

## **Just War Theory as Ideological and Combatant Role Confusion**

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### **Abstract**

This essay attempts to demonstrate how just war theory functions in our lifeworld as a fundamental assumption justifying military resolutions to political problems. It explores the issue of why this state of affairs and other specified conditions imply its ideological status. Four different interpretations of ideology will be discussed, with emphasis on Habermas' theory of unconscious lifeworld assumptions and the postmodern conception of ideology as a traumatic kernel of truth which can only be precipitated by a significant Event. The arguments regarding the ideological status of just war theory are further explored as a basis for analyzing the difficulties in assessing the morality of role acceptance and role fulfillment on the part of the combatant in a culture in which the belief that war can be justified in principle functions ideologically.

### **Introduction**

The concept of ideology examined here originated in 19<sup>th</sup> century Marxist political theory to refer to political arguments and language that falsify or mystify the true nature of socioeconomic reality. Neo-Marxists also contend that the role of the state is primarily ideological, to get the support of the public for what are actually the narrow economic interests of the ruling class. From a Marxist perspective, George W. Bush's rationalization of the invasion of Iraq in 2003 is ideological, considering that the appeal to a discovery of Saddam Hussein's arsenal of nuclear weapons qualifies as false, given the non-existence of these weapons or reliable evidence regarding this state of affairs. In addition, Marxist appeals to the economic interests of the ruling class with regard to the primary causes of the Iraqi war would include Bush's Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld's, ties to the private military contractor Halliburton and its lucrative role in the rebuilding of Iraq's destroyed infrastructure.

This first part of this paper will consider other possible interpretations of ideology to be found in contemporary political and ethical theory. These include Jurgen Habermas' theory of communicative action, which will be examined with regard to the implications for ideology of the existence of unchallenged lifeworld assumptions, here about the justifiability of war. (Habermas, 1984). The postmodern political theory in the writings of Slavoj Zizek and Alain Badiou will also be discussed in light of the relationship between ideological arguments and truth, namely an undisclosed traumatic kernel of truth lying at their base (Zizek, 1987) and (Badiou, 2000). The second part examines the consequences of just war theory functioning ideologically in our society for combatants' conflicting understandings of their role responsibilities.

This essay will adopt the general conditions that have to be met for a particular military engagement to be ethically justified. These include:

1. That the overall benefits outweigh the overall costs;
2. That the nature of the leaders' intentions themselves are morally defensible;
3. That there is a strong probability that peace will ensue as a result of the combat;
4. That no other means could have been used to achieve peace other than military combat; and finally,
5. That combat is to be used as a last resort. (Cady, 2010).

### **Ideological thinking drives warism**

*Jurgen Habermas' theory of communicative action and lifeworld assumptions.*

Jurgen Habermas' work on communicative action is an important starting point for the analysis of the standing of just war theory, i.e., whether war can ever be justified under the above-mentioned conditions.

Habermas argues that successful communicative action regarding justifiable policies and fruitful dialogue in general among citizens, even in pluralistic societies, is made possible by the existence of certain limits. These are the common assumptions a political community shares that enable dialogue to get off the ground in the first place with the aim of possible consensus, including on controversial issues that may be dividing and polarizing society. He argues that

“Communicative action takes place within a lifeworld that remains at the backs of participants in communication. It is present to them only in the pre-reflective form of taken-for-granted background assumptions... (which has certain features): It is an implicit knowledge that cannot be represented in a finite number of propositions; it is a holistically structured knowledge, the basic elements of which intrinsically define one another; and it is a knowledge that does not stand at our disposition, inasmuch as we cannot make it conscious and place it in doubt as we please” (Habermas, 1984, p. 335-337).

Only in the atypical instances of an assumption contradicting new evidence or reasonable beliefs will these assumptions be challenged. Yet, I argue there that the possibility of waging a just war in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is an assumption that is not seriously challenged by the American public, nor is it debated by Congressional representatives.

