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SANTA CRUZ

# Indoctrinated Incoherence

## An Institutional Theory of Traumatic Experience

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

POLITICS

with an emphasis in SOCIOLOGY

by

**James Beneda**

December 2017

The Dissertation of James Beneda is  
approved:

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Tyrus Miller  
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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2017

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## Abstract

### **Indoctrinated Incoherence: An Institutional Theory of Traumatic Experience**

James Beneda

Beginning from theories of psychological trauma as ‘moral injury’, this dissertation argues against established models that explain posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among war veterans as the inevitable result of exposure to violence. Instead, I argue the condition we recognize as trauma is the behavioral adaptation, following a crisis of belief, to life in anomic circumstances. Trauma’s cause is the inability of pre-existing moral beliefs to provide for the contextualization or justification of personal actions or the actions of others, resulting in the unsuccessful accommodation of morally challenging experiences. The resulting incoherence demands an interpretation of the situation as having been traumatic. Analyzing trauma requires an institutional approach that accounts for the history of the traumatic event within the broader context that gives the event meaning.

My analysis begins with veterans’ accounts of wartime experience published as war novels. Close readings illustrate the genre’s critique of the institutions of war, including the persistent suggestion that trauma results when the moral authority of these institutions proves illusory. The dissertation then considers the US Army’s institutional values to locate potential points of moral failure that may be the source of trauma among recent veterans. This analysis of the ideal soldier’s moral expectations accounts for: processes by which the Army regulates individual

behavior; institutionally sanctioned limits on moral decisionmaking; the influence of historical legacies on present practices; and the relative power and motives of various political interests in pursuing institutional change or continuity. I argue American soldiers sent to war in Iraq could not rely on their available moral beliefs for two primary reasons. First, there is a fundamental conflict between the moral demands of warfighting and the cultural values of democratic society. Second, the Army creates the conditions under which its soldiers are unable to reconcile the actions it demands of them and the ethos it provides. The idealist expectations of too many American soldiers sent to war in Iraq simply collapsed in the cognitive dissonance of confronting a war they were neither ideologically nor institutionally prepared to fight.



## Acknowledgements

If I have learned anything from the years spent alone with my computer working on this dissertation it is that knowledge production is always a collective effort. The knowledge product before you would not exist but for the support, criticism, and inspiration of my advisors, Ronnie Lipschutz, Dan Wirls, and Karen Bassi, who trusted me to cast aside disciplinary boundaries and write the dissertation that I wanted, and probably needed, to write.

I also recognize that this work could have been accomplished in very few social science programs in the United States, and I am grateful to have been a part of the intellectual community that is the University of California, Santa Cruz. I must thank the faculties of UCSC's Politics and Sociology departments, in particular Ben Read, Mark Massoud, Megan Thomas, Julie Bettie, Debbie Gould, Herman Gray, Miriam Greenberg, and Craig Reinerman, all of whom, whether they remember or not, had a hand this project. Just as importantly, I thank the many fellow graduate students, my comrades-in-precarity, too numerable to name, with whom I struggled, celebrated, and complained alongside these past six-plus years.

Finally, this really would have been impossible without the love and support of my wife, Jill, who first suggested UCSC, strongly lobbied against a move to Chicago, endured my constant threats to quit grad school and become an accountant, and has sacrificed so much to make this happen. I dedicate this work to her.

The book was *Maniacs in the Fourth Dimension* by Kilgore Trout. It was about people whose mental diseases couldn't be treated because the causes were all in the fourth dimension, and three-dimensional Earthling doctors couldn't see those causes at all, or even imagine them.

Kurt Vonnegut  
*Slaughterhouse Five*

## Introduction

On October 3, 2016, Republican candidate Donald Trump ‘broke the internet’ for the umpteenth time in the 2016 US presidential election. This time, news outlets across the country sounded the candidate’s death knell for his attack on American veterans. The *Washington Post* headline announced, “Trump suggests military members with mental health issues aren’t ‘strong’ and ‘can’t handle it’.”<sup>1</sup> NBC News wrote, “Trump Implies Vets Suffering From PTSD ‘Can’t Handle’ War.”<sup>2</sup> The left-leaning news site salon.com claimed “Trump tries for empathy, lands on narcissism, explains to an audience of veterans the ‘horror stories’ of war.”<sup>3</sup> While Trump’s opponents jumped on the story, the issue was quickly overshadowed by the media sensation aroused by charges of sexual violence against the candidate arising from a 2005 interview. The short-lived scandal was indicative of the two most common narratives of the psychological traumas of war veterans. Trump’s remarks, taken largely out of context by outraged members of the media, were in response to a question from former US Marine Chad Robichaux, founder of a Christian nonprofit veterans service organization, as to whether the Republican candidate would if elected:

support and fund a more holistic approach to solve the problems and issues of veteran suicide, PTSD, TBI and other related military mental and behavioral health issues and will you take steps to restore the historic role of our

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<sup>1</sup> Sullivan and Jonson, “Trump Suggests Military Members with Mental Health Issues Aren’t ‘Strong’ and ‘Can’t Handle It’.”

<sup>2</sup> Bailey, “Trump Implies Vets Suffering From PTSD ‘Can’t Handle’ War.”

<sup>3</sup> Gauthier, “Draft-Dodger Donald Trump: Veterans with PTSD “Can’t Handle” Combat.”

Chaplains and the importance of spiritual fitness and spiritual resiliency programs?<sup>4</sup>

The question of ‘spiritual fitness and spiritual resiliency’ in relation to psychological trauma is as revealing as Trump’s response:

When you talk about the mental health problems, when people come back from war and combat and they see things that maybe a lot of the folks in this room have seen many times over and you’re strong and you can handle it. But a lot of people can’t handle it. And they see horror stories. They see events that you couldn’t see in a movie, nobody would believe it.<sup>5</sup>

That some veterans were not strong enough to handle the things they saw in war speaks directly to the question of resiliency. Though the question suggests that the US military and the federal government’s support for spiritual resiliency need to be restored, it belies the fact that the official positions on trauma of both the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recognize (though to varying degrees) resilience as a mediating factor in cases of psychological trauma.<sup>6</sup> Resilience, a concept from the field of positive psychology, is precisely what Trump implies by the ‘strength’ some veterans had to ‘handle’ the horror stories that civilians would not believe. The US Army’s resilience program, Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness (CSF2), developed through the University of Pennsylvania’s Positive Psychology Center, defines resilience as the “mental, physical, emotional, and behavioral ability to face and cope with adversity, adapt to

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<sup>4</sup> White, “Read Donald Trump’s Remarks to a Veterans Group.”

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Cornum, Matthews, and Seligman, “Comprehensive Soldier Fitness”; Southwick et al., “Resilience: An Update.”

change, recover, learn, and grow from setbacks.” Resilient individuals are “better able to leverage intellectual and emotional skills and behaviors that promote enhanced performance and optimize their long-term health.”<sup>7</sup> Resilience researchers have identified six ‘core competencies’ of resilient individuals: self-awareness, self-regulation, optimism, mental agility, character strengths, and connection.<sup>8</sup> In calling them ‘competencies’, it is presumed that these individual characteristics can be both taught and learned. Both Trump and the US military thus imply that the soldiers traumatized by their experiences in war lacked the resilience to successfully adapt, due to either the *individual’s* inherent lack of resilience or incompetence.

Quantifying the problem of psychological trauma among veterans is notoriously difficult, given that treatment is often sought only after leaving the military, and too often not at all. For American veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan, estimated rates of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are as high as 24.5 percent. All mental health diagnoses among active and reserve servicemembers increased 62 percent between 2000-2011. The incidence rate of mental health conditions among active Army soldiers was 35 percent in 2010.<sup>9</sup> Of course, to claim that the reality of combat experience can destroy the individual soldier’s psyche is, for most Americans, to state the obvious. The war stories we hear may bring to mind fear stricken victims of ‘shellshock’, the disabling guilt of a witnessed atrocity, or of homeless veterans

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<sup>7</sup> HQDA, *AR 350-53*, 6.

<sup>8</sup> Reivich, Seligman, and McBride, “Master Resilience Training in the U.S. Army,” 27.

<sup>9</sup> For an overview of these and other deployment related mental health trends see Blakeley and Jansen, “PTSD and Other Mental Health Problems in the Military.”

desperately seeking treatment for PTSD. Our common understanding is that exposure to violence and the horrors of the battlefield are more than the human soul can bear, that war itself is the source of psychological breakdown, that the best we can do is help these lost souls find the will to leave their pasts behind them. But what these psychopathological paradigms miss is that soldiers go to war with an inherently unstable conception of the role they must play. Military doctrine and popular culture indoctrinate soldiers to a heroic individualist ideal that they must embody, yet this sort of idealism begins to unravel in the extreme experiences of combat. While this heroic ideal serves the societal and military purpose of forming citizens into recruits, recruits into soldiers, and soldiers into armies, the effects of failed moral indoctrination are the soldier's to bear alone. The discipline of psychology and the institutions and ideologies it supports place the causal burden for these traumas not on flawed indoctrination, but inside the flawed mind of the flawed individual.<sup>10</sup>

Recently developed theories of 'moral injury' have been an important contribution to the study of psychological trauma in war. According to psychology's currently dominant definition of moral injury, it is the result of the individual's "inability to contextualize or justify personal actions or the actions of others and the unsuccessful accommodation of these potentially morally challenging experiences into pre-existing moral schemas."<sup>11</sup> This line of research has contributed to a better

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<sup>10</sup> This is the only possible interpretation of trauma from a methodologically individualist perspective. The flaw may be inherent or it may be experienced as an injury, but in either case it is the individual's alone.

<sup>11</sup> Litz et al., "Moral Injury and Moral Repair in War Veterans," 705.

understanding of trauma by reducing diagnostic emphasis on event-induced fear, recognizing the social context of trauma cases, and expanding the range of potentially traumatizing experiences. At the same time, adherence of these researchers to a psychological paradigm results in continuing to place the cause of injury in the individual's already pathologized cognitive dysfunction. Thus, much of this line of research fails to fulfill the theoretical implication of its very label: if an injury is *moral* its explanation must account for more than just psychology. The point is missed because psychology as a discipline<sup>12</sup> does not adequately explain the social and political nature of either morality or the conduct of war. War is a collective undertaking, but modern culture and its institutions are founded upon a morality of individualism. Psychology as a discipline is inseparable from these same ideological traditions, and its focus on the individual psyche has come to equate individual mental health and moral character. From these works we also find an underlying expectation of war as something independent of man. One can only respond to the reality of war and prepare accordingly; there is no possibility that war is waged by choice, or that there are individuals whose decisions and interests lead to traumatic outcomes for others.

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<sup>12</sup> In the critique that follows, my references to psychology are more specifically to the discipline's general reliance on psychologism: the onto-methodological individualism that understands human behavior, including morality, as originating in the individual psyche. Many psychologists do, of course, understand morality as relational, and more critical approaches are more likely to recognize the interdependence of society and psyche.

This dissertation attempts to fulfill the promise of moral injury as a general theory of traumatic experience—a move that may not be entirely self-evident—by reconceptualizing trauma as an institutional rather than psychological phenomenon. That is, in contrast to psychology’s onto-methodological tendencies to presume that all human behavior can be reduced to the individual psyche, this work’s fundamental assumption is to understand human behavior as *always* mediated by social institutions. I attempt to shift conceptual emphasis from the psychological effects of traumatic experience to its underlying moral cause. If moral injury is a valid model of trauma—and I argue that it is despite my criticism of its theorists—then it demands an account of the sociological nature of morality: morality is never an individual’s alone, but always an expression of the individual’s relationship to the moral authority of social institutions. With this in mind, I argue that trauma is the interpretation of an extreme experience in a way that damages the relationship of the individual to the relevant moral authority. It is not the individual’s inability to accommodate morally challenging experiences with existing beliefs, but rather the inability of those pre-existing beliefs to explain or justify personal actions or the actions of others, resulting in the unsuccessful accommodation of morally challenging experience, a fracture in the relationship between the individual and the moral authority those unreliable beliefs depended on, and the interpretation of the experience as having been traumatic.

In sociological terms, the emotionally disabling trauma of a soldier’s wartime experience is the condition of ‘anomie’. This state of moral alienation occurs when



experience in war is at odds with the soldier's moral expectation; and, thus, that the soldier's moral preparation for war has been inappropriate to the wartime conditions in which that soldier has been placed. In other words, psychological trauma, or at least some set of conditions that we recognize in contemporary society as trauma, is the result of failed institutions and ideologies. Trauma is neither inevitable nor imagined, nor is war inevitably traumatizing. Trauma is not the result of an individual's lack of resilience: no amount of personal resilience can overcome the flaws of an institution's non-resilient ethos.

In its relation to war, trauma as a social phenomenon cannot be separated from the institutionalized power of the military, the government's decision to go to war, or the role of the soldier as it is defined by society. An institutional theory of traumatic experience suggests that the United States either sent some very large number of American soldiers off to war who failed the military's moral indoctrination process, or that the values provided by that indoctrination are inappropriate to the moral situations actually faced in war. In either case, the failure belongs to the military. Indoctrination to the values of an inconsistent ethic creates and imposes a moral environment in which individual moral crises are more likely to occur. When doctrinal tenets fail, personal beliefs will be drawn upon—beliefs that may be at odds with both institutional values and the moral situation created by experience. If moral injury is a valid model of psychological trauma, then the experience of American soldiers in the Iraq War points to the inadequacy of the military's institutional values. Testing this requires the theoretical construction of a culturally and institutionally

ideal American soldier.<sup>13</sup> I draw from a broad selection of texts to piece together this ideal, including the personal accounts of war veterans, US Army leadership and ethics doctrine, and a wide range of narratives from popular media. Contradictory expectations are written into all of these texts, revealing the complex inter-relationships between the American soldier and the Army institution, the American state, the American people, and the populations they sought to liberate and/or defeat in Iraq. The common point of failure in all of these relationships—the particular political dynamic of the Iraq war—is the contradiction of war’s demand for collective sacrifice and the glorification of individualism within the neoliberal order of American politics.

### **The ‘Problematic’ of Trauma**

Rather than follow the conventions of contemporary social science in the positing and testing of a set of hypotheses, this dissertation is a study of discourses: psychological trauma as a problem of individual psychopathology; war as inherently traumatizing; the US Army as a trusted institution; of soldiers heroically sacrificing on behalf of a grateful nation. It is an exercise in theory building that follows what cultural studies theorist Lawrence Grossberg calls ‘radical contextualization’. Grossberg’s methodology is a study of cultural practices: their production, embedding, and

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<sup>13</sup> Historically, this ideal soldier is certainly male and this probably remains the case today. However, given the growing number of female soldiers who have faced combat in America’s recent wars, as well as the (limited) efforts the US military has made toward gender integration, I use gender neutral pronouns (‘they’, ‘their’, ‘them’) in reference to this institutionally ideal soldier.

operation in the lives of individuals and groups. It is largely a descriptive method, but discovery of the context of a practice may reveal the political dynamics in which the practice is constituted. Most cultural practices are taken for granted, but at times particular ‘articulations’ of a cultural practice reveal something else. We sense a connection with a broader context, that “there is a story to be told but we do not yet know what it is.”<sup>14</sup> This connection, the discovery of a social fact, becomes the ‘point of entry’ to begin ‘mapping the configuration’, as best we can, of the multi-dimensional contexts contained within a cultural-historical ‘conjuncture’. The outcome of this sort of study is not the testing of a hypothesis, but a better understanding of the ‘problematics’ of lived experience.

This dissertation begins with a particular problematic of contemporary American political culture: psychological trauma among American veterans of the war in Iraq. My point of entry to the subject is in my own experience as a US Army veteran of that war.<sup>15</sup> Having witnessed first-hand the moral collapse of both the Army and its people over the full course of the Iraq War, it was impossible for me to avoid thinking about the problem of psychological trauma among my fellow veterans.

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<sup>14</sup> Grossberg, *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*, 26.

<sup>15</sup> I enlisted a few months after the 9/11 attacks, serving from February 2002 through January 2005, and deployed to Iraq with the Army’s 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division from March 2003 through February 2004. Though I left the Army and happily returned to civilian life, my enlistment obligation required an additional five years of service in the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR), a period during which I was subject to recall for active service. That recall came in June 2007 when I was mobilized for fifteen months and deployed again, begrudgingly, to Iraq from October 2007 through July 2008. Returning from the deployment on the eve of the Great Recession, I chose to remain on active duty until I was medically retired from the service in March 2012.

I had viewed the experience of my first enlistment from 2002 to 2005 and deployment for the invasion of Iraq in 2003 as genuinely positive, although it was plain to see the negative impact the experience of war had on too many of my fellow soldiers. Violent crime, drug and alcohol abuse, and deaths under ambiguous circumstances were all too frequent occurrences in my small part of the Army in the year after that first deployment. But distance from the military and the escalating violence in Iraq gradually led me to the realization that things happened during my deployment that I could now see were clearly morally unjustifiable and, at best, militarily counterproductive. In mid-2007 the Army recalled me to join the ‘Surge’ effort, and I returned to war only semi-willingly, out of a misplaced, but deeply embodied, sense of obligation to a generic ‘American soldier’—if I didn’t go, the Army would find some other poor soul to take my place. At that point, it was fairly plain that there was no legitimate military reason for my presence in Iraq: the ethnic cleansing was done; the only beneficiaries of the continued American presence were the Iraqi elite; and the Surge was no more than the Bush administration’s face-saving Hail-Mary and David Petraeus’s attempt to make a point about counter-insurgency doctrine. Still, for the ten months of that deployment I searched for a moral justification for having been sent back. I never found it.

Wrapped up in that search for justification, I began to consider the question, what motivates soldiers to action in war? It is perhaps the central epistemological problematic of this dissertation about psychological trauma. As I tried to answer that for myself I turned to books (lots of books) about war to find some clue about what it

all meant. All this reading led me to the conclusion that the historians, political scientists, military theorists, politicians, retired generals, and even most journalists have relatively little to say about war that squares with my own understanding. For the most part, their scope is wrong. The generally accepted discourse of war is about states, grand strategies of great men, lines on maps, and abstract (usually numeric) notions of violence. It seems, to me, an odd way of going about it. War is a social phenomenon, and it is certainly important to understand the acts, motivations, and justifications of the collective political forces in conflict. But the privilege we give to mass ignores the fact that wars are fought by individuals—individuals making individual decisions about life and death. For instance, we tend to reduce the Iraq War to the blunders of the Bush administration or the genius of David Petraeus, despite the fact that it was the lived experience of hundreds of thousands of American troops (and, more importantly, of millions of Iraqis, but that is well beyond the scope of my work) that actually composed the action and experience of the war. The experts tend to ignore this, and so the rest of America does too. The standard accounts fail to capture the institutional influences that make official histories and the opinions of generals radically out of synch with the experiences of the soldiers actually engaged in warfare. The result is a cultural narrative of war and the Army that turns ordinary soldiers into generic heroes and leaves their work far more morally charged than military necessity can explain.

Despite the power of these narratives to totalize the moral authority of military institutions, in my military experience I could not fail to piece together a rough

understanding that there had to be an institutional component to the traumas of war veterans. Practices of military discipline came to seem radically alien in terms of both American values and military necessity. The values the Army claimed as its own were rarely reflected in its operations, which seemed justifiable (and to be justified) in only the most utilitarian sense. The day-to-day missions of soldiers in Iraq had no basis in the political claims of the nation's political leaders. And even the Army's own leaders seemed completely out of touch with the reality faced by their troops. For example, despite the declarations of American military success, the true force behind the Surge was not the strategic influx of troops, but the tactical use of cash by low-level commanders, what Army doctrine refers to as 'money as a weapons system'. American soldiers on the ground were taking part in an experiment in the exercise of real power at a very personal level, in which actions taken within a single neighborhood could influence the foreign policy of the world's lone superpower. If the military's own narratives did not acknowledge the tactical reality, it has to be asked whether or not the soldiers carrying out the nation's policies could ever justify their experiences in terms of any larger meaning of the war provided to them by the institution.

While more formal studies of war offered me nothing worthwhile, fictional accounts of war by those who had themselves experienced it—authors like Tolstoy, Joseph Heller, and Tim O'Brien—helped me make sense of my own time at war. Had I been a better writer, I would have attempted to make sense of it all by writing a novel. Instead, I went to graduate school. Still, I had no pretension to write a

dissertation about my own experience of war. In my first year of graduate school, the best I could say was that my project would be an epistemological study of the American military—something about 9/11 and counter-insurgency and what might come next; it might certainly attempt to account for the ordinary soldier, perhaps even critique the disconnect between the Army’s values and its operational practices, but I could not have imagined at the time how PTSD could be the topic of a dissertation on politics.

Understanding trauma as a political phenomenon is only possible by, following Grossberg’s method, radically contextualizing it. My systematic undertaking of the task began, quite by accident, in the first weeks of my second grad school year. Admittedly, I was certainly not aware at the time (or for some time after, for that matter) that I was radically contextualizing anything, and I also recognize now that the project was possible only because I had previously made the instinctual connection between PTSD and certain practices within the military. It was an anthropologist’s comparative study of the manifestations of schizophrenia across cultures that provided the first kernel of my dissertation. I happened to sit in on an anthropology symposium by Tanya Luhmann, a Stanford anthropologist studying religious experience. Professor Luhmann’s talk that day was a presentation of her recent fieldwork, a comparative study of schizophrenic hallucinations in the United States, Ghana, and India.<sup>16</sup> Having had a close childhood friend afflicted by schizophrenia, I felt that I knew something of the disease; or rather, I believed in

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<sup>16</sup> Luhmann, “Hearing Voices in San Mateo, Accra and Chennai.”

psychology's expert knowledge of schizophrenia as a biological fact. Dr. Luhrmann's claim that its manifestation is culturally relative, that schizophrenia is a very different disease in different parts of the world, was my first glimpse into the real power of culture on the human mind. In those same few weeks, I had also been assigned to read for a sociological theory seminar Emile Durkheim's *Suicide*, which identified particular cultural, social, and political variables to explain varying rates of suicidal behavior across the countries of Europe in the late-nineteenth century. In my naïve realization that all mental illness might be culturally relative, I turned to the internet to find that a few theorists were beginning to make tentative claims about the social aspects of PTSD—they were attempting to contextualize it (though, unfortunately, not very radically). Most importantly, I found Jonathan Shay's *Achilles in Vietnam* (1994), which argues that the psychological traumas of the Vietnam veterans he treated as a VA psychiatrist were not just the inevitable effects of witnessing the horrors of war, as psychiatric medicine generally agreed,<sup>17</sup> but resulted instead from the moral betrayals of soldiers by their leaders. Shay's work resonates so strongly with me because his analysis takes the stories he is told at face value; his patients are human beings who happen to have been soldiers at war during a particular moment of their lives. Inspired by Shay, but thinking more broadly of the morally challenging experiences of soldiers in war, I realized that the epidemic of PTSD among returning American troops might not be a product of their exposure to violence, but of the *politics* of that violence. That is, trauma is a social phenomenon that cannot, in its

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<sup>17</sup> American Psychiatric Association, "Anxiety Disorders."



relation to war, be separated from institutionalized power of the military, government decision making, and the idealized role of the soldier as defined by society.

My decision to consider a problem of individual psychopathology from a cultural perspective and the problem of war from an individual perspective (and all of these through an institutional perspective) is a consequence of both my training and experience. I have been trained in a 'Politics' department that is not organized around the traditional subfields of political science, and so it has been completely natural to embrace a cross-disciplinary philosophy in my understanding of political phenomena. But my instinct to account for the political context of trauma at multiple levels of analysis (and write a dissertation that is simultaneously a work of, among other things, psychology, sociology, and political science) is the product of my experience of politics as a soldier. What I experienced of war had less to do with international than with interpersonal relations, where the US position in the world could rise or fall at any moment, decided by an American teenager in a more or less alienated relationship to both the state and the military institution. State-centric models of politics simply cannot account for humanity in war on either the front lines or among a state's decision makers; psychological models of human behavior cannot account for the political and institutional powers that constrain or enable human potential; and powerful institutions like the US military or the discipline of psychology have the capacity to set the narratives of how we understand and analyze any of it. To radically contextualize the problematic of trauma requires mapping the configuration of practices across all of these levels of analysis. This dissertation attempts that by

reading the individual soldier's traumatic experience as an engagement in the collective act of war, as mediated by the military institution.

But underlying all of this is a critical reflection on my own position in the cultural-historical conjuncture that is the popular conception of the American soldier in the early years of America's post-9/11 wars. That experience revealed not just the lies my country told me, but also the conceptual failures of my personal moral ethos. Simply put, *living* the Iraq War forced me to accept that what I *believed* about the nature of my duty and sacrifice to my country and my Army could never be reconciled with what I actually *did* there. I have spent countless hours interrogating the beliefs that shaped my decision to serve—beliefs in large part determined by my uncritical readings of military history and blind acceptance of our culturally privileged meaning of military service. I have questioned the indoctrination I embraced in my military training, and I have critically assessed the formal academic studies of war that I have since come to know. My conclusion amounts to this: the scars I and many other American soldiers carried home from war are, ultimately, the result of the incoherent moral principles with which we were equipped.

Beyond the central problematic of traumatic experience, there are a number of other arguments that become critical to the dissertation. There is an ontological question of the relative priority we should give to individual human existence versus how much influence we presume society plays in human behavior. This in turn get to epistemological and methodological arguments about the influence of psychology as a discipline on modern society, which then suggests an ideological argument about

the relationship between psychology, capitalism, and liberal democratic ideals. There is a related argument about the academic study of morality, and the moral realism that has become fundamental to psychology, capitalism, and liberalism, and how those assumptions shape contemporary American society and the cultural conflicts of American politics. The fight over American culture cannot, of course, be kept out of its social institutions, and the US military has been a site of those struggles. There is a further question about how institutions shape knowledge, yet this is inseparable from the underlying problem of ontological priority. Knowledge within an institution reflects who is institutionally privileged, and so certain truths become powerful, even at the expense of the real, lived experience of the vast majority of an institution's members. In this way, war scholarship is cleansed and its claims are too often unrecognizable to those actually fighting the war, while their voices go unrecorded or misinterpreted within the prerogative of the institution. That is, for a society to have war heroes, it has to erase the long line of history and institutional interests that depend on their sacrifices and exploits.

This problem of perspective, our Clausewitzian understanding of war as the great duel between states and armies and political leaders rather than war as the collective action of individuals, is a problem of scholarship, the moral and epistemological consequences of which proceed from and reinforce inherent methodological flaws.<sup>18</sup> Most importantly, the primary credible sources of military scholarship are mostly inseparable from military institutions: archived operations

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<sup>18</sup> Keegan, *The Face of Battle*.

reports; doctrinal publications and regulations; personal papers of military leaders; intra-institutional and defense industry research; etc. The individual soldier is hardly accounted for in any of this, and so is rarely a primary source. Independent scholars seldom go off to war and must rely on institutional sources for their theories. Soldiers who move into academia during or after service tend to have been career-officers whose expertise cannot be separated from the institutional doctrines they authored and enforced. Because of this our culture's dominant narratives of war amount to little more than a collection of mythologized tales of history's great men. The myth becomes doctrine; doctrine becomes policy; doctrinally based policies are the topic of scholarship; and culture glorifies and reproduces the underlying myth. Thus, to explain the role of the soldier, which is constructed anew in each conflict, is necessarily a task in sorting 'fact' from 'fiction'.

### **Choosing Narratives of Trauma**

Of this last point about institutional effects on knowledge and narrative, much more needs to be said, and Chapter Two goes into some theoretical depth on the subject in relation to the process of traumatic experience. The point is also directly relevant methodologically, in the role of narratives, and the choice of narratives, in relation to the structure and claims of the dissertation. Both the theoretical and methodological frameworks of this dissertation are heavily influenced by the work of Jonathan Shay, which explains trauma in terms of narrative elements, rather than as a typology of psychological symptoms or processes. He works from the stories of combat and its aftermath told by the patients he treated, and the basis of Shay's narrative analysis of

moral injury is Homer's epic poem *The Iliad* and the story of Achilles. For Shay, the power of morality as a political force, in its effects and failures, is evident throughout the narratives of both the ancient heroes and modern war veterans. Following Shay's formula, I find the theme of moral failure in war persistent in modern war stories, which, in many ways, reproduce the themes of the Greek epics. This certainly reflects the powerful influence of the ancient narratives themselves on modern literature. In the modern era, novelistic critiques of war are a tradition of veteran-authors: Stendhal (*The Charterhouse of Parma*, 1839) fought in the armies of Napoleon; Leo Tolstoy (*War and Peace*, 1869) was a Russian cavalry officer in the Crimean War; George Orwell (*Homage to Catalonia*, 1938; *1984*, 1949) joined the Anarchists of the Spanish Civil War; Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (*August 1914*, 1972) was an artillery officer in Stalin's Red Army; Báo Ninh (*The Sorrows of War*, 1990) fought against the United States in the North Vietnamese Army. It is noteworthy that of the books that might properly be labeled 'war novels' among the Modern Library's *100 Best Novels*, each was written by combat veteran.<sup>19</sup>

What I refer to in the analysis that follows as 'war literature' is the work of authors who, from personal experience, seek to challenge a dominant discourse of war through storytelling. Though the works I offer as evidence of my argument in Chapters Three and Four are novels, the genre also includes, among others: the

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<sup>19</sup> *Catch-22*, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, *The Naked and the Dead*, *Parade's End*, *From Here to Eternity*, and *A Farewell to Arms* are plainly war novels. Other works such as *1984*, *Lord of the Flies*, and *Brideshead Revisited* arguably, though less directly, reflect the war experiences of their authors.

British War Poets, most notably Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and Robert Graves; memoirists like T.E. Lawrence, Paul Fussell, Phillip Caputo, and Anthony Swofford; and the veteran scripted anti-war movies of the post-Vietnam era, such as *Platoon* and *Full Metal Jacket*. Taken as a whole, this body of war literature comprises the most significant body of immanent critique—in its breadth and its consistency—of the modern military institution. That is, there is no significant body of literature written from within the military institution that offers an alternative to the dominant narrative of unquestioning obedience to the authority of heroic tradition, the accepted rules of war, the wisdom of great strategic thinkers, or the primacy of victory.

What is important in these works is their discursive challenge to dominant narratives of war, the military, and the soldier's experience. Yet, because this critique has arisen from such personal narratives, much of it fictionalized, it has not been adequately acknowledged by war scholars. For example, military sociologist Morris Janowitz, who was arguably the most influential scholar of military institutions in the mid-twentieth century, dismisses the usefulness of the genre, calling it “more an expression of personal frustration than an exploration of military life in depth,” and suggests, instead, the “more thoughtful and reflective” memoirs of retired generals, though he is careful to note that such works should not be read as historical records.<sup>20</sup> These stories may certainly reflect personal frustration, but they hold such cultural value because they also reflect the frustrations of millions of other soldiers who were

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<sup>20</sup> Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, 5.

justifiably frustrated with a military value system that exists, I argue, for its own perpetuation and has long been radically different from the political and cultural ideals for which it purportedly exists. And even if wars are both analytically equivalent and utterly unique from the perspective of the soldier, these stories most accurately reflect the moral environments I observed in my time as an American soldier at war.

It is not uncommon for scholars to rely on the cultural and political claims of texts from popular culture as valid social commentary. Ronnie Lipschutz, for example, makes the point that the narratives of popular fiction can “tell us something about society’s concerns, interests, fears, and obsessions.”<sup>21</sup> As the product of a particular time and place, cultural works naturally carry some evidence of the popular sentiment of that context. Of course, such works can only be produced in relation to already existing narratives. The themes and forms of earlier works may be directly referenced by authors or implied by readers in the interpretation and understanding of such texts. Writers of contemporary war novels write within conventions of the genre, but even authors who would challenge those conventions will certainly be read in relation to them. If there are similarities between the Greek epics and contemporary works, this may reflect a cultural lineage that, at least in part and probably imperfectly, shapes the narrative. *War and Peace* could very well be the definitive modern war novel, making all that have followed redundant,<sup>22</sup> but Tolstoy claimed

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<sup>21</sup> Lipschutz, *Cold War Fantasies*, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Rawlinson, “Does Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* Make Modern War Literature Redundant?”

late in life that everything he knew of war he learned from reading Stendahl's descriptions of the Battle of Waterloo in *Charterhouse of Parma*, a work Tolstoy would have read prior to his own military experiences.<sup>23</sup> Despite the genre constraints that might explain some narrative similarities, these works also reflect generalizable facts about wartime experience beyond the unique experiences of their authors. Most notably, they point to the common characteristics of military institutions (which imagine their own direct lineage to the ancients).

Identifying the factual claims of these authors requires reading them without assuming that they are trying to elevate their own experience, or glorify the acts of their dead comrades, or even that they are trying to condemn war for its evils. I do not, of course, claim to know the validity of the authors' experiences on the battlefield: every combat situation is unique and the ones I personally encountered can certainly not be compared to France in 1916, or even the situations faced by another veteran of Iraq. What I do claim is the validity of the authors' cultural and political critique of institutions. The institutional circumstances experienced by soldiers is shaped by the same set of moral and epistemological principles today (though certainly there are differences) as those of previous generations—a point I consider in some depth in the second half of the dissertation. For the soldier, war is inherently the experience of hardship, the immediacy of violence, being asked to kill, and maybe die, on another's behalf. Yet, in the end “it is as if there had been a million

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<sup>23</sup> Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox*.



wars, or as many wars as there were soldiers.”<sup>24</sup> Still, even this fails to capture the full complexity soldiers face in reconciling expectation and experience. Elliot Ackerman, a recent veteran of Afghanistan and author of the novel *Green on Blue* (2015) explains the logical and moral complexity of arriving at any conclusion about his own *experiences* of war:

Getting around humbled me. I understand how many perspectives there are on the war, all equally well informed and often radically different. Each should be respected and valued. Each is unique. I might not feel the same if I’d done one tour. I might be more of an asshole about the ‘truth’ of my experience.<sup>25</sup>

While I do not seek to either heroize these authors or to elevate their stories beyond criticism, I do recognize that our cultural expectations of war and soldiering make it easy to read the same war stories through both militarist and pacifist lenses. While some of these authors have been avowedly anti-war in their intent (Tolstoy, Erich Remarque, Kurt Vonnegut), and others may be more sympathetic to, or at least nostalgic about, their wartime memories (James Jones, Ernest Hemingway), the stories are never that simple. For example, the horrific experiences of trench warfare described in Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front* could very well be read as a valorization of the individual overcoming of hardship as a source of meaning, or a story of the unique value of comradeship among soldiers. Remarque even states that comradeship was “the finest thing that arose out of the war,”<sup>26</sup> a point readily grasped by a reader already indoctrinated to believe in the moral superiority of military

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<sup>24</sup> O’Brien, *Going After Cacciato*, 189.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Castner, “Afghanistan.”

<sup>26</sup> Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, 26–27.

comradeship. Yet comradeship comes to nothing in the novel as the war destroys all that is of any moral value. In all of these works we see characters struggling to find positive meaning, but their authors insist that any positive outcome is heavily qualified at best, pure illusion at worst. If a reader like international relations scholar Christopher Coker can find in the novels of Remarque or Frederic Manning (works I discuss in Chapters Three and Four) a message that “reinforces our faith in humanity,” that message is read through an insufficiently critical, culturally indoctrinated belief in the values of military institutions. Coker sees the characters in these works as heroes on existential quests they can only fulfill by being true to themselves. Readers, Coker thinks, should take inspiration from these works to “develop one’s true inner self” through the lessons of characters who are “as real, and often more vital, intelligent and captivating, than the great majority we will meet in real life.”<sup>27</sup> It is a message in line with Coker’s long-term academic project of convincing us that we live in an era in which we have lost our ‘warrior ethos’.<sup>28</sup> Whether or not these works offer inspiration, and by my reading these works are projects to undermine the sort of political romanticism Coker espouses, is only partially relevant to my argument. Their moral is less important than their accounts of the moral practices of soldiers and militaries.

Similarly, I do not argue that the claims expressed in these novels are beyond critique by nature of their origin in personal experience. Charges of ‘combat

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<sup>27</sup> Coker, *Men At War*, 12.

<sup>28</sup> Coker, *The Warrior Ethos*. Coker’s argument will be addressed at length in Chapter Seven.

gnosticism', the presumption that anything valid said of war must come from personal experience, has been leveled against war writers and their sympathetic critics. For instance, historian and literary scholar Paul Fussell, an American veteran of the Second World War, is accused of simply reproducing the claims of earlier writers like Wilfred Owen that the truth of combat is impossible to communicate without having experienced it. According to critic James Campbell, the combat gnosticism of authors like Fussell, which importantly is a critical rather than an authorial perspective, equates "the term 'war' with the term 'combat'," and by doing so first-hand experience of combat becomes "prerequisite for the production of a literary text that adequately deals with war." The offense of combat gnostics is the ideological appropriation of these stories to reproduce a specific cultural theme: "a definitive coming to manhood for the industrial age, in which boys become men by confronting mechanical horror and discovering their essential masculinity, perhaps even their essential humanity, in a realm from which feminine presence is banished."<sup>29</sup> However, for both Campbell and those critics he condemns, to read this as the primary theme of those works is to miss the point. These stories are not about discovering their protagonists' masculinity, and certainly not their humanity. It is the exact opposite: these stories are about the discovery that masculinity, as it had been known, is all wrong. More, these works are about realizing that humanity might not be worth discovering. Owen makes that claim vividly in his poem "Disabled":

*He's lost his colour very far from here,  
Poured it down shell-holes till the veins ran dry,*

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<sup>29</sup> Campbell, "Combat Gnosticism," 204.

*And half his lifetime lapsed in the hot race  
And leap of purple spurted from his thigh.  
One time he liked a blood-smear down his leg,  
After the matches, carried shoulder-high.  
It was after football, when he'd drunk a peg,  
He thought he'd better join.—He wonders why.  
Someone had said he'd look a god in kilts,  
That's why; and may be, too, to please his Meg; [...]  
To-night he noticed how the women's eyes  
Passed from him to the strong men that were whole.<sup>30</sup>*

My argument is not that outsiders *cannot* understand the wartime experiences of these authors, it is that they *do not*. One *could* write a valid account of war without having gone to war, but, I argue, not without first critically examining the narratives of those who have.<sup>31</sup>

My decision to use fictional accounts of war as empirical evidence of both psychological trauma and the moral practices of soldiers and militaries is based on their critique of military institutions, a critique made possible by the experiences of their authors, a critique often missed by their readers, a critique that is so out of time and space with our dominant narratives of war that it is no wonder we get it wrong. But, it can be known by those who privilege the lived experience of ordinary people over culturally embedded assumptions. Feminist scholars have critiqued our limited (and limiting) understanding of war by asking, “Where are the women?”<sup>32</sup> Though it may seem counterintuitive, most war scholarship is yet to ask, “Where are the

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<sup>30</sup> Owen, *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen*, 67.

<sup>31</sup> Which is actually much closer to Fussell’s own position than Campbell acknowledges in his charge of combat gnosticism.

<sup>32</sup> Sjoberg, *Gender, War, & Conflict*; Enloe, *Globalization and Militarism*.

soldiers?” The point is made in Frederic Manning’s prefatory note to *Her Privates We*: “my concern has been mainly with the anonymous ranks whose opinion, often mere surmise and ill-informed but real and true for them, I have tried to represent faithfully.”<sup>33</sup> What the anonymous ranks know that the scholar can readily ignore is that “War, which tested and had wrecked already so many conventions, tested not so much the general truth of a proposition, as its truth in relation to each and every individual case...”<sup>34</sup> This is all to say that these veteran authors have experienced something akin to religious revelation: not only was war not what they believed it to be, but social and political powers have conspired to fool them. The revelation of the act of believing *as political* creates a new political motive to share with others this sublime new truth—not just of war, but of the forces that have duped us all into our collective misunderstanding of war.

But because the authors of war literature have not just spoken this new truth but systematically analyzed their experiences through the act of writing, what they offer is not just the truths of their individual case, but the test of the general truth of propositions. These are not simply individual histories; they are works of analysis. This body of literature represents valid scholarship on war, by other means. It is storytelling as method. Storytelling, presenting analyzable data as stories, is as valid a method of explaining social phenomena as social science typically provides. If one accepts the proposition that the complexity of human relations makes universal

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<sup>33</sup> Manning, *Her Privates We*.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

generalizations about social processes nearly impossible, then explanation of an event or phenomenon is the best the 'social scientist' can hope for in most cases. Storytelling offers perspective and explanatory detail that cannot be captured in the traditional scientific method. Clifford Geertz claims that all social scientific interpretations are inherently fictional, not in the sense that they are false, but that they are manufactured.<sup>35</sup> This is not to undermine the value of social science research, but merely to point to the fabrication process it necessarily entails. It is also not to ignore Catherine McKinnon's warning that "Lies are the ultimate risk of storytelling."<sup>36</sup> Truth claims are, in most social science work, contextual at best, but by collecting a variety of similar research findings we achieve a broad enough perspective to make some generalizations about the phenomena described. I make the same assertion of the collected studies of war that are the product of the author's experience, reflection, and careful analysis. There are any number of interesting social phenomena that we can find through comparison and interpretation of narratives. Identifying these phenomena is the source of new theories for future researchers.

The perspectives of a few draftees and reluctant volunteers—and the anti-institutional commonality of their experience—have been captured in the novels they fabricated. These keen participant-observers turned their memories into field notes and produced detailed, accurate, and readable ethnographies of military culture.

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<sup>35</sup> Geertz, *The Interpretation Of Cultures*, 15–16. See also Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things*, in particular Chapter 10, "The Human Sciences".

<sup>36</sup> Posner, "Legal Narratology." Quoting McKinnon in *Law's Stories: Narrative and Rhetoric in the Law*, Peter Brooks and Paul Gewirtz, eds. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 235.

These works often include deeper theoretical elements as well. For instance, *War and Peace* probably is the world's most widely read philosophy of history. Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End* is both an analysis of the Great War's impact on the British political and social elite and a case study of 'shellshock'. Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* and its lesser-known sequel *The Road Back* do the same thing for the German working class. Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* is the iron cage of modernity described far more intricately than Max Weber's telling. Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* is a postmodern, eyewitness history of the Dresden bombings. Novels by Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos, Norman Mailer, and James Jones are works of philosophy, social criticism, psychology, and politics. For my purposes, all of these works also serve as ethnographic case studies of the authors' own traumatic experiences in war. If there is a flaw in the literature, it is simply the inherent limitation of critique. Critical methods are intended to challenge commonly held knowledge in order to get us closer to truth, particularly truth that falls outside the accepted objects of history. Critique cannot, in itself, produce positive moral judgment. It can show us what is wrong, but it cannot justify what is right. To argue for a positive moral requires grounding a position in some field of truth, whether it be metaphysical or empirical. If the war stories I share here offer us little in the way of positive moral truth, it may be because their authors have come to believe that there is none.<sup>37</sup> This is, unfortunately, easily missed by readers who uncritically interpret these works through the assumptions provided by popular culture. I hope that the

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<sup>37</sup> Isaiah Berlin's essay "The Hedgehog and the Fox" makes this argument of Tolstoy.

inclusion of fictional(ized) narratives of veteran-authors' experiences of war serves as an effective counterpoint to the more traditional historical and institutional accounts of war, armies, and soldiers in the dissertation's second half.

### **Politics and the Interpretation of Traumatic Experience**

War narratives, like stories of any significant part of human existence, take many forms. There is, however, a general narrative of war in the modern era that has run largely unchanged since the eighteenth-century development of the European nation-state and its national army. There are two core themes of this narrative: a romanticized ideal of the heroic soldier; and an institutionalized reality of bureaucratized mass armies. The two developed in tandem under specific historical conditions, but remain the dominant elements in the Western popular and political understanding of war. The early nation-state appropriated from medieval warfare the notions of chivalric honor, duty, and sacrifice, which were central to the conduct of battle. Warfare was often, quite literally, the match between the individual heroes of each opposing side, in which the fall of a single man could determine the outcome. The stories of heroic warriors became the basis upon which national identities formed and upon which their armies relied for the recruitment and motivation of soldiers to fill the ranks. Against this romantic element, however, was the establishment of mass armies and the bureaucratization necessary to mobilize, maneuver, and wield them for state purposes. Organizational necessity placed the individual soldier into a system of interchangeable parts—a soldier in a rank, in a platoon, in a company, in a battalion, in a regiment, in a division, in a corps, in an army—in which the individual mattered



only insofar as the specific job they filled, in aggregate, could or could not be accomplished. Hierarchy ensured that the loss of even an army commander would not undermine the army's conduct of war. Thus, in modern warfare, we find the paradox of the need for heroes in a system that, ideally, eliminates all individual distinction. This paradox underlies all of our modern notions of war, from the decision at the highest level to go to war, to the popular acceptance of political justifications; from official military doctrine to the war stories swapped by veterans over drinks; from heads of state to common citizens; and from general officer to private soldier.

The dominant modern military discourses are thus some combination of scientific knowledge and primitive myth. Structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss warns that “myth is unsuccessful in giving man more material power over the environment. However, it gives man, very importantly, the illusion that he can understand the universe and that he *does* understand the universe. It is, of course, only an illusion.”<sup>38</sup> In its reliance on romance, the dominant ‘scientific’ narrative of war cannot escape the power of its own illusions. For the ordinary soldier, the illiterate understanding of the environment may be more accurate than the highly conservative and tradition-bound meanings required for inclusion among the institutionally literate. The ordinary soldier, when faced with the reality of combat, will quickly learn that war is no movie or video game, and that the great moral crusade they have enlisted for has devolved into ambiguity. At the same time, the officer in headquarters may remain forever free from the soldier's disabused reality: his war movie heroes retain

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<sup>38</sup> Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning*, 6. Emphasis in original.

their luster; the histories of his grandfathers' actions at Bastogne or Guadalcanal (the battles his grandfathers never actually spoke of) have all been fulfilled in the sacrifices and bravery of his men in the field; the medals the officer hands out makes real the greatness of America's newest generation of heroes; the wisdom of Clausewitz finds embodiment in the officer's own brilliant operations orders; and the memoirs the officer will one day write will be appropriated by the military scholar to reproduce the myth of glorious war. The scholar may even ask a few questions of the illiterate masses to fill in the lines with colorful detail, but the scholar lacks the vision to notice the 'illiterate' veteran's struggle to reconcile their own experience with a dominant narrative that drowns out all other voices. Despite knowing the truths and realities of war, for the veteran to shout out that the 4,409 American troops who died in Iraq did not, in fact, die for our freedom, is to claim the earth was not made in six days.

Ultimately, in relation to the study of politics, traumatic experience is a problem of ideology. In a general sense, 'ideology' has become almost synonymous with partisanship, the ideas that drive the irrational politics of the opposition, as the rationality of one's own side must be above politics. As ideas become more and more normalized, the forces that constitute an institution are taken for granted by its members; when ideas are reduced to commonsense, too obvious to be recognized as constitutive, the institutional power they support may be placed beyond the power of any individual to change and, thus, naturalized as political truths.<sup>39</sup> In traditional

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<sup>39</sup> Hall and Taylor, "Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms," 940.

political science, ideology is often treated as having little explanatory value despite its ubiquity. In the late-1960s, political scientist Giovanni Sartori noted that the discipline's growing interest in ideology had been matched by the concept's "growing obscurity," leading him to ask "whether there is a technical meaning, or meanings, of 'ideology' which constitute a necessary tool of enquiry for a science of politics."<sup>40</sup> That ambiguity persists in a field dominated by rational choice assumptions of human behavior (another example of onto-methodological individualism in modern social science), and so ideology tends to be reduced to easily measured variables like party affiliation, or stuck in a black box as an unanalyzable given. For example, even a serious attempt at 'bringing ideas back in' to the study of politics could only conceive of ideology as an 'error term' in the explanatory equations of political science, the elements that cannot be accounted for in normal variation.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, more critical studies of politics view ideology as the general conditions of cultural domination and resistance, the '-isms' that shape modern life. In cultural studies, for instance, ideologies are "the frameworks of thought which are used in society to explain, figure out, make sense of or give meaning to the social and political world."<sup>42</sup> However, the nature of critical scholarship can undermine the study of ideology. When operating from a position of resistance, one's own axiomatic premises stand in stark contrast to hegemonic common-sense, and ideology may

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<sup>40</sup> Sartori, "Politics, Ideology, and Belief Systems," 398.

<sup>41</sup> Lieberman, "Ideas, Institutions, and Political Order."

<sup>42</sup> Donald and Hall, *Politics and Ideology*, ix.

come to explain everything, resulting in the same black box effect that more mainstream political science suffers from.

More useful is Hannah Arendt's framework for the study of ideology. Her study of twentieth-century totalitarian movements begins and ends with ideology, but makes all competing ideologies equally subject to analysis and critique. Arendt's interest is in ideological effectiveness, and her objects of study, Nazism and Stalinism, are perhaps modernity's best available cases for explaining the power of systematized political belief. As Arendt defines it, an ideology is simply the "logic of an idea. Its subject matter is history, to which the 'idea' is applied; the result of this application is not a body of statements about something that is, but the unfolding process of constant change."<sup>43</sup> What Arendt is describing is highly effective ideologies, in the combination of totalizing logic and totalizing practices. Most ideologies will not be so effective, nor their practices so historically important. However, Arendt's analysis of totalizing ideologies is no less applicable for studying the organizing beliefs of a small group. Belief is *of* some set of knowledge. That set can be widely held, or very particular, but these sets are analytically equivalent. Ideologies are effective in the extent to which they "to the satisfaction of their adherents can explain everything and every occurrence by deducing it from a single premise." This amounts, in practice, to a prohibition against logical contradictions that requires extraordinary political authority to maintain. This was achieved by

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<sup>43</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 469. Sartori critiques Arendt's definition as "overly speculative" ("Politics, Ideology, and Belief Systems," 403).

totalitarian regimes through indoctrination processes intended to destroy the individual's capacity to form any personal conviction, and by political practices that would destroy the capacity for individual freedom by isolating individuals against each other.

This is not to equate the contemporary US Army with life under Hitler or Stalin. Still, the question of ideological efficacy is important to consider for two reasons. First, the US Army's institutional culture, like modern militaries in general, retains significant characteristics of totalizing institutions, and has constructed its institutional values around the totalizing principle of their military necessity. Second, the social atomization of modern industrialized society (the too common feeling of uprootedness, superfluousness, and loneliness experienced by the masses) that Arendt argues was the prerequisite to twentieth-century totalitarian movements may be no less prevalent today than between the World Wars, making the moral certainty of the American military ethic politically useful. But where totalitarian movements could readily align political consequences with their single guiding principle (eliminating dissenters proved the truth of a movement's principle), the truth of the Army's guiding ideological principle—military necessity—can only be tested in war.

The underlying point in equating traumatic experience and anomie is to emphasize that trauma is as much a problem of social groups and institutions as it is of individuals, and, as such, a social or institutional analysis will find the cause of trauma outside the individual, with the institutions in which individual beliefs are indoctrinated and mediated. By exploring the relationship of institutional expectations

to the soldier's role as actually practiced, we can also explore the relationship of the individual soldier to the military institution, and by extension the state and society. Each soldier possesses a unique soldierly 'habitus'—the particular disposition of an actor to particular conditions of its existence—but the degree to which the individual effectively functions in the institution is determined by the degree of conformity to an ideal expressed in the formal and informal expectations of the institution. While an individual's morality originates in life's countless social interactions and experiences, the elements of the ideal soldier's habitus arise and operate at three distinct levels: the elements of morality that are culturally produced and pre-exist military service; codes of military conduct, whether formal regulation or informal norms of institutional membership, that are instilled in the individual through the process of indoctrination; and those values particular to a given conflict that serve to distinguish the enemy from the self. Conformity to practiced norms of military discipline and obedience is an expression of this ideal. However, the ideal is also a product of conflicting norms, for example: a religiously-based tradition of 'just war' that is at odds with the technologically and bureaucratically dehumanized practice of modern warfare; institutionalized deference to military authority in opposition to institutionalized hypermasculine norms of individuality; or liberalism's valorization of individual self-interest set against heroic ideals of selfless, altruistic sacrifice.

The task of the second half of this dissertation is to trace out the morality of the ideal soldier and to locate potential points of anomic failure. Trying to trace moral indoctrination processes in their entirety is an incredibly complex undertaking.

Presenting the logic of military indoctrination in relation to its failure in war in a way that gets to this complexity is only slightly less difficult. The basic claim I will make is that American soldiers sent to war in Iraq could not rely on their available moral beliefs for at least two primary reasons. First, there is a fundamental conflict between the cultural values of civilian life in a liberal democratic society and the moral demands of war fighting. This is not a particularly radical claim. In preparing an overview of this dissertation for publication, an anonymous reviewer pointed out to me that, “people attentive to military ethics constantly encounter arguments that societal values and battlefield exigencies clash in a way that creates dissonance and, too often, moral injury.” While this is certainly the case, these arguments have generally ignored the institutional mediation of both values and battlefield experience. This gets to the second reason military indoctrination fails: the problem of trauma in war is not a conflict between societal values and battlefield exigency; it is a conflict between societal values and military values *cloaked* in battlefield exigency, and of both with battlefield reality. That is, the military institution creates the conditions under which its soldiers are unable to reconcile the actions demanded of them and the values provided.

