

St. Augustine's Just War Theory: an Analysis of its Moral Implications in the Context of the Israel-Gaza Conflict

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Abstract: This study critically examines St. Augustine's Just War Theory and its implications in the context of the Israel-Gaza conflict, a complex and enduring geopolitical struggle. Augustine's theory, one of the foundational texts in Christian ethics, outlines specific criteria for when war is morally justifiable, including just cause, right intention, legitimate authority, proportionality, and the pursuit of lasting peace. In this analysis, these principles are used as a framework to assess the actions of both Israel and Gaza, particularly focusing on military engagements, civilian casualties, and claims of self-defense. Through a qualitative methodology that combines historical, theological, and contemporary conflict analysis, the research evaluates how well the conflict aligns with Augustine's ethical standards. The findings reveal that, while both parties often cite self-defense as a just cause, significant ethical challenges arise, particularly regarding the proportionality of force and the protection of non-combatants. Augustine's emphasis on peace as the ultimate goal of any just war is contrasted with the ongoing cycle of violence, raising questions about whether either side is genuinely pursuing a peaceful resolution. Additionally, the issue of legitimate authority complicates the application of Augustine's theory in a conflict involving state and non-state actors. The study concludes that while Augustine's Just War Theory remains a valuable tool for ethical reflection, its application to modern asymmetric conflicts, such as the Israel-Gaza war, requires careful consideration of the unique challenges posed by contemporary warfare. This research underscores the need for reinterpreting ancient ethical frameworks in light of current geopolitical realities.

Keywords: St. Augustine's Just War Theory; Israel-Gaza Conflict; Ethical Challenges; Proportionality of Force; Legitimate Authority.

Introduction

The Israel-Gaza conflict, a focal point in Middle Eastern geopolitics, is one of the most protracted and volatile disputes of the modern era. Rooted in competing nationalist, territorial, and religious claims, the conflict traces its origins back to the early 20th century. The establishments of the State of Israel in 1948, followed by the Arab-Israeli wars, and the subsequent occupation of Palestinian territories, have fueled decades of military and political tension between Israelis and Palestinians. The Gaza Strip, governed by Hamas since 2007, has been a key flashpoint, with recurrent hostilities involving rocket attacks, airstrikes, and ground operations. The humanitarian toll of these cycles of violence, particularly the loss of civilian lives, has prompted significant international debate over the ethical dimensions of the conflict.

This paper aims to evaluate the Israel-Gaza conflict through the lens of St. Augustine's Just War Theory, a foundational ethical framework in Christian thought. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following questions: To what extent do the actions of Israel and Gaza align with the criteria of a just war as articulated by Augustine? How do the principles of just cause, right intention, proportionality, and the pursuit of peace apply to this modern conflict? By addressing these questions, the paper explores the relevance and limitations of Augustine's theory in understanding the ethical challenges posed by contemporary asymmetric warfare. Ultimately, the research aims to contribute to the broader discourse on war ethics by contextualizing ancient philosophical principles within a modern geopolitical conflict.

Theoretical Underpinning of the Concept of Just War Theory

The development of Just War Theory has spanned over centuries, with its origins primarily found in early Christian thought, most notably in the works of St. Augustine (354–430 CE). Augustine's contributions emerged in the context of a Roman Empire transitioning from paganism to Christianity, where questions about the morality of war within a Christian ethical framework became increasingly relevant. Augustine contended that war, though tragic and inherently violent, could be justified if it aimed to restore peace and justice (Johnson, 2019). For Augustine, war was not to be waged for conquest or power but as a last resort, with the intention of correcting a wrong or protecting the innocent. His framework laid the foundation for later developments, focusing on key principles such as legitimate authority, right intention, and the pursuit of peace as ultimate goals of any just war (Langan, 1984).

