



English Learning for Curious Minds



**Member-only content
Transcript & Key Vocabulary**

Thank you - your ongoing membership makes Leonardo English possible.
If you have questions we'd love to hear from you: hi@leonardoenglish.com

Episode #127

The Just War Theory

26th Jan, 2021

[00:00:00] Hello, hello hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:00:12] The show where you can listen to fascinating stories, and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:23] I'm Alastair Budge and today we are going to be talking about Just War, the [ethical](#)¹ and philosophical theories of when it is right to go to war, and how wars should be fought.

[00:00:37] In this episode we'll start by talking about the early ideas about when wars can and should be fought, and how they can be [morally](#)² [justified](#)³.

¹ relating to the individual principles of right and wrong

² relating to the general principles of right and wrong

³ considered acceptable



The Just War Theory

[00:00:48] We'll then talk about probably the most famous Just War theory, by the Italian philosopher and priest, Thomas Aquinas.

[00:00:57] Then, we'll move on to how more recent wars have been [justified](#), some of the alternative theories about when and why countries should go to war, and what this actually all means on a practical [basis](#)⁴.

[00:01:12] So, let's not waste a minute, and get started right away.

[00:01:18] Since the beginning of time, humans have fought to solve [disagreements](#)⁵.

[00:01:24] Both on a one-to-one level, so a caveman punching another one in the face because he stole food from him, and on a much larger level, with hundreds of thousands of people lining up opposite each other and killing each other until one side gave up.

[00:01:43] While this episode isn't going to be an argument either for or against the idea that war is a natural thing for humans to be doing, there can be little doubt that for as long as humans have existed, we have [resorted to](#)⁶ violence as a means of solving problems.

⁴ the fact or ideas from which something is developed

⁵ a situation in which two or more people do not agree

⁶ to do something bad because there is no other option



The Just War Theory

[00:02:02] There's a phrase in English that goes "All's fair in love and war", which means when it comes to affairs of love, or of fighting, there are no rules.

[00:02:14] But while this might be a [catchy](#)⁷ and memorable phrase, and is one that's used by people actually having [extra-marital affairs](#)⁸ - they're of course talking about the love, rather than the war – we'll find out that there are some rules, and certainly a lot of theories, that cover what is and isn't fair, or just, when it comes to 'war'.

[00:02:38] Given that fighting has been a theme throughout history, philosophers, religious leaders, and thinkers have [devoted](#)⁹ a large amount of time considering the question of war.

[00:02:51] When is it right to go to war?

[00:02:54] When is it ok to kill someone?

[00:02:58] How should wars be fought?

[00:02:59] Although the most famous Just War Theory was proposed by Thomas Aquinas, an Italian monk in the 13th century, these types of questions have troubled thinkers from all over the globe since [the dawn of time](#)¹⁰.

⁷ easy to remember

⁸ sexual relationships with someone you are not married to

⁹ used a lot of time (to do)

¹⁰ the start of time, the start of history



The Just War Theory

[00:03:15] There's evidence of the considerations of under what conditions going to war is acceptable in the Indian [epic¹¹](#) the Mahabharata, parts of which date back to the 4th century BC.

[00:03:29] And throughout Ancient Rome and Greece, philosophers [took a stab at¹²](#) deciding when it was right to go to war.

[00:03:39] Aristotle suggested that war was an acceptable decision to take if the alternative was being sold into slavery, and the ancient Romans believed that a war was [justified](#) to stop an invasion or if a [treaty¹³](#) was broken.

[00:03:57] But of course, given the fact that the Romans conquered large parts of Europe, without [treaties¹⁴](#) being broken or the threat of an invasion, they evidently didn't always stick to their own rules.

[00:04:11] In Europe, it was only really after Christianity started to become an important religion that questions about the [justification¹⁵](#) of war became more and more important.

¹¹ very long poem

¹² tried to do

¹³ a written agreement between two or more countries

¹⁴ a written agreement between two or more countries

¹⁵ a good and acceptable reason for doing something



The Just War Theory

[00:04:24] The Bible, the most important religious text in Christianity, has quite a lot to say about the rights and wrongs of killing.

[00:04:33] To start off with, the Fifth Commandment is Thou Shalt not Kill - you shall not kill.