To test these claims I must first sketch out in general what an American soldier might have judged their actions against in the post-9/11 era. This moral ideal is an amalgam of principles from across broad fields of American society. Some of these are more deeply rooted in institutions and traditions, others specific to the era. This ideal has much in common with that of earlier generations, but has also changed

in important ways. This sketch will attempt to capture what the men and women of that generation held in common throughout and the general shifts that began September 11, 2001. Likewise, capturing an all-inclusive ideal is impossible. Some factors are simply too fleeting to be accounted for. The reality of individual experience is, of course, infinitely complex, but accounting for just a few shifts in perspective can exponentially increase the potential for ideological incoherence. Consider the Army that invaded Iraq in 2003: senior and midcareer leaders joined an institution prepared to defend Europe against Soviet invasion, but culturally wounded by Vietnam era politics; junior leaders came into a peace-time force, redeemed by the success of Operation Desert Storm, but lacking a clear mission and enemy; the rank and file, however, were split by 9/11—some joining the peace-time force, others enlisting to fight a known enemy for a known cause. The ideal of service differed for each group, so the reality of war would be interpreted by each in a slightly different moral context.

While necessities arising from warfighting inarguably have shaped military practices, modern military institutions were also established in response to the same domestic forces—economic, social, and political—that shaped modern societies more generally. Most of the defining features of modern militaries were fully established by the late-eighteenth century and continue to influence military practices today despite radical shifts in the nature of warfare and societal organization. However, the continuity and persistence of particular interests within militaries, and the deference of civilian political leadership to military expertise, have contributed to the



remarkable conservatism of military institutions. At its core, today's military institution is a legacy of traditions that persist primarily for pursuit of the institutional imperative of its own self-perpetuation. This has made attempts to redefine the soldier's role in ways that might better reflect both military necessity and appropriate contemporary societal imperatives highly incremental and incomplete. From this institutional perspective, the soldier as a moral actor is measured in conformance to political, cultural, and institutional expectations of obedient fulfillment of institutionally defined roles. The military purpose of the soldier is undermined by militaristic indoctrination inappropriate to the conditions of contemporary warfare.

Further complicating the moral expectations of the soldier's role, the ideals and practices of military indoctrination may be at odds with many tenets of recruits' earlier indoctrination to a broader set of American political and cultural ideals. This gap reflects the Army's effort to maintain political and cultural autonomy and the pursuit of its own interests in a society that has long demanded that its military reflect broader societal values. The Army's persistent reliance on a tradition of authoritarianism in defining the role of the soldier has been challenged throughout American history by the strong anti-authoritarian bent of American political culture. Certainly, many of the worst abuses of military tradition have been done away with—for instance, soldiers are no longer lashed for insubordination as was the practice in the US Army through the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>44</sup> But most attempts to liberalize military culture have been only nominally successful, while others have been resisted

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<sup>44</sup> Donohue, "The Anatomy of Discipline," 56.

entirely. The individualism of American culture has long been at odds with military claims of disciplined collective identity as the fundamental condition of soldiering, but individualism has always been part of American military idealism, though how and by whom individualist ideals can be acted on has been tightly controlled and limited to those with full institutional membership. Such membership has expanded and contracted, but the perpetuation of traditional military authority through the indoctrination of disciplined obedience, small-unit loyalty, and altruistic service to the nation remains the precondition of full membership. In sum, the conflict of functional, societal, and institutional imperatives results in an American soldier caught between expectations of altruistic deference to traditional military authority motivated by a narrative of military necessity, and egoistic fulfillment of liberal democratic idealism. As neither of the two sides of the soldier are founded wholly—if at all—upon the necessities of war, their potential for failure in combat is likely, and the resulting loss of faith for the soldier in their authority is, I argue, the fundamental cause of American soldiers’ traumatic experiences.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

The body of the dissertation is organized in eight chapters. Chapter One offers my own institutional theory of traumatic experience. I begin by establishing the theoretical context within the historical evolution of trauma theory since the First World War in order to highlight the politicized nature of contemporary trauma models. Because ‘moral injury’ is the conceptual starting point for explaining trauma as an institutional phenomenon, I review competing definitions of the concept in

contemporary psychology and other fields in order to evaluate its theoretical promise and limitations. I argue that if moral injury is a valid model of traumatic experience, then its cause is located in the inability of pre-existing moral schemas to provide for the contextualization or justification of personal actions or the actions of others, resulting in the unsuccessful accommodation of morally challenging experiences. That is, when the stakes are high enough and an ethos that would normally be drawn upon is insufficient or fails to address specific moral circumstances then the resulting incoherence demands an interpretation of the situation as having been traumatic. The resulting damage is to one's trust in moral authority, leaving the injured in an anomic state of moral alienation. In Chapter Two, I further develop the theory by addressing important epistemological considerations that arise from shifting trauma from a psychological to an institutional paradigm. The complexity of trauma requires we must consider the history of the traumatic event within the broader history of the relevant social interactions that give the event meaning. This makes trauma as much a problem of social groups and institutions as of individuals, and, as such, requires an institutional analysis of some sort to effectively explain its occurrence. The chapter begins with the claim that morality is *always* mediated by institutions, and in explaining the point I offer an overview of sociology's common approaches to the study of morality, and justify an approach based on an analytical framework of moral formalism. Because morality is intersubjective, it is only observable as the institutionally mediated practices of 'moral action'. Working from Pierre Bourdieu's theories of practice suggests that, for the individual, morality is embodied belief in

the moral authority of institutions. The relationship of individual and institution is characterized by what Bourdieu calls ‘hysteresis’, the lagged response to changing social conditions. The interpretation of an experience as traumatic is the hysteretic failure of the relationship and a shift into the condition of anomie. Finally, I consider the process of moral interpretation of experience by drawing a parallel between individual belief and collective memory. Just as society is constituted in its relation to the past—to its own history—the individual’s understanding of self is a process of narration. Trauma is the attempt to make sense of sublime experience.

In Chapter Three I explain in more depth my understanding of traumatic experience as the condition of the anomie, the alienated existence in the absence of moral regulation. For anomie to be psychologically damaging it first has to be recognized. This raises the epistemological questions discussed in the previous chapter of how an experience comes to be interpreted as having been traumatic. I argue that this follows a process defined by the relationship of belief to its origins and to its relevance in experience. It is the same relationship of knowledge and experience we see in those who depend on knowledge of history as a way to explain present circumstances or predict the future—it is simply the way all of us know the world around us. I illustrate the distinction between disabling psychological trauma of anomic existence and the temporary condition of affective distress through an analysis of two accounts of war by veteran-authors. To illustrate the anomic experience of war I borrow from the work of Vietnam War veteran and novelist Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried* (1990). I then illustrate the distinct condition of

affective distress through a reading of the First World War novel *Her Privates We* (1930) by Frederic Manning.

With this distinction between anomie and affective distress established, the particular sorts of relationships that are broken in war and its aftermath are explored in more depth in Chapter Four. Trauma comes after experience, in the process of sense making, which depends on the moral values invoked by experience. Trauma is the result of moral failure and the hysteretic shift of the habitus to a condition of anomie, and there are two basic sets of experiences that will bring about this anomic state: those in which one's own actions violate moral beliefs; and those when morality is violated by another. The realization of one's own moral failure is an acknowledgment of sin. Violations by others can be divided into at least four categories: individual; institutional; political; and ideological. The problem analytically is to try and find the moral principles that are forced into conflict in the relationship. The goal of this chapter is to illustrate a few examples of the sorts of violations that occur for soldiers at war. As in the previous chapter, I draw from war literature to demonstrate the complex dynamics of the soldier's relationship to the moral authority of institutions, and the anomie that comes from the failure of those relationships. Betrayal by the military institution is illustrated in Tim O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato* (1978); political betrayal using Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1928); and ideological betrayal in Pierre Boulle's *The Bridge over the River Kwai* (1954). I look at the trauma of one's own moral violation,

which I will refer to simply as sin, in *The Yellow Birds* (2012) by Iraq War veteran Kevin Powers.

Where the purpose of these first four chapters is to provide an alternative theory of trauma as an institutional phenomenon and to demonstrate the sorts of morally inexplicable experiences faced by soldiers in war that might lead to an anomie break with moral authority, the dissertation's second half attempts to outline the specific moral expectations—through moral doctrine—placed on my generation of American soldiers in the post-9/11 wars. This study is not a normative evaluation of the content of this body of beliefs (although it may serve to critique certain normative claims), but is instead an analysis of the use and efficacy of ideas and belief of morally appropriate conduct within the US Army to better understand the political processes and interests that define it institutionally. Institutional analysis of moral doctrine may identify processes by which the Army regulates individual soldiers' behavior, the methods and limits of decision making, the influence of historical legacies on present practices, the relative power of various political interests, and motives of those interests in pursuing institutional change or continuity. The remaining task of this dissertation is to trace out the morality of the ideal American soldier in the era of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and to locate potential points of failure in specific areas of practice that may produce the anomie conditions of traumatic experience. The basic claim I will make is that American soldiers sent to war in Iraq could not rely on their available moral beliefs for two primary reasons. First, there is a fundamental conflict between the moral demands of war fighting and

the cultural values of civilian life in a liberal democratic society. Secondly, the military institution creates the conditions under which its soldiers are unable to reconcile the actions it demands of them and the values it provide. To explain the too common occurrence of such moral failures in recent American wars, I point the finger at the military itself for not understanding its mission, its position in society, its own values, or the values of its soldiers.

Chapter Five considers several taken for granted tenets that have been used to describe the soldier's expectations more universally. I first consider the necessity of military indoctrination to an institutionally mediated collective ethic that defines both the soldier and the institution as moral actors. I then turn to the fundamental condition of the modern soldier's relationship to the military institution: disciplined obedience to traditional military authority. That authority is not monolithic, however, and the frictions of modern war have produced multiple sources of moral authority upon which the soldier might act: the institution itself; its heroes and great leaders; the nation; or the comrades of a soldier's own small unit. Finally, attempting to understand moral action in war cannot be done without understanding the soldier's actions in war more generally, and so this chapter's analysis is fundamentally of the justifications behind a soldier's 'combat motivation'. From an institutional perspective, combat motivation is the military's judgment of its soldiers in their degree of conformity to the roles it demands of them. Because today's military institution is a legacy of traditions that persist primarily for the institution's own self-perpetuation, combat motivation in the modern military institution becomes a proxy

for questioning the individual soldier's conformance to political, cultural, and institutional expectations of obedient fulfillment of an institutionally defined role.

Chapter Six considers the defining traits of the ideal American soldier that reflect the gap between military necessity and militaristic institutional imperatives by tracing a history of the ever evolving ideal as it has been expressed culturally, politically, and institutionally in the American military tradition. Based on assertions that the tradition has been established in military necessity, US Army recruits are indoctrinated to belief in an idealized standard of disciplined obedience to military authority, loyal comradeship to their assigned units, and altruistic service to the nation as citizen-soldiers. Adherence to these doctrinal tenets becomes the soldier's principle of moral action, and, as no clear lines distinguish these ideals, each reinforces the other as the basis of the institution's traditional authority. In practice they serve as a selection mechanism for institutional membership, which is, of course, defined primarily by institutional imperatives. Exploring these ideals in the historical development of the US Army reveals some of the ways they have been mobilized to serve both military necessity and militaristic interests. In the more critical history that I offer in this chapter it becomes apparent that the institutional practices built on this narrative have been deeply embedded as institutional imperatives. To the extent that Army indoctrination becomes the soldier's principle of moral action, that principle may be inherently contradictory, both in relation to other military practices or even on its face. An historical analysis of discipline, comradeship, and altruistic national service as principles of the Army's ideal soldier—those principles defining the



relationship of the soldier to the Army and the state—shows that each has been a means to disparate functional, societal, and institutional ends. Each may have served a legitimate military purpose at some time, but in the contemporary US Army their practice is primarily a militaristic effort to maintain traditional modes of military authority. By misreading its own history for purposes that have little to do with military necessity, the Army creates the preconditions of anomie in a moral environment in which its moral authority is more likely to be invalidated in the experience of its members.

The focus of Chapter Seven shifts to specific developments in the Army's moral doctrine that would have influenced the traumatic experiences of soldiers in the Iraq War. For the Army, maintaining its high regard in American popular opinion, which it worked so hard to restore after Vietnam, required convincing the public of the military necessity of its unique institutional culture and values. The moral doctrine produced is a culturally resonant statement of the moral exceptionalism of the Army and its soldiers that depends on a narrative of altruistic service to the state, disciplined obedience to the institution's traditional authority, and idealized comradeship within the small unit. With the previous chapter's historical account in mind, Chapter Seven provides a close-reading of the Army's moral doctrine as it was established in the years immediately preceding the 9/11 attacks and in the early years of the wars that followed. My analysis reveals the dynamic nature of moral doctrine as the Army responded to various internal and external crises since the end of the Cold War, and the Army's efforts played out as unhappy compromises between

liberal and traditional values. While disciplined obedience, altruistic service to the state, and idealized comradeship remained the primary principles of moral practice among soldiers, the doctrinal tenets that were developed in the era complicated the ideal soldier, who would have to also exemplify leadership, moral character, and a ‘warrior ethos’. By accounting for the multi-contextual development of these tenets of moral doctrine, its logical flaws and moral incoherence become evident. If traumatic experience is in fact an institutional phenomenon as I propose, adherence to an institutional ethic so at odds with both military necessity and American cultural values would have been a primary cause of the anomie suffered by so many veterans of the recent American wars.

In the dissertation’s final chapter, I shift analytic focus once more in order to account for the broader influences in American popular culture on the ideal American soldier. Chapter Eight considers the particular conception of altruistic service represented in the HBO miniseries *Band of Brothers* as the defining cultural articulation of the American conception of patriotic heroism at the start of its post-9/11 wars. This ideal was critical to the cultural mobilization for war, shaping both the US military response and the motivations of its servicemembers. The analysis draws on a range of evidence and relevant methods, including close-reading of texts, a more ‘distant’ reading of news media, and a critical reflection on my own position in the cultural-historical conjuncture that series represents: the popular conception of the American soldier in the early years of the American ‘war on terror’. I attempt to offer some insight into the competing motivations that composed a defining moment

in the relationship of the American people and its warfighters. In doing so I hope to explain the connection between wartime experiences of my generation of veterans and the cultural politics of the time. The themes of the series filled an ideological void in our imaginations, but this narrative of idealized service would eventually be undermined by the strategic and tactical conditions we faced in Iraq. Our idealist expectations simply collapsed in the cognitive dissonance of encountering a war we were neither ideologically nor institutionally prepared to fight.

# Chapter One

## An Institutional Theory of Traumatic Experience

For at least the last century, our knowledge of psychological trauma has gradually developed with every major war we fight.<sup>1</sup> Wars provide trauma researchers with a large population of traumatized subjects and the resources to study them. Unlike the traumas of ordinary life (ranging from the sudden death of a loved one, to experiencing family or sexual violence, to surviving natural disaster) the traumas of soldiers impact an easily identified and accessible population. There is also a political necessity in the care of soldiers during war, and to a lesser extent in its aftermath, which has propelled trauma research in a way that, until recently, those more ubiquitous traumas could not. The American war in Iraq continues this trend, both scientifically and politically.

The sheer scale of the First World War, in its political impact and unprecedented violence, forced militaries and the medical establishment to address the reality of ‘shell-shock’ in the trenches of Europe and accept the condition as physiological—if only among less fit members of society. In World War II it was recognized that the psychological breakdown of ‘battle-fatigue’ was not just

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<sup>1</sup> For a general history of trauma in psychiatric medicine see Judith Lewis Herman's, *Trauma and Recovery*; Simon Wessely's “Twentieth-Century Theories on Combat Motivation and Breakdown” looks at trauma’s history alongside the responses of western military institutions.

physiological but inevitable, that ‘every man has his breaking point’. Shell-shock and battle-fatigue were not, however, what we understand today as the long-term, disabling condition of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Research after the Vietnam War made the connection between the psychological stresses of the battlefield and the post-war mental health disorders of veterans. It was proposed that exposure to an event “generally outside the range of usual human experience,” whether in combat or ordinary life, caused physiological changes in the brain that produce the symptoms of PTSD.<sup>2</sup>

In these developments we have to recognize that research is driven as much by the cultural and political conditions of the day as by our continually evolving knowledge of the human brain. This is not to question the reality of trauma as a medical condition. It is simply a reminder that changing a scientific consensus is a political struggle: how new facts are presented, and to whom, is as important as their discovery. It should be remembered also that the study of trauma, its treatment, and its prevention all occur within different institutional and political settings. To speak of trauma from only one of those positions is necessarily incomplete.

In one sense, shell-shock could gain popular acceptance after World War I, despite resistance from traditionalist military elites, because the war’s impact on society matched the scale of the devastation in the trenches. If traditionalists denied shell-shock as merely a lack of ‘moral fiber’ among the conscripted masses of industrialized society, those masses could readily point to the political failures of a

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<sup>2</sup> American Psychiatric Association, “Anxiety Disorders,” 236.

war undertaken on traditionalist principles but on an industrialized scale. For those who accepted the reality of shell-shock, its study as a psychiatric condition was limited by theories that presumed hysterical behaviors were problems of the unconscious mind, rooted in early childhood, and not caused by traumatic experience. The development of mental health theories and treatments was also deeply gendered, equating mental illness with femininity, mental health with masculinity. Thus, psychiatric research had great difficulty understanding the sudden affliction of hysteria upon so many men, and had little to offer by way of treatment.

In World War II, armies mobilized anticipating the impact of ‘combat neurosis’ by screening for moral and psychological weakness, but these efforts collapsed with the growing need for men and growing evidence that even hardened soldiers were breaking down in combat. The cultural stigma of mental illness, however, required military psychiatrists approach combat neurosis as an acute condition, willingly taking psychologically exhausted soldiers off the front lines, offering brief treatments with newly developed cathartic techniques, and returning them to duty as quickly as possible. Although some researchers recognized the potential long-term psychological effects of combat experience and the limits of acute treatment, there was no organized post-war effort to systematically treat returning veterans or continue studying the issue. American veterans returned to a society moving beyond the war as quickly as it mobilized for it.

The prevailing understanding of the role of the soldier in war has been largely unchanged since the production of massive sociological studies by the American

military during the WWII. Theories of combat motivation—why soldiers act in combat—shifted away from assumptions about patriotism and ideology to an emphasis on the soldier’s relationship to the small unit. These studies recognized that even the best-trained, best-led unit could eventually become combat-ineffective, resulting in psychological damage to its members. Combat itself, under this logic, is inevitably damaging. A soldier’s reaction to traumatic experience was no longer seen as originating in genetic predisposition or social upbringing, and so PTSD as a recognized diagnosis became possible. In practice, these theories are not without their inconsistencies. The American military continues to stress the importance of small-unit identity as essential to preventing breakdown in combat, but clinical practice interprets breakdown as an individual response to trauma largely independent of group influence.

In this context, the leap from acute combat neuroses to posttraumatic stress disorder is a significant paradigm shift, which depended on both the advancement of neuroscience and the cultural politics of the Vietnam War. When PTSD was proposed as a psychiatric diagnosis in the years following Vietnam the medicalization of mental illness was already well-established. However, the cultural stigma of mental illness remained. The challenge for researchers was to move the cause of trauma entirely outside the individual, rather than in any inherent individual weakness. Thus, if soldiers returned from war psychologically traumatized then the cause was the war itself. The logic, which would be applied to both military and civilian traumas, is this:

extreme events produce physiological reactions in the human body such that future reminders of the event produce the same bodily reaction.

The American war in Iraq produced two significant developments in the clinical study of trauma. First, traumatic brain injuries (TBI) caused by concussive force—which some call the ‘signature wound’ of the war—can produce changes in personality that look very much like the symptoms of PTSD.<sup>3</sup> In one sense, the recognition of TBI essentially removes its casualties from the ranks of the psychologically traumatized. In another, it confuses the very notion of psychological trauma—a recent *New York Times Magazine* article on TBI asks in its headline, “What if PTSD is more physical than psychological?”<sup>4</sup> Notably, the research by Shively, et al. highlighted in the article does not equate PTSD and TBI, but it does suggest that the PTSD diagnoses of many veterans may be misdiagnosed blast-associated TBI. The research also points to how little we know about the subject: prior to their postmortem study of eight chronic and acute cases of blast exposure, the researchers could identify only a few studies of such injuries conducted during the World Wars; since then, the “sparse scientific literature” on such traumas had been based on just eleven cases—that is, eleven individual brains. While blast exposure was certainly common among soldiers deployed to Iraq, the *Times* headline seems premature.

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<sup>3</sup> Shively et al., “Characterisation of Interface Astroglial Scarring in the Human Brain after Blast Exposure.”

<sup>4</sup> Worth, “What If PTSD Is More Physical Than Psychological?”



The second important development in recent clinical research is the recognition of the traumatizing potential of ‘moral injuries’, the debilitating effects of experiencing the violation of one’s moral belief. Unfortunately, much of this line of research fails to fulfill the theoretical implication of its very label: if an injury is *moral* its explanation must account for more than just psychology. The point is missed because psychology as a discipline (at least in its mainstream forms) does not adequately explain the social and political nature of either morality or the conduct of war. Clinical approaches to moral injury see only war’s aftermath, and fail to recognize that soldiers go to war with an inherently unstable conception of the role with which they have been tasked. War is a collective undertaking, but modern culture and its institutions are founded upon a morality of individualism. Psychology as a discipline is inseparable from these same ideological traditions, and its focus on the individual psyche has come to equate individual moral character and mental health. The American military institution, despite strong collectivist moral traditions, is also a product of the American individualist ethic, and so its understanding of human behavior is often governed by the logic of psychology. Military doctrine and popular culture indoctrinate soldiers to a heroic individualist ideal that they must embody, yet this sort of idealism begins to unravel in the extreme experiences of combat. While this heroic ideal serves the societal and military purpose of forming citizens into recruits, recruits into soldiers, and soldiers into armies, the effects of failed moral indoctrination are the soldier’s to bear alone. The discipline of psychology and the institutions and ideologies it supports place the causal burden for

these traumas not on flawed moral indoctrination, but inside the flawed mind of the flawed individual.

As a corrective, I propose a radical, but simple, redefinition of moral injury that avoids psychology's overemphasis on individual mental illness. Instead, I attempt to shift the conceptual emphasis from its psychological effects to its moral cause. I begin with an overview of existing moral injury theory to explain its various definitions and their theoretical limitations and possibilities. I then offer an institutional theory of psychological trauma based upon sociological theories of moral practices. Unlike recent clinical theories of moral injury as distinct from PTSD, my claim encompasses a range of reactions to traumatic experiences. Moral injury is the starting point for reconceptualizing psychological trauma as a crisis of belief, and the damage done to the individual in any such crisis ought to be studied for the institutional effects at play in the traumatic situation. I argue that trauma must be understood as part of a process, and for most, it may manifest in ways less obviously pathological than PTSD, and, though it is beyond the scope of this dissertation, moral injuries may be collective, manifesting in events such as the prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib prison. I take the position that *all traumatic experience* is rooted in moral violation. At the same time, it must also be acknowledged that all 'psychological trauma' may not be rooted in traumatic experience. Research in traumatic brain injury and the genetic links to anxiety and depressive disorders suggest that that the condition we currently label as 'PTSD' probably accounts for a wide array of psychological conditions with various causes. Yet, even when PTSD-like symptoms

can be attributed to physical brain injury, it is reasonable to suggest that any symptoms that manifest as socially deviant behaviors are in some part shaped by the pre- and post-injury moral environments which the injured must attempt to reconcile and adapt.

### **Overview of Moral Injury**

#### *Moral Injury as The Betrayal of What's Right*

The 1994 publication of Jonathan Shay's *Achilles in Vietnam* began the current discourse around the moral aspect of combat veterans' traumatic experiences. The term 'moral injury' appears only twice in the book, once seemingly in passing, the other in a restatement of the author's argument: "Moral injury is an essential part of any combat trauma that leads to lifelong psychological injury."<sup>5</sup> In Shay's follow-up work, *Odysseus in America* (2002), moral injury is Shay's preferred label for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and its 'undoing' of the veteran's moral character. Though it was not until recently that he recognized 'moral injury' as a clinical term he 'apparently coined',<sup>6</sup> Shay has refined his definition over the years to three specific criteria: betrayal of what is right; by someone who holds legitimate authority; in a high-stakes situation.<sup>7</sup>

Shay likens psychological trauma to physical trauma, noting the difference between 'primary' wounds and the more life-threatening 'complications' that follow.

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<sup>5</sup> Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 20. Emphasis in original.

<sup>6</sup> Shay, "Moral Injury."

<sup>7</sup> Shay, "Casualties," 183.

He warns, however, that this ‘mind-body distinction’ is a false one, that in fact, “the body codes moral injury as physical attack and reacts with the same massive mobilization” for biological survival.<sup>8</sup> The primary psychological injury is an individual’s reaction to extreme circumstances: for the soldier at war, the radically alien environment of prolonged combat leads to a distrust in the physical sense of the surrounding world; as the lines between reality and anticipation blur, old truths fall to the lessons of lived experience. Shay claims that trust in perception will be restored for most in the return to ordinary life, “unless the soldier has also experienced major betrayals of morality by his own leaders.”<sup>9</sup> Such betrayals are the complications, the infection of moral injury, that result in long-term illness, disability, or death.

Shay’s notoriety probably has as much to do with his method as his theory. Rather than a formal clinical study, Shay shares his patients’ personal accounts of war and the difficulties they faced in returning to civilian life to demonstrate the common narrative elements of their traumatic experiences. By comparing these stories with Homer’s epic poem the *Iliad*, Shay shows the consistent use of a particular narrative formula in his patient’s stories of combat and PTSD—sometimes only in part, but often in its entirety. These narrative elements shift the conception of trauma away from psychopathological symptoms or processes toward the evaluation of individual moral crises experienced in war, all of which begin with the perception of a betrayal of what is right by military leadership. Shay argues that betrayal is also the source of

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>9</sup> Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 170.

the tragic rage in Homer's hero Achilles. In Shay's reading, the *Iliad* is a story of Achilles' moral injuries, represented in the following seven narrative elements:<sup>10</sup>

- Betrayal of what's right
- Shrinkage of the social and moral horizon
- Condition of captivity and enslavement
- Being already dead
- Guilt and wrongful substitution
- Disconnection from the human community
- Going berserk

The narrative formula of moral injury begins in the *betrayal of 'what's right'* when the Greek king Agamemnon seizes the war prize (the princess Briseis) given to Achilles by his men for valor in combat. It is an example of a violation of the moral rules of war that, though they have changed over time, construct bonds among soldiers and give legitimacy to their leadership. If, as Shay notes, "the moral power of an army is so great that it can motivate men to get up out of a trench and step into enemy machine-gun fire,"<sup>11</sup> then moral violations by the soldier's leadership undermine this power and create the *shrinkage of the social and moral horizon*. In this state, the only social bonds that have any meaning are those of the small unit; Achilles' betrayal by Agamemnon leads him to withdraw from the Greek host to his company of Myrmidons. The bonds within the small unit become idealized so that all outside of that group become potential enemies. When bonds of loyalty to a greater cause have been severed, a space where old morals no longer operate is opened up, and the potential for atrocity arises; the deepening sense of moral alienation "can,

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<sup>10</sup> Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

quite simply, produce bestiality, the utter loss of human relatedness.”<sup>12</sup> Shay sees in the nature of war a political struggle down to the level of the individual soldier, that, “for soldiers in prolonged combat, war is the mutual struggle to paralyze or control the will of enemy soldiers by inflicting wounds and death and creating the terror of these.”<sup>13</sup> But this struggle is reciprocal. Armies structure themselves so that the enemy cannot achieve dominance over any of its elements, in particular the individual soldier, and, thus, life in the war zone becomes a *condition of captivity and enslavement*. In this condition, intensified by the compression of social relations, kin-like relationships develop (the ideal of ‘brotherhood-in-arms’) and mutual dependence for survival becomes a bond of love that cannot be replaced when one brother is lost in combat. When Achilles loses his closest comrade Patroklos the grief he suffers leads to his self-destruction. Achilles’ grief manifests in weeping, self-reproach, self-imposed fasting, and self-mutilation. Shay suggests that, because in warfare there is no place for grief, in this loss of his beloved friend Achilles himself is *already dead*. This is one of the most damaging elements of moral injury, and leads to severe, long-term emotional disability.<sup>14</sup> The inability to grieve leads to misplaced *guilt and wrongful substitution*, the sense that ‘it should have been me’. To experience such loss is interpreted as an irreconcilable violation of the soldier’s spiritual and religious indoctrination, a violation of civic and religious teachings that

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 23. Quoting Martha Nussbaum’s *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 68.

willingness to sacrifice oneself serves a higher purpose. Faced with an unanswerable ‘Why?’, self-blame is the soldier’s only available explanation. With this sense that all bonds with humanity have been cut, there is a self-imposed *disconnection from the human community*, and when forced to act under extreme conditions the soldier becomes *berserk*. Achilles rages, chokes the River Scamander with the bodies of the Trojans he kills, and defiles the body of Hector. While it may be easy to dismiss the mythology of Achilles, the power of Shay’s narrative formula of moral injury is in the parallel narratives shared by his patients, rivaling Achilles’ in their brutality and tragic consequences.

#### *Clinical Theories of Moral Injury as Individual Transgression*

A 2009 study of the seemingly unique traumas reported by veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan offered a much more clinical approach to moral injury. This study, led by VA clinical psychologist Brett Litz, departs from Shay’s theory in its recognition of moral injury as a condition distinct from PTSD that does not fit neatly into the diagnostic criteria of clinical psychology—it is the “moral conflict-colored psychological trauma” originating in one’s own moral transgression.<sup>15</sup> In contrast to Shay’s notion of betrayal within a social relationship, Litz, et al. see moral injury as the traumatic result of an individual’s moral transgression, defined as “perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply

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<sup>15</sup> Litz et al., “Moral Injury and Moral Repair in War Veterans,” 696. It is noteworthy that Litz, et al. do not reference Shay’s work, though Litz did admit in a later interview that, “Shay started the ball rolling, using literature to raise the consciousness of care providers and their families” of the potential moral significance of psychological trauma (see Bebinger, “Moral Injury”).

held moral beliefs and expectations.”<sup>16</sup> Moral injury—manifest in emotional responses of shame and guilt and dysfunctional behaviors such as social isolation and withdrawal—is the harmful effect of the individual’s “inability to contextualize or justify personal actions or the actions of others and the unsuccessful accommodation of these potentially morally challenging experiences into pre-existing moral schemas.”<sup>17</sup> In this model, self-awareness of one’s transgression is the source of *dissonance* or inner conflict, and it is the individual’s *attributions* of significance to the transgression that determine the extent of the moral injury. That is, to be traumatic the transgression must be judged to have been non-context dependent, an internal flaw of the individual’s character, and enduringly unforgivable. The injury itself manifests as feelings of *shame*, *guilt*, or *anxiety*. Expectations of being unforgivable lead to the individual’s *withdrawal* from normal social life, and the continued *self-condemnation* feeds back upon the individual’s feelings about the transgression. Further, this failure to forgive oneself results in *chronic intrusion* of memories of the transgression and attempts to numb or avoid those feelings, as well as *self-harming* behaviors, including suicide. The continued injury also feeds back upon the individual’s attributions of the transgression. Moral injury is mediated by the individual’s pre-existing psychological characteristics. *Risk factors* for moral injury, such as neuroticism and shame-proneness, will limit the individual’s ability to find coherence in moral dissonance and negatively influence the individual’s attributions

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<sup>16</sup> Litz et al., “Moral Injury and Moral Repair in War Veterans,” 700.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 705.



of meaning to the traumatic experience. *Protective factors*, including ‘belief in a just world’, high self-esteem, and a forgiving social support system, positively mediate the individual’s attribution of meaning to the transgression and limit the potential for social withdrawal. It is important to note that this framework, with the exception of ‘forgiving supports’ as a protective factor *after* the injury, is an entirely internal process for the morally injured person.

This model has inspired further clinical research—much of it funded by the US military and Department of Veterans Affairs—to better define categories of traumatic experience and to correlate those experiences with particular psychological outcomes. An Army funded study proposes six categories of deployment related traumatic experience, including life threat to self or others, exposure to the aftermath of violence, and moral injury to self or others.<sup>18</sup> Other research suggests a nine item ‘moral injury events scale’ to reconcile Shay’s notion of betrayal (by leaders, other soldiers, or non-military others) and transgression in the model of Litz, et al., in a somewhat confusing arrangement of perpetrating, witnessing, or being distressed by transgressive acts of commission or omission; the study also points to potential issues for caregivers in the slippery slope between moral injury and ordinary ‘moral wrongdoing’, “a misconception that cannot help but evoke negative judgments and emotions.”<sup>19</sup> More recently, three categories of transgression were correlated with particular psychological outcomes: betrayal by leaders or others is most strongly

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<sup>18</sup> Stein et al., “A Scheme for Categorizing Traumatic Military Events.”

<sup>19</sup> Nash et al., “Psychometric Evaluation of the Moral Injury Events Scale,” 650.

associated with PTSD and feelings of anger; witnessing the transgressions of others with PTSD in general; and self-transgression with feelings of hopelessness, pessimism, and anger.<sup>20</sup> The logic of moral injury has been further supported by a ‘neuroanthropological’ theory of PTSD based on neurological studies of the ‘enculturated brain’ that demonstrate the influence of social and cultural conditions on the physiological development of the brain and the resulting expressions of individual identity.<sup>21</sup>

Though not yet a formal psychiatric diagnosis, the VA currently recognizes moral injury as a ‘co-occurring condition’ of PTSD, noting that, because transgression is not a necessary condition for PTSD, clinicians must “assess mental health symptoms and moral injury as separate manifestations of war trauma.”<sup>22</sup> The logic of this line of moral injury research also parallels the US military’s response to the mental health crisis brought on by its ongoing wars: ‘strengths-based’ training in individual ‘resilience’ to face ‘life’s adversities.’ The foundation of the US Army’s response is its *Comprehensive Soldier & Family Fitness* program,<sup>23</sup> a preventative model for addressing the stressors leading to trauma by managing five dimensions of

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<sup>20</sup> Bryan et al., “Measuring Moral Injury.”

<sup>21</sup> Collura and Lende, “PTSD and Neuroanthropology.”

<sup>22</sup> Maguen and Litz, “Moral Injury in the Context of War.”

<sup>23</sup> The program was developed by the University of Pennsylvania’s Positive Psychology Center under a \$31 million no-bid contract with the Army, and promoted by the American Psychological Association in a special issue of the journal *American Psychologist* (January 2011). An important critique of both *Comprehensive Soldier & Family Fitness* and UPenn’s resilience research was published in response to the *American Psychologist* special issue by the Coalition for an Ethical Psychology (see Eidelson and Soldz, “Does Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Work?”).

psychological ‘resilience’: physical, social, emotional, spiritual, and family fitness.<sup>24</sup>

The logic is simple: the resilient soldier resists psychological trauma by resisting moral transgression.

### *Competing Definitions of Moral Injury*

Neither Shay nor Litz, et al. consider the meaning of ‘moral injury’ outside of their own or the other’s definition, although Shay does draw from a number of moral philosophers in connecting morality and damaged character. However, the concept has been used historically in reference to religion, philosophy, and the law. Though each is unique, these uses offer some insight for an institutional theory of moral injury trauma. Religiously, the term means something like ‘damages done by sin’. Though the term has been rare in popular discourse, where it has appeared it usually follows this meaning. For instance, an 1873 letter to the editor of the *New York Evangelist* decried the “moral injury to the victims of tobacco,” specifically, “When the visit of a pastor to the sick room is dreaded from the offensive odor [of tobacco smoke] he brings... is there not... a positive injury done to the Christian character?”<sup>25</sup> An 1888 editorial in *The New York Times* railed against the moral injury done by striking workers to themselves, who “after a few days men out of employment lose sight altogether of the notion of bettering themselves.”<sup>26</sup> Elvis Presley’s appearance

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<sup>24</sup> Casey, “Comprehensive Soldier Fitness”; Seligman, “Building Resilience.” Information on *Comprehensive Soldier & Family Fitness* can be found at the Army’s website [csf2.army.mil](http://csf2.army.mil), and UPenn’s [www.positivepsychology.org](http://www.positivepsychology.org).

<sup>25</sup> Anonymous, “The Moral Injury.”

<sup>26</sup> Anonymous, “Arthur and Powderly.”

on the Ed Sullivan Show in 1956 drew the ire of one Catholic priest who wrote, “Your Catholic viewers, Mr. Sullivan are angry; and you cannot compensate for the moral injury, not even by sticking the Little Gaelic Singers of County Derry on the same bill with Elvis Presley.”<sup>27</sup>

Scholars have, of course, offered more serious considerations of moral injury. Its most formal definition is legal. In civil law, moral injury refers to damages done to non-patrimonial property (those things not heritable). This includes specific torts against an individual’s dignity, such as defamation, as well as violations more broadly which damage one’s reputation or cause emotional distress. In common law, moral injury refers only to damages, such as emotional distress, mental suffering, or humiliation, and not specific torts.<sup>28</sup> This meaning has also been used to argue that the clinically psychopathic’s incapacity for moral obligation is also an incapacity for dignity; such individuals can never possess non-patrimonial property, can never be morally injured, and are, thus, ‘morally dead’.<sup>29</sup> More optimistically, religious ethicist Paul Lauritzen considers the nature of forgiveness by comparing the means of an offender’s absolution for moral and criminal injuries: criminal injury requires either the offender’s full payment of a debt to the state, or the state’s grant of pardon; moral injury is absolved only by the injured’s decision to forgive, an act which “necessarily involves a context of interpersonal relations in which a moral relation between

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<sup>27</sup> Zito, “Flashback.”

<sup>28</sup> Litvinoff, “Moral Damages.”

<sup>29</sup> Murphy, “Moral Death.”

individuals is at stake.”<sup>30</sup> Legal theorist Ronald Dworkin opens his 1986 book *Law’s Empire*, an interpretivist critique of legal positivism, with a reminder of the moral stakes in legal decision making: the public injustice of a system’s failure to fulfill its societal obligations is the community’s infliction of a moral injury upon one of its members, who is now ‘stamped an outlaw’. And as a collective experience, historian O.N. Njoku describes the “untold material and moral injury” of European colonialism, specifically the burdens placed on colonies for far off wars between the colonizers, writing: “The colonised had to carry for their colonisers the cross of imperialism on their very weak shoulders.”<sup>31</sup>

### **The Promise and Limits of Moral Injury Theory**

Moral injury is certainly an improvement on previous trauma models that generally ignored social factors in mental illness. Psychology has historically tended to understand human behavior as biological and universal,<sup>32</sup> and that the brain essentially operates by machine-like computational processes.<sup>33</sup> Such ‘cause-effect models of trauma’ underlie the previous clinical definition of PTSD as an extreme emotional reaction to a violent event.<sup>34</sup> An example of that outdated logic occurs in Dave Grossman’s highly cited *On Killing* (1995), which insists on a biological

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<sup>30</sup> Lauritzen, “Forgiveness,” 143.

<sup>31</sup> Njoku, “The Burden of Imperialism,” 97.

<sup>32</sup> Agassi, “Institutional Individualism.”

<sup>33</sup> Cosmides and Tooby, “Cognitive Adaptations for Social Exchange”; Cosmides and Tooby, “Evolutionary Psychology.”

<sup>34</sup> Collura and Lende, “PTSD and Neuroanthropology”; American Psychiatric Association, *DSM-IV*.

aversion to violence genetically embedded in the human species, making PTSD a genetically ingrained response to exposure to violence.<sup>35</sup> Moral injury models offer a better understanding of trauma by, at the very least, expanding the range of potentially traumatizing experiences. Most significantly, moral injury theories influenced the recent clinical reclassification of PTSD from ‘anxiety disorder’ to ‘trauma and stressor-related disorder,’ a move that de-emphasizes event-induced fear and allows a wider range of traumatic stressors.<sup>36</sup> The new definition also recognizes the social context of trauma cases, which may vary in terms of the traumatic event itself, its preconditions, and manifesting symptoms.<sup>37</sup>

If moral injury is a valid model of psychological trauma, understanding the sources of morality and the ways morality is manipulated or enforced needs to be a research priority in the study of traumatic experience. Alongside the clinical theories of Shay and Litz, the legal, religious, and philosophical conceptions of moral injury also suggest the social nature and effects of moral violations on the individual.

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<sup>35</sup> Grossman's claim is a perfectly logical conclusion, given the political history (see Wessely's “Twentieth-century Theories on Combat Motivation and Breakdown”) of PTSD's evolution from cowardice to shellshock to combat neurosis, etc. Though it is beyond the scope of this work, moral injury and inherent aversion must be logically incompatible—to call morality biologically inherent is to make it devoid of any meaning whatsoever and ignores the obvious human capacity for guiltless violence.

<sup>36</sup> Nieuwsma, “Moral Injury”; Nieuwsma et al., “Possibilities within Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for Approaching Moral Injury.”

<sup>37</sup> American Psychiatric Association, “Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders.” The changes also reflect a broader shift in psychological research which finds that even mental illnesses long thought to be purely neuro-physiological such as schizophrenia may manifest in radically different ways depending on social contexts (see Luhrmann, “Hearing Voices in San Mateo, Accra and Chennai”; Larøi et al., “Culture and Hallucinations”).

Legally, we recognize the damaging effect of offenses against the dignity of an individual in the same way we recognize physical property damage and equally worthy of compensation; that is, in the eyes of the law it is possible to place blame on a responsible party for an individual's traumatic suffering. Likewise, it is reasonable to suggest of traumatic experience that the harms done to an individual are theirs alone to forgive, that injustice done by one in the service of others is a collective act, and that moral wrongs are political acts. Even nineteenth-century editorials are useful, as they demonstrate the range of behaviors some are willing to raise to the level of morally valued. And finally, if there are some who imagine the morally deviant as undeserving of dignity, then it is no wonder that the morally injured have such difficulty reconciling their experiences with the expectations of ordinary life.

Shay's theory has been widely cited in a range of scholarship, but its fundamental implications—that psychological trauma is a social and political phenomenon and not just a mental health condition—have not been adequately addressed.<sup>38</sup> In its relation to war, moral injury as a social phenomenon cannot be separated from the institutionalized power of the military, the government's decision

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<sup>38</sup> Due perhaps to cultural and institutional deference to psychology, I have located very little work in the broader social sciences that specifically addresses moral injury as a concept for analysis. IR scholar Christian Enemark approaches the topic using the definition of Litz, et al. (see "Drones, Risk, and Moral Injury") Anthropologist Ken MacLeish has taken a highly critical position on the work of Litz, et al. similar to my own (see "On 'Moral Injury': Psychic Fringes and War Violence" [forthcoming]). And anthropologist Nadia Abu El-Haj has announced a forthcoming book *The Ethics of Trauma: Moral Injury, Combat, and U.S. Empire*, a study of military psychology and the implications of our shifting definitions of trauma (see <https://barnard.edu/profiles/nadia-abu-el-haj>, accessed October 10, 2017).

to go to war, or the role of the soldier as it is defined by society. The work of Litz, et al. is wholly within institutional constraints set by academic research practices, funding agencies, and peer review publication. Shay's work, on the other hand, was less limited by disciplinary standards: he is a self-proclaimed 'missionary' to the cause of the patients he served;<sup>39</sup> his books are published in the popular press, and the only peer-review is the continued support of veterans who recognize the strength of his argument. The freedom to offer a narrative theory of PTSD came at the cost of academic respect, at least within the community of clinical research, and so Shay's criticism of the military institution, even as an employee of the Department of Defense during portions of his career, seems to have been generally ignored. Despite offering the military institution a number of specific policy changes to alleviate the occurrence of moral injury,<sup>40</sup> his most significant contribution to the sociology of moral injury has been the growing recognition of the value of programs offering veterans the ability to communalize their experience. For instance, several communities have developed writing projects for veterans that draw on the therapeutic effects of confessional writing and offer a forum for their publication. Shay's influence is also evident in the efforts of religious communities to create reintegration programs for returning veteran members of their congregations.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Shay, "Casualties."

<sup>40</sup> See Shay's concluding chapters of both *Achilles in Vietnam* and *Odysseus in America*.

<sup>41</sup> Kinghorn, "Combat Trauma and Moral Fragmentation."



Today, most references to moral injury follow the model of Litz, et al. Unfortunately, this line of research and the commentary that has followed leave major gaps for an effective explanation of the link between moral injury and psychological trauma. The work offers neither a well-developed theory of morality, nor an explanation of why an experience might be morally damaging. Of course, defining moral behavior is difficult, both analytically and philosophically. Litz, et al. are specific: morality is “the personal and shared familial, cultural, societal, and legal rules for social behavior, either tacit or explicit,” and the “fundamental assumptions about how things should work and how one should behave in the world.”<sup>42</sup> Although the definition acknowledges the social nature of morality, it becomes problematic when read through a psychological paradigm of pathology and treatment. Psychological paradigms of morality may recognize the socially relative value of behaviors,<sup>43</sup> but still impose a moral reality that equates pathological behavior with moral deviance. This presents most strongly in the tradition of Freudian psychoanalysis. For Freudians there is no distinction “between natural and moral evil,” making the problem of moral transgression merely a “residue of the ‘death instinct’” in the individual psyche, devoid of “the all-pervasive weight of ideology.”<sup>44</sup> Psychology also presumes that fundamental moral assumptions must apply to both the morally injured patient and the therapist, but it privileges the moral authority of

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<sup>42</sup> Litz et al., “Moral Injury and Moral Repair in War Veterans,” 699.

<sup>43</sup> Haidt, “The New Synthesis in Moral Psychology.”

<sup>44</sup> Rieff, *Freud*, 275.

the therapist who is tasked with fixing the patient's broken morality.<sup>45</sup> For example, Lisa Finlay, a former VA psychologist, argues that clinical training leads to the common belief among psychotherapists that the guilt arising from moral transgression can be dismissed as a "feeling not, not a fact." This position, instilled in common practices like cognitive processing therapy (CPT) and Prolonged Exposure (EP) conceive guilt, and by extension the moral beliefs from which it originates:

as a style of cognitive appraisal that is separate from objective reality, unattached to value systems or traditions, and maladaptive by definition. In accordance with its supposed uselessness, guilt is included as one of the 'negative trauma-related emotions' of PTSD in the DSM-5 and assumed by many clinicians to contribute to maladaptive behaviors like social withdrawal. It is also often contrasted with self-forgiveness, which is another way of implying that there is no actual 'Other' that has been neglected or harmed.<sup>46</sup>

In many ways, psychology inherently limits the sorts of beliefs, practices, and experiences that count as being morally real. For example, much of the research cited by Litz, et al. comes from the study of wartime atrocity, and so limits itself to circumstances of "unnecessary, cruel, and abusive" violence<sup>47</sup> that are easily recognized in contemporary culture as morally transgressive. They also presume that the nature of the war in Iraq as a counter-insurgency is somehow uniquely morally challenging, given the difficulty of distinguishing civilians and combatants—a presumption that ignores both the relatively short history of the civilian-combatant distinction and the long history of atrocity in war. From these works we also find an

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<sup>45</sup> Cushman, *Constructing the Self, Constructing America*; Singer, "Shame, Guilt, Self-Hatred and Remorse"; Finlay, "Evidence-Based Trauma Treatment."

<sup>46</sup> Finlay, "Evidence-Based Trauma Treatment," 222.

<sup>47</sup> Litz et al., "Moral Injury and Moral Repair in War Veterans," 697.

underlying expectation of war as something independent of man: one can only respond to the reality of war and prepare accordingly; there is no possibility that war is waged by choice; or that there are individuals removed from the immediacy of experience whose decisions and interests lead to traumatic outcomes.

Psychology as a discipline has been criticized by sociologists since the nineteenth century for its dependence on methodological individualism. This remains the dominant methodological framework in a number of psychological sub-disciplines. This individualism, the understanding of human behavior as originating in the individual psyche, whether or not that is biologically absolute or can be overcome through individual will, is central to, for instance, evolutionary psychology, evidence-based psychotherapy, Freudian psychotherapy, and positive psychology. Many psychologists do, of course, understand morality as relational, and more critical approaches are more likely to recognize the interdependence of society and psyche. Part of the problem of the field's limited conceptions of moral behavior can be seen in its methodological effects. Jonathan Haidt, probably the leading moral psychologist in the United States, argues that the field's study of morality has been limited by a focus on behaviors of "interpersonal treatment" arising from "evolutionary mechanisms of kin selection," specifically those behaviors characterized by either harm/care or fairness/reciprocity; only recently have a broader range of behaviors related to group loyalty, obedience, and purity been studied as distinct expressions of morality.<sup>48</sup> Still, more critical approaches have long recognized the problems of

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<sup>48</sup> Haidt, "The New Synthesis in Moral Psychology," 1001.

methodological individualism. Feminist perspectives revolutionized the study of trauma. For instance, Judith Herman's introduction of 'complex-PTSD' recognized causes beyond exposure to a traumatic event, including the traumatic condition of captivity and 'subordination to coercive control' such as that experienced by prisoners and survivors of prolonged domestic violence.<sup>49</sup> It is worth noting that Shay's epigraph to the first chapter of *Achilles in Vietnam* quotes Herman: "Every instance of severe traumatic psychological injury is a standing challenge to the rightness of the social order."

Ultimately, psychology's disciplinary dependence on methodological individualism is a problem of what Talcott Parsons calls 'ontological priority'<sup>50</sup>—our assumptions about the nature of human existence—and the issues of epistemology and methodology which follow from where one's priorities may lie. This can be understood in the relationship between ideology and methodology in the dominant psychological paradigm. Joseph Agassi, a philosopher of science, offers the following framework for categorizing the study of human behavior which illustrates the link between methodology and morality. Ontological assumptions about the relationship between the individual and society underlie moral ideologies: an individualist ideology ascribes the power to act "to all and only to individuals"; collectivism, on the other hand, sees individual ends and decisions as socially constrained and "subject to conformity with the good of society at large." At the same time, there can also be a

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<sup>49</sup> Herman, "Complex PTSD."

<sup>50</sup> Parsons, "Psychology and Sociology."

methodological relationship between individual and society: psychologism presumes all human behavior can be reduced to the individual psyche; in contrast, institutionalism is merely the “denial of psychologism.”<sup>51</sup> In this model, the dominant paradigm of psychology is individualist-psychologism, focusing on the individual both ontologically and methodologically. While, of course, not all psychology is individualist-psychologism, it is not an exaggeration to call this the dominant paradigm in clinical psychology, and in the social sciences generally, because it is virtually synonymous with liberal ideology, given the discursive interdependence of the moralities of liberal politics, capitalism, protestant Christianity, and psychology. The point is made by cultural studies scholar Couze Venn who argues that psychology arose in the nineteenth-century pursuit of knowledge of the “utility of the human being.”<sup>52</sup> The discipline’s assumptions of the individual psyche are directly connected to the individualist logic of bureaucratic administration and economic rationality; however, Venn writes, “psychology as a science of the social *interiorizes that connection*: it produces the identity between the ‘normal’ subject of individualism and that of rationality, and locates that identity inside the subject. Thus it naturalizes that notion of rationality and of normality.”<sup>53</sup> In effect, psychology constructs rationality as the norm of the moral subject; those identified by psychology as irrational must be—the assumption becomes the assertion—both mentally and

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<sup>51</sup> Agassi, “Institutional Individualism,” 144–45.

<sup>52</sup> Venn, “The Subject of Psychology,” 127. Citing Georges Canguilhem’s 1968 work *Etudes d’histoire et de philosophie des sciences*.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 133. Emphasis in original.

morally deviant. In equating mental health and the moral subject, psychology erases the social nature of morality. Arguably, morality itself cannot be studied psychologically because it is always a relational state and never an individual phenomenon. The psychological paradigm will always mistake morality's effects as causes because its unit of analysis is the (ir)rational individual subject whose principle of (im)moral action is their own (ir)rational, (im)moral psyche. In practice, the psychologist cannot help but impose their own moral reality upon the subject.

### **Psychological Virtue**

Agassi distinguishes between individualism as an agential theory of power and psychologism, a theoretical assumption that all human activity is reducible in the final analysis to a purely psychological explanation. That is, if the free-willed individual is an ontological claim about the nature of the moral actor, psychologism serves as the epistemological foundation for its recognition. Agassi claims that psychologism has served as the foundational assumption in the development of social science, derived from belief in atomism among early-nineteenth-century physicists: if the physical world could be reduced to fundamental units of distinct elements, human existence must be ultimately reducible to the individual psyche. From this, it follows that individuals are morally autonomous and that social conditions are the product of individual conscience.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Agassi, "Institutional Individualism." Agassi's argument parallels the work of poststructuralists to reconcile agency and structure. He calls for an approach to social

While early atomic theories were disproven by physicists in the 1890s, psychologism has continued to hold a much firmer influence on social science, despite the efforts of sociologists since Emile Durkheim to show that social existence precedes the individual. The liberal ethic of individualism finds its justification in the paradigms of psychology. Durkheim railed against the failed psychological assumptions of early sociologists like Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer, whose work has since been critiqued as a ‘biological apology for laissez-faire’ capitalism.<sup>55</sup> However, psychologism may have its most important ideological effect in the analyzed patient of the clinical practitioner under the deep influence of Freudian psychoanalysis.

