

Normative Justification and Moral Responsibility in The Context of War: A Comparative Study of Augustine And Levinas

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Abstract:

War has remained an enduring feature of human civilization, presenting one of the most complex ethical dilemmas confronting humanity. Despite significant developments in political institutions and international law, the justification and moral responsibility of warfare continue to evoke philosophical debate. This study investigates the normative justification and moral accountability of war through a comparative analysis of Saint Augustine's Just War Theory and Emmanuel Levinas's Ethics of the Face of the Other. The central research problem concerns the unresolved tension between the *ethical legitimacy of war* and the *moral responsibility toward the Other*. The study asks: (1) How does Augustine provide a systematic moral framework for the justification of warfare? (2) In what ways does Levinas's ethical philosophy challenge this justification? and (3) Can their concepts of justice and responsibility be integrated to form a coherent ethical approach to war in the modern world? Adopting a qualitative, analytical, and comparative philosophical methodology, the research critically analyze the primary concepts of Augustine and Levinas, supported by contemporary commentaries. Findings reveal that while Augustine moralizes warfare under conditions of justice and right intention, Levinas rejects all forms of violence as violations of ethical being. Yet, their dialogue suggests a possible synthesis where *justice is continually governed by responsibility*. The study concludes that an ethically informed political philosophy must integrate Augustinian criteria of justice with Levinasian responsibility, offering a framework for rethinking the ethics of war and peace in the contemporary global order.

Keywords: Just War, Saint Augustine, Emmanuel Levinas, Face of the Other.

Introduction

Throughout the history of humankind, war has remained a pervasive and recurrent phenomenon across all regions of the world. The motives behind warfare, the methods employed, and the consequences it produces have evolved significantly over time, acquiring increasingly complex and multifaceted dimensions. Originating in the prehistoric struggles of early humans, this global tendency continues to persist as a destructive and integral feature of modern civilization, despite the remarkable progress achieved in international law, human rights, and diplomatic practices. The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have witnessed unprecedented advancements in technology and political organization. Yet, the succession of global conflicts—from the World Wars and the Cold War to the ongoing crises between Ukraine and Russia, and Israel and Palestine—demonstrates the continuing inevitability of war in human affairs. Across all eras and regions, the onset of war reduces human nature to its most primal form, governed by the instincts of survival and self-preservation. These impulses become the driving forces behind human action, overshadowing higher moral ideals and the cooperative ethos of social life (Walzer, 2006: 3). In the aftermath of war and the devastation it brings, efforts are often undertaken to restore order and rebuild what has been destroyed. Humanitarian groups, international organizations, and peace treaties emerge as responses to mitigate the suffering caused by conflict. Yet, amid these recurring crises, profound ethical questions arise: On what grounds do morally guide human beings—shaped by religious and ethical teachings—become driven to wage war? Can war ever be morally justified? Is it truly a necessary phenomenon, or does it stand as an expression of humanity's collective moral and political failure? These enduring questions continue to challenge the very foundations of ethical reasoning and human responsibility in the face of violence.

Ethical considerations concerning war can be approached metaphysically on two distinct levels. The first is rooted in the medieval tradition of *Just War Theory*, systematized by Saint Augustine, which evaluates the moral legitimacy of war based on criteria such as just cause, lawful authority, and proportionality. This framework seeks to determine under what conditions warfare may be deemed ethically permissible. The second approach, articulated by the existential phenomenologist Emmanuel Levinas, advances an ethics founded on the inescapable responsibility toward the *Other*. Levinas's moral standpoint, emphasizing the primacy of human life and relational responsibility, categorically rejects the very legitimacy of war, viewing it as a fundamental negation of ethical being. In an era marked by asymmetric warfare, terrorism, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the need for careful ethical reflection on the methods employed in conflict resolution has become increasingly urgent. Moreover, ethical inquiry into war is no longer confined to the sphere of academic scholarship; it holds vital practical relevance for policymakers, military

leaders, and all those engaged in shaping or responding to the dynamics of modern warfare.

This research paper seeks to examine the ethical dimensions of war within the modern global order through two fundamental philosophical frameworks. First, it analyzes Saint Augustine's contribution to the tradition of *Just War Theory*, exploring how his ideas have provided a rational and systematic foundation for the moral justification and organized execution of warfare. It also considers the extent to which Augustine's framework legitimizes war under specific moral conditions. Second, the study investigates Emmanuel Levinas's concept of the *Face of the Other*, which radically opposes the notions of necessity and justification in war. It explores how Levinas's ethical philosophy challenges the traditional theoretical structure of just war, offering an alternative moral lens through which to reassess the legitimacy of violence. Through this dual analysis, the paper seeks to attain a deeper understanding of the ethical legitimacy of war in contemporary global dynamics, emphasizing a universal humanistic perspective that prioritizes the sanctity and moral responsibility of human life.

Research Problem

- War remains one of the most profound ethical dilemmas confronting human civilization; the reconciliation between the necessity of violence and the demands of moral responsibility continues to be an unresolved philosophical problem.
- Augustine's *Just War Theory* provides a moral framework for legitimizing warfare, whereas Levinas, through his philosophy of the *Face of the Other*, categorically rejects all forms of violence as ethically indefensible.
- Although these two philosophical standpoints present contrasting perspectives on the moral justification of war, the relationship between ethical legitimacy and moral responsibility has not been sufficiently clarified, as these frameworks have rarely been examined together within a comparative philosophical analysis.

Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following research questions:

- How does Saint Augustine's *Just War Theory* provide a systematic moral framework for the ethical justification of warfare?
- In what ways does Emmanuel Levinas's ethical philosophy of the *Face of the Other* fundamentally challenge the very notion of moral legitimacy in war?
- Can Augustine's concept of *ethical justification* and Levinas's notion of *moral responsibility* be integrated to formulate a coherent ethical perspective for understanding the realities of warfare in the modern world?

Research Objectives

The study was guided by the following specific objectives:

- To examine the philosophical foundations of *ethical justification* in Augustine's *Just War Theory* and *moral responsibility* in Levinas's ethical philosophy of the *Face of the Other*.
- To conduct a comparative analysis of Augustine's and Levinas's ethical frameworks through the thematic lens of war and violence.
- To explore the interrelation between *justification* and *responsibility*, and to elucidate how these concepts contribute to a deeper ethical understanding of warfare in the modern world.

Literature Review

The research article "The Just War Tradition and the World after September 11" by George Weigel (2002) argues that the *Just War* tradition represents one of the most respected ethical frameworks developed on the basis of divine guidance to evaluate the moral legitimacy of war. It asserts that this tradition provides clarity and meaning regarding the moral duties associated with warfare—an area often marked by ambiguity and divergent national beliefs. For over fifteen centuries, this framework has functioned as a distinctly Catholic approach to questions concerning government, warfare, and peace. Grounded in such a long-standing heritage, the Catholic Church holds a unique capacity to guide nations—including political and military leaders—in shaping their responses to conflicts such as the post-September 11 "War on Terror." Accordingly, the principles advanced by this tradition offer a profound and pragmatic ethical foundation for global politics. They contribute to the pursuit of international governance grounded in idealism yet free from confusion and contradiction. From this perspective, the Church's primary responsibility lies in assisting the state to define morally acceptable political objectives and to act accordingly, thereby elucidating the intricate relationship among religion, government, and warfare.

The research article "*The Elements of St. Augustine's Just War Theory*" (1984) by John Langan critically examines Augustine's influence on the development of *Just War Theory* and identifies eight key components within his framework. Among these are the conception of war as a form of punishment for wrongdoing, the assessment of war's moral legitimacy based not merely on its consequences but on the moral disposition of those who engage in it, and the requirement of divine or political authorization for the exercise of violence. According to the study, Augustine's theoretical structure prioritizes spiritual welfare over worldly concerns, legitimizing military action led by an authority sanctioned through both scriptural and moral grounds when circumstances demand. However, the article also notes that later theoretical developments, such as the protection of noncombatants, were largely absent

from Augustine's original framework. Augustine, as the study observes, constructs his doctrine on two planes: the instability of earthly peace as contrasted with divine peace, and the necessity of war in maintaining the former when required. Though his contribution has exercised profound influence over subsequent centuries, it has also faced criticism for its implicit assumption that individuals involved in warfare bear no personal moral responsibility, acting instead merely in obedience to authority.

