Morality and Political Violence

Political violence in the form of wars, insurgencies, terrorism, and violent rebellion constitutes a major human challenge today as it has so often in the past. It is a challenge not only to life and limb, but also to morality itself. In this book, C. A. J. Coady brings a philosophical and ethical perspective to the subject. He places the problems of war and political violence in the frame of reflective ethics. In clear and accessible language, Coady reexamines a range of urgent problems pertinent to political violence against the background of a contemporary approach to just war thinking. The problems examined include the right to make war, the right way to conduct war, terrorism, revolution, humanitarianism, mercenary warriors, conscientious objection, combatant and noncombatant status, the ideal of peace and the right way to end war, pacifism, weapons of mass destruction, and supreme emergency exemptions from just war prohibition. Coady attempts to vindicate the relevance of the just war tradition to contemporary problems without applying the tradition in a merely mechanical or uncritical fashion.

C. A. J. Coady is an Australian philosopher with an international reputation for his research in both epistemology and political and applied philosophy. In addition to his academic work, he is a regular contributor to public debate on topics having to do with ethical and philosophical dimensions of current affairs. A professor of philosophy at the University of Melbourne, he has served as the founding director of the Centre for Philosophy and Public Issues and the deputy director of the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics and head of its University of Melbourne division. In 2005, he gave the Uehiro Lectures on practical ethics at Oxford University.

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For my parents, Phyllis and Jack, in gratitude

The air is loud with death,
The dark air spurts with fire,
The explosions ceaseless are.

Isaac Rosenberg,
"Dead Man's Dump"

Contents

Preface

My interest in war and related forms of political violence dates back to my early childhood, when, before conscription was instituted, my father volunteered for service in World War II. I recall being shocked when I realised that war involved people who didn't know each other and had no direct grievance against each other trying desperately to kill each other because they were on opposite "sides." My shock was of course all the greater and more personal for the realisation that my father might kill or be killed. He was not killed or physically wounded, as it happens, though he took part in one of the bloodiest battles of the Australian involvement in the Pacific war against the Japanese on the island of Tarakan off the Borneo coast. I don't know what part he played in the killing of enemy soldiers, since, like many combat soldiers, he was most reluctant to speak to his family of his war service.

Since then, my conviction that there is something affronting, even absurd, and certainly morally problematic about the resort to war has been strengthened by reading and reflection about war's reality. I have never myself experienced what Keegan once called "the face of battle," and hope never to do so. My nearest brush with military realities was when I had a commission from the British (and, sadly, still Australian) queen as a cadet lieutenant in my school cadet corps and learned the arcane skills of firing the Bren gun, the .303 rifle, and the anti-tank six-pounder. All these weapons were, even then, antiquated, and are now almost antique, so I hardly qualify as "a trained killer," but I got a whiff of the atmosphere of military training, and it did nothing to promote the romance of war for me.

I will not here elaborate my position on political violence, since what follows is an attempt to do that, but I will foreshadow my attitude. I am sympathetic to some strands in the just war tradition, but also to some central elements in the pacifist tradition. Indeed, I think that there is more convergence between the two traditions than is usually acknowledged. The third tradition often invoked in the discussion of war and political violence more

generally is the one known as realism, and again I think that there is more affinity between central elements in realism (understood as the creation of political theorists like Morgenthau) and the just war tradition than is usually allowed. But to say this much is only to gesture at a position; my defence of it is to be found in what follows.

