Is War Amoral?

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Abstract
War is described as the most dreadful, destructive and horrific form of human interaction which permits people to kill each other, in large numbers, causing massive human suffering. Some scholars believe this type of interaction is morally bad and should be completely avoided, while others agree it is permissible in certain circumstances. Another category of scholars insist that concepts of good or bad and right or wrong cannot be applied to war and are 'literally inapplicable to the realm of foreign affairs' (Orend, 2000:130) where state survival is concerned because the political and the moral are completely different spheres of thought that do not overlap. These categories of scholars are the realists, although not all realists deny the presence of ethics in international affairs (Korab-Karpowicz, 2013). The idea that war has its own rules and is beyond the purview of ordinary morality, that applies to private individuals, is not new and not without valid reasons. However, if killing is 'normally' wrong, and war involves killing, then as Weigel (2008) observes, war is a human phenomenon involving human decisions, choices and actions that take place within the realm of morality and so cannot be above moral judgment. This article adopts David Fishers' Virtuous Consequentialism as a theoretical framework and argues that it is human beings, whether combatants or statesmen, that take decisions about war and for this reason, the nature of morality, the nature of war and the nature of the international system put war within the purview of moral judgment.

Key Words: Morality, War, Peace, International System, State

Introduction
War, as Creveld (2011) rightly explains has two distinct meanings – the Clausewitzian meaning and war as a legal condition. In the former, war is divorced from ethical or normative structures and defined as organized violence to achieve political ends; while in the later, war is defined as the permissible limits of organized violence, where ethics and legality cannot be separated from strategy and the conduct of war (Metz and Cuccia, 2011:2). Although the Clausewitzian notion of war, however, is the perception held by most military and strategic communities (Metz and Cuccia, 2011:2), the ethics of war and peace have been the source of debate since the beginning of human history not just in contemporary times (Orend, 2013:9). War is described as the most dreadful, destructive and horrific form of human interaction which permits people to kill each other, in large numbers, causing massive human suffering. Some scholars believe this type of interaction is morally bad and should be completely avoided, while others agree it is permissible in certain circumstances. Another category of scholars insist that concepts of good or bad and right or wrong cannot be applied to war and are 'literally inapplicable to the realm of foreign affairs' (Orend, 2000:130) where state survival is concerned because the political and the moral are completely different spheres of thought that do not overlap. These categories of scholars are the realists, although not all realists deny the presence of ethics in international affairs (Korab-Karpowicz, 2013)

and argue that war is an amoral activity that states engage in; and which is beyond the scope of moral evaluation (Nathanson, 1993:138-139). Most realist or realpolitik scholars argue that just like natural disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis, tidal waves and hurricanes happen, war, like these disasters, cannot be judged from a moral perspective. Realists are split in terms of the role of morality in issues of war and international relations as a whole. While some realists deny morality any relevance to war, others allow morality a place before and after the war but deny its relevance during the war itself (Fisher, 2011:11). However, scholars like Jeff Shaw rightly point out that, "there is a morality associated with war that runs much deeper than the simple considerations of national interest or strategic prerogative" (Shaw, 2015:1). In line with this, Fisher (2012:131) elaborately discusses the morality of war in the 21ˢᵗ century arguing that society, military personnel and government officials need moral education to understand and comprehend the general principles of morality and particularly morality in relation to the conduct of war. The idea that war has its own rules and is beyond the purview of ordinary morality, that applies to private individuals, is not new and not without valid reasons. However, if killing fellow human beings is 'normally' wrong, and war involves killing, then as Weigel (2008) rightly observes, war is a human phenomenon involving human decisions, choices and actions that take place within the realm of morality and so cannot be above moral judgment. This article argues that it is human beings, whether combatants or statesmen, that take decisions about war and for this reason, the nature of morality, the nature of war and the nature of the international system put war, not outside, but within the purview of moral judgment.

