

War and peace

(a) Explain what is meant by the terms 'just war' and 'pacifism'. (28 marks)

(b) To what extent can pacifism ever be compatible with a just war? (12 marks)

(a) A just war is a war that is fought on the grounds that it fulfils the criteria laid down by one or more versions of the just war theory. The Bible did not offer a clear answer as to whether Christians should fight, but the earliest Christians were pacifists who were not compelled to fight for the army of the occupying Romans. However, when Constantine converted to Christianity, this became an issue that had to be addressed urgently. Christians were vital to the war effort, and when Rome was facing defeat by the Visigoths in 410 CE, many believed that the failure of Christians to fight was weakening Rome's defence.


Augustine was the first to offer a just war theory, later developed by Aquinas who identified three conditions necessary in order for a war to be just: a war must be fought under the authority of the sovereign by whose command the war is to be waged; for a just cause; and a right intention. In time, the theory was developed to distinguish between the principles that should govern resort to war (*jus ad bellum*) and those that should govern conduct in war (*jus in bello*). To Augustine's principles were added the requirements that there must be comparison of justice on both sides; the war must be a last resort; and there should be a reasonable likelihood of success. Conduct in war should ensure that there should be a reasonable proportion between the injustice being fought and the suffering inflicted by war; that the use of weapons must be proportional to the threat and only minimum force should be used; and civilians should be protected as far as possible.

In some cases a just war is religiously motivated, and is in a sense a holy war. At various times it has been suggested by Jews, Christians and Muslims that war is justified in order to defend their faith or, in some cases, to convert others to it. The idea of a holy war has its roots in Jewish scriptures and can be seen in the Crusades, in some modern American attitudes to atheistic countries and in the Muslim *jihād*. Holy wars usually have three characteristics: the achievement of a religious goal; they are authorised by a spiritual leader; and it is believed that there is a spiritual reward for those who take part. The aim of a holy war, therefore, might be to spread the faith, convert people of other nations, recover sacred places or avenge blasphemous acts.

Pacifism is the belief that it is wrong to use force to deal with conflict or to resolve disagreements. It need not simply be applied to refraining from engaging in warfare but in any violence, even on an individual basis. Pacifism has famously been used by

religious and political leaders as a powerful way of addressing major issues, such as Martin Luther King's peaceful protest against racial segregation in the USA. However, in terms of warfare, three types of pacifism can be identified. At its extreme, absolute pacifism promotes the belief that it is never right to take part in war because nothing can justify the killing of human beings. A relative pacifist believes that war is inherently wrong but recognises that there may be circumstances when war is the lesser of two evils. Selective or nuclear pacifists oppose wars involving weapons of mass destruction because of the devastating consequences of such weapons and the fact that it is impossible to win using them. However, they will concede that warfare using conventional weapons is sometimes acceptable.

A pacifist may be motivated by religion, for example drawing on the teachings and practices of Jesus. He taught Christians not to resist an evildoer: 'If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also' (Matthew 5:39). Paul wrote to the Church in Rome encouraging them to leave it to God to settle disputes in his way: 'Vengeance is mine says the Lord.' A pacifist may also be motivated by environmental concerns (war has a devastating effect on the planet, particularly in areas that are already threatened environmentally) or humanitarian concerns. War does not achieve any ultimate good, and can be demeaning and soul destroying for everyone involved. It is also financially draining and even a victorious country may spend many years re-establishing the nation's finances after a war.

 This is a clear approach to the question. The candidate has done exactly what has been asked without any unnecessary padding. He/she has recognised the need to address both aspects of the questions equally. Too many responses to this question will focus too much on discussing just war and make only a passing reference to pacifism. Here, the candidate has shown an equal understanding of both positions. The material on just war draws on a range of approaches and the student has avoided a turgid listing of all the principles in favour of longer, fluent sentences that combine more than one approach.

