of the just war tradition heed the divisions internal to their own field. The aim is not necessarily to heal these divisions, or soothe them

away, but merely to understand them and gain an appreciation of the issues that give rise to them. Such an understanding will better equip scholars to reflect upon their own relationship both to the academic field of the ethics of war and to the practice that animates and defines it—thinking ethically about the use of force.

Of course, the production of a special section such as this reflects the work of a wider pool of people than just the contributing authors. We are very grateful to Brent Steele, Jack Amoureux, Ronan O’Callaghan, Eric Grynviski, and Huw Williams for their sustained and stimulating engagement with this project. We are also very happy to thank the editors of this journal for their generous support and keen guidance throughout this process.