The morality of war can be viewed from three ethical view-points: Deontological, Utilitarianism and Relativism. From the deontological perspective, war is an obligation or duty to ones country for military members and as such it is morally permissible (Orend, 2007:471). It is seen as simply following orders from superiors. However, this is not an excuse for military personnel to commit crimes against humanity (Bachmann, 2011:202). Deontology is the normative ethical position that judge's morality of an action based on its adherence to stipulated rules as such ethical rules bind people to their duties. It argues that what makes a choice or action right is its conformity with moral norms which are simply to be obeyed (Alexander and Moore, 2012:4). Associated with the Kantian philosophy, deontology is any approach to morality that understands good actions to be those adhering to an unwavering set of rules (Alexander and Moore, 2012:5) The deontological view is criticized on the grounds that it is just covered in popular morality and that objective and unchanging principles are only a matter of subjective opinion. From the perspective of utilitarianism, actions taken during warfare are determined by their consequences (Conway and Gawronski, 2013:216). Built on the principles of Jeremy Bentham (1781:14), it argues that the right action or policy is one which would cause the greatest happiness of the greatest number. So, it is morally right for a state to wage war if and only if no other course of action available to it has greater expected well-being, otherwise waging war is wrong (Shaw, 2016:47). In other words, 'military necessity admits of all direct destruction of life or limb of armed enemies and of other persons whose destruction is incidentally unavoidable in the armed contests of war' (Ohlin et al, 2017:61). Here actions taken to weaken and defeat the enemy are acceptable regardless of whether civilians or non-combatants are affected in the process. Utilitarianism is consequentialist, egalitarian and welfarist because it takes everyone's interest into account (Shaw, 2016:23). It has been criticized for its 'end justifies the means' mentality. From the perspective of relativism, moral concepts have meaning only within a given cultural framework as such there can be no one correct rational morality or a set of values for all societies (Grcic, 2013:416). Morality is a social construct and so in principle, any moral system is possible in any society (Grcic, 2013:416). From this

perspective, war is right or wrong based on what each culture or society deems it to be (Levy, 2003:165). It is considered a way of life for certain cultures, like Africa, for instance. While this perspective argues that no single true morality as something can be right to one and wrong to the other depending on their frame of reference (Magni, 2017:13), some scholars agree that there are some similarities in moral virtues among stable cultures (Grcic, 2013:416).

Methodology
This paper adopts a simple discursive methodology to present arguments against the idea that war is outside the purview of morality. While reference is made to theorists like Michael Walzer and Orend Brian, we still just focus on discussing those simple reasons why war must be subject to moral judgment. The argument is organized under three themes, the nature of morality, the nature of war and the nature of the international system. Existing literature, from journal articles, books, conference papers and authentic online sources, have been consulted extensively to provide a basis for the arguments raised within those themes. The article adopts Fishers theory of Virtuous Consequentialism as a theoretical framework for analysis.

Theoretical Framework for Analysis
The theoretical framework adopted for this article is the Fisher's virtuous consequentialism. Consequentialism is a view that normative properties depend only on consequences (Fisher, 2011). Virtuous consequentialism tends to provide perspective of the nature of moral reasoning as it shows how complex and difficult our moral lives are (Fisher, 2011:134). Virtuous consequentialism gives weight to the principles that guide human actions and the virtues required to practice those principles in everyday life. Fisher (2011:134) argues that virtuous consequentialism can adequately account for moral reasoning in both public and private realms and as such argues that morality extends from private to public spheres of life (Fisher, 2011:134). Although critics will argue that because consequentialism itself disagrees about what consequences matter, and as such, is not a convincing argument for a debate on the morality of war, it is suitable for this article because of its position that if morality applies at all, it applies to all our actions including those ones before, during and after war (Fisher, 2011:11).

Arguments against the 'Amorality' of War
i.   The Nature of Morality
Morality, like many other concepts, is highly contested, and its interpretation is said to be subjective (Zimmerman, 2006). However, there is a basic acceptance that morality is an ethical system through which we determine moral values, right and wrong conduct, what moral obligations we have towards others, when we should be held morally responsible and what is good or bad action (Lutzer, 1990). Within this ethical system, what makes an action right or wrong is determined by the culture and history of a people inferred from a mixture of social rules and customs of society either agreed upon or enforced by some law, some form of authority or even rational or common sense rules (Whitworth, 1995). Although it is relative in the sense that it is possible that what is right in one place is considered wrong in another place, every culture understands the horrors associated with war (though some wars are bloodless and the horrors indeed absent) and has felt the need to justify in moral or religious terms the taking of human life (Cook, 2004:215). War may be hell, evil and outrageous but it always assigned a meaning within the structural and cultural framework of these societies. For a long time the Iroquois wars were described as simply irrational and barbaric given the cruel character of the Iroquois nations. However, Richter (1983:528) has

