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Book Reviews

Helen Frowe. *The Ethics of War and Peace: An Introduction* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 244 pp. ISBN: 9780415492409 (pbk.). Hardback/Paperback: £70.00/17.99.

The past twenty or so years have witnessed an astonishing rise in philosophical interest in the ethical problems raised by war. However, despite an expanding body of literature, a notable lacuna to date has been the lack of a thorough introduction to the field. Of the available books dealing with just war theory in more generalist terms, many focus heavily on the historical development of the just war tradition or approach the topic from a legal or theological perspective.

Helen Frowe's *The Ethics of War and Peace* sets out to address this shortfall and wholly succeeds in its stated project of providing "an accessible, critical introduction to what is happening *now* in just war theory" (p. 3). Whilst occasionally drawing on historical and legal sources in order to illuminate its points, *The Ethics of War and Peace* focuses entirely on work in contemporary philosophical ethics, providing a comprehensive overview of the field and the key on-going debates. The prose is engaging, lucid and unshowy, rendering the book accessible to the non-specialist. However, this does not result in a lack of precision or a glossing-over of the difficult arguments. This book exhibits the greatest virtue of an introductory text by demonstrating just how rich and complex a subject can be, without leaving the reader feeling alienated or unqualified to critically comment. The use of colourful thought experiments to tease out subtle distinctions is particularly helpful in this regard.

The book is divided into ten succinct chapters, each dealing with a specific theme animating current discussion and concluding with a useful summary, suggestions for further reading, and questions for discussion. Whilst it is possible to read most of the chapters in isolation, the book is structured so as to guide the reader through the debates "from the ground up."

The first two chapters provide an introduction to more abstract issues in just war theory. Perhaps surprisingly for the uninitiated, Chapter 1 discusses recent philosophical work on the permissibility of killing with no explicit reference to war, focusing instead on the main theories of permissible self-defence amongst individuals. The relevance of this discussion to war is made clear in Chapter 2, where the different ways of understanding the application of these theories to the phenomenon of warfare are discussed, most importantly the debate between those who view the principles of morally justified warfare as merely analogous with those governing individual self-defence and those who argue that the rules of war are straightforwardly reducible to considerations of personal self-defence.

With this important background in place, the book then moves on to consider specific practical issues in just war theory. Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the conditions for the just initiation of war (*jus ad bellum*) and the difficult cases of humanitarian intervention, preventive war, and wars of punishment. Chapters 5 to 7 provide a rich and challenging discussion of the other main branch of just war thinking, concerned with the justice of conduct in war (*jus in bello*). The concluding chapters consider more contemporary issues for just war theory. Chapters 8 and 9 provide a systematic and level-headed discussion of terrorism, both in terms of its definition and moral status. The permissibility of torturing terrorists is also considered. The final chapter, appropriately, discusses the ethical problems surrounding the termination and aftermath of war.

Rather than provide a detailed overview of each chapter I will instead simply note that they are uniformly excellent and should be required reading on any university course on the subject and indeed for anyone with an interest in thinking clearly and deeply about war and violence. The reason for this brevity is that I want to draw attention to the overarching merit of *The Ethics of War and Peace*, which lies in its combination of clarity and sympathetic presentation with a healthy dose of audacity and provocation. Whilst many introductions would be content with merely setting out the philosophical orthodoxies and drawing attention to difficult cases of application, Frowe's work starts from the assumption that the standard tenets of thinking about morality and war must earn their philosophical keep. This motivation underpins the central contribution of the book, which is to illustrate the ways in which the orthodox view within just war theory, as influentially defended by Michael Walzer, has been powerfully challenged in recent scholarship. A major theme running throughout *The Ethics of War and Peace* is that even the most common ideas about war, such as that it is possible for soldiers to fight justly even in an unjust war, or that civilians are never legitimate targets in war, or that terrorism and torture are never permissible, are surprisingly difficult to square with our moral beliefs about killing and harming in circumstances other than war and that this should give us cause for concern. Throughout this work Frowe poses the deep and enduring questions of how the relationship between war and peace is to be conceived and to what the extent moral reflection on the latter can illuminate the former. As Frowe explains, the question of how the apparent inconsistencies between these two spheres are to be understood and resolved is one of the most interesting and pressing issues in contemporary just war theory, with deep implications for our actual practices concerning life and death in war. This book should leave the reader feeling both informed and challenged.