Wendy Brown’s account of neoliberal governmentality, *Regulating Aversion* (2008), demonstrates how critical Sigmund Freud’s influence on the popular understanding of human nature has been to the capitalist project. In Brown’s reading of Freud’s late-career work, particularly *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921) and *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), we see in the liberal subject the “individual as a primordial unit of analysis and action and thereby pathologize the group as a dangerous condition of de-individuation and psychological regression.”<sup>56</sup> Freud’s theory of society goes beyond those who argued for a distinction between individual and group psychology, the idea that the ‘herd instinct’ is an inherent but

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science that maintains individual agency while rejecting psychologism in favor of an institutional epistemology to explain social phenomena.

<sup>55</sup> Weinstein, “Herbert Spencer.” Quoting Richard Hofstadter’s *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 41 & 46.

<sup>56</sup> Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 157.

primitive element of the individual psyche. Instead, Freud suggests a unified psychological theory to explain individual behavior and the construction of society in the ordinary psychological state of its individual members. That is, the ‘drives’ of human nature operate in the same way between individuals as between the individual and society, and, thus, in Freud’s theory “the individual is both the ontological a priori and the telos of civilization; groups are not primary or natural, nor are they stable.”<sup>57</sup> Man’s psychologized natural form resembles the Hobbesian state of nature, in which fulfillment of our individual passions is driven by our inherent, animalistic aggression which Freud would come to understand as the ‘death drive’.<sup>58</sup> Love, in both its libidinal forms and ‘aim inhibited’ platonic forms, is a natural human instinct that draws us together despite the death drive; a primitive social order develops to mediate these oppositional impulses, establishing “a mean distance at which they could most tolerably exist.”<sup>59</sup> To achieve ‘civilization’, on the other hand, requires transferring our aim-inhibited love to an object, rather than particular individuals,

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Freud, Sigmund, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 70–72. Freud anticipates the retort of his critics, writing: “‘For the little children do not like it’ when there is talk of man’s inborn tendency to ‘wickedness’, to aggression and destruction, and therefore to cruelty. For God created them in his own perfect image; one does not wish to be reminded of how hard it is to reconcile the existence of evil, which cannot be denied—despite the protestations of Christian Science—with His infinite power and goodness. [...] In view of these difficulties, it is advisable for each of us, at an appropriate point, to make a profound obeisance to man’s deeply moral nature; this will help to make us generally popular and much will be forgiven us.”

<sup>59</sup> Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, 118. Here, Freud quotes Arthur Schopenhauer’s parable of freezing porcupines who desire the warmth of their fellows but find it difficult to get too close, in *Parerga and Paralipomena*, “Gleichnisse und Parabeln,” 1851.



representing society; to minimize the influence of the death drive within any significant population, the idealization of the communal object provides “a way of satisfying one’s own need to be loved by projecting one’s ideals of goodness onto another.”

Fear of man in the state of nature seems to be a critical belief for liberalism. Where Hobbes sees the formation of society as a rational decision by all to escape the state of nature, Freud’s theory requires the pre-existence of some object (whether a person or totem) worthy of the love of the many, a relationship in which the individual “becomes more and more unassuming and modest, and the object more and more sublime and precious”; turning the death drive outward to another civilization in an act of sacrifice for the love of the objectified society “follows as a natural consequence.” While this could be understood to imply an imbalance of power between the lover and the loved object, Freud insists it is only the product of the libido, “whose purpose is to gather together individuals, then families and finally tribes, peoples and nations in one great unit—humanity.”<sup>60</sup> This unity of libidinal instinct allows civilization to function, like the disciplining superego of the individual psyche, as an inhibition to the destructive impulses of so many collected aggressive psyches. We can see that in psychological logic atrocity is a regression to man’s natural state. To be in a broken group is to be returned to a state of nature where rivalry and self-preservation are the only relevant values; all group norms, at least those norms that overtly govern group conduct, are rejected or allowed to be rejected.

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<sup>60</sup> Freud, Sigmund, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 75.

## Reading Moral Injury from the Psychological Paradigm

Moral philosopher Nancy Sherman's book *Afterwar* (2015) illustrates this problem of trauma and psychologized morality. The book represents, both clinically and philosophically, perhaps the best example of the currently dominant understanding of moral injury. It follows the definition from Litz, et al. of moral injury as transgression, but does not present it as necessarily distinguishable from PTSD.<sup>61</sup> Sherman's psychoanalysis of one US Marine's feelings of guilt over the death of a friend represents an ideal case of moral injury as it is currently understood and also the limits of psychological logic:

In his psychic reality, he sees only his missing causal agency—what he *let* happen on his watch. He doesn't see the inflated sense of control he *inserts* in constructing this picture of volitional and morally responsible agency. He doesn't see that he is making the blame fit by turning an omission, for which he isn't at all culpable, into a transgression that will hold him blameworthy...

[H]is aspirations to protect and be in charge are rooted in desires and fantasies of childhood about how "super parents" can rescue and save, and in his real childhood world about how *machismo* men *do* really protect and how gang leaders really are all powerful. Marine ideals reinforce that familial and childhood world: *semper fidelis*—never leave a comrade behind, protect your own, be in charge, bring your troops home...

Or that's how the superego takes up the ego ideal and punishes the self who is just a "good enough" commander who did his best with what he had. "His best was not enough," is the superego's devastating critique...

The failure of pretense to satisfy the fantasy of how it is all supposed to work out leaves a hole for crippling disappointment and despair to fill.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> In a slightly confusing footnote on page 174, Sherman acknowledges Shay's influence on her project, but appears to have discarded his formulation after learning of the work done by Litz, et al.

<sup>62</sup> Sherman, *Afterwar*, 63. Emphasis in original.

Sherman's psychoanalytic assessment is problematic on at least two counts. First, it dismisses the Marine's genuine moral belief: the need to protect, which serves as the source of his moral goodness. Second, its moral assumptions may not reflect moral practices inside the military institution. Certainly, one's familial and cultural influences do instill certain moral practices and expectations, and military ideals reinforce some of these, though in other ways they are probably diminished by military experience. But by placing the injury in the Freudian ego-superego conflict, in order for the Marine to imagine a guiltless omission as a blameworthy transgression then Sherman's assessment must ultimately depend on either, a) this Marine's posttraumatic inability to recognize legitimate moral reality, and/or, b) the analyst's rejection of both his pre-existing and posttraumatic moral beliefs as morally illegitimate.

That is, the Marine must either have been traumatically blinded to moral truth by his friend's death, or he is simply not, in the analyst's judgment, a moral person. If he has been blinded, then he can be healed through the analyst's guidance and allowed to see moral reality for what it is. That is, the rational ego's understanding of reality being false, the moralizing superego's rightful judgment of guilt will be overturned once the ego achieves a proper understanding of reality.

But if this Marine has not been blinded to moral reality by his friend's death, then he must not be a moral person. He either misunderstands moral truth or is governed by immoral belief. In the act of his self-judgment, his pre- and/or posttraumatic beliefs in the wrongness of his actions might simply be falsely held—

what is amoral is mistaken for moral—and therefore correctable through moral education. If not, his beliefs are immoral and must be rejected before he can be healed. In either case, the moral injury is the wrongful judgment of an immoral superego of the innocent ego.

However, in imposing the author's own moral reality upon that of the Marine, Sherman's account insists on a sort of 'noble lie' to cleanse the Marine's personal story of the immorality of his self-judgment.<sup>63</sup> As a moral philosopher focused on 'what ought to be', Sherman fails to recognize 'what is'.<sup>64</sup> Consider instead the possibility that this Marine's various beliefs are all legitimately held, in which case he is faced with a dilemma in his attachments to legitimate but conflicting moral authorities. On the one hand, his culturally established belief in his masculine obligation to protect is the source of the moral value of friendship, and so cannot be rejected. On the other hand, rejecting his military indoctrination requires also rejecting the military institution and the moral authority of its mission, thus making his friend's death meaningless. But because the stakes are so high and belief and experience have become mutually contradictory, the Marine is crippled by the moral dissonance of his friend's death. To overcome this, there is a real cognitive demand

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<sup>63</sup> I borrow the term 'noble lie' from Shay (2003, 191), but the concept comes from Plato's assertion of the utility of falsehood in maintaining power relations, including those lies that come to be accepted as truth even by the powerful (*Republic*, III, 414b-417b).

<sup>64</sup> And the dominance of psychology in western thought makes much of modern moral philosophy equally psychologizing. An exception is Robert Meagher's *Killing from the Inside Out* which generally follows Shay's model of moral injury in an indictment of the role of prescriptive philosophies, such as just war theory, in undermining the moral character of war veterans.

for the rejection of some old belief, and in this case it seems to have been the belief in himself as a good Marine, a good friend, a good person. The hole of ‘crippling disappointment and despair’ that Sherman perceives as his false sense of guilt is not a self-imposed prison for his failure to ‘satisfy the fantasy’—it is a grave into which he is cast by cultural and institutional judgment of his moral failure.

### **An Institutional Theory of Traumatic Experience**

While Shay’s work largely escapes the psychological paradigm, the theoretical limitation in the work of Litz, et al. and Sherman lies in the psychological paradigm’s moral realism. Psychology cannot adequately explain social phenomena like morality because it assumes that society is the mere sum of individual human experiences, and tends, ultimately, to reduce all human behavior, including morality, to the individual psyche, a point long criticized by sociologists. It is Emile Durkheim’s charge that psychological logic necessarily confuses cause and effect (though he also recognizes a third variable, the ‘constraints’ of the physical environment, to which individuals and society are both subject).<sup>65</sup> Talcott Parsons critiques psychology for granting ‘ontological priority’ to the individual (and urges sociology to avoid doing the same to ‘society’ by recognizing the ‘relativity of perspective’).<sup>66</sup> Mark Granovetter points to the ‘naivety’ of psychology (and the economic theories it has influenced) for an ‘under-socialized’ understanding of human action.<sup>67</sup> And, in a recent overview of the

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<sup>65</sup> Durkheim, *Rules of Sociological Method*.

<sup>66</sup> Parsons, “Psychology and Sociology.”

<sup>67</sup> Granovetter, “Economic Action and Social Structure.”

sociological study of morality, Steven Hitlin and Stephen Vaisey insist that psychology's current emphasis on locating morality in biology and neuroscience continues to reproduce the same methodological errors noted by Durkheim.<sup>68</sup> Taken together, the psychological paradigm faces a methodological barrier: if, as sociology generally holds, social phenomena are always external to the individual, then psychology's generalization from the individual to the collective can only point to social effects, not causes.

Fortunately, the sociological study of morality is not so limited, as it works from an institutional paradigm that rejects the methodological barriers of psychologism, understanding human behavior as always mediated by social institutions. The advantage of sociology's institutionalist perspective on morality comes from its unit of analysis—not the mind or an imagined moral reality, but the lived social context in which practices have moral effects. Unlike psychology's interest in “universal characteristics of moral judgment,” sociologists attempt to understand “the sources and consequences of variation in conceptions of morality.”<sup>69</sup> That is, as morality is empirically observed it is undeniably particular to social contexts. This is not to deny human agency, as individuals can certainly be a cause of social change, but it does point to the political nature of the relationship between the individual and social institutions. Society possesses a degree of power that individuals cannot, and its institutions are both the manifestation of those powers and agential in

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<sup>68</sup> Hitlin and Vaisey, “The New Sociology of Morality.”

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

their own right. Institutions possess moral beliefs and practice those beliefs; they self-organize and express an independent sentiment; and they possess legitimate authority to act upon their members and the external environment.<sup>70</sup> The legitimate authority of an institution over its members is morality; or rather, the exercise of this authority gives moral value to institutionalized beliefs and practices. From an institutional perspective, morality is the institution's capacity to both create the expectation of certain behaviors among its members and to judge its members' conformity or deviance; for the individual, it is 'embodied belief'<sup>71</sup> in the moral authority of an institution.

The differences between the logics of individualist-psychologism and institutionalism become evident by considering which element of the term 'moral injury' might be emphasized in its definition. From a psychological perspective 'moral *injury*' describes the damaged psyche, but institutionally '*moral injury*' describes the alienated relationship of the individual and the authority of social institutions that make belief morally valued. Institutionally, one is not simply morally injured—the damage is to one's embodied belief in the relationship, to morality itself. This points to an alternative definition of moral injury that begins with morality. Again, consider Litz et al.'s description of the psychological condition of moral injury as the result of the:

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<sup>70</sup> Durkheim, *Rules of Sociological Method*.

<sup>71</sup> Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*.

inability [of the morally injured person] to contextualize or justify personal actions or the actions of others and the unsuccessful accommodation of these potentially morally challenging experiences into pre-existing moral schemas.<sup>72</sup>

Here, the authors' adherence to a psychological paradigm insists on placing the cause of injury in the individual's already pathologized cognitive dysfunction—cause and effect never escape the bounds of the individual psyche.<sup>73</sup> An institutionalist perspective, on the other hand, would place the cause of moral injury in the:

inability of pre-existing *moral schemas* to provide for the contextualization or justification of personal actions or the actions of others, resulting in the unsuccessful accommodation of morally challenging experiences.

The difference is not merely semantic, but a wholly distinct causal logic. The cause of moral injury shifts from the flawed mind of the flawed individual (the only possible interpretation of trauma from a methodologically individualist standing; the flaw may be inherent or it may be inflicted as an injury, but in either case it is the individual's alone) to the flawed moral schemas—its ethos, ethic, beliefs, or values—of a flawed social institution. By understanding psychological trauma as moral injury, and by understanding moral injury as a problem of morality rather than of psyche, the condition can be seen as a fractured relationship between the individual and the moral authority of an institution. This then is the site of moral injury.

In sociological terms, this alienated existence in the absence of moral regulation, is the condition of *anomie*. Durkheim describes the anomic relationship of

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<sup>72</sup> Litz et al., "Moral Injury and Moral Repair in War Veterans," 705.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 700. Their 'causal framework' is, with the exception of 'forgiving supports' as a 'protective factor' after injury, an entirely internal process for the morally injured person.



an individual to society as mediated by a 'blocking environment', which limits interaction to 'only stimuli of a certain intensity', making meaningful social connection all but impossible.<sup>74</sup> For example, he suggests that anomie was at the root of high suicide rates in the harsh conditions of European industrialization: the constant crises of capitalism are equally crises of the collective order, and the individual, unable to find security even in times of economic stability, constantly faces "an impulse to voluntary death."<sup>75</sup> In the mid-twentieth century, sociologist Robert Merton turned to anomie to explain how social structures force individuals into nonconforming or deviant conduct. He argued against sociology's totalitarian current of biological determinism (a particular manifestation of individualist-psychologism), suggesting that certain deviant behaviors ought to be considered perfectly normal responses to anomic conditions. Merton categorized the range of individual behavioral adaptations to anomie, including conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion.<sup>76</sup> Durkheim and Merton have influenced a more recent line of social theory, that of 'collective' or 'cultural trauma'.<sup>77</sup> This scholarship suggests the social construction of significant cultural/political events as being traumatic through a discursive/political process that reinterprets collective identity. A group perceives an event as traumatic not for the direct harm done, but rather through the direct agency of political actors responding on behalf of the group. Thus,

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<sup>74</sup> Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*.

<sup>75</sup> Durkheim, *Suicide*, 246.

<sup>76</sup> Merton, "Social Structure and Anomie."

<sup>77</sup> Alexander, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*.

collective trauma occurs because there is a perception (shaped by the group itself) that established norms have been broken, leaving the group in an anomic relationship to the moral authority upon which those norms depended.

Understanding of collective trauma as political is a valid basis for examining the political process that plays out in the traumatic experience of the individual. Thinking about traumatic experience from an institutional perspective suggests the validity of Shay's model of PTSD as moral injury. As anomie, individual trauma results from a moral situation in which pre-existing moral beliefs are inappropriate to the situation's moral requirements. When the moral stakes of the situation are high enough, trust in moral authority collapses as circumstance reveals new moral realities and the false premises of old truths, leading the morally injured to interpret the experience of the situation as traumatic. As in Merton's model of anomie, adaptation to anomic conditions brought on by traumatic experience leads to a range of possible behavioral changes for the morally injured—including those which manifest as symptoms of PTSD. Crucially, this is not an instantaneous reaction, and though it does occur over time it is not exactly a sequential process. This temporality makes traumatic experience a process of interpretation, and its manifestation as moral injury exactly parallels this process. That is, traumatic experience does not cause moral injury, it is moral injury.

Moral injury, traumatic experience, and anomie are essentially three perspectives on the same thing. 'Moral injury' could refer to the effects, the body's real physiological response to experience, while 'traumatic experience' could refer

more to the particular situation(s), and ‘anomie’ to the relation of the injured to moral authorities; but ultimately this difference is semantic. The conditions we recognize as psychological trauma, PTSD, Litz or Shay’s moral injury, and a whole range of other more or less pathological behaviors are simply behavioral manifestations of moral injury, traumatic experience, anomie. But the cause of moral injury (the source of the damage done, the reason an experience is interpreted as traumatic, the moral fault line of anomic fracture) is the incompatibility of moral expectations—that is, trust in moral authority—and the conditions of a moral situation.

There is extensive research to support this link between individual traumatic experience and anomie. The study of ‘betrayal trauma’ suggests that the deeper and more traumatic effects of interpersonal violence, compared to violence inflicted by strangers, result from violated trust; and the persistence of abusive relationships depends on ‘adaptive blindness’ to these betrayals.<sup>78</sup> In such cases, memories of abuse perpetrated by care-givers are less persistent than that by strangers.<sup>79</sup> That is, violence in interpersonal relationships may create an anomic condition that victims trapped in those relationships make sense of by cognitive and moral erasure. This sort of trauma can also extend well beyond such close interpersonal experiences. For instance, the traumatic symptoms of sexual assault survivors are significantly more severe when a perceived ‘institutional betrayal’ is also experienced in the crime’s

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<sup>78</sup> Freyd, “Betrayal Trauma”; Freyd, “Violations of Power, Adaptive Blindness and Betrayal Trauma Theory.”

<sup>79</sup> Freyd, “Violations of Power, Adaptive Blindness and Betrayal Trauma Theory”; Freyd, DePrince, and Zurbriggen, “Self-Reported Memory for Abuse.”

aftermath.<sup>80</sup> As well, a number of studies link cultural ideology and political belief to individual traumatic effects. Researchers in South Africa find that traumatic symptoms of former members of anti-apartheid ‘self-defense units’ are caused by “the contradiction and ambiguity inherent in living up to hegemonic ideals of masculinity” instilled by the movement’s indoctrination process.<sup>81</sup> Research from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict shows a correlation between experienced violence, psychological trauma, and the moral coherence of political ideologies used to justify violence. For instance, one study links the trauma of experiencing terrorist violence to exclusionist political attitudes toward rival groups.<sup>82</sup> Such political hatred may serve as a psychological protection against trauma by reinforcing moral justifications for violence,<sup>83</sup> and particular traumatic symptoms (anxiety or depression) may vary with the degree to which one’s political beliefs provide a moral justification for violence.<sup>84</sup> These findings reinforce the assertion that the moral link between trauma and experience extends beyond the individual psyche; further, the link is not just social, but political.

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<sup>80</sup> Parnitzke Smith and Freyd, “Institutional Betrayal.”

<sup>81</sup> Langa and Eagle, “Intractability of Militarised Masculinity,” 172.

<sup>82</sup> Canetti-Nisim et al., “A New Stress-Based Model of Political Extremism.”

<sup>83</sup> Hobfoll, Canetti-Nisim, and Johnson, “Exposure to Terrorism, Stress-Related Mental Health Symptoms, and Defensive Coping among Jews and Arabs in Israel.”

<sup>84</sup> Lavi et al., “Protected by Ethos in a Protracted Conflict?”

## **Moral Injury and the Phenomenology of Trauma**

Like the case of Sherman's Marine, when an ethos that would normally be drawn upon is insufficient or fails to address specific moral circumstances then the resulting incoherence demands an interpretation of the situation as having been traumatic. The resulting damage is to one's trust in moral authority, leaving the injured in an anomic state of moral alienation. The anomic experience is a crisis of belief, and damage done to the individual in these conditions depends on the particular relationships in which those beliefs have value. Extreme conditions require adapting one's understanding and belief to the radically new perception of the world, and adopting a set of behaviors appropriate to the conditions, though most will recover from any damage done once conditions return to normal.

The difference between those who recover—reconcile might be a better word—and those who cannot illustrates Shay's distinction between a primary injury and the lasting, more dangerous, and difficult complications of moral injury. The former he describes as 'pure PTSD', which for veterans is the "persistence into life after mortal danger of the valid adaptations to the real situation of other people trying to kill you."<sup>85</sup> Moral injury, on the other hand, results in what we recognize as the disabling mental illness of complex-PTSD. It is characterized by the impairment after

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<sup>85</sup> Shay, "Moral Injury," 184. It is important to note that Shay disapproves of the PTSD label. He writes in an earlier essay ("Casualties") that 'disorder' implies illness, which for much of history was the leading cause of death for soldiers in war. Illness is the product of bad luck and stigmatized in military culture—the plague faced by the Greeks at the opening of the *Iliad* is brought on by Agamemnon's crime against the god Apollo. Injuries, however, are a universal expectation of soldiering and therefore not stigmatized.

moral betrayal of the capacity for social trust, which is then “replaced by the settled expectancy of harm, exploitation, and humiliation from others.”<sup>86</sup>

The distinction is important, but there is a flaw in Shay’s definition of primary injury, though not in the concept itself. Defining it as ‘persistence’ confuses the injury, its symptoms, and adaptive attempts to avoid future injuries. Just as a purely physical injury like a blunt force impact is characterized by a set of symptomatic physiological responses, exposure to circumstances that overwhelm the senses also produce a physiological response, which I believe is better described as ‘affective distress’ than either ‘pure PTSD’ or ‘primary injury’. Extreme experience of any sort is cognitively dissonant and mentally exhausting. To be shocked is to briefly see the world anew, and the physiological exertion of the mind is required to reconcile—or perhaps, repress—that new vision in relation to the old, whether that occurs in the moment or sometime afterward. To experience stress of any sort is physiologically demanding and may affect our cognitive ability and mood. But just as hitting your thumb with a hammer might invoke valid behavioral adaptations to relieve its symptoms and to prevent future injuries—visiting an emergency room and giving up carpentry—experiencing affective distress might also lead to changed behaviors. The persistence of such behaviors can only be thought of as pathological if those behaviors are themselves damaging. Affective distress is the psychological trauma, even if minor and fleeting, of extreme experience.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 186.

What distinguishes trauma from affective distress is the intrusion of emotion, which occurs when valued relationships intrude on experience, or more precisely, when the interpretation of the experience evokes or invokes (the difference being passive or active thought) those values. The value of the beliefs relevant to those relationships, that is, the stakes raised in the experience, is the deciding factor in the extent of trauma. This depends on a somewhat artificial distinction between affect and emotion. Affective distress implies feeling, the most obvious feelings that arises in discussion of trauma being fear or the sorts of feelings we generally think of as instinctual (even if the evocation of many of those feelings is culturally and situationally contingent). Psychiatric medicine, after all, limits its causes of trauma to experiences of “exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence.”<sup>87</sup> In contrast, emotion, as I will use it in what follows, is transactional, the feelings deriving from or applicable to social relationships. Fear of one’s own immediate death is an example of an affect; the interpretation of that fear as cowardice is an emotion rooted entirely in one’s sociality. This transactional nature of emotion will be further developed in the following chapter.

While Shay’s definition of ‘primary injury’ is problematic, the parallel he draws between physical and psychological injury is helpful. In a physiological sense, to put it crudely and comically, one feels the impact of hitting your thumb with a hammer in the same way one would feel the touch of a feather or the impact of a falling anvil—they are the same experience, yet to a different degree, both

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<sup>87</sup> American Psychiatric Association, “Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders.”

physiologically and normatively. Yet, the hammer impact could be equally as deadly as the anvil if the wound it causes becomes infected; for that matter, the impact of a feather could be deadly if it carries avian tuberculosis bacteria.<sup>88</sup> In each case, the ultimate cause of death is the experience of the impact of a foreign object on the human body, yet the degree to which each experience (either the impact itself or the resulting loss of life) is judged relative to ordinary human experience varies both physiologically and normatively. Obviously, being killed by a falling anvil might invoke an intense, if brief, affective response of shock in the victim, just as a hammer's impact on your thumb might briefly invoke intense feelings of anger; the touch of the feather might even produce feelings of pleasure and wistful happiness. In none of these cases would we expect the experience of the impact to result in psychological trauma, because for the individual the affective response is secondary to the physiological effect. On the other hand, trying to make sense of a less than lethal impact from the falling anvil could be psychologically devastating;<sup>89</sup> patients with chronic illnesses like tuberculosis suffer higher rates of anxiety and mood disorders;<sup>90</sup> and in the economic precarity of late-modernity, a hand injury severe

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<sup>88</sup> The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warn of just a few of the horrific ways birds can kill us: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/pets/birds.html>.

<sup>89</sup> The work of Chuck Jones suggests that such experiences can be linked to violently obsessive behaviors among coyotes.

<sup>90</sup> Orhan Aydin and Uluşahin, "Depression, Anxiety Comorbidity, and Disability in Tuberculosis and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease Patients"; Moussas et al., "Anxiety and Depression in Patients with Bronchial Asthma, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease and Tuberculosis."



enough to affect a person's employment could have devastating financial effects with just as devastating social and psychological implications.<sup>91</sup>

The point I hope to make is that a straight forward concept like 'injury' may be more complex than at first blush. The complexity of psychological injury is orders of magnitude greater than physical injury. The physiological responses of extreme experiences are the injury of affective distress. An intensely frightening experience, even a near death experience, may be as benign and fleeting as the pain of a hammer strike, or could produce lingering anxiety and changed behavior; affective distress may even be fatal: a nonviolent altercation, job stress, or just receiving bad news can lead to sudden cardiac death in people *without* heart disease.<sup>92</sup>

The fundamental injury of any psychological trauma, including affective distress, is the irreconcilability of new and old belief. The fear response of a sudden shock is a challenge to the embodied belief in our personal safety, no matter how fleeting or easily reconciled. The sort of persistent behaviors implied in Shay's 'primary injuries'—for example, hypervigilance at home as if in combat—are the result of less easily reconciled experiences, and so some adaptation of belief and/or behavior is required to make sense, consciously or unconsciously, of it. Behavioral adaptations that make sense in combat, may not be appropriate in civilian life but may still persist long after the soldier returns home. If, for example, aggressive driving tactics became habitual during deployment for fear of attack, it is not unreasonable to

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<sup>91</sup> Keogh et al., "The Impact of Occupational Injury on Injured Worker and Family."

<sup>92</sup> Krenzi et al., "Sudden Cardiac Death with Stress and Restraint."

expect the returning soldier to persist in those habits on civilian roads.<sup>93</sup> The injury, then, might manifest in the persistence of those habits, but the injury itself—the psychological parallel of blunt force impact—is the affectively distressing experience of fear. Still, we can look at the behavior and point to a case of psychological trauma.

This disabling condition is what we generally think of as psychological trauma, and what I will refer to as trauma. The primary definition of ‘trauma’ is, it must be remembered, simply another word for injury or wound. Its use in psychiatric medicine only originated in the late-nineteenth century.<sup>94</sup> Of course, in common use we would not call a sore thumb a trauma, though technically it is. My use of ‘affective distress’ is an attempt to differentiate the severity of psychological injuries and suggest that thinking of these injuries as occurring on a continuum is necessary to defining what psychological trauma is phenomenologically. As the limited research on traumatic brain injury that I pointed to at the beginning of this chapter suggests, it is a dangerously under-theorized concept. While the behavioral manifestation of blast-associated brain injury may look a lot like the behaviors diagnosed in posttraumatic stress disorder caused by terrifying experience, the two injuries are obviously different phenomena. Contemporary conceptions of injury can effectively categorize different types of physical injuries in ways that account for severity: blunt

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<sup>93</sup> On the other hand, aggressive driving is a tactic that soldiers are trained to perform, and while not a product of fear, it is equally reasonable to expect the returning soldier to persist in those habits on civilian roads. To the inexperienced observer conditioned to believe returning veterans are psychologically damaged, both cases of aggressive driving may look like trauma because both are displaying behaviors considered deviant in civilian life.

<sup>94</sup> "trauma, n.". OED Online. June 2017. Oxford University Press.

force injury is a particularly apt comparison for understanding psychological injury because it is easy to conceptualize severity of blunt force, but also because we are in constant physical contact with our environment in ways that do not cause injury. We are constantly impacted by external objects—the clothes we wear, the tools we use, the air we breathe, the people in our lives—to the extent that we lose our conscious awareness of them. At the same time, being touched can be both pleasurable and even necessary for human existence. Just as we constantly *feel* the incessant impacts of the physical world, we are also constantly impacted psychologically in the ways we *know* the world around us—sometimes in ways that are harmful, more often in ways that are positive, but mostly in ways that are too commonplace to notice. A psychological injury, then, is the harm that comes from knowing.

Whether we call it ‘affective distress’, ‘primary psychological injury’, or ‘pure PTSD’, what is important is that, as Shay notes, this condition “is rarely what wrecks veterans’ lives, crushes them to suicide, or promotes domestic and/or criminal violence.”<sup>95</sup> Obviously, physical trauma and physical disability are distinct conditions, and psychological trauma and disability are no different. If our embodied reaction to an affective condition can produce persistent behavioral changes, the impact of a morally extreme experience may be orders of magnitude greater. Yet,

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<sup>95</sup> Shay, “Moral Injury,” 184. He notes elsewhere, “The most common and disastrous complications of primary psychological injury from war flow directly from persistence of combat sleep patterns.” The two complications that commonly “supervene” given the persistence of disrupted sleep are first, “abuse of alcohol to promote sleep,” and second, the resulting “loss of emotional and ethical self-restraint and of social judgment” that comes with constant exhaustion and substance abuse (see “Casualties,” 182).

because trauma is a process of interpretation of pre-existing beliefs in relation to both the event and social contexts, the extent to which moral injuries are disabling is determined by that process rather than the event itself. No matter the severity of the traumatic event, in the degree to which it falls within ordinary human experience, if social norms are maintained by the relevant groups then individuals who conform to those norms ought not be traumatized (or, at least, not pathologically disabled). If norms are weak prior to the traumatic event, then individuals are more likely to be morally injured.

In order to be interpreted as traumatic, the event must first, and this is common to all traumas, be interpreted as a betrayal of moral principle. Betrayal cannot exist without a pre-existing social and moral context, and is a social act (even when wholly in the mind of the betrayed) inseparable from the power relations of the betrayed and the betrayer. Morality is the set of terms upon which this relationship was previously understood. In practice most of these terms go unsaid and may not be recognized until they have been broken, though formal terms composed of laws, regulations, traditions, and other institutional norms can, of course, be betrayed. Betrayal reveals the failure of moral authority and the source from which it originates. Because each instance of moral injury will be unique to the individual, the content of a moral ethos is less important (for purposes of this theory; specific moral content is central to the individual trauma case) than a simple assertion that each moral injury requires the perception that moral belief has been betrayed or violated. It is in the

comparison of these acts where commonalities of experience and institutional influence may be identified.

In other words, the site of moral injury is the social conditions that require adaptation. If the injury persists outside of that site then it simply has not yet healed. It might heal before the veteran returns home or it might take longer. What needs to be stressed is the sort of causes—the overwhelming of the senses—that bring on an adaptation of belief and related behaviors. What is concerning from a public health perspective is the effect of those adaptations on the injured. Really, the problem of psychological trauma is its effect on the capacity to function in ordinary life. To be physically injured—to lose a limb, for example—is not in itself, given our medical capabilities, a destruction of functional capacity. And neither is a neurological adaptation to stress that never goes away, being ‘triggered’ by loud noises, for example. In fact, as Shay notes, we can understand behavioral adaptation as a ‘work around’, essentially a psychological prosthesis.<sup>96</sup> But it can be a destruction of functional capacity if the adaptation is not socially acceptable. We could not reasonably expect an amputee to get back to normal life without equipping them with the tools to successfully function—prosthetic limbs, wheelchairs, continuing access to physical and occupational therapy, etc. It might also be expected that society offers reasonable accommodations in the home, workplace, or community that allow the injured person to function successfully. For the psychologically injured, we have no good prostheses and our therapies are limited (though perhaps improving). However,

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<sup>96</sup> Shay, “Casualties.”

we cannot expect to accommodate psychological disability if we do not understand what it really is, or worse, if society is itself the cause of it.

In some ways, clinical conceptions of trauma do account for this range of severity and permanence. However, such attempts point to the field's failure to adequately define what trauma is phenomenologically. The most recent clinical manual includes PTSD as a 'trauma stressor-related disorder', a category that also includes the more mild 'adjustment disorders' and the potentially severe but temporary 'acute stress disorder'. In PTSD, exposure to a traumatic event produces a set of identifiable symptoms, including: the persistent re-experiencing of the event, such as nightmares or reactivity to external stimuli; avoidance of trauma-related reminders; negative thoughts or feelings worsening after the event, for instance, feelings of guilt or blame or the sense of isolation; and trauma related arousal or reactivity, such as hypervigilance, irritability, or insomnia. These symptoms must persist for more than one month, must not be due to other causes such as substance abuse, and most importantly, must create observable 'distress or functional impairment'—that is, the symptoms of PTSD are an observable psychological 'disorder'.<sup>97</sup> The DSM model of PTSD is basically linear: an event is experienced and symptoms can be observed more than one month after the event—the collection of those symptoms are an indication of the psychological injury; some 'predisposing factors' in either the environment or the individual were assumed to affect both the experience of the event and manifestation of symptoms. Neuro-biological studies of

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<sup>97</sup> American Psychiatric Association, "Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders."

PTSD reflect this linearity, for instance, in findings that traumatic events produce lasting changes in the brain's amygdala, hippocampus, and prefrontal cortex, and subsequent stressors produce higher than normal cortisol and norepinephrine responses.<sup>98</sup> A mnemonic model has been proposed in which an event is experienced which leads to the construction of memories of the event, and it is the memory of the event that produces the observable set of symptoms, which in turn affect the way the event is remembered; a number of factors influence both the event and memories of it, including “gender, personality, education, intelligence, social economic status, social support, family and individual history of psychiatric disorders.”<sup>99</sup> Psychopathology is arguably dominated by a ‘latent variable’ paradigm—the assumption that an identifiable mental illness is a collection of symptoms arising from a common cause; in PTSD, this is the linear relationship of event to psychological injury to symptoms. By this logic, the stressor and the symptoms are independent of each other: the stressor causes PTSD and PTSD causes its symptoms.<sup>100</sup> But this could still describe more than one disorder: the stressor may directly damage the brain or may merely activate an already existing disorder.

The complexity of psychological trauma is revealed in what has been medically validated. A fully validated medical diagnosis will be based on five conditions: empirically supported clinical description; clear biological markers; a

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<sup>98</sup> Bremner, “Bremner.”

<sup>99</sup> Rubin, Berntsen, and Bohni, “A Memory-Based Model of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.”

<sup>100</sup> McNally et al., “Mental Disorders as Causal Systems.”

clear delineation from other conditions; and follow-up and family studies of long-term effects. While research can certainly support and describe the existence of psychological trauma, studies into the four other measures of validity offer mixed results at best. Part of the conceptual problem arises from the way in which PTSD entered clinical practice. Where, historically, most psychological disorders have been identified through manifestations of symptoms before discovery of their cause (though in practice this has been far from straightforward), PTSD came into existence simultaneously positing cause, condition, and symptoms.<sup>101</sup>

The whole process is also reinforced by the common societal reaction to traumatic experience. Feminist philosopher Karyn L. Freedman argues that we tend to deny the ‘epistemic legitimacy’ of emotional responses to traumatic experience. For instance, if one’s response to trauma is the belief that similar circumstances should be feared, to be then told that there is nothing to fear, particularly by those with no way of understanding the traumatic experience or the new moral reality revealed by it, only undermines the justification for the injured’s cognitive response to the traumatic experience. It devalues the fear response as nothing more than an irrational expression of emotion, which, of course, feminizes the injured as morally weak.<sup>102</sup> But this requires understanding emotion as belief in the moral value of an experience, rather than mere psychopathological irrationality or inherent biological response. But society has only to point to a causal event in order to justify programs to support

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<sup>101</sup> North et al., “Toward Validation of the Diagnosis of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.”

<sup>102</sup> Freedman, “The Epistemological Significance of Psychic Trauma.”



survivors of trauma. So in a sense, the neurological condition is secondary to the effects. PTSD is fundamentally about blame. The problem is, by stopping at the event, psychology misplaces blame. I argue that asking why an experience is traumatizing will change our conception of trauma regardless of the underlying neuro-biological phenomena we are describing.

### **Conclusions**

Psychology fails to explain the institutional sources of trauma because it confuses effects for causes by assuming the individual precedes society. Psychology fails to ask the origin of an individual's moral principles, and so merely dismisses those principles as inherently pathological when they deviate from the norm. It can only show the damage done by moral misjudgment, and cannot comprehend that damage as the logical outcome of institutionally sanctioned belief.

Moral philosophy fails because it deems the empirical to be unworthy of consideration, that morality only exists in metaphysical perfection, that human action is merely nearer or further to an ideal. Similarly, military scholars fundamentally misunderstand the reality of the ordinary soldier's experience, and by extension, cannot comprehend the practice of morality inside the military institution. Perhaps they choose not to see it. Perhaps they deem it an unworthy topic.

And military leadership fails because the influence of psychology, moral philosophy, and its institutional prerogative makes it blind to the institutional functions of morality. Finally, those who argue for a distinction between PTSD and moral injury fail to see the equivalence of traumatic experience that underlies both conditions.

They recognize only symptoms, calling anxious responses PTSD and depressive symptoms moral injury. If sociology's perspective has not overtaken the psychological despite a centuries-long effort, it is because an understanding of morality that does not originate in metaphysics or the individual's free will is wholly at odds with the dominant (and wholly intertwined) individualist logics of liberalism, Protestantism, Kantian moral philosophy, and psychologism. What research has shown, however, is that these responses depend on the nature of the traumatic experience and the ideology of the individual. One's political beliefs in relationship to violent conflict make all the difference. In its relation to war, trauma as a social phenomenon cannot be separated from the institutionalized power of the military, the government's decision to go to war, or the role of the soldier as it is defined by society.

The truly significant contribution of moral injury theory, though not yet fully realized, is its connection of traumatic experience to the institutions in which we live every day. Those who see it only as a diagnosis or a therapeutic model are expunging any value from the meaning of morality and offer no better insight to traumatic experience than discredited labels like hysteria or neurosis; they simply expand what counts as trauma. However, if this institutional model of moral injury trauma is valid, then identifying instances of failed belief allows us to point to specific institutional failures and demand accountability for the damage they cause. Admittedly, this approach requires a certain perspective on the nature of morality, one that makes no necessary distinction between morality, ethics, custom, or any other rules of social

interaction, no matter how mundane. When the stakes are high enough, ordinary expectations become life or death value judgments. In the same way that just war theorists legitimize killing under certain circumstances,<sup>103</sup> those very circumstances may transform the ordinary into the sublime, allowing, for instance, an ordinary act of omission to become a real moral transgression. For the soldier at war, burdened with the responsibility of life and death, an administrative oversight, a skipped item on a checklist, a missed training opportunity months before deployment (never mind an error in actual combat), may become a moral failing as blameworthy as cold-blooded murder—not in the soldier’s fantasy, but in the reality of an institutionally mediated moral situation. That there is no formal accountability for some failures does not lessen their moral impact. Yet, circumstances need not be quite so extreme as combat to have observable moral effects. Institutional values having no claim to universal truth may still equate a member’s institutional value to that person’s human value. A lousy soldier, in garrison or at war, has likely also been judged by peers and institution, and ultimately the self, as a person unworthy of moral value. Even physical injuries honorably earned in combat can reduce a soldier’s human value. In an ethos that demands that its members “always place the mission first,”<sup>104</sup> soldiers who are no longer physically able to do the job they signed up for may find themselves in an institutional quagmire that turns “injured soldiers into bad soldiers,

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<sup>103</sup> Robert Meagher traces the genealogy of the just war tradition of western philosophy, showing it as the construction of the sort of noble lie Shay warns is at the heart of military authority (see *Killing from the Inside Out*).

<sup>104</sup> One of four principles of the Army’s ‘Warrior Ethos’.

and bad soldiers into injured ones.” Such soldiers may ultimately come to see themselves as ‘broke dicks’ and ‘shitbags’<sup>105</sup>—labels carrying the same, or more, institutional weight as ‘warrior’ or ‘professional’.

Recognizing the true moral weight of such circumstances requires observing morality as it is actually practiced, not as it is idealized. An institutional analysis of traumatic experience must be as inclusive as possible of what might count as moral by accepting the truth of an individual’s moral belief while rejecting the possibility of any moral truth (or falsehood) that might limit the validity of the injured’s claim. Whether morality is real or relative is, frankly, irrelevant to the study of moral practices and effects. It is sufficient to follow Shay’s definition of morality as ‘what’s right’ and his practice of placing moral authority in the hands of the morally injured. For Shay, morality need not be judged against any moral truth except that of the individual; he grants ‘ontological priority’<sup>106</sup> to the moral authority of his patients because he accepts that truth learned under extreme conditions may be more valid than the inexperienced could ever know, and because to do otherwise perpetuates trauma.<sup>107</sup> As well, Shay has a much more nuanced view of the soldier’s situation in combat than psychology (as well as most war scholarship) typically allows. By privileging his patients’ own moral judgment, Shay recognizes what others cannot see (or what they hope to hide): that language is robbed of its meaning by the noble lies

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<sup>105</sup> MacLeish, *Making War at Fort Hood*, 113.

<sup>106</sup> Shay, “Casualties,” 186. Shay uses the term ‘ontological priority’ to remind the reader that we are all “brain/body, mind, social actor, and culture inhabitant at every instant.”

<sup>107</sup> Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 187–93.

and euphemisms used by political and military leaders to justify war; that the political contest of war permeates down the hierarchy to the soldier and the squad; and that survival is threatened by one's own side as much as by the enemy.<sup>108</sup> This method—privileging morality as if it is the individual's alone—leads to the somewhat paradoxical conclusion that morality's effects can only be understood in their social contexts. This is certainly Shay's most significant contribution to trauma studies. The cooptation of moral injury by Litz, et al. points to the challenge Shay's theory raises against the dominant psychological paradigm, but also to the need to better theorize trauma as an institutional phenomenon.

This chapter offered an argument against the onto-methodological individualism that has dominated trauma studies, and provided a logic to reframe psychological trauma as an institutionally mediated crisis of belief, moral alienation, and behavioral adaptation: traumatic experience, anomie, moral injury. But shifting to an institutional paradigm raises a critical epistemological question. If traumatic experience is a crisis of belief, what is the relationship of an individual's embodied belief in the truth of moral knowledge and the authority of institutions that mediate that knowledge? The following chapter offers well-established sociological theories of moral practices in order to make the connection between institutional practices, moral beliefs, and traumatic experience.

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 32–37.

## Chapter Two

### Moral Authority, Embodied Belief, and the Interpretation of Traumatic Experience

In the previous chapter I defined psychological trauma as the behavioral adaptation, following the crisis of belief that characterizes traumatic experience, to life in anomic circumstances, which results from the inability of pre-existing moral schemas to provide for the contextualization or justification of personal actions or the actions of others, resulting in the unsuccessful accommodation of morally challenging experiences. As anomie, individual trauma results from a moral situation in which pre-existing moral beliefs are inappropriate to the situation's moral requirements. When the moral stakes of the situation are high enough, trust in moral authority collapses as circumstance reveals new moral realities and the false premises of old truths, leading the morally injured to interpret the experience of the situation as traumatic. Adaptation to anomic conditions brought on by traumatic experience leads to a range of possible behavioral changes for the morally injured—including those which manifest as symptoms of psychological trauma. Traumatic experience is a process of interpretation, and its manifestation as psychological injury exactly parallels this process.

Because this model describes a radically different phenomenon than our contemporary understanding of trauma, a few epistemological issues have to be resolved, particularly in the relationship between individual moral belief and the social relationships that give beliefs their moral value. To begin, we must

acknowledge that neither the ‘facts’ nor the ‘understanding’ of an experience are entirely black and white, and that we do in fact fabricate, individually and collectively, all these things we think we know. The ‘truthfulness’ of our knowledge varies in its interpretation by every individual to whom it matters. For a given event in a given society at a given time there may be a general commonality of interpretation of that event, but the most important differences, even among eyewitnesses, will be in the moral principles through which we individually and collectively judge the meaning and value of facts and experience.

Acknowledging this variety of meaning among all individuals, even of the seemingly mundane, forces us to acknowledge the possibility that what we take as ‘truth’ may be more ambiguous than we would like to believe. The underlying point is that trauma is as much a problem of social groups and institutions as of individuals, and, as such, requires an institutional analysis of some sort to effectively explain its occurrence. The problem arises, however, of accounting for unique individual experiences in a broad social context. Study of individual traumatic experience has been largely consumed within psychological and clinical research, but these methods cannot be simply aggregated to explain the institutional dynamics from which the condition proceeds, though some commonalities of experience may be identified. Similarly, a social or institutional analysis, though it might provide some generalities of context, cannot be disaggregated to sufficiently explain individual experiences. Beginning from individual psychology or from structural sociology, while accounting for the other at the same time, will not allow for any meaningful extrapolation

between disciplines, as this would require a unit of measurement common to the individual and all of the relevant social contexts of the traumatic event. The complexity of trauma requires a methodology capable of identifying specific instances of potentially traumatic events, as well as the specific social and political forces that are active in the life of the traumatized prior to, during, and after the event. That is, we must consider the history of the traumatic event within the broader history of the relevant social interactions that give the event meaning.

While the conditions of every individual traumatic experience are unique, there are several common elements implied by this framework in relation to the nature of morality and the process of traumatic interpretation. First, morality is inherently social and its assemblage as a collective ethos represents a relationship between the group that holds the ethos as valuable and the individual moral actor. However, individuals exist as members of multiple groups, each with its own conception of morality. Even in a highly homogenous society with widely shared ideas of right and wrong, each community within it will have particular rules defining membership, some of which may rise to the same level of authority as broadly held moral beliefs. However, the individual's moral beliefs are not the only relevant beliefs in a moral situation. The expectation to act morally assumes judgment by others: those directly involved in the situation; its witnesses; the actor's individual or group relations, even those known to hold contrary moral beliefs; and society more broadly. Further, judgment may be wholly imagined by the actor, but its effect is no less powerful than any real judgment. Thus, a narrow definition of morality—that is,



a definition that in itself delimits moral *content*—will not adequately explain traumatic experience. For analytical purposes, I propose that morality is, from an institutional perspective, an institution's legitimate authority to both create the expectation of certain behaviors among its members and to judge its members' conformity or deviance; for the individual, it is embodied belief in the moral authority of the institution.

Because trauma is a process and moral situations are only potentially traumatic, there may be a number of influences following the traumatic experience to mediate the injured's response. For example, the degree to which the newly revealed truth of the experience can be related to other beliefs or experiences will determine the depth of the anomic state: if understanding the experience is compartmentalized then anomie will be limited to the conditions of the situation; on the other hand, the injured may connect the trauma to new or old experiences, forcing a more totalizing reassessment of what had been previously taken for truth. Similarly, continued existence in similar conditions may both reinforce traumatic beliefs or create additional moral injuries. The ability to escape extreme circumstances and return to ordinary life could allow the safe compartmentalization of those traumatic beliefs, though an experience that undermines a totalized belief will be more damaging than loss of faith in a more compartmentalized belief. And, of course, the ability to find adequate treatment for trauma will impact the traumatic process. Finally, the response to traumatic experience should be understood as a sort of learned behavior. A new understanding of the world requires adaptation to that reality. This may be as simple

as recognizing that caution should be taken in similar circumstances in the future; it may demand a change in the injured's relationship with moral authorities; or the new reality may be so radically different that escape from its anomic conditions becomes the only rational option.

This chapter begins with the claim that morality is *always* mediated by institutions, and in explaining the point I offer an overview of sociology's common approaches to the study of morality. I note the problems that arise from sociology's contested onto-methodological assumptions of moral realism and relativism. In contrast, I follow an analytical framework of moral formalism. Because morality is intersubjective, it is only observable in its phenomenological form as the institutionally mediated practices of 'moral action'. The framework fits well within Pierre Bourdieu's theories of practice and suggests that, for the individual, morality is embodied belief in the moral authority of institutions. The relationship of individual and institution is characterized by what Bourdieu calls 'hysteresis', the lagged response to changing social conditions. The interpretation of an experience as traumatic is the hysteretic failure of the relationship and a shift into the condition of anomie. Finally, I consider the process of moral interpretation of experience by drawing a parallel between individual belief and collective memory. Just as society is constituted in its relation to the past—to its own history—the individual's understanding of self is a process of narration. Trauma is the attempt to make sense of sublime experience.

## **The Moral Authority of Institutions**

There are at least two ways to define an institution. The most common understanding is of “an establishment, organization, or association, instituted for the promotion of some object.”<sup>1</sup> The other definition refers not to the organization itself, but to what it is founded upon and sustained by—the ‘rules of the game’ that set the conditions for life inside the organization and define its disposition and relationship to the rest of the world.<sup>2</sup> Each definition can be applied at different scales: the United States as an institution could be the sum of its governmental structure, or simply its Constitution; its economic infrastructure, or the feelings invoked by a cold bottle of Coca-Cola; a state in an international system of states, or a combat outpost in Afghanistan. Each of these has its own unique effects and moral authority, yet is inseparable from the other examples and from any other number of institutions that might be understood by someone, somewhere, as the ‘United States’. Whether an institution is very narrowly defined as a particular organization or very broadly defined as a disposition or idea, institutional analysis assumes an inherent complexity, especially if our perspective is of an individual navigating the myriad institutions of modern society.

Durkheim offers a vivid illustration of this perspective, and its implications for theory. Note the exclamation marks:

What a gulf, for example, between the feelings that man experiences with forces superior to his own and the institution of religion with its beliefs and practices, so multifarious and complicated, and its material and moral organization! ...[E]ven when society is reduced to an unorganized crowd, the collective sentiments which arise within it can not only be totally unlike, but

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<sup>1</sup> "institution, n.". OED Online. June 2017. Oxford University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*.

even opposed to, the average sentiments of the individuals in it. How much greater still must be the gap when the pressure exerted upon the individual comes from a normal society, where to the influence exerted by his contemporaries, is added that of previous generations and of tradition! A purely psychological explanation of social facts cannot therefore fail to miss completely all that is specific, i.e., social, about them.<sup>3</sup>

Durkheimian sociology, which continues to be one of the major traditions in the sociological study of morality,<sup>4</sup> is founded on this inability of psychology to explain social phenomena because its paradigm assumes that society is the mere sum of individual human experiences. Durkheim saw, instead, that society always precedes the individual and sets the conditions of individual subjectivity.<sup>5</sup> Society possesses a degree of power that individuals cannot; institutions are the manifestation of those powers and are agential in their own right. As Durkheim shows here, institutions possess beliefs and practice those beliefs; they self-organize and express an independent sentiment; and they possess legitimate authority to act upon their members and the external environment. The legitimate authority of an institution over its members *is* morality. It is the capacity to create the expectation of certain behaviors among its member and the sanctions imposed for deviance—a form of embodied belief.<sup>6</sup> The degree to which sanctions produce an emotional response from

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<sup>3</sup> Durkheim, *Rules of Sociological Method*, Chapter V.

<sup>4</sup> Abend, “Two Main Problems in the Sociology of Morality.”

<sup>5</sup> Durkheim recognizes a third variable, the ‘constraints’ of the physical environment, to which individuals and society are both subject.

<sup>6</sup> Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*. Foucault’s conceptions of ‘bio-power’, and the ‘truth effects’ of ‘disciplinary power’ are also helpful explanations of the political nature of institutional mediation of individual morality (see *Society Must Be Defended*).

their members—either positive or negative—determines the moral value of expectations.

Of course, several millennia of philosophical debate have not been sufficient time to reach consensus on what morality *is*. Sociologically, the results are no better; even agnostic claims on the nature of morality seem to be inherently political and divisive. Durkheim suggested the problem was sociology's roots in moral philosophy—he cites the work of Herbert Spencer and Auguste Comte—which he found to be too focused in the philosopher's own mind, reaching metaphysically real conclusions only by “substituting themselves for things.”<sup>7</sup> Durkheim's life project, on the other hand, was the search for scientifically proven, ‘socially real’ tenets of how society ought to be, a position open to criticism both philosophically and scientifically.<sup>8</sup>

Nonetheless, analyzing morality requires a position sure to offend someone. The analyst of moral injury must be as inclusive as possible of what might be considered as moral, accepting the truth of the injured person's moral belief, rejecting the possibility of any real moral truth (or falsehood), and limited to the scope of the study. Within this institutional theory of traumatic experience, the ‘moral situation’ is the logical starting point. It is this social interaction, however distant, between an individual and a moral authority in which morality occurs as an observable (or, at least, describable) action involving judgment of moral value: that which is morally

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<sup>7</sup> Durkheim, *Rules of Sociological Method*, Chapter II.

<sup>8</sup> Lukes, “Introduction to This Edition.”

wrong is blameworthy; that which it is morally wrong *not to do* is morally obligatory; action beyond the call of duty is admirable if the reasons are moral; reasons are moral when “the absence [of moral reasoning] from a person’s mind beyond a certain point becomes blameworthy.”<sup>9</sup> Moral disapproval is a form of social discipline both in the case of blame as an action or as sentiment, which may be held broadly, or wholly imagined in the mind of the blameworthy. The resulting actions are equally powerful in either case.

