

2019

## Realist Ethics: Just War Traditions as Power Politics

Doyle Hodges

Valerie Morkevičius

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

---

### Recommended Citation

Hodges, Doyle and Morkevičius, Valerie (2019) "Realist Ethics: Just War Traditions as Power Politics," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 72 : No. 2 , Article 14.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol72/iss2/14>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu](mailto:repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu).

For each conflict considered, Drohan describes its origin, introduces the activist groups, exposes the human rights violations, details the activists' challenges to the British methods, and reveals the British leaders' systematic and bold efforts to deny any brutality against insurgents and innocent civilians. Throughout the book, Drohan provides numerous examples of *lawfare*, a concept he describes as a strategy for using—or misusing—the law to achieve an operational military objective.

Chapters 1 and 2 cover the late 1950s Cyprus insurgency and the Cyprus Bar Council's extensive efforts to counter Britain's coercive interrogation methods to obtain intelligence. With parallels to the war on terror, Greek Cypriot lawyers challenged the colonial secretary's Emergency Regulations that vested near-absolute power in the British military commander on Cyprus. The legal battles continued for years, including an appeal to the European Commission of Human Rights to investigate the British atrocities; however, Britain successfully deflected the allegations until the conflict was resolved without any meaningful resolution of the abuses that British soldiers perpetrated.

In the 1960s, when an anticolonial insurgency arose in the British territory of Aden and Britain employed the same brutal tactics used in Cyprus, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) stepped in to protect unlawfully detained nationalists. Chapters 3 and 4 detail the ICRC and Amnesty International efforts to counter and expose British violations on the international stage. With aggressive, unrelenting campaigns on both sides, it was, as Drohan notes, a protracted and messy affair, with numerous investigations,

British manipulation of the process, and hollow victories for the advocates.

Chapter 5 focuses on British brutality during the Northern Ireland Troubles, including Britain's approval of five techniques used for interrogation of interned prisoners: wall standing, hooding, white noise, sleep deprivation, and a bread-and-water diet. Despite evidence of illegal detention and coercive interrogations, Britain successfully limited government inquiries and shielded or absolved officials and interrogators from legal liability. Years later, when George W. Bush administration officials sanctioned similar enhanced interrogation techniques, those officials likewise were shielded from liability.

Drohan's examination and detailed study of the relationship between human rights activism and British counterinsurgency practices is worthy of review by civilian and military leaders with a role in shaping wartime policy, particularly lawyers, military planners, and policy writers. *Brutality in an Age of Human Rights* is eminently worthy of a spot on the counterinsurgency bookshelf next to David Galula's *Counterinsurgency Warfare* (Praeger, 2006), John Nagl's *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 2005), and the *U.S. Army / U.S. Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (Cosimo, 2010).

JEFF A. BOVARNICK



*Realist Ethics: Just War Traditions as Power Politics*, by Valerie Morkevičius. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2018. 268 pages. \$34.99.

Professor Valerie Morkevičius offers a provocative thesis in her new book: the just war tradition has more in

common historically with realist views of international relations than with the idealist views that characterize contemporary just war thought. She argues that just war thinking will be a more effective constraint on the use of force if it returns to those realist roots, rather than continuing trends toward pacifism and “liberal crusading” that dominate much modern work on just war. Morkevičius supports her thesis with careful scholarship in the Christian, Islamic, and Hindu just war traditions and persuasive arguments about the relationships among religion, power, law, and the use of force.

Morkevičius was motivated by puzzling behavior prior to the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. Prominent realists, such as John Mearsheimer, Stephen Walt, and Robert Pape, vocally opposed the war as unnecessary and inimical to U.S. interests. Prominent just war thinkers, including Michael Walzer, James Turner Johnson, and Jean Elshtain, expressed cautious support for the war. Curious about how realism—often associated with the amoral use of force by states—could be invoked to oppose the war, while the just war tradition—normally associated with limits on the use of force—could be called on to support it, Morkevičius studied the history of just war thought. “I expected—in typical liberal fashion—to see a constant evolution of just war norms toward the good. . . . What I found was a history of power” (p. 5).