Following Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274 CE) significantly expanded Just War Theory during the medieval period. In his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas systematized the theory, providing a clearer, more structured approach. Aquinas introduced the concepts of *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*, two central pillars of the theory that have since become foundational (Aquinas, 1947/2017). *Jus ad bellum* refers to the conditions that must be met for the initiation of a just war. These include:

1. **Just Cause:** War must only be waged to right a grievous wrong, such as self-defense or protecting the innocent.
2. **Legitimate Authority:** Only duly recognized and competent authorities (such as governments) have the right to declare war (Biggar, 2013).
3. **Right Intention:** The aim of the war must be the restoration of peace and justice, not for material gain or vengeance.
4. **Last Resort:** All non-violent means must be exhausted before resorting to war.
5. **Reasonable Chance of Success:** War must not be undertaken if it is doomed to fail, as this would unnecessarily lead to loss of life (Bellamy, 2006).

Jus in bello on the other hand, focuses on the ethical conduct within war. This includes the principles of:

1. **Proportionality:** The violence used in war must be proportional to the goals sought. Excessive force or indiscriminate violence is deemed unjust.
2. **Discrimination:** Combatants must distinguish between legitimate military targets and non-combatants. Civilians and non-combatants should not be intentionally targeted in warfare (Walzer, 2006).

In the centuries following Aquinas, Just War Theory continued to evolve, particularly in response to the changing nature of warfare. The theory's principles were further refined by Christian thinkers and secular philosophers alike. In the 16th and 17th centuries, scholars like Francisco de Vitoria and Hugo Grotius expanded the theory in the context of international law, making significant contributions to the development of the concept of sovereignty and the rights of nations (Russell, 2016).

In contemporary times, thinkers such as Michael Walzer and Jean Bethke Elshtain have revisited Just War Theory, addressing the challenges posed by modern warfare, including terrorism, asymmetrical conflicts, and humanitarian interventions. Walzer's *Just and Unjust Wars* (1977) critiques the rigid application of traditional just war criteria, emphasizing the need to rethink these principles in light of conflicts where non-state actors, such as insurgents and terrorist organizations, play a significant role. He questions how concepts like legitimate authority apply when wars are not always declared by states but rather by groups acting outside traditional legal frameworks. Walzer also delves into the moral ambiguity of civilian casualties in modern warfare, given the widespread use of technologies such as drones, airstrikes, and cyber warfare, which often blur the lines between combatants and non-combatants (Walzer, 2006).

Jean Bethke Elshtain, in her work *Just War Against Terror* (2003), reflects on the ethical dimensions of the "War on Terror," arguing for the need to adapt traditional just war principles to address the moral complexities of fighting non-state actors. She highlights the ethical dilemmas posed by modern conflicts, particularly the need for a just response to terrorism that balances national security with the protection of human rights (Elshtain, 2003). In addition, contemporary scholars have debated the applicability of Just War Theory to humanitarian interventions, where military action is taken not for self-defense but to prevent atrocities such as genocide or ethnic cleansing. These interventions, while often framed as morally just, pose challenges to traditional just war principles, particularly around issues of sovereignty and legitimate authority (Bellamy, 2006). Critics argue that such interventions may be abused for political purposes, while proponents maintain that the international community has a moral duty to prevent large-scale human rights violations (Orend, 2013).

Thus, the evolution of Just War Theory—from Augustine to Aquinas, and further through contemporary scholars—illustrates its dynamic nature, constantly being adapted to address the moral challenges posed by different historical contexts and the evolving nature of warfare. The theory's key principles of *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* provide a moral and ethical framework for evaluating the justice of war and the conduct within it. However, its application in modern conflicts, such as the Israel-Gaza war, requires careful consideration of the unique challenges posed by asymmetry, the role of non-state actors, and the blurring lines between combatants and civilians. This theoretical underpinning thus serves as the ethical backdrop for analyzing the Israel-Gaza conflict, offering a lens through which to assess the actions of both sides within the conflict.

A Scholarly Overview of the Historical Antecedents of the Israel-Gaza War

The Israel-Gaza conflict is a deeply complex and multifaceted struggle, rooted in a century of geopolitical tensions, nationalistic aspirations, and territorial disputes. At its core, the conflict revolves around the longstanding Israeli-Palestinian question, with Gaza becoming a particularly volatile flashpoint after Israel's disengagement from the territory in 2005. The withdrawal, followed by the election of Hamas as the governing authority in Gaza in 2007, marked a significant shift in the dynamics of the conflict. Since then, Gaza has been embroiled in a cycle of violence, characterized by frequent clashes, rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel, and Israeli military responses through airstrikes and ground operations (Bregman, 2017).

