

Just Participation in Unjust Wars

SABA BAZARGAN

Department of Philosophy, Rutgers University
New Brunswick, NJ, USA

Abstract

According to contemporary, orthodox just war theory, the moral permissibility of participation in a war does not depend on whether that war is just. This position, which has come to be known as the combatant's privilege, has recently been challenged by arguments that cast doubt on the permissibility of participation in unjust wars. I agree that the combatant's privilege is mistaken. However, it seems to have gone unnoticed that determining the permissibility of participation in a war, once the combatant's privilege is denied, is hampered by the fact that most wars have both just and unjust aims. Specifically, there are two problems, broadly construed. Firstly, orthodox just war theory does not provide a method of deriving a univocal claim regarding the justness of a war when that war involves the pursuit of both just and unjust aims. Secondly, even if an account is provided which categorizes wars as either 'just' or 'unjust' (perhaps by deriving the justness of a war from its weighted aims), such an account will have the bizarre consequence that the moral permissibility of participating in a war does not depend on whether that war is just or unjust. The reason for this, I argue, is that any account which categorizes wars as either 'just' or 'unjust' will conceal the moral heterogeneity of the war's composite aims. The permissibility of participation in a war requires a more fine-grained object of moral evaluation than that of the war *tout court*. Ultimately I argue that if we deny the combatant's privilege, we cannot continue to regard the *ad bellum* status of the war as the basis for determining the permissibility of participation in that war.