Habermas contends that in addition to the existence of shared lifeworld assumptions, communicative action is able to approach consensus because we also share certain assumptions about rational argumentation that enable us to take a different perspective on our own needs. A change in our own perspective on justified action occurs when we hear the interpretations of the needs others have with respect to the issue at hand, e.g., testimonies by returning veterans with regard to traumatizing combat experiences. He assumes that when we are engaged in dialogue about public policy issues among the relevant stakeholders on the issue, we are open-minded enough to be persuaded by the force of the best argument, i.e., the one which has the strongest support for the existence of a particular set of (the most weighty) needs (Habermas, 1984). Without a society-wide dialogue with returning veterans or with those who have borne the brunt of war’s impact on their own shores, an altered perspective on how war unjustifiably results in basic human rights violations is unlikely to occur.

*The ideology of warism and conceptions of rationality.*

Several reasons can be given for the claim that acceptance of the possibility of a just war, i.e., that there could be a war that fulfilled all the above necessary conditions for justifying war, functions as an unchallenged lifeworld assumption as well as ideologically in American (and most) societies. First, Cady’s analysis supports this view in his claim that there is no dialogue about just war issues in our society. In addition, he argues that common objections to pacifism are posed in the form of a claim that anyone who would take an absolute stance against war must be naïve, foolish, even dangerous. Although Cady argues that this type of objection is logically irrelevant (fallacy of personal attack), his argument supports the idea that one’s stance on the validity of just war theory functions as a means of separating the rational from the irrational citizen. Although this attack can be dismissed as obviously fallacious, its frequency and persuasive power play an important role in setting limits to genuine dialogue as grounded in canons of rationality. Even the discussion of other political issues, arguments, or agendas can get short shrift when the validity of a particular existing military engagement is under fire, given the sense of urgency attached to the discussion of military problems often posed as emergency scenarios. He argues that in our own contemporary Western culture, warism is a dominant outlook. As such there is no special burden of moral justification that must be borne by the warist. As a matter of fact, the greater burden of justification rests with anti-warists. This very fact qualifies warism as (a) sort of unconscious fundamental presupposition (Cady, 2010).

Another criterion of a belief’s ideological nature, adopted from feminist thinking about sexism and racism, is that when a belief conflicts with empirical facts, it is the facts that must be rejected, not the

belief. Prejudices against members of various social groups can be viewed as ideological on this basis. For example, when an ideologically based sexist belief is held about female basketball abilities, the evidence of such playing will be denied and instead, it might be claimed these are not really females. Although the just war conditions are in principle falsifiable, the executive decisions made without congressional approval for every war and occupation since World War II have not included the comprehensive analysis required prior to such decisions if they are to be morally justified. The sparse public, congressional and executive debates on whether or not it is justified to engage the military forces to implement a particular policy decision can be interpreted as fact-resistant, another way to identify ideological beliefs (Scarry, 2014).

Scarry described the absence of public and congressional debate prior to executive declarations of war as violating the most basic principle of the American Constitution, which is that the state exists to provide its citizens with the conditions of peace. Executive decisions to conduct war since World War II have been made without careful analysis of the underlying political, social, economic, or cultural conditions of the enemy's country. She denies the truth of the rationalization provided for immediate decision-making in an emergency situation is made possible by cultures that can provide structures including habitual responses to real and hypothetical emergencies. (Scarry, 2014).