The research article "Case Study: Just War Doctrine" (2023) by Tzenios provides a detailed account of the origins and evolution of the *Just War* doctrine, alongside an analysis of whether World War II conformed to its principles. The study emphasizes that human life is not experienced uniformly across different regions of the world; individuals often lack agency over fundamental aspects of their existence. In such contexts, the article raises the ethical question of how war waged by rulers—inflicting harm on populations who have no control over their circumstances—can ever be considered morally justified. The study further notes that the criterion of a *just cause* relies on faith-based and interpretative judgments, allowing each party involved in a conflict to claim sufficient moral grounds to justify their actions. It also underscores that no single authority possesses ultimate decision-making power in determining the ethical legitimacy of war. As an illustrative case, the article observes that the Nazis possessed reasons they deemed sufficient to consider their actions justified. This perspective invites critical reflection on whether *Just War Theory* functions merely as a political instrument. The article concludes by emphasizing the necessity of pursuing new, peaceful methods for resolving conflicts globally, highlighting the limitations of conventional justifications for war in addressing contemporary ethical and humanitarian challenges. Ileana Cornea (2024), in her study "*The Bad Peace and the Good War: Rhetoric of Duplicity in Augustine, from De Civitate Dei to Epistola 185*," reveals how Augustine's theological reasoning came to justify war as a moral necessity in pursuit of divine peace. She explains that Augustine, inheriting both classical philosophical and Christian theological traditions, viewed earthly disorder and "false peace" as conditions demanding correction, even through violent means. In *De Civitate Dei* (Book XIX), Augustine distinguishes between a natural, just peace and a perverted, sinful peace that can only be healed by war waged for the *pax Christi*—the peace of Christ. Cornea shows that for Augustine, war, though inherently evil, becomes "good" when it serves the restoration of divine order, functioning as a kind of medicine to cure moral corruption. This logic extends into *Epistola 185*, where Augustine develops the notion of "righteous persecution" (*iusta persecutio*), legitimizing coercion and even armed force to defend Church unity and convert heretics "in the spirit of love." Cornea concludes that Augustine's fusion of moral idealism and political realism thus sanctified war under the claim of achieving a higher good—the triumph of Christian peace—establishing the doctrinal roots for later justifications of religious violence such as the Crusades and the Inquisition.

The research article "Just War Theory and Last of Last Resort" (2015) by Eamon Aloyo examines the principle that decisions to engage in warfare within the framework of *Just War Theory* should always be considered only after peaceful alternatives have been thoroughly evaluated, and even then, should constitute a final recourse. The study argues that strict adherence to this procedural requirement increases the likelihood of preventing greater suffering among innocent populations than would result from immediate military action. The article further emphasizes that, whether an action is violent or non-violent, the ethical aim of warfare must remain the protection of innocents. Accordingly, the notion of *final recourse* should not be dismissed, but must be carefully interpreted in light of proportionality. Yazhini highlights that considerations of proportionality provide sufficient moral justification for determining when military action may be ethically permissible, ensuring that the protection of innocents remains the central criterion guiding wartime decisions.

The research article "The Challenge that War Poses to Levinas's Thought" (2024) by Hofmeys explores how the ethical principles of Levinasian phenomenology are challenged and often undermined by acts of warfare. The study highlights that, even under exceptional circumstances, war generates profound moral dilemmas. Key questions addressed include the feasibility of adhering to ethical imperatives during conflict, the applicability of *Just War* criteria, and the possibility of reconciling Levinas's ethical philosophy with the pragmatic realities of political decision-making. Similarly, the study "Ethics of Responsibility and Ambiguity of Politics in Levinas's Philosophy" (2020) by Anckaert examines how ethical responsibility arises at the level of individual actors but is constrained in the pursuit of political justice. Institutionalized systems of violence, even when framed as ordered and egalitarian, suppress individuality in favor of collective objectives, thereby creating a persistent tension between political necessity and moral accountability. The article underscores Levinas's insistence that state actions, while sometimes necessary, must remain open to continuous ethical scrutiny and critique.

The research article "Emmanuel Levinas's Personalist Philosophy and Christian Pacifism: Towards a Responsible Process of Peacemaking/Peacebuilding" (2008) by Obiekwe examines the relationship between Levinas's ethical phenomenology and the Christian pacifist tradition. The study emphasizes how an ethical approach oriented toward the *Other* must integrate nonviolence and the constructive establishment of peace across both frameworks. It underscores that, according to Levinas, peace is not merely the absence of violence but must be actively cultivated through genuine relational engagement. This perspective is highlighted as a crucial principle to be prioritized in contemporary political practices and conflict resolution.

The research article "Ethical Relations of Muslims and Non-Muslims in Creating a Culture of Peace at Peace Place Pati in the Perspective of Emmanuel Levinas" (2024) by Farid Naufa Musyafi'in and Nur Said's examines how Levinas's ethical phenomenology can be utilized to foster religious reconciliation. Conducted in the context of a nonviolent, integrated social setting in Indonesia, the study employs a phenomenological research approach to analyze interactions between Muslim and non-Muslim communities. The central focus of the study is how Levinas's concept of the *Face of the Other* can cultivate ethical responsibility

among individuals who adhere to strict moral principles, guiding their engagement with others. The research highlights the importance of awareness regarding pluralism and communal integration for promoting social well-being. It argues that Levinasian ethics plays a significant role in establishing a nonviolent culture grounded in moral responsibility and in reconstructing intercommunal relationships, thereby contributing meaningfully to the development of harmonious and ethical societies.

While existing scholarship provides extensive discussions on Augustine's Just War Theory and Levinas's Ethics of the Face of the Other, these two frameworks have largely been treated in isolation. Studies on Augustine (e.g., Weigel 2002; Langan 1984; Aloyo 2015; Tzenios 2023) have focused on the theological and political rationalization of war and its adaptation into international law. Conversely, scholarship on Levinas (e.g., Hofmeyr 2024; Anckaert 2020; Obiekwe 2008; Musyafi'in & Said 2024) has emphasized the absolute primacy of ethical responsibility and non-violence. However, the interrelation between moral justification and moral responsibility—that is, how the justification of war (Augustine) and the responsibility for the Other (Levinas) can coexist or conflict in ethical reasoning—has not been adequately explored in comparative philosophical literature. Most prior works address either the political ethics of warfare or the phenomenology of peace, but not their philosophical reconciliation. Even where Levinas's critique of totality is discussed, it is seldom examined against Augustine's theological conception of the fallen world and divine justice. Likewise, Augustinian theorists often overlook the implications of Levinas's insistence on the inviolability of the Other for redefining moral legitimacy in warfare. Consequently, there exists a conceptual void between frameworks that seek to regulate violence and those that seek to transcend it altogether.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, analytical, and comparative philosophical approach. It is grounded in secondary research and textual interpretation, focusing on the ethical reasoning of Saint Augustine and Emmanuel Levinas concerning the moral legitimacy of war. The methodological framework integrates conceptual analysis, hermeneutic interpretation, and comparative synthesis to examine how both thinkers articulate justice, violence, and moral responsibility. Primary sources, including Augustine's *The City of God* and Levinas's *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*, form the core textual foundation of the inquiry. These works are critically analyzed to identify the underlying ethical principles that define each thinker's position on war and human responsibility. Supplementary philosophical and theological commentaries are employed to situate these ideas within their historical, cultural, and intellectual contexts. The methodological emphasis is not empirical but normative and interpretative, aiming to clarify the conceptual foundations of war ethics rather than to measure their practical outcomes. Through this approach, the study seeks to contribute to ongoing debates in moral and political philosophy by developing a philosophical model that reconciles justice with responsibility in evaluating the ethical dimensions of warfare.