[00:04:41] The Bible also [preaches¹⁶](#) that you should turn the other [cheek¹⁷](#) if you are [slapped¹⁸](#), that you should forgive if you are [wronged¹⁹](#), if someone does something wrong to you.

[00:04:51] And there are dozens of other parts of the Bible that either [implicitly²⁰](#) or [explicitly²¹](#) [condemn²²](#) killing people or taking [revenge²³](#).

[00:05:02] So [reconciling²⁴](#) this, making this work, with the idea that there are some situations in which it is right to go to war, and to kill other people, is challenging.

¹⁶ talk about how good something is, in order to encourage other people to do it

¹⁷ the soft part of your face between your mouth and ear

¹⁸ hit with the palm of your hand

¹⁹ if you are wronged, someone does something bad to you

²⁰ in a way that is suggested indirectly

²¹ in a way that is suggested directly

²² say is wrong

²³ something that is done to punish someone because they have done something to you

²⁴ to find a way to make two or more things be true and acceptable



The Just War Theory

[00:05:16] It's worth just taking a quick pause to consider the meaning of the word 'just'.

[00:05:24] Just can mean '[morally](#)' right, but it can also refer to whether something can be [justified](#).

[00:05:32] So if a war is 'just', it doesn't necessarily mean that it is the [morally](#) correct thing to do, but it can mean that it is the right thing to do because the alternatives are worse.

[00:05:47] It's an important [distinction](#)²⁵, and one that's worth making before we get into the Christian tradition of Just War.

[00:05:55] So, Christian philosophers were trying to figure out under what criteria they could ignore this particular part of the Bible, or at least make their practical, real-life world work with their religious beliefs.

[00:06:12] The first of these was in the 5th century AD, a man called Saint Augustine, Augustine of Hippo, a [bishop](#)²⁶ from modern day Algeria.

[00:06:22] He documented eight different [criteria](#)²⁷ in a theory about when Christians could go to war, and it was primarily based on the idea that violence wasn't good [per](#)

²⁵ difference between two similar things

²⁶ an important Christian official

²⁷ standards used to judge something



The Just War Theory

[se²⁸](#), it wasn't good in itself, but that Christians shouldn't be frightened of using violence when the objective of doing so is to promote peace.

[00:06:46] He even went one step further saying that opting not to fight, opting for peace, if you could stop a terrible thing from happening was a sin.

[00:06:58] So, not going to war, if going to war would stop something bad from happening, was a sin against God.

[00:07:06] Fast forward 800 years or so and the next major development in Just War Theory came from a Dominican priest from modern day Italy, called Thomas Aquinas, or Tommaso D'Aquino in Italian.

[00:07:21] He was really the father of modern Just War Theory, and a lot of how Western countries think about war today comes from the writings of Thomas Aquinas.

[00:07:34] To summarise, Aquinas wrote that three conditions needed to be met for a war to be 'just'.

[00:07:43] Firstly, the war needed to be fought under the command of a just leader, a king or queen.

[00:07:51] Secondly, the war needed to be fought because of a just reason, because a wrong had been done.

²⁸ in itself



The Just War Theory

[00:08:00] And thirdly, the [intent](#)²⁹ of those fighting must be good, and by [intent](#) he meant that they should try to promote good and [avoid](#)³⁰ evil.

[00:08:12] These three conditions might seem a little simplistic, and they are certainly [open to interpretation](#)³¹.

[00:08:20] What meets the condition of a just leader, a true leader?

[00:08:25] What meets the condition of a just reason, and what is a 'wrong' one?

[00:08:31] And, what meets the conditions of having 'good [intent](#)'? Surely that is very much [open to interpretation](#)³².

[00:08:40] Indeed, at the time that Thomas Aquinas was writing his Just War Theory, Christian [crusaders](#) were off in the Middle East fighting a holy war that they believed to be 'just', according to the conditions set out in Aquinas's theory, but most people today wouldn't believe to be 'just' and correct.

[00:09:02] For the [crusaders](#), it was 'just' because it was a holy war, they were fighting it on behalf of their God, which was a 'just' reason, so it had good [intent](#).

²⁹ objective

³⁰ if you avoid something, you deliberately do not do it

³¹ The Crusaders were Christian soldiers in the 11th-13th centuries who attempted to take Palestine from the Muslims

³² can be understood in different ways



The Just War Theory

[00:09:14] And it was [sponsored](#)³³ by [sovereign](#)³⁴ leaders, it was allowed and promoted by the true leaders of the countries, so it met all of the conditions of Aquinas's theory.