*Postmodern conceptions of ideology, traumatic truth and the social contract.*

Another criterion for ideological beliefs, contributed by postmodern thinkers such as Badiou, is that at their foundation lie assumptions that operate as a "traumatic kernel" of belief, i.e., cannot be articulated without traumatic results for the knower (Zizek, 1989; Badiou, 2000). Zizek argues in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* that "ideology is not simply 'false consciousness,' an illusory representation of reality, it is this reality itself which is already to be conceived as 'ideology'; 'ideology' is a social reality whose very existence, i.e., the social effectivity... insofar as it is supported by 'false consciousness'" (Zizek, 1989, p. 15-16). Zizek characterizes concepts such as "peace" and "freedom" as "rigid designators," which are applied in wide-ranging contradictory conditions. As such, they would qualify as ideological in its original Marxist sense, as examples of "false consciousness." (Zizek, 1989). It can be asked, what do warists believe about the value of the lives of persons engaged in combat? Perhaps at the heart of warism are the following beliefs and attitudes.

There is an inherent cruelty in life that cannot be avoided: one's own death is an expression of the cruel power of nature and reality in the ending of every individual's life. Surviving with honor and dignity requires one's immersions and identification with one's social group(s). Destruction of the enemy's weapons, armed forces, infrastructure, and bases of operation in the waging of war is the price one has to pay to enable one's group to survive. Engaging in the intentional killing, maiming, or capture of one's enemies as part of the social contract among citizens requires being a certain type of person: courageous, self-sacrificing, loyal and obedient to the leaders who are authorized to make decisions about a group's survival. These assumptions about the virtuous combatant play a key role in combatant role confusion, as discussed below. Yet, in Hobbes' version of the social contract theory, these beliefs about what is morally required of citizens and soldiers are all based on what Hobbes argues for is rational under specified conditions, either in a state of nature as well as once an absolute monarch is in power (Hobbes, 1651).

Existing lifeworld assumptions about individual responsibility and autonomy take on a paradoxical meaning in the context of the battlefield, given the necessity of submitting to the decisions of one's superior. Heroic actions on the battlefield presuppose voluntariness, yet desertion for most is not a reasonable option for those who have to come to realize the unjustifiability of the military engagement in which they find themselves. Acting autonomously requires engaging in a critical evaluation of one's motivations and values in having chosen or accepted military service, but doing so can result in further demoralization. Low morale can threaten the unit's capacity for successful military action.

In addition, metaphysical beliefs about forgiveness and redemption function to assuage guilt about carrying out orders requiring the annihilation of strangers who may have come to be perceived as

pawns on the other side of the chess board. Visceral responses to the slaughter of other human beings must be overcome by courageous soldiers being traumatized by warfare. Their redemption may require forgetting what they did or saw in battle, a refusal to let the trauma of warfare dominate or eviscerate one's psyche and, ultimately, one's capacity for future moral action.

*Secrecy, honor and traumatic truth.*

Keeping secret the traumatizing experiences may be viewed as a precondition of honor among combatants because such information jeopardizes the group's survival through military success. Maintaining honor and reliability in one's unit functions to rationalize all but the most egregious acts of cruelty during warfare. But renegeing on the social contract at this point can only make things worse, both for one's fellow soldiers and for oneself upon the disgraceful return to family and civilian life. How much resocialization takes place prior to her return to civilian life has yet to be revealed to the public. Finally, assumptions about the essential link between being a citizen and a soldier further diminish the voluntariness of decisions to enlist, given the unreasonableness of casting one's fate outside the net and protections of civil society. Jean Bethke-Elshstain has revealed, furthermore, the logical connection between being regarded as a citizen and defending one's country through military service in her analysis of sexism against women in societies where only males participate in national military service. (Bethke-Elshstain, 1981).

Furthermore, beliefs about the possibility of forgiveness and, ultimately, redemption for those who have acted honorably in their carrying out of orders also leads to a paradox for the returning warriors. One can be forgiven if one didn't really know that what one was doing was immoral, which entails that one's status is more akin to that of a chump than an evildoer or an honorable age. In addition, forgiveness can be earned only if one resolves not to perpetrate such crimes again, another point in favor of distancing oneself and one's identity from one's past. (Hampton, 1980). In sum, if there is a single belief that lies at the foundation of the ideology of warism, it would be that only the lives of one's own group have inherent moral value and should not be taken except in self-defense, and that even those lives have value only if they have behaved honorably in the defense of the nation. Although constitutional jurisprudence is filled with controversial discussions of the *actual* rights of persons due to their moral worth and dignity, no such dialogue has emerged in our public sphere about whether sending troops into dangerous and traumatizing battle zones violates their basic dignity and intrinsic value.