since shown that warfare had a huge cultural significance for the17th Century Iroquois and their neighbors. They had a reason and a way of doing it. People assign meanings of cruelty, justice, right and wrong and although these meanings may differ among cultures and even change with time within cultures, they are still very present and fairly uniform enough to make moral judgment possible (Walzer, 1977:20). They are also enough to make us question our purpose and conduct in and after war. Early records of collective fighting reveal that some moral considerations the treatment of women, children, non combatants and prisoners have been used by warriors in different cultures and at different times to limit the outbreak of war or reduce the potential consequences of warfare (Moseley, 2009:2). Notions of honor in warfare are also common in early history of warfare and many analysts have described codes of honor as the 'most powerful force preventing excess on the battlefield' (Robinson, 2006:6). Again while their interpretation as Robinson (2006) observes differ with time and place, these notions are enough to tell us that warfare has been infused with some moral concerns from the beginning rather than being a mere 'Macbethian bloodbath' (Moseley, 2009:2). The argument that the principle of force exists in a realm of its own with its own separate laws as distinct from rules of ethics relating to individuals ignores the reality that though war is characterized by chaos and uncertainty, people are responsible for decisions to use or refrain from using force in certain ways guided by the opinions they hold. As Walzer (2006:15) rightly argues, the moral reality of war is not fixed by the actual activity of the combatants, which gives the impression of anarchy and chaos, but by the opinions of people. So this moral world of war is shared, not because we have a universal view about what is right and wrong or just and unjust but because the process through which we reach our moral judgments are common (Wolfers, 1962:51) and we acknowledge, in Walzers' terms (2006: xxiii) the same difficulties on our way to our conclusions, face the same problems and use the same language. If the military serves the interest of society, and society is governed by ethics then the military needs to operate ethically and accountably within the realm of right and wrong (Fisher, 2011).

ii. The Nature of War

War is said to be a 'world apart where necessity and self interest prevail' (Walzer, 1997:3). However, 'necessity' itself is a judgment, a choice that has to be made from other alternatives, by considering that the said action is the best and necessary one chosen in defense of a particular states interest. Again 'self-interest' like necessity, involves a choice among other values that have been considered deserving of defense in this case 'state survival'. War, as Clausewitz (1976) opines, is a 'rational instrument of national policy'. This means that it is not irrational in the sense of being used arbitrarily but must be based on well thought out estimates of the cost and benefit of war, weighing the aims of the war with the means and the expected benefits. It is instrumental, in that it is not war for war sake but for a set goal, a 'well-defined purpose' (Summers, 1984:135). It is national, because its objective must be to defend or further the interest of the state not personal interests. Many analysts use Clausewitz analysis of war to justify their position about why war is above moral considerations but if we take this perspective of the rational instrumental and national dimensions of war we quickly see that it is subject to moral judgment meaning that if it does not serve a national purpose, or if the costs outweigh the benefits then it should be abandoned. These are moral considerations! It acknowledges that it would be immoral to commit material resources and deploy soldiers to die for a cause that is unachievable or does not serve a national purpose. War is a political instrument and the degree of effort to be made should be appropriate to the objective to be reached (Summers, 1984). The purpose of war, if nothing else, gives it its ethical content. Again, the need to take specific and appropriate courses of action requires planning in order to match the peculiar nature of the

means of war to its ends. This involves strategy, a word that suggests justification (Walzer, 2006:13). This question of strategy features prominently in the decision making process. Governments decide what type of war is to be fought and how it should be fought. So war depends on government policy that is driven by specific ethical considerations namely the military force available and the political aims sought. War is not separate from politics, but in Clausewitz's words, it is a continuation of political intercourse carried on with other means (Fleming, 2004). Although some will argue that war is characterized by disorder and that the very idea of strategy is problematic given that war will always meet with 'friction' where plans go wrong and expectations do not always match activities in the field (Bay, 2005) yet plans are made anyway with the full awareness of possible friction using combat experience that contributes to and influences future strategies and rules of engagement governing conduct in war. For instance, despite the chaos and disorder, it is a rule that civilians are not to be targeted and killed. It is true that states violate this but the fact that they lie or try to justify why they killed civilians at all shows they acknowledge that it is morally wrong to do so. Clausewitz (1976) acknowledges that every age has its own kind of warfare, its own limiting conditions and its own peculiar conceptions and the type of weapons to be used often involves ethical considerations. So the character and conduct of war may change but this does not alter its nature because it is people that fight and get killed in wars not just inanimate objects and no matter how chaotic war becomes or the tactics employed, people are still involved in the planning and execution of even the use of drones and as long as this remains the case, war cannot be isolated from moral life (Walzer, 2006:64). Nuclear weapons have security, political and economic implications but the issue of whether or not to use them has remained a moral question of right/wrong and good/evil from the perspective of ordinary morality simply because the impact is on 'innocent' civilian noncombatants (Wilson, 2013:319). The reason for war, its conduct, choice of weapons, strategies and tactics employed, are decisions that are governed by reason and while the choices we make are influenced by maximizing gains and minimizing loses they are still determined by the right way or wrong way to achieve them.