Whilst primarily offering a thorough introduction for the newcomer, *The Ethics of War and Peace* also provides stimulation for those who are more well-versed in just war theory, as Frowe often criticises and refines the views she sets out and offers some novel responses to several well-known objections. Frowe's contribution to the "just or justified combatants" debate and her criticisms of Lionel McPherson's analysis of the wrongfulness of terrorism are particularly worth reading. It is testament to the level of original content in the book that I am able to conclude by offering the following quibble with one of Frowe's proposals.

In her discussion of the “individualist” approach to just war theory, Frowe offers an interesting defence of this view against a persistent objection raised by David Rodin. As Frowe explains, individualists take the view that the moral principles governing war are wholly derivable from reflection on the moral principles governing the use of force between individuals, primarily through considerations of permissible self-defence. Rodin argues that the justice of war cannot be reduced to the principles governing individual self-defence because these principles are actually far more restrictive than any plausible account of permissible defensive war could allow. In particular, Rodin points out that there is a requirement of *retreat* built into accounts of self-defence, which holds that if an attack can be avoided without bloodshed, for example by running away, then employing lethal defensive force is impermissible. Applying this constraint to war, argues Rodin, would require that nations appease rather than confront aggression whenever doing so will avoid bloodshed. Since most of us find this implausible, we ought to reject individualism.

Frowe’s novel counter to this objection holds that while self-defence does require retreat under certain conditions, these conditions hardly ever arise in cases of national-defence. Frowe points out that retreat is only required in self-defence cases when the costs of doing so are not great. When retreat involves substantial costs, a potential victim is not required to bear them in order to avoid defensively harming their attacker. Moreover, in contrast to retreating in cases of personal attack, a nation’s appeasement of aggression seems to necessarily involve incurring large costs, even if it does avoid bloodshed. Given these huge political and economic burdens, argues Frowe, a nation is not required to appease aggression. The self-defence requirement of retreat does not translate into the requirement of appeasement when applied to war.

This is a good response, indicative of the precision of the work as a whole. Frowe is certainly correct to draw the distinction between costless retreat and appeasement and to point out that “serious harm is not limited to the loss of life or limb” (p. 39). But I am not sure that this fully meets the objection. Whilst it is certainly true that the *nation* will suffer serious harm through appeasement, it is less clear that any *individuals* would necessarily suffer harms of sufficient seriousness to justify defensive killing. It is this latter claim that needs to be demonstrated if Rodin’s objection to individualism is to be rebutted, since individualism holds that “What a state may do to protect itself is just an extension of what individuals may do to protect themselves” (p. 34). However, it is not obvious that the political and economic harms suffered by an appeasing nation would necessarily “trickle down” to such an extent that its individual citizens would suffer any concrete harms comparable to those which usually constitute grounds for the use of lethal self-defensive force, such as death, rape, enslavement or torture. It is particularly unclear in the example employed by Frowe, in which one liberal democracy annexes a portion of the territory of another, whether appeasing this aggression would impose any obvious welfare costs on individuals which would exceed that which they would be required to bear in order to avoid large-scale killing and maiming.

So, whilst certainly pointing in the right direction I am not sure that this response fully meets Rodin's objection. Whilst a tad unfair as a criticism of a work of this scope and length, Frowe's defence of individualism might have been bolstered by a discussion of how the theory can accommodate the protection of certain *political* rights under the rubric of personal self-defence. If it can be argued that a nation's right to self-determination and political independence is explicable in terms of specific individual rights and that these rights are of comparable importance to the rights to life and limb, then this might explain why appeasement is not required even in cases where appeasement would not seem to entail any obvious burdens in terms of resources.

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