Yet, the statistics indicating that one out of four Iraq and Afghanistan veterans return to the U.S. with serious cases of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder would suggest that having one's psyche and brain so radically and negatively altered by combat experience is tantamount to an endangerment or destruction of their moral personality and personal dignity. Given this possibility, it is astonishing that the U.S. Veteran's Administration has consistently denied seriously injured and psychologically maimed veterans the basic medical care and disability benefits that they deserve, given that the combat experience had a causal role in producing many of their injuries.

Martin Schram argues that when veterans attempt to get VA benefits for their service-related medical condition, it is extremely unlikely that they will be able to prove causation as individuals due to the lack of access to facts about other veterans with similar health effects. This is exacerbated by the fact that, to prove causation, they will be battling legions of government lawyers, doctors, scientists, and bureaucrats, all of whom have a mandate to deny them their benefits. The irony of this situation is that, despite the fact that they may have experienced a transcendent uniting of soul and body with comrades during the war, the government in these cases reinforces their status as individuals (Schram, 2008).

One can wonder if the government's attempts to refuse to engage in a dialogue about whether or not benefits are deserved is based solely on the obvious financial savings, a Marxist interpretation of government action. Instead, I suggest that a dialogue regarding how refusing genuine claims of disability is a violation of veterans' rights as bearers of human dignity could result in questioning the basic assumption of just war theory: namely, that putting combatants in the role of fighting wars of

questionable moral validity is not a denial of their moral worth and value. As indicated above, the proverbial well is poisoned against anyone who questions a particular war's legitimacy by the view that it is irrational to question the validity of just warism.

Once this has been asserted, the empirical issue of whether the conditions for a just war have been met becomes moot. Not only is its ideological status supported by its apparent unfalsifiability, its functioning ideologically, as interpreted by Marxist theory, can be revealed in the well-known economic benefits that war provides to the capitalist enterprise, including money spent on the defense industry for weapons, artillery, mines, planes, ships, helicopters, drones, bombs, tanks, military research, and testing.

In addition, the possibility of *total war* functions to dismiss objections to a particular administration's call to arms based on its rationalization as a deterrent to the use of nuclear weapons by other nations. It is viewed as irrational to question claims that a given military threat or actual military engagement is essential to staving off nuclear war, given that in the absence of realistic predictions as to the specific conditions that might provoke a nuclear state to use nuclear weapons, rationality calls for opting for the maximin strategy, choosing the least worst outcome. Given that it is obvious that a nuclear attack is the worst case scenario that must be avoided, and that, in the absence of probabilities about its occurrence, nations must rely either on the "educated guesses" of academic experts or of those in the Pentagon, in light of the classified or unobtainable nature of the state of conventional and nuclear weapons held worldwide. Yet, this state of affairs violates the conditions of justified ethical policy making from the perspective of Habermas' theory of communicative action, which would seem to call for national dialogue among all affected members of society. In addition, the existence of non-rational extremist actors, e.g., suicide bombers, with possible access to nuclear material and/or weapons, provides an additional basis for U.S. citizens to question the validity of scenarios regarding the possibility of nations conducting conventional or nuclear wars created by military experts.

Such a condition certainly predisposes the American public to ideological thinking, given that such thinking can be characterized as being out of contact with reality. Scarry points out that Americans know very little about the location of the fourteen nuclear submarines containing nuclear weapons or about how close previous presidents have come to actually pushing the button and eradicating millions of people. She further points out that throughout our history, American presidents have not given the public or our representatives much information or insight into the executive decisions that have resulted in non-nuclear military conflicts. Furthermore, there has been a pattern of such executives opting for inscrutable reasoning regarding conducting a non-declared war, with President George W. Bush providing an extreme version of the absolute right of executives with regard to conducting war with no evidence supporting its necessity (Scarry, 2014).