Findings and Discussion

Normative Justification in the Works of Saint Augustine

The *Just War* tradition is traditionally grounded in two fundamental principles. The first concerns the right to wage war (*jus ad bellum*). According to this principle, a war must be undertaken under legitimate leadership, for a just cause, with a proper intention, and its ultimate aim must always be the establishment of peace. The second principle pertains to the conduct of war (*jus in bello*), which dictates that military actions must adhere to ethically acceptable procedures. This includes the protection of noncombatants, the nature of the weapons used, and distinctions in their application. Within this tradition, three major approaches can be identified:

- The Ancient Secular Approach: Developed through the contributions of thinkers such as Plato, Xenophon, Aristotle, and Cicero, this approach emphasized a rational, non-religious framework for evaluating warfare.
- The Medieval Christian Theological Approach: Initiated by Saint Augustine and systematized by Saint Thomas Aquinas, this approach is rooted in divine law and theological principles, integrating moral guidance with Christian doctrinal frameworks.
- The Modern Legal Approach: Emerging in the modern era with contributions from Hugo Grotius, this perspective emphasizes human laws and secular ethics, independent of religious considerations, and later contributed to the development of international law (Johnson, 1975: 26–29).

In this manner, the tradition of *Just War* connected with political practice demonstrates profound intersections across temporal, theological, and ethical domains. The definitions and principles articulated within this tradition provide a stable framework for evaluating the moral legitimacy of warfare.

The foundational principles of Just War theory can be traced to classical philosophy, most notably in the systematized works of the Roman scholar and statesman, Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BCE). His writings give significant consideration to the criteria under which a war may be deemed just. In his treatises *On Duties* (*De Officiis*), *On the Republic* (*De Re Publica*), and *On the Laws* (*De Legibus*), Cicero posits that a war, though inherently undesirable, can be justified as a necessary pursuit for a lasting peace, a means of rectifying wrongs, and for the defense of the state. Within this framework, warfare is approached as a duty-bound action, undertaken for the purpose of punishing unjust aggressors. Consequently, a state may legitimately engage in war both in its own defense and in aid of its allied nations (Mattox, 2006: 16). A further stipulation advanced is that injustice must first be addressed

through intellectual discourse, employing reason and linguistic persuasion; only after such measures have proven ineffective may physical military engagement be legitimately considered. It is underscored that a war is unjust if it is undertaken precipitously, without prior attempts or warnings to seek redress through non-violent means after an injury has been sustained. Moreover, war must not be waged for the personal aggrandizement of rulers. From this, Cicero derives the principle that the objective of a just war must be the establishment of a peace free from injustice. Concurrently, his framework introduces considerations of *jus in bello*—the just conduct *within* war. It mandates that all actions in warfare must adhere to ethical norms, even if such adherence imposes tactical disadvantages. For instance, operations must not be driven by a vengeful or wrathful disposition against the enemy (Justen hoven, Barbieri, 2012: 9-27). In the subsequent medieval period, this conceptual framework was integrated with Christian theological doctrines and significantly reinforced by Saint Augustine.

Augustine's engagement with the concept of war represents a synthesis that balances two ostensibly antithetical theoretical positions: Realism and Pacifism. The foundational realist tenet that 'war is but a continuation of politics by other means' provides a crucial point of departure. This premise, articulated by the Prussian military strategist Carl von Clausewitz, posits that warfare is a necessary and acceptable instrument for safeguarding national interests. This line of reasoning, which can be traced from earlier political philosophers such as Niccolò Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes to later diplomats like Henry Kissinger and George Kennan, finds its ancient provenance in the historical writings of Thucydides. In his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides records the Athenian generals justifying their assault on the Spartan colony of Melos with the stark realist assertion that "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must" (Rocheleau, 2022: 36; Walzer, 2006: 5). This military campaign was rationalized by the generals as essential for ensuring the security of the Athenian state. From the perspective of social contract theory, the very rationale for the establishment of a political community is to guarantee the safety and well-being of its citizens. Hobbesian realists contend that if warfare serves as a necessary instrument to this end, its prosecution is therefore justifiable. A corollary to this position is the realist assertion that such warfare exists beyond the purview of ethical guidance and cannot be meaningfully evaluated through moral frameworks (Shaw, 2019: 571).

The Roman Empire, following its adoption of Christianity as the state religion under Emperor Theodosius I in 380 CE, faced the dual challenges of military engagement with various ethnic groups during its expansion and suppressing revolts within its already subjugated territories. This created a significant ideological tension. In the wake of Emperor Constantine's conversion in 312 CE, a substantial number of citizens who had fully embraced Christian teachings began to withdraw from military service, adhering to a pacifist interpretation of their faith. Their stance was that refraining from violence under any circumstance was the path most pleasing to Christ. Early Christian apologists such as Tertullian and Origen vigorously championed this position. Tertullian, in particular, exhorted Christians to exhibit absolute submission and love, even in the face of persecution and execution, and he specifically advocated for their withdrawal from military service (Brown, 2008:18; May, 2008: 26). It is crucial to note, however, that Tertullian's rejection of military service was not based solely on a principled pacifism. Scholarly analysis of his works, including *On Idolatry and Apology*, suggests that his stance was also profoundly influenced by the pervasive pagan practices within the Roman legions. Since soldiers were prohibited from marrying for at least a ten-year period, they frequently resorted to consorting with prostitutes and committing acts of rape in conquered territories. Tertullian thus argued that military life was fundamentally incompatible with the Christian injunction against fornication, making participation in the army a form of idolatry against God's law (Patterson, 2023: 46).

This perspective exemplifies the comprehensive nature of the Christian pacifist position. Pacifism contends that warfare necessitates individuals committing acts that cannot be justified by any coherent ethical framework (Shaw, 2019: 571). This stance generated significant dilemmas for a Christianizing Roman Empire, which was increasingly reliant on a citizenry imbued with these values, for its defense against external incursions. Concurrently, traditionalists within the Roman power structure maintained a realist posture, arguing that war was an indispensable tool for safeguarding imperial interests and that the application of violence was, at times, a necessity. They emphasized that power, pragmatism, and military strength were essential for both the expansion and administration of the Empire, prioritizing strategic advantage over moral scruples. Some voices within this camp even propagated the critique that the Empire's adoption of Christian pacifist tendencies was a contributing factor in the eventual decline of the Western Roman Empire circa 476 CE. It was within this context of profound ideological polarization that Saint Augustine formulated his seminal contribution, seeking to mediate between these extreme positions. His work aimed to establish a theoretical foundation that could simultaneously preserve the integrity of the Roman state and the Christian faith, reconciling the demands of earthly governance with the tenets of divine law (Corey, Charles, 2012 :21; Kany, 2012: 37; Goldsworthy, 2016: 169).

These ideas synthesize the Christian teachings of love and non-violence with the pragmatic necessities of maintaining public order and protecting the innocent. This synthesis established the two foundational pillars of the modern Just War doctrine:

- *Jus ad Bellum* (Justice in Resorting to War): This component establishes the criteria for determining whether engaging in a war is morally permissible. The stipulated criteria include a just cause (a morally acceptable reason for action), legitimate authority (declaration by a sovereign entity), right intention (aimed at achieving peace and justice), and last resort (the exhaustion of all viable non-military alternatives).

- *Jus in Bello* (Justice in the Conduct of War): This component governs the ethical conduct *within* warfare itself. It provides a regulatory framework that dictates the permissible use of weaponry, the identification of legitimate targets, and the rules of engagement for combatants, ensuring that military operations are carried out with proportionality and discrimination.

These ethical principles have been refined over centuries and have made a significant contribution to the development of international humanitarian law and the codified rules of armed conflict (Rocheleau, 2022: 43).