(b) In principle, it is impossible to reconcile these two approaches to war fully since the just war theory acknowledges that war is sometimes just and necessary, while some approaches to pacifism would consider this an unacceptable compromise. Absolute pacifists would reject fully the view that their position could ever be compatible with the just war theory, as they would be required to reject all wars and violence whatever the cause. For absolute pacifists, the notion of a just war would be impossible to maintain as all wars involve killing and absolute pacifists would reject even a hand being raised in anger.

A nuclear pacifist would be in agreement with many principles of the just war theory but would see that it could not justify nuclear war. The requirement that warfare should be proportionate and discriminate means that nuclear weapons could never be used in a just war. Nuclear weapons do not prevent wars — they still take place without them. All they do is threaten the annihilation of everything. Others argue that nuclear

weapons are so awful that they prevent conflict as nobody is really prepared to use them. In this case the nuclear pacifist may allow that possession of nuclear arms may be pragmatic, but the risks involved must be calculated carefully.

A relative pacifist occupies the position closest to that of just war. Fought in a just cause, war may be the only means of confronting evil, protecting the weak or bringing about vital change in a corrupt regime. The war must still fulfil the other conditions of the just war theory, but if it does, relative pacifism recognises it as addressing one of the particular instances that this position allows.

The relative pacifist is committed to seeking a peaceful solution where at all possible and the just war theory also allows for this — conflict should be the last resort and fought with an eye to proportionality and discrimination. However, in an ideal world, even the relative pacifist will seek to avoid war. In the spirit of the just war theory, all sovereign authorities should recognise that it is not intended to justify *all* wars, only to identify those few that may be, in principle, just.

☞ Again, the candidate has taken care to include nothing here that is not directly relevant. He/she has produced a clearly evaluative response that systematically relates different approaches to pacifism to the just war theory and answers the question. The student demonstrates full understanding of the material and of the need not to waffle or be sidetracked. This is a professional essay that gains a clear A grade.

Don't swamp your answer with examples or case studies from history or contemporary wars — the question isn't intended to test your historical knowledge.

Sexual ethics (1)

- (a) Explain the view that there are no rights and wrongs in sexual ethics. (28 marks)
- (b) To what extent is it reasonable to argue that sexual ethics should be linked to religious beliefs? (12 marks)

(a) The view that there are no rights and wrongs in sexual ethics is based on the presumption that there are no moral absolutes that should control sexual behaviour. A moral absolute is a rule that always applies and to which there can be no legitimate exceptions. Both Islam and Christianity contain a considerable amount of teaching on sexual ethical issues and offer moral guidance in the form of absolute rules. Absolute rules determine what is always permitted or always forbidden, what is always right or always wrong. Thus, if religious texts teach that some sexual behaviour is wrong, it will always be considered wrong and nothing can change that. For example, Exodus 20:14 teaches 'Do not commit adultery' and many people, not just religious believers, consider adultery always to be wrong. Similarly, the Qur'an states: 'nor come nigh to adultery for it is a shameful deed and an evil opening the road to other evils' (Surah 17:32). Therefore, no act of adultery could be believed to be morally right when tested against this teaching.

On the other hand, if there are no moral absolutes there can be no rights and wrongs in sexual ethics. If we adopt this view we are committed to arguing that the moral absolutes found in religious teachings are no longer relevant for modern sexual ethics or have been misinterpreted. For example, we might argue that the prohibition on adultery was intended to control the sexual behaviour of a community that would benefit from a stable family structure or that was aiming to set an example to other communities, but it is not relevant to a society that has already become established. It may be argued that absolute rights and wrongs in sexual ethics are harmful to individuals if they are expected to obey them to the letter but do not feel able to do so.

Perhaps the most prevailing example of this concerns homosexuality. Homosexuality was illegal in the UK until the Homosexual Reform Act of 1967, so it was not only a moral issue but a criminal one. Homosexual people were obliged to go to great lengths to protect themselves against prosecution. In many cases they married heterosexual partners to conceal the truth or to convince themselves they were not gay. This did not ensure happiness for anyone, and many gay people later realised they could not live a false life and had to come to terms with their natural sexual orientation.