In summary, the following reasons support the conclusion that the belief in a just war functions ideologically in American society and culture:

1. Anyone who denies this belief is regarded as irrational, and not worthy of engaging in dialogue.
2. There have been no serious attempts on the part of American presidents who have initiated post-World War II military engagements without congressional approval to discern whether the conditions of just war have been fulfilled. This failure to subject the relevant facts to an analysis of just war theory applicability, for all practical purposes is akin to unfalsifiability, or at minimum fact-resistance.
3. The assumption that only the honorable lives of those in our social group have inherent value and may not be unjustly taken lies at the foundation of uncritically applied warism, yet violates our fundamental belief in the inherent value and dignity of all human beings.

### **What Were They Thinking?**

*Combatant moral conflict and its aftermath: moral transformation or degradation.*

John Glenn Gray's analysis of the psychology of men in battle illuminates the factors that contribute to the soldier's state of moral conflict, moral confusion and exasperation. In addition, he argues that

resolution of such conflicts may lead to moral insight and clarity for some, or for others, moral degradation and cynicism. Essential elements include:

1. The recognition that everyone around him depends on him for protection, and views him as a “center of force, a means of security and survival... His moods and dispositions are affected by the presence of others, and the encompassing environment of threat and fear. He must surrender in a measure to the will of others and to superior force” (Gray, 1998, p. 25-27).
2. Gray also claims as essential the acknowledgement that one has taken an oath requiring him to obey as essential to maintaining one’s positions and succeeding in one’s tactics in the midst of chaos, confusion, extreme fatigue, hunger, boredom.
3. Gray includes that the finding of oneself in situations in which, no matter what choice is made with regard to one’s options, the results of any choice will seriously endanger those around him.
4. He maintains the importance of their existing a disconnect between the superior officers who issue the orders and the reality on the battlefield.
5. The recognition that, in certain situations, if one follows clearly illegal and immoral orders, one will have “crossed a line” with regard to losing one’s moral center and integrity. (Gray, 1998).

Gray interprets the occurrence of guilt on the part of combatants as a result of a soldier’s looking inside himself and recognizing that, although his options and voluntary choices may be extremely limited (e.g., disobeying orders can result in arrest, detention, and in some military forces, torture or execution), he could have done better in registering his moral repugnance with the orders (Junger, 2014).

Gray’s description and analysis of moral conflict, demoralization or conversion, includes several points about personal guilt and blame as well as collective responsibility. These views are most clearly articulated in his concluding chapter on the future of war versus genuine peace. The state of genuine peace implies the absence of states of preparedness for future military engagements. Given the insidious, seemingly intractable hold warism has on our culture, he claims it would require the dynamism of an institution with as strong of a hold on our collective conscience as warism currently does. That two particular psychological dispositions or propensities keep us tied to the military defense system: fear and hatred. Furthermore, he attributes war-making as part of our nature as humans, apparently in agreement with Freud on this issue. In addition, he cites basic human desires as adventure, excitement, spectacle, self-sacrifice for the sake of the community, and in general, the emotional surges and excesses that war brings to our lives. (Junger, 2014).

Yet, he leaves open the issue of what such institutions might be. Obvious candidates for such a role include:

- national community service programs that could provide opportunities for service to the local, national, or international community, and which would provide challenges and opportunities for those who are struggling with issues of meaning and personal identity, an issue that motivates many young recruits to enlist;
- religious institutions that eschew warism and articulate virtues of forgiveness, tolerance, compassion, an enlarged sense of community, and a conception of courage that is not tied to risking one’s life in combat;
- educational institutions that would provide a critique of the virtues and mindset of combat and offer challenges to the assumptions of history texts and curriculum regarding the inevitable necessity of war;
- supports for parenting that would provide alternative models of courage, self-sacrifice, and adventure. Given that parenting is an essential element in developing moral integrity and personal identity, it could play a necessary role in criticizing those depictions of soldiering that would put their children in danger of losing their moral center.