Leaving aside traditional questions of metaphysics, two distinct approaches have developed for the study of morality in modern social science: realism and descriptive-relativism.<sup>10</sup> The realist position assumes that, regardless of the source, there are objectively moral facts; that is, a moral proposition can be proven true or false. The source of moral truth need not be religious or supernatural. For instance, Marxist theory of alienation depends upon realist assumptions of human nature and of capitalism—founded on the metaphysical truth of historical materialism—as a moral corruption of self-actualization.<sup>11</sup> Durkheim’s ‘social realism’ influenced an approach to the sociology of morality that accepts the possibility of objectively moral truth and rejects the notion that social theory can or ought to be value free.<sup>12</sup> Liberal

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<sup>9</sup> Skorupski, “Morality and Ethics,” 564.

<sup>10</sup> Tavory, “The Question of Moral Action”; Abend, “Two Main Problems in the Sociology of Morality.”

<sup>11</sup> Tavory, “The Question of Moral Action,” 274–75. Citing Karl Marx’s *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1959).

<sup>12</sup> Abend, “Two Main Problems in the Sociology of Morality.” Abend’s examples of ‘Durkheimians’ include Zygmunt Bauman, Amitai Etzioni, and Philip Selznick.

approaches like rational choice theory or utilitarianism may be morally realist in their deterministic understanding of human nature and use-value; theories of human behavior from evolutionary psychology and sociobiology follow this same logic.<sup>13</sup> And certainly the ‘New Atheism’ of public intellectuals like Richard Dawkins or Sam Harris is just as committed to the moral truths of secular reason as the religious zealots it condemns for their irrational faith.

In contrast, descriptive-relativism rejects the idea that moral propositions can be proven true or false, claiming instead that moral authority is relative in time and place, and that when viewed externally morals can be seen to form systems of social guidance over individual behavior.<sup>14</sup> Here, any *a priori* assumptions about the nature of morality are problematic at best because of the varying local conditions of moral authority. The fact of moral diversity is sufficient to disprove moral realism; even if a principle could be proven as universally held, universal acceptance does not imply universal applicability.<sup>15</sup> Max Weber and Friedrich Nietzsche are the two primary influences on descriptive-relativist social theory. There is a distinction for Weber between knowledge and belief, in that belief is related to metaphysical presuppositions that create a sense of value and become a ‘possession’ of those who hold them;<sup>16</sup> social phenomena predicated on belief are by nature “entirely matters of

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<sup>13</sup> Tavory, “The Question of Moral Action.”

<sup>14</sup> Abend, “Two Main Problems in the Sociology of Morality”; Lukes, *Moral Relativism*.

<sup>15</sup> Lukes, *Moral Relativism*, 27–28.

<sup>16</sup> Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” 133.

choice and compromise,” and beyond the capacity of science.<sup>17</sup> Like Durkheim, Weber argues against the ‘romantic irrationalism’ and ‘naïve optimism’ of sociologists following the lead of Comte or Spencer.<sup>18</sup> He does not, however, embrace Durkheim’s social realism, citing the influence of Nietzsche.<sup>19</sup> In *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) and *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887), Nietzsche critiques the entire western tradition of moral philosophy for its dogmatic pursuit of the ‘Good in Itself’ as “the worst, the most tiresome, the most dangerous of errors.” To accept the existence of an ideal ‘Good’, and by extension an ideal ‘Evil’, is for Nietzsche “the very inversion of truth, and the denial of the PERSPECTIVE—the fundamental condition—of life.”<sup>20</sup> Questioning the perspective of the philosopher leads to the conclusion that moral philosophy is more accurately a moral politics of weak and strong. Nietzsche suggests a historical origin of morality in the nonmoral, merely descriptive distinction between the noble ‘good’ of ancient warrior classes and the slaves over whom they ruled as, linguistically, the ‘bad’;<sup>21</sup> from the perspective of the

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<sup>17</sup> Weber, “The Meaning of ‘Ethical Neutrality’ in Sociology and Economics,” 18.

<sup>18</sup> Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” 121.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. Weber writes that it is possible, after Nietzsche’s critique in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* of those ‘last men’ who ‘invented happiness’, to “leave aside altogether the naive optimism in which science—that is, the technique of mastering life which rests upon science—has been celebrated as the way to happiness. Who believes in this?—aside from a few big children in university chairs or editorial offices.” Weber also cites Tolstoy as useful critic of this sort of sociology. See Leo Tolstoy. *What Then Must We Do?*, trans. Aylmer Maude (London: Oxford University Press, 1960 [1886]).

<sup>20</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 1–2. Emphasis in original.

<sup>21</sup> Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, 12. Nietzsche is relying on the distinction of the German words *gut* (good) and *schlecht* (bad), where the origin of *schlecht*, in its



slave, however, goodness is the moral virtue of suffering in opposition to the oppressive ‘evil’ of the master, a dynamic that would be inscribed in western culture with the political ascendancy of the (Christian) slave classes. Whether or not the argument is historically accurate, Nietzsche’s insistence on moral perspective has been widely influential. In sociology’s Weberian tradition—the field’s historically dominant paradigm—recognizing the political nature of morality requires that its study ought to ensure that the sociologist’s own truth claims be value free.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, scholars of radical politics have relied on descriptive-relativism “to affirm and celebrate otherness” while mobilizing against the “logocentric bias of western thought.”<sup>23</sup> And it could be easily argued that the entire ‘interpretivist turn’ in the social sciences depends on morally-relativist assumptions about the nature of political power and subjectivity originating with Nietzsche’s influence on the poststructuralist theories of Roland Barthes, Pierre Bourdieu, Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, Jean-Francois Lyotard, and Gilles Deleuze.

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similarity to *schlicht* (humble, simple), is ‘plebeian’ or ‘vulgar’. He also finds similar patterns in Greek and Latin.

<sup>22</sup> Abend, “Two Main Problems in the Sociology of Morality.” Abend’s examples of ‘Weberian’ sociology include Kristin Luker’s *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) and Michèle Lamont’s *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class, and Immigration* (New York: Russell Sage, 2000).

<sup>23</sup> Ansell-Pearson, “Nietzsche, Woman, and Political Theory,” 29. Examples of the appropriation of Nietzsche’s moral relativism by scholars of emancipatory politics, despite earlier readings of his work as sexist, racist, and totalitarian, include Judith Butler, Frantz Fanon, Robert Gooding-Williams, Bonnie Honig, Luce Irigaray, and Chela Sandoval.

But moral relativism is not a product of postmodern, politically correct scholarship. Shakespeare announced it to his audiences in *Hamlet*: “for there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.”<sup>24</sup> In Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan* (1651) the religious seeds of human nature are derided as merely “opinion of ghosts, ignorance of second causes, devotion towards what men fear, and taking of things causal for prognostics”<sup>25</sup> Yet Hobbes’ project is the description of a ‘Christian commonwealth’ derived from scripture. Hobbes is only able to reconcile the two by acknowledging that variation of Christian religious practice is the product of “institution, or custom of men”<sup>26</sup>; that error and contradiction exists in scripture, as “none can know they are God’s word... but those to whom God himself hath revealed”<sup>27</sup>; and that interpretation of Christian belief ultimately can only rely on judgments, ideally of Reason but often arbitrary, “established for such by the sovereign authority.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, morality derived from even true religious belief will be imperfectly relative until God is once again the *earthly* sovereign of man. Hobbes’ work essentially mirrors that of Saint Augustine from a millennium earlier. For

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<sup>24</sup> The quote is Hamlet’s declaration to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that Denmark is to him a prison—a moral judgment, arguably the result of a moral injury. Shakespeare’s response through Rosencrantz, “Why then, your ambition makes it one: ’tis too narrow for your mind,” (*Hamlet.*, 2.2.253-4) is only to Hamlet’s opinion of Denmark; the claim of moral relativism is accepted by Hamlet’s antagonists and, perhaps, by their author himself.

<sup>25</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, “Of religion.”

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, “Of the kingdom of God by nature.”

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, “Of the number, antiquity, scope, authority and interpreters of the books of Holy Scripture.”

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

Augustine, and thus for the 1600 years of Christian tradition influenced by him, moral truth can only be measured in its nearness to God, and Original Sin makes every practice of man always and already distant from God and therefore always imperfect. This distance fundamentally defines man's relation to moral truth as a perpetual state of alienation from God—a perpetual state of anomie. In a sense, Augustine sees us all as morally injured and our anomic suffering only alleviated by faith, hope, love and our individual capacity for natural reason, founded only “in the bodily sense or in the intuitions of the mind.”<sup>29</sup> To go even further back in time, Augustine, a Latin rhetorician before his conversion to Christianity, is simply adapting Platonic idealism to the needs to his own time and the Church's political struggle for orthodoxy. This entire philosophical tradition affirms the relativist reality of morality, at the very least, *as it is practiced*. Even if the truth could be known, its human practice can never be judged with absolute certainty, regardless of whether one's judgment comes from an atheistic embrace of cultural diversity or true devotion to orthodox religious faith. The examples show that the history of western civilization is a reflection of the perpetual struggle for political control of moral truth. That morality is political ought to be enough evidence to put to an end the realist-relativist debate, but the nature of morality as an expression of individual and collective value and embodied belief makes that highly unlikely. A retort might be that there is no way to prove that absolute value does not exist, that relativity is mere speculation; by that same logic it is also clear that absolute value cannot be proven.

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<sup>29</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, 4.

Realism and relativism lead to distinct methodological problems. Moral realism—even in a world in which God is dead—makes moral claims essentially irrefutable and therefore of questionable value in social science, requiring an epistemological and ontological leap of faith by the theorist and the audience to a shared understanding of human nature.<sup>30</sup> Descriptive-relativism makes all moral claims equally subject to scrutiny, but the method may still be critiqued for the limitations such work inherently produces. Reducing morality to emic categories of locally relevant conceptions of morality, as occurs in much Weberian and poststructuralist social theory, can produce no more than genealogies specific to those categories; a comparison of genealogies will only “transubstantiate categories of practice into a unified category of analysis.”<sup>31</sup> That is, the inherent limits of genealogy make comparison impossible because the very personhood of compared subjects is constructed in such constrained and specific categorical positions; both the subject and the representation of that subject to an observer are dependent upon the moral ethos already described in a categorized genealogy.

For purposes of this dissertation’s analysis, it is true that specific moral content is not entirely relevant to the findings. We need not know that an actor’s morality is based upon a specific Bible verse to know that its action is moral. This is not to claim that *for the actor* content does not matter; it may be the only thing that matters in a moment of moral interpretation. Analytically, content matters to the

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<sup>30</sup> Tavory, “The Question of Moral Action,” 275.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 275–76.

extent that it is shared or deviant. The social phenomena of a moral fact is entirely relevant to understanding any particular moral act, but we gain little understanding of the power of morality in motivation without removing content. Content can only be used as comparison in the aggregate. Common morals tell us something about the group, and we might use those commonalities to explain group behavior. But to get to those commonalities, to establish the fact of morality, particular phenomena must first be defined as moral.

### **The Unit of Moral Analysis: Moral Action**

At this point, we are less concerned with any particular moral tenet, than understanding the action as representing a recognizable *form* of social existence. Iddo Tavory, a sociological ‘pragmatist’, suggests turning to a paradigm of formalism to counter the limitations of both realism and relativism. Rather than studying the content of morality, it is more appropriate for social theorists to consider the wide variety of phenomena, those forms of social interaction, recognizable as ‘moral actions’. Tavory describes the moral form as the body of norms, independent of their specific content, relied on to effect community and beneficial cooperation.<sup>32</sup>

To illustrate the difference between formalism and other approaches, Tavory points to theories of poetry that categorize the genre not by “specific content, but by a form of writing... that defamiliarizes the mundane approach of readers to the

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<sup>32</sup> Tavory, “The Question of Moral Action.”

world.”<sup>33</sup> For example, we recognize a text as poetry because its peculiar verbal characteristics are different from other agreed upon forms of writing: very few would mistake a poem for a more familiar written form, such as a dictionary (though it is possible a particular work could be both at the same time). Agreement on what defines the form need not be universal, only that such a form is generally agreed to exist. For instance, Tavory points to problems in early sociological studies of religion where certain practices were not included as religious because they were not recognizable within the observers’ culturally limited definition of religion, a problem corrected in later studies by defining the form in terms less dependent on the observer’s situated understanding,<sup>34</sup> and by widening the analytical scope of what counts as religious belief, practice, or institution, such as Clifford Geertz’s definition of religion as a symbolic system that regulates moods and motivations in a society by factualizing those moods and motivations in a shared order of existence.<sup>35</sup>

Categorizing phenomena as forms allows comparison of interesting characteristics across space and time, and in relation to other, seemingly unconnected phenomena. For example, a short written expression of love may have nothing in common with a

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<sup>33</sup> Citing Victor Shklovsky. “Art as Technique,” *Russian Formalist Criticism*, ed. L.T. Lemon and M. Reiss (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965 [1917]), 3-25.

<sup>34</sup> Tavory, “The Question of Moral Action,” 276. The problematic example is Weber, who although he “avoided any *a priori* definition of religion in his ‘sociology of religion,’ the examples he uses are drawn unreflectively from the *religionwissenschaft* of his day.” See Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

<sup>35</sup> Geertz, *The Interpretation Of Cultures*.

short written description of the weather, but if both are three lines of five, seven, and five syllables then both take the poetic form of haiku.

Methodologically, formalism is not without limitations or its critics. Structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss claims that “formalism destroys its object,” in its insistence that form and content “must be absolutely separate, since form alone is intelligible, and content is only a residual deprived of significant value.” Because of this, meaningful analysis becomes impossible as it moves its object “from concrete to abstract, but can no longer come down from the abstract to the concrete.”<sup>36</sup> However, such a critique seems inapplicable to moral formalism. Realists insist that the abstract is concrete. Descriptive-relativists undo that work, and so could be accused of the sort of formalism Lévi-Strauss critiques. Tavory’s formalism, on the other hand, seeks to find the abstract in the concrete moral actions that others fail to recognize at all.

While there could be a number of possible approaches to defining the form of morality depending on one’s perspective, Tavory’s analysis focuses on ‘moral actions’ of the socially situated individual, and the situated evaluation of those actions as moral “if and only if it is what an agent with a virtuous character would do in the circumstances.”<sup>37</sup> Here, morality—and the same can be said of immorality—is a form of identity performance characterized by three simultaneous criteria:

- 1) actions that define the actor as a certain kind of socially recognized person, both within and across fields;<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Lévi-Strauss, “Structure and Form,” 132–33.

<sup>37</sup> Tavory, “The Question of Moral Action,” 278. Quoting Justin Oakley, “Varieties of Virtue Ethics,” *Ratio* 9, no. 2 (1996):129.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

- 2) self-definitional actions that actors experience—or expect others to perceive—as defining the actor both intersituationally and to a greater extent than other available definitions of self;<sup>39</sup>
- 3) actions to which actors either have themselves, or expect others to have, a predictable emotional reaction.<sup>40</sup>

In the study of morality's form in such actions, by making moral practices and their effects the unit of analysis, it is possible to trace out the wide number of institutional influences, some explicit and others more taken for granted, that might be at play in a given situation. By focusing on these actions as moral practices the observer might discover “the stuff existential dilemmas are made of.”<sup>41</sup> Actors exist simultaneously in any number of social fields and bring the morality of those other fields into a moral situation—the condition of necessity to act in relation to a moral expectation. This assumes that a situation is morally charged simply because the actors present, and those who may come to judge them, recognize that some moral belief is situationally relevant: morality may need to be acted upon in some positive way, or have been challenged or violated. Even if the act is merely a routinized response requiring no conscious decision, it remains inseparable from the broader situations in which the actor exists. That is, in a moral situation the action itself may not require a conscious moral decision, but may be a consequence of or dependent upon previous moral actions that morally charge a situation. However, the situation may only be recognized after the fact when interpreting the act and situation through moral

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 279.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 288.



expectation. To be analyzed as a moral action what is important is not the specific circumstances of the situation itself, but the recognition by the actor and/or others that a moral situation did, does, or might exist. For our purposes it is only the interpretation and judgment of a situation as moral that need be considered. Thus, questions of ‘moral relativism’ are analytically irrelevant, because morality is always ‘real’ in its particular social context—where it is recognized as legitimate authority.

Despite the simplicity of moral formalism, morality in practice will likely always be more complicated than any ideal, whether it is presupposed by the actor, the situational expectation of others, or in its performance and reception. It is the moral action practiced in a given social context that represents the significance of moral beliefs. This perspective also suggests the true complexity of moral effects and the limitless number of interactions that might become moral situations. The key point analytically in the study of morality’s role in trauma is that the expectation of moral action is shaped by a range of influences varying in scale (macro/cultural, meso/institutional, micro/interpersonal) and time (prior, concurrent, and post situational).

### **Embodied Belief in Moral Authority**

Tavory’s theory of moral action as performance of situated identity fits neatly into Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of practice<sup>42</sup> by understanding moral action as the *practice* of identity definition and recognition by and of the situated actor. Bourdieu’s focus on

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<sup>42</sup> Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*.

practice avoids the analytical limitations of structuralist social theory, with its objectification of immaterial social forces and overdetermined subjects, and agent-centered theories of hyper-rational actors unfettered by the necessities of social existence, by situating the analyst ‘within real activity’ of structured actors pursuing their own practical ends; these real activities are, thus, a better analytic starting point for social theory than preconceived structures or agents.

The actor of practice—the *habitus*—is a complex theoretical construction, but this allows for a great deal of theoretical flexibility. Habitus is the particular disposition of an (individual or collective) actor to particular conditions of its existence; it follows that a person (or people) possesses multiple dispositions—each an adaptation to the range of practices, each with its own conditions, regularly encountered in everyday life. For example, an individual can possess simultaneously the habitus of a child, a parent, a friend, a coworker, an employee, a citizen, and any number of relationally defined potential dispositions. A collective is equally multifaceted, presenting itself (or represented in the consciousness of others) uniquely in all of its relations: to its members; to distinct groups of its members; to a larger group; to competing groups; to others it might not recognize; to others who might not recognize it. Habitus, then, represents the characteristics of a relationship or set of relationships, and while unique to each relation, each habitus of an actor is not wholly independent of the others. It is adaptable, but dependent on its own history. Habitus is real in its effects, even if its existence is wholly imagined.

In addition to habitus, there are a few other elements of Bourdieu's theory that need to be accounted for—other analytical perspectives to more fully understand social phenomena as practice. Practices occur in specific relational *fields*, the already structured conditions of space and time that give meaning to practices and to the dispositions of the actors within the field. An actor's social existence takes place in any number of fields: some overlapping, some distinct; some well-defined, others fleeting. The field is place and time itself, the actors within it, and the rules and powers that define it internally and externally. Practice is also defined by the shared and contested knowledge of the field, its *doxa*, those presuppositions that give meaning to practice, habitus, and the field, which allow for communication and interaction and ensure their own perpetuation. Finally, practices are economic and political exchanges of relevant forms of *capital*—economic, symbolic, or coercive—and thus expressions of power. Again, the complexity of the theory is important, and each element—practice, habitus, field, doxa, and capital—is only a perspective on the complex reality of human social existence. It is an ontological argument that the human species, collectively and individually, is fundamentally social, though not wholly determined by that. The individual cannot be reduced to a concrete, organic or psychological self, and the social is neither monolithic nor impervious to the imagined possibilities of a single member.

Keeping in mind that each element of practice is simply a different analytical perspective on the same social fact, the following points can be made about Tavorý's theory of moral action as practice. First, moral actions are practices in themselves—or

elements of more complex practices—of habitus construction and reproduction. Action as the performance of habitus will always be contextual to the experience of the actor and to the field of action, which operates within a body of recognizable moral expectations—doxa—against which practices are judged. Practices are recognized as moral when they are appropriate to expectations of the field. The actor draws upon experience relevant to the situation and seeks to act in a way that results in an expected emotional reaction from others both within that field and within other fields in which the actor moves. In their emotional effects, moral acts are transactions of social and symbolic capital.

This final point about emotion as transactional is the most important and theoretically difficult to make, in part because Bourdieu appears to be somewhat dismissive of emotion. For him, the value we place in moral belief is merely a particular element of habitus: emotional value being an extreme sense of anticipation, it is the body's physical reaction to the 'hallucinatory presenting' of the impending future which "leads a person to live a still suspended future as already present, or even already past, and therefore necessary and inevitable."<sup>43</sup> Much of Bourdieu's

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<sup>43</sup> In *The Logic of Practice* emotion is limited to a single footnote on page 292. However, my theory of traumatic experience will suggest that philosophical theories of 'embodied knowledge' can be taken quite literally. Memory is, obviously, a biological process: neuroscience links memory to physical movement (see Sarbin, "The Role of Imagination in Narrative Construction") and the neurological responses of emotion to physical movements of social interaction (see Hess and Fischer, "Emotional Mimicry as Social Regulation"). Psychiatric medicine claims that the symptoms of PTSD correlate with structural brain abnormalities (see Karl et al., "A Meta-Analysis of Structural Brain Abnormalities in PTSD"), and levels of stress related hormones are reduced in patients following psychotherapy treatments (see Olf et al., "Changes in Cortisol and DHEA Plasma Levels after Psychotherapy for

empirical work deals with the construction of cultural value and aesthetics, and emotion as a behavior is only one set of effects from those processes.<sup>44</sup> Tavory's emphasis on the essential relationship of emotional reaction to moral expectation requires a greater theoretical emphasis on emotion. Emotional value is arguably the defining characteristic of morality, and it is certainly the defining characteristic of moral injury. In a sense, the economic metaphor of emotional value in moral action is less a market transaction than a process of primitive accumulation and defense against wholesale loss. By acting morally, recognition is extracted from the field, and some minimum level of extracted recognition is required to maintain a position in the field. That is, habitus is constructed through accumulated recognition through moral action; moral principles hold value because they are the stuff of individual identity. This is admittedly an incomplete explanation of emotion and morality. Still, following Bourdieu, emotion, or some set of emotions, is only the indicator of moral action, and so we only need to consider, at this point, its observable form, rather than any fully developed theory of emotion.

A moral act is always an interpretation and judgment—either of the individual by society, society by the individual, or the individual of the self. However, while the act is potentially instantaneous, interpretation is a process, and with any process the element of time is always present. The moral act and its interpretation begin with

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PTSD”) which claim to integrate “the memories of the trauma into the totality of a person’s memory” (see Lindauer et al., “Effects of Brief Eclectic Psychotherapy in Patients with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder”).

<sup>44</sup> Bourdieu’s most noteworthy studies of this sort are probably *Distinction* (1984) and *Homo Academicus* (1988).

belief, the possession of particular doxic knowledge related to the expectation of an emotional reaction. That is, belief (as opposed to knowledge) can be thought of as the truths we hold that have practical, situational value to ourselves and others. Or better, the recognition of that value transforms knowledge to belief. One can know a fact (no matter its relation to reality), but it is valuable because it is useful in certain situations. A fact may always be true and always useful and we may not recognize its equivalence to moral belief because its absolute value in practice may never be challenged. But what if it could? What if, for example, mathematical truths suddenly failed? We would be left in a state of disbelief and the value of our embodied belief in those now false truths would be revealed, with implications for our relationship to the mathematical authority. Analytically at least, belief and knowledge are differentiated by the potential for disbelief: some things are more readily disbelievable; some people are more readily able to disbelieve. The acquisition of knowledge and belief are learned through experience, and experience almost always falls entirely within expectations of the actor and society, because the relevant moral value of the moment has been so deeply and physically embodied in habitus, individually and collectively.<sup>45</sup>

In embodied knowledge, Bourdieu suggests a general tendency to conservatism, particularly in moments of crisis. This is both a pre-adaptation to as many outcomes as possible and also a potentially false anticipation of the future. New experience will be incorporated in habitus within parameters set by established belief;

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<sup>45</sup> Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 68.

commonalities of belief, which are imposed by processes of social incorporation (formation of habitus, building of fields, establishment of doxa, transactions of capital), are the basis of individual membership in social groups. Similarly, practices persist within social groups—thus, the inherent conservatism of institutions—because of the durability of individual habitus beyond the experiences in which shared beliefs have been established. Belief becomes further normalized through processes of indoctrination that create a habitus of membership—the shared understanding of an individual’s role within a group. The performed role is an awareness of and *belief in being* that has developed through a process of indoctrination and continuous acts of embodiment of knowledge. But critically to all of this, the act of indoctrination erases itself, and belief takes on “the illusion of innateness.”<sup>46</sup>

In its oldest definitions, the verb ‘indoctrinate’<sup>47</sup> means simply to “imbue with learning, to teach,” or to “instruct *in* a subject.” Usage beginning in the nineteenth century took on more political tones: it is to imbue one “*with* a doctrine, idea, or opinion,” or to “bring *into* a knowledge of something.” In common use, to equate teaching with indoctrination certainly raises sinister images of psychological manipulation, but in sociological terms indoctrination is the building of a particular disposition of an agent in a field of social relations, what Bourdieu calls the “making durable of the habitus, a permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking,

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>47</sup> "indoctrinate, v.". OED Online. June 2017. Oxford University Press. Emphasis in original.

walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking.”<sup>48</sup> More simply, indoctrination is the process of becoming a member of an institution, although the power differences between recruits and other members and the institution itself make membership in a complex organization like the United States Army anything but simple.

In Bourdieu’s model, gaining institutional membership requires the accumulation of symbolic capital through practice in rites of indoctrination, though some may begin the process already possessing traits valued (either positively or negatively) by the institution that make the further accumulation of capital more or less difficult. Because these exchanges of value occur asymmetrically between unequal members, the dependent relationship of the recruit to the institution comes to be disguised under a “veil of moral relations.” That is, the legitimacy of actions and positions in a field are set in relation to the objective value of *goods* (in either economic or moral terms) according to the field’s logic of exchange. For Bourdieu, the practice of such exchanges serves to consecrate the actors, the goods, and the field in a performance of “the fundamental operation of social alchemy, the transformation of arbitrary relations into legitimate relations, *de facto* differences into officially recognized distinctions.”<sup>49</sup>

Every institution depends to some degree on indoctrination to ensure individual members acting appropriately in the absence of direct authority. As Bourdieu explains, “in the absence of officially declared and institutionally

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<sup>48</sup> Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 70.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.



guaranteed delegation, personal authority can only be lastingly maintained through actions that reassert it practically through [members'] compliance with the values recognized by the group."<sup>50</sup> Because symbolic capital is just that, the formalization of behavior through the indoctrinated belief in the legitimacy of the exchange erases the actual content of the exchange. The processes of indoctrination, composed of all those social mechanisms that produce a 'compliant habitus',

are an integral part of the conditions of reproduction of the social order and of the productive apparatus itself, which could not function without the dispositions that the group inculcates and continuously reinforces and which exclude, as *unthinkable*, practices which the disenchanted economy of 'naked self-interest' presents as legitimate and even self-evident.<sup>51</sup>

That is, the indoctrinated member's practices of self-interested behavior serve to legitimate the authority of the institution by reproducing the conditions of membership while simultaneously excluding and precluding illegitimate practices. The accumulated institutionalization of members' practices as doctrine is thus also the institutionalization of members' relationships "between recognized positions, defined by their rank in a relatively autonomous space, distinct from and independent of their actual and potential occupants."<sup>52</sup>

Of course, most of us draw distinctions between being a good member of a group and being a good person. Individuals have varying degrees of self-investment in the groups to which they belong and groups make varying demands on their

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 130. Emphasis in original.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 131.

members' self-investment. Tavory expands on Bourdieu's work in order to distinguish morality from other rules of a field, based on the stakes the practice of those rules have for an actor's self-identity as a good person. For Tavory, morality transcends any one field and any one habitus, though not in any metaphysical way. To follow the rules of the field (or not) marks the individual as a certain kind of actor. When those definitions of habitus take on intersituational salience they may come to mark the individual as a certain kind of valued person: those characteristics that are marks of a good member in one field come to be valued to such an extent that belief in their legitimacy demands their practice be extended to all fields. The political dynamics of a field circumscribe or imbue certain actors or actions with moral value, transforming things that previously held no stakes in self-definition as now more broadly intersituationally salient. Further, "the less the environment is built to cater to a specific category of people, the more moral situations would arise in these people's lives."<sup>53</sup> That is, conflict with the values of others forces individuals to make moral decisions, and therefore to increase their personal investment in the capital of the field. An institution's bounding of moral expectation helps to ensure conformity of members and provides opportunities for members to strengthen the value of their ties to the group. In such circumstances, the "emotional valence of an action" will, ideally, determine the actor's self-definition as a good person.<sup>54</sup> Where the moral

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<sup>53</sup> Tavory, "The Question of Moral Action," 289.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

environment is more challenging, that valence is, at minimum, an available resource to shape a decision to act morally.

Finally, the degree to which institutional relationships are totalizing or compartmentalized will shape the emotional valence of moral decision making. Erving Goffman argues that modern life is highly compartmentalized as the practices of everyday social life are segregated by place, the people involved, and organizing authority. That is, the average person's identity and 'moral career' evolves in the relatively autonomous (at least in principle) practices of life through compartmentalized experiences, relationships, and principles of action. In contrast, the 'total institutions' of modern life—for example, prisons, psychiatric hospitals, and militaries<sup>55</sup>—break down the compartmentalization of ordinary life in order to bureaucratically fulfill the needs of a large number of people confined by place and circumstance. The 'inmates' of a total institution are collectively directed from above, under 'staff' supervision, through all of their daily activities, following "a single rational plan purportedly designed to fulfill the official aims of the institution."<sup>56</sup> The total institution's control over its inmates depends on a process of 'untraining' the practices and beliefs of inmates' pre-existing sense of self through acts of 'mortification' that disrupt "the usual relationship between the individual actor and

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<sup>55</sup> Goffman, "On the Characteristics of Total Institutions." Goffman argues that at least certain military institutions, for example training barracks, fit a particular type of total institution, those that are "purportedly established the better to pursue some worklike task and justifying themselves only on these instrumental grounds," (5).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

his acts.”<sup>57</sup> In the desegregation of daily activity, conduct in one sphere becomes a constraint on conduct in all spheres, thus devaluing autonomous action and thought.

Total institutions depend, at least initially, on the direct coercion of inmates, but their effectiveness may depend more on the totalizing effects of its organizing principles. This is probably illustrated most vividly in the ideologies of totalitarian political movements and the states they came to control. Hannah Arendt’s account of twentieth-century totalitarianism suggests that any ideology has some totalizing assumptions and effects. The function of ideology is to explain, but this occurs through a pre-existing framework that orders facts into logical procedures starting from its axiomatic premise. An ideology insists on there being a ‘truer reality’ beyond ordinary perception and “independent of all experience from which it cannot learn,” and so the most effective ideologies will result in their adherents’ “emancipation of thought from experience.”<sup>58</sup> As well, effective institutionalization of an ideology will erase the material acts of power upon which it is established and then produces. The effects of ideologies on the actions of political movements are more evident than those on institutions because the organizing and operating principles of most institutions align very closely with the those of the broader societies to which they belong. While certainly lacking the total overt control over members that prisons or totalitarian regimes impose, American military institutions maintain a totalizing institutional ideology to achieve the same functional ends of any total institution:

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>58</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 470–71.

fulfillment of its goals through efficient control of large numbers of people by means of a totalizing principle of action. In doing so, as any total institution would, they define their members as moral actors.

From the perspective of practice, and adhering to Tavory's criteria (the socially recognized inclusive or exclusive interaction, in a shared and intersituational experience, through the range of expected and possible emotional responses), moral action can best be seen as a political moment in which power reveals itself to the reflexive observer. In sum, in Bourdieu's words:

The relation to what is possible is a relation to power; and the sense of the probable future is constituted in the prolonged relationship with a world structured according to the categories of the possible (for us) and the impossible (for us), of what is appropriated in advance by and for others and what one can reasonably expect for oneself.<sup>59</sup>

In the probable future, the institutional practices of conservative power will almost always ensure the conservative response of individuals. But to explain the response we must return to the process of interpretation. The moral response begins from an interpretation of the situation within a constrained range of possibility: the actor responds based on the (usually instantaneous, because embodied) interpretation of possible actions; and the reaction to the act is the interpretation, by the actor and others, of what is morally possible. Deviation from possibility in a moral situation, the necessity to act despite the inappropriate possibilities offered in pre-existing moral belief, is the beginning of the traumatic process.

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<sup>59</sup> Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 64.

## **Hysteretic Response**

Deviations from moral expectation create dissonance for all involved, what Bourdieu characterizes as an effect of ‘hysteresis’.<sup>60</sup> In many readings of Bourdieu, hysteresis is usually understood (and glossed over) as merely the lagged response of habitus to changing social conditions. Habitus is durable and therefore it takes time for it to catch up to changes in the social environment. Cheryl Hardy, attempting to emphasize the importance of the concept, argues that Bourdieu’s conception of disruptive social change could not be adequately explained by available social concepts, specifically Durkheim’s ‘anomie’ and Marx’s ‘alienation’. According to Hardy, both terms presuppose a necessary ‘determinate moral force’ in social change to which Bourdieu objects; ‘hysteresis’, on the other hand, “supports a more scientific view of the relationship between society and the individual, and between subjective and objective, so that hysteresis is a field condition affecting individuals within a social space.”<sup>61</sup> While Hardy’s distinction between hysteresis and anomie/alienation may have some validity, Bourdieu himself makes little effort to explain his use of the word. Throughout Bourdieu’s theory the most recognizable characteristic of social change is the hysteretic mismatch of habitus and field. However, the hysteretic relationship between habitus and field is so essential to the theory that Bourdieu

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 62; Mesny, “A View on Bourdieu’s Legacy,” 65.

<sup>61</sup> Hardy, “Hysteresis.”

generally takes it for granted; the only explanatory context he offers in *The Logic of Practice* is a reference to Marx and Don Quixote.<sup>62</sup>

Whatever the label, this mismatch or lag between what we know of the world and the actual conditions of experience is the very phenomena I describe as moral injury, traumatic experience, and anomie. While it may not seem necessary to add yet another concept to my theory, because practice is the analytical core of the rest of this dissertation, it is worth the effort to try to get to a better conception of hysteresis.

Hysteresis is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as:

A phenomenon observed in some physical systems, by which *changes in a property* (e.g. magnetization, or length) *lag behind changes in an agent on which they depend* (e.g. magnetizing force, or stress), *so that the value of the former at any moment depends on the manner of the previous variation of the latter* (e.g. whether it was increasing or decreasing in value); any dependence of the value of a property on the past history of the system to which it pertains.<sup>63</sup>

The term originated in the late-nineteenth century in British engineer J.A. Ewing's study of magnetic materials.<sup>64</sup> In the physics of magnetism, hysteresis is the dynamic

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<sup>62</sup> Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 62. Citing Marx and Engels, "Apologetical Commentary," in *The German Ideology*.

<sup>63</sup> "hysteresis, n." OED Online. June 2017. Oxford University Press. My emphasis.

<sup>64</sup> Ewing, *Magnetic Induction in Iron and Other Metals*. "Moreover, this description applies equally to the effects of *any* cyclic variation of magnetic force, provided the range through which the force is varied be not exceedingly small. Starting from any condition of magnetism and of magnetising force, if we remove and re-apply a part of the force, or if we apply and remove a supplementary force, and repeat the process until its effects become cyclic, we find that the two stages of the process may be represented by two curves, which do not coincide, but differ in a way that may be concisely described by saying that there is a tendency, at each change of process, for the preceding magnetic condition to persist. The changes of magnetism lag behind the changes of force. To this tendency the author gave the name of *magnetic hystērēsis*,

measure of a material's magnetization in relationship to a magnetic field. Some materials gain magnetic properties when exposed to a magnetic field and retain a degree of those properties when removed from the field. They also resist demagnetization and the reversal of their polarity. This occurs in a predictable way depending on the material's particular magnetic characteristics: its 'coercivity' (the ability to resist depolarization) and its 'remanence' (level of magnetism it naturally retains).

If hysteresis is a relationship between material properties and the surrounding environment, Bourdieu's hysteresis, then, is not really an alternative to anomie or alienation. In general, it should be understood, in terms of practice, as the durability of habitus in relation to the authority of the field under which it is initially constructed and through changing conditions. In contrast, anomie is only a potential phase in a hysteretic relationship when either embodied belief or moral authority can no longer justify moral action. The relationship can be illustrated in the same mathematical terms as magnetic hysteresis, represented as the graph of looped 'logistic' functions (a measurement of exponential change that slows as it approaches a maximum or minimum limit).

The process of hysteretic change is illustrated in figure 1, below. The *x*-axis represents a measure of the moral authority of a social field, and the *y*-axis the degree of the habitus's embodied belief in that moral authority. The measure of moral

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from *ὑστερέω*, to lag behind" (94). Ewing also footnotes his original publication of the concept in "*Proc. Roy. Soc.*, No. 216, 1881, p. 22."



authority includes all of those factors that produce, demand, and reinforce moral belief, and represents the capacity of the field to act upon the habitus as moral authority. The measure of embodied belief is the degree to which the habitus understands itself as a moral actor in the field. The particular characteristics of habitus and the field define the relationship and its curve. The S-curve of initial moral indoctrination (*line a*) moves upward from the intersection of the two axes, and this will be more or less steep depending on the match between relevant characteristics of habitus and field. Following indoctrination, habitus will retain a degree of embodied belief (remanence of its historical disposition) under changing field conditions; in the same way, the relationship of habitus and field assumes some capacity (resistance to coercive forces) to limit the effects of changing field conditions. Negative value on the *y*-axis (crossing below the *x*-axis) represents a state of embodied disbelief—a change of the substance of habitus, just as a positively charged magnetic substance can be transformed into a negatively charged substance. Figure 1 illustrates a perfect hysteric cycle: (*line a*) indoctrination from zero to perfect moral authority and embodied belief; (*line b*) a traumatic shift downward to perfect belief in an oppositional moral authority; and (*line c*) a shift upward toward recovery of the original perfect moral authority and belief.

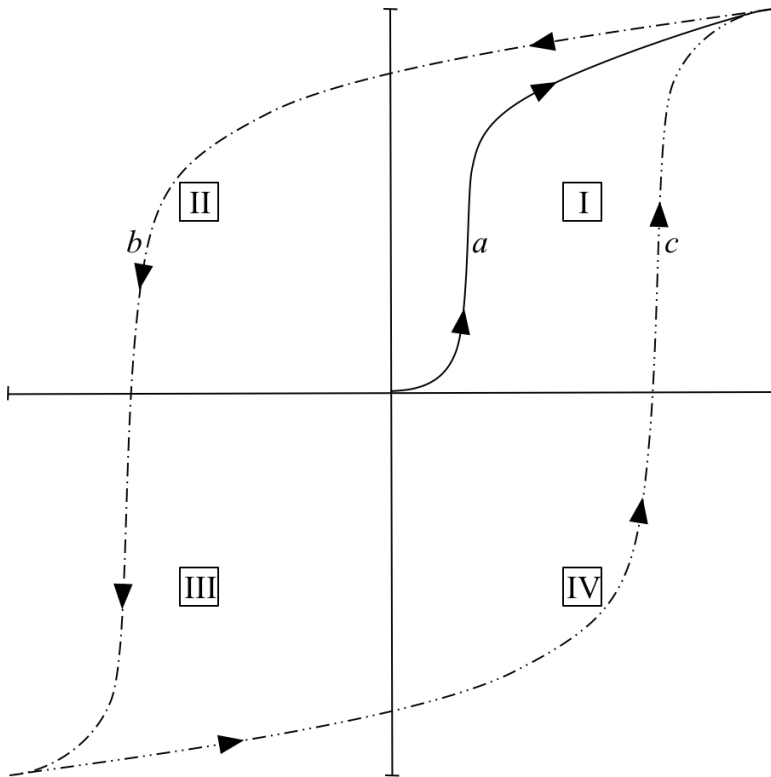


Figure 1. The cycle of hysteresis

Because conditions will rarely be perfect, a cycle will likely be interrupted and the hysteretic process reversed. In magnetism, a reversal of conditions while on a downward or upward curve will change the trajectory of the process to the opposing curve. That is, if a material is being demagnetized in a steeply downward direction (*line b*), restoring its magnetization will proceed in the much flatter trajectory in the general line of the full upward curve to re-magnetization (*line c*). For the habitus, hysteretic change is probably very similar, but of course, human relationships are never so determined. The patterns here are simply suggestive of the mutually constructive relationship of the individual and social circumstances, and does not account for the full complexity of social existence, particularly in relation to political

power. Quadrant I represents ordinary conditions, the status quo, in which belief and authority are both operating. After indoctrination, even if moral authority weakens and approaches zero, belief still remains virtually unchanged (*line b*). Quadrant II represents the persistence (remanence) of belief even under the influence of an oppositional moral authority; belief only weakens under the influence of very highly coercive moral authority. That is, the moral substance of habitus remains despite shifting into the field of another moral authority (*line b* crossing the *y*-axis). Quadrant III represents a transformed habitus compliant to the authority of the new field. Once embodied belief is lost (*line b* crossing *x*-axis) very little exercise of the new field's moral authority is necessary to draw the habitus toward perfect embodied belief in the new morality, so that even if that authority weakens (*line c*) belief remains strong. Quadrant IV represents the persistence of new belief when returning to the moral authority of the original field (*line c* crossing the *y*-axis); new belief only weakens under the very strongly restored influence of the original moral authority.

The illustration is intended to demonstrate the difficulty of changing our deeply embodied beliefs, and Bourdieu's metaphorical comparison of embodied belief and magnetic properties of substances seems apt. Belief is always relational, and so to give up one's beliefs is to give up that relationship. Our most deeply held beliefs are inextricable from our most deeply important relationships—those relationships that define us as moral beings. The curves here suggest a gradual process, but real change (both socially and magnetically) can occur much more rapidly. A strongly magnetic object (with naturally high remanence and coercivity) in

the strong presence of its natural magnetic field could still be instantly demagnetized should it be exposed to an external force strong enough to change its magnetic substance (either the introduction of a strong enough oppositional magnetic force or something equally energetic, such as the high heat and pressure that can undo a material's magnetic charge). Moral belief may be stronger (in terms of remanence and coercivity) than iron—consider the long history of religious and political martyrs willing to die for their beliefs. But to experience moral violation, through either the act of betrayal by another or in one's own transgressive act, is to be cut off from the source of value of one's beliefs—to be thrown violently into an anomic condition.

For the individual, we see hysteretic dissonance most clearly when moral expectations are challenged and habitus is revealed as inappropriate to the context of the experience. The actor must respond to both the situation itself and the expectation of some available moral expectation, particularly the possibility of negative sanctions if the response cannot be, after the fact, made coherent with previously held beliefs and expectations—that is, if the value of the relevant capital cannot be retained. These moments of dissonance are moments of revelation and opportunities for reflection; it is here in these moments of sublime experience, and perhaps only here, that embodied belief can ever be radically changed. But, this is wholly dependent on the individual's relation to the social fields in which the habitus performs. If dissonance can be made coherent through the collective interpretation of the experience, then there will be very little change in either the habitus or the field. Where dissonance cannot be overcome, the individual and others in the field must

judge the experience and its consequences, resulting in a changed relationship between the two, a change that can be extreme, as the individual and group seek to negatively sanction the other. The power relationship between the two will almost always ensure that the field's position will prevail. Similarly, as groups tend inherently toward conservatism, the degree to which group belief is institutionalized in a field's practices (and many institutionalized practices will be maladapted to rapidly shifting contexts) will affect the bounds in which the individual and field may reconcile. Where coherence cannot be achieved, the individual is left to decide either to accept the sanction in order to preserve position in the field, or to reject the sanction, group membership, and the beliefs necessary to membership.

This all gets to the complexity of traumatic experience. To fully understand a particular case of trauma we would need to know the characteristics of the moral substance of the habitus and the nature of the field(s) in which it has been indoctrinated and which it is operating before, at the time of, and after the traumatic experience. These are all things the morally injured person might not be aware of. But because we live in social institutions, there are always shared commonalities of indoctrination, possible experience, and influences on interpretation of experience. Traumatic experience is always a cognitive adaptation to changing social conditions, and the damage done is the change of habitus to a socially inappropriate substance.

### **Moral Interpretation of Experience**

The relationship between individual belief and moral authority suggests the presence of parallel histories of individual and social belief. On the one hand, the individual's

beliefs are the collected experiences drawn upon to create a coherent understanding of self. These experiences are strung together in a way that explains and justifies a particular habitus of the individual, and these explanations are the source of coherence for relations to self and others. This occurs through a process of selection and interpretation of past experience, which might be thought of as the authoring of a personal historical narrative. On the other hand, collective belief stems from the selection and interpretation of past experience as explanatory of collective habitus; it is the production of collective history. However, what cannot be forgotten is that collective history is compiled by authors separated in time and space from the experiences they interpret; this distance creates the possibility of producing a critical history that challenges long-held beliefs. Personal narratives are also impacted by time and distance from experience, as habitus, despite its durability, is never entirely static; but the author will always begin this narrative from the embodied knowledge of the experience itself, making critical self-analysis of experiences far more difficult than in collective history. Thus, the durability of habitus limits the possibility of any critical effort successfully challenging established beliefs, either individually or collectively.

The use of historical narratives as a basis for moral injury research would thus depend on equivalent, therefore comparable, relationships of authors to the past. Historiography influenced by poststructuralist social theory approaches the relationship of past, author, and narrative as central to its method. These historically-minded theorists begin from a distinction of historical reality and historical

representation; that is, what actually happened in the past can never be fully represented in narrative or chronicled accounts. The approach attempts to overcome the fundamental problem of the human sciences—reconciling our empirical observations of the world to our rational understanding of it.

Foucault approaches the problem of rationality and empiricism by modeling the types of truth claims that can be made within our modern episteme.<sup>65</sup> He imagines a three dimensional space where different truths exist in each plane of the dimension and in their intersections. The three planes of truth are:

- a) the truths of deduction and verification of physics and mathematics;
- b) analogic truths of causal relations demonstrated by the empirical sciences, such as biology or economics;
- c) and the wholly immanent truths of the reflexive science of philosophy.

The truths found at the intersections of these planes are:

- 1) truths of ‘mathematicizable’ relations of applied mathematics at the intersection of a & b;
- 2) ontological truths of ‘alienated man’, that is, the beliefs of the ‘philosophies of life’ at the intersection of b & c;
- 3) and the logic of ‘formalized thought’ at the intersection of a & c.

In other words, we might conceive of a world that *is*, a world that is *observed*, and a world of *meaning*. Truths may occur in each individually, or in two simultaneously, but never in all three. Yet, it is the failing of the modern human sciences to attempt just that, by claiming that truth exists in its mathematically formalized analogies of causation as accounting for the human mode of existence, but in a way that

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<sup>65</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 346–57.

universally “traverse[s] all of its empirical manifestations.”<sup>66</sup> Thus, Foucault places human sciences in the void created by the three dimensions. What we take as social reality is only ever its representation, which cannot be an object, but only its own ‘condition of possibility’. If humanity is ever the object of science, that science can only aspire to an analysis of “norms, rules, and signifying totalities which unveil to consciousness the conditions of its forms and contents.”<sup>67</sup> To claim scientific truth of human experience beyond these analytic limits—as onto-methodological individualism has too often attempted—is mere pretension.

From a poststructuralist perspective, social theory, including the writing of history, is always an interpretive act and is therefore a political transaction that must itself be analyzed. The most significant political act in writing is the writer’s self-positioning within the text. As Foucault notes, the author seems to disappear in the act of writing—a seeming necessity in the production of historical narrative. The disappearance is, in fact, the very point of writing; that is, writing creates an object in itself, for which the presence of the author would reduce to mere representation. For the critic, however, presence is found in absence, once the author’s void is located.<sup>68</sup> There is a paradox in written history: the historian’s name upon the cover places the text within a particular discourse and is a signification of legitimacy.<sup>69</sup> Yet, as Roland Barthes notes, the form of the historical text—the portrayal of a substantive statement

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 347.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 364.

<sup>68</sup> Foucault, “What Is an Author?”

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 380-381.



of objectivity—becomes a “nomination of historical objects” in which “no one is there to assume the statement.”<sup>70</sup> Despite the efforts of the author to disappear, the assignation of an ‘author function’ serves a particular social purpose—the creation of a particular habitus severed from the individual author. This author function is the “projection, in more or less psychologizing terms, of the operations we force texts to undergo, the connections we make, the traits we establish as pertinent, the continuities we recognize, or the exclusions we practice.”<sup>71</sup> To go a step further, these only functional authors can be collected to create a ‘genre function’, of which these same characterizations can be made, which serves as a starting point for critique, and it would be reasonable to suggest the collection of genres as a ‘discourse function’ and of discourses for an ‘epistemic function’.

By tracing the political functions of authors and genres we find a starting point to begin speculating about particular acts of interpretation that link or obscure historical reality and its representation. Any knowledge must be reconciled to the constructed realities a particular audience operates within: it is attached to pre-existing knowledge and given emotional value in its connection to the moral authority of social relationships. To borrow from Charles Taylor, ‘meaning’ is *for* a particular subject, is *of* a particular object or event, and exists only *within* particular fields.<sup>72</sup> The ‘backgrounds of desire’ to which we have been indoctrinated and from which we all operate (for, of, and within) are made up of interpretations of our own lived

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<sup>70</sup> Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, 134–35.

<sup>71</sup> Foucault, “What Is an Author?”

<sup>72</sup> Taylor, “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man.”

experiences, as well as the interpretations of reality we readily accept from trusted authorities. Any attempt at describing the lived/imagined intersubjective reality of individual and collective humanity at any given time or place is therefore necessarily an interpretation itself. Any description of the empirical world we experience is constrained by our limited consciousness that allows us, at best, to categorize our observations of it. That is to say, interpretation is usually the best we can ever offer in terms of the truth of human experience, and so there seems no better standard of evaluation than to allow the observations themselves the possibility of rendering an interpretation that is not wholly preconceived by the audience. As Clifford Geertz states with some optimism, “It is not against a body of uninterpreted data, radically thinned descriptions, that we must measure the cogency of our explications, but against the power of the scientific imagination to bring us in touch with the lives of strangers.”<sup>73</sup> The story must, immanently, tell itself. However, the logic of the interpretation matters as much as context.

Noting that “it is a paradox that an experience, a fact should seem to have absolute value,” Ludwig Wittgenstein argues that the logic of moral interpretation is expressed through simile:

But a simile must be a simile of *something*. And if I can describe a fact by means of a simile I must also be able to drop the simile and to describe the facts without it... [And] as soon as we try to drop the simile and simply to state the facts which stand behind it, we find that there are no such facts.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Geertz, *The Interpretation Of Cultures*, 16.

<sup>74</sup> Wittgenstein, *Lecture on Ethics*, 49. Emphasis in original.

If Wittgenstein is right, to make sense of a morally charged experience requires the blurring of reality and the representation of some other fact entirely. If, however, there is a parallel process of individual and collective interpretation, the work of historiographer Frank Ankersmit suggests that those nonrepresentational elements of interpretation might still be gotten at by reconsidering our empiricist notions of experience. The goal of empiricism is truth, but our experience of history is affective or aesthetic. In other words, the individual interaction with historical reality or its representation, whether it is lived experience, the act of producing a historical text, or even reading history, will always be mediated through emotion. In this aesthetic history, there is an intimacy of subject and object: in historical experience we are constituted by the past; in historical representation the past is constituted by us.<sup>75</sup> Ankersmit's theory suggests that the efforts of historians to produce objective accounts of historical reality may be impossible, because an objective, empirical truth demands an absolute delineation of subject and object. When beginning from historical experience in the production of historical representation, the author becomes trapped in logical circularity due to the subject-object intimacy—the past produces a present through which the past is produced, *ad infinitum*.<sup>76</sup> The gap produced by this logical flaw is explained by the aesthetic relation of the past to its authors, which Ankersmit characterizes as 'presence in absence'. Anton Froeyman's critique of Ankersmit attempts to clarify the point: "Because the past is absent from

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<sup>75</sup> Froeyman, "Frank Ankersmit and Eelco Runia," 396–97. Citing Ankersmit's *De Historische Ervaring* (Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij Groningen, 2000).

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 397.

our representational categories, it can be present in our inner selves, in a much more direct way than if it were represented.”<sup>77</sup>

Hayden White writes of this intimacy as well, characterizing the historian’s encounter with historical writing—the reading of historical sources or the act of writing about them—as potentially transcendent: “instead of pacifying our will to know, [it] stimulates us to ever more research, ever more discourse, ever more writing.”<sup>78</sup> This aesthetic inspiration is, for the historian, here White quotes Ankersmit, an ‘estrangement’ from the past, presumably in both our prior knowledge and affective experience of it.<sup>79</sup> We experience this estrangement not through the past itself, but through the metaphorical interpretation of an author. While the particular details of historical events may interest us, it is the ‘emplotment’ of events through a recognizable narrative structure that moves us emotionally.

The question then arises: does the aesthetic encounter with the past reveal anything for social theory more broadly? Ankersmit better explains the function of the differentiation of historical reality and representation in the production of knowledge as a source of revelation of multiplicities of truth. Even in a purely interpretive analysis, we take for granted the reality of an historical event. However, if our knowledge of the event is only ever representational and can never compose the whole of the event itself, then each representation is itself another object. Finally,

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 398.