Over a thirty-year period, Saint Augustine's extensive corpus—encompassing sermons, letters, tracts, and most notably his seminal work, *The City of God*—articulated a sophisticated moral framework that integrated nuanced justifications for war within Christian theology. A central tenet of his argument was a particular interpretation of the commandment to "love your neighbour as yourself." Augustine contended that this imperative could manifest as an act of love through military action, understood as a duty to protect the innocent from suffering and to punish those who violate the legal and moral order (Patterson, 2023: 48; Swift, 1983: 10). Furthermore, Augustine drew upon scriptural evidence to counter absolute pacifist claims. He referenced the incident during Jesus's trial where, after being struck by a high priest's servant, Jesus did not passively accept the injustice but instead challenged it, asking, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" (John 18.23). Augustine interpreted this not as an endorsement of violence, but as a demonstration that injustice must be confronted through righteous and principled means, rather than ignored or tolerated. By deploying this example in his polemics, Augustine conveyed a crucial message to Roman pagans: that Christ's mission was actively to diminish evil in the world, not to permit its proliferation by forgoing necessary measures of defense and order. He argued that Christians, in their support for a just public order, would invariably lend their full support to righteous causes, thereby reconciling the demands of faith with the responsibilities of civic life (Kany, 2012: 38).

Saint Ambrose (c. 340–397 CE), the spiritual mentor and intellectual guide to Augustine, provided a crucial theological foundation for the latter's thought. Ambrose's assertion that "he who knows how to do what is right and fails to do it, commits a sin" (New Catholic Encyclopedia-*De Officiis*: 1:36:179), coupled with his observation that "Moses did not hesitate to oppose injustice in order to protect his people," served to articulate a fundamental moral principle: that ethical action inherently entails the protection of the vulnerable (Atterton, 2009: 153). For Ambrose, the defense of the Roman Empire was inextricably linked to the safeguarding of Christendom itself, a conflation that rendered military service by Christians a justifiable, and indeed at times obligatory, undertaking (Mattox, 2006: 20). Consequently, Augustine's project was not the propagation of an absolute pacifism, but rather the formulation of a framework wherein the imperative to counteract evil could be legitimately enacted by Christians in concert with the imperial authority. His intellectual maneuver possesses enduring relevance and can be approached like follow:

- **Theological and Ethical Justification for War:** Augustine argues that while war is inherently tragic, it is permissible under specific conditions. He posits that war, if waged to protect the innocent, restore peace, or rectify grave injustices, can be an authentic expression of love and justice. This framework constituted a significant departure from the absolute pacifism of early Christianity. A key insight is that the morality of war is determined not solely by the act itself, but by its underlying *intention* and ultimate *objective*.
- **The Primacy of Love and Justice:** A central tenet of Augustinian thought is that war must be motivated by love and a desire to uphold justice. It should never be pursued out of hatred or a will to dominate, but must strictly aim to re-establish peace and order. This redefines the moral dilemma of war, casting it not as a glorious endeavor but as a lamentable necessity.
- **The Concept of Right Intention:** The principle of "right intention" demands that warfare be conducted with morally sound objectives. It requires belligerents to forgo cruelty, vengeance, and hatred, focusing instead on achieving a just and sustainable peace. This concept, which remains central to contemporary Just War Theory, underscores the critical importance of moral accountability in conflict.

Augustine's diverse intellectual contributions have exerted a profound influence over subsequent centuries, among which his formulation of the Just War doctrine remains particularly significant. This principle was notably advanced in the twelfth century by the jurist and canon lawyer Gratian (c. 1080–1160). In his seminal work, the *Concordia Discordantium Canonum* (Concordance of Discordant Canons), Gratian systematically integrated and aligned his own thought with Augustinian doctrines. Furthermore, in his *Decretum Gratiani* (Decree of Gratian - c. 1140), a text of monumental importance to the tradition of canon law, he explicitly argued that war could be justified for the defense of the Church, the preservation of Christian values, and the protection of Christendom from external threats. His assertion that "the enemies of the Church ought to be compelled, even by war," is especially noteworthy (Johnson, 1975: 36).

The thirteenth century, a period marked by pervasive conflict across much of the world, witnessed Saint Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–1274) provide a more systematic formulation of just war principles in his *Summa Theologica*. He rigorously emphasized the core criteria of sovereign authority, just cause, and right intention (May, 2008: 28). Within this framework, he asserted that the objective of Christian states must be the establishment and maintenance of order, peace, and justice (Patterson, 2023: 50). This doctrinal development was subsequently assimilated and refined within the late scholastic tradition by the Spanish Jesuit theologian and philosopher Francisco Suárez (1548–1617), who made a pivotal contribution. Suárez elaborated a comprehensive set of juridical

principles, insisting that war must be an ultimate resort (*ultima ratio*), must have the securing of peace as its central aim, and must be conducted in strict adherence to established norms of justice (Brown, 2008: 36). Furthermore, the works of both Gratian and Aquinas explicitly identified categories of non-combatants who should be granted immunity from attack, including clergy, monastics, pilgrims, travelers, merchants, and farmers. This critical delineation established the foundational precedent for the later codification of rules defining protected persons in warfare (Johnson, 1975: 44).

The subsequent period witnessed efforts to synthesize Augustinian doctrine with Christian ethical guidance within the emerging Protestant tradition. Martin Luther contended that while individuals in the Kingdom of God are governed by divine law and love, rendering earthly authority superfluous in theory, the inherent sinfulness of humanity in the earthly kingdom necessitates temporal government and laws. He further argued that the state, as a holder of provisional authority, has a duty to participate in mandated services to protect the innocent faithful from evil (Luther, 2003: 55). This rationale is reflected in Protestant catechisms, designed to explicate doctrine for the laity. Notably, the Westminster Larger Catechism of Presbyterian theology (1563), in its explanation of the sixth commandment, to the 135th question "Thou shalt not kill," is interpreted in a manner that provides a foundation for just war theory. This interpretation delineates three affirmative duties:

1. The Preservation of Life: The conscientious safeguarding of one's own life and the lives of others.
2. The Resistance of Evil: The active prevention of injustice, oppression, and violence.
3. The Protection of the Innocent: The provision of security for those who are vulnerable, oppressed, or in a state of victimization.

Furthermore, it is stipulated that the taking of life—whether one's own or another's—constitutes a sin in all circumstances except those involving the defense of public justice, a legally declared war, or necessary acts of self-preservation. Expanding on this, the Lutheran Catechism posits the consequentialist view that "the deliberate failure to protect the innocent, when one possesses the capacity to do so, is morally equivalent to murder" (Brown, 2008: 20). This particular hermeneutic of the sixth commandment provides an ethical justification for engagement in defensive warfare, thereby granting moral permission for such actions. Consequently, Protestant denominations collectively sanction their members' participation in civil service, permitting them to bear arms in a legally mandated war for the purposes of self-defense, the protection of the innocent, and the confrontation of evil—provided such engagement is guided by a pure intention and legitimate state authority. These theological interpretations have historically served to legitimize the participation of Christian citizens in military service and have provided a moral framework for Christian rulers to employ military force, both domestically and, where feasible, in international interventions.

Within this discourse, the position of the Episcopal Church — identified as a principal Christian denomination within the global Anglican Communion and headquartered in the United States — is of significant contemporary relevance. Historically engaged with the ethical permissibility of war, this denomination prioritizes reconciliation, peace, and non-violence, while simultaneously acknowledging a conditional support for the Just War tradition in extreme circumstances. It emphatically contends that any recourse to war must be an ultimate resort (*ultima ratio*) and that its objective should be the restoration of justice, not the advancement of national interests. The church's "Cross Before the Flag" principle underscores the doctrinal stance that Christian convictions must take precedence over nationalist allegiances. This ethos is articulated in official documents such as its 81st General Convention resolution, which focuses on condemning unjust military actions, endorsing peace initiatives, and advocating for nuclear disarmament. The denomination posits a proactive, structural approach to peacemaking, arguing that global poverty and inequality are root drivers of conflict. Consequently, it asserts that the pursuit of economic and social justice constitutes a fundamental form of preventative action against war. While championing these proactive measures, the church's theological framework concedes that in the rarest and most extreme of situations, military intervention may be a tragic necessity to uphold justice and preserve the dignity of humanity (The Episcopal Church, 2024: 677).