[00:09:27] Apart from these three conditions, of having a just leader, a just reason, and to promote good and not evil, Aquinas also proposed that violence should be used as a [last resort](#)³⁵, after all peaceful [avenues](#)³⁶ had been [exhausted](#)³⁷.

[00:09:45] Leaders had an obligation to try and find a peaceful solution, and war was only [justified](#) if none could be found.

[00:09:55] Aquinas didn't only deal with the [morals](#)³⁸ of when to go to war, but also how you should behave during battle, how you should behave when you are at war.

[00:10:08] Soldiers shouldn't use [excessive](#)³⁹ violence or [cruelty](#)⁴⁰, they should only do what is necessary for the war to be fought, nothing more.

³³ paid for and supported

³⁴ having the highest power in a country

³⁵ if something is a last resort, it is what you do because there are no other options

³⁶ options

³⁷ finished, not available

³⁸ general standards of right and wrong

³⁹ more than is necessary

⁴⁰ behaviour that deliberately causes pain and suffering



The Just War Theory

[00:10:18] So, killing innocent non-military people, killing civilians, that was out of the question.

[00:10:26] [Subsequent](#)⁴¹ philosophers built on Aquinas's theory to consider the idea of when it is right to go to war, and how these wars should be fought.

[00:10:37] At least in Western culture, the theories presented by Aquinas have been developed, but [at its core](#)⁴² the ideas about when it is just to go to war, and how wars should be fought have remained pretty similar since the 13th Century.

[00:10:55] You could argue that Thomas Aquinas's theory hasn't really done a huge amount to stop wars from happening in the first place, but what it has done is it has presented a [framework](#) for thinking about war, and this [framework](#) has been used over and over when leaders are considering the rights and wrongs of going to war.

[00:11:19] Perhaps the largest and most testing time, the most challenging time, for the theory of Just War came in the 20th Century, with World War I, and then World War II.

⁴¹ happening after something else

⁴² at its most important part



The Just War Theory

[00:11:32] At the beginning of World War I there was actually a [theological](#)⁴³ battle going on between German and British [theologians](#)⁴⁴ about who was [in the right](#)⁴⁵, who was fighting a 'just' war.

[00:11:47] Indeed, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the most senior person in the Anglican Church collaborated with a large number of religious leaders to publish a document [outlining](#)⁴⁶ why the German [theologians](#)' ideas about war were wrong, and why it was actually the British forces, the Allied forces, who were [in the right](#).

[00:12:12] And the 20th century has of course put a lot of Aquinas's theories to the test.

[00:12:19] When Aquinas was writing, war was fought on battlefields by men with swords, [bows](#)⁴⁷ and [arrows](#)⁴⁸, and hand to hand [combat](#)⁴⁹.

[00:12:30] Yes, civilians might get hurt and cities might be burned to the ground, but it was [a far cry](#)⁵⁰ from the events of even World War II, when cities would be bombed to

⁴³ relating to the study of religion

⁴⁴ the study of religion

⁴⁵ correct and right

⁴⁶ showing the main arguments

⁴⁷ a weapon used for shooting arrows (see next word)

⁴⁸ a long, thin stick with a sharp end and feathers at the other end

⁴⁹ fighting

⁵⁰ to be very different



The Just War Theory

the ground by aeroplanes far up in the sky, or today, where [drone⁵¹ strikes⁵²](#) on civilians can be carried out from thousands of miles away.

[00:12:53] Some of Aquinas's ideas about what a just leader was have also been questioned, and this is often pointed at as a problem with his theory.

[00:13:04] With Aquinas's just war theory, an official leader was the only one capable of [waging⁵³](#) a 'just' war.

[00:13:12] This would mean that a rebellion or revolution would be, by default, [unjust⁵⁴](#), because the leader wasn't [sovereign](#).

[00:13:21] Lenin, the Soviet revolutionary leader, therefore decided to come up with his own Just War Theory, which was based on the idea that war was [justified](#) as part of a revolution.

