Can There be a Just War?

a talk by

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Abstract: Just war theory distinguishes between *jus ad bellum* (whether the war itself is justified) and *jus in bello* (whether the conduct of those fighting the war is justified). I argue, against the traditional view, that modern warfare has made it impossible to separate the two in practice. Specifically, I argue that modern war is a techno-cultural system which requires its participants to violate the primary criterion of *jus in bello* – noncombatant immunity. From this it follows that even a war of self-defense is not a just war. I then consider several challenges to my position – the doctrine of double effect and the claim that noncombatant immunity can be suspended on the basis of military necessity or supreme emergency. I argue that neither of these challenges are acceptable and that to suspend the rule of noncombatant immunity is to suspend the moral point of view itself. Finally, I suggest alternatives to surrender, alternatives which would change the techno-cultural system of modern war.
The Speaker: Karsten J. Struhl teaches political and cross-cultural philosophy at John Jay College of Criminal Justice (CUNY) and the New School. He has co-edited Philosophy Now, Ethics in Perspective, and The Philosophical Quest: A Cross-Cultural Reader. His articles have appeared in a variety of journals, books, and encyclopedias on such topics as ideology, human nature, just war theory, socialist ethics, global ethics, democracy as a universal value, and visions of communism. He is currently working on an attempt to synthesize the analyses of Marx, Marcuse, and Buddhism on the theme of desire and liberation.