<sup>78</sup> White, *Figural Realism*, 7. Quoting Ankersmit’s “The Dilemma of Contemporary Anglo-Saxon Philosophy of History,” *History and Theory* 25 no. 4 (1986): 1-27.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

each representation “drags along with itself its own represented”; that is, the represented aspects of the event are yet another layer of objectified reality.<sup>80</sup>

Ankersmit illustrates this point through a visual representation of history: there is the objective historical person Napoleon; there is a representational portrait of Napoleon; and in the portrait there is represented a particular aspect of Napoleon. The distinctions matter because the relation of the artist (historian) to the object (whether that is Napoleon, the portrait itself, the Napoleon depicted in the portrait) is a function of the truth of the object. That is, an aesthetic relation to the objective past can only occur through representation via some other narrative. And this relation is to only an aspect of the object, never the whole. But the presence of an objective event (experienced historical reality) creates the possibility for the aesthetic relation, which is itself an aesthetic of possibility, getting closer to the object’s whole. Closure of any object as fully represented at any level is thus closure of possibility, closure of the aesthetic relation, closure of narrative, and, ultimately, closure of truth. It is only by holding out the past as objectively real, even if never actively acknowledged, that history has any meaning.

The same can be said of the individual’s relation to the object of belief. It is only by holding out beliefs as true that the individual has any meaning, and this, I argue, can serve as the basis for a more holistic approach to studying traumatic experience. As White observes, “It is because narratives are always emplotted that they are meaningfully comparable; it is because narratives are differently emplotted

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<sup>80</sup> Ankersmit, “Truth in History and Literature,” 40.

that discriminations among the plot type can be made.”<sup>81</sup> By reading (literally or figuratively) an individual narrative of an experience alongside other narratives of the same or similar experiences, common narrative elements emerge as potential sites for further analysis—exactly the method Shay used to conceive of moral injury. Reading these commonalities within the collective narratives they are drawn from and compose may reveal the disappearance of the individual ‘authors’ and the political functions behind both individual and collective belief.

Trauma narratives reveal the effect of these parallel histories of individual and collective belief. For example, ‘cultural’ or ‘collective trauma’—the shared traumatic historical experience—has been addressed across disciplines. For instance, in sociology, Jeffrey Alexander identifies a ‘trauma process’ in the gap between historical reality and representation. Collective trauma begins with an individual claim to the collective of some event as a “fundamental injury,” or “the terrifying profanation of some sacred value,” which is transmitted through the collective political dynamic and established as a ‘new master narrative’ of loss and victimization.<sup>82</sup> In this vein, Ron Eyerman writes of the ‘cycle of generational memory’ that has allowed the persistence of slavery’s traumatic impact on the African-American community, and the efforts of some African-American scholars to reconsider this history in a way that alleviates slavery’s historical burden while

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<sup>81</sup> White, *Figural Realism*, 30.

<sup>82</sup> Alexander, “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma.”

maintaining cultural autonomy in the acts of not forgetting that history.<sup>83</sup> Neil Smelser casts the acts of the Bush administration following the 9/11 attacks as a political production of trauma that drew upon American cultural tendencies: the dualistic morality of good Americans against the evil of Al Qaeda; ascriptive nationalist sentiment that places anyone who questions American exceptionalism as morally inferior and un-American; and a mythologized ‘instrumentalism’ that requires an efficient, practical, and perhaps overwhelming response to tasks the nation ‘must do’.<sup>84</sup> This scholarship draws from Durkheim’s writing on collective consciousness and forms of solidarity<sup>85</sup> as determinative of sociological pathologies (e.g., the anomic breakdown of social bonds or the failure of cultural norms), which in turn create patterns of psychological pathologies (egoistic or anomic suicide, respectively).<sup>86</sup>

These contemporary sociologists have all been heavily influenced by the authors who attempted, beginning in the 1960s, to come to terms with the individual and collective traumas of the Nazi Holocaust. The extremity of the Holocaust experience, being beyond speech and reason,<sup>87</sup> and its ‘negative transcendence’ of reality, has led to its sacralization through an equivalence of the traumatic experience

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<sup>83</sup> Eyerman, “Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity.”

<sup>84</sup> Smelser, “Epilogue: September 11, 2001, as Cultural Trauma.”

<sup>85</sup> Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*.

<sup>86</sup> Durkheim, *Suicide*.

<sup>87</sup> White, *Figural Realism*, 33. Quoting George Steiner in Berel Lang, *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 151.

and the ‘sublime’.<sup>88</sup> Author Primo Levi, a survivor of the Auschwitz concentration camp, captured this sentiment in his 1963 novel *The Truce*:

Perhaps one cannot, what is more one must not, understand what happened, because to understand is to justify... If understanding is impossible, knowing is imperative, because what happened could happen again.<sup>89</sup>

As Levi shows, many of those most traumatized were moved to attempt an expression of the inexpressible. Yet, there has been an ongoing debate about what forms the expression of the Holocaust’s historical reality might take. Some have argued that realism, though always insufficient, is the only appropriate form, that “only the most literal chronicle of the facts of the genocide comes close to passing the test of ‘authenticity and truthfulness’ by which [they] must be judged.”<sup>90</sup> Others argue that by its very nature any account of such sublime experience, regardless of form, is also “bound by its very nature to fail.”<sup>91</sup>

Despite this, as Levi shows, there has been a rich history of Holocaust survivors turning to interpretive forms in an effort to share the reality of their experience. Ankersmit suggests that narratives of ‘sublime historical experience’ are themselves the source of human awareness; when experience becomes ‘ineluctable reality’ the past becomes for us “no less a part of what [we] are as our limbs are part

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<sup>88</sup> LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*.

<sup>89</sup> Richardson, “The Ethical Limitations of Holocaust Literary Representation,” 17. Quoting Primo Levi, *The Truce*, trans. Stuart Woolf (Italy: Einaudi, rev. repr. London: Abacus Books, 1987), 395-396.

<sup>90</sup> White, *Figural Realism*, 33–34. Again, citing Lang.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 42. Here, citing Levi’s *The Periodic Table*.



of our bodies—and forgetting the past would then be an intellectual amputation.”<sup>92</sup>

To forget our experiences is to lose an element of identity, and it is only through their telling—even if only to ourselves—that we retain our connection to our own humanity.

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<sup>92</sup> Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience*.

## Chapter Three

### Narrating the Anomic Condition of Soldiers and Veterans

In this chapter I explain in more depth my understanding of traumatic experience as the condition of anomie. For anomie to be psychologically damaging, it first has to be recognized. This raises the epistemological questions discussed in the previous chapter of how an experience comes to be interpreted as having been traumatic. I argue that this follows a process defined by the hysteretic relationship of belief to its origins and to its relevance in experience. It is the same relationship of knowledge and experience we see in those who depend on knowledge of history as a way to explain present circumstances or predict the future—it is simply the way all of us know the world around us. I illustrate the distinction between disabling psychological trauma of anomic existence and the temporary condition of affective distress through an analysis of two accounts of war by veteran authors. To illustrate the anomic experience of war I borrow from the work of Vietnam War veteran and novelist Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* (1990). I then illustrate the distinct condition of affective distress through a reading of the First World War novel *Her Privates We* (1930) by Frederic Manning. With this distinction between anomie and affective distress established, the particular sorts of relationships that are broken in war and its aftermath will be explored in more depth in the following chapter.

## The Anomic Condition

Despite being first published in 1897, Emile Durkheim's *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* remains highly influential across the social sciences.<sup>1</sup> Durkheim's analysis of the social patterns of suicide suggested to him that the cause of suicide could be neither "the organic-psychic constitution of individuals nor the nature of the physical environment."<sup>2</sup> He instead looked at the shared conditions of the social and cultural environment in each country studied to identify general causes which might become individualized to produce the cases that made up his aggregate count of suicides. For the countries of western Europe in the late-nineteenth century, Durkheim proposed three general categories of social conditions that produce suicidal behavior. Two categories fall at the extremes of social integration: the 'egoism' of social atomization and hyperintegration of 'altruism'. The third category, 'anomie', is the condition of the absence of moral regulation. A fourth category, the 'fatalism' of extreme moral regulation, could be a possible social cause of suicide, but Durkheim does not recognize it as a significant force in the societies he studied.

Scholars of Durkheim may protest my equating anomie and trauma among soldiers. Durkheim proposes that the source of neurotic breakdown among soldiers is the hyperintegration of military culture, the condition of altruism in which one's principle of action is external to the individual. For each country he studied the

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<sup>1</sup> A search of Google Scholar returns multiple entries for various versions of the work. It's entry for the original 1897 French edition shows a citation count of 13,223 as of August 3, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Durkheim, *Suicide*, 145.

occurrence of suicides was significantly higher among soldiers than among the civilian population, even after controlling for factors such as age, alcoholism, and marriage status. Further, he identified much higher suicide rates among officers and noncommissioned officers than among lower-enlisted soldiers.<sup>3</sup> From this, Durkheim concluded that individuals who are “most inclined to this career, who are best suited to its needs and are best sheltered from its disadvantages and inconveniences,” are those most susceptible to suicide.<sup>4</sup> This suggested that prolonged discipline weakens the soldier’s social ties with broader society, as the military institution requires the soldier’s principle of action to be bound to “a massive, compact group providing a rigid setting for the individual and preventing any independent movement.”<sup>5</sup> Individuality is subordinated to the absolute discipline and regimentation of military membership. Durkheim suggests that the social power of idealized duty and honor are merely remnants of primitive society still reflected in nineteenth-century militaries (and certainly would say the same of modern militaries, as well). In such a condition, the soldier, unable to escape and unwilling to challenge the hyperintegrative power of military life “kills himself at the least disappointment, for the most futile reasons.”<sup>6</sup>

Durkheim’s account of military suicide can be questioned on a number of accounts. For instance, the desire to escape hyperintegration may suggest that such a

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<sup>3</sup> The pattern is reversed in the contemporary US Army, as suicides are more likely among new soldiers, see Ursano et al., 2016. Neither Durkheim nor the recent study account for suicides by veterans that occur after military service.

<sup>4</sup> Durkheim, *Suicide*, 233.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

disenchanted soldier actually may no longer be integrated in military life, at least morally. But Durkheim's study is also flawed technically. His data fail to capture the impact of war, and focus instead on military customs and institutions distinct from their social functions. While I agree that the experience of military culture may in itself be traumatizing to the point of inspiring suicidal behavior, nowhere in his analysis of military suicide is combat ever mentioned. He does however offer one statistic suggesting combat experience might play a role. The suicide rate among English soldiers age 35-40 was forty-five percent higher among troops stationed in India than among troops at home stations.<sup>7</sup> English troops in India were involved in combat throughout the time periods he considers. In addition to actions on the subcontinent itself, such as suppressing the Great Rebellion of 1857 and the political instability of the numerous mass famines in the era, these soldiers were also active in combat across the region, including the Second Opium War (1856-60), the Bhutan War (1864-65), the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-81), and the Second and Third Anglo-Burmese Wars (1852-53 and 1885-86). Without considering war as a factor, Durkheim also notes high rates of suicide among troops from Austria (engaged in war against Prussia and Italy in 1866, and constantly engaged in the Balkans), the United States (Civil War of 1861-1865 and constantly engaged in the western territories), Germany (numerous internal conflicts before 1871, Austro-Prussian war of 1866, and Franco-Prussian war 1870), and France (numerous colonial wars in Africa and Indochina, and the humiliating defeat by the Germans in 1870).

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 232.

Given the sheer number of conflicts faced by European powers, Durkheim's omission is glaring. However, the error serves to illustrate the value in theorizing trauma as anomie. If combat is central to the soldier's existence, then it simply must be a variable when theorizing their suicides. Further, by using suicide as a proxy for trauma, if Durkheim's underlying thesis is correct—that suicide is a social act—then his model of suicidal behaviors at the extremes of social integration (egoism $\leftrightarrow$ altruism) and moral regulation (anomie $\leftrightarrow$ fatalism) is still analytically useful in considering the causes of trauma. Durkheim is undeniably correct to claim that altruistic selflessness is at the core of military culture, and serves as a necessary component of hierarchical control, particularly as it is written into both doctrinal standards of the soldier's behavior and broader principles of militarist culture.

But at the other extreme of Durkheimian social integration, military culture also relies on modeled behaviors of extreme egoistic individuality in the heroic ideal of freely chosen self-sacrifice. It is the exercise of freewill, in fact, that separates the hero from ordinary soldiers. Consider the decisions of Homer's Achilles, whose story still serves as the heroic ideal of western military culture. He is not simply history's greatest warrior, but is foremost a man of unbending principle. In Homer's telling in the *Iliad*, Achilles' honor is bound up in the hard-won battle prize awarded by his men, and it is lost when the prize is seized by the Greeks' military commander Agamemnon. In response, the hero chooses, on principle, to leave the field of battle until his honor has been satisfied, despite the desperate pleas of his friends who will surely be destroyed without him. The hero then chooses to return to the field to fulfill

his own desire for vengeance, and chooses to be brutal and self-destructive. He selects his enemies, and may choose to show them mercy. The hero can choose to set aside his anger and return to normal life, or may choose to die in battle, to control his own mortality, knowing he will achieve undying glory in the end. The free choices of Achilles, himself a king, are only bound by personal honor and the will of the gods, which prevent him from satisfying his honor by taking revenge against Agamemnon.

But as Homer reminds us in the speech of the lowly soldier Thersites, whose sentiment toward the continuing war largely mirrors that of Achilles, the ordinary soldier cannot make the principled decisions of the hero. The demand for the soldier's strict obedience all but eliminates the possibility for heroic agency. To be heroic, one must have the formal or moral authority to act. For common soldiers, militaristic visions of individual heroics may motivate them to go to war, but this false ideal cannot survive the grind of prolonged combat. Idealized notions will ultimately be discarded (or rendered unimportant by superiority of force of one side or the other) as armies struggle to achieve victory on the battlefield. It is only in the crises and chaos of actual face-to-face combat, the conditions of which isolate the individual from the institution, that the ordinary soldier is left the possibility of freewill. The power of moral authorities within which the soldier is socially integrated may fail to operate upon the isolated soldier in combat, allowing and demanding the individual's freedom of action and thought.

Social isolation is, of course, not necessarily absence of moral regulation. Durkheim's variables are not mutually exclusive as long as egoism and altruism are

understood free from the moral implications typically associated with the labels: egoism is not a negative judgment of an individual's personality, nor is altruism a sense of goodwill; again, both are measures of the degree to which an individual is socially integrated, the locus of one's principle of action. An egoist, for Durkheim, could be self-centered out of either feelings of isolation or valorized independence; an altruist's interest in others could be based in either a sense of the goodwill of others or coercion. If there is a sense that egoism and anomie are highly entwined, it is because modernity valorizes the independent individual as it also atomizes all members of society. That is, the morality of modernity originates in the individual. If all one can prove of existence is one's own being, then moral action can only be judged against an idealization of individual existence. Though the principle certainly pre-dates Descartes, the egoism expressed in '*cogito ergo sum*' is the necessary condition of the Enlightenment. But with that self-knowledge established, argues theologian Richard R. Niebuhr, everything outside the self "appears to us a world demanding of us initiative, decision... , and we respond as men seeking freedom within and without to act." Thus, the morality of modernity is less concerned with knowing oneself to achieve self-actualization than with fulfillment of action and desire ('*ago ergo sum*' or '*volo ergo sum*').<sup>8</sup> But whether one's principle of moral action is knowledge, desire, or action itself, its regulation is contained within the independent self. That is, if morality is demonstrated through independent action, then egoism is highly morally

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<sup>8</sup> Niebuhr, "The Widened Heart," 128. Niebuhr also suggests two other ways of awakening to one's existence: doubt (*dubito*) and suffering (*patior*).



regulated. If society is then structured on this individualist ideal, those who fail its moral expectations find themselves both socially isolated and deemed immoral—in the judgment of society and their own self-judgment—leaving them in an egoistic anomie. Similarly, one can be socially isolated and be fatalistically bound to old beliefs. A soldier isolated in combat whose beliefs are appropriate to the experience and deeply enough embodied will be prepared to act on those beliefs in very extreme circumstances or will be able to make sense of their actions afterward with no psychological damage. On the other hand, one can be a fully integrated member of a group while being morally repulsed by the group's norms. But when experience cannot be made sense of, physical isolation becomes moral isolation and altruism loses its power, even after social reintegration. Or, perhaps, altruism becomes a condition of enslavement. In either case, the individual comes to be anomically alienated from and experiences a loss of belief in a previously legitimate source of moral authority.

From Bourdieu's model of habitus and practice, the individual soldier is constructed to fit an appropriate institutional form through, first, militaristic socialization, then, military training and indoctrination. By exploring the relationship of this formal standard to the soldier's role as actually practiced, we can also explore the relationship of the individual soldier to the military institution and to society. Thus, each soldier possesses a unique soldierly habitus, but the degree to which the individual effectively functions inside the institution is determined by the degree of

conformity to an ideal soldierly habitus expressed by the formal and informal expectations of the institution.

While an individual's morality originates in life's countless social interactions and experiences, the elements of the ideal soldier's habitus arise and operate at three distinct levels: the elements of morality that are culturally produced and pre-exist military service; codes of military conduct, whether formal regulation or informal norms of institutional membership, that are instilled in the individual through the process of indoctrination; and those particular to a given conflict that serve to distinguish the enemy from the self. Conformity to practiced norms of discipline and obedience is an expression of this ideal. However, the ideal is also a product of conflicting norms, for example: a religiously-based tradition of 'just war' that is at odds with the technologically and bureaucratically dehumanized practice of modern warfare; institutionalized deference to military authority in opposition to institutionalized hypermasculine norms of individuality; or liberalism's valorization of individual self-interest set against heroic ideals of selfless, altruistic sacrifice. An analysis of the particular ideals to which soldiers are indoctrinated is offered in the dissertation's second half.

### **Anomic Narratives and the Experience of War**

This complexity of habitus, of who we are both morally and socially, is revealed in extreme circumstances of war, and is thus one of the great themes of war literature. These stories complicate Durkheim's claims of altruistic military suicide. Particularly

relevant to this point is Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*.<sup>9</sup> The novel reads as a collection of related short-stories, whose narrator, 'Tim O'Brien', may or may not be the author himself. It is powerfully rooted in the author's experience as a US Army soldier in combat in Vietnam, but by straddling the line between fiction and autobiography O'Brien achieves a critical distance to consider a real (if not actual) account of soldiers at war against an idealized backdrop of the cultural influences that provide their principles of moral action.

The novel serves as a commentary on the truths we find in war stories. For instance, O'Brien analyzes a common narrative of altruistic suicide:

Four guys go down a trail. A grenade sails out. One guy jumps on it and takes the blast and saves his three buddies. (79)

This simple story seems to fit well within Durkheim's conception of altruism. The jumper's principle of action can only be entirely external to himself as he sacrifices his life for his comrades, and so this short narrative could, perhaps, serve as a definitive example of altruistic hyperintegration of the individual into and by military society. This same story is found repeatedly in the official narratives of Medal of Honor recipients, which provide the US Army's exemplars of idealized behavior within the institution. For instance, the official narrative of the death of US Army soldier Ross McGinnis in Iraq in December 2006 reads:

While Private McGinnis was manning the M2 .50-caliber Machine Gun, a fragmentation grenade thrown by an insurgent fell through the gunner's hatch into the vehicle. Reacting quickly, he yelled "grenade," allowing all four

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<sup>9</sup> All quotes are taken from: Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (New York: Mariner Books, 2009 [1990]).

members of his crew to prepare for the grenade's blast. Then, rather than leaping from the gunner's hatch to safety, Private McGinnis made the courageous decision to protect his crew. In a selfless act of bravery, in which he was mortally wounded, Private McGinnis covered the live grenade, pinning it between his body and the vehicle and absorbing most of the explosion. Private McGinnis' gallant action directly saved four men from certain serious injury or death.<sup>10</sup>

Here, McGinnis's life is reduced to a split-second decision, which must only be interpreted through institutional idealization of his 'conspicuous gallantry', 'intrepidity', 'extraordinary heroism', and 'selflessness'. Yet, this particular narrative closes—the last word on Ross McGinnis—with a statement of institutional appropriation and imposition of meaning: McGinnis's actions "are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army."

But aside from the Army's insertion of institutional prerogative, the narrative of Ross McGinnis (who is not the only grenade jumper of the recent wars) differs from O'Brien's jumper only in descriptive detail. Both rely on the same clear moral lesson: death in pursuit of duty, honor, courage, and selflessness is among the soldier's proper ends. O'Brien, however, is less intent on moralizing and more interested in getting to 'truth' of the soldier's experience in war. Rather than a story of dutiful courage, O'Brien might claim that truth is better served if we see these two narratives as love stories: what else might drive a soldier to take their own life but the

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<sup>10</sup> "Iraq War Medal of Honor Recipients."

love of their comrades? Regardless, *in this form* they are clearly narratives of heroic individuality achieved by means of altruistic selflessness.

O'Brien, however, warns us throughout his work that 'true' war stories do not have a moral. Something so simple as love or duty cannot tell the full truth about war, and so O'Brien questions altruistic selflessness as causal in the jumper's actions by complicating the narrative:

Four guys go down a trail. A grenade sails out. One guy jumps on it and takes the blast, but it's a killer grenade and everybody dies anyway. Before they die, though, one of the dead guys says, "The fuck you do that for?" and the jumper says, "Story of my life, man," and the other guy starts to smile but he's dead.  
(80)

While this story of the jumper may have come to an end, there is an implied starting point in some other place and some other time that makes the story more 'true', without needing to include it in the narrative.

Throughout the novel, O'Brien reminds us that the soldier's habitus in war cannot be separated from their previous social existence. He tells the story, notably in the first-person, of being confronted with his decision to comply with his draft orders and go to Vietnam. He places himself in a boat on a river that forms the border of Minnesota and Canada. He has come to escape his draft obligation, and sits in the bow of the small boat trying to will himself out of it toward the Canadian shoreline:

I did try. It just wasn't possible... It was as if there were an audience to my life, that swirl of faces along the river, and in my head I could hear people screaming at me. Traitor! They yelled. Turncoat! Pussy! ...Even in my imagination, the shore just twenty yards away, I couldn't make myself be brave. It had nothing to do with morality. Embarrassment, that's all it was.

And right then I submitted. I would go to war—I would kill and maybe die—because I was embarrassed not to. (57)

O'Brien goes to Vietnam: "where I was a soldier, and then home again. I survived, but it's not a happy ending. I was a coward. I went to war."

Here, before the soldier even exists as such, is the social space in which social hyperintegration operates (and perhaps fatalistic moral regulation). O'Brien is clearly at the mercy of social forces far greater than himself. Society has found a mechanism to keep young men in line without their knowing it. He is faced with the morality of obligation to a society that punishes immoral action through guilt and shame. O'Brien sees a host of imagined obligations: family and country, marching bands, dead soldiers, his unborn children, "LBJ, and Huck Finn..., a couple of popes..., Jane Fonda dressed up as Barbarella..., a slim young man I would one day kill with a hand grenade along a red clay trail outside the village of My Khe," and a dozen other images lined up—twenty years retrospectively—along the river banks as the full audience of his cowardice (55-56). These are among the ever-present (past and future) forces that constitute the soldier's moral habitus.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In a later interview O'Brien was asked about his connection as a writer to his life experience before the war, and his answer suggests the lingering effects of such socialization in memory, experience, and expectation. "Writers are connected. I'm connected to my past, but we're connected to bad things, too. There were things about the Midwest that I liked. But my dominant recollection about growing up in this part of the country, in the Midwest, is one of a kind of seething, contained rage. Even as a kid I felt that way. Small town gossip and the values of these places. I don't feel these things, this kind of rage, in my ordinary life when I return to Massachusetts, but when I return to the Midwest these feelings of resentment and rage do resurface." See Bourne and Shostak, "A Conversation with Tim O'Brien."

Given the moral complexity we find in ‘true’ war stories, it seems necessary to reevaluate Durkheim’s theory of altruistic suicide. Some combination of altruism and egoism send the soldier off to war where anomic forces tear them down. What O’Brien offers are not stories of struggle against hyperintegration in military institutions. Instead, he shows us the impossibility of idealized moral exceptionalism in a dehumanizing military institution, and a reality of combat in which moral absolutes cannot operate. The inability to make sense of such extreme circumstances reveals to the soldier, whether altruist or egoist, both the limits of agency and the failure of structured belief. What results is a loss of connection with the moral authorities that give meaning to the soldier’s habitus, a meaning that had been formed by the moral norms of family, country, gender, etc. Durkheim errs because his focus on the military centers on how society has structured their ranks, rather than on the peculiar tasks society, including the military institution itself, imposes upon its soldiers to perform on its behalf.

When the conflicting norms of social integration—heroic egoism and altruistic selflessness—are revealed in experience, the moral foundations of those norms collapse. The effect is a reshaping of the habitus in the struggle to find meaning in the experience and to make sense of newly discovered truth. So that others might understand this difficulty, O’Brien shows us “How to Tell a True War Story.” This single chapter of *The Things They Carried* is O’Brien’s critical assessment of the soldier’s relationship to war itself. The chapter’s title offers clues. ‘Tell’ might have multiple meanings: Is it to speak the story out loud? Or is it perhaps

to recognize or distinguish, as in telling true from untrue? And what is true? And for whom? And what does telling come to mean in a story in which its antitheses—silence and listening—are such overarching themes?

On the eve of a long patrol into the mountains, O'Brien is told the story of six soldiers sent into the jungle to a listening post (LP): "they don't say boo for a solid week. They don't got tongues. *All ears.*" But the jungle gets 'spooky', filled with thick 'vapors' that make both the men and the land invisible, and after a few days of just listening these soldiers begin to hear things—strange music, voices, the sounds of a 'very civilized' cocktail party. But these are the sounds of the land itself: "The rock—it's *talking*. And the fog, too, and the grass and the goddamn mongooses. Everything talks. The trees talk politics, the monkeys talk religion. The whole country. Vietnam." The soldiers try but cannot ignore the sounds: "it's a listening post, right? So they listen." They get nervous, but cannot report what they hear. Under orders to maintain their own silence, they cannot even discuss the sounds with each other. In the end, the soldiers become desperate to make sense of their surroundings and are driven mad as they hear things they know cannot be real. And so they call a barrage of artillery and airstrikes, "[t]hey blow away trees and glee clubs and whatever else there is to blow away," inflicting violence on the land itself because violence is all they have available in their efforts to find sense in the experience. Afterwards they are confronted with the land's complete silence, "[I]ike you never even *heard* quiet before." And when they go back, the Army, their "fat bird colonel," demands answers for the violence they inflicted (and which it provided



without question), but the soldiers can give none; their silent response, just a wordless stare, “says everything you can’t ever say. It says, man, you got *wax* in your ears. It says, poor bastard, you’ll never know—wrong frequency—you don’t *even* want to hear this.” The story’s moral, according to O’Brien’s fellow soldier: “Nobody listens. Nobody hears nothin’. Like that fatass colonel. The politicians, all the civilian types. Your girlfriend. My girlfriend. Everybody’s sweet little virgin girlfriend. What they need is to go out on LP. The vapors, man. Trees and rock—you got to *listen* to your enemy” (68-74, emphasis in original). Here, O’Brien’s focus on silence illustrates the anomic environment of the soldier in war. The soldier is isolated on the battlefield from all but their immediate comrades, surrounded by a hostile land and people. When forced by circumstance to ‘listen’ to the surroundings, the soldier may be confronted with a sense of connection to the ‘enemy’, but that connection cannot be ‘told’ to anyone else, because no one else could comprehend and “because certain stories you don’t ever tell” (72).

Still, storytelling is the only available means of making sense of anomic experience. O’Brien tells the story of US Army soldiers Curt Lemon and his best friend in the world Rat Kiley. The two soldiers are goofing off during a break on patrol, playing catch with a smoke grenade. Lemon trips a booby trap and the explosion kills him. O’Brien describes the scene of Lemon’s death:

I glanced behind me and watched Lemon step from the shade into bright sunlight. His face was suddenly brown and shining. A handsome kid, really. Sharp gray eyes, lean and narrow-waisted, and when he died it was almost beautiful, the way the sunlight came around him and lifted him up and sucked him high into a tree full of moss and vines and white blossoms. (67)

But there is no time in war for grief; the patrol must continue. Later that day they find a “baby VC water buffalo” on the trail.<sup>12</sup> They lasso it and lead it along to a village where they set up for the night. After dinner, Rat approaches the buffalo, strokes its nose, attempts to feed it, but the buffalo refuses the food. Rat steps back and shoots it. He shoots it again and again. The platoon watches, knowing his only intention is to make the baby buffalo hurt. They don’t say much, but are painfully aware that “Curt Lemon was dead. Rat Kiley had lost his best friend in the world.” He shoots it again and again, but the buffalo will not die. Rat tries to say something to it, “as if talking to a pet,” but the buffalo stays silent, “or almost silent, just a light bubbling sound where the nose had been. It lay very still. Nothing moved except the eyes, ...the pupils shiny black and dumb.” Finally, Rat begins to cry and goes off by himself. The rest of the platoon “had witnessed something essential, something brand-new and profound, a piece of the world so startling there was not yet a name for it.” It is not certain whether that new thing is Rat’s violence or the buffalo’s failure to die, though one soldier reflects: “Well, that’s Nam... Garden of Evil. Over here, man, every sin’s real fresh and original” (74-76). Here, the buffalo’s suffering silence represents the silence of Vietnam. The American soldier inflicts violence but gets nothing in response and is left to make sense of it without any feedback that can be understood as such. It is

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<sup>12</sup> That it is a ‘VC’ (Viet Cong) buffalo, and that it is otherwise described as being out of place and belonging to no one, suggests the representation of something else. Perhaps the soldiers see in it the violence they have done to the land and its people, or perhaps O’Brien replaces a captured Vietnamese person (whether or not a member of the Viet Cong) with the buffalo in order to hide the true nature of an atrocity.

something new, and they all recognize it as evil, but can only interpret that through their very limited catalog of available moral principles.

A week later, Rat writes to Lemon's sister. He cries as he tells her about the great times he and her brother had. Lemon had "the right attitude," and was "pretty nutso sometimes, but you could trust him with your life." Rat pours his heart out in the letter, shares a few stories to illustrate what he admired so much in his friend, and expresses his love for Lemon, "they were like soulmates... like twins or something."

So what happens? Rat mails the letter. He waits two months. The dumb cooze never writes back. (65)

Rat Kiley says cooze. Not woman, or girl, or even bitch:

He's nineteen years old—it's too much for him—so he looks at you with those big sad killer eyes and says cooze, because his friend is dead, and because it's so incredibly sad and true: she never wrote back. (66)

Rat's obscenity expresses his sense of betrayal: by Lemon's sister, perhaps, but more fundamentally by his belief in the value of his friendship and loss. And the trauma of the betrayal is not just Rat Kiley's; all of the witnesses have been deeply wounded, but none can explain the nature of their injuries. The experience utterly transcends the capacity to explain it. O'Brien's brutal misogyny is critical to understanding the anomic fracture between experience and explanation. At the chapter's conclusion, O'Brien again invokes the epithet in the narrator's own words, in response to a listener many years later: "It's always a woman. Usually it's an older woman of kindly temperament and humane politics," who hates war stories, but was drawn to the sad story of the baby buffalo; in sympathy she tells O'Brien to "put it all behind

me. Find new stories to tell.” Frustrated because his listener was not really listening, he rages to himself, “*You dumb cooze... It wasn't a war story. It was a love story*” (80-81, emphasis in original).

The misogynistic language has been variously interpreted by critics. O'Brien himself claims:

There's a rage that goes through that story that was entirely intentional, but doesn't represent my own rage necessarily, but the rage that could be the consequence of men doing all the fighting and women being excluded from it. Not a political rage, but a sense of "well, here we are in the war and there they are back home." It's a rage I saw exemplified on a lot of occasions. You can see it in the lingo in which women are talked about in the military. The language is pretty coarse. Women are treated in language, in conversation, as aliens, and in some ways women are aliens to that combat milieu.<sup>13</sup>

American studies scholar Lorrie Smith sees in it something akin to combat gnosticism, but of a particularly masculine sort that necessarily alienates and marginalizes female readers. The narrative of the soldier's traumatic alienation from feminine civil society is one of “wounded American manhood that depends, for its meaning—whether tragic, ironic, or redemptive—on the positioning of women and Vietnamese as others.”<sup>14</sup> By this logic, O'Brien's sole purpose in deploying the epithet could only be “to solidify the male bond and ridicule and reject the feminine, which it does with stunning hostility.”<sup>15</sup> Other critics see more nuance in O'Brien's language. Pamela Smiley argues that O'Brien's guiding project in the novel is “to make such women [as Lemon's sister or the woman at the reading and all others who

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<sup>13</sup> Bourne and Shostak, “A Conversation with Tim O'Brien.”

<sup>14</sup> Smith, “The Things Men Do,” 18.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

did not experience it] understand their brothers, friends and lovers who went to Vietnam,” and his use of his female characters “de-genders war, constructs an ideal (female) reader, and re-defines American masculinity.”<sup>16</sup> Smiley argues that Rat’s intent in writing the letter to Lemon’s sister is “to use storytelling to win a female reader,” but he does not understand the narrative power of invoking the unspeakable—those details of Lemon’s experience in Vietnam—toward that end.<sup>17</sup> In O’Brien’s storytelling, love of a woman becomes the “means of spiritual redemption. That only through her can life become whole again.”<sup>18</sup> Smiley writes:

When a woman listens and understands, something shifts. As a result, the man’s experience has—what is it? Reality? Validity? Redemption? Instead of the sergeant [of traditional war stories] who proclaims the soldier as a man, it is the ideal female reader for whom O’Brien’s characters perform their masculinity.<sup>19</sup>

By invoking this desire for love and understanding (and the limits of either), even among other soldiers, O’Brien is critiquing the very notion of those relationships as uniquely valuable, not reifying them. Making the idea of love among soldiers open to critique points toward the sources of anomie. Susan Farrell points out that even O’Brien’s male characters, including himself as the narrator, “do not necessarily understand war and gender as well as they think they do.”<sup>20</sup> In the description of Rat’s letter, “surely O’Brien wants us to consider how such assertions might affect Curt’s

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<sup>16</sup> Smiley, “The Role of the Ideal (Female) Reader,” 95–96.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>20</sup> Farrell, “Tim O’Brien and Gender,” 107.

sister, who has never met Rat and who lives in a different world entirely, not desensitized to the violence and horror of war as Rat and his buddies are.”<sup>21</sup> For Farrell, O’Brien is keenly aware that the experience of war has inflicted an anomic break between the norms of war and civilian expectations, even the soldier’s own pre-military beliefs; the misogynistic language emphasizes the depth of the break, as the soldier is “so immersed in the violence of his experience that he cannot imagine the effect” an honest telling of the experience might have on the listener.<sup>22</sup>

Yet, O’Brien’s story makes it clear that the soldier’s experience may not offer enough evidence to support the real *truth of itself*. The narrator points out the soldiers’ lack of knowledge leading up to Lemon’s death in the jungle: “They didn’t understand the spookiness. They were kids; they didn’t know. A nature hike, they thought, not even a war” (66). O’Brien admits his own difficulty knowing what really happened to him and the other soldiers: “What seems to happen becomes its own happening and has to be told that way.” Witnessing violence makes “you close your eyes and duck and float outside yourself..., you look away and then look back for a moment and then look away again..., you tend to miss a lot.” So if the story must be told, “there is always that surreal seemingness, which makes the story seem untrue, but which in fact represents the hard and exact truth as it *seemed*” (68, emphasis in

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 112. Farrell also suggests that “what Rat praises in Curt [always for ‘some statement or action that seems racist, violent, or grotesque’] are qualities that would most likely seem frightening and horrific to someone back home.” Thus, his insistence of being just like Lemon, along with “his promise (threat?) to look the sister up after the war, are surely enough to ensure that he’ll never hear from her again” (113).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 113.

original). Thus, to get closer to the truth of their injuries, for both the reader and himself, O'Brien must retell the story of Lemon's death:

Then he took a peculiar half step, moving from the shade into bright sunlight, and the booby-trapped 105 round blew him into a tree... The gore was horrible and stays with me. But what wakes me up twenty years later is Dave Jensen singing "Lemon Tree" as we threw down the parts. (79)

But the story still cannot express the whole truth. O'Brien has to tell it again:

But if I could ever get the story right, how the sun seemed to gather around him and pick him up and lift him high into a tree, if I could somehow recreate the fatal whiteness of that light, the quick glare, the obvious cause and effect, then you would believe the last thing Curt Lemon believed, which for him must've been the final truth. (80)

But because O'Brien knows that people do not and cannot listen, he makes one last attempt:

None of it happened. None of it. And even if it did happen, it didn't happen in the mountains, it happened in this little village on the Batangan Peninsula, and it was raining like crazy... (81)

Throughout *The Things They Carried* O'Brien has made the military institution almost entirely absent. What must be recognized in these narratives is that Rat and Lemon are presented by O'Brien (as the story's eyewitness narrator) not as soldiers, but as fully-formed human beings who find themselves stuck in a soldierly role they probably did not choose, and certainly never fully comprehended, and to which they are forced to adapt, armed only with their pre-existing beliefs in themselves as soldiers in the American war in Vietnam. The physical and moral isolation of war is the point at which those beliefs prove their worth, but this is up to

the individual alone to judge. Describing that effort when those beliefs prove false makes the true war story impossible to tell. When even sympathetic eye-witnesses come up short, the Army's official narratives and heroic ideals could only ever provide a false war story.

Does the truth of this story matter? For O'Brien the true war story keeps being retold. Perception shapes meaning, so meanings change as the storyteller moves further away from actual events. All too often, the storyteller cannot *tell* the story—no one understands, no one listens, yet the story is constantly retold and relived. The true war story is never really about war: it is about sunlight, or love, or sorrow, or memory; and for O'Brien's characters, real and imagined, the anomic break between war and the story's truth may never be truly resolved, as the experience is so deeply embodied that it could never simply be put behind them. No one listens, the story cannot be told, and the anomic condition of wartime experience persists into civilian life.

### **The Primary Psychological Injury of Affective Distress**

In war novels we see a persistent theme that war itself—the exposure to violence—is less damaging than the traumas inflicted on soldiers by society or the military institution. This isn't to deny the immediate terror of death in all its myriad forms; the question however is whether or not that in itself is the cause of psychological disability. As I argued in chapter one, a distinction must be made between the affective distress of extreme experience and the disabling effects of traumatic



experience. Frederic Manning's novel *Her Privates We*<sup>23</sup>—first published in 1929 as *The Middle Parts of Fortune* under the pseudonym 'Private 19022'—is an eloquent depiction of the affective distresses of combat. Manning, an educated, middle-class Australian, enlisted in the British army in 1915 and saw action at the battles of the Somme and Ancre in 1916. He fictionalizes that experience in the story of Private Bourne, who Christopher Coker sees as literature's ideal 'stoic hero'.<sup>24</sup> The narrative focuses on the senses and the body's response to the stresses of combat, juxtaposed against the moral response to the unnecessary hardships placed on the soldier by the military institution. War, it seems, could be almost bearable if any possible meaning could be found in the experience to justify the hardship, and which was not undermined by the militarily unnecessary burdens imposed by the soldier's own side. The extreme circumstance of combat opens the soldier to revelation of new knowledge, and the lessons become deeply embodied because the stakes of the situation are so high. While war is both psychologically and physiologically overwhelming, Manning shows that in the relatively brief moments of combat it is

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<sup>23</sup> All quotes are taken from: Frederic Manning, *Her Privates We: The Middle Parts of Fortune—Somme and Ancre, 1916* (London: Endeavour Press, 2013 [1930]).

<sup>24</sup> Coker, *Men At War*, 95–106. For Coker, Bourne is heroic because he will "reassert control" when made "vulnerable to the contingent," and because, unlike the 'warrior' who sees war as a calling, he can recognize war's ironies; Bourne's stoicism reflects, for Coker, a "profound resignation" to "the role fortune or chance play in war," and the British enlisted soldiers' acceptance of war as a task that must be done: "The greater the hardship, the less they grumble." Coker sees such stoicism as the soldiers' moral choice, but Manning's work seems to emphasize the limits of willing resignation.

more a physical than moral experience.<sup>25</sup> Any moral revelation comes only with reflection: the intensity of the physical experience provides the intensity of the moral experience.

The book begins in the immediate aftermath of a big attack at the Battle of the Somme as the soldiers reorient themselves on the battlefield and regroup to move to the rear for rest and refit. Bourne's battalion has been decimated, its fighting strength reduced from four companies to a little more than one, and Manning describes the conditions of existence for soldiers in one of the bloodiest battles in human history:

One had lived instantaneously during that timeless interval, for in the shock and violence of the attack, the perilous instant, on which he stood perched so precariously, was all that the half-stunned consciousness of man could grasp; and, if he lost his grip on it, he fell back among the grotesque terrors and nightmare creatures of his own mind. Afterwards, when the strain had been

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<sup>25</sup> Numerous critics have noted the obvious distinction between the tones by which Manning differentiates the soldiers' experiences at the front and behind the lines. A review from 1935 observes: "Sentimentalism and brutality are but the obverse and reverse of the same thing and Manning is neither sentimental nor brutal. He burks nothing. He shows slaughter and anguish; but he shows too rest and enjoyment, escape and repose. In fine, in his own words [Manning's prefatory note], he shows that 'war is waged by men; not by beasts or gods,'" (see Kaepfel, "Frederic Manning, Soldier, Scholar, Artist," 50). At its publication, the book was embraced by more conservative readers who had been disappointed in the 'anti-war' turn of the era's war novels, particularly Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and had found in Manning's work a 'war book'. The book's review in the *Time Literary Supplement* (16 January 1930) observes, for example, "We have met many defeatists and 'leadswingers' in recent fiction. This book helps to remind us that men of that type are not representative, though they did exist" (quoted in Klein, "In the Midst of Beastliness"). Coker's reading can be understood as a continuation of that conservative vein of interpretation. Another critic sees Manning's morally sterile accounts of combat as particularly troubling. Compared with, for example, the heroic futility of Tennyson's "The Charge of the Light Brigade," Manning's work seems an acceptance of war, "and even in a sense glorifies it," as the author's "intelligence and imaginative ability make the book plausible, even seductive" (see Parfitt, "Frederic Manning and the Great War," 95).

finally released, in the physical exhaustion which followed, there was a collapse, in which one's emotional nature was no longer under control. (3)

In this pause after combat, the moment when the strain begins to release, Bourne observes of his friends in a dugout waiting orders to withdraw: "they sat there in their bitter resignation, with brooding enigmatic faces, hopeless, but not defeated."

However, at the end of the day, after the rolls are counted (the losses are spoken aloud) and those remaining are dismissed, "the will which bound them together dissolved, the enervated muscles relaxed, and they lurched off to their tents as silent and dispirited as beaten men" (4-5). In the relative safety of their camp that first night after the battle, their sleeping bodies regress to the conditions of combat. Bourne wakes "in an access of inexplicable horror," a nightmare he cannot remember, nor is he sure was a nightmare; it is perhaps simply "a vague restlessness troubling equally the other men," whose bodies twitch and convulse before relapsing into deep sleep:

Even though Bourne tried to persuade himself that these convulsive agonies were merely reflex actions, part of an unconscious physical process, through which the disordered nerves sought to readjust themselves, or to perform belatedly some instinctive movement which an over-riding will had thwarted at its original inception, his own conscious mind now filled itself with the passions, of which the mutterings and twitchings heard in the darkness were only the unconscious mimicry. The senses certainly have, in some measure, an independent activity of their own, and remain vigilant even in the mind's eclipse. The darkness seemed to him to be filled with the shudderings of tormented flesh, as though something diabolically evil probed curiously to find a quick sensitive nerve and wring from it a reluctant cry of pain. (6)

Only on reflection, which cannot occur in the moment of stress, does the moral interpretation of Bourne's experience take shape into something that might transcend physical experience. If what the soldiers have experienced is evil, it is only in its

effects on others that Bourne can recognize it as such. He is less judgmental of combat's effect on his own body and mind. In Bourne's effort to make sense of the experience, Manning shows how sensory overload creates moral overload, and if given the chance clarity can be perceived and written to memory to replace old, now useless, beliefs and expectations. The experience places these soldiers in another social condition: "a gulf between men just returned from action, and those who have not been in the show, as unbridgeable as that between the sober and the drunk" (5).

As Bourne looks back on the battle he realizes his movement out of the trench and into the attack could only happen as the movement of something greater than himself, as "Every impulse created its own violent contradiction," leaving his mind in a confusion "inseparable from the senseless fury about him" (7). He tries to disentangle the forces that brought about his action to overcome the material force of physical violence directed against him, and which would certainly, he already knew before leaving the trench, take the life of many of his comrades:

Power is measured by the amount of resistance which it overcomes, and, in the last resort, the moral power of men was greater than any purely material force which could be brought to bear on it. It took the chance of death, as one of the chances it was bound to take; though, paradoxically enough, the function of our moral nature consists solely in the assertion of one's own individual will against anything which may be opposed to it, and death, therefore, would imply its extinction in the particular and individual case. The true inwardness of tragedy lies in the fact that its failure is only apparent, and as in the case of the martyr also, the moral conscience of man has made its own deliberate choice, and asserted the freedom of its being. The sense of wasted effort is only true for meaner and more material natures. It took the more horrible chance of humiliation. But as far as Bourne himself, and probably also, since the moral impulse is not necessarily an intellectual act, as far as the majority of his comrades were concerned, its strength and its weakness were inseparably entangled in each other. (10)

Though he calls it moral power, Manning is here describing Durkheimian altruism, the condition of social hyperintegration, “where the ego is not its own property, where it is blended with something not itself, where the goal of conduct is exterior to the self.”<sup>26</sup> To climb out of the trench into machine gun fire is not a rational act, but neither is it a moral choice, either of which would require some degree of freewill. It is also not the moral willingness to die. Humiliation might be a fate worse than death had a choice been made to remain in the trench, but, in the moment, that tool of social control has no power over Bourne. He is simply one person in a mass of others who all act, and so the action cannot be ascribed to any particular morality. In this act neither his body nor his will is his own. Through the irresistible force of the collective the soldiers move as a thoroughly integrated mass. But shortly into the attack Bourne is forced to act to save himself—the mere act of throwing himself into a shell hole—at which point he gains the clarity of his animal senses and the knowledge that “he could rely on no one but himself” (8). It is a lesson that he must not blindly accept the moral authority of others. His experience demands he retain his sense of an independent self for physical survival.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Durkheim, *Suicide*, 221.

<sup>27</sup> It has been observed that Manning’s conscientious accounting of both individual and collective viewpoints is one of the novel’s most important achievements. He captures “a whole battalion in its actual routine,” as its members “of good and less desirable quality” find themselves by circumstance “allied through an unspoken, grudging sense of belonging together.” While capturing the experience of a central character and his immediate comrades, accounting also for the battalion illustrates how the individual and the unit are central and simultaneously peripheral to the war (see Klein, “In the Midst of Beastliness,” 141–42). This points to the war as being, for all practical purposes, politically inescapable, and allows Manning to avoid questions

There are two related lessons Bourne takes from the intensity of combat that are directly related to, or even an element of, the affective distress experienced by all the soldiers. First, that war is collective action, but survival is individual. One cannot move alone into the oblivion of combat, one cannot climb out of a trench into enemy fire except for the altruistic force of the collective. But once in combat the collective dissolves, and some degree of free will must be exercised, if for nothing else than individual survival. The second lesson for Bourne is that seeing death all around him makes death relative:

Whether a man be killed by rifle bullet through the brain, or blown into fragments by a high-explosive shell, may seem a matter of indifference to the conscientious objector, or to any other equally well-placed observer, who in point of fact is probably right; but to the poor fool who is a candidate for posthumous honours, and necessarily takes a more directly interested view, it is a question of importance. He is, perhaps, the victim of an illusion, like all who, in the words of Paul, are fools for Christ's sake; but he has seen one man shot cleanly in his tracks and left face downwards, dead, and he has seen another torn into bloody tatters as by some invisible beast, and these experiences had nothing illusory about them; they were actual facts. Death, of course, like chastity, admits of no degree; a man is dead or not dead, and a man is just as dead by one means as by another; but it is infinitely more horrible and revolting to see a man shattered and eviscerated, than to see him shot. And one sees such things; and one suffers vicariously, with the inalienable sympathy of man for man. (11)

There are preferable ways to die, and as a result the act of dying takes on a new moral value derived from the facts of experience. Manning is making no universal claim that one way of dying must always be preferable; the judge of death is the individual alone. But given Bourne's feelings about individual agency, it must be presumed that

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of its morality (questions not relevant to Bourne and his comrades) while still offering an ideological argument against the romantic glorification of war.

to be denied the choice of one's death in war, or to be denied even leaving it to chance, is a moral affront. To die a certain kind of death is to suffer a more severe crime than another, as when some are killed needlessly by one's own side. In Manning's story, the contrast of the moral and physical dangers of combat with the moral and physical dangers of life behind the lines as the battalion is reconstituted is the surest evidence of the differing causes of affective distress and anomic trauma.

As they march away from the front the battalion is bombed by German airplanes, killing several of them. The event is given little thought: "In spite of their casualties the men were very steady, and though there was no cover, they moved quietly off the unenclosed road on to soft wet turf, which would stifle to some extent the effect of any more bombs" (38). Manning's only evaluation of the bombing is speculation about the accuracy of the attack and improvements in German aircraft. Contrast this with Bourne's indignant reaction (anything but stoical) to another bombing by German planes (which Manning retells four times) that cannot be reconciled with Bourne's new moral reality.<sup>28</sup> When the battalion is far behind the lines, several soldiers are killed by an explosion while standing in formation for an inspection by the battalion officers. Bourne witnesses the explosion and is disgusted by the 'silliness' of the circumstance: though soldiers are posted to watch for enemy

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<sup>28</sup> It is worth noting that Coker's reading of Bourne's stoic heroism makes no mention of this incident. He sees in Manning's account of life behind the lines as a time of boredom, for voicing "petty grievances," when, at worst, "Occasionally the war intrudes." But otherwise Coker's reading sees characters behind the lines who "affirm the completeness of being," given a "new beginning" as they "master" their common experience at the front (see *Men At War*, 102).

aircraft, they are untrained and not properly equipped; the soldiers are ordered to stay out of the streets during daylight to avoid being spotted by aircraft, and military police are posted to enforce the order; then, Bourne complains, “having taken all these precautions, fifty men are paraded in the middle of the street... as a target I suppose, and are kept standing there for twenty minutes or a half an hour. It’s a bloody nice kind of war.” In his frustration he realizes “men were cheap in these days” (55). He is later asked about the bombing by friends who were not present, and he shares that he has heard that the explosion was actually not a German bomb, but a misfired British anti-aircraft artillery shell. However, Bourne’s telling is contradicted by comrades who had been on aircraft watch duty at the time of the explosion, who claim there had been no warning of the German planes prior to the explosion. Bourne later confirms the official account reported by the battalion’s officers: misfired anti-aircraft artillery. But he cannot help but think that shifting blame from the Germans to the British themselves, “would give an accidental colour to the incident. One might anticipate an attack by enemy aircraft and avoid unreasonable exposure to it; but one could not anticipate a defective shell, which failed of its object...” Bourne tries to put it out of his mind, taking the position that “men were liable to be killed rather cursorily in a war” (61-62). But he can only repress his anger for so long. Three chapters later Bourne’s anger over the bombing returns in an exasperated tirade to his sergeant. He has learned the real reason behind the inspection in the first place: a British general’s car had sped through the village the day prior, but the soldiers on guard had not reacted quickly enough to salute. The battalion officers were chastised



by the general for the 'slackness' of their troops. The inspection and parade are the troops' punishment, as "there are precious few mistakes made in the army that are not ultimately laid on the shoulders of the men." Bourne, helpless to act on his anger, concludes that "the war might be a damned sight more tolerable if it weren't for the bloody army" (95). Six chapters after this, Bourne's anger is rekindled when he witnesses another battalion bombed by German artillery while lined up for breakfast in their bivouac a few miles from the front lines. The scene reminds Bourne and his comrades both of the bombing and of their deep "resentment against an authority which regulated, so strictly, every detail of their daily lives." Manning says the soldiers' resentment toward the army's disciplinary power is not without its benefit: "It does no harm to know that he may be sacrificed with some definite object in view..., but no man likes to think his life may be thrown away wantonly, through stupidity or mere incompetence." Yet, Manning attempts to cloak their anger against the army behind their stoicism, saying their resentment toward the army ultimately "meant very little, even to the men themselves. It fell away from them in words" (181-82). However, in a point reminiscent of his statement on the nature of war in the author's preface, that to call war "a crime against mankind is to miss at least half its significance; it is also a punishment of a crime," Manning cannot reach this conclusion—that these losses from institutional incompetence meant very little to the soldiers—without first returning the individual to the center of the problem. Their condition cannot be explained wholly in the altruistic power of the collective that

holds them captive, as Bourne has come to recognize that morality depends on the will of individuals.