iii.   The Nature of the International System

Many philosophers struggle with the problem of how to extend morality from the private realm into the international sphere, as Leinmiller (2012:175) points out, but scholars like Fisher (2012) argues rightly that the problem is only a question about difference in degree not in principle. The nature of the international system has significance for moral decision-making. War is often described as an inescapable feature of the international system (Donnelly, 2000) and is always an option for states. But while some realists will perceive this environment as one of anarchy because there is no overarching authority, as we have in the domestic sphere, it is important to observe that this anarchy is not synonymous with chaos. The international system presents opportunities for cooperation rather than competition alone and there is a community of interests sufficient to remove fear and develop friendships even if only temporary ones (Wolfers, 1962:54). The United Nations, International Criminal Court (ICC), regional institutions like the European Union, African Union, ASEAN, along with treaties and conventions exist because states are trying to set limits on the use of force through different avenues of cooperation, compromise and conciliation. They are establishing principles to regulate their behavior and even though there appears to be a high degree of non-compliance, the fact that they are doing these shows that it is not utter chaos out there. Certain moral rules of conduct, constrain the choices of statesmen, especially when it comes to human life in wartime and more so in peacetime. While in the middle ages, belligerents could kill or torture all enemies regardless of whether or not they were soldiers or combatants, in the modern state system there are fundamental moral and legal principles

governing the actions of belligerents (Morgenthau, 1948:80). Today we have the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 regarding the Laws and Customs of war governing the conduct of war; the Geneva Conventions relative to the treatment of Prisoners of War which establishes the standards of international law and humanitarian treatment of war. With more international support and cooperation, institutions like the ICC will deter war crimes by bringing perpetrators to justice. The challenges faced by states regarding limitations of international law and collective security organizations like the United Nations', are a sign, not of the inapplicability of moral judgment, but the reality of morality in state relations. In recent years states have resorted to the invocation of rights of self-defense to justify the use of force against rogue states, failed states, states supporting terrorism, and humanitarian intervention by states showing that states are compelled to define their actions in moral terms (Helmke, 2010:69) especially where legal arguments are limited. The 2003 war in Iraq, for instance, was preceded by detailed justification stating that the Gulf War was a 'noble cause'; the humanitarian intervention in Rwanda was a move to do the 'right thing' and the use of force in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq were said to be for 'just causes' (Welsh, 2004). Sometimes states lie about their intentions but only because they know they feel compelled to justify their actions, for it is simply wrong to kill for no reason. While some argue that ordinary morality is not a standard that should be applied to politics (Machievelli, 1961), empirical evidence shows that moral pressures still influence state behavior. Whether this morality is invoked for selfish aims, as some would argue, it is invoked primarily because it is expected that war should be for a purpose thus putting pressure on states to justify their decisions. The international system may have no overarching authority and states may often behave in a self interested manner but like Teson (2004:90) rightly argues, international relations are regulated, apparently we do not have the right institutions yet, but in a regulated state of nature we can make moral distinctions between justified and unjustified violence (Locke, 1963) even about war.

Conclusion

The argument that we cannot speak meaningfully of state behavior in terms of moral concepts and judgments but only in terms of security, power and national interest is not totally plausible. Neither the decision to go to war nor the conduct of the war can escape moral judgment. War is not unlimited in aims and means. It is an instrument of policy that gives it its ethical content. If it does not have a purpose then it would be impossible for ethical considerations to play a role in moderating the use of force. The argument that state survival will justify any course of action because politics is a zero-sum game and only about competition and possible expansionism is not sufficient reason to put war above moral judgment given that other interests requiring cooperation exist. The destructive power of war seems to place it beyond our moral world as if it lies beyond the scope of every day moral problem solving but whether it is right or wrong to kill, and in what circumstances is within our moral realm and since war involves killing, even though on a massive scale, it is safe to argue that it is not beyond the realm of morality. The use of force rightly distinguishes war from other instruments of policy but does not put it above ethical considerations, as policy continues to guide the war even after hostilities begin and the situation escalates.

Finally, although there is no overarching authority to enforce compliance and punish violations, there are rules and regulations that regulate state behavior, even if in an imperfect way, and states cover up violations only because they know they have acted wrongly. War is not beyond the realm of moral judgment. War is not amoral.

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