

## ARGUING ABOUT WAR

Michael Walzer, Yale University Press, 2004, 208 pp, \$49.95 hardcover.

In 1977 Michael Walzer published *Just and Unjust Wars*, his classic modern elaboration of Just War Theory. His new book brings his discussion of modern warfare up to the US invasion and occupation of Iraq. It is not a single systematic work, but a collection of essays written between 1988 and 2003. The essays are divided into three sections, the first dealing with general issues such as terrorism and military intervention, the second with particular wars and conflicts, from Kosovo to Iraq, and the third with possible future global political arrangements. After reflecting on such relatively recent atrocities as ethnic cleansing in Kosovo and genocide in Rwanda, Walzer says that he has become more willing than he was in the 1970s to 'call for military intervention'.

The Just War tradition contains Western civilisation's most well considered deliberations on war and morality. It is neither pacifist (no war is morally justified) nor amoralist (anything goes in war). Rather, it holds that some wars are on-balance morally justified, in both arms and conduct, even though not everything that occurs in Just Wars can be morally justified. The modern version of Just War Theory has two sides — *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*. The former concerns just causes or arms of war, the latter just conduct in war. In the broadest terms, *jus ad bellum* stipulates that a Just War must be a last resort, undertaken by a proper authority, and aimed at restoring existing elements of peace and justice that have been aggressively or tyrannically disturbed. The most important *jus in bello* principle is the prohibition of direct attack on civilians. To this structure, Walzer in this work adds a third dimension — *jus post bellum*, concerned with justice in the aftermath of a war, such as the ongoing US occupation of Iraq. Speaking of the Bush administration lavishing profitable Iraq reconstruction projects on well connected US companies, he says, tellingly 'a just occupation costs money; it doesn't make money'.

In the second section of the book, Walzer evaluates in Just War terms some of the more recent armed conflicts around the globe. He assesses as on-balance just the Gulf War that freed Kuwait from Iraqi occupation, the NATO action to stop Serbian ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, and the post 9/11 war against the terrorist-sheltering Taliban regime in Afghanistan. He declares that military intervention to stop genocidal massacre in Rwanda would have been justified (as were in fact the interventions to stop slaughter and repression of Vietnam in Cambodia, India in East Pakistan, and Tanzania in Uganda). On Israel/Palestine, he says there are four wars going on simultaneously, two of them just and two unjust. The two Just Wars are the war to establish an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel, ending the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, and Israel's war for security within its 1967 borders. The two unjust wars are the war of (some) Palestinians to destroy the state of Israel, and war of (some) Israelis for a Greater Israel that rules and settles the occupied territories. Moving onto the most recent major war, the US-led invasion of Iraq, he finds it unjust. While he acknowledges that Saddam's regime was a real threat to its neighbours and world peace, he argues that the containment and inspection policies pursued in the preceding years were working and could have been made to work better; there were viable alternatives to war. Bush's notion of preventive war was not in the circumstances a moral option.

However, all the wars that America and its allies have been involved in over the last thirty years, whether just or unjust, have exhibited a troubling new moral trend — a moral inequality. The military technologies available to the Western powers — especially 'smart' missiles and bombs — enable their forces to kill people and destroy targets without risking the lives of their own soldiers and airmen. But, says Walzer, the hard truth is, 'you can't kill people unless you are prepared to die'. He means that justice in war requires our side to accept risks in order to provide the highest reasonable level of protection for civilians on the other side. We should not, for instance, drop 'smart' bombs from such

risk-free high altitudes that they become 'dumb' enough to kill (accidentally?) children in farmhouses below. And we should not place civilians at greater risk by bombing military and infrastructural targets in cities rather than risking soldiers' lives on the ground. For this reason amongst others, even recent Just Wars (such as the war over Kosovo) have involved atrocities and war crimes on the part of the on-balance just side.

All in all, I find Walzer's arguments convincing. It is an important and timely collection of work.

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