Whether it was justified or not, however, the sense of being at the disposal of some inscrutable power, using them for its own ends, and utterly indifferent to them as individuals, was perhaps the most tragic element in the men's present situation... There was no man of them unaware of the mystery which encompassed him, for he was a part of it; he could neither separate himself entirely from it, nor identify himself with it completely. A man might rave against war; but war, from among its myriad faces, could always turn towards him one, which was his own. (182)

While the bombing is perhaps the most extreme and unforgivable betrayal committed against the soldiers by their military institution, it fuels Bourne's anger toward the army in several other incidents that occur before his battalion returns to the front, ranging from his inability to get his helmet replaced to the death of a favorite officer, killed when sent on a mission after losing an argument with a superior. Bourne is certainly a stoic when it comes to combat, but his emotions are fully on display when his own values are violated.<sup>29</sup> What distinguishes affective distress from trauma is the intrusion of emotion, which only occurs when relationships intrude on experience. In combat, as opposed to life behind the trenches, Bourne's emotion is displaced, not in the taking of any philosophical standpoint, but

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<sup>29</sup> Klein, "In the Midst of Beastliness." Klein suggests that Bourne's pre-war position as a 'gentleman' has sharpened his sense of the injustices imposed by the army on the enlisted ranks. Coming from a more privileged background does not lead Bourne to feel wronged any more than his comrades, but does allow a more balanced and thoughtful critique of those injustices. Klein sees Bourne's politics as based on spiritual equality, the greatest threat to which is the bureaucratic dehumanization of modern industrialized society.

by the sheer physicality of the immediate experience and anticipation of danger.<sup>30</sup>

The blurring of anticipation and reality by the senses is illustrated in the account of Bourne's night watch from the trenches. He stares into darkness, knowing that behind it there are enemy soldiers watching him in the same vigilant anticipation. He forgets "his own existence" within his hyperawareness as "every nerve was stretched to the limit of apprehension." His awareness pushes out into the dark to the physical limits of his senses "to take possession... of some forty or fifty yards of territory within which nothing moved or breathed without his knowledge of it." The experience mixes up his own being and the physical world into something else entirely.

The effort of mere sense to exceed its normal function had ended for the moment at least, not only in obliterating his own identity, and merging it with those objects of sense which he did actually perceive, but in dissolving even their objective reality into something incredible and fantastic. He had become so accustomed to them that they had ceased to have any reality or significance to him. (225)

The darkness takes on its own life with the shifting light of the moon, its reflection on the wet earth, the drifting mists. The darkness becomes one with the silence, where even the sporadic artillery and machine gun fire do not register in the senses. Only changes of special significance will break him from the spell: a rat scurrying among

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<sup>30</sup> There is one exception to this in the narrative. When a young soldier for whom Bourne has taken a protective role is killed at his side, Bourne's reaction is entirely driven by emotion. He briefly cradles the teen's body as he is "filled with a kind of tenderness that ached in him, and yet extraordinarily still, extraordinarily cold." When the fight forces Bourne to move again, he charges forward toward three surrendering German soldiers whom he fires on as "the ache in him became a consuming hate that filled him with exultant cruelty." He charges forward again, shouting "Kill the bloody fucking swine!" His rage is only checked by the wisdom and moral authority of his trusted sergeant-major (216).

the shell holes because Bourne is nauseated by them; the crack of a sniper's shot because of its "too definite an aim and purpose to be dismissed from the mind as soon as it is spent." Otherwise, the silent darkness is "such an unearthly stillness that he almost prayed for something to happen, so that he might kill, or be killed" (225-26).

In the whole sequence of the final raid in which Bourne is killed and in which Manning concludes the novel, there is no mention of morality and only the slightest suggestion of emotion. Though there is a recognition that he has been unjustly chosen for this mission, Bourne himself comes to accept it fatalistically. But the raid itself is all action and all sensation. His hyperawareness is expressed in Manning's detailed descriptions of the physical environment. The mist, upon which the raid depends for its success, is "luminous in the moonlight." The mud they daub on their faces for camouflage is firm from the frost, but the puddles are not yet frozen over, vitally important because cracking ice could betray their movement. Machine gun fire is no threat, merely an "admonition," but when they come to a wire obstacle Bourne is "mortally afraid" of making noise: "Every sound he made seemed extraordinarily magnified. Every sense seemed to be stretched to an exquisite apprehension." They bound from shell holes and abandoned trenches. Bourne spots an enemy position, "a faint yellowish light, that had none of the spectral pallor of moonlight." The attack begins and Manning records every move: machine gun fire, a count of the grenades thrown, the movements of the rest of the party, the Germans they kill and the wounds they inflict. Only as Bourne is withdrawing to his own lines is there reflection. First, he is "glad to be clear of the wire," and after taking cover from the light of a flare, he

feels “a sense of triumph and escape thrill in him,” though it could just have been a sense of relief: “Anyway, the Hun couldn’t see them now.” But with this thought Bourne is shot. Bourne’s only remaining act is to tell his comrades they do not owe him the effort to carry back his body (244-46).

## Chapter Four

### Narrating the Anomic Condition of Soldiers and Veterans (*Continued*)

Trauma comes after experience, in the process of sense making, which depends on the moral values invoked by experience. Trauma occurs when pre-existing moral beliefs cannot successfully accommodate morally challenging experiences. Trauma is the result of moral failure and the hysteretic shift of the habitus to a condition of anomie. In this chapter I propose that there are two basic sets of experiences that will bring about this anomic state: those in which one's own actions violate moral beliefs; and those when morality is violated by another. The realization of one's own moral failure is an acknowledgment of sin. Violations by others can be divided into at least four categories: individual; institutional; political; and ideological. A moral violation is a break in the relationship between the habitus and the authority of the field in which it exists. When the stakes are high enough, the violation ruptures the relationship to such an extent that it can never be the same again.

For the soldier at war, betrayal could include a breach of trust within interpersonal relationships, the failure to fulfill moral obligations within social groups or institutions, or a violation of widely held beliefs of societies and cultures. Trauma may result from the individual's own actions, or those of another or the group. For instance, a soldier's guilt resulting from an accidental killing of civilians is clearly a reflection of a perceived betrayal of what is right: faced with a narrow moral horizon of military discipline and inherent masculine norms, the soldier is denied the space to

grieve and comes to feel captive by service and disconnected from humanity. The moral injury comes not from the particular act of violence, but from the perceived incoherence of moral value in the violent act. However, the moral injury that this soldier suffers could result from the belief that they have violated, for example, either a deeply held conviction of the sanctity of human life, or an indoctrinated standard of soldierly conduct; the injured might place blame either on the military institution's glorification of violence, society's flawed justifications for war, or a personal failure as a soldier or human being. Thus, the anomic cause of moral injury could be attributed to the act itself, or to the more general circumstances faced by the soldier at war. The same logic can be applied broadly to a limitless number of potential moral conflicts created by the extreme conditions of warfare: to the commander who must order their soldiers into harm's way despite their loss of faith in the mission; the drone pilot who realizes their job is more than a videogame; the jailor confronted by the humanity of the imprisoned; or the intelligence analyst who knows a truth that must be told, yet is bound by honor and by law to withhold it.

Stories of interpersonal betrayal are rare in war literature. While I suspect that in real wartime experience purely interpersonal betrayal does occur and does produce anomie and trauma, war literature is more interested in the broader, collective context in which interpersonal conflict may occur. Interpersonal relationships, in narrative and real life, are not easily distinguished from the structures they represent, the institutions and beliefs that compose the habitus of the betrayer and betrayed. To be a purely interpersonal act, the betrayer and betrayed must occupy positions of relative

equality. The relationship must be a thing in itself, not representative of some other ideal. For instance, a betrayal of a child by their parent is defined by the culturally imposed definitions of that relationship which presumes an inherent inequality of position. Such a betrayal is as much a violation of the cultural order that regulates the unequal power of the parent-child relationship as it is the relationship between two agential individuals. For analytical purposes, I will categorize betrayal in terms of whether the story's focus is on the acts of the betrayer or whether the act is representative of something else. The problem analytically is to try and find the moral principles that are forced into conflict in the relationship. In relation to the interaction of habitus and moral practices, the analysis is an attempt to trace the flow of capital between players in the moral field of the relationship.

In modern war literature, there are certainly many stories of betrayal by particular individuals, but these tend to be the actions of leaders whose pride, incompetence, or indifference lead to tragedy for their soldiers. This power differential between betrayer and betrayed arises in the examples that follow in the characters of O'Brien's Lieutenant Sidney Martin, the schoolmaster Kantorek in Remarque's novel, or Boule's Colonel Nicholson. What these authors make clear, however, is that the vices of the betrayer are always the product of institutional, political, or ideological failure.

The few examples of interpersonal conflict between social equals in the genre are either incidental to the narrative or point toward experiences or principles that transcend the obvious betrayer and betrayed. In Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End*



tetralogy, the protagonist Christopher Tietjens is betrayed by General Campion, who is Tietjen's godfather and wife's lover. But the betrayal (and combat as well) is incidental to Tietjens' trauma, which comes about at the end of the war when he is forced to serve as a commander of German prisoners. Out of his "passionate Tory sense of freedom,"<sup>1</sup> Tietjens is broken by a job more detestable than the possibility of being a prisoner himself (which he metaphorically is throughout the book).

In contrast, the interpersonal conflict between the rival sergeants Elias and Barnes is a crucial element of both the plot and its moral judgment of the Vietnam War in Oliver Stone's 1986 film *Platoon*. While the two characters represent good and evil, their influence on their soldiers is more complex. Through Barnes' influence the soldiers brutally destroy a Vietnamese village, but we are told by the film's narrator immediately prior that "Barnes was at the eye of our rage - and through him, our Captain Ahab - we would set things right again. That day we loved him..."<sup>2</sup> In this sense, when Barnes leaves Elias for dead in the jungle for fear that he will report the atrocity it is a betrayal by the entire platoon, not simply the one sergeant of the other.

Shay notes the distinction between the act of betrayal and its representation in the moral injury done to Achilles by Agamemnon in the *Iliad*, which transcends the interpersonal relationship of the two kings. He asserts, "What Agamemnon did to Achilles was no private wrong. There are no private wrongs in the use of military

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<sup>1</sup> Ford, *Parade's End*, 670.

<sup>2</sup> Stone, "Evil in the Early Cinema of Oliver Stone," 82. Citing Oliver Stone and Richard Boyle, *Complete Original Screenplays of Platoon and Salvador* (New York: Random House, 1987).

power.”<sup>3</sup> Though the two kings might be social equals, and though Achilles certainly has the capacity to kill Agamemnon, the moral stakes of war and the rules under which it is fought make Achilles institutionally and morally subordinate to the Greek commander. As a king, Achilles has the freedom to act on his outrage, but his freedom is not absolute. He can leave the fight, but he cannot otherwise satisfy the damage done to his honor.

For Shay, Agamemnon has breached his fiduciary duty as a leader from the very beginning of the tale when he refuses to release the princess Chryseis, his own war prize, to her pleading father, a priest of Apollo. The refusal is made despite the opinion of the Greek forces that Agamemnon ought to “Respect the priest and take the ransom” (1.31).<sup>4</sup> The offense to Apollo brings a plague upon the Greek army (though, interestingly, not the Greek leaders). The Greek seer Calchas will only reveal the cause of the plague with guarantee of his safety by Achilles for fear of offending Agamemnon. There seems to already be some rivalry between Achilles and Agamemnon before Homer brings them into conflict, certainly Achilles holds some disdain for Agamemnon who he demeans for boasting to be “the best of the Achaeans” (1.97). Agamemnon rages after Calchas’s pronouncement and demands a prize from someone else if he must give up his own to appease Apollo. Achilles responds to his demand in front of the assembled Greek leaders with insults, calling him a “greedy glory-hound” (1.131) before offering the reasonable suggestion that the

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<sup>3</sup> Shay, “Moral Injury,” 186.

<sup>4</sup> All quotes of Homer’s *Iliad* are taken from Stanley Lombardo’s translation (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Books, 1997).

army will repay Agamemnon many times over when they defeat the Trojans. It is, after all, the political interests of Agamemnon's family for which the war has been waged. But when Agamemnon insists he must be compensated, Achilles' rages against the king and declares his intention to take his troops and leave for home. Agamemnon replies with his own insults, and declares he will take Achilles' prize, the princess Briseis. Achilles struggles to contain his rage, and begins to draw his sword to kill Agamemnon. His action is only stopped by the intervention of the goddess Athena. Then the wise king Nestor invokes more earthly authority to stay Achilles:

A scepter-holding king has honor beyond the rest of men,  
Power and glory given him by Zeus himself.  
You are stronger, and it is a goddess who bore you.  
But he is more powerful, since he rules over more. (1.293-6)

In what is ultimately a political fight, if Achilles has been morally injured it is not simply because he has been betrayed by Agamemnon personally. It is because he is helpless to right the injustice within the bounds of law, the will of the gods, or his own moral principles. Had Achilles acted within his physical power he could have simply killed Agamemnon, satisfying his honor and eliminating the injury. His deference to the legitimate authority of Agamemnon as the Greeks' high king, and the whisperings of the gods, force Achilles to bear the burden himself. Agamemnon's betrayal has taken from Achilles his reason for fighting—the honor and glory of war—making the war a worthless effort. However, the crime of killing Agamemnon would have equally undermined his principles of action. He has been robbed of the thing most valuable to him, and he is helpless to recover it or even avenge himself.

He leaves the battle and only returns when he takes vengeance on the Trojans, in this case an act for which there is no prohibition, for the death of his beloved friend Patroclus.

Given Achilles near total freedom of choice it is difficult for me to fully accept Shay's argument that the betrayal is traumatic. At the same time, morality is specific to circumstances and not always readily apparent to an outsider, and so trauma must also be specific and not always recognizable. Modern norms make the conflict between the two kings seem childish and petty, though the First World War may have been fought over less important offenses. Nonetheless, the logic of Agamemnon's betrayal as representative of something greater than the interpersonal relationship itself is self-evident in Homer's narrative. Faith in the Greek cause is undermined by Agamemnon's moral violations, and so it is perhaps not just the loss of Achilles from their ranks but the loss of trust in the moral authority of their leaders that temporarily turns the tide against the Greek army. In this same way, the examples that follow demonstrate the complex dynamics of the soldier's relationship to the moral authority of institutions, and the anomie that comes from the failure of those relationships. The goal of this chapter is to illustrate a few examples of the sorts of violations that occur for soldiers at war. Betrayal by the military institution is illustrated in Tim O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato*; political betrayal using Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*; and ideological betrayal in Pierre Boulle's *The Bridge over the River Kwai*. I look at the trauma of one's own moral

violation, which I will refer to simply as sin, in *The Yellow Birds* by Iraq War veteran Kevin Powers.

I should note that the works I have chosen in this and the previous chapter are quite arbitrary. I believe that they are simply good examples of the various categories of traumatic experience. They are also works that I am personally compelled to write about. In each of the works there is a clear distinction between the affective distress of war and the much more deeply damaging moral violations that lead to trauma. Moral violations are complicated and the categories of violation never wholly distinct from each other. The examples I have selected seem to, in my reading, focus more precisely on one of these categories than the others, but the accounts I offer do demonstrate the categorical ambiguity. The arguments that I make in each example could be made just as well using some other work in the genre. These chapters could have been written based solely on Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, and even then only scratch the surface of that massive work. There is no better example of institutional betrayal than Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, but its story of the US Army Air Corps makes it less comparable to the direct combat narratives of the examples chosen, though the difference is probably false. Every work in the genre is a critique of failed ideologies, but the example from Pierre Boulle's work illustrates the failure of a single ideological principle. Ideological betrayals are, of course, political betrayals as well, but most authors in the genre have been subtle in their condemnation of politics. The political object of Remarque's blame is anything but understated. Examples of individual violations, whether by a particular other or in one's own sins, are actually

hard to find in these works. While such violations may be significant sources of trauma in real life, the presence or absence of those narratives in this genre is, following Foucault, a site of politics.<sup>5</sup> Finally, the examples are not necessarily narratives of trauma; rather, they illustrate the potential for trauma when pre-existing beliefs about what is right are at odds with the moral demands of the soldier's experience.

### **Betrayal by an Institution**

Tim O'Brien's National Book Award winning novel *Going After Cacciato*<sup>6</sup> is a story of one soldier's effort to make sense of the moral contradictions of his experiences in Vietnam.<sup>7</sup> The work illustrates how imposing an institutional ethos at odds with the particular moral demands of that war is an act of betrayal by the military institution of its soldiers. In the moral void, soldiers develop their own moral institutions to try and bring order to an experience few of them are prepared for.

Told through the memory and imagination of Private Paul Berlin, O'Brien shows us a platoon of American soldiers in Vietnam who find themselves at the mercy of the unbending principle of their platoon leader, Lieutenant Sidney Martin.

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<sup>5</sup> Foucault, "What Is an Author?"

<sup>6</sup> All quotes are taken from Tim O'Brien, *Going After Cacciato* (New York: Broadway, 1999 [1978]).

<sup>7</sup> O'Brien stated in a later interview that in the experience of war the "sense of imprisonment and stress... heightened by the fear of death," produces a need to escape. "So you retreat into your own mind. You manufacture a new reality." For O'Brien, *Going After Cacciato* "is primarily a book about the impact of war on the imagination. And the impact of imagination on the war." Quoted in LeClair and McCaffery, *Anything Can Happen*, 273.

In contrast to O'Brien's effort in *The Things They Carried* to erase the military institution from the narrative, here he creates Sidney Martin as a representative of the US Army in Vietnam. As an institutional proxy, Martin is represented as the fully-formed heroic ideal of post-war American military service. He is young—no older than many of his soldiers—but appears more mature face-to-face. He is blond, blue-eyed, skinny, of above-average intelligence, and with above-average training. Though he is “almost as new to the war as Paul Berlin,” (42) as a West Point graduate, Martin is an initiate of America's military elite. He trusts in his common sense and in the Army's teaching of Thucydides and von Clausewitz. Like all good officers he knows the dictum of these strategists: that war is the means to a political end, the extension of policy by other means. And so Sidney Martin has come to believe that his primary professional interest—his duty as an Army officer—is combat effectiveness, achieving victory through the most efficient use of his forces.

He believed in mission. He believed in men, too, but he believed in mission first. He hoped that someday the men would understand this; that effectiveness requires an emphasis on mission over men, and that in war it is necessary to make hard sacrifices. He hoped that the men would someday understand why it was required that they search tunnels before blowing them, and why they must march to the mountains without rest. He hoped for this understanding, but he did not worry about it. (163)

However, his instrumentalist pursuit of victory is twisted, unwittingly, by his pursuit of an individually heroic end. Martin, “neither bloodthirsty nor bloodshy,” simply accepts that battles must be fought, despite his recognition that something is not right in Vietnam—its lack of common purpose. Yet, although he would rather

have fought in an earlier war, in one of history's great battles, he cannot imagine fighting and dying for such a purpose:

Death was its own purpose, no qualification or restraint. He did not celebrate war. He did not believe in glory. But he recognized the enduring appeal of battle: the chance to confront death many times, as often as there were battles. (164-65)

This is the common heroic fate. O'Brien creates in Martin a modern hero whose decision to fight parallels the choices of Achilles. Both will fight in defiance of mortality. War exists to test men's will and endurance, and the lessons it teaches ensure that "men might not be robbed of their own deaths." So, while societies choose war to achieve political ends, the hero sees in war the means "of confronting ending itself, many repeated endings" (165). The heroic Sidney Martin goes to Vietnam not because he is brave, nor because he is compelled like O'Brien's literary self in *The Things They Carried*; rather, he goes to war for egoistic self-fulfillment of his unbending principles; principles he thinks to be his own, but that have, instead, been instilled by socialization, and selected and sharpened by his military indoctrination. And so, O'Brien will insist that Martin's principle will be his undoing: he will fail in his mission and will be robbed of his own death and immortality. Martin's out of place idealism reflects the US military's inability to reconcile its traditionalist understanding of war as a series of battles—victory in battle being the military's heroic principle of action—to the political realities of the Vietnam War. The Army's unbending belief in the value of victory is best summed up in an account from the war's peace negotiations: an American colonel says to his Vietnamese counterpart,



“You know, you never beat us on the battlefield,” to which the Vietnamese colonel replies, “That may be so, but it is also irrelevant.”<sup>8</sup>

Unfortunately for both Martin and his soldiers, the platoon he leads is constructed on moral principles at odds with his own, new moral principles constructed to fill an anomic void. One soldier explains it to Paul Berlin:

What we have here... is your basic vacuum. Follow me? A vacuum. Like in emptiness, suction. Can't have order in a vacuum. For order you got to have substance, matériel. Aimless, that's what it is: a bunch of kids trying to pin the tail on the Asian donkey. But no fuckin' tail. No fuckin' donkey.

A vacuum. No substance, no conceptual matériel. Follow me. Bad logistics. We're getting short-changed on conceptual supplies. And, mark me, armies rise and fall on the packhorses. When the supply channels fail, everything goes bust. It happened to the Krauts in Russia...

You end up like Bonaparte, drifting in the drifts. (105-06)

Offered only their lieutenant's idealism as a principle of action and rejecting it, these ordinary soldiers establish norms of performance and moral obligation that are more appropriate to the combat situation they face in Vietnam. Their organization exists independently of the Army's bureaucratic hierarchy, and develops its own selection mechanisms shaped by personalities, individual knowledge and skills, and rapidly established traditions and superstitions. Within the platoon there is a recognition that

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<sup>8</sup> Summers, “Interview with General Frederick C. Weyand.” As an example of how the military institution understands its moral responsibility to its soldiers, consider how Summers, the American colonel, reflects back on this exchange and insists that not acknowledging the victories on the battlefield is a betrayal of the war's veterans. He writes, “In a narrow strategic sense, he was right. Whether they defeated us on the battlefield or not, they did win the war. But in another sense he was dead wrong, for that fact was relevant indeed to the almost 3 1/2 million Americans who served in Southeast Asia during the war. Many of them still bear a burden they do not deserve and blame themselves for what went wrong there.”

luck, pride, and trust are among the most important organizing principles. For instance, it is through luck rather than merit that Martin's sergeant holds his rank: he has survived in Vietnam for nine months despite very little understanding of survival. Martin's idealized pride in service and in self contrasts the soldiers' individual pride, which is restricted to their individual contribution to their collective survival. Most importantly, they are organized on trust in each other: the most trusted soldiers take the roles their comrades most trust them with; and the roles most critical to survival, operating the radio or initiating an ambush, for example, are only held so long as trust is proven. Trust trumps all other organizing principles, directing even their most trivial actions, even directing their collective disobedience. Ultimately, Martin cannot be trusted by the soldiers because his devotion to mission and the Army's 'Standard Operating Procedures' cannot be reconciled with the platoon's own, informal, nonnegotiable SOPs.<sup>9</sup>

Private Paul Berlin finds himself caught between the moral demands of the platoon and his own barely formed sense of himself as a moral person, his only motive in the war being "to live long enough to establish goals worth living still longer for." Like in all these war stories, the war itself is not morally damaging. It is

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<sup>9</sup> The problem of independent norms within totalizing institutions is made by Goffman: "Whether a particular total institution acts as a good or bad force in civil society, force it will have, and this will in part depend on the suppression of a whole circle of actual or potential households. Conversely, the formation of households provides a structural *guarantee* [my emphasis] that total institutions will not be without resistance. The incompatibility of these two forms of social organization should tell us something about the wider social functions of them both." (See "On the Characteristics of Total Institutions," 12).

only an environment in which individual and collective moral actions become more complicated. Berlin can deal with the violence, he can tell the detailed stories of the deaths of his comrades, as well as of the violence they inflict on the Vietnamese (though he wants the Vietnamese to understand that he himself is innocent in his intent). Berlin's traumas can only be made sense of by erasure from his war story, because the experiences are morally distinct from the war, and because what Berlin has experienced is so morally incoherent that it cannot be said aloud or written on the page. O'Brien forces us to assume that the platoon's conflict with Martin leads to his execution by the platoon members. He offers a scene in which the soldiers refuse Martin's orders to search an enemy tunnel. The searches are demanded by the Army's SOP, but have already resulted in the deaths of two platoon members. Martin threatens them all with court-martial for their willful disobedience and searches the tunnel himself. The soldiers discuss throwing a grenade into the tunnel to kill Martin, the only possible means of reestablishing the platoon's more appropriate moral order. They will not act however unless the decision is unanimous and affirmed by each member's placing their hand on the grenade. But Private Cacciato is not present—he knows what the others have decided and is pretending to fish in a nearby bomb crater. The burden falls on Berlin to get Cacciato's assent, which he can only do by forcibly placing Cacciato's hand on the grenade. Cacciato resists the act but does not otherwise acknowledge it. Berlin does not return to the others before Martin reemerges, reminding them of the SOP and his legal authority to have them court-martialed. It is the last we see of Martin. He is counted in Berlin's catalog of the

platoon's dead, but whereas accounts are given of all the others' deaths, of Sidney Martin's we are only told it was "a very sad thing" (247).

Berlin's role in Martin's death is the cause of his second trauma, the platoon's loss (or killing?)<sup>10</sup> of Cacciato. Months afterward, Cacciato deserts the platoon, telling Berlin he will walk to Paris. No reason is given for his desertion. Led by their new lieutenant, the platoon pursues Cacciato through the jungle. The new lieutenant, unlike Martin, is a highly flawed man, a failure in the eyes of the Army, and unfit for higher command. However, his earlier experience—"whiskey and the fourteen dull years between Korea and Vietnam" (2)—makes him fit to lead this platoon without violating its established moral order. And so their search for Cacciato is wholly their own action, outside of the domain of the Army and distinct from the war. But what happens to Cacciato is even more ambiguous than Martin's death. We are never told why they choose to risk their lives to pursue a deserter—an action that is itself a desertion—except that they have "certain responsibilities to consider" (34). And speaking of the platoon's own status, they know what happens to deserters: "They

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<sup>10</sup> The question of what happens to Cacciato is not settled among O'Brien's critics. Most seem to take the assertion that Cacciato deserts at face value, for example, see Saltzman, "The Betrayal of the Imagination"; Searle, "The Vietnam War Novel and the Reviewers"; Kaplan, *Understanding Tim O'Brien*. It has also been suggested that Cacciato is accidentally killed by the platoon: as Jakaitis ("Two Versions of an Unfinished War," 197) observes, "We never learn what really happened because the event is related from Berlin's point of view, and he began the assault in a seedy boarding house in Paris only to wake on his knees in the Cambodian jungle." The confusion is understandable as the novel's structure "can at times be so demanding that some critics have had trouble getting their facts about the novel straight" (Kaplan, *Understanding Tim O'Brien*, 122). My reading suggests that the platoon may have killed Cacciato intentionally for violating the unit's SOPs, an argument I have not found among other critics of the work.

burn” (311). Berlin desperately wants Cacciato to have escaped, and much of the book is spent in the fantasy of their pursuit of him across Asia to Paris.<sup>11</sup> But the facts of Cacciato end with his desertion and finally his discovery.

It was a fact that one day in the rain, during a bad time, the dummy had packed up and walked away, a poor kid who wanted to see Paris, no mysterious motives or ambitions. A simple kid who ran away. There was no toying with the truth. It couldn't be colored or altered or made into more than it was. So the facts were simple: They went after Cacciato, they chased him into the mountains, they tried hard. They cornered him on a small grassy hill. They surrounded the hill. They waited through the night. And at dawn they shot the sky full of flares and they moved in. “Go,” Paul Berlin said. He shouted it—“Go!”

That was the end of it. The last known fact.

What remained were possibilities. (323)

If Cacciato has no motive, it is because the facts surrounding Martin's death have been erased from the narrative. O'Brien has Berlin replay their final encounter with Cacciato four times as both fact and fantasy (25, 243, 323, 330), but the outcome is only hinted at. The fantasy ends as ambiguously as the factual narrative, with Berlin trembling with fear, uncontrollably firing his rifle, and losing control of his bowels. When the story resolves itself in the narrative of what actually happened, Berlin is dazed, blocking out things around him. He asks another what happened to Cacciato, who says only “It's done,” and changes the subject to Kool-Aid. His sergeant tells him, “That's it... Finished,” and winks conspiratorially. Another says, “we had him

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<sup>11</sup> Kaplan argues that the fantasy provides Berlin the opportunity to make sense of the incomprehensible war, as the story develops “according to a coherent geographic and temporal plan, and despite many crazy episodes, compared to the war, it makes sense.” The imaginative process allows Berlin to discover “that he can organize his experiences into a framework that will lend them some clarity” (*Understanding Tim O'Brien*, 114).

good,” to which the lieutenant responds, “Maybe so, maybe not.” They return to the war and report Cacciato missing in action. The novel ends with the lieutenant telling Berlin, “I guess it’s better this way... There’s worse things can happen... And who knows? He might make it... Miserable odds, but...” (332-36).

Ironically, Sidney Martin’s fate is a direct product of Army bureaucracy. As the fate of Achilles is bound up in the whims of the gods, Martin’s arbitrary assignment to lead a group of men unwilling to accept his uncompromising leadership or the institution’s lack of purpose ends badly. His failing (the US military’s failing), the unbending devotion to mission, is corrected through the platoon’s informal SOPs. The platoon’s fate is, also ironically, less predetermined than their leader’s—it is within their power to adapt. Still, they have been the victim of a collective moral injury. The military institution has morally failed by not providing a moral purpose sufficient to justify the soldiers’ sacrifices. It has, in fact, provided an ethos based on principles that are either wholly romanticized or, at best, an institutional adaptation to some other war. And the reality of war has forced these soldiers to adapt to the anomic void. There is a long history of soldiers making-do with what they have to survive in war when their armies fail them. O’Brien shows us that moral purpose is as material to survival as strategy, tactics, or logistics.

## Political Betrayal

Called by some the greatest war novel of all time,<sup>12</sup> *All Quiet on the Western Front*<sup>13</sup> by German army veteran Erich Maria Remarque tells the story of Paul Bäumer, a young German volunteer of the First World War, and the small band of soldiers of his platoon on the Western Front during the second half of the war. It is a book about the brutality of modern trench warfare, and it is difficult to see beyond that brutality to Remarque's nuanced critique of politics. Every description of war is physically and emotionally overwhelming. The glimpses and whispers of more ordinary life are easily overlooked next to the incredible suffering, and drowned out by the constant artillery bombardment. It is an utterly depressing work. However, underneath the brutality is a narrative in which the war is resisted at every turn. But at every turn the war is stronger. It is of course, this particular war for this particular generation who come of age at the front.<sup>14</sup> For this group their whole being is defined by war and so they are doomed regardless of the war's outcome. There is hope only for soldiers of the older generation who have potentially already developed an identity as something other than soldiers.

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<sup>12</sup> Eksteins, "All Quiet on the Western Front and the Fate of a War." Such praise was common in early reviews for "Remarque's supposedly frank portrayal of human responses to war and the depiction of a pitiful dignity under suffering" (354).

<sup>13</sup> All quotes are taken from Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*. A.W. When (New York: Ballantine, 1996 [1928]).

<sup>14</sup> Some critics like Eksteins are even more specific. The novel is about the truth of the war, or even about Remarque's generation of veterans: "It was, first and foremost, the truth about Erich Maria Remarque in 1928" ("All Quiet on the Western Front and the Fate of a War," 362).

When the book opens Bäumer and his comrades have already been in combat for some time and the claim is already made that theirs is a lost generation. And they can already point to their old schoolmaster Kantorek, and what he represents of German culture and politics, as the cause. The values that had been instilled in them are so weak that they do not survive the first attack. But though the soldiers have been morally ruined for a future civilian life, they at least for the moment have each other. And they have adapted new values and practices and habitus based on these. They have been shown the error of their old beliefs which fail because they are inappropriate to war, but also because these soldiers were just boys dependent on their elders—they have not yet experienced life and so their beliefs are embodied only so deeply as their trust in their teachers' visions of society. They know already that they can never really go back, because they have been betrayed by the people who sent them to war: the German state and the German people, from the Kaiser to their parents and teachers.

Though morally lost, whether or not they have been psychologically traumatized is another question. Bäumer tells us how troubled he is by the experience, that the wound is always beneath the surface. The experience is physically and sensorially overwhelming. There is a physical terror of death, different from the moral affect of fear. There is the physical impact of bombardment. There is death all around. There is loss. But all of these seemingly obvious traumas of war produce an ambiguous, conflicted response from the soldiers. For instance, we are told immediately by soldiers just off the front line that the war would not be so bad "if



only one could get a little more sleep” (2). More significantly, we are shown throughout that traumatic experience is relative. Experience makes their response to danger relative: what was once the cause of affective distress becomes a new normal. New recruits understand nothing of the battlefield and break down in the terror of their first shelling—the experienced Bäumer admits to this himself—while the veterans have learned to numb themselves to it. At one point, Bäumer calmly makes pancakes during a bombardment even while his comrades have fled to safety: “after all, it means four pancakes more, and they are my favorite dish” (236). And while he can withstand such a moment of isolation with humor, the moment of his greatest terror and panic comes when he is separated from his comrades on a night patrol: “a senseless fear takes hold... I am alone and almost helpless in the dark... my hands tremble... an awful spasm of fear, a simple animal fear...” (210); he is paralyzed and can act to save himself only after hearing the voices of his friends in the distance.

Remarque also shows us relativity in traumatic loss and grief, the witnessing of suffering, and the moral value of killing. The veterans are moved to anguish by the killing and wounding of horses during a bombardment. They cannot endure the animals’ cries: “It is the moaning of the world, it is the martyred creation, wild with anguish, filled with terror, and groaning” (62). By contrast, the new recruits who reinforce their ranks and die so quickly do not move the emotions of the veterans. One newcomer lies dying in no-man’s land for days, close enough to the trenches that his calls and cries are heard, but he cannot be found. Remarque describes the scene only in the cold detail of their search and speculation of his circumstance; we are only

told that his cries are terrible, and that the men need no inducement to risk their lives in the search (124-5). Where the cries of the horses invoke sadness and pity, the lost soldier's cries only remind them of their own mortality. Of the recruits no name is ever mentioned and in the year long course of events no friends are made among the newcomers.

Despite all this the soldiers resist the forces tearing them down. They find value in little things. Their practices adapt with experience. Their values adapt. They recreate their own social order. And they numb themselves to their surroundings. But the story is not about the triumph over adversity, it is fundamentally about anomie—the relentless process of moral isolation of the individual from others. When they enlist they are cut off from the relationships that gave meaning to their old lives as schoolboys. They are cut off from the army in the trenches. They are cut off from each other in combat. There is a sense that all *could* turn out fine in the end if they could just stick together, living under their newly created rules of life, as long as they were provided the basic necessities and the killing stopped. Their greatest fear—as opposed to their terror of death—is the loss of these few remaining connections. And because the war does not stop, their isolation is the ultimate outcome.

The author tells us in his prefatory note that, “The book is neither an accusation nor a confession,” that his intent is “simply to tell of a generation of men who, even though they may have escaped shells, were destroyed by the war.”<sup>15</sup> This

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<sup>15</sup> Murdoch suggests that the most telling element of Remarque's note is the form the author claims the work will take. It is not (in the original German) a mere telling, it is a reporting (*berichten*), “reminding us that although the fictive narrator would have

point of a ruined generation is made time and again, in every chapter. The sense of ruin is not fatalism, the condition Durkheim sees in those “with futures pitilessly blocked and passions violently choked by oppressive discipline,”<sup>16</sup> though fatalism does appear as a theme in the book as ‘Chance’ regulating life and death on the battlefield, but only on the battlefield. But if Remarque’s story is simply a telling without accusation or confession, it is because an accusation is not necessary where responsibility is so easily placed. And if there is nothing to confess, it is because the men of this generation are victims, but not victims of the war itself. Rather, they are victims of politics. Bäumer represents the generation betrayed by the society who sent them to war. There is nothing in their circumstance that is either inevitable or arbitrary. The betrayal is to the soldier by the German state and people and all the cultural and political institutions there encompassed.

We see the betrayal in the title of the book itself, a point more obvious in the work’s German title *Im Westen Nicht Neues*. The title is taken from the closing paragraphs telling of Bäumer’s death in October 1918, “on a day that was so quiet and still on the whole front, that the army report confined itself to the single sentence: All quiet on the Western Front” (296). The German original, *im Westen sei nichts Neues zu melden*,<sup>17</sup> is more literally, “in the West there is nothing new to report.” Expressible only in this sort of deep irony, we see that the death of a soldier is in

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been dead for ten years when the book appeared, other soldiers had survived” (“From the Frog’s Perspective,” 179).

<sup>16</sup> Durkheim, *Suicide*, 276.

<sup>17</sup> Remarque, *Im Westen Nicht Neues*, 204.

itself of no military or political value, but the book is the story of the betrayals that make Bäumer's death meaningless—even for himself.

If the betrayal encompasses the German state and people, there are a few targets the soldiers can identify for having wronged them. As they debate the war's politics, one soldier holds the opinion of 'an old Front-hog' which he offers in rhyme:

*Give 'em all the same grub and all the same pay,  
And the war would be over and done in a day. (41)*

Another soldier proposes that in a declaration of war the ministers and generals from all sides should simply fight among themselves in an arena, winner-take-all, a solution "much simpler and more just than this arrangement, where the wrong people do the fighting" (41). If they can blame no one person for their circumstances, not even the Kaiser, they are aware enough to know the war would not have been fought had "twenty or thirty people in the world... said No... but they damned well said Yes" (203). They can recognize that on the one side, all the German "professors and parsons and newspapers" insist upon claiming the moral right, while the "French professors and parsons and newspapers" claim the moral truth of their position. When the most naïve soldier of the group, the only conscript, asks how a war begins, he is told, "Mostly by one country badly offending another." He replies, "A country? I don't follow. A mountain in Germany cannot offend a mountain in France. Or a river, or a wood, or a field of wheat." The first soldier is more specific, "One people offends another—," but the retort comes easily, "Then I haven't any business here at all... I don't feel myself offended" (204). The war is of no use to simple people on either side, but only of value to the powerful. While the naïve soldier cannot believe

someone so powerful as the Kaiser could have any earthly want, an older soldier explains that the Kaiser “has not had a war up till now. And every full-grown emperor requires at least one war...” Another, an uneducated peasant in his old life, reminds them the war will make the generals more famous than an emperor, and that there are “other people back behind there who profit by the war.” Still another, a childhood friend of Bäumer, thinks that the war is like a fever, “No one in particular wants it, and then all at once there it is.” In the end they realize all their talk will not make a difference and Remarque resolves the individual soldier’s nationalist politics to its core: “here he is. But that is the end of it; everything else he criticizes from his own practical perspective” (206-7).

The clearest story line of betrayal is Bäumer’s relationship with his former teacher Kantorek. It is Kantorek who encourages his class to enlist, but still Bäumer can place no specific blame on him, even for the death of a soldier Kantorek pressures into enlisting. Bäumer has recognized that the responsibility transcends his old school-master: “Where would the world be if one brought every man to book? There were thousands of Kantoreks, all of whom were convinced that they were acting for the best—in a way that cost them nothing.” Remarque then picks up, “And that is why they let us down so badly.” The blame for his generation’s loss is laid upon the older generations who should have guided them to maturity, because the trusted authority of their elders had been “associated in our minds with a greater insight and a more humane wisdom.” That their elders were simply wrong reveals itself immediately in battle when the soldiers learn that “death-throes are stronger” than the

patriotism they had preached (12-13). For Paul Bäumer and his classmates the entire vision of life provided to them is false, so returning to that old life, knowing what they now do, would be impossible. They are left only with images of their youth that seem as photographs of dead friends. “To-day we are burnt up by hard facts: like tradesmen we understand distinctions, and like butchers, necessities. We are no longer untroubled—we are indifferent. We might exist there; but should we really live there?” (122).

Bäumer does get the satisfaction of seeing Kantorek called up for service in the local home guard force where he is placed under the command of one of Bäumer’s former classmates, who abuses and humiliates his old teacher remorselessly while regaling him with his own worthless lessons: “You seem as though you can never learn. Inadequate, Kantorek, quite inadequate...”; and “Territorial Kantorek, we have the good fortune to live in a great age, we must embrace ourselves and triumph over hardship...”; and “in the trifles never lose sight of the great adventure” (78). Any humor or satisfaction in this, however, is short-lived as the story immediately turns to Bäumer visiting the mother of another classmate who refuses to accept his comforting lie that her son died without suffering.

Bäumer’s time home on leave is set after the book’s most intense combat, and serves to illustrate the soldier’s anomic existence in relation to civilian life. Going home is leaving behind the only social connections that can now matter.<sup>18</sup> Even well-

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<sup>18</sup> On this point, several critics have noted the changing voice of the narrator throughout the text: Bäumer, of course, speaks for himself, but his analysis—his claims about the war—always takes the first-person plural, denoting the social

meaning strangers cannot be trusted. He is offered a drink at the train station by a red cross volunteer: “she smiles at me foolishly, so obsessed with her own importance: ‘Just look, I am giving a soldier coffee!’—She calls me ‘Comrade,’ but I will have none of it” (156). Home just a few hours he is confronted in town by an officer of the local guard who berates him for not saluting: “You think you can bring your front-line manners here, what? Well, we don’t stand for that sort of thing. Thank God, we have discipline here!” (163). Paul is powerless to protest the idiocy. At home, only his dying mother can be trusted because she stops asking questions of his experience. She asks only once and accepts his insistence that life at the front is not so bad. He can forgive her because she already suffers herself. His father pesters him with questions about the war, but Bäumer finds the questions unbearable. He tries to evade his father’s morbid curiosity with amusing stories, but his father persists and Bäumer leaves the house. He meets an old teacher and head-master at the pub who offer him drinks and cigars, telling him “people know how much they are indebted to the soldiers.” In this interaction the questions the civilians ask are less important than their comments, comments that disregard his expert knowledge of the war. His presence simply spurs their own martial fantasies: they argue about what territories Germany should annex; they “expound just whereabouts in France the break-through must come”; and lecture Bäumer that the German troops must “shove ahead a bit out

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connections on whose behalf he speaks. The ‘we’ of the narrative alternates between Bäumer’s platoon and his generation of soldiers. In the final chapters, there is a dramatic shift to the first-person singular, before, ultimately, the narrative’s conclusion in the voice of an anonymous third-person. See Murdoch, “From the Frog’s Perspective”; Coker, *Men At War*.

there with your everlasting trench warfare—Smash through the johnnies and then there will be peace” (166-7). Bäumer shares his informed opinion on the possibility of such a break-through, but they dismiss it saying he knows nothing about it:

The details, yes..., but this relates to the whole. And of that you are not able to judge... You do your duty, you risk your lives, that deserves the highest honour... but first of all the enemy line must be broken through and then rolled up from the top. (167)

While Bäumer is very clearly alienated from his old social relations, Remarque also shows how the anomic condition arises not just in relation to other people, but to the knowledge they had once offered him as truth. That knowledge, the lessons society insisted he pursue, had shaped his understanding of himself, giving existence to a once vital habitus. Society’s betrayal of their own lessons destroys the truth of that old knowledge and leaves in Bäumer a cognitive void that he desperately wants to escape: “I cannot find my way back, I am shut out though I entreat earnestly and put forth all my strength.” Failing that, he copes by embracing the only habitus he now recognizes: “I am a soldier, I must cling to that” (172-3). Still, in his old bedroom, Bäumer looks to his old books, hoping they will take him back to his youth, but those lessons and the habitus have lost their vitality.

I stand there dumb. As before a judge.  
Dejected.  
Words, Words, Words—they do not reach me.  
Slowly I place the books back in the shelves.  
Nevermore.  
Quietly I go out of the room. (173)

When Bäumer’s leave is over he does not return immediately to the front. He is detailed as a guard over Russian prisoners, but the experience is not less damaging



than combat. The guards try their best to ignore the prisoners and avoid their gaze, but Bäumer finds himself looking and unable to turn away:

I know nothing of them except that they are prisoners; and that is exactly what troubles me. Their life is obscure and guiltless;—if I could know more of them... then my emotion would have an object and might become sympathy. But as it is I perceive behind them only the suffering of the creature, the awful melancholy of life and the pitilessness of men...

A word of command has made these silent figures our enemies; a word of command might transform them into our friends.<sup>19</sup> (193)

It is a realization that these and all enemy soldiers are far less dangerous to him and his comrades than his old schoolmasters or the officers appointed over them by the army. Even so, he knows “we would shoot at them again and they at us if they were free” (193-4). The recognition of the commonality of their existence frightens him:

I dare think this way no more. This way lies the abyss. It is not now the time but I will not lose these thoughts, I will keep them, shut them away until the war is ended. My heart beats fast: this is the aim, the great, the sole aim, that I have thought of in the trenches; that I have looked for as the only possibility of existence after this annihilation of all human feeling; this is a task that will make life afterward worthy of these hideous years. (194)

In enforcing their imprisonment, Bäumer experiences the same physiological reaction as bombardment in the trenches. It is a reminder of the betrayal, a reminder that political decisions transform ordinary people into enemies, that someone is responsible for robbing him of his humanity. But he cannot act on this knowledge now. This is the knowledge he will carry home from war and will form the basis of

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<sup>19</sup> Murdoch notes, “the importance of this passage for the novel and for Weimar is clear. The distancing from responsibility is as marked as the inclusivity implied by the first-person plural, and the questions of guilt and murder will be raised in [The Road Back] and elsewhere” (“From the Frog’s Perspective,” 190).

his future being, even though the memory will produce a response in him as surely as loud noise might reproduce the anxiety of bombardment. Paul Bäumer and his entire generation have been made wise in their experience. They have seen the truth of politics, “how peoples are set against one another, and in silence, unknowingly, foolishly, obediently, innocently slay one another... that the keenest brains of the world invent weapons and words to make it yet more refined and enduring.” Despite the knowledge, of himself he can only say, “I am young, I am twenty years old; yet I know nothing of life but despair, death, fear and fatuous superficiality cast over an abyss of sorrow” (263).<sup>20</sup>

In the end, Paul Bäumer will lose all of his friends to the war, and in such a circumstance we might normally say he ‘has nothing left’. But Remarque concludes the scene of Bäumer’s last friend’s death with a puzzle. Bäumer tells us instead, “I know nothing more” (291). It is the finality of his learning. Bäumer survives into the final days of the war, utterly alone in the crowd of nameless, meaningless others. His final thought before we learn from an unnamed narrator that Bäumer is killed is worth considering in full:

I am very quiet. Let the months and years come, they can take nothing from me, they can take nothing more. I am so alone, and so without hope that I can confront them without fear. The life that has borne me through these years is still in my hands and my eyes. Whether I have subdued it, I know not. But so

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<sup>20</sup> Murdoch (*Ibid.*) sees the novel’s discursive functions in this passage, in the “almost exculpatory words... clearly directed at the ex-soldiers who survived the war,” and in the question it suggests of “how the older generation would react if they called them to account.”

long as it is there it will seek its own way out, heedless of the will that is within me. (295)

It is a difficult passage to dissect, particularly in light of Bäumer's narrative of knowing rather than having. But I think its meaning is this. He still lives but possesses no habitus. Without friends and with no one to return to after the war, his social being is dead. He has nothing but the life inside him and the knowledge of his experience. It is knowledge so deeply embodied that it is no longer his to possess. He has become only what he knows. Though he might one day find the will to control it, no one will ever change his belief in being—an unending isolation in the experience of war and knowledge of betrayal. If there is hope in his anomic existence, it is only that he lives.

### **Ideological Betrayal**

The 1954 novel *The Bridge over the River Kwai* by Pierre Boulle<sup>21</sup> is rooted in the author's experience in southeast Asia during World War II. Boulle served as a member of the Free French forces engaged against the Japanese and Vichy colonial government, by whom he was imprisoned.<sup>22</sup> It is not specifically a story of trauma, though its outcome is easily imagined as traumatizing. It is simply the story of how

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<sup>21</sup> All quotes are taken from: Pierre Boulle, *The Bridge Over the River Kwai*, trans. Xan Fielding (New York: Presidio Press, 2007 [1954]).

<sup>22</sup> Boulle, *My Own River Kwai*. Boulle's biographer Lucille Becker claims that Boulle's inspiration for Nicholson was found in his own experience with "Vichyite officers and civil servants who let themselves be caught in a de facto betrayal of France as a result of too strict an attachment to the rules of military discipline" (*Pierre Boulle*, 48).

inappropriate adherence to moral principles can produce chaos in an anomic environment. The book tells the story of the failure in war of a single moral principle: individual action.<sup>23</sup>

The novel is, on its surface, both an adventure story and a story of the triumph of western culture over the barbarity of the uncivilized world—in the long tradition of western orientalist literature. The novel is structured around two intersecting plot lines: the first, the construction of a Japanese rail bridge; the second, the attempted destruction of the bridge by a small team of British commandos. The story begins when a British army battalion in colonial Malaya is forced to surrender to the conquering Japanese. The unit is sent to the jungles of Siam as forced labor to build a railway bridge of great strategic importance to the Japanese war effort. The imperialist superiority of the battalion's commander Colonel Nicholson and his vision

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<sup>23</sup> Boulle's analysis of the moral power of action begins in his own experience in southeast Asia. He later writes in his autobiography *My Own River Kwai* (1967) of the power anticipation held over him and other colonials as the war approached:

*kept in a permanent state of restlessness by the equatorial sun, the upheavals of Europe which we followed feverishly every evening on the wireless and also, it must be admitted, a natural tendency to impetuosity and ebullience, the very tendency perhaps that had drawn us to Malaya in the first place. We were romantics.*

*We were romantics! The course of the war, the series of disasters that had overwhelmed our country, assumed in our eyes an element of wonder that was even more fabulous and tragic for anyone listening to the news in a plantation tucked away in the middle of the jungle, and cruelly conscious of his isolation and helplessness. It is not surprising that when the war spread to South-East Asia our first reaction was a feeling of hope: at least we were not to be eternally excluded from the epic. Nor should it be held against us that our ambitions were exaggerated and that the schemes we contemplated hardly tallied our capacities. We were romantics: amiable, touching, bumptious and probably incurable romantics. (7-8)*

of himself as a modern 'great man' of action inspires his men to complete the project in little time and to western standards of construction, despite the direct threat the completed bridge and rail line pose to the British war effort.

The principle and chauvinism of Nicholson sets him immediately in conflict with his Japanese captors. Nicholson's greatness depends on setting himself apart from both the Japanese and his own men. Despite denigrating the Japanese as barbaric, he accepts their legal authority over his battalion. He will not, however, relinquish his own authority over his troops, nor the authority of laws of the 'civilized world'. He puts his soldiers to work under Japanese orders, his own orders amplifying those of their captors, so that "the men in his unit behaved well and fared badly" (8). But Nicholson insists that the Japanese abide by the Hague Convention's prohibition on the forced labor of officers, a point the Japanese commander insists on violating. Nicholson's position is motivated by his certainty that his soldiers' best interests lie in maintaining the regimentation of British military life, for its inherent qualities and to prevent their moral contamination by the Japanese. Even in the harsh conditions of captivity, Nicholson is convinced that "Nothing's worse for morale than inactivity, and their physical welfare depends largely on their morale. Troops who are bored... are troops doomed in advance to defeat" (93). The soldiers must "feel they're still being commanded by us and not these baboons. As long as they cling to this idea, they'll be soldiers, not slaves" (10). Despite weeks of beatings and imprisonment for Nicholson and his officers, and despite the pleas of his own medical officer, Nicholson does not relent on his principle.

In the absence of their officers, the British soldiers take action to stymie progress on the Japanese bridge. They take seriously their duty as soldiers to oppose the efforts of their enemy, and are infuriated by their captivity and enslavement. They are moved to action by the principled stand of their commander and his strength of will to resist the torture of the Japanese in the only way they can, competing with each other:

to see who could be the slackest or, better still, who could commit the most elementary blunders under an ostentatious show of willingness. There was no punishment sufficiently severe to curb their insidious activities, and the little Japanese engineer was sometimes reduced to tears of desperation. The guards were too spread out to superintend all of them, and too stupid to spot the culprits. (36)

Their resistance effectively brings the project to a standstill and forces the Japanese commander to capitulate to Nicholson's demands. But when Nicholson is released he is appalled by the soldiers' "disgraceful inefficiency" and the state of construction. He orders his officers to reinstate his old standards of discipline and punish any "sabotage or malingering" by their soldiers (47). Nicholson also refuses to acknowledge the initiative taken by the soldiers in the absence of his leadership, telling the officers:

Through these savages they've fallen into idle, slipshod habits unbecoming to members of His Majesty's forces. We'll have to be patient with them and handle them carefully, for they can't be held directly responsible for the present state of affairs. What they need is discipline, and they haven't had it. It's no good using violence instead. You only have to look at the result—a lot of disconnected activity, but not a single positive achievement. These Orientals have shown how incompetent they are, when it comes to management. (46)

But the soldiers, indoctrinated to the belief in the value of a job well done and a distaste for subversion, quickly fall back into line and with little protest. Their civilized, British morality requires they “make a loyal and considerable effort in return for their daily bread,” in pursuit of “something solid and constructive” (93).

Nicholson scraps all the work his men had completed while the British officers had been imprisoned. He organizes the entire project on his own terms, assigning his own engineer to design a bridge to western standards of construction and manage the project to western standards of efficiency. They will build a structure worthy of their British identity.<sup>24</sup> In so doing, the British battalion removes itself from the larger war effort. They stop fighting the Japanese in any military sense. What remains is only the ideological struggle to complete the job and prove racial superiority over the Japanese.<sup>25</sup> Nicholson, in fact, convinces the Japanese to undertake their own share in the manual labor, while the British officers enjoy the protection of the Hague Convention’s prohibition on the forced labor of officers. The construction of the bridge is Nicholson’s achievement in every sense.

If, under Nicholson’s leadership, the British soldiers are convinced they are not slaves to the Japanese, they are in reality slaves to Nicholson’s vision of action.