None of the roles occupied in the above-mentioned institutions place its actors in a situation that would compromise their integrity, let alone put into the dangerous position of losing one's moral center entirely.

Despite the value of his analysis of guilt among soldiers in combat during World War II, Gray ignores several issues central to a discussion of collective blame and responsibility. First, given the avowed self-destructive nature of fear and hatred, Gray never provides evidence that the role of the combatant is articulated in military training and internalized in the forms of intense fear and often absolute hatred, defined by Gray as hatred that exists without awareness of the concrete circumstances of the despised enemy (Gray, 1998). It would seem that most soldiers go into combat without a clear, accurate perspective on the cultural, economic and social circumstances of their enemies in combat. To the extent that combat experiences provide evidence for warranted attitudes of generalized fear and absolute hatred of the populations encountered, the lack of a forum of public discussion for returning vets precludes a valuable opportunity for transforming pre-existing conceptions.

Secondly, although Gray does mention that in order to attain a collective psychological conversion to genuine peace, a strong leader would be required. This is because, even though a political leader himself could be open to eliminating militarism, this leader would not be psychologically strong enough to fail in his role as a Hobbesian "ultimate bodyguard" (Hobbes, 1982, originally 1651). Yet, this assumption about the head of state's role as defender is itself question-begging, given that it functions at the same level and with the same power as the unquestioned nature of warism. Such a leader would believe his or her only choices are: 1. Keep military forces and use when perceived as necessary for the sake of security and tamping down fear, despite tremendous costs to combatants; or 2. Eliminate the military forces and use political discourse, education, and media to tamp down fear and hatred. Neither one of these options includes a discussion of the further problem of the immoral, and potentially self-destructive, role in which government and military leaders place combat troops for the sake of reducing fear in those who will not enter the military. Consequently, because the assumptions regarding what is necessary for waging a successful war with respect to soldiers' mindsets themselves go unchallenged as a result of the ideological nature of just war theory, a militarized society must be held responsible for the predictable self-destruction, demoralization, or alternatively psychological conversion that can be known to occur.

Thirdly, despite the authority and power of Gray's analysis of the psyche of the soldiers fighting in World War II, there is a surprising dearth of discussion of the special moral role of veterans in bringing their moral narratives to bear on the discussions in the public sphere, regarding the legitimacy of ongoing military solutions to political problems. For example, Gray claims that one of the possible outcomes of a soldier's experiencing actions that violate all possible aspects of a person's dignity and value is that of hatred for humanity in general (Gray, 1998). Witnessing the execution of hostages, torturing of prisoners of war, and mass murder of civilians in the "liberation" of villages can permanently thwart the sense that human nature has any redeeming features. Alternatively, refusing to participate in such inhumane, horrific actions can alienate one's comrades and deprive the soldier of the only moral support and interactions with humanity that are essential to psychological survival in battle. His critical evaluation of these morally problematic battlefield experiences and insights fails to address the issue of whether the role that veterans and soldiers must play is immoral or evil, although he documents many cases in which playing this role can cost a soldier his moral personality and integrity.

