

**RENAISSANCE IDEAS OF PEACE AND WAR,
AND THE HUMANIST CHALLENGE TO THE
SCHOLASTIC JUST WAR: THE *DISPUTATIO DE PACE
ET BELLO* OF 1468; ERASMUS AND MACHIAVELLI**

Thesis for a Doctor of Philosophy in Politics

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Submitted by Michael John Cailes to the University of Exeter
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ABSTRACT

This thesis compares and contrasts Renaissance ideas of peace and war, focussing on the humanist challenge to the scholastic just war tradition. I argue that rather than representing a strong continuity of the latter, the period is more accurately seen as being without adequate ideas on the justification for, and moral restraint in, war. I consider two paradigmatic writers, Erasmus and Machiavelli, and argue that despite evident differences in the underlying religious and social ontology, there is also an instructive commonality in their challenge to the weak representation of the just war tradition.

I first set the ideas in their historical and intellectual context: aspects of contemporary warfare, the church and the papacy; medieval traditions and ideas; and the scholastic tradition and Renaissance humanism. I then examine a mid-fifteenth century disputation, *Disputatio de pace et bello*, which differentiates sharply between the humanist challenge and contemporary church orthodoxy. This is evident from very different understandings of the concepts of peace and war, and is further reflected in their approaches to the justification of war, and to its conduct. I apply this template of ‘concept’, ‘justification’ and the ‘conduct’ of war, throughout the thesis. I consider a range of interpretations of Erasmus, and argue that he is a pacifist by conviction, but is forced to prevaricate. This is especially clear when he accepts a necessary war of last resort, but does not allow for adequate and acceptable means with which to conduct it. In Machiavelli’s thought, I emphasise the key relationship between politics and war, and argue that far from advocating unrestrained violence, he insists on applying a firm ‘bridle’ on the use of force. There is, however, little aspiration for peace. Finally, I briefly follow these ideas through into the Early Modern period, concluding that Lipsius exemplifies a necessary re-balancing of ideas on peace, war, and the just war tradition.

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