I owe thanks to many people and many institutions. In the course of researching and writing this book over far too many years, I have published articles on the themes of a number of its chapters in learned journals, and I must thank various journal publishers for allowing me to make use of rewritten versions of those articles or extracts from them. The journals are *Ethics*, *Inquiry, Philosophy*, *The American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, *The Journal of Applied Philosophy*, and *The Journal of Ethics*. I thank Jeff Ross for permission to use some material in Chapter 13 that I wrote for our joint publication in *The American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* (2000), "St. Augustine and the Ideal of Peace." I have also drawn upon work of mine that has appeared in edited books, most notably in *The Encyclopedia of Ethics*, second edition, ed. Laurence and Charlotte Becker (Routledge, 2001); *Terrorism and Justice: Moral Argument in a Threatened World*, ed. C. A. J. Coady and Michael O'Keefe (Melbourne University Press, 2002); *A Companion to Applied Ethics*, ed. R. G. Frey and K. Wellman (Blackwell, 2003); *Ethics and Foreign Intervention*, ed. Deen K. Chatterjee and Don Scheid (Cambridge University Press, 2003); *Terrorism: The Philosophical Issues*, ed. Igor Primoratz (Palgrave, 2004); *Ethics and Weapons of Mass Destruction*, ed. Sohail Hashmi and Steven Lee (Cambridge University Press, 2004); *Ethics of Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism*, ed. Georg Meggle (Ontos Verlag, 2005); and *Righteous Violence: The Ethics and Politics of Military Intervention*, ed. Tony Coady and Michael O'Keefe (Melbourne University Press, 2005). My thanks to the publishers for permission to draw upon these writings.

I have been supported in my research by the University of Melbourne and its Philosophy Department and by the Centre for Philosophy and Public Issues (CPPI) and later the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics (CAPPE) at the University of Melbourne. I also gratefully acknowledge several grants and a Senior Fellowship from the Australian Research Council, and Fellowships at the University Center for Human Values at Princeton University (1993–94), Corpus Christi College Oxford (2005), and the United States Institute of Peace in Washington, D.C. (1999–2000). I learned from my participation in a variety of workshops and seminars on issues to do with the themes of this book at the University of Melbourne, the Center for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC) at Stanford University, the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy at the University of Maryland, the Philosophy Department at the University of Arizona in Tucson, the Jean Beer Blumenfeld Centre for Ethics at Georgia State University, Princeton University (both the Center for Human Values and the Philosophy Department), Oxford University, and Leipzig, Bonn, Berlin, and Bielefeld Universities.

I have received particularly helpful comments and criticism on topics discussed in the book from too many people to mention here, but special thanks are due to Andrew Alexandra, Robert Fullinwider, Mark Johnston, Arthur Kuflik, John Langan, David Lewis, Judith Lichtenberg, David Luban, Jeff McMahan, Igor Primoratz, David Rodin, Debra Satz, Henry Shue, and Janna Thompson. My thanks also to David Coady for discussion of some issues involved in causation that are relevant to the discussion of C. D. Broad's position in Chapter 11 and of some problems concerning intention and terrorism in Chapter 8. I have also learned from many who have published on these topics, especially Anthony Coates, Robert Fullinwider, Robert Holmes, Jeff McMahan, Richard Norman, David Rodin, Henry Shue, and Jenny Teichman, to name only a few. (Others are cited in the text.) It is unlikely that anyone who writes on the central topics dealt with in this book can fail to be indebted to Michael Walzer's restatement and recasting of traditional just war thinking in his book *Just and Unjust Wars*, and I am happy to acknowledge the stimulation I received from his work. Much of this has been stimulation to disagreement, for philosophers are disagreeing, if not disagreeable, people.

I would also like to thank a number of people who helped me with research assistance over the years, especially Will Barrett, Mianna Lotz, Andrew Schaap, Jeff Ross, Toni Morton, Anna Goppel, Jessica Wolfendale, and, most helpfully, Ned Dobos, who was in at the death, so to speak, and who worked very hard to help organise the final presentation of the manuscript. He also provided invaluable help in compiling the index. My wife, Margaret, deserves more than the usual ritual of thanks to a life partner, for she has supported me through the thick and thin of my work on these themes, even though I suspect that she has never fully accepted my obsessional interest in this rather depressing topic. It is certainly very depressing at the time of this writing, though a recent report marshaling statistics to show that the number and intensity of wars has declined dramatically since 1992 offers some encouragement that the stubborn capacity of human beings to fail to learn from history may be suffering some slight erosion.

Finally, the topics addressed in this book are discussed from a philosophical point of view, but since everyone has, or should have, an interest in the bearing of morality upon political violence, I have attempted to write in a way that avoids philosophical technicalities where possible. My hope is that much of the argument will be accessible to those in disciplines beyond philosophy and to interested nonspecialists. I admire philosophy that is clear and embodies standards of rigorous argument – standards that I aim to emulate here – but on topics having to do with political violence, I have little sympathy with thought that is enclosed in houses of intellect locked and shuttered against the world.

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