⁵¹ an unmanned aircraft

⁵² military attacks

⁵³ starting (a war)

⁵⁴ not fair



The Just War Theory

[00:13:36] For Lenin, the war was between the [oppressed](#)⁵⁵ and the [oppressors](#)⁵⁶, the working [proletariat](#)⁵⁷ and the Russian [bourgeoisie](#)⁵⁸, the poor and the rich.

[00:13:47] He argued that there was no need to ask yourself ‘who was attacking who’, because the [oppressed](#), the Russian poor, were being fought by their [bourgeoisie oppressors](#), by the rich.

[00:14:00] A socialist war against the [oppressors](#) was, by default, just.

[00:14:06] Of course, World War II caused the most direct deaths of any war in the history of mankind, and there were some real questions posed there about the right and wrong way to fight a war.

[00:14:21] World War II might have been the last global war, but it certainly hasn’t been the last war.

[00:14:28] Countries [embarking](#)⁵⁹ on military campaigns since then have often used a similar [framework](#) to the one Aquinas developed 700 years ago to think about whether the war can be [justified](#) or not.

⁵⁵ people who are treated unfairly

⁵⁶ people who treat others unfairly

⁵⁷ unskilled, usually urban workers

⁵⁸ the rich and educated in society (according to Marxism)

⁵⁹ starting



The Just War Theory

[00:14:43] The modern theory of Just War revolves around the idea that war is something that should be [avoided](#)⁶⁰ if at all possible, but there are times where it is the least bad option.

[00:14:57] And Just War Theory may be the most famous theory about when and under what conditions it is right to go to war.

[00:15:06] But it's not without its opponents, or at least alternatives.

[00:15:11] Pacifists, for example, argue that there is never a time for war, that there are always peaceful options that are better than going to war.

[00:15:22] And on the other side, there are those that feel that the Just War theory is too [lenient](#)⁶¹, it actually [imposes](#)⁶² too many conditions for a war to be just.

[00:15:36] Militarism is a theory that proposes that war isn't inherently bad, it's not bad in itself, and it can actually be a good thing for society.

[00:15:48] Realism is another theory that you might be familiar with, and proposes the idea that looking at these kinds of questions [through a moral lens](#)⁶³ just isn't realistic, it's not the right way to think about it.

⁶⁰ if you avoid something, you deliberately do not do it

⁶¹ not as strong or severe as is required

⁶² officially force

⁶³ consider morally



The Just War Theory

[00:16:03] Instead, countries should be practical, and [on occasion](#)⁶⁴ war is the most practical, realistic, action to take.

[00:16:13] And somewhere in the middle is something called consequentialism, the theory that the end [justifies](#)⁶⁵ the means, that if the [outcome](#)⁶⁶ of war, or an act during the war, is good, then the act can be [justified](#).

[00:16:31] For example something like dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War II would be [justified](#) like this, as the objective was to end the war, even though the impact of dropping two atomic weapons on two large cities was, evidently, [horrific](#)⁶⁷.

[00:16:53] Now, bringing this back to real life for one minute, what does this actually mean [in terms of](#)⁶⁸ whether a country can or can't go to war with another one?

⁶⁴ sometimes

⁶⁵ be considered acceptable

⁶⁶ result

⁶⁷ very bad

⁶⁸ relating to



The Just War Theory

[00:17:03] We've dealt with the [moral](#)⁶⁹ and [ethical](#) arguments, but when it comes to [practicalities](#)⁷⁰, when and under what conditions can a country now go to war with another?

[00:17:15] Evidently this is a very complicated subject, far too complicated to cover properly in a small section of this episode, but there is no black and white answer of under what conditions a country can or can't go to war.

[00:17:31] I'm sure that we can all think of examples from recent years of countries, including the UK, going to war and there being large debates both inside and outside that country about whether the war is just, and whether it's indeed legal.

[00:17:49] From a legal point of view, in the United Nations Charter countries have [sworn](#)⁷¹ to not use force against the territorial [integrity](#)⁷² or political independence of any state.

[00:18:00] So any country that signed the UN Charter, and that's almost every country in the world, has [sworn](#) to not go to war with another country.

[00:18:10] But, as we know, there are still countless examples of wars still happening, for reasons that wouldn't pass the test of being 'Just'.

