

H-Net Reviews

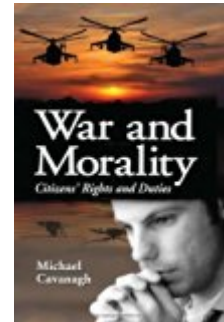
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Michael E. Cavanagh. *War and Morality: Citizens' Rights and Duties*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2012. 207 pp. \$45.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7864-6988-8.

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey



Informational! Informative! Educational! Challenging! This book is more than a book about war and morality. It is about the rights and duties of all American citizens. With that said, readers from every nation, especially those from democratic ones, will benefit from reading this book. Buy it!

“The purpose of this book is to help today’s citizens make decisions with regard to whether war in general or a specific war can be a moral enterprise based on core constitutional and humanitarian values” (p. 2). It does not provide the reader with a check list to determine whether a war is moral or just. Neither is it either prowar or antiwar. What it does is provide the reader with a great deal of information about war, morality, and ethical decision making. It challenges the reader to inform himself or herself and then become proactive and hold the government accountable when it comes to matters of war, interventions, and peace.

The author uses the introduction to inform the reader about the journey to be taken through the eight chapters in the book. He describes the journey in clear, concise terms. He also reminds us that as citizens we are the primary stakeholders in our government, especially when it comes to war. Thus, the American citizen owns the wars we fight. The citizens of this country are the employers of the politicians and the military leadership and not the other way around! The latter are obligated to provide us with sufficient information to approve or not approve going to war, our conduct in it, and when it is time for peace. The author notes that there is a limit to the amount of information that can be shared due to reasons of security, but this threshold is overly used.

In the first chapter the author does a superb job of ed-

ucating the reader about conscience and moral decision making. His discussion about ethical theories is clear as is his discussion of the process of moral decision making. He concludes this chapter with a critical analysis of conscience. This discussion itself makes the book worth reading.

Cavanagh’s second chapter focuses on the principles of just war. It is perhaps the best overview of these principles that this reviewer has read. Of particular interest is that this author includes a discussion of *jus post bellum*, or the just termination of war. Only a few of us write about this aspect of war. To ignore it is to set the stage for yet another conflict. The Treaty of Versailles and the humiliation of Germany at the end of WWI, for example, set the stage for the emergence of Hitler. We cannot repeat this mistake.

In his third chapter the author plays the two extremes of pacification and realism. He does a pretty good job and toes the line quite well.

One of the more interesting chapters is the fourth. Here he discusses virtue and compares it to values. If you read this chapter carefully you readily start thinking reflectively. You can understand that although each of the military services has a set of core values this does not translate into upright behavior. There is a difference in touting values and not encompassing virtues. To fully understand the difference the reader must do a lot of reflecting.

The fifth chapter is quite interesting in that the author talks about the cognitive dimension of moral decision making. As with the previous chapter, this one encourages the reader to be reflective. Although the author

does not specifically state the situation, the reference to Lt. Gen. Gregory Newbold is quite obvious (p. 114). While attending a planning meeting for the Iraqi Freedom Operation General Newbold knew he should speak up about several of the issues that were simply dismissed. By his own admission he did nothing because “[he] was the junior military guy in the room.”[1]

Cavanagh began chapter 6 with this mind-grabbing statement: “National political and military leaders often claim civilians and soldiers, are not in a position to make informed conscience decisions about war because they are not privy to important information about war” (p. 125). He then begins to show why this is the case. He specifically addresses the issues of propaganda and deceit by federal government officials. He clarifies his discussion on propaganda by explaining the difference between persuasion and propaganda. An important element of his dialogue about propaganda and deceit concerns the consequences of such activities, the replacement of faith in political and military leaders by cynicism on the part of the people. The long-term impact of cynicism does not serve our republic well.

In the last two chapters of the book the author focuses on the theoretical and practical issues of morality and war. Particularly interesting is his ten-page discussion on preemptive and preventive force, which goes beyond

theoretical issues. The future implications for a nation that employs either may reveal themselves in unexpected ways.

The author concludes the book with discussions about terrorism, unmanned aerial vehicles, cluster munitions, economic sanctions, and the use of depleted uranium in munitions. There is much to think about as one reads these five sections. They are well written.

There is but one criticism of this book. The author should have written some sort of summary or wrap-up chapter. Perhaps he will at a later date.

This book is informative and well worth reading. It ought to be mandatory reading in all military ethics courses. Politicians and military leaders are advised to read this book as well. Finally, citizens of all democratic societies, especially the United States, would be well served to read this book. With the knowledge thereby gained they could then hold their political and military leaders accountable with regard to the employment and deployment of their nation’s military forces.

Note

[1]. Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York: Pantheon, 2006), 4.

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