In the formative period of Christian thought, with the singular exception of Saint Augustine, no other figure contributed as substantially to the development of a Christian disposition towards war, violence, and military service (Swift 1983: 110). Augustine was the seminal thinker who systematized the doctrine that war could be morally justifiable, a theoretical framework that would exert a profound and enduring influence on subsequent Western Christian thought concerning warfare (Ramsey, 1992: 8). He provided a crucial ethical justification for Christian participation in the military profession (Hartigan, 1967: 7), and his work functioned as an effective moral guide for a Christian soldier serving in the army of Caesar (Miller, 1964: 255). In *De Civitate Dei* XIX, he declares peace is achievable only through divine justice and sometimes through corrective, In *Epistola* 185, Augustine defends coercion as "persecution in love" (*iusta persecutio*) to correct heretics and restore Church unity, His justification of coercion became foundational for later ecclesiastical policies—Inquisition and Crusades, (Cornea, 2024: 73-76). War in this context, it is plausible to argue that without Augustine's pivotal contribution, the Christian approach to warfare would likely have retained a more pronounced pacifist and non-violent character. Alternatively, the Church might have been left with an unresolved duality in its stance towards state-sanctioned military violence. This inherent dichotomy would have risked generating significant internal contradictions, potentially leading to a schism within the faithful—between those adhering to a strict pacifist ethic and those committed to the defense of the state.

In this light, Augustine's Just War doctrine can be interpreted as a strategic compromise between the pacifist guidelines of early, marginalized Christianity and the political exigencies it faced after becoming an institutionalized and state-aligned power.

Consequently, Augustine can be identified as the figure who provided a theological framework for fundamentally pacifist Christians to participate in warfare deemed just. It is critical to observe that this rationale for "just war" subsequently created the ideological conditions for Christian participation in "holy war" (*bellum sacrum*). For instance, the Renaissance philosopher Francis Bacon (1561–1626), in his 1622 work *Advertisement Touching a Holy War*, delineated six contemporary justifications for waging holy war: the propagation of the Christian faith, the liberation of Christians from non-Christian rulers, the reconquest of lands formerly lost by Christians, the recovery of Christian holy sites, taking action against those who blaspheme Christ, the expulsion of unbelievers from Christian territories. The religious wars in Europe, the English Reformation, and colonial expansions coupled with missionary activities were all underpinned by such ideological frameworks (Johnson, 1975: 85-87). In conclusion, Augustine's seminal contribution was to establish a moral and theological basis for the belief that warfare is, under specific conditions, not only acceptable but necessary for Christians. This intellectual legacy has profoundly shaped the ethos of contemporary Christianity—now the world's predominant religion, adhered to by 31% of the global population—providing a justificatory framework for Christian military service in nations like the United States and for these nations' extensive engagements in armed conflict throughout history.

Consequently, a critical examination of Augustine's contribution is indispensable for understanding contemporary applications in military intervention, humanitarian action, and international law. This inquiry is predicated on a central counterfactual hypothesis: had Augustine not advanced the proposition of a Just War, would Christianity have maintained a fundamentally pacifist trajectory? It is crucial to note that Augustine did not mandate Christian participation in warfare *per se*; rather, he formulated a permissive framework authorizing war as a response to grave injustice. This framework provides a moral sanction for those who, convinced of the ethical legitimacy of their cause, feel compelled to act. It does not, however, furnish a warrant for action against those who choose to abstain from violence on conscientious grounds. In subsequent epochs, political and ecclesiastical authorities instrumentalized Augustine's doctrine to advance their own strategic objectives. This is evident in historical episodes from the Crusades (11th–13th centuries) and the wars of colonial evangelization (15th–17th centuries) to the religio-political conflicts of the Thirty Years' War in Europe. While these conflicts were frequently driven by a complex amalgam of economic and political ambitions, religion consistently provided a facile and expedient justificatory narrative. Given that Augustine was a Christian bishop whose theological guidance became profoundly authoritative within the tradition, this particular interpretation of his thought—the just war tradition—has been normalized as the predominant ethos within mainstream Christian political heritage.

Augustine's intellectual project furnished a moral and theological sanction for Christians to transcend a strictly literal interpretation of Jesus's teachings and engage in warfare. His framework emerged precisely because the radical pacifism implicit in Jesus's ministry proved politically untenable for rulers seeking to mobilize Christian citizens into an effective military force. Augustine provided the necessary theological accommodation. Central to his rationale was the doctrine of the fallen world, which posits that in a sinful and imperfect reality, absolute pacifism is unsustainable; war becomes a tragic necessity to restrain evildoers and protect the innocent from harm. Once this initial justification for defensive war was established, the underlying logic was susceptible to expansion and instrumentalization. The Augustinian framework was progressively co-opted to legitimize not only defense but also imperial expansion, state consolidation, and projects of political subjugation. This development stands in profound tension with the core Christian tenet, articulated by Christ that "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36), effectively transforming war into a standard instrument of worldly statecraft. A profound irony thus emerged: warfare and violence were increasingly employed by Christian rulers precisely to defend a faith whose foundational scriptures prioritize peace and non-violence. In this manner, the doctrine developed by Augustine fundamentally reoriented the Christian perspective on war. This paradigm shift can be analyzed through the following critical dimensions:

- Ethical Justification for War: Augustine established that Christians could licitly participate in war if specific criteria were met: a *just cause* (e.g., restoring peace, protecting the innocent), *right intention*, and *legitimate authority* (a declaration by the emperor or sovereign government). Without this Augustinian framework, these specific stipulations would not have been systematized, potentially leaving Christian citizens without a clear moral rationale for participating in state-sanctioned violence.
- The Necessity of Order in a Fallen World: Augustine's theology was grounded in the reality of a fallen world, rife with sin and violence, where God's Kingdom was not yet fully realized. In this imperfect state, the use of coercive force was argued to be a tragic necessity to establish peace and social order. Without this theological justification, Christians might have been compelled to reject all forms of state violence, leaving them unable to legitimize participation in war for self-defense or the protection of their communities.
- The Church-State Integration: A pivotal consequence of Augustine's doctrine was its facilitation of a closer relationship between the Church and the state in matters of governance and military affairs. By providing a space for Christian rulers to wage war under certain conditions, his theory bridged the gap between political necessity and religious duty. This enabled Christians to act as political agents while maintaining their spiritual identity. Absent this theoretical construct, the Church would likely have remained detached from warfare, focusing solely on spiritual matters and maintaining a distance from state and military concerns.

- The Transition of the Roman Empire: As the Roman Empire evolved from a pagan polity to one with a substantial Christian populace, Augustine's doctrine supplied the necessary justifications for this transformed empire to defend itself from invasion and maintain internal order. This guidance was critical; without it, even rulers acting with theological intent would have lacked a coherent framework to justify their military actions within a Christian worldview.

A fundamental and enduring question arises from the juxtaposition of Jesus's teachings—such as "Love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44), "turn the other cheek," "blessed are the peacemakers," and "blessed are those who are persecuted" (Brown 2008:18)—with the Augustinian doctrine that war, while a tragic necessity in a sinful and fallen world, must be conducted according to strict ethical principles. This inquiry is intrinsically linked to the previously posed hypothesis regarding the trajectory of Christian ethics. This tension is rooted in a profound historical transformation: by Augustine's era, Christianity had evolved from a faith advocating a simple, counter-cultural way of life into the institutionalized state religion of a vast, heterogeneous empire. Plurality inherently breeds conflict, and for the Roman Empire, which already possessed a massive military apparatus, the application of violence and coercive power offered a more expedient means of managing dissent than the arduous path of love and tolerance. This fostered a *de facto* duality in the Christianized Empire's conduct: it promoted love and peace among its assimilated subjects while simultaneously engaging in warfare to expand, consolidate, and maintain its imperial authority over external territories. Consequently, military campaigns were often waged against communities whose "rebellion" was, in fact, a struggle to preserve their autonomy, culture, and traditions against the imperial imposition of Roman law, governance, and the Christian religion itself. In this context, the propagation of Christianity was framed as a sacred duty, thereby furnishing a "just cause" for war. This justificatory logic was underpinned by the prevailing belief that the Christian faith alone could provide the foundation for a true and lasting peace, ironically legitimizing violence as a pathway to its ultimate establishment.