Historically, the conflict can be traced back to the early 20th century, with the rise of both Zionism and Arab nationalism in Palestine during the waning years of the Ottoman Empire and under British mandate rule. Tensions escalated following the United Nations' 1947 partition plan, which led to the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and the creation of the State of Israel. The 1967 Six-Day War resulted in Israel's occupation of Gaza, alongside the West Bank, marking a significant point in the territorial dispute. While Israel withdrew its settlements from Gaza in 2005, the region remains a highly contested space with significant humanitarian and political challenges (Shlaim, 2014).

The Israel-Gaza conflict involves various stakeholders with divergent perspectives. From the Israeli standpoint, national security is paramount. Israel views the repeated rocket attacks from

Hamas and other militant groups in Gaza as acts of aggression, necessitating defensive military actions. The Israeli government argues that its military operations are in line with its right to self-defense, as enshrined in international law, particularly when its civilian population is targeted (Gross, 2020). Moreover, Israel contends that Hamas' strategy of embedding military infrastructure within civilian areas further complicates the ethical and tactical dimensions of its military responses.

On the Palestinian side, particularly from Hamas' perspective, the conflict is seen as a struggle for liberation from Israeli occupation and what they perceive as apartheid-like policies toward Palestinians. For Hamas, armed resistance is framed as a legitimate response to decades of Israeli control and the blockade imposed on Gaza, which they argue has led to severe humanitarian conditions. The blockade, along with periodic escalations in violence, has devastated Gaza's infrastructure, economy, and population, contributing to widespread poverty and suffering (Roy, 2016).

International actors, including the United Nations, the United States, and regional powers like Egypt and Qatar, also play crucial roles in the conflict. The U.N. has frequently condemned both sides for violations of international humanitarian law, particularly the disproportionate use of force and the targeting of civilians. The U.S., a key ally of Israel, has consistently supported Israel's right to self-defense while simultaneously calling for a negotiated two-state solution to address the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Meanwhile, Egypt and Qatar have often acted as intermediaries in ceasefire negotiations, reflecting their regional interests and relationships with both Israel and Hamas (Bacharach & Barak, 2018).

However, in recent years, several key developments have shaped the Israel-Gaza conflict, further complicating its resolution. The 2021 escalation in violence marked one of the most intense flare-ups in recent history, with both sides suffering heavy casualties. The conflict, triggered by tensions in East Jerusalem and the Israeli response to protests at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, quickly spread to Gaza, leading to a renewed exchange of rocket fire and Israeli airstrikes. The 2021 violence once again highlighted the civilian toll of the conflict, with international actors calling for restraint while grappling with the underlying issues of occupation, blockades, and the status of Jerusalem (Beaumont, 2021).

Another significant development is the increasing role of Hamas in regional geopolitics. In the aftermath of the Arab Spring and shifting alliances in the Middle East, Hamas has sought to navigate its relationships with both Arab and non-Arab states, balancing its ideological commitments with pragmatic concerns. The recent rapprochement between Israel and several Arab states through the Abraham Accords has further altered the dynamics of the conflict, isolating Hamas from some of its former regional backers (Miller, 2020). Nonetheless, support from actors such as Iran continues to fuel Hamas' military capabilities, complicating efforts toward de-escalation and peace.

Socially, the ongoing conflict has had a profound impact on both Israeli and Palestinian civilians. In Israel, the psychological toll of living under the constant threat of rocket fire has led to widespread trauma, particularly among those residing near Gaza. In Gaza, the blockade and repeated military confrontations have devastated the local population, with high unemployment rates, limited access to basic services, and a growing sense of hopelessness among the youth (Feldman, 2018). These social consequences underscore the human cost of the conflict and highlight the urgent need for a sustainable political solution.