⁶⁹ relating to general ideas of right and wrong

⁷⁰ the real facts of a situation

⁷¹ promised

⁷² (of a country) being united



The Just War Theory

[00:18:21] So, although the theory of Just War does give us a useful [framework](#) for thinking about the rights and wrongs of war, and when a war can actually be [justified](#), real life suggests that, as Jack Sparrow of Pirates of the Caribbean once said, they're more like [guidelines](#)⁷³ than actual rules.

[00:18:43] OK then, that is it for Just War, and the theory of when, and under what conditions war can be [justified](#).

[00:18:52] To state the obvious, it is a complicated, [divisive](#)⁷⁴, but certainly interesting subject.

[00:18:57] I hope you enjoyed it, and that you learned something new.

[00:19:02] As always, I would love to know what you thought of today's episode.

[00:19:06] What do you think of the Just War theory?

[00:19:09] Are there [circumstances](#)⁷⁵ when war can be [justified](#)? Or is it never right, whatever the other options?

[00:19:16] You can head right into our community forum, which is at community.leonardoenglish.com.

⁷³ information given as advice, not official rules

⁷⁴ if something is divisive, it causes disagreement between people

⁷⁵ the conditions that affect a situation



English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #127
The Just War Theory

[00:19:22] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:19:27] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF PODCAST]



Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Ethical	relating to the individual principles of right and wrong
Morally	relating to the general principles of right and wrong
Justified	considered acceptable
Basis	the fact or ideas from which something is developed
Disagreements	a situation in which two or more people do not agree
Resorted to	to do something bad because there is no other option
Catchy	easy to remember
Extra-marital affairs	sexual relationships with someone you are not married to
Devoted	used a lot of time (to do)
The dawn of time	the start of time, the start of history
Epic	very long poem
Took a stab at	tried to do
Treaty	a written agreement between two or more countries



The Just War Theory

Treaties	a written agreement between two or more countries
Justification	a good and acceptable reason for doing something
Preaches	talk about how good something is, in order to encourage other people to do it
Cheek	the soft part of your face between your mouth and ear
Slapped	hit with the palm of your hand
Wronged	if you are wronged, someone does something bad to you
Implicitly	in a way that is suggested indirectly
Explicitly	in a way that is suggested directly
Condemn	say is wrong
Revenge	something that is done to punish someone because they have done something to you
Reconciling	to find a way to make two or more things be true and acceptable
Distinction	difference between two similar things
Bishop	an important Christian official
Criteria	standards used to judge something



The Just War Theory

Per se	in itself
Intent	objective
Avoid	if you avoid something, you deliberately do not do it
Open to interpretation	can be understood in different ways
Crusaders	The Crusaders were Christian soldiers in the 11th-13th centuries who attempted to take Palestine from the Muslims
Sponsored	paid for and supported
Sovereign	having the highest power in a country
Last resort	if something is a last resort, it is what you do because there are no other options
Avenues	options
Exhausted	finished, not available
Morals	general standards of right and wrong
Excessive	more than is necessary
Cruelty	behaviour that deliberately causes pain and suffering



The Just War Theory

Subsequent	happening after something else
At its core	at its most important part
Framework	way of thinking about something
Theological	relating to the study of religion
Theologians	the study of religion
In the right	correct and right
Outlining	showing the main arguments
Bows	a weapon used for shooting arrows (see next word)
Arrows	a long, thin stick with a sharp end and feathers at the other end
Combat	fighting
A far cry	to be very different
Drone	an unmanned aircraft
Strikes	military attacks
Waging	starting (a war)
Unjust	not fair



The Just War Theory

Oppressed	people who are treated unfairly
Oppressors	people who treat others unfairly
Proletariat	unskilled, usually urban workers
Bourgeoisie	the rich and educated in society (according to Marxism)
Embarking	starting
Avoided	if you avoid something, you deliberately do not do it
Lenient	not as strong or severe as is required
Imposes	officially force
Through a moral lens	consider morally
On occasion	sometimes
Justifies	be considered acceptable
Outcome	result
Horrific	very bad
In terms of	relating to
Moral	relating to general ideas of right and wrong



The Just War Theory

Practicalities	the real facts of a situation
Sworn	promised
Integrity	(of a country) being united
Guidelines	information given as advice, not official rules
Divisive	if something is divisive, it causes disagreement between people
Circumstances	the conditions that affect a situation

We'd love to get your feedback on this podcast.

What did you like? What could we do better?

What did you struggle to understand?

Let us know in the forum community.leonardoenglish.com