In the seventeenth century, the Just War doctrine, which had historically been articulated within a Christian theological framework, was systematically secularized by Hugo Grotius (1583–1645)—a statesman, philosopher, and pioneer of international law. In his seminal 1625 work, *De Jure Belli ac Pacis* (*On the Law of War and Peace*), Grotius reconceptualized the theory on a secular basis. This reformulation was a direct response to the evolving dynamics of international relations among states, and it sought to provide a foundation for its principles in rational explanation rather than divine authority. Grotius posited that the justice of war could be guided by ethical principles, even in the absence of religious foundations (May, 2008: 25). His central thesis was that warfare and peace could—and should—be governed by human law, grounded in an understanding of human nature, rather than being solely directed by the precepts of divine law.

Grotius's theoretical framework is distinguished by several pivotal tenets. He asserts that only sovereign states possessing legal authority may declare war, explicitly excluding private individuals or factions from this prerogative. Within his schema, just causes for resorting to war (*jus ad bellum*) are strictly limited to national self-defense, the reclamation of property or rights, and the punishment of violations against natural or international law. Furthermore, Grotius mandates that the conduct of war (*jus in bello*) must adhere to principles of justice and comply with prevailing international agreements. Crucially, he introduces a significant moral qualification: even if all other conditions are met, a war remains unjust if it is pursued with a wrongful intention. Finally, he enshrines the principle of last resort, stipulating that all viable peaceful and legal avenues for conflict resolution must be exhaustively pursued before military force is legitimized (Stumpf, 2012: 203-212). The profound influence of Grotian thought is evident in its role as a foundational pillar for modern international law, influential treaties, diplomatic practice, and the charter of the United Nations. Its secular and rationalist character renders it particularly suited to the pluralistic nature of the contemporary global order. It is this seminal contribution that has earned Grotius the distinguished epithet, "the father of modern international law."

Under international law, specifically the United Nations Charter, the application of military force is prohibited in all but explicitly specified circumstances. Article 2(4) of the UN Charter proscribes the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state (UN Charter, 1945). The two principal exceptions to this prohibition are actions taken in self-defense and military measures authorized by the UN Security Council. Article 51 affirms the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member State. This right is exercisable only until the Security Council has implemented measures to restore international peace and security. A critical procedural requirement is that any measures undertaken in self-defense must be reported immediately to the Security Council (UN Charter, 1945: Art. 51). Furthermore, a state is permitted to intervene in another upon receiving a legitimate request for assistance from the latter, who is invoking its own right of self-defense. Concurrently, Chapter VII of the Charter grants the Security Council the authority to authorize military action to maintain or restore international peace and security (UN Charter, 1945: Chap. VII) (May, 2008: 9-13). This authorization may be granted to a single nation or to a coalition of states. Beyond these Charter-based provisions, justifications for the use of force have also been advanced on the grounds of humanitarian intervention and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). These doctrines are aimed at preventing mass atrocities, war crimes, and profound human suffering.

Moral Responsibility in term of Humanity in the works of Emmanuel Levinas

The philosophical contributions of Emmanuel Lévinas present a profound challenge to traditional ethical justifications for war. The Lithuanian-French philosopher, whose life (1906-1995) was marked by direct and indirect experiences of multiple wars, developed

a theoretical framework that offers a categorical rejection of warfare. He contends that war is fundamentally unacceptable under any conditional justification. Central to this assertion is his seminal concept of the "face of the Other" (*le visage d'autrui*). The "face" represents the irreducible and immediate presence of another person, which, for Lévinas, makes an ethical demand that precedes all rational calculation or self-interested action related to warfare. It is a primordial command to act with infinite responsibility towards the Other. From a Lévinasian perspective, ethics itself originates in the recognition of the Other's inherent vulnerability and the unconditional imperative to respond to their suffering (Hutchens, 2004: 18). Within this framework, war represents the ultimate negation of this ethical relation, as it systematically reduces the Other to an abstraction or an enemy to be eliminated, thereby obliterating the foundational ethical encounter.

In the preface to his work *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas posits that the prevailing approach to war within Western philosophy and politics represents the ultimate expression of a totalizing perspective that seeks to subsume all of existence into a unified whole. From this vantage point, war—the most extreme manifestation of violence—is interpreted as the most profound failure of ethical responsibility. War operates by reductively transforming the opposing side into an abstract enemy that must be comprehensively defeated, thereby systematically effacing the human attributes that would otherwise demand ethical consideration. Levinas describes a tragic metamorphosis: individuals, who were once complex beings with distinct identities, unique personal histories, secrets, and desires, intricately woven into their social fabrics, are subsumed by the war machine. They are converted into mere cogs in a vast apparatus—interchangeable, anonymous, and stripped of their identity, uniqueness, and humanity (Shaw, 2019: 570; Pattison, 2013: 38). Here, the suffering of fellow human beings is neither acknowledged nor is any consideration given to creating pathways for its alleviation. War functions by systematically diminishing ethical responsibility and prioritizing power, domination, and totality, thereby constituting a mode of relation that fundamentally connects one person to another through violence. Within the encompassing frameworks of the nation, ideology, or abstract historical necessity, individual life is subordinated and devalued. Personal uniqueness is rendered irrelevant. Consequently, war is not merely an activity that destroys physical infrastructure; it is an enterprise that annihilates the very possibility of ethical relations. A central tenet of Levinas's position is that during war, the obligation to act responsibly toward the Other is eradicated. The opposing side is reconfigured not as beings to whom one is responsible, but as enemies to be vanquished and disarmed. In this view, warfare, which enacts total violence upon the humanity of others, is categorically unjustifiable and incapable of being morally regulated. It is to this extent that the entire tradition of Just War theory, with its propositions for conditional justification, is subjected to a comprehensive and absolute rejection within the Lévinasian framework (Lingis, 2002: 12; Levinas, 1969).

Levinas categorically condemns the Just War tradition, which seeks to justify violence under specific conditions, on the following foundational grounds:

- War as a Fundamental Failure of Human Ethics: War fundamentally operates by categorizing individuals into a "We" and a "Them." Those subsumed under "Them" are reductively framed as adversaries holding opposing views, actors whose very existence and actions are defined in opposition to "Us," and thus must be vanquished. This process obscures the humanity of the Other, and the suffering they endure is rationalized by abstract notions such as upholding justice or ensuring national security. Levinas's philosophy asserts an absolute imperative: the ethical demands inherent in our relation to the Other are inviolable and cannot be legitimately overridden by any political or ideological justification.
- The Irreducibility of the Other's Suffering: The suffering of the Other is a matter of pure ethical concern that is absolute and non-negotiable. It cannot be subjugated to rational calculation or justified through utilitarian reasoning. The prospect of beneficial outcomes or "greater goods" can never legitimize the infliction of suffering upon a group. Because warfare and its attendant violence inherently involve the destruction of that which should be the focus of our utmost human care—the well-being of other people—it can never, under any circumstances, constitute a truly ethical enterprise.
- The Impossibility of Ethically Licenced Violence: Levinas issues a profound challenge to the core tenets of *jus in bello*, such as proportionality and discrimination. He argues that even when a war is ostensibly justified by noble aims, its very logic necessitates the objectification of the adversary. This process systematically degrades the ethical relationship we are commanded to hold with the Other and denies their inherent dignity (Kosky, 2001: 52). Consequently, the regulation of war through ethical principles is ultimately a futile endeavor, as the act of war itself is a primal violation of the ethical relation.

Based on the foregoing principles, the Lévinasian theoretical framework facilitates a profound re-examination of the purported necessity and ethical permissibility of war within the modern global order. This philosophy presents a fundamental challenge to the realist position that warfare is an inevitable feature of international relations, insisting instead that non-violent alternatives must be rigorously pursued for conflict resolution. Levinas's critique implies the necessity for a radical transformation of international relations—a shift away from militarized state actions and coercive policies toward a paradigm that prioritizes dialogue, empathy, and the recognition of a shared humanity. This perspective compels a specific ethical focus on the human cost of conflict. In reflecting on the losses of various wars, Levinas directs attention not to abstract, aggregated statistics that can be rationalized as "collateral damage," but to the irreducible, singular suffering of each individual victim. Consequently, his thought offers a critical lens through which to evaluate contemporary security paradigms. For instance, in countering terrorism, a Lévinasian approach would argue that military operations which result in human casualties are ethically indefensible. It would insist that the underlying causes

driving individuals toward extremism must be addressed. The focus must shift from a strategy of annihilation to one that addresses the root causes of conflict through appropriate, non-violent methodologies aimed at genuine resolution.