The book rigorously traces that history. Drawing on representative thinkers from major periods of Christian, Islamic, and Hindu just war thought, Morkevičius shows that just war thinking can be evaluated through an international relations lens as expressing evolving norms about the use of state power. Norms are a more efficient way for powerful states

to enforce their desires than frequently going to war. Just war traditions represent one way to create and sustain norms that benefit powerful states. To be clear, she does not suggest that religious authorities cynically serve the interests of the state; rather, they are pragmatic about the scope of their influence.

Morkevičius shows how the relationship between religious authority and the state can explain the historical focus of just war thought. When the political power of religious authorities was tenuous, religious thinkers emphasized the legitimacy of the state and focused on questions of how believers could justify war—*jus ad bellum* questions. When the relationship between religious authority and the state was more secure, the religious leaders offered views on how political authorities should conduct themselves in war—questions of *jus in bello*. Thus, early Christian and Islamic writers were concerned with whether, when, and against whom war could be justified, while later writers in both traditions explored the duty to protect noncombatants from the evils of war. Hindu just war thought is more difficult to trace, since it relies more on oral traditions and less on written scriptures, but Morkevičius shows a similar development in Hindu epics and sacred texts. Concern with the treatment of noncombatants, she asserts, reflected not only a religiously founded moral emphasis on mercy but also a politically expedient emphasis on avoiding actions that would make it difficult to govern conquered territories by fostering bitterness among the defeated population. The three disparate religious traditions Morkevičius examines are united by a pessimistic view of human nature. They all believe that, although humans need

each other to survive and thrive, people are naturally fractious, routinely fighting with one another rather than cooperating. Political realism shares this outlook. By contrast, much contemporary just war thinking begins from a secular legalist perspective, which is more optimistic and idealistic about human nature and the ability of rules and norms to create a just society. Morkevičius argues that this modern idealism is responsible for both a pacifist tendency in modern just war thinking, which can weaken its power to create norms, since states are unlikely to give up the use of force entirely, and an interventionist tendency, which leads to concepts that challenge sovereignty, such as the responsibility-to-protect doctrine. While the motives are laudable, she asserts, these trends risk marginalizing the influence of just war thought.

Practitioners will find the argument of this book interesting and will benefit from exposure to Islamic and Hindu just war traditions, which are likely less familiar to them than the Christian tradition. Scholars will enjoy the rigorous research and careful textual analysis. Whether one agrees with its thesis or not, the book challenges readers and engages them in an important dialogue about how power, religion, authority, and norms interact in the international arena.

DOYLE HODGES



*Cadets on Campus: History of Military Schools of the United States*, by John Alfred Coulter II. College Station: Texas A&M Univ. Press, 2017. 464 pages. \$50.

J. A. Coulter has done a masterful job tracing the evolution and history of

military schools throughout the United States over the past 216 years. What really makes this book unique is the extent of Coulter's research. He provides a comprehensive review of all the military schools that have been established across the United States. The appendices, notes, and references are a testament to the research Coulter conducted to prepare the manuscript. He provides both history and analysis to demonstrate the impact of each of these schools on American history. As a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy, I was fascinated to learn about the important role that the graduates of military schools have played in our nation's history.

Initially, Coulter lays the foundation and explains the elements of military school culture in terms of Edgar Schein's organizational culture model using artifacts, espoused values, and underlying assumptions. Artifacts include the cadet uniforms, rank, and insignia. Espoused values consist of the cadet honor codes and leadership values. "According to Edgar Schein, the final and most powerful element of organizational culture is shared tacit assumptions which result in perceptions, feelings, and behaviors that are learned and taken for granted and are not debatable" (p. 4). These elements make the military schools unique and give them a special place in the history of American education.

Coulter tells the story of how just a few men, such as Major Sylvanus Thayer, USA, and Captain Alden Partridge, USA, who worked together in the early years at West Point, were instrumental in the growth of military schools and colleges across the United States. Partridge's subsequent court-martial and removal from West Point laid the