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<sup>24</sup> According to Becker, “The irony here, of which Boule is quite aware and in which he delights, is that, in truth, the Japanese had just beaten the Allies in a campaign that showed their remarkable command of very difficult engineering and transport problems. They were perfectly capable of building their own bridges” (*Pierre Boule*, 48).

<sup>25</sup> Nicholson fits Arendt’s ideal model of the European imperialist bureaucrat who “are not supposed to have general ideas about political matters at all; their patriotism should never lead them so far astray that they believe in the inherent goodness of political principles of their own country” (see *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 214).

The British commander is convinced that he is saving the soldiers from themselves. Conditions in relation to the Japanese do improve, and even the sceptical medical officer is convinced of Nicholson's effect on morale and of the superiority of western organization. In the end, though, once the bridge is complete the men are all shipped off to another camp where their ultimate fate is unknown. Boulle only leaves us to wonder what might become of them and what might have been but for Nicholson's vision and action.

While British sensibility demands Nicholson build a bridge he can be proud of, the sensibility of British commanders still fighting the Japanese demands it be destroyed. A small band of British commandos, equally motivated by imperialist chauvinism and the ideal of individual action, undertake a meticulous effort to destroy the bridge in order to halt the Japanese advance toward India across Britain's south Asian colonies. Boulle's deep sense of irony puts the competing visions of action in constant conflict. As the commandos plan the mission they lament the condition of the British prisoners: "If only they knew this bridge of theirs was never going to be used, it might raise their morale a bit" (106). During the reconnaissance of the bridge by one commando he cannot help but wonder at the high morale of Nicholson's troops and the obvious sense that they have not been defeated by their Japanese captors. He reports back to his superiors that the British prisoners "make it a point of honor to behave as though their guards weren't there," and that despite the brutal conditions "they couldn't be taken for slaves... I could see it in their faces." An



officer responds, “The British soldier’s got any amount of guts when he’s really up against it” (120-21).

In the end however, Boule insists on the ultimate absurdity<sup>26</sup> of glorifying individual action in the collective sphere of war. The commandos are found out at the last moment. After carefully planting the explosives on the bridge’s piling, the commandos’ luck fails them the morning the first train is set to cross Nicholson’s bridge. After setting the charges on the bridge, the commando team must await the first train’s arrival, each of the three British soldiers isolated from the others with their own responsibility in the action. Downstream, Joyce, the junior commando who has been tasked with the bridge’s detonation, anxiously observes. Though he has thus far proved himself capable to his superiors, he has dreaded and questioned his ability to take the ultimate individual action: the killing of another human being at close quarters. Now, he has nothing but his mission and his own thoughts. His only weapon is his knife. He is confident in his work, and looks back on his civilian life, his old self, and the tedium, monotony, and anonymity of his work life as an engineer. His only accomplishment in life had been two years of testing and experiments to reduce the weight of a steel girder by a mere two and a half pounds. As he fitfully sleeps in his jungle observation post he dreams of the girder, “that bit of metal... which had occupied the whole of his youth,” but the vision of the girder is replaced by a vision

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<sup>26</sup> Boule understands absurdity as the “lack of congruity between the motives explaining a certain conduct and the results achieved when one follows to the letter the ‘good’ principles motivating this particular behavior.” Quoted in Becker, *Pierre Boule*, 47.

of “DESTRUCTION.” He wakes in the dark and sees the shadow of the bridge, the sight of which assures him that “His life would no longer be the same after this. He was already tasting the fruits of success while witnessing his own metamorphosis” (174-75). In destroying the bridge he will destroy his old habitus, defined by its utter lack of action, and replace it with one founded on greatness.

But with the sunrise, Joyce is briefly thrown back into the worthlessness and futility of his old self. He awakens to find the river has dropped in the night and the detonation wire leading to his position is exposed. He cannot leave his hiding spot to cover it up, for fear of being found out and of jeopardizing the mission completely. He knows that only the weight of the locomotive, due to arrive in a few hours, will ensure the effectiveness of the explosion and destruction of the bridge. He must wait, and as he waits he realizes that the mission and his own great action will rely on his ability to kill an enemy if discovered. He wrestles with his conscience, searching out a principle to justify this ultimate action. He thinks of his sense of duty and his hatred of the enemy, but realizes those ideals are “ludicrous irritants.” He thinks of his fellow commandos and leaders relying on his decision to act, but even this relationship is “barely sufficient to induce him to sacrifice his own life.” The promise of the mission’s success in itself is not sufficient motive to kill another human being. It is only when he remembers the hollowness of his old self, the vision of the girder and the flashing vision of ‘DESTRUCTION’ that Joyce finds a principle “sufficiently consistent, sufficiently complete, sufficiently powerful to make him rise above the disgust and horror of his wretched carcass” (183-84). In war, Joyce finds an escape

from what Arendt calls the “spiritual and social homelessness” of the modern subject’s condition of “atomization, of their loss of social status along with which they lost the whole sector of communal relationship in whose framework common sense makes sense.”<sup>27</sup> By killing with his knife and saving the mission he will be transformed, escaping from his life among the superfluous masses, into a man of independent action.

But Joyce is too inexperienced to know that “it’s no good cutting any old throat. You’ve got to cut the right one” (201). Joyce is not discovered by the Japanese but by Colonel Nicholson, who hurries down to the river bank, dragging along the Japanese commander, to investigate the exposed detonation wire. Faced with discovery and, worse, the possibility of failure, his new found motivation moves Joyce to action and he kills the Japanese commander. He is physically and morally spent in his effort. He begins to drag himself from under the lifeless body of the Japanese officer to regain the detonator. Nicholson remains “rooted to the spot, petrified by the suddenness of the scene...” Joyce breathlessly announces himself, “Officer! British officer, sir? The bridge is going up. Stand clear!” Nicholson can only slowly grasp the significance of the situation, saying to himself, “Blow up the bridge,” first as a question then as repeated exclamations (192-93). The detonation

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<sup>27</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 352. This same sense of superfluity motivated Boule’s decision before the war to leave France for the French colonies in Southeast Asia. Ironically, his experience with the equally dehumanizing colonial bureaucracies “explain his antipathy to anything that dehumanizes the individual as well as his fear that from this milieu a strange synthetic creature will finally emerge with no resemblance to the human race” (see Becker, *Pierre Boule*, 13).

will destroy the accomplishment of the greater man, Colonel Nicholson, who has no qualms taking the life of Joyce with his own hands. And Joyce, as Nicholson's subordinate, surrenders himself to the fate and actions of his social, institutional, and moral superior.

The final outcome is reported to the British forces in India by Major Warren, the only surviving commando. Warren, who watched events unfold from his position on a hill above the river, is certain that Joyce had understood in his final moments that he had committed a fatal error in killing the "wrong colonel." Warren describes the details of the physical and moral contest between the unproven Joyce and the tested and convinced greatness of Nicholson:

His hand was close to the hilt of his knife. He seized it. He stiffened. I could almost see his muscles flexing. For a moment I thought he had made up his mind. But it was too late. He had no strength left. He had given all he had. He was unable to do anything more—or else unwilling to. He dropped his knife and gave in. Total surrender, sir. You know what it's like, when you have to give up completely? He just resigned himself to his fate. He moved his lips and uttered just one word. No one will ever know if it was an oath or a prayer, or even a polite conventional expression of utter despair. He wasn't bloody-minded, sir, or if he was he didn't show it. He always treated his superior officers with respect. Good God, Shears and I only just managed to stop him springing to attention each time he spoke to either of us! I bet you he said 'sir' before passing out, sir. (203)

Though Nicholson is killed by another commando, his great action—the bridge and Japanese rail line—survives the commando raid, despite the material harm its existence might do to the British war effort. Warren's report to his superior officer is an attempt to make sense of it all and a lament on the power that independent action holds over them all. He is sure that Nicholson had been steeped in the chauvinism of British imperialism, certain that the colonel recited Kipling as he led

the efforts of his men to build the monument of imperial superiority: “Yours is the earth and everything that’s in it, and—which is more—you’ll be a man my son,” Warren muses (202).<sup>28</sup> Warren knows, because he is no different, that Nicholson like all such men must have been driven by his sense of duty and satisfaction in making real his vision.<sup>29</sup> It is, as Arendt might argue, an example of the bureaucratized racism of the European imperialists that create “a certain conservation, or perhaps petrification, of boyhood noblesse which preserved *and* infantilized Western moral standards.”<sup>30</sup>

But Nicholson’s adherence to principle reveals to Warren the ultimate fruitlessness of such idealism. Nicholson’s failing is not so much his own, but the

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<sup>28</sup> The line comes from Rudyard Kipling’s poem “If”.

<sup>29</sup> Boule’s autobiography suggests his belief in the war’s perpetuation of this tendency among survivors, even as they recognize its pathology:

*What happens after the tumultuous elation of the turmoil depends on the intensity of the emotions experienced, on the degree to which the mind has been affected and on the particular manner in which each individual reacts to the return to normality, his ears still buzzing at night with persistent memories. Some, incurably intoxicated by the philter they have drunk, try for all they are worth to prolong the spell... Others, the greater number, recover, either willingly or reluctantly, the equilibrium of normal life. This is what I personally tried to do...*

*It so happened that I was unable to follow this sensible course. Was it the memory of the Burma Road, of the Nam-Na rapids, or perhaps the endless hours of meditation spent in solitary confinement that had made regular employment seem flat and uninteresting? I had become incapable of doing an ordinary job. For a long time I refused to admit this fact; I struggled against it and tortured myself, until it finally dawned on me one day with startling clarity. After that I felt relieved...*

*Was I not clearly appointed by Destiny to make a name for myself in Literature? (212-13)*

<sup>30</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 210.

product of the ideal itself. It is the “idiotic worship of action,” to which, Warren now recognizes, “our little typists subscribe as much as our great generals!” (202). If there is truth in the ideal, then collective action is meaningless, because society and its lesser men must always subordinate themselves to the will of the great men of action. There can be no accountability for such men, no matter the consequence for others, when society’s guiding moral principle lies in “the intrinsic quality of the effort.” Alternatively, if what Warren has learned from his experience is true, then the society built upon such principles is illusory. The reality of our condition, which war makes visible, is instead, “simply hell afflicted with devilish standards which warp our judgment, lead the way to every form of dishonesty, and culminate in a result which is bound to be deplorable” (202). Boule’s lesson of war is simply that in collective life moral truth cannot originate in the individual.

### **The Sins of the Individual**

To this point, the examples I have offered of the moral violations soldiers experience in war have been external to the individual psyche. Yet, it is no mistake that the first great novel to emerge from America’s post-9/11 wars, Kevin Powers’ *The Yellowbirds*,<sup>31</sup> a finalist for the 2012 National Book Award, is a story of an individual soldier’s moral failure. Set in the semi-fictional city of Al Tafari in northern Iraq, paralleling Powers’ time as a US Army soldier in the actual city Tal Afar in Nineveh

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<sup>31</sup> All quotes are taken from Kevin Powers, *The Yellow Birds* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2012).

province,<sup>32</sup> the novel tells the story of US Army privates John Bartle (“Bart”) and Daniel Murphy (“Murph”) and their realization that war transcends the individuals who make it. They find that war is a thing in itself with no regard to the will, desire, or obligation of its participants, and immune to the whims of fate.

Powers makes the point in the book’s opening sentence: “The war tried to kill us in the spring.”<sup>33</sup> With the war’s agency thus established, Powers expands on its power over its participants:

It tried to kill us every day, but it had not succeeded. Not that our safety was preordained. We were not destined to survive. The fact is, we were not destined at all. The war would take what it could get. It was patient. It didn’t care about objectives, or boundaries, whether you were loved by many or not at all.” (2-3)

The realization in itself is devastating to the habitus of the young soldiers, raised in an era when the neoliberal American ethic does not just valorize the principle of

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<sup>32</sup> One critic points to the importance of the name shift by Powers as a “clear attempt on Powers’ part to create a degree of distance between Bartle’s experiences in Iraq and his own.” The author’s act of distancing creates a “connective dissonance” between the American and Iraqi imaginaries that helps create an “opening of an imaginative space in which new empathic ‘ties’... might begin to be emerge” (O’Gorman, “Refiguring Difference,” 550–51).

<sup>33</sup> Christine Sylvester sees this opening line as useful in her critique of international relations scholarship. Sylvester asks: “Is the author anthropomorphizing war as a fictional technique of enhancement, a way of enlarging the realm of truth to fit the highly fraught setting he depicts? ... Or, does war know the international, its limits and its opportunities to go on and on, composed as it is of people who shape and are shaped by the range of activities they undertake in circumstances of armed collective violence?” IR’s understanding of war, limited by scholarship that has only accounted for the beginnings and endings of wars, might be improved by accounting for war, like Powers does, as an ontology “that operated capriciously, slyly, often lied and was in far more control of outcomes than those using war to attain their goals” (“Experiencing War,” 669).

independent action, its success has ensured the moral and social atomization of its subjects (a point that will be expanded on in the coming chapters). It is all the more traumatic as experience teaches the two privates that all they had known of war is wrong. After the war, as Bartle tries to make sense of the war and his place in it, he will realize the moral impossibility of either the promised hope of personal fulfillment in military service, or, failing that, of surviving the war by embracing his own insignificance:

I'd been trained to think war was the great unifier, that it brought people closer together than any other activity on earth. Bullshit. War is the great maker of solipsists: how are you going to save my life today? Dying would be one way. If you die, it becomes more likely that I will not. You're nothing, that's the secret: a uniform in a sea of numbers, a number in a sea of dust. And we somehow thought those numbers were a sign of our own insignificance. We thought if we remained ordinary, we would not die. We confused correlation with cause and saw a special significance in the portraits of the dead, arranged neatly next to the number corresponding to their place on the growing list of casualties we read in the newspapers, as indications of an ordered war. (12)

As the war defies all their expectations in its indifference to heroes and cowards alike, and having no hope in their individual efforts to oppose it, the two privates grasp for hope in the power of fate, and the count of America's war dead takes on vital importance. The approaching death of the one thousandth American service member in the late summer of 2004 becomes the object of their hope in the war's moral vacuum. To live or to be killed beyond that number would be an escape from the war's irresistible animus; to be the thousandth killed would be unspeakable. Bartle will eventually realize that the imposed sense of significance by hoping in his own



insignificance was only a survival tool, and any sense of order in war's relentless effort to kill them could only ever have been imagined:

I didn't die. Murph did... I believe unswervingly that when Murph was killed, the dirty knives that stabbed him were addressed "To whom it may concern." Nothing made us special. Not living. Not dying. Not even being ordinary. (14)

In his first experience of combat, Bartle realizes the necessity of viewing death and violence as commonplace, the normal state of existence in war. After being splattered with the blood of his platoon's Iraqi interpreter, a death that does not count towards the thousandth and so has little meaning, he is unsurprised by the cruelty of his ambivalence. To be ambivalent towards death is to reject the neoliberal presumption of the equal value of all human life. With death all around, only special circumstances of death, "the bullet with your name on it, the IED buried just for you," (11) need be given much thought.

The lesson in itself may be damaging, but becomes more so given Bartle's special moral burden. Murphy is assigned to Bartle's team right out of basic training, a few days after his eighteenth birthday and shortly before they deploy to Iraq. Their relationship, though it becomes very intimate, is at first imposed by the Army and unwelcomed by Bartle. Their team leader Sergeant Sterling, who has already been to Iraq and knows its lessons, makes Murphy accountable to Bartle, who is a few years older and has been in the Army for two years. Sterling tells the new soldier, "All right little man..., I want you to get in Bartle's back pocket and I want you to stay there. Do you understand?" But Murphy does not answer; Bartle answers for him and the two walk away. Sterling calls after them, "You guys seriously need to unfuck

yourselves. None of you people get it” (34). Bartle does not understand Sterling’s anger or intent. He assumes responsibility for Murphy by answering for him, but Sterling is actually imposing an obligation on Murphy alone. Bartle has no sense of how moral obligation operates, as he has been indoctrinated within a society that demands it in some circumstances without any clear foundation to justify one’s moral entanglements with its other members. Because of this, Bartle fears responsibility. Joining the Army only to escape his lack of prospects in small town America, he had been relieved to learn in his time at basic training that as a private in a vast hierarchical institution he “would never have to make a decision again” (33).

And so the oaths he takes—before the war teaches him otherwise—bear no moral weight. Military service, to Bartle, implies an idealized vision of comradeship that operates of its own accord. But Sterling demands of his privates a personal oath of loyalty to him before their deployment: “Tell me you’ll do what I say. Every. Fucking. Time.” He wants them to promise, to say it out loud, not just offer him an empty ‘sure thing’. He needs them to understand that in Iraq, “It’s gonna be a goat fuck... People are going to die... It’s statistics” (39). The brief exchange, the true intent of which is lost on the two privates, is crucial to the story’s outcome. First, and most importantly, the oath relieves the two of any accountability for the other, shifting accountability for both wholly to Sterling, who is the embodiment of military altruism. Second, the two completely misunderstand Sterling’s invocation of statistics: he wants them to understand the stakes of their oath to him, that his

experience and knowledge will lower the risk of *their* deaths; but, for the two privates, his words become the source of their obsession with the war's death toll.

Bartle, understanding none of this, unwittingly deepens his moral obligation for Murphy. On the eve of their deployment, Bartle finds himself alone with Murphy's mother, who thinks the pair are already good friends. She promises to take good care of the two of them, sending lots of care packages while they are in Iraq, and in return she presumes that Bartle will look out for her son. Like Sterling, she demands he speak it aloud, which Bartle does, his actual intent only to soothe the mother's anxiety in the moment and escape an awkward situation. Sterling overhears the oath and confronts Bartle afterward. He explains to the sergeant that he was "just trying to make her feel better... It's not a big deal." Sterling is enraged and punches him twice in the face, leaving him bleeding in the snow, "Report me if you want. I don't even fucking care anymore" (47).

Once in Iraq, Bartle gains enough perspective to recognize the emptiness of oaths. In a speech before they begin an attack into the city of Al Tafari that will change the course of their lives, their colonel tries to rouse his troops' morale in a "half-assed Patton imitation." He tells them what's on the line, dismissing their value as individuals by acknowledging that some of them will not come back from the fight, an action that will however give their families "a distinction beyond all others." Bartle recognizes the moral inappropriateness of the colonel's final exhortation: "We're counting on you, boys. The people of the United States are counting on you. You may never do anything this important again in your lives" (87-89). The private

realizes what the senior officer cannot. Theirs will be the third American attack on the same enemy held ground, but the colonel's speech invokes for Bartle a comparison of his own circumstances with the narrative of his grandfather's experience in WWII, with its constant forward movement, purpose, and vital importance. In the historical comparison, Bartle sees through to the officer's ignorance of the war they are fighting and the emptiness of his moral call to action.

During the attack, they come across a dying American soldier from another platoon, and several crowd around as he is being tended to by the medics, all in anticipation that the dying soldier might say some important final word. Bartle is distracted in conversation with Sterling about the dead soldier, before recognizing the event's impact on Murphy and his own inability to intervene:

I turned and saw Murph kneeling next to the body. His hands were on his thighs. I could have gone to Murph, but I did not. I didn't want to. I didn't want to be responsible for him. I had enough to worry about. I was disintegrating, too. How was I supposed to keep us both intact? It is possible that I broke my promise in that very moment, that if I'd gone to comfort him a second earlier, he might not have broken himself. I don't know. He didn't look distraught, he looked curious. He touched the body, straightened the collar, put the boy's head in his lap. (120)

The attack continues and in its course Bartle accepts that the war's demands on his survival will not permit him to bear responsibility for Murphy, and also that his own altruistic dependence on Sterling is necessary. Afterwards, back in the relative safety of the American base, he slowly notices Murphy's absences and distance. He looks back on their experience, trying to figure out when and where he lost Murphy, "somehow thinking that if I could figure out where he had begun to slide down the curve of the bell that I could do something about it." He is frustrated in the effort by

the subtlety of his comrade's change and his own uncertainty of what they have experienced:

But these are subtle shifts, and trying to distinguish them is like trying to measure the degrees of gray when evening comes. It's impossible to identify the cause of anything, and I began to see the war as a big joke..., for how desperately I wanted to measure the particulars of Murph's new, strange behavior and trace it back to one moment, to one cause, to one thing I would not be guilty of. And I realized... that the joke was in fact on me. Because how can you measure deviation if you don't know the mean? There was no center in the world. The curves of all our bells were cracked. (154-55)

In the references to statistics—bell curves and deviations—Bartle has begun to understand Sterling's amoral, nonfatalistic invocation of chance in war. Sterling has known that war exists in an empirically distinct reality where old principles do not apply. People are killed by war, but one's chances for survival are improved by adaptation, the appropriateness of which can only be measured by experience. Still, the measurement will only indicate correlation, not causation. As well, the adaptation cannot be measured against the norms of civilian life, despite the inevitability of that occurring. Bartle looks back and can find no cause for Murphy's social withdrawal—the evidence of which insists his own actions are a correlated variable. So he interrogates himself, particularly the promise made to Murphy's mother, but not fully remembering exactly what he had promised: "Bring him home? What, in one piece? At all...? Would I have failed if he wasn't happy, if he was no longer sane?" (155).

He goes to Sterling with his worries, but Sterling—being already accountable for Murphy—knows the circumstance and where it is he disappears to, Powers' reminder that Bartle really has no reason to be responsible for Murphy, which in his actions he has already abdicated. Sterling knows that in the war's moral reality

Murphy is already a dead man, a fact that Bartle refuses to acknowledge. Sterling tells him, “There’s only one way home for real, Private. You’ve got to stay deviant in this motherfucker” (156). Sterling is explaining to Bartle their anomic break from their previous existence. He has already learned that there is no greater meaning to their experience of war, at least not in any sense the inexperienced might recognize. When he says that statistically people will die, that is all he is saying. It is a bare fact that negates all previous value judgments about death. It is the new guiding principle by which life operates. Sterling understands this and so is not in an anomic condition while he is at war and in charge of the limited sphere he controls. Bartle, however, continues to be ruled by his oath, while still recognizing that the whole unit has descended into this anomie, at least in relation to previous moral standards: “We were unaware of even our own savagery now: the beatings and the kicked dogs, the searches and the sheer brutality of our presence. Each action was a page in an exercise book performed by rote. I didn’t care” (159).

Murphy’s withdrawal is an attempt to try to find something meaningful, a refusal to adapt to their condition, and so he begins routinely observing a female medic from afar. When Bartle remembers his oath, he finally discovers Murphy and watches with him as the girl is unable to save a wounded Iraqi boy brought to the base by helicopter. She sits alone and cries after the boy dies, and Bartle comes to understand his comrade’s motive:

the small area where she was; it might have been the last habitat for gentleness and kindness that we’d ever know. So it made sense to watch her softly sobbing in the open space of a dusty piece of ground. And I understood why he came and why I couldn’t go, not just then at least, because one never

knows if what one sees will disappear forever. So sure, Murph wanted to find a place where compassion still happened, but that wasn't really it. He wanted to choose. He wanted to want... He wanted to have one memory he'd made of his own volition to balance out the shattered remnants of everything he hadn't asked for.<sup>34</sup> (165)

But the girl is killed in a mortar attack. Murphy, now devoid of hope, walks naked off the base and into Al Tifar where he is captured and his body mutilated by an unstated enemy. An all-out search is made of the town, but Murphy's body is found by Sterling and Bartle alone. Because Sterling has failed in his obligation, and because their actions will occur independent of the Army and independent of the war, he defers moral authority in this brief moment to Bartle.<sup>35</sup> Bartle, who knows he has failed in his obligation to Murphy's mother, understands what he is now morally bound to do given what he now knows. With Sterling's help, he throws Murphy's body into the Tigris River, where it will never be recovered. Motivated originally to spare the feelings of the mother, the situation demands he do the same now—an act of selflessness on the mother's behalf, not simply the escape from an uncomfortable situation—so that she never will know the truth or pain of her son's actual fate. Were

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<sup>34</sup> The scene can, of course, be easily criticized for its uncritical reproduction of women in war, even female soldiers, as 'beautiful souls' who must be defended by men who are more authentic soldiers. See, for example Sjoberg, *Gender, War, & Conflict*, who cites Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). However, the accuracy of Powers' claim to the empirical truth of such an event as a moral practice in the US Army, circa 2004 and almost certainly still in 2016, is unimpeachable.

<sup>35</sup> Sterling's deference is fleeting. As soon as they have placed Murphy's body in the river Sterling reclaims his authority and kills the Iraqi hermit who has helped them recover Murphy. Powers' work thus becomes "a novel of *two* lives lost in the wilderness, and of the sharp, absurd imbalance in the perceived value attributed to each" (O'Gorman, "Refiguring Difference," 551, emphasis in original).

Bartle to comply with less socially deviant norms of truth, the outcome would be morally unacceptable:

[Murphy's body] would land in Dover, and someone would receive it, with a flag, and the thanks of a grateful nation, and in a moment of weakness his mother would turn up the lid of the casket and see her son, Daniel Murphy, see what had been done to him, and he would be buried and forgotten by all but her, as she sat alone on her rocking chair in the Appalachians long into every evening, forgetting herself, no longer bathing, no longer sleeping, the ashes of cigarettes she smoked becoming long and seeming always about to fall to her feet. And we'd remember too, because we would have had the chance to change it. (207)

Though they remain in Iraq for another four months, Powers insists that Bartle will have nothing else worth saying about the war. The war ends with Murphy's death—perhaps there is, as for Paul Bäumer, nothing left for him to know. Still, Bartle and Sterling are both unable to live with their moral failures—their sins. Sterling, after returning to the US, immediately finds an opportunity to return to Iraq, where he understands moral truth. Bartle learns, about a year after Murphy's death, that Sterling has killed himself after accusations of his possible role in the killing of Iraqi civilians. Though the investigators call his death an accident, Bartle knows it is the one action Sterling had ever taken “truly for himself, and it had been the last act of his short, disordered life” (187). But the investigation leads to rumors of what might have happened to Murphy, and so also leads to Bartle.

After Murphy's death, however, Bartle cannot reconcile his—now two—betrayals of Murphy's mother, and in his desperate need to make sense he is driven to “pick up a pencil and write a letter to a dead boy's mother, to write it in his name, having known him plenty long enough to know it was not his way to call his mother



‘Mom’” (30); even after the Army has told her that her son is missing in action. He knows it is an act of cowardice, accepting that the “debt would come due, but not now, please not now, anything for a little more time” (179). With yet another sin hanging over him, he is unable to adapt to civilian life after returning from the war and leaving the Army. He is paralyzed by a complex mixture of the lingering affective distress of combat, grief over Murphy’s death, guilt for the oaths he has violated, and shame for who he has become. Mostly, he is paralyzed by his thoughts, of memories of what happened and things he cannot remember but for which he blames himself, “on account of the sheer vividness of scenes that looped on the red-green linings of my closed eyelids” (134). Bartle struggles to put into words what it is he had done in a way that others might understand, as he has not yet learned any other method of making sense. After Sterling’s death, Army investigators contact Bartle’s mother. She tries to convince Bartle to tell her of what happened in Iraq, but he cannot answer. He only thinks to himself:

What fucking happened? That’s not even the question... How do you answer the unanswerable? To say what happened, the mere facts, the disposition of events in time, would come to seem like a kind of treachery... It is not enough to say what happened. Everything happened. (148)

When he is ultimately found by the Army’s investigator and confronted with the letter to Murphy’s mother he cannot find a way to truthfully answer. He simply lacks the means:

If writing it was wrong, then I was wrong. If writing it was not wrong, enough of what I’d done had been wrong and I would accept whatever punishment it carried... None of it made sense. Nothing followed from anything else and I was required to answer for a story that did not exist. (182)

He admits to the letter, but also that his side of the story does not matter. Because he has found no meaning in his experience, in his dialog with the investigator he offers no defense, just resignation of what must be when accountability finally comes. The investigator, as a representative of the Army institution, is just as resigned:

Bartle: "There are lies all through this."

Investigator: "It's just the way it's gotta be, kid. Someone has to answer for some of it."

Bartle: "Shit rolls downhill, huh, Captain?"

Investigator: "Shit's rolling everywhere nowadays. It's a shitty goddamn war. You ready? You'll be all right."

Bartle: "I just wish more of it was true."

Investigator: "Me, too, but it's lies like this that make the world go 'round."  
(188)

In the end Bartle is imprisoned, though he never reveals exactly what it is he is guilty of. He is confronted by Murphy's mother a few years later. Like Bartle, her life has been a struggle to make sense of anomic existence since her son's death. She offers no anger and he no resistance, and together come no closer to the truth except that they may never find it:

Even after talking for six hours straight I couldn't swear to any visible relief. She hadn't offered forgiveness and I hadn't asked for it. But after she left, I felt like my resignation was now justified, perhaps hers too, which is a big step nowadays, when even an apt resignation is readily dismissed as sentimental. (223)

Bartle accepts that he has sinned, but he is never sure exactly how. He has, of course, sinned by lying to Murphy's mother. But the real sin is ultimately much more complex. It takes the entire novel to explain it, and so there is a long list of particular moral failures that amount to a whole sin, which has no distinct bounds and no name.

He has sinned by failing to fulfill the individualist ideal of neoliberal American culture; by believing he might find personal fulfillment in military service; by trusting a false knowledge of war; by accepting moral obligation without understanding it; by confusing empirical truth for chance; by not deferring to the wisdom of Sterling; by not trusting his new found knowledge of war's moral demands and writing the letter to Murphy's mother. In all these failures we can, from a distance, point to the ultimate responsibility someplace other than the actions of Private John Bartle. The distinction between self and other is more an outcome of trauma than the experience itself: it is only afterwards that judgment of guilt can be rendered. Unfortunately, neoliberalism's cultural ideology demands individual accountability, even if its moral foundation never exceeds the individual's atomized existence.

### **Narrative Incoherence**

To the extent that these stories represent some definable segment of the soldiery to which they belong, the authors' accounts of moral violation can be generalized to the war in which they fought. Each military force in each particular conflict will have some generalized set of moral conditions in which it operates culturally and institutionally, and upon which its members may rely. Remarque does not speak for the universal experience of the German Soldier of the First World War, but the resonance of his work among his peers—it sold over four million copies worldwide in its first year of publication—suggests a reflection of empirical reality (that it was burned by the Nazis and condemned by militaries around the world as a “piece of

‘refined pacifist propadanda’” is equally telling).<sup>36</sup> The point is not whether German veterans all suffered long-term psychological trauma because of their betrayal by the German state and society. The point is that Remarque’s story points to the perception among some contingent of German veterans that they were politically betrayed (as Hitler’s ‘stab in the back’ claim also implies) and that the sense of betrayal might have been more damaging than the war’s violence in itself. These betrayal narratives also speak volumes of the societies in which and for whom they were produced. O’Brien’s critique of individual heroic idealism has its parallel in an Army and American society that would have preferred fighting in a much more coherent war (as they imagined national success in World War II to represent). Boulle’s critique of ‘action’ is as much a critique of capitalism, imperialism, and liberal politics as it is of western militarism—all of which are heavily dependent on the others. Powers account of individual responsibility reflects the atomization of neoliberal American politics. The other point is that the range of betrayals claimed by these authors suggest the commonalities of soldiers’ moral experience across time and culture, and the particular moral demands upon distinct groups of soldiers in distinct conflicts. The importance of this is that by defining specific betrayal themes in veterans’ experiences we can, among other things: a) identify particular political dynamics of a conflict; b) identify institutional causes of trauma; c) offer veterans alternative

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<sup>36</sup> Eksteins, “All Quiet on the Western Front and the Fate of a War,” 355. Eksteins observes of the logic of such violent criticism: “If the war had been an absurdity, then conservatism as a mentality was an absurdity; then fascism, which glorified the ‘front experience’, was an absurdity.”

narratives of their experience to perhaps overcome the effects of cognitive dissonance in their adaptation to morally ambiguous life in civilian circles.

Still, there seems to be a more generalizable problem arising in these stories. In 2015 as I was researching this dissertation, I attended a writing workshop for veterans in San Francisco. There I met a veteran still struggling to explain the truths he learned in Vietnam, to himself and anyone willing to listen. He has been writing about the experience for more than forty years; writing only for himself, because, he says, people won't listen. When he talks about Vietnam people tell him to 'get over it'. Sounding much like Paul Bäumer, he now tells those people that he was in Vietnam at a point in his life when other people are going off to college, learning about themselves, the world, and their place in it; people look back on their young-adult lives with nostalgia; we don't tell them to 'get over it'.

Shay addresses this problem of listening, noting that long-term impacts of traumatic experience can be lessened through a process of narrative communalization; it is, unfortunately, impossible without the genuinely empathetic response of an audience.<sup>37</sup> Historian Paul Fussell, himself a veteran of the Second World War, describes the problem as:

the collision between events and the language available—or thought appropriate—to describe them... [S]oldiers have discovered that no one is very interested in the bad news they have to report. What listener wants to be torn and shaken when he doesn't have to be? We have made *unspeakable* mean *indescribable*: it really means *nasty*.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 189.

<sup>38</sup> Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 169.

In other words, language fails because we have chosen to speak of war in ways that do not match its moral reality. What the works of these authors points to is the political dynamics that shape cultural narratives of war and, thus, the moral expectations of soldiers. Inspired by the methods of these authors, I will in the following chapters attempt to map the configuration of the multi-dimensional contexts of the construction of the soldier's habitus in the cultural-historical conjuncture of America's post-9/11 wars. What follows is an attempt to trace the relationship of the soldier to the military institution, and the institution to American political culture. That relationship can be largely reduced to the caste-like relationship of enlisted soldiers to their officers, which since WWII has become an equally caste-like relationship of the recruit to the professional, career-soldier. The relationship is one of disciplined obedience to traditional military authority and idealized, patriotic, voluntary 'service' to the nation and the small unit.

## Chapter Five

### Military Indoctrination and the Soldier's Relationship to Moral Authority

The source of traumatic experience lies in the creation of the soldier's habitus, and thus with the institutions in which individual beliefs are indoctrinated and mediated. While each soldier possesses a unique soldierly habitus, the degree to which the individual effectively functions in the institution is determined by the degree of conformity to an ideal expressed in the formal and informal expectations of the institution. While an individual's morality originates in life's countless social interactions and experiences, the elements of the ideal soldier's habitus arise and operate at three distinct levels: the elements of morality that are culturally produced and pre-exist military service; codes of military conduct, whether formal regulation or informal norms of institutional membership, that are instilled in the individual through the process of indoctrination; and those particular to a given conflict that serve to distinguish the enemy from the self. Conformity to practiced norms of discipline and obedience is an expression of this ideal. However, the ideal is also a product of conflicting norms, for example: a religiously-based tradition of 'just war' that is at odds with the technologically and bureaucratically dehumanized practice of modern warfare; institutionalized deference to military authority in opposition to institutionalized hypermasculine norms of individuality; or liberalism's valorization of individual self-interest set against heroic ideals of selfless, altruistic sacrifice. In American militarism heroic idealism serves several purposes. It makes war more

palatable to society by whitewashing its realities, which might be used to mobilize society in the build-up to war, or to minimize popular dissent over its course. Similarly, it creates a personified repository of society's collective guilt, absolving individual political responsibility for war's outcomes. For a military institution, heroic exceptionalism can be employed to maintain a degree of autonomy in the broader environment of domestic politics. And for the individual soldier, heroism may serve as a source of motivation in preparation for war and a justification of personal sacrifice in its aftermath. These topics will be addressed individually in this dissertation through multiple methods of analysis, both interpretive and empirical.

The remaining task of this dissertation is to trace out the morality of the ideal American soldier in the era of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and to locate potential points of failure in specific areas of practice that may produce the anomic conditions of traumatic experience. This moral ideal is an amalgam of doxa from across broad fields of American society. Some of these doxa are more deeply rooted in institutions and traditions; others specific to the era. This ideal has much in common with that of earlier generations, but has also changed in important ways. This sketch will attempt to capture what the men and women of that generation held in common throughout and the general shifts that began September 11, 2001. Because this culturally and institutionally ideal American soldier is the product of multiple ideologies and their indoctrination processes, its analysis should consider the internal logics of these belief systems, their social and political functions, and the effects they produce.<sup>1</sup> By

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<sup>1</sup> Donald and Hall, *Politics and Ideology*.



sketching a portrait representative of the institution's 'most authentic members'<sup>2</sup> we see that this ideal soldier is first a product of contemporary American culture in general and its militarist culture in particular. Prior to joining the Army the individual recruit has been exposed to a number of homogenizing forces, including a culturally ideal vision of the American soldier. Joining the Army, the recruit is indoctrinated to an institutional ideal formally written into the manuals and regulations of Army leadership and ethics doctrine, but informally interpreted through the Army's cultural traditions. Contradictory expectations are written into all of these ideologies, both internally and in relation to each other, because the social and political functions they play are never designed entirely, if at all, to create ideal soldiers. The ideological contradictions reveal the complex inter-relationships between the soldier, the military institution, the state, the nation, and the external objects of war—those people the soldier must defeat or liberate.

The basic claim I will make is that American soldiers sent to war in Iraq could not rely on their available moral beliefs for two primary reasons. First, there is a fundamental conflict between the moral demands of warfighting and the cultural values of civilian life in a liberal democratic society. Secondly, the military institution creates the conditions under which its soldiers are unable to reconcile the actions it demands of them and the values it provide. To explain the too common occurrence of such moral failures in recent American wars, I point the finger at the military itself for not understanding its mission, its position in society, its own values, or the values of

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<sup>2</sup> Dill and Hunter, "Education and the Culture Wars."

its soldiers. Given the rates of psychological disability among American veterans, an institutional theory of traumatic experience suggests that the United States either sent some very large number of American soldiers off to war who failed the military's moral indoctrination process, or that the values provided by that indoctrination are inappropriate to the moral situations actually faced in war. In either case, the failure belongs to the military institution. Indoctrination to the values of an inconsistent ethic creates and imposes a moral environment in which individual moral crises are more likely to occur. When doctrinal tenets fail, personal beliefs will be drawn upon—beliefs that may be at odds with both institutional values and the moral situations of war.

I argue in the coming chapters that the principles of the US Army's 'moral doctrine' are mostly institutional residue, reactions to political and cultural shifts, and attempts by the military to consciously distance itself from American society in order to maintain its political autonomy. It must be taken on faith that adherence to this doctrine is both necessary and effective, because institutional common-sense makes it impossible to consider the gap between civilian and military values as anything other than natural and inviolable. More importantly, moral doctrine is totalizing, presented as a complete set of moral principles that can be relied upon in all situations.

However, an institutional understanding of morality suggests that the values of military institutions are no less political than a state's contested political culture.

Military indoctrination is a political struggle between competing and often incompatible ideologies over proper moral expectation, making ideological coherence

all but impossible. The inevitable inconsistencies and contradictions within the Army's moral doctrine lead to soldiers' inadequate preparation for the moral environment of prolonged combat.

However, before I consider the moral expectations placed upon the American soldier in Iraq, this chapter considers several taken for granted tenets that have been used to describe the soldier's expectations more universally. I first consider the necessity of military indoctrination to a collective ethic that defines both the soldier and the institution as moral actors. I then turn to the fundamental condition of the modern soldier's relationship to the military institution: disciplined obedience to traditional military authority. That authority is not monolithic, however, and the frictions of modern war have produced multiple sources of moral authority upon which the soldier might act: the institution itself; its heroes and great leaders; the nation; or the comrades of a soldier's own small unit.

Attempting to understand moral action in war cannot be done without understanding the soldier's actions in war more generally, and so this chapter's analysis is fundamentally of the justifications behind a soldier's 'combat motivation'. That is, when a society asks its soldiers to kill, and maybe die, on its behalf, what is it that moves the individual soldier to endure the physical and emotional hardship of the war zone, place him or herself in constant danger, and take up arms to harm another? While every war is unique, two conditions of war are probably universal in their impact on the soldier: the ever-present possibility of experiencing violence against oneself; and the potential to inflict violence on others. These are the basic moral

conditions of all soldiers at war, and it is action under these conditions that define the soldier as a moral actor in war. From the perspective of the individual soldier, the mere possibility of facing combat can come to require the same motivation for action as combat itself. Thus, from these two conditions the soldier's combat motivation is the "influences that bear on a soldier's choice of, degree of commitment to, and persistence in effecting"<sup>3</sup> the requirements of a military mission when facing the possibility of combat; institutionally, it is the military's judgment of its soldiers in their degree of conformity to the roles it demands of them. Because today's military institution is a legacy of traditions that persist primarily for the institution's own self-perpetuation, combat motivation in the modern military institution becomes a proxy for questioning the individual soldier's conformance to political, cultural, and institutional expectations of obedient fulfillment of an institutionally defined role.

### **The Necessity of Military Indoctrination**

The first problem that arises in analyzing the morality of the ideal American soldier is one of ontology: is the moral object of an ideology the individual or collective? An ideology is individualist if its guiding principle of moral action is the fulfillment of individual aims and interests in relation to those of other individuals; a collective ideology values the common good above that of any individual member of the community.<sup>4</sup> A morality founded upon individualism will be fundamentally at odds

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<sup>3</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 6.

<sup>4</sup> Agassi, "Institutional Individualism."

with a collective morality, even if we grant that the nature of morality as a means of *social* regulation could never in practice be wholly individualist. While the morality of contemporary American culture is certainly far more complex than can be reduced to any single ideology, individualism is central to the American ethic. American culture and its morality have been undeniably individualistic throughout the country's history, with particular principles variously praised and criticized by both the political right and left.<sup>5</sup> There is, admittedly, a republican strain to American idealism, which is rooted in a more pure belief in a common good that cannot be reduced to self-interest. Similarly, communalist traditions of Christianity have not necessarily been subordinated entirely to liberal ideals. The politically subordinate position of many minority groups, African-American culture being probably the most significant instance, has allowed resistance to individualist tendencies in popular culture. There have been a few periods of American history—the Revolution, Civil War, the Great Depression and Second World War, and perhaps, culminating in the Civil Rights Era—that have seen surges in collective goodwill and altruism. But these periods, if they did in fact represent a genuinely irreducible collective morality, were never sustainable beyond the crises to which they responded. These few exceptions serve to prove the rule: the steady state of American moral idealism is, historically and today, liberal high-individualism.

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<sup>5</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America, Vol. II, The Social Influence of Democracy*; Beard, "The Myth of American Rugged Individualism"; Bennett, *Book of Virtues*; Greer and Kohl, *A Call to Character*.

The principles which have evolved as the justification for the common individualist American identity are fundamentally at odds with both the collective nature of war and the collective moral tradition of American military institutions. The way this contradiction plays out culturally is further complicated by the strain of individualism running through the narratives of American militarism. There are two sides to this ideal—liberal individualism inculcated by American culture generally, and the more specific heroic ideal that shapes the recruit’s expectations of the soldier’s role in society and the nature of warfare. The heroic ideal is, of course, shaped by broader cultural forces, but, as will be shown, it is also influenced by the military institution’s efforts. In many ways the gap between military and civilian moral expectations is a problem (to the extent that it might influence military effectiveness) of the military’s own making; that the military rejects popular values to the detriment of its effectiveness and the wellbeing of its soldiers; and that the traditions it bases its institutional knowledge upon are less grounded in historical reality than proponents believe. Still, the US Army’s everyday institutional practices operate, however imperfectly, within the collective values of its traditional culture. Collectivism is the foundation of the American military ethic in, for instance, its institutionalized discipline, valorization of comradeship among soldiers in their units, and the persistence of the ‘citizen-soldier’ ideal. This may be for good reason: military sociologists have long pointed to a life and death necessity for the collective adherence to primary group loyalties in combat units. However, as will be shown in the coming chapters, the American military ethic is not isolated from American

culture, and the institution's formal moral doctrine is schizophrenically caught between individualist and collectivist moralities.

But war is *always* a collective undertaking. Even if we were to assume the unwillingness of all soldiers to fight the personal wars of their leaders, action in war is never individualized, except perhaps in the very moment of combat, when the individual soldier may be completely cut off from the military institution, despite physical proximity to other soldiers. Of course, war is individualized afterward when the veteran is left to bear the burden of anomic life. The problem of individual/collective morality in war is most readily revealed in the problems of 'just war' theory. The point here, however, has nothing to do with whether war can ever be truly just or unjust. Robert Meagher's work offers a genealogical account of just war theory to suggest that this philosophy, so deeply embedded in western international politics, has never been more than a tool of the state, even in its earliest formulations in the fifth-century Christian church. Meagher then argues that such attempts to justify the always unjustifiable act of killing is at the root of moral injury among soldiers.<sup>6</sup> This tension between individual and collective in just war theory certainly illustrates the potential moral confusion for individual soldiers at war. Nonetheless, war may be forever morally unjustifiable without some collective ethic to justify individual participation, because in the collective act of war, "we must and may act

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<sup>6</sup> Meagher, *Killing from the Inside Out*. While I disagree with Meagher's conception of 'moral injury', which too strongly assumes a moral truth that killing is always sinful, the critique of just war theory as a means of creating compliance with the will of the ruler is so thorough and so straightforward that (if his history is accurate) just war doctrine becomes utterly discredited.

against the enemy war effort, despite the fact that this involves destroying innocent lives.”<sup>7</sup> At the least, there must be the recognition of a moral duality of the individual acting in a collective. That is, within a purely individualist ethic, war could only be morally right if the individual combatants are all individually responsible for all of their own actions. However, given that wars are fought between states (or would-be states), only political actors could ever be individually responsible, and so the killing of individual soldiers could only be justified—in an individualist ethic—when their own political actions are blameworthy.

Problematically for the soldiers of liberal democratic states, just war theories from the liberal tradition depend on the ability of individuals to rationally decide on the justness of their actions in war, including their decision to participate as an agent of the state. Because of this, individualist justifications of war necessarily descend into either logical gymnastics or the ultimate rejection of all war as unjust. For example, when the right action of states is founded upon the ‘primitive right’ of the individual under natural law, as Grotius and others argue,<sup>8</sup> the only rationally justifiable war is purely defensive because individual violence can only be justified in self-defense. But, paradoxically, the individual right to self-defense demands the moral equality of individual combatants, regardless of the justness of their state’s actions. This principle has been written into, and is perhaps the foundation of, international humanitarian law: direct participation in war as a legitimate combatant

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<sup>7</sup> Zohar, “Collective War and Individualistic Ethics,” 619.

<sup>8</sup> Grotius, *On the Law of War and Peace*.



grants special protections, liabilities, and responsibilities to the individual. But claims of moral equality of legitimate combatants may fall apart in the attempt to eliminate the culpability of individual participation in unjust wars. If one can one possess the individual right to participate yet hold no individual responsibility for their participation in a cause that is morally unjustifiable, it can only be accomplished by appealing to collective morality.<sup>9</sup> As bioethicist Noam Zohar points out, “[t]rying to make sense of warfare as a though it were an aggregate of individual confrontations can only produce moral vertigo.”<sup>10</sup>

Whether or not justifications are constructed by political leaders, war must be always a collective action requiring a collective ethic—an ideology of shared identity which serves as a principle of collective action (regardless of the ‘justness’ of that principle in any metaphysical sense). Wars are fought between military forces, and there is necessarily a defined collective identity that makes any military distinctive. Armies are *joined* (even under conscription, and even perhaps under systems of military slavery)<sup>11</sup> and so soldiers are always *members* of an institution at some level. This relationship of soldier to military institution belongs to a discourse of war that is largely continuous over time in western thought, particularly in its modern expression, which is directly connected to the rise of the modern state. This discourse is largely derived from the professionalization of armies, most notably by the

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<sup>9</sup> Which the individualist will claim to be morally untenable. For instance, see McMahan, “Collectivist Defenses of the Moral Equality of Combatants.”

<sup>10</sup> Zohar, “Collective War and Individualistic Ethics,” 615.

<sup>11</sup> Pipes, “The Strategic Rationale for Military Slavery.”

eighteenth-century Prussian academy, which achieved dominance in western military thought in the Napoleonic era. Perhaps the most obvious manifestation of this discourse is the strict hierarchical structure of military rank and echelon. Early-modern warfare saw a transition from late-feudal forms—which relied upon the conglomeration of small bands individually held together through personal loyalty of either feudal obligation or mercenary economic interest—to a regimentation of individual and group performance. Through regimentation, the organization of infantry in tactically useful formation, the relation of soldier to the modern army is the assignment to a specific physical space and the performance of the function required of that space, within echelons of spaces and functions. In practice, each echelon is a distinct social field, and so the habitus of the individual soldier will vary with the requirements of echelon: a soldier is a very different *being* in relation to comrades, sergeants, commanders, or the state.

For the ordinary soldier, relations to particular higher echelons are less important than the relationship to the collective hierarchy—rank and file in opposition to institutional cadres—which is most plainly represented in the distinction of enlisted and officer. This distinction has been naturalized by the institution as militarily necessary. Whether that is the case, it is certainly the key element of the totalizing logic of military institutions, and probably the most foreign institutional characteristic to military recruits in liberal societies. Outside of total institutions our relationships to authority tend to be clearly demarcated: familial relationships do not typically extend beyond the domestic sphere; in most workplaces employees report to

a single supervisor; there is an expectation that community rules are non-arbitrarily enforced by agents of the state. That is, rules and their enforcement in everyday life are clearly compartmentalized. According to Erving Goffman, the echeloned authority of a total institution is characterized by the “multiplication of active enforced rulings” in the regulation of behavior among the rank and file. The fundamental power disparity creates the condition in which “*any* member of the staff class [cadres] has certain rights to discipline *any* member of the inmate class [rank and file], thereby markedly increasing the probability of sanction.” As the regulation of behavior is “diffuse, novel, and strictly enforced,” members of the inmate class will be faced with “chronic anxiety about breaking the rules and the consequences of breaking them.” This anxiety is exacerbated by the social isolation that arises in the individual’s “persistent conscious effort” to avoid trouble, and the systematic incentives to report deviant behavior imposed by such a system.<sup>12</sup>

The necessity of a collective ethic and the complexity of moral demands upon the individual soldier are reflected in the very nature of modern interstate warfare. In a total war, such as the Napoleonic Wars, the American Civil War, or the World Wars, any distinction between the state and its military institutions is set aside; the state’s principle of action is war itself, and the logic of both state and society becomes the conduct of that war. All other state functions are deprioritized to transfer manpower to create the military force and to shift economic resources to field and equip that force. The political capital necessary to undertake such a massive

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<sup>12</sup> Goffman, “On the Characteristics of Total Institutions,” 42–43.

economic and governmental shift has only been achieved through ideological mobilization of the nation—society must become a community, as all particular social connections are suspended by the general social connection to the state.<sup>13</sup> However, this sense of community “is a thoroughly coerced one, not only existing independently of the will of individuals but crushing them wherever they stand in its way,” and those individuals or groups professing nonpartisanship are “reduc[ed] to nothing.”<sup>14</sup> And while this shift from society to community may only ever have been a political imaginary, its effect must be real in order to reach the necessary level of mobilization across the state’s population to carry out the tasks of total war (which is probably never truly total). In modern history, the ideologies of nationalism have served the purpose of forging the state and nation into a single, all-encompassing military institution. Only a coherently defined people as a nation can undertake war at

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<sup>13</sup> Lederer, “On the Sociology of World War,” 244. Lederer, an Austrian writing of the general state of European mobilization just five months after the start of WWI, borrows from sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies the terms ‘Gesellschaft’ and ‘Gemeinschaft’: “In the state of *Gesellschaft* [society], men typically live peacefully with one another, but generally in a state of separation rather than union with one another. In *Gesellschaft*, men remain separate from one another despite being all together with one another, whereas in the *Gemeinschaft* [community] men feel themselves all together with one another despite being all separate from another. In *Gesellschaft*, writes Tönnies, ‘no activity takes place that could be derived from an existing a priori unity; no activity proceeding from the action of individuals at the same time expresses the spirit and will of unity...; rather, every man is alone for himself and in a state of tension with all others.’ In the *Gemeinschaft*, a sense of togetherness surrounds and precedes the individual as a carrier of unity founded in ‘familial understandings’, not based on legalized, strictly normed and sanctioned relations, or contracts.”

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

such a scale, and only such a collective can hope to resist another totally mobilized state.

Of course, most wars are not total wars. The capital required in mobilization for limited war depends on the capacities of existing institutions and the nature of the particular conflict. States may be in a constant state of limited war, and the modern state system all but demands that states remain in a constant state of anticipation of war, and so some level of economic output, governmental capacity, social mobilization, and political capital all become permanently directed toward maintaining the military institution. Efforts at maintaining state military institutions will vary widely depending on the particular circumstances of the state, both internally and in relation to other states.

In total war, the military institution (in all its forms—armed forces, economic production, domestic policing, and nationalist cultural institutions) becomes both state and nation. By contrast, in a state of limited war, or in anticipation of some possible war, the military institution is a more or less autonomous institution among all other existing state and cultural institutions. A national collective ethic is still necessary in limited war, but its tenets are limited by the scope of war in relation to the more or less permanent tenets of the military institution. Despite the different natures of such conflicts, nationalism has been naturalized by modern militaries as one of those permanent tenets of institutional collective identity. Theoretically, it would be possible to quantify an absolute minimum degree of collective identity necessary, both nationally and institutionally, to carry out any particular war. And

theoretically, a state's institutions could be analyzed to determine whether or not its capacity for collective identity and collective action might be sufficient to successfully carry out a particular war. That is, the extent of an ideology's influence need only be so great as to attain the minimum mobilization to fight the war at hand, and the will to fight need only be so extensive among the populace for the military institution to function at the war's required level.