From a Levinasian perspective, genuine peace is not a political condition but an ethical achievement, possible only through a primordial and non-violent relationship with the Other. This peace cannot be established by treaties, power structures, or rational calculations of interest; it arises exclusively from an unconditional responsibility towards the Other. When confronted with the Other, all political, ideological, and philosophical systems are rendered secondary to the immediate, pre-thematic demand of their humanity. Such a peace requires a disposition of welcoming—a "loving" of the human *for its own sake*. In this ethical encounter, any attempt to reduce human beings to components of a totalizing system is abandoned. Instead, the irreducible uniqueness of the Other—their alterity which resists all categorization—is fully acknowledged and affirmed. True peace is thus founded on the infinite ethical obligation to the singular face of the Other, prior to any contractual or institutional agreement.

Emmanuel Levinas's essay "The State of Caesar and the State of David" interrogates the complex relationship between politics, ethics, and religion. The essay juxtaposes two archetypal realms: the State of Caesar, emblematic of political power, sovereignty, and the nation-state, and the State of David, representing ethical and religious traditions and the prophetic lineage. Levinas underscores a critical distinction in their relationship to violence: Caesar, as a historical figure, waged innumerable wars for Roman expansion, whereas David, as noted through a citation of Saint Ambrose, only faced wars imposed upon him and was never an aggressor (Mattox, 2006: 20). Diverging from an Augustinian eschatology as presented in *The City of God*, Levinas posits these two "states" not as otherworldly domains but as concurrent, interpenetrating realities within our world. His central thesis is that political action cannot claim autonomy and must be subject to ethical intervention and constraint. He argues that since human beings are fundamentally constituted by their responsibility to one another, states cannot limit their concern solely to internal affairs—such as order, security, and sovereignty—while remaining indifferent to the suffering of others beyond their borders. This framework leads Levinas to issue a stark warning: political formations such as unbridled nationalism, fascism, and totalitarianism, which operate on this exclusionary logic, pose a grave danger to humanity. Nevertheless, engaging with the Talmud—a primary source influencing his philosophy—Levinas concedes, in a nuanced acceptance, that political violence may be a necessary evil to resist a greater evil (Herzog, 2020: 60, 64). The ultimate Levinasian position, therefore, is that in an ideal social order, political authority—even when exercised for self-defense—must remain perpetually accountable to and guided by a higher, transcendent ethical law.

Furthermore, Psalm 82:3-4, a text from the collection associated with King David and included in both the Christian Old Testament and the Hebrew Bible, exhorts: "Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked." Levinas, whose philosophy is deeply informed by his engagement with Jewish texts, integrates this imperative into his ethical framework. On this basis, he acknowledges the protection of those in suffering and peril as a second, circumscribed circumstance in which the application of violence may be permissible (Atterton, 2009: 145). However, Levinas immediately qualifies this concession. He argues that the law and order established through warfare are inherently incomplete and can never constitute full justice, as they remain fundamentally rooted in the exercise of power and domination. Therefore, it is imperative that action, even in its forceful dimension, be guided by a responsibility for the Other, necessitating a shift from viewing human beings as interchangeable entities to engaging with them with compassion. This principle dictates that violence deployed against evil must be executed without irresponsibility or cruelty, demonstrating instead strength tempered by moral fortitude. This nuanced position is emphasized in works such as *Otherwise than Being* and *Totality and Infinity* (Hamblet, 2007: 416). A critical insight is that compassion, in its most complete humanitarian form, must be capable of extension even to those who have acted as oppressors. For Levinas, this expansive, unconditional compassion represents the fullest realization of a humanitarian approach to the Other.

From a Levinasian perspective, war is not merely a historical or political phenomenon, but rather the ultimate expression of a philosophical commitment to "totality." Totality can be understood as a worldview that seeks to subsume individuals and their unique experiences under any unified system—be it political, cultural, or ideological. This totalizing approach attempts to comprehend and dominate all of existence within a closed system of knowledge, thereby pre-emptively foreclosing any possibility for legitimate alternative perspectives (Hofmeyr, 2024: 30). Within this framework, war emerges as the most lucid manifestation of totality. It is the process by which individuals are reductively instrumentalized as mere tools for the achievement of a grand, abstract objective. This objective can take various forms—the defense of a state or territory, the imposition of a specific ideology, or the establishment of a religious doctrine. War, therefore, possesses the capacity not only to annihilate human beings physically but also to eradicate their very essence—their subjectivity. It operates as a destructive force that submerges all particularity under the logic of the whole. Consequently, war is not simply a clash between armed forces; it is an act of forcibly imposing unity over difference, a process that systematically negates the alterity of the Other. Levinas traces this philosophical tradition in Western thought from Plato to Hegel, arguing that it has perpetrated an "intellectual violence" by consistently thinking of individuals as constituent parts of a whole and prioritizing the whole itself. War, in this view, is the practical enactment of this philosophy: it demands the negation of personal autonomy and sacrifices the individual for the totality, often instilling a metaphysical conviction that such self-annihilation is a sublime and noble act (Atterton, 2009: 148; Moyn, 2005: 96).

Furthermore, war and peace are not two entirely separate and distinct realms; rather, the global order is constituted by their intermixture. In the current state of the world, the logics of war—predicated on the primacy of totality—are deeply and naturally

embedded within human history, politics, and culture. Simultaneously, even within this totality, the potential for peace remains immanent, latent within the ethical relations between human beings. Levinas critiques the common tendency to normalize war and violence by presenting them as standard features of human behavior. He posits that the causes of war are precisely the refusal to assume responsibility for the Other and the betrayal of the ethical relation. This framework directly challenges conceptions of war as a natural, inevitable, or intrinsic part of the human condition. According to Levinas, such a mindset stems from a fundamental failure to acknowledge the primordial existence of the Other, a failure that can, in principle, be transformed through ethical conduct. Nevertheless, he concedes the profound difficulty of sustaining an ethical orientation in a world governed by power and violence. Levinas thus reframes war not as an expression of human strength, but as a manifestation of a profound *weakness*—a moral failure. This very weakness, however, serves to underscore a perpetual ethical imperative: the constant necessity for vigilant consciousness, the continuous struggle against totalizing mentalities, and the unwavering effort to affirm the transcendence of the Other (Hand, 1989: 289-296; Purcell, 2006: 158).

Moral Justification and Ethical Responsibility: A Comparative Perspective

The Augustinian doctrine of just war is fundamentally architected as a necessary compromise between the pacifist ideals of Christianity and the demands of political realism. In stark contrast, the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, forged through direct experience of the profound losses and trauma of 20th-century warfare, originates in an unyielding quest for avenues to transcend violence altogether, with a critical focus on the underlying political and psychological mechanisms that make war possible. From this divergent grounding, the Just War tradition and the Levinasian ethical approach articulate fundamentally incompatible positions on the moral permissibility of warfare. The former provides a pragmatic framework for regulating war, predicated on an acknowledgment of human fallibility and the realities of political order. The latter, however, advocates for an uncompromising prioritization of peace and responsibility, positing that the ethical obligation to approach every human being with humanity is absolute and non-negotiable. For Levinas, this obligation cannot be legitimately overridden by any political or pragmatic calculus; war is, by its very nature, a violent transgression against the inviolable humanity of the Other.

This foundational divergence between the systematized tradition of Augustine and the existential ethics of Levinas precipitates two central questions:

- First, can the Levinasian precepts concerning our relation to the Other be meaningfully integrated within the conceptual structure of the Just War tradition?
- Second, are these two approaches ultimately incommensurable?