*Combatant role confusion and combatants as contractual bodyguards and killers.*

Gray's test case is that of World War II, which many would argue is the only just war occurring in recent times, given the horrors of Nazism that had to be stopped. Yet, he argues that once a soldier becomes a part of a battlefield unit, previous views about the justice of the military conflict or about the possibility of bringing about a successful military outcome using certain specific tactics become irrelevant as a basis for action. The only goal soldiers aim for is winning the war while saving the lives of his comrades. The same holds true for many enlistees' motivations for signing up for military duty: desires to keep up a family military tradition, finding personal meaning in an otherwise mundane life, providing service to

one's country. It soon becomes apparent that their main objective is to win the war (whether or not this produces justice) and this is accomplished by sticking to the mission's objectives more narrowly specified. Gray claims that if one's mission isn't clearly articulated, soldiers may fail to adopt the role of soldier willing to sacrifice his life for the sake of his comrades-in-arms (Gray, 1998).

Nowhere does Gray mention that if and when a soldier realizes he is not fighting a just war, the soldier may become demoralized and seriously consider forsaking his comrades. This is because, regardless of the original mission and broadest objectives to be fulfilled by the war, soldiers come to realize that their sole duty is to keep their comrades and themselves alive. What Gray does not address is the issues of whether self-sacrifice is warranted and commendable in the course of fighting an unjust war, or alternatively, that the value of self-sacrifice would be compromised or eliminated under these conditions.

In essence, I am arguing here that the role of the soldier as a vital element in achieving justice, and ultimately peace, through conventional warfare has been replaced by the role of the soldier as a contractual bodyguard and killer who must save as many lives of his countrymen as possible. Rather than explicate the transition from the avowed, original role to the subsequent one, Gray's focus is primarily on the moral transformation involved when one realizes that the specific actions one is required to take are blameworthy. The prior philosophical question of whether it is an immoral role to be put in or to accept is not broached.

*Moral conflict resolved through transcendence.*

Another aspect of role confusion in Gray's experience of combat in Italy and France is revealed in the emotional and psychological changes that combat troops endured when they were dealing with civilian populations in these countries. He argues that American soldiers regularly switched from cruelty and barbarism towards collaborators, to love, tenderness, and compassion towards others within a timeframe of only moments. He explains these moral lapses as due to the occupying of the role of functionary, which he analyses as a result of cowardice when the role enactment involves closing one's eyes to his freedom and responsibility to act morally. In his discussion of the atrocities committed by the Nazis and Fascists during WWII, he claims they were all cowards, who were primarily motivated by fear, who say they were forced to do what they did. He minimizes the moral degradation that must have occurred in those who were committing horrific acts of abuse when he concludes that being a functionary is not that unusual for any of us. The transition from one's original motivations for participating in combat for reasons of personal meaning and identity to that of keeping those in your unit alive is explained by Gray in his claim that there occurs a transcendence of the self when soldiers' experience a merging of the self with that of the group. Readiness to die for the sake of saving others is explained by Gray as resulting from transcending the moral self and identifying with a heroic immortal self who survives death (Gray, 1998).

What is missing in the analysis of a soldier's psychology in combat is the issue of whether these motivations to experience the sublime are affected at all by the recognition of the war's immorality. The issue loses its urgency and meaning, and combatants' focusing on this issue a real disvalue, once survival issues take over. The possibility that one's role and purpose in combat is analogous to a mercenary or hired killer for purposes of aggrandizing power, other's property and money, or other self-serving national motives would threaten the achievement of the transcendent expansion into the sublime, when such achievement presupposes a commitment to ends higher and greater than those of the individual self.

*The cost of autonomy and combatant moral conflict.*

Peter French claims that, in assessing a soldier's moral blame and responsibility for deaths occurring in the fighting of an unjust war (e.g., in the case of following legal orders to destroy a suspected enemy dwelling), there is an "inference gap" between these facts and a conclusion regarding a combatant's moral blame (French, 2010). Although this is true, given that more premises are needed regarding the soldier's



state of mind, French's analysis falls short of providing a clear idea of what is needed so as to close the inference gap. For example, an autonomous soldier could realize that:

1. The particular assault may be justified according to the rules of engagement, but not as part of a justified war;
2. His hatred for all citizens living in the enemy zone could be preventing him from carrying out his orders in a more humane, perspicacious way (in French's example an innocent woman is killed);
3. His only options are to follow orders or to be found guilty of desertion and subject to a dishonorable discharge;
4. His primary moral duty while in service is to save the lives of his fellow combatants on the battlefield.