This is, of course, entirely idealized. But to go a step further, if the military institution's only purpose were the conduct of a particular war, the collective ideal could be readily known and acted upon—it might be so simple as victory of 'us' over 'them'. This would, however, require that the institution be purely a tool of the state and that the state's only interest in maintaining a military force be the conduct of that particular war. Neither condition has probably ever been the case, even in total war. However, to continue this thought experiment, in such a wholly idealized case (an ideal military in an ideal state in an ideal conflict) there is still a necessary sense of community and corresponding collective ethic, but that ethic need not be anywhere near universally held. It need only extend to the institution and be only so encompassing as to define the institution and its mission to its members and potential members. That is, all of a military's members—both individuals and sub-institutions—must be able to draw upon some principle of the collective ethic in order to identify themselves as members of the collective, and to understand their role in relation to other members. Sub-institutions may then develop their own institutional ethics which can be drawn upon by their own individual members to identify

themselves as such and to define their individual roles within the institutional hierarchy. In order to attract and retain members, the institution's influence must extend into state society to some minimal degree. That is, the institutional ethic must in some part overlap with the ethical principles of some part of the state's population. Where a particular population exists, or can be created, which can be relied upon to produce such values among individuals, that population may become itself simply an extension of the institution.

It follows that the potential complexity of values and beliefs within the military institution as a whole will match the complexity of the institution's organization. Beyond one degree of separation among an institution's members, there may not actually be any necessary shared values between members in different hierarchical and functional positions. Even at a single degree of separation, individual members may share no values with another member if there is more than a single guiding institutional principle within the primary ethic of the parent institution (as its ethic is practiced, not necessarily as it is formally pronounced). For the parent institution, a single member need only be as compliant with the primary ethic as is necessary to maintain the member's own ideological coherence required of their position. Thus, an institution with a complex ethic will be more ideologically diverse than one with a simpler ethic and will create more potential for internal strife among members. A simple ethic, however, may limit the institution's capacity for action by limiting the roles of sub-institutions and the possibility of membership, particularly in a diverse external political environment. Yet, a simple ethic may make the institution

more effective and efficient at those tasks it undertakes within the limits of its guiding principles. Again, the complexity of guiding principles within the institution as a whole depends on the complexity of the organization. A flat organization with a narrowly defined purpose will require a simple ethic. A deeply hierarchical organization undertaking a range of divergent tasks could create organizations at the bottom that are wholly antithetical to the values of the overarching institution. Of course, it must be kept in mind that not all values are equally powerful or situationally relevant. A simple illustration demonstrates the potential complexity of values in a hierarchical structure:

- An institution operates under principles A, B, C.
- A sub-institution is established to act upon principle C, but comes to operate under principles C, D, E.
- A member fills a role in the sub-institution to act upon principle E, but also believes in principles F, G.

In equilibrium, the member may perform as a full and successful member of the parent institution without sharing any of its basic principles. The frictions of war, however, may grossly disrupt such an equilibrium.

To be successful, a military institution at war depends on the mobilization of shared values across a broad enough swath of the state's other institutions and population to carry out its required mission. In total war militaries have historically relied on the principles of nationalism, though even in total war not all other values are discarded. Still, the real value in practice of any belief has to be strong enough relative to all other values to consistently influence individual behavior. Combat, however, is socially atomizing. The experience of combat isolates soldiers from the



moral authority of the institution, and soldiers come to rely on only those values deeply enough embedded in habitus and practice to withstand extreme circumstances. If total war relies on the single unifying collective principle of nationalism, and limited war relies on the collective ethic of the institution, in combat itself, especially prolonged combat, membership in the collective comes to operate at the lowest common denominator—the collective experience of the small unit. If this bond breaks, the only value left is individual survival.

If this is the case, then the individual soldier at war does require some available principle of collective action. There is necessarily some value that directs the state's decision to go to war, a value which must be shared in some degree by the military institution. There is necessarily some value that directs the actions of the institution, which (unless it were to spontaneously self-form in time of war, uniquely for that war) will have some set of values separate from the particular values of the state at war. Unless the institution operated purely on coercion of its members, there has to be an ethic that makes membership in the military unique (from other political or cultural forms) and which makes the conduct of war more than the aggregate of individual moral decisions and more than the management of atomized individuals by a central authority. That is, armies are to some degree autonomous moral actors made up of individuals acting to some degree autonomously based on some set of recognizable moral principles toward a collective end. And finally, those individuals will be forced by circumstances into a primary group relationship in which those group values may come to be the primary moral authority under certain

circumstances, particularly in combat. If the soldier at war is ever the sole source of moral authority, something has gone horribly wrong.

### **Military Discipline**

Wars are fought between political entities, but the connection of common soldiers to politics is often tenuous at best. To achieve their ends, political actors must make men fight on their behalf. Historically, this has depended on a mixture of, often violent, coercion by military institutions and of culturally enforced moral ideals of heroic masculinity. In the modern era, western military institutions have managed to seamlessly merge coercion and idealization. Through indoctrination the modern soldier comes to believe that violently coercive punishment is the acceptable result of failed 'discipline', the individual's conformance to military standards of behavior and performance.

It is only in the crises and chaos of actual face-to-face combat, the conditions of which isolate the individual from the institution, that the ordinary soldier is left the possibility of independent action. The power of moral authorities within which the soldier is socially integrated may fail to operate upon the isolated soldier in combat, allowing and demanding the individual's freedom of action and thought. If we recognize that institutional authority may not be functional in combat, then we have to consider what might fill that void. Action in the absence of institutional power requires that the authority of leaders in combat must reflect the values of those being led. If the institution can create the soldier's embodied belief in the legitimate authority of their leaders that is appropriate to combat, then indoctrination is

successful, as long as the leader's actions continue to reflect those values. For the modern military institution, discipline is the guiding doctrinal principle upon which the relations of all soldiers at all ranks is established. Discipline is at the same time a value, a practice, and an outcome. Military indoctrination is the act of disciplining soldiers to be soldiers; following the discussion of indoctrinated belief in Chapter Two, military indoctrination is the instruction of soldiers *in, with, and into* (the) military discipline. Military discipline is thus the belief in and practice of military authority. To be indoctrinated as a disciplined soldier is the establishment of the soldier's embodied belief both in their own soldierly habitus, a full member of the US Army, and in the legitimate moral authority of the institution.

The US Army and modern militaries generally claim the military necessity of disciplined obedience, and the presumption goes largely unquestioned both inside and outside the institution. Combat is accepted as such a radical departure from ordinary human experience that militaries have been entrusted as uniquely qualified to judge its proper conduct and indoctrinate soldiers appropriately. The purpose of military indoctrination will thus bleed into the distinct nature of military culture. Military sociologist James Burk argues that the central elements of military culture come from “an attempt to deal with (and, if possible, to overcome) the uncertainty of war, impose some pattern on war, control war's outcome, and to invest it with meaning or significance.”<sup>15</sup> This model reflects the Clausewitzian perspective of war as a “special business,” distinct from “the other pursuits which occupy the life of man,” both

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<sup>15</sup> Burk, “Military Culture,” 1243.

individually and collectively. For Clausewitz, the professional soldier's true expression of the army's 'military virtue' is:

to make use of [that virtue], to rouse, to assimilate into the system the powers which should be active in it, to penetrate completely into the nature of the business with the understanding, through exercise to gain confidence and expertness in it, to be completely given up to it, to pass out of the man into the part which it is assigned to us to play in War.<sup>16</sup>

For Clausewitz, neither nationalization nor bureaucratization will ever "do away with the individuality of the business," but given the inherent frictions of war, individuality must be managed and this is best done through the guild-like maintenance of military virtue in collective expression of the military unit's 'honour of its arms'.<sup>17</sup> The military virtue of the army is a necessity in that the commander can only lead the whole of the army, and "where he cannot guide the part, there military virtue must be its leader."<sup>18</sup>

In many ways, military practices of disciplining behavior have been naturalized as the very expression of military virtue, which is common in military culture in part because behaviors are easily measurable and attitudes are not—a sentiment captured in an oft-cited quote of General George Patton: "If they don't look like soldiers they won't fight like soldiers!"<sup>19</sup> The same equating of institutional practice and military necessity is still claimed by many contemporary military

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<sup>16</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 115.

<sup>17</sup> Clausewitz notes that the Americans of his day did not display this virtue.

<sup>18</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 115.

<sup>19</sup> Donohue, "The Anatomy of Discipline," 3. Donohue attributes the quote to General George S. Patton, Jr., cited in William A. Knowlton, Jr., "Morale: Crucial, But What Is It?," *Army* (June 1983): 35.

scholars. Martin van Creveld, for instance, sees a long historical and cross-cultural tradition of highly similar methods of soldier indoctrination into the ‘culture of war’ that is distinct from training particular skills. He argues that recruits must be physically isolated and marked off from old social ties, and to do this, “Every military education system ever designed starts by humiliating its trainees,” in order to eliminate from the pool of recruits, “the childish, the weak, and the feminine.” Surviving such humiliation, as an act of discipline, becomes the basis for soldiers’ pride in military membership. Success in war, according to Creveld, depends on faithful practice of the culture of war, which depends on indoctrination through a process of tearing down a recruit’s old social being so thoroughly that new social ties offered by military membership, exemplified by the principle of comradeship, can be strong enough to withstand the stresses of combat.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Christopher Coker argues that traditional military discipline serves to subordinate “the passions of the warrior to reason,” by transforming the warrior’s existential self-fulfillment in combat “into a socially prescribed good,” and translating fear “into a healthy respect for dangers and risks.”<sup>21</sup> According to Coker, military indoctrination depends on an ethic of sacred trust as the basis of social interaction within the institution. Unfortunately, Coker laments, this trust is undermined through liberal modernity’s instrumentalization of the soldier in war: for a military organization to operate effectively in war it must recognize that its relationship to soldiers is a covenant

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<sup>20</sup> Van Creveld, *The Culture of War*, 46–53.

<sup>21</sup> Coker, *The Warrior Ethos*, 63.

rather than contract. Coker argues that the US military had forgotten this before the Iraq War, but its adoption of the ‘Warrior Ethos’ (which will be discussed more fully in Chapter Seven) was the proper response to the institution’s post-Cold War failures under the Clinton administration. That is, the liberal belief in war as morally abhorrent is just as damaging to the soldier’s ability to fight as the feminization Creveld despises. For Coker, if war is to be more humane, and legalistic attempts of international law have failed, reestablishing a cultural tradition of disciplined warrior honor is the only viable option.

Other scholars are less chauvinistic but equally uncritical in their deference to military practices of indoctrinated discipline. Scholars at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research argue that the military’s ‘intense indoctrination’ is necessary because combat is so radically different from recruits’ prior experiences. Most importantly, training must instill in the individual attitudes and behaviors that enable “killing someone in the service of a mission to protect one’s country, and the willingness to subordinate self-interests, including survival, in the service of group goals.” Though the researchers do not advocate practices of humiliation, they do acknowledge the need for ‘deindividuation’ through ‘softening up’ so that recruits, presumed to possess an “inherent reluctance to kill,” can internalize a military identity consistent with the capacity to kill and willingness to die. This identity also depends on ‘desensitization’ to the use of weapons and both the deindividuation and ‘dehumanization’ of potential enemies, though, they claim, the militaries of democratic states are careful to distinguish combatant from non-combatant in this

process. Indoctrination by American military institutions pursues the formation of military identity while also “developing more traditionally accepted standards of conduct and socially acceptable values... such as integrity and honor, along with adherence to standards, such as killing only enemy combatants, [practices which] are designed to prevent members from becoming an automaton that simply follows orders regardless of its moral consequence.”<sup>22</sup> Other military psychologists suggest that military indoctrination practices that create extreme conditions of physical and psychological distress act as a ‘stress inoculation’ that allows effective performance in combat and protection against psychological trauma afterward.<sup>23</sup>

But even scholars well outside the bounds of military institutional research maintain a sense of deference to the military’s authoritative claims of discipline as militarily necessary. In an argument about the limits of financial incentives on worker motivation and organizational effectiveness, economists George Akerlof and Rachel Kranton argue that military indoctrination of the soldier’s identity and attachment to the institution provides a model of organizational effectiveness.<sup>24</sup> Indoctrination in this model is a ‘relatively cheap’ investment to instill a belief in the fundamental distinction between military and civilian life, thus turning “outsiders into insiders” through various “initiation rites, short haircuts, boot camp, uniforms and oaths of office.” Stress inducing training methods lead recruits to “take on a different self-

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<sup>22</sup> McGurk et al., “Joining the Ranks,” 14–15.

<sup>23</sup> Doran, Hoyt, and Morgan, “Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape (SERE) Training”; Borders and Kennedy, “Psychological Interventions after Disaster or Trauma.”

<sup>24</sup> Akerlof and Kranton, “Identity and the Economics of Organizations,” 17–19.

image, as they explain to themselves why they have (seemingly willingly) accepted such treatment.” Akerloff and Kranton become apologists for even “very harsh discipline,” which they claim, “plays a direct role in the operation of a successful army,” specifically:

We view a small amount of such harsh punishment as controlling mavericks who do not adhere to the military ideal. A realistic extension to our model would include workers with varying susceptibility to military indoctrination, with punishment to keep the mavericks from burgeoning out of control as an epidemic.

Critics of military indoctrination point to its production of the same range of effects claimed by its apologists. Indoctrination draws a clear distinction between military and civilian culture by gendering the distinction. Military ideals of masculinity distinguish military-civilian roles in war of men who fight on behalf of women who need their protection.<sup>25</sup> This applies to the military role of national defense, that the distinction between the proper roles of those on the battlefield and the those on the ‘homefront’ naturalizes gendered division of labor generally, the public life of men and the domestic life of women, but is also translated into terms of national security interests of the state: “the battlefield must reflect the need to protect a greater good.”<sup>26</sup> The distinction is written into international law’s distinction between combatants as able-bodied men and non-combatants, those who are physically or mentally incapable of making war—children, the elderly, and women. Laura Sjoberg argues that the gendered distinctions of military culture run so deeply

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<sup>25</sup> Elstain, *Women and War*.

<sup>26</sup> Horn, “Boots and Bedsheets,” 62.



“that it is only possible to fully understand gender in the context of war and conflict, and that it is only possible to fully understand war and conflict considering their gendered aspects.”<sup>27</sup>

Critics also acknowledge the military’s efforts to isolate the soldier from old social ties. Abusive hazing rituals of initiation reinforce norms of masculine comradeship that serve as the ‘cementing principle’ of military culture.<sup>28</sup> For the institution, soldiers’ adherence to masculine ideals and exclusion of the feminine creates social bonds between recruits of diverse cultural or economic backgrounds who might otherwise be in conflict with each other.<sup>29</sup> Submitting to such abuse reinforces a relationship of willing self-sacrifice to a group composed of others who have demonstrated the same masculine traits in their selection.<sup>30</sup> The acceptance of one’s expendability is fundamental to groups dependent on the willingness of members to risk their lives, thus military culture’s “fatalistic devaluation of individual life dovetails with the meaning of manhood.” This fatalism is seen as both the foundation of military social control, through the discouragement of “emotional or situational flexibility” of discipline, and the means of the individual soldier’s control of their own emotions through the mastery of highly stressful conditions.<sup>31</sup> Military

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<sup>27</sup> Sjoberg, *Gender, War, & Conflict*, 5.

<sup>28</sup> Harrison, “Violence in the Military Community.”

<sup>29</sup> Braswell and Kushner, “Suicide, Social Integration, and Masculinity in the US Military.”

<sup>30</sup> Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*.

<sup>31</sup> Braswell and Kushner, “Suicide, Social Integration, and Masculinity in the US Military,” 533.

indoctrination activates pre-existing social codes of masculinity like emotional control and risk seeking.<sup>32</sup> When recruits are uncertain in their adherence to these codes, indoctrination offers a “hegemonic representation of idealized norms of masculinity which privilege the tough, stoic emotionless warrior, capable and willing to employ violence to achieve whatever ends he may be ordered into.”<sup>33</sup>

The discrepancies between these varying accounts of military training and discipline are indicative of the complexity of the subject and the lack of agreement on the relationship between the soldier and the army. There is an underlying assumption that the soldier’s behavior in war must conform to some model of military authority upon which success in war depends. Because that sort of authoritarianism is not valued in modern liberal culture, recruits have to be indoctrinated to a new set of values and a state’s people have to accept the necessity for the military to do that. It is taken on faith that the indoctrinated acceptance of military authority is the fundamental condition of soldier training because obedience to orders is the *sine qua non* for the soldier’s success and survival in combat. The assumption goes unquestioned inside the military institution, but this is equally true among scholars of war, including those most critical of the military. The assumption is, however, complicated by institutional practices that are distinct from the practice of war. A critique of such practices suggests that the object of military discipline may have little to do with success in war. Instead, the totalizing discipline of military indoctrination

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<sup>32</sup> Ben-Ari, *Mastering Soldiers*.

<sup>33</sup> Whitworth, “Globalizing Gender,” 125.

makes deviant behaviors “stand out in relief against the visible, constantly examined compliance of others.”<sup>34</sup> This serves to objectify the institution’s authority and formally distinguish between its full members and the recruits it must initiate and dominate.

### **Moral Authority and the Object of Discipline**

Setting aside claims about the timeless and universal necessity of discipline, whatever the commonalities of experience between ancient and modern soldiers in combat, the disciplined obedience of the modern soldier reflects an epistemic break from pre-modern warfare. The same forces that began reshaping culture and politics in post-medieval Europe also produced the modern military institution. Max Weber proposes a universal link between war and social organization, suggesting that a society’s economic bases determine the character of the wars it fights. This determines in turn the form of its military institutions, and leads to the development of a unique form of military discipline, which, finally, determines the forms taken by the society’s political institutions.<sup>35</sup> Rather than a product of military necessity, the disciplined soldier of the modern military institution is the fitting of a position in a bureaucratic hierarchy. To the extent a disciplinary regime “appeals to firm motives of an ‘ethical’ character, it presupposes a ‘sense of duty’ and ‘conscientiousness’.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, discipline becomes a means of institutionalizing elite status and legitimating

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<sup>34</sup> Goffman, “On the Characteristics of Total Institutions,” 7.

<sup>35</sup> For Weber the development is not simply correlated, but specifically teleological.

<sup>36</sup> Weber, “The Meaning of Discipline,” 254..

hierarchical power relations in the objectification of moral authority in, for instance, traditions of the military institution, the genius of heroic leaders, or patriotic citizenship.

By objectifying authority it follows that, through a number of related forces, practices of military discipline erase the common soldier's individuality within the military institution and from discourses of war. In part, this arose out of, or alongside, changes in military organization brought on by technological change. The most obvious characteristic that defines modern war is the introduction of gunpowder and the weapons produced to exploit it. The new technology necessitated arranging troops hierarchically in massed formations. While massed infantry combat reemerged in the late-medieval period in response to increasingly heavy armor of feudal cavalry, it was the development of musketry that allowed the creation of mass armies of state. Mass conscription is impossible without musketry, as close combat with swords and pole-arms requires expertise only developed by standing armies, something beyond the means of most early states. Without the institutional infrastructure to raise and maintain such skilled forces, late-medieval period infantry warfare saw the widespread reliance on highly trained, professional mercenary companies. Massed musketry fire, in contrast, required only sufficient weapons and ammunition, a minimally trained but disciplined soldiery, and a hierarchy of leaders to coordinate the movements of their soldiers, allowing states to raise larger and larger national armies. However, the national armies of the Napoleonic wars came nearly 300 years after the widespread introduction of firearms to European warfare, and so the

influence of technology on military organization has to be understood as less of a revolutionary shift than a process of evolutionary responses to the gradual introduction of new technologies.<sup>37</sup>

More important to the objectification of moral authority was the corresponding evolution of methods of social control in the modern state. The influence of military thought on methods of social control in the early capitalist state is the basis of Michel Foucault's theories of embodied discipline. To discipline the individual as an obedient subject of the state requires the 'enclosure' of distinct social groups, for instance the modeling of factory workhouses on military barracks. There is then a 'partitioning' of each enclosure in which, "Each individual has his own place; and each place its individual."<sup>38</sup> Thus, the place and the individual become inseparably 'functional', a part of the machinery of production, and entirely 'interchangeable'.<sup>39</sup> The result is the production by modern societies of the docile bodies and populations upon which industrialization depends. Drawing from military, religious, and civic texts of the era, Foucault sees direct connections between the industrializing social order of Napoleonic Europe and the disciplinary regime of the new state military institutions. In corresponding processes, the worker becomes a mere cog in the works, while the soldier becomes their *rank*—the physical intersection of the line and column of the infantry formation. That is, through regimentation, the organization of soldiers in tactically useful formation, the relation

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<sup>37</sup> Neill, "Ancestral Voices."

<sup>38</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 143.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 135–69.

of soldier to the modern army becomes the assignment to a specific physical space and the performance of the function required of that space, within echelons of spaces and functions. The soldier is to their platoon as the platoon of soldiers in line is to the company, company to the regiment, regiment to the army.

For Bourdieu, the social differentiation created by hierarchical rank structure, as an objectified credential distinct from the individual, is inseparable from the legal processes that establish those positions. With the interchangeability of bodies:

relations of power and dependence are no longer established directly between individuals; they are set up, in objectivity, among institutions, that is, among socially guaranteed qualifications and socially defined positions, and through them, among the social mechanisms that produce and guarantee both the social value of the qualifications and the distribution of these social attributes among biological individuals.<sup>40</sup>

Here, Bourdieu's logic follows Weber's observation that the rational discipline of modernity diminishes the importance of individual action, while simultaneously rationalizing the stratification of status within groups. This meant that the sort of sacred traditions that justified pre-modern military authority, what Weber called the 'charismatic authority' of 'natural' leaders, had to be coopted in the processes of institutional development. Hierarchical bureaucratization has been a structural process of all western militaries since the end of feudalism, but the process has been uneven, the product of the conduct and outcomes of war, domestic politics, economic forces, technologies, and cultural influences.<sup>41</sup> Because of this, bureaucratization has

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<sup>40</sup> Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 132.

<sup>41</sup> Weber, "The Meaning of Discipline"; Spindler, "The Military: A Systematic Analysis"; Neill, "Ancestral Voices"; Conway, *War, State, and Society*.

never entirely eliminated charismatic idealism, making modern military authority internally contradictory in many ways. It may be simultaneously ascribed to either: the power of the state, entrusted to military professionals guided by the empirically sound principles of military science; or the naturally arising heroic leadership of a morally superior warrior-caste moved to action by the genius of the great men of history.

In an era of state building, military organization became a means of domestic political control: the monarchical state over aristocratic elites, and elites over local populations.<sup>42</sup> For instance, the Prussian military of the early-eighteenth century was established in the rapid state monopolization of political authority through the disbanding of local militias and establishment of a centralized regimental system under which the state required lifelong military service of virtually all military-age males, regardless of social class. But the move served to reinforce class distinctions, as the officer corps was drawn from the landed elite. The brutal discipline used by the officer corps to ensure soldiers' obedience was mirrored in the relation of landlord to peasant, and was readily transferrable to the relation of shop boss to worker as the German economy industrialized.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, the disciplinary order served to stifle potential dissent in a society in which conscripts might more rationally have chosen

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<sup>42</sup> North and Thomas, *The Rise of the Western World*; Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*.

<sup>43</sup> Büsch, *Military System and Social Life in Old-Regime Prussia, 1713-1807*.

to turn their arms against the domestic order to which they were subject than against a foreign army.<sup>44</sup>

The development of military science provided military leaders justification of their own elite positions in such political hierarchies. As early-modern political thought owed much to the Renaissance rediscoveries of Roman republicanism, military theorists of the time adapted the principles of Roman generals to their own needs. On the battlefield, as technology rendered the armored knight obsolete, the centrality of infantry formations to the ancient Roman armies seemed a logical basis for post-feudal warfare.<sup>45</sup> The influence of Rome, Julius Caesar in particular, was also central to how modern warfare came to be discussed, written about, and taught in the military academy. Historian John Keegan notes that since the late-seventeenth century, “it is Roman military practices—drill, discipline, uniformity of dress—and Roman military ideas—of intellectual leadership, automatic valour, unquestioning obedience, self-abnegation, loyalty to unit—which are dominant in the European soldier’s world.”<sup>46</sup> Caesar’s *Commentaries* provided the narrative formula for institutionalizing the study of war and objectifying the authority of military leaders: the corporation and movement of wholly non-agential, highly disciplined masses by the genius and will of history’s great men.<sup>47</sup> By the late-eighteenth century, the principles of drill and tactics inspired by ancient texts, and reinterpreted through the

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<sup>44</sup> Martin, “The Objective and Subjective Rationalization of War.”

<sup>45</sup> Willems, *A Way of Life and Death*, 27.

<sup>46</sup> Keegan, *The Face of Battle*, 62.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.



bureaucratization of the aristocracy in the military institution, had been legally formalized with the publication and frequent revision of each state's military regulations. As well, the foundations of military theory as an academic discipline were established during the early decades of the nineteenth century in the works of aging Napoleonic era generals, most notably the barons de Jomini and von Clausewitz. These works, the principles of which would become institutionalized in the curricula of military academies around the world, clearly follow Caesar's narrative, defining war from the great leader's perspective, almost completely ignoring the individual soldier. But as the armies of post-Napoleonic Europe became thoroughly bureaucratized, the growing capacity of the nineteenth century state also encouraged a shift in military discourse away from reliance on individual genius toward a collective genius of state and institution. For instance, Clausewitz viewed soldiers as mere tools awaiting energetic use, writing that "in War it is only by means of a great directing spirit that we can expect the full power latent in the troops to be developed."<sup>48</sup> Yet, the premise of Clausewitz's project is that this directing spirit can be produced and perpetuated by the rational study of warfare. A similar shift to rational institutionalization appears in Jomini's work. Noting that Roman civilization collapsed due to its 'effeminacy', Jomini claims that the soldier's motivation must begin with the state's encouragement of a military spirit throughout the population, which is the basis for the temporary passions necessary for general mobilization. However, the sustained motivation of an army and its troops is created through the

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<sup>48</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 43.

rigid discipline and regimentation imposed by the military institution, and is maintained in combat only by the trained skill of the commander.<sup>49</sup>

Clausewitz and Jomini both suggest different moral objects in the demands arising from mobilization for war and war's actual conduct: that is, the values drawn on to motivate willing military service may be entirely different from the values a military will rely on to motivate a soldier's participation (willing or not) in combat. To mobilize for war, states have come to depend on national calls for patriotic service. Political psychologist Daniel Bar-Tal defines patriotism as "an activating, cognitive-affective force which not only binds individuals together but also provides the necessary ideology, explanation and justification for action on its behalf."<sup>50</sup> In more practical terms, according to Paul Stern, a nation mobilizes for war by activating a popular sense of national identity. Political leaders must manipulate the social attachments of their people "so as to socially construct the nation as an object of 'primordial' attachment."<sup>51</sup> That is, an emotional attachment to the nation must be stronger than both the emotions of individual self-interest and competing group attachments. The nation, its allies, and foes are personalized as heroes, victims, and villains—objects of love, sympathy, or hatred: "when a nation is the villain, only a nation can be the hero, so individuals act on their sense of moral obligation only through their national identification."<sup>52</sup> That is, other objects of moral authority must

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<sup>49</sup> Jomini, *The Art of War*, 56–57.

<sup>50</sup> Bar-Tal, "Patriotism as Fundamental Beliefs of Group Members," 57.

<sup>51</sup> Stern, "Why Do People Sacrifice for Their Nations?" 229.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

be eliminated or at least subordinated to the nation. Historian Dixon Wecter argues that creating objects of nationalist identification—either the ‘fatherland’ or heroic citizens—serves to ‘fix’ the relationship of the nation’s people to ‘greatness’, as any people “that cannot evoke the spirit of its dead heroes and the birth of new ones, in a time of crisis, is doomed.” But the dangers of nationalism, “with its mass egotisms and mass hatreds,” grow out of the same sort of objectification.<sup>53</sup> As Lipschutz notes, “Absent an enemy or some other organizing rationale, [the state] is hard put to maintain its internal cohesion, especially if and when times turn bad.”<sup>54</sup> Similarly, Margaret Somers argues that the real value in patriotism lies in its power over domestic dissent, as accusations of unpatriotic behavior have been “always more directed against fellow citizens than actual foreigners, for it is by ‘othering’ internal dissenters and the socially excluded that the included are able to distinguish themselves as true patriots ready to defend the nation against the threats from without or within.”<sup>55</sup>

The rhetoric of national spirit has served as the basis for the mobilization of national armies since the French Revolution. The ‘citizen-soldier’ ideal was yet another rediscovery from Roman republicanism, but until the end of the eighteenth century had not been applied since states regularly drew their forces from outside their own territories. Though it was important to the rhetoric of the American Revolution, the first truly national armies were the product of the French Revolution.

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<sup>53</sup> Wecter, *The Hero in America*, 6–7.

<sup>54</sup> Lipschutz, *Cold War Fantasies*, 197.

<sup>55</sup> Somers, *Genealogies of Citizenship*, 139.

The *levee en masse* declared by the French in 1793 assigned a proper role to all the people of France: young men would fight, women would sew uniforms, “old men will have themselves carried to the public square, to help inspire the courage of the warriors, and preach the hatred of the kings and the unity of the Republic.”<sup>56</sup> Initial attempts at democratization of the French armies, including the election of officers and elimination of old disciplinary codes, were ultimately done away with and older models reintroduced. Nationalist citizenship mobilized the state, but it had its limits in the motivation of soldiers in both war and peacetime, leaving violent discipline the primary means of exercising military authority. At Waterloo, for example, the French cavalry was positioned behind their own infantry units to prevent retreat.<sup>57</sup> British deserters were branded or tattooed until 1871; flogging was not outlawed in the peacetime British army until 1868, and still available to officers during campaigns until 1881 and in military prisons until 1907.<sup>58</sup> In the US, filling the ranks for the Civil War required abolishing severe forms of corporal punishment. In itself, this was insufficient to meet personnel requirements and a draft was instituted in 1863, though the inequity by which it was implemented led to riots.

Though the ordinary soldier remained an expendable tool of the military institution, nineteenth-century militaries were influenced by the growing liberalization of western society, leading to the greater inclusion of the middle classes

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<sup>56</sup> Holmes, *Redcoat*, 36. Citing the decree of the French National Convention of August 23, 1793.

<sup>57</sup> Keegan, *The Face of Battle*.

<sup>58</sup> Holmes, *Redcoat*, 324.

in the officer corps. At the same time, nationalist sentiment infused itself in popular expectations of military service, and in the years leading up to the First World War, the motivation of individual soldiers in war was explained as inherently present or absent in both the soldier and the nation. Darwin's theories of natural selection explained the development of western civilization in terms of a people's "superiority in the arts" acquired through selection of higher "intellectual and moral faculties" via competition within the group itself and with other tribes and nations. Darwin essentially equates morality and sociality, and sees the origin of this faculty in the 'sympathetic instinct', which manifests in two important ways for civilization. First, the willingness of some to sacrifice themselves for their group, when channeled into a concerted effort, is the foundation of a group's success relative to others. It is the necessary condition of government, as the shared willingness to sacrifice makes group coherence possible. Military success rests on the degree to which a group is endowed with this sympathetic instinct, as Darwin notes: "The advantage which disciplined soldiers have over undisciplined hordes follows chiefly from the confidence which each man feels in his comrades."<sup>59</sup> Willingness to sacrifice, however, does not make much biological sense—individuals most highly endowed with this trait would be less likely to produce offspring—and so the critical difference between successful groups and those they displace is the development of the sympathetic instinct to express the sense of the "love of approbation and dread of infamy" and the group's capacity to regulate that:

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<sup>59</sup> Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 1:156.

It is obvious, that the members of the same tribe would approve of conduct which appeared to them to be for the general good, and would reprobate that which appeared evil. To do good unto others—to do unto others as ye would they should do unto you—is the foundation-stone of morality. It is, therefore, hardly possible to exaggerate the importance during rude times of the love of praise and the dread of blame. A man who was not impelled by any deep, instinctive feeling, to sacrifice his life for the good of others, yet was roused to such actions by a sense of glory, would by his example excite the same wish for glory in other men, and would strengthen by exercise the noble feeling of admiration. He might thus do far more good to his tribe than by begetting offspring with a tendency to inherit his own high character.<sup>60</sup>

The capacity to inspire the group to glory thus becomes the evolutionary basis for the selection of an elite class within the larger group, while the capacity for willing obedience to that class is indicative of the group's moral faculties relative to other groups. That is, advanced civilization is a clear indication of a people's moral superiority. Darwin himself, unlike the white supremacists he inspired, might have recognized the capacity of individual members of different nations or races to possess high moral or intellectual faculties, but still insisted on the greater occurrence of these traits among western Europeans, particularly his own Anglo-Saxon race:

Obscure as is the problem of the advance of civilization, we can at least see that a nation which produced during a lengthened period the greatest number of highly intellectual, energetic, brave, patriotic, and benevolent men, would generally prevail over less favoured nations.

Darwinian influence justified belief in the inheritance of a people's spirit for war, which was to be brought out in the heroic leadership of the military's officer class. Well-bred men would stand and fight for their homeland because a nation's victories on the battlefield had, in the course of history, already sorted the weak from the

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 1:158–59.

strong, certainly among the bourgeois and aristocratic elites who filled the officer corps. Cowardice in the ranks indicated low breeding, which could only be overcome by strict discipline. Despite limited democratization of the ranks, the racial and class-based distinction of officer from enlisted and of soldier from coward remained the institutional norm well into the twentieth century.<sup>61</sup>

Of course, regardless of one's breeding, a leader's ability to encourage willing participation of their troops was limited by bureaucracies that had little regard for even the material needs of individual soldiers beyond the necessities of combat. Institutionally, the modern, bureaucratized army could utterly disregard any soldier's emotional or spiritual needs.<sup>62</sup> But the scale of the First World War—the millions of psychological casualties it produced among soldiers and officers alike—forced governments to address for the first time the psychological wellbeing of soldiers at war, if for no other reason than to minimize the costs of medical care and pensions for the millions of disabled veterans.<sup>63</sup> Military leaders had seen the armies of Russia and Austria-Hungary disintegrate as their conscripted masses lost the will to fight, and it

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<sup>61</sup> Such class distinction was naturalized in the claim by eugenicist Francis Dalton that 'civic worth' was normally distributed across populations. It is worth noting, however, that anti-militarists were equally influenced by social Darwinism and based their arguments on the same classed and racial chauvinism. For example, Stanford zoologist Vernon L. Kellogg's *Military Selection and Race Deterioration* (1916) argued that modern warfare was destroying the elite classes and exposing western societies to a 'race deteriorating diseases'. French sociologist Jacques Novicow's *War and its Alleged Benefits* (1912) offered a theory of 'scientific pacifism' based on claims of war's negative selection effects—the fittest are killed while the survivors had been the cowardly, sick, and enslaved. See Crook, *Darwinism, War and History*.

<sup>62</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 4.

<sup>63</sup> Wessely, "Twentieth-Century Theories on Combat Motivation and Breakdown."

was a subject of debate as to whether the French army could have maintained its morale had the Allied counter-offensive of August 1918 not succeeded.<sup>64</sup> What the war made certain to military commanders was that neither ideology nor bureaucratized social control were sufficient motive for conscripts to continue to fight in prolonged, industrialized warfare. They responded by adapting tactics to new technologies, precision artillery and the machine gun in particular, which necessitated the coordinated deployment of small units spread over a far wider geographic space. By World War II, the individual soldier became an isolated element, even if only a few yards from their comrades, whose effectiveness required much more indirect control than had been typically possible in combat situations. To achieve this demanded a recognition that the individual soldier's motivations and relation to the military institution were a tactical, and perhaps strategic, necessity.

### **Combat Motivation Sciences and Moral Authority of Comradeship**

The modern military institution has evolved to create an additional structure to bind the soldier physically, if not morally, to the political community. Anticipating the shrinkage of moral and social horizons in war, the role of the soldier is structured to ensure a motivation to fight will be always present through the idealization of small-unit identity. The smallest tactical unit, the fire team, is composed of only four soldiers, and lives, moves, and survives as a unified body in the war zone. Two fire teams led by a sergeant compose the nine soldier squad. For the average private,

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<sup>64</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*.



social and physical needs are met entirely within the squad; all interaction with the broader military institution is managed by the squad leader. All within the squad are dependent on their fellow squad members, even more dependent on their fire team members, to survive combat. Moral bonds imposed by squad membership (and to a lessening extent membership in higher echelons of control—the platoon, company, battalion, brigade, division, branch of service, and ultimately the state) ensure that a soldier’s anomic break from the greater common cause does not throw that soldier out of combat. The squad is dependent upon higher echelons for its survival and cannot desert the war zone *en masse*. The nearly unbreakable small-unit bonds between idealized brothers-in-arms ensures the soldier will fulfill the moral obligation to fight—if not for their country, then surely for the survival of their closest friends. The only way an individual soldier can escape combat is to depend on their friends to collectively kill the enemy and complete the mission.

That soldiers fight in support of their immediate peers—the principle of small-unit cohesion—was the primary take-away from the large-scale sociological studies conducted during the Second World War. Formal ‘scientific’ study of combat, as distinct from the study of war as a broader concept like in the works of Clausewitz or Jomini, is a relatively recent undertaking. There have long been studies of ‘battle’ (of combat *corps à corps*), but the experience of soldiers in combat was rarely ever studied, mostly for lack of evidence. Though some diaries and memoirs of ordinary soldiers appear in the nineteenth century, and some ‘infant murmurs’ of the ordinary soldier’s voice can be heard in the histories of the American Civil War, only with the

First World War was the experience of combat by combatants accounted for in any systematic way. Most military scholarship takes the position, as Keegan describes it, that “the events and characters of a battle are subordinate in importance to its outcome,” whether that be in terms of the military campaign, the political settlement of the war, or institutional changes.<sup>65</sup> Of course, one can write about combat at the individual level with an interest only in the outcome as well, but as military historian Joseph Ryan observes, where military thought had ever considered the motivations of individual soldiers the authority of those claims were based in the author’s “innate ability to judge men, and that such things were matters of intuition and common sense.”<sup>66</sup> There are a number of reasons that more systematic micro-level analysis became important with the First World War. On one hand, the social scientific study of industrial processes made bureaucratic management dependent on micro-level observation; even if such studies ultimately subsumed individuality within a dehumanized process, the unit of measure was still the individual rather than the mass.<sup>67</sup> On the other, the political climate in the spread of democratic citizenship to the working classes made the welfare of working-class soldiers more politically important. This is certainly related to the importance given to the study of trauma by military psychiatry. Perhaps the most important factor in the increased emphasis on the individual soldier in military scholarship was literacy of the soldiers themselves.

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<sup>65</sup> Keegan, *The Face of Battle*, 44.

<sup>66</sup> Ryan, “Samuel A. Stouffer and The American Soldier,” 108.

<sup>67</sup> There is a certain irony in noting that Frederick Taylor’s study of industrial efficiency *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911) refers to malingering in the workplace as ‘soldiering’.

But the systematic study of individual behavior of soldiers in combat is primarily a product of twentieth-century total war and the mass mobilization of American society for World War II. This research reflects the convergence of technology, bureaucracy, military necessity, and academic faith in the scientific method for social engineering.

The scale of the US mobilization for World War II allowed its military to develop the resources and technology to study the topic of combat motivation in enormous depth, and established that the motivation of individual soldiers results from their social and physical dependence on the ‘primary group’, that is, the intimately connected identification of soldiers with their closest comrades in the small unit. The technological changes that brought about the devolution of power toward the individual soldier had been recognized by the Army prior to the start of WWII. Rhetoric of the era, of which more will be said in the following chapter, acknowledged that the chaos of modern combat requires preparing individual soldiers to act on their own initiative. What goes unsaid, however, is the presumption that military training has adapted appropriately. It also takes for granted that individual initiative can be trained at all and that military training programs actually produce this result. It presumes that the will of the commander, exercising the legitimate authority of the Army’s officer corps and given troops properly trained to institutional standards, is sufficient to success in modern warfare. However, the view does not account for what Clausewitz refers to as the ‘moral forces’ in war, a mistake that “condemns beforehand every one [sic] who would endeavour to justify himself before

its judgment seat by the mere physical relations of forces.”<sup>68</sup> The studies of combat motivation conducted during the war confirmed the necessity of initiative of individuals, but offered a body of evidence that contradicted claims about patriotism, military genius, and (to a lesser extent) institutionalized disciplinary practices. The ‘Big Three’ foundational texts of combat motivation scholarship grew out of these studies and were published in the few years following the war: Samuel Stouffer’s *The American Soldier* (1949), S.L.A Marshall’s *Men Against Fire* (1947), and “Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II” by Edward Shils and Morris Janowitz (1948). Though each study varied in its object and its method, the three works conclude that the motivation of individual soldiers results from their social and physical dependence on the primary group, that is, the intimately connected identification of soldiers with their closest comrades in the small unit.

*The American Soldier*<sup>69</sup> approaches combat motivation, not from the question ‘why do men fight?’ but rather as the “aspects of the situation which made it possible

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<sup>68</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 112.

<sup>69</sup> The work of Stouffer, a University of Chicago sociologist, is the compilation of four years of research conducted by the War Department’s Research Branch, Information and Education Division. The two volumes of *The American Soldier* contain results from more than three hundred survey projects, which in total represent the various opinions of more than half a million soldiers. The scale of the project is a reflection of the total mobilization of American society for the war effort. Stouffer served as the director of the professional research staff, which included some of the era’s leading sociologists. The project became one of the foundational works of quantitative social science. However, Stouffer did note the limits of the Research Branch, characterizing it as “set up to do a fast, practical job; it was an engineering operation,” and any “value for the future of social science” was “quite incidental to the mission of the branch in wartime” (see Ryan, “Samuel A. Stouffer and The American Soldier,” 194). The chapters of *The American Soldier* were authored by

for the combat soldier to sustain the extraordinary stresses to which he was subjected.”<sup>70</sup> It takes for granted that soldiers find themselves in war for any number of reasons, and that the soldier’s role is to fulfill the lawful orders of their superiors. In so doing it can move directly to what it sees as the essential problem of motivation: maintaining effectiveness in the face of wartime realities. Solving the problem requires first identifying the stresses or ‘countermotives’ that conspire to force the soldier from the field, beginning with the obvious frictions of war that directly impact the soldier: the danger of combat, its unrelenting fatigue, and the deprivation of necessities, comforts, and personal freedoms. The study also gets at more profound stressors—some of which may be peculiar to the context of the Second World War—that soldiers would have to overcome for their own survival, and that the military would have to overcome to achieve victory. These include: the conflict arising in the soldier’s impulse to self-preservation and the social compulsion toward danger; the subordination but persistence of individual obligations to family and home; the decline of physical health in prolonged combat; the ‘sharp break’ with the moral norms of conduct in civilian life; the soldier’s sense of expendability caused by the impersonal military necessity to risk their life; and the ‘endlessness of combat’—the soldier’s perception that their war would inevitably end with injury or death in combat, or in psychological breakdown from the constant stress.<sup>71</sup> Perhaps the most

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various members of the Research Branch staff. Any references to ‘Stouffer’ that follow refer to the project as a whole. Specific citations indicate individual authors.

<sup>70</sup> Williams and Smith, “General Characteristics of Ground Combat,” 105.

<sup>71</sup> Williams and Smith, “General Characteristics of Ground Combat.”

significant finding of the study is that stresses accumulate with prolonged combat experience. Soldiers reported that as their unit's casualties mounted, close comrades were lost, and atrocities were witnessed, their own 'physical symptoms of fear' experienced during combat, such things as tremors, faintness, nausea, or loss of bowel control, increased in frequency and intensity. This and similar findings allowed for the connection of psychological breakdown to war itself, and the recognition that 'combat fatigue' was not simply a failure of courage, but could in time take even the best trained, best led, most self-confident soldiers out of the fight. In this light, fear can be interpreted as the natural reaction to danger and not a failure of character. Fear in itself does not undermine combat motivation. Instead, motivation fails with the accumulation of stressors, many of which bring the soldier into conflict with their own self-interest. This internal conflict of self-preservation and external demands "was one of the factors which sometimes lay at the root of neuropsychiatric breakdowns involving gross disorganization of behavior."<sup>72</sup>

While many of these stressors are inherent to war, other conditions of wartime experience naturally resist stress and should be the institutional basis for creating combat motivation. In particular, Stouffer points to the unifying effect of an external threat to a group as a whole. Conflict creates solidarity, but the differentiation of 'us/them' goes beyond the obvious struggle against enemy forces. Front-line troops find themselves in conflict with their own military institution. Such threats to soldiers' wellbeing commonly included: incompetent leadership; well-fed support

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 87.

troops far from the front (the phenomenon of ‘relative deprivation’); bureaucratic rules that could never be reconciled with the conditions experienced in combat; and the ‘soft’ men back home who took advantage of the soldiers’ absence. With all these threats, the only people worthy of a soldier’s trust are the members of their own small unit—the ‘primary group’—those who truly understand their experience, and on whom they rely for protection from both the enemy and the Army, and to whom they turn for acceptance and approval of the morally conflicting experiences they are all forced to share. Because of this, the means by which stressors are reduced are the semi- or informal norms of small group membership. Stouffer suggests that the soldier faces a hierarchy of norms, with formal institutional regulations applied to all, but which are mediated by the judgment of the soldier’s commanding officers, who must represent the necessary formalities of the army institution *for* their men while being simultaneously *of* the informal social reality of the small unit. Motivation therefore depends on the ability of officers to effectively navigate these conflicting demands of leadership, and that this sort of leadership produces the most effective combat units. The problem for leaders, however, was the common disconnection between the perspectives of officers and enlisted. When Army officers were asked to identify what they felt kept their soldiers in the fight, their responses included: leadership and discipline (19 percent); group solidarity (15 percent); sense of duty and self-respect (15 percent); ending the task (14 percent). When enlisted soldiers were asked to identify their own motivations, thirty-nine percent said ‘ending the task’, while smaller groups identified ‘thoughts of home’ and ‘self-preservation’ as

their primary motive. Taken together, the soldiers' answers might be interpreted as a single response: surviving the war. It accounted for the majority of responses. Less than one percent said that leadership and discipline kept them in the fight.<sup>73</sup>

Despite this emphasis on the individual soldier and small unit, the study concludes that the military's institutionalization of operating procedures was the essential factor in the overall effectiveness of the war effort. Because losses in combat create a constant rotation of unit members and leaders, military success could only occur in a system operating independently of individual personalities and loyalties. Small-unit loyalties developed despite the constant turnover of members. Indoctrination hardwires the necessary mechanical response of soldiers and leaders through training and discipline, but more importantly it defines the individual soldier's habitus in the expectation to respond to the conditions of combat as a member of the small unit. In other words, soldiers act in combat because they have been institutionalized as soldiers who will act in combat.<sup>74</sup>

S.L.A. Marshall's *Men Against Fire*<sup>75</sup> challenges a truly fundamental assumption of *The American Soldier*, and perhaps the majority of military

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<sup>73</sup> Smith, "Combat Motivations among Ground Troops," 107–10.

<sup>74</sup> Williams and Smith, "General Characteristics of Ground Combat," 100–104.

<sup>75</sup> Marshall's work is drawn from the author's service in the US Army Historical Branch where he conducted approximately 400 'after action interviews' with combat units in both the Pacific and Europe. Marshall had served as an enlisted soldier in France during WWI, and worked as a journalist and syndicated columnist between the wars. His assignment as an historian was to record soldiers' experiences in combat for the production of official unit histories, but the scope of his work provided a perspective from which he could describe the enormous range of conditions faced by troops in combat and analyze their responses. Marshall's prior experience in journalism may be the great downfall of the work, as he paid little attention to



scholarship. When Stouffer saw primary groups performing well in combat, he could say without doubt, “we already know that most soldiers *did fight* in the face of all the cumulative stresses tending to drive them out of combat.”<sup>76</sup> Marshall makes the radical claim that in most combat units the vast majority of soldiers *did not fight*. Marshall’s analysis of combat motivation works from macro to micro. Though not acknowledged, he follows Weber’s model of war and social organization, in which the conditions of war are created by the civilizations involved. In each society, its technological and economic characteristics determine the choice of weapons with which it equips itself, and it is weaponry around which armies must organize themselves. Once hostilities commence, military necessity forces each side to rebalance its structure and weaponry to account for the strengths and vulnerabilities of the opposition. As already noted, the armies of World War II—on all sides—were forced by technology to organize their ground forces into smaller and smaller units. Only by allowing dispersion of its own personnel could a unit maneuver against the mass killing potential of machine guns and precision artillery. Marshall argues that these adaptations demanded placing the responsibility of initiative upon the individual soldier, and while the US Army recognized this philosophically, the institution could not adapt in ways that effectively instilled individual initiative. Initiative, Marshall agrees, depends on the soldier’s position within their primary group; but where

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academic standards of recordkeeping or analysis, leaving later scholars unable to reproduce many of his findings from the notes he left to military archives. Thus, while his account is compelling, many of Marshall’s specific claims call for a certain degree of skepticism. See Chambers, “S.L.A. Marshall’s Men Against Fire.”

<sup>76</sup> Smith, “Combat Motivations among Ground Troops,” 107. Emphasis added.

Stouffer's researchers argue that effectiveness results from the social benefits of the primary group Marshall sees ineffectiveness resulting from inappropriate 'tactical relationships' that stymie individual initiative. That is, unless small units are able to fully coordinate the actions of each individual—an incredibly difficult undertaking in the jungles of the Pacific or the dense settlements of Europe—soldiers lose initiative as soon as they became isolated on the battlefield. Gaining and maintaining initiative is the most fundamental aspect of combat motivation.

Marshall's claim that most soldiers did not fight comes from his attempts to reconstruct combat events from the reports of soldiers themselves, in groups and individually, who consistently identify only fifteen to twenty-five percent of their unit's personnel, specified here as ground troops in direct engagement with small-arms, who actually fired at their enemy. This problem of 'firing ratios' arises from two sources. The first is, again, the nature of twentieth-century warfare: the increased physical distance between individuals necessary for survival makes communication and control incredibly difficult, and too often leaves soldiers isolated, leading to loss of initiative and inability of individuals to act. The second source is institutional: the failure of militaries to recognize the individual soldier as the primary unit of an army's force. Military training was (and in many ways still is) mired in nineteenth-century discipline and drill, wholly inadequate to twentieth-century warfare. In mass formations, mechanistic training drills were developed with the goal of instilling the soldier's mechanical response to orders in combat. However, mechanical response is a false ideal for an isolated soldier who is "thrown upon his own responsibility

immediately combat starts.”<sup>77</sup> To take initiative requires the ability to evaluate a situation and respond accordingly.

Marshall is careful to note that of those who did not fire approximately eighty percent had been in position to fire at some point in the engagement. However, he makes clear that cowardice (a willful act of self-preservation in violation of social expectation) did not contribute to these soldiers’ inaction. Though immobilized by fear, troops rarely fled if someone within their range of sight exercised initiative, and would support the active-firers once they could join in coherent group action. Similarly, flight *en masse* tended to occur only when isolated soldiers witnessed others leaving the battlefield. Once started, such retreat would ultimately continue until communication and situational awareness could be reestablished.

Nevertheless, Marshall insists that only a small group of soldiers in any unit would engage the enemy. The distinction of firers and non-firers reflects a moral dimension shaped by both military and civilian indoctrination. Those soldiers who did fire shared traits that allowed for autonomous action despite their rank or level of performance outside of combat. Outside of combat, autonomy was (and is) frowned upon in the military, and Marshall reports that many of these active-firers were deemed to be inadequate soldiers by institutional standards, being poorly disciplined and resistant to authority. However, these soldiers who consistently took initiative tended to gravitate toward each other in combat—action in itself being the moral center of the unit once the battle begins. Non-firers, on the other hand, were those

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<sup>77</sup> Marshall, *Men Against Fire*, 40.

soldiers who could not accept the moral responsibility of killing, a trait that results from social conditioning. Marshall concludes that the average American soldier is “what his home, his religion, his schooling, and the moral code and ideals of his society have made him. The Army cannot unmake him.”<sup>78</sup> This is, however, a qualified assertion. The Army of the day could not unmake the American citizen-soldier, but Marshall suggests that changes in military organization, training, indoctrination, and improved communication between all levels of the hierarchy could allow the individual soldier far greater autonomy and the capacity to more readily act. To achieve this level of moral autonomy, however, requires the institutional and cultural abandonment of romantic notions of war and the acceptance of combat’s harsh realities. Marshall suggests that the problem of combat motivation would be best achieved through socialization and training that acknowledges the amorality of combat.<sup>79</sup>

A comparison of American soldiers with their German enemy demonstrates the degree to which the soldier’s self-understanding and relations to moral authorities are culturally dependent. Whereas Stouffer and Marshall studied an army constantly on the advance in both Europe and the Pacific, “Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II” by Edward Shils and Morris Janowitz, is the study of an army first halted, then put in near constant retreat by the Allies in North Africa, then

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 41.

Italy, and finally in France and across the Rhine to Germany itself.<sup>80</sup> Despite the constant losses, the German Army continued to tenaciously resist the Allied advance until news of Hitler's suicide reached the front.<sup>81</sup> The German surrender came eight days after his death, but until then there was, unlike in the First World War, no sign of a general collapse or any organized effort within the German Army to end the war.<sup>82</sup> Shils and Janowitz set out to contradict the popular belief