A superficial parallel exists in their diagnosis of war's origin: Levinas frames it as a rupture of human ethics, while Augustine perceives it as a consequence of sin—a necessary evil in a fallen world. However, this apparent similarity belies a profound ethical chasm. Levinas's position resonates strongly with the radical pacifist teachings of Jesus, whereas Augustine's theory is explicitly a modification of these teachings to suit the practical exigencies of the *saeculum*. This raises a critical challenge regarding the practical applicability of Levinas's thought to the realm of realpolitik. The crucial distinction lies in their valuation of violence itself. For Augustine, war is a *necessary evil* to be regulated—a manifestation of sin that can be morally harnessed for a just end. Levinas, while acknowledging the potential *necessity* of violence to confront a greater evil, refuses to grant it any *moral* legitimacy. He maintains that war, as the most extreme form of violence, remains an absolute ethical failure. Thus, while Augustine seeks to morally sanitize a necessary instrument of statecraft, Levinas treats all violence as a tragic, and always regrettable, suspension of ethics.

A critical dimension warranting examination is the observable tendency of political and military leaders to frame their decisions and actions not primarily through the lens of raw power politics, but through the language of ethical justification. They meticulously articulate why a specific war is deemed necessary and how its conduct conforms to established moral criteria. This strategic deployment of ethical rhetoric is essential for securing domestic ideological support and legitimizing military action within the international community to facilitate coalition-building (Walzer, 1977: 20). This strategic knowledge elucidates a central paradox in international relations: even when states engage in warfare based on realist calculations of interest, they almost invariably feel compelled to justify their actions within the discursive framework of Just War theory. This adherence to a dualistic posture—where realist action is cloaked in deontological language—has characterized the prosecution of numerous conflicts in recent centuries. The tradition permits a state not only to fight in its own defense but also to render military assistance to an allied nation. However, when a state expends its own resources to aid another, the expectation of reciprocal benefits is a natural corollary of such intervention.

The scope of these expected reciprocities is extensive, ranging from preferential access to the recipient nation's resources to enhanced geopolitical influence and positioning on the global stage. The origins of this practice can be traced to Cicero's writings, who noted that the Roman Empire could extend its hegemony under the pretext of protecting its allies (Mattox, 2006: 15). This historical precedent reveals how the noble imperative to protect others can be strategically instrumentalized to justify the accumulation and projection of power by the intervening state itself.

A foundational tenet of the Just War tradition is that its ultimate objective is the establishment of a stable and lasting peace. However, Levinas subjects the conventional conception of peace—typically realized through political treaties and balance-of-power agreements—to a profound and radical critique. He argues that such "peace" constitutes little more than a temporary suspension of

open warfare, a fragile armistice underpinned by the very same logics of control, domination, and totalization it purports to overcome. For Levinas, this form of peace is not born from an authentic ethical responsibility or a genuine recognition of the Other's existence; rather, it is a condition enforced by the *fear of war*. Consequently, a political structure that remains oriented towards the project of totality is constitutionally incapable of producing a genuine peace. Levinas posits that true peace is not the logical subsumption of diverse elements into a unified system, but rather the "fraternal mode" of a "union that does not fuse" (*un mode fraternel ... d'une union sans fusion*), a coexistence that preserves and honors alterity (Derrida, 1969, *Writing and Difference*). True peace, in this view, emerges not from the erasure of difference through integration, but from the ethical relation to the Other that precedes and transcends all political calculation.

A pivotal and provocative insight from Levinas demands serious consideration: philosophy and war, he contends, are fundamentally complicit in a shared operation. War, in its concrete reality, annihilates individual subjectivity, transforming human beings into mere components of a vast military apparatus subservient to overarching political objectives. In an analogous manner, Levinas argues, the tradition of Western philosophy has systematically subsumed the totality of human experience under constructed, all-encompassing categories and methodologies, forcing the singular into the universal. This philosophical process, which Levinas identifies as totalization (*totalisation*), treats human beings as abstract, generalizable entities, thereby effacing their profound and incommensurable uniqueness. This erasure of alterity is, for Levinas, the core of the problem. He illustrates this by pointing to the historical project of the Roman Empire, which waged innumerable wars in its effort to assimilate diverse indigenous peoples into its imperial totality. Following Christianity's adoption as the state religion, Levinas suggests that Augustine, in his capacity as a philosopher, performed a crucial operation: he theologically "colored" or legitimized Rome's totalizing mission by positing Christianity as the vehicle for perfect peace. This philosophical legitimization successfully inscribed into human consciousness the notion that war could be acceptable, just, and necessary. Thus, the ultimate triumph of the Augustinian philosophical project lies in its having reframed war—a phenomenon that unleashes the most bestial aspects of humanity—into a divinely sanctioned activity. Through this conceptual alchemy, the organized violence of the state was rendered morally intelligible and even obligatory within a theological framework.

What is often accepted as truth are, in fact, interpretations that transcend objective reality—constructed narratives that serve specific ends. The drive to subsume individual identities within a larger totality manifest through numerous channels. These include identity-based collectives such as racism and nationalism; ideological systems like democracy, communism, and socialism; and comprehensive religious worldviews including Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. While these frameworks present themselves as complete and coherent wholes, they are, in practice, composed of smaller, contestable components. It is precisely this perception of their own totality that provides the psychological impetus for dividing humanity, compelling individuals to align with distinct factions and engage in conflict. Philosophers and ideologues have historically fortified this impetus by providing the theoretical underpinnings, systematic justifications, and doctrinal structures that lend these totalities intellectual credibility. A critical examination of any major conflict in world history will readily reveal the significant contributory role played by one or more of these elements. This persistent pattern leads to a profound conclusion: war is not merely a breakdown of diplomacy, but the ultimate manifestation of a collective human failure—a failure to embrace pluralism, honor singularities, and conceive of a shared existence grounded in coexistence rather than assimilation. It represents the comprehensive expression of an inherent inadequacy within the human condition when confronted with the challenge of difference.

Conclusion

Within the architecture of the modern global order, war persists as an immutable reality, perpetually justified under the rubric of political necessity. Despite humanity's collective aspiration for peace, unity, and justice, the lust for power and security has perennially served as a foundational pretext for legitimizing violence. It is against this enduring backdrop that the philosophical debate concerning the ethical permissibility of war continually resurfaces. Saint Augustine's formulation of the Just War doctrine stands as a seminal compromise, seeking to reconcile absolute pacifism with the exigencies of political realism. It is predicated on the conviction that violence may be a necessary instrument to restrain evil, protect the innocent, and restore order. By delineating moral criteria—just cause, right intention, proportionality, and legitimate authority—Augustine established a framework for imposing ethical constraints on warfare, a framework that would later underpin modern international law and the doctrine of humanitarian intervention. Yet, this very framework has historically been instrumentalized to justify political ambitions.

In stark contrast, the ethical metaphysics of Emmanuel Levinas issues a fundamental challenge to the moral legitimacy of war itself. His central concept of the "face of the Other" institutes an infinite and pre-political responsibility for the suffering of another human being. Levinas's primary objective is to posit that human relations must be founded not on violence, but on mutual responsibility. Consequently, he insists that no ethical justification for war is possible, as it constitutes a profound violation of the sanctity of human life. These two philosophical positions illuminate the ethical dimensions of war from divergent vantage points. Augustine provides a philosophy for regulating violence, whereas Levinas champions an ethical awakening that calls for its absolute rejection. Both, however, are ultimately engaged in the defense of human value and the foundations of justice. Contemporary phenomena—from counter-terrorism and humanitarian intervention to asymmetric conflicts—underscore the persistent tension between these two approaches. While Augustinian thought offers a metric for political justification, Levinasian philosophy seeks to reclaim the ethical

conscience of humanity.

The synthesis of these perspectives—a balance between the demands of justice and the imperative of responsibility—offers a new trajectory for the ethical discourse on war. Thus, while war may sometimes appear politically unavoidable, it must forever remain ethically questionable. A path toward a less violent peace for humanity can only emerge from the integration of the calibrated criteria of the Just War tradition with the unyielding ethical vigilance demanded by the "face of the Other." Augustine's doctrine provides the guiding path, while Levinas's ethics provokes us to think beyond it. It is in the confluence of these two streams of thought that the potential for a more profound peace resides—a possibility that can be realized only when political actors and policymakers anchor their actions in unwavering ethical guidance.

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