The Israel-Gaza conflict, deeply embedded in historical grievances, territorial disputes, and divergent national aspirations, remains one of the most challenging conflicts of the modern era. A multifaceted analysis reveals that the perspectives of various stakeholders—Israel's security concerns, Hamas' calls for resistance, and the involvement of international actors—are all crucial to understanding the complexities of this conflict. Recent developments, such as the 2021 escalation and the shifting regional alliances, further complicate prospects for peace. A

resolution to the conflict will require addressing not only the immediate security concerns but also the deeper political, social, and humanitarian issues that continue to fuel the violence.

Analysis of the Principles of St. Augustine's Just War Theory in the light of Israel-Gaza War

St. Augustine (354–430 CE) is credited as one of the earliest Christian thinkers to develop a theological and philosophical framework for the concept of a just war. Writing during a period of political instability in the late Roman Empire, Augustine sought to reconcile Christian pacifism with the necessity of warfare in certain circumstances. His *Just War Theory* laid the foundation for later developments in Christian and secular thought on the ethics of war, including the work of Thomas Aquinas and modern just war theorists. Augustine's approach to war was shaped by his belief in the inherent sinfulness of humanity and the necessity of maintaining social order. While Augustine believed that violence was intrinsically evil, he argued that war could sometimes be a necessary evil in a fallen world, where peace could only be achieved through the use of force in certain situations. His principles, though not as systematically outlined as later formulations, provided the groundwork for key elements of *Just War Theory* that persist today. The key principles of his theory could be summed as follows:

1. **Just Cause:** For Augustine, the primary justification for war was the restoration of peace and justice. War could be waged to defend the innocent, reclaim stolen property, or punish wrongdoing. Augustine argued that war was only permissible if it was fought in response to an injustice or in defense of others, not for purposes of conquest, domination, or revenge (Johnson, 2019).
2. **Legitimate Authority:** Augustine emphasized that the decision to wage war must be made by a lawful authority, such as a sovereign ruler or state. This principle was rooted in his belief that individuals, even when wronged, did not have the right to seek personal retribution. Only those in positions of authority, entrusted with maintaining peace and order, could declare war (Mattox, 2006). This notion of legitimate authority later became a central tenet of just war thinking, formalized in international law.
3. **Right Intention:** Augustine stressed that war must be fought with the right intention—namely, to restore peace and justice. War should not be motivated by hatred, revenge, or a desire for power. The end goal of any just war, according to Augustine, must be a just and lasting peace (Elshtain, 2003). This idea emphasizes the ethical dimension of warfare, asserting that the internal motivations of those waging war are just as important as the external conditions.
4. **Last Resort:** Although not explicitly defined in Augustine's writings, the idea that war should only be pursued after all peaceful alternatives have been exhausted is implicit in his thought. Augustine viewed war as a tragic necessity, to be avoided whenever possible but accepted when no other option could rectify grave injustices (Biggar, 2013). The idea of war as a last resort has since become a crucial aspect of modern just war doctrine.
5. **Proportionality and Discrimination:** Augustine's thoughts on how wars should be conducted emphasized the importance of limiting violence and ensuring that innocent civilians were not deliberately targeted. While Augustine did not provide a fully developed concept of *jus in bello* (justice in war), his insistence on right intention and proportionality implied that the means of warfare should be carefully measured to avoid unnecessary harm (Langan, 1984).

Augustine's principles remain influential in contemporary discussions on just war, but they have also evolved in response to the changing nature of warfare. In modern times for example, thinkers such as Michael Walzer have adapted Augustine's ideas to address the complexities of new forms of conflict, including terrorism and asymmetrical warfare. The principle of just cause, for instance, has been expanded to include humanitarian interventions aimed at preventing atrocities such as genocide or ethnic cleansing (Orend, 2013). Additionally, the principle of legitimate authority is now interpreted in the context of international law and the role of

institutions like the United Nations. Modern just war theory often requires that states seek approval from international bodies before engaging in military interventions, reflecting a shift from Augustine's focus on individual rulers to a more collective approach to decision-making (Bellamy, 2006). The emphasis on right intention also persists, though contemporary scholars often debate how to assess the motivations of states and non-state actors in a globalized, politically complex world.

Despite its enduring influence, Augustine's Just War Theory has faced significant criticism, particularly from modern philosophers and ethicists who question its applicability to contemporary conflicts. One of the primary critiques is that Augustine's theory is overly idealistic and fails to account for the moral ambiguities of modern warfare. Thus, critics argue that Augustine's concept of right intention is difficult to apply in today's conflicts, where the motivations of warring parties are often unclear or mixed. For example, in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the global War on Terror, the question of whether a state or group is truly fighting for justice or simply pursuing its own interests is often hotly debated (Walzer, 2006). Modern conflicts, especially those involving non-state actors like insurgent groups, challenge the clarity of the just war framework.

Similarly, Augustine's principles, rooted in classical warfare, are often seen as inadequate for addressing the challenges posed by asymmetrical conflicts, where one party may be a state with a professional military and the other a guerrilla or terrorist group. Contemporary critics argue that the rigid distinctions between combatants and non-combatants, central to the principle of proportionality, become blurred in such conflicts. The use of drones, cyber warfare, and other modern technologies further complicates Augustine's vision of ethical warfare (Gross, 2020). Moreover, Augustine's accommodation of war as a means to achieve peace has also been challenged by pacifist thinkers, both historical and contemporary, who argue that war, by its very nature, cannot lead to true justice or peace. Pacifist theologians like Stanley Hauerwas contend that Christians should follow Jesus' example of non-violence, rejecting Augustine's justification of war as incompatible with Christian teachings (Hauerwas, 2011). Still, some critics argue that the broadening of the concept of just cause in modern interpretations of Just War Theory has led to the justification of too many wars. The inclusion of pre-emptive strikes and humanitarian interventions as just causes has been criticized for providing states with moral cover for aggressive actions. Augustine's original framework, which emphasized defense and the restoration of justice, is seen by some as more restrictive and thus less likely to be abused (Biggar, 2013).

The foregoing notwithstanding, St. Augustine's Just War Theory laid the groundwork for the ethical evaluation of warfare, introducing principles such as just cause, legitimate authority, and right intention. While these ideas remain influential in contemporary discussions, they have been both expanded and critiqued in light of modern conflicts. The moral ambiguities of asymmetrical warfare, the rise of non-state actors, and the evolving nature of international law all challenge the applicability of Augustine's framework. Nevertheless, Augustine's insistence on the moral limitations of war continues to provide a valuable lens through which to evaluate the ethics of military conflict.

Moral /Ethical Implications of St. Augustine's Just Way Theory for the Israel-Gaza War

The application of St. Augustine's Just War Theory to the ongoing Israel-Gaza conflict offers both insights and challenges in addressing the ethical and moral dimensions of warfare in the modern world. Augustine's principles, which emphasize just cause, legitimate authority, right intention, and proportionality, provide a framework for evaluating the actions and policies of both Israel and Gaza's governing body, Hamas. However, the complex nature of this conflict, which involves state and non-state actors, asymmetrical warfare, and deep-rooted historical grievances, reveals the limitations of Augustine's theory in its original form.

The first area of moral assessment centers on the principle of just cause and Israel's right to self-defense. Arguably, one of Augustine's core principles is that war must be waged for a just cause,

typically in response to an injustice or an attack. In the context of the Israel-Gaza conflict, Israel frequently invokes this principle to justify its military actions against Hamas, particularly in response to rocket attacks launched from Gaza. Israel argues that these acts of aggression constitute a direct threat to its civilian population, thus providing a just cause for military retaliation. This aligns with Augustine's belief that the defense of innocent lives can be a legitimate reason for warfare (Gross, 2020). However, Augustine also emphasized that a just cause must not be conflated with aggressive expansion or unnecessary violence. Critics of Israel's military responses often argue that the disproportionate use of force in densely populated areas of Gaza, leading to significant civilian casualties and destruction of infrastructure, violates the principle of proportionality, a key component of Augustine's theory. The challenge here is balancing the right to self-defense with the ethical or moral responsibility to minimize harm to civilians, which Augustine saw as essential for maintaining moral legitimacy in war (Elshtain, 2003).

In the second instance, Hamas' perspective of resistance is also laden with a serious moral challenge. Arguably, from the standpoint of Hamas, its actions are framed as part of a broader resistance to Israeli occupation and the blockade of Gaza, which it views as unjust and oppressive. Hamas claims that its use of armed force is a necessary response to the long-standing deprivation and human rights violations faced by Palestinians, fitting Augustine's criteria for a just cause. Yet, the indiscriminate nature of rocket attacks targeting civilian areas in Israel complicates Hamas' claim to be adhering to the principles of a just war. Augustine stressed that a just war must distinguish between combatants and non-combatants, and the deliberate targeting of civilians undermines any ethical justification for warfare (Orend, 2013). Furthermore, the question of legitimate authority arises. Augustine's theory asserts that only a legitimate authority can declare war. Israel, as a recognized state, meets this criterion, but Hamas, being classified as a terrorist organization by many international bodies, does not possess the same legal standing. This raises ethical / moral questions about the applicability of just war principles to non-state actors engaged in armed struggle, a dilemma Augustine did not face in his time but which modern interpretations must address (Bellamy, 2006).

The third moral burden rests on the principle of proportionality of force. Clearly, Augustine's principle of proportionality requires that the violence used in war be commensurate with the threat faced and that it avoids unnecessary harm, particularly to civilians. This principle is relevant to both sides of the Israel-Gaza conflict. Israel's airstrikes on Gaza, which often result in significant civilian casualties, have been widely criticized for lacking proportionality. The 2021 conflict, for example, saw over 250 Palestinians killed, many of them civilians, while Israel argued that its strikes were targeted at Hamas militants and military infrastructure (Beaumont, 2021). On the other hand, Hamas invasion of Israel on October 7, 2023 which resulted in the massacre of 1,200 men, women and children with 254 hostages taken into Gaza on the claim of retaliation also violates St. Augustine's principle of proportionality. In response, Israel has also bombarded Gaza resulting to the death of over 42,000 civilians (men, women and children). For Augustine, such large-scale loss of civilian life would violate the moral parameters of a just war, as the goal of restoring peace and justice cannot be achieved through indiscriminate destruction.

Moreover, Hamas' strategy of launching rockets from within civilian areas, effectively using civilians as human shields, also violates the principle of proportionality and ethical warfare. This tactic complicates Israel's military response, making it difficult to avoid civilian casualties, but it also raises moral questions about Hamas' commitment to protecting its own population, a responsibility Augustine would likely view as paramount for any legitimate authority.

Aside the moral / ethical burden placed upon Israel and Gaza by St. Augustine's Just War Theory; the theory in itself is fraught with some challenges of application especially in highly sophisticated context like the Israel-Gaza war. For example, the Israel-Gaza conflict poses significant challenges to the application of Augustine's Just War Theory, particularly when considering the asymmetry in military power and the blurred lines between combatants and non-combatants. It could be argued that while Israel's actions can often be framed within the context

of self-defense, the scale of its military responses and the civilian toll raises ethical / moral concerns about whether such actions truly meet the criteria of a just war. This is clearly the case with the ongoing response of Israel to the Hamas attack of October 7, 2023. The principle of *right intention*, which Augustine emphasized, is also contested. Although both sides claim to seek peace and justice, their methods and the outcomes of their actions suggest that achieving lasting peace may be secondary to achieving strategic military objectives (Walzer, 2006). For Hamas, the ethical implications are equally complex. While they claim to be resisting occupation and fighting for the rights of Palestinians, their tactics, particularly the targeting of civilians is clearly in conflict with the ethical demands of just war. Therefore, Augustine's theory demands a higher moral standard from those who wage war, including a commitment to minimizing harm to innocents, which both sides of this conflict struggle to uphold.

