

Notes from the Radlett U3A Philosophy Group 21st February 2013

The subject for discussion "is there ever a "just war"? A straw poll at the start showed a majority thought the Iraq war was not justified and that WW2 was justified.

During a general discussion the following points were aired: -

- Why don't we go to war against all tyrants?
- The Holocaust was not the reason for WW2
- When choosing to go to war there is not the advantage of hindsight
- Civilians always suffer in war
- The public should be allowed a referendum before war is declared
- National interests such as oil, industry or weapons influence decisions
- Human beings are by nature cruel
- If WW2 was justified, was Hiroshima?
- Was Dresden revenge or to destroy civilian morale?
- Is the targeting of civilians ever legitimate?
- Mrs Thatcher appeared to enjoy being at war
- Would it be just to have another Falklands war?
- The 6 day war was easy to justify
- Rich Arab countries have not helped Palestinian refugees
- The United Nations gives its blessing to wars
- The rate of suicide of troops is shocking
- The armed forces do not prepare combatants for return to civilian life
- The mental health of troops is better if they regard the war as just
- History is written by the victors
- Conscientious objectors are cowards
- Pacifists have often taken dangerous humanitarian roles in warfare
- Conditional pacifism allows some self defence

Quotes from philosophers included: -

The school of Salamanca gave examples of "just war" as 1) in self-defence, if there is a reasonable possibility of success 2) Preventive war against a tyrant who is about to attack. 3) War to punish a guilty enemy.

Cicero argued that war must be for just vengeance or self-defence, be publicly declared after compensation for the enemy's offence had first been demanded.

Thomas Aquinas gave three conditions for a just war 1) There must be a just cause. 2) The war must be started and controlled by the authority of state or ruler. 3) The war must be for good, or against evil.

Plato advocated a close relationship between ethics or virtue and military training in the Republic.

The general feeling expressed at the end was that it had been an interesting discussion with no solutions. Whilst we seek to justify war, the results are harder to justify. It was suggested (by a man) that men cause wars; therefore we should be governed by women.