Activity 1 – Regulating War

When Rome adopted Christianity as its official religion, under Constantine the Great (306 – 337 CE), the Empire was faced with a moral dilemma: how to reconcile an essentially peaceful moral code, complete with “turn the other cheek” instructions, with the political expediency of maintaining the rule of Rome and of expanding the Empire. The eventual answer was encapsulated in what evolved into the Just War Tradition, which attempts to codify when and how a war might be fought. Drawing on thinking from classical Greek and Roman philosophers, like Plato and Cicero, and added to by Christian theologians, like Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, today it offers a philosophical, if not ethical and moral, guide to whether a war is “just”. Elements of Just War thinking can be found in ideas such as Chivalry and even in the principles of the United Nations.

Task 1

Read the following overview of the Just War Tradition:

http://www.iep.utm.edu/justwar/

1. Does the Just War Tradition still have a place in a world of nuclear weapons and drones?
2. To what extent do statesmen today take notice of such a moral code?
3. Are the principles of Jus in Bello followed by all participants in a conflict?

Attempts to regulate the conduct of war have an equally long history: in wars in Ancient Greece, olive trees were not cut down as they were so important to local life and so slow-growing. More recently, efforts such as the Hague Peace Conferences of the very late nineteenth century and the Geneva Conventions have sought to make the care of the wounded, protecting civilians and outlawing some extreme methods of killing (such as soft-nosed or “dum-dum” bullets). Today, symbols such as the Red Cross and Red Crescent are internationally recognised and achieve a high degree of respect, despite occasional outrages such as the bombing of hospitals.

Task 2

Watch the following summary of the Rules of War from the International Commission for the Red Cross and Red Crescent (ICRC): https://youtu.be/HwpzzAefx9M

Read this summary of the legal position on the rules of war: https://humanrightsinvestigations.org/the-laws-of-war/
1. How carefully do states such as the United Kingdom or the United States apply these rules?

2. How realistic is it to expect terrorist organisations to abide by these rules?

3. How can such rules be enforced?