Adding to this is the fact that Augustine's framework was developed in a different historical context, one characterized by conventional warfare between states or empires. Also, the weapons of warfare deployed in conventional warfare in the context of Augustine were not as sophisticated as we have it today. The Israel-Gaza conflict, involving a highly advanced military power on one side and a non-state actor using guerrilla tactics on the other, presents a modern reality that Augustine's principles do not fully account for. Asymmetrical warfare introduces ethical dilemmas that challenge the proportionality and discrimination principles, especially when one side has significantly more military power than the other. For instance, Israel's use of sophisticated technology such as drones and airstrikes against a relatively poorly equipped Hamas raises the question of whether Augustine's idea of proportionality can still apply in such imbalanced conflicts (Bellamy, 2006).

Finally, the ethical implications of applying Just War Theory to the Israel-Gaza conflict extend beyond the direct actors to include international stakeholders. Augustine's notion of legitimate authority would suggest that international organizations, such as the United Nations, have a role in mediating and addressing the underlying injustices that fuel the conflict. However, the repeated failure of international diplomacy to bring about a lasting peace raises questions about the responsibility of external actors in perpetuating or mitigating violence. Augustine's emphasis on restoring peace would imply that global powers bear a moral responsibility to actively seek justice and peace in conflict zones like Gaza (Elshtain, 2003).

Consequently, it could be stated that while St. Augustine's Just War Theory provides a valuable ethical framework for evaluating the Israel-Gaza conflict, emphasizing the need for just cause, legitimate authority, right intention, and proportionality poses a serious limitation to it. For instance, the application of these principles to the modern realities of asymmetrical warfare and non-state actors presents significant challenges. While both Israel and Hamas claim to meet the criteria of a just war, their actions often fall short of the ethical standards Augustine envisioned, particularly in terms of protecting civilians and pursuing a just peace. The conflict highlights the limitations of traditional just war theory in addressing the complexities of contemporary warfare, suggesting the need for a more nuanced approach to ethical evaluations of war in the 21st century.

Conclusion

The application of St. Augustine's Just War Theory to the Israel-Gaza conflict reveals both the enduring relevance and the limitations of his ethical framework in understanding modern warfare. Augustine's principles—just cause, legitimate authority, right intention, and proportionality—provide a crucial lens for evaluating the actions of both Israel and Hamas. The concept of just cause underlines the moral justification for Israel's military responses to rocket attacks, while also revealing the ethical complexities of Hamas's claims of resistance against perceived oppression. However, the application of Augustine's framework also highlights significant challenges, particularly regarding the proportionality of responses and the ethical treatment of civilians. In contemporary conflicts characterized by asymmetrical warfare and the involvement of non-state actors, the rigid application of Augustine's principles becomes

increasingly difficult. The ethical dilemmas inherent in such conflicts necessitate a more nuanced interpretation of just war theory that takes into account the realities of modern warfare, including the use of advanced technology, guerrilla tactics, and the blurring of lines between combatants and civilians. The moral imperatives that underpin Augustine's theory call for a higher standard of conduct in warfare that remains relevant in assessing the legitimacy of actions taken by both sides.

Given the complexities highlighted in this analysis, future research should focus on several key areas. More in-depth studies could examine how just war principles can be adapted or modified to address the unique challenges posed by asymmetrical conflicts. Understanding how these principles apply to non-state actors and guerrilla warfare is crucial for developing a contemporary just war framework. Further exploration is needed into how international law intersects with Just War Theory, particularly regarding the responsibilities of global actors in mediating conflicts like that of Israel and Gaza. This includes investigating the effectiveness of international interventions and the moral obligations of states under international law. Research could also delve into how public perception of just war principles influences policy decisions and military actions. Understanding the moral beliefs of citizens and their impact on the support for military engagements could inform both political and military strategies. Lastly, policymakers should be guided by ethical considerations drawn from Augustine's framework when crafting responses to conflicts. The development of ethical guidelines that prioritize civilian protection and humanitarian considerations could enhance the legitimacy of military actions and international responses.

In summary, Augustine's Just War Theory remains a vital tool for understanding and evaluating modern conflicts. Its principles encourage a critical reflection on the moral dimensions of warfare, prompting both scholars and policymakers to seek solutions that uphold ethical standards and promote lasting peace.

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