From French's perspective, without stating what's missing in the premises, it would seem to be possible that a soldier, after recognizing that he may be killing people unjustly and needlessly (not necessary for saving the lives of his comrades), may nevertheless be morally justified or morally excused for the killings. If what French is considering is the likelihood that soldiers are not acting voluntarily in their roles (given their lack of reasonable alternatives), this fact would be relevant to his blame, which would be mitigated by such involuntariness. However, after such critical reflection occurs on the part of the autonomous soldier, he can begin the process of figuring out which is the least unreasonable of any of the alternatives he can choose to end his term of deployment. Yet, given the nature of the socialization process involved in military training, the incentive for becoming more autonomous in the combatant role is reduced by the directives to obey authority unquestioningly, submit his or her will to that of the commander, and take responsibility for saving the lives of all in his unit. Autonomy would be viewed as a moral ideal too costly to develop on the part of the individual, given the stakes for his fellow troops. [See "Notes" section for further discussion.]

### Conclusion

What the above analysis has aimed to achieve is a clearer account of the relationship between an ideologically held belief that war is justifiable and the impact on combatants who find themselves fighting an unjustified war. Once this recognition takes place, combatants switch their focus from justice to helping save the lives of fellow combatants. At this point, some combatants face moral transformation and conversion or moral cynicism and degradation, both possible consequences of their state of role confusion and moral conflict. Combatants are generally described as achieving a level of solidarity with fellow soldiers that approximates transcendence and a state of spiritual change. The issue of combatants' moral blame and responsibility for a role that is tantamount to contractual bodyguards and killers when fighting an unjust war centers on the existence of conditions for voluntary, autonomous choice and action. Voluntariness is seen to be compromised to the extent that soldiers lack relevant information regarding whether the war fits the necessary conditions of a just war, as well as lacking an understanding of the enemy population's culture, history, or current socio-economic and political situation. Finally, the value of autonomy is also diminished if a critical evaluation of this role has unacceptable costs, in terms of loss of morale and the resultant diminished capacity to protect.

### Notes

One soldier interviewed in the documentary film, *Korengal*, consisting of interviews with combatants fighting the Taliban in the Korengal Valley in Afghanistan, described the paradox resulting from viewing his responsibility for his harmful actions as follows: "I felt like God hated me for what I've done, even though I would do it (again) the exact same way. That's the thing about war." When confronted with the issue of whether the evil that he had done was done voluntarily, in the form of a typical claim others made to assuage his guilt, that you did it because you had to do it, he disagreed (Junger, 2014). His rejection of this excuse was due to recognizing that his original decision to enlist was voluntarily made, or it could be argued that it was because his moral commitment to preserve the lives of the others in his company was

perceived as absolute. This is an example of what I'm referring to as ideological role confusion, a type of cognitive dissonance. The soldier believed he had done evil, that evil resided in him, that God hated him, but that he would have done it "the exact same way," because the role voluntarily assumed called for it and it was too late to renege on his contract with the military (Junger, 2014).

When the soldiers in the Korengal Valley in 2007 were questioned about what they would miss the most about their experience fighting the Taliban, they unanimously agreed that it would be the firefights. The adrenaline rush and feelings of empowerment derived from repeatedly firing their own beloved weapons led many to wish they were back there after experiencing the reality of daily citizen life. This was claimed despite the common belief that they would not be leaving the Korengal Valley alive, given daily firefights leaving at least one wounded or killed. Yet, given the intensity of their bond with fellow soldiers, it would seem that the belief that each one would unquestioningly lay down their own lives if needed to save the life of another in their unit would render social relations in civilian life as insufficient in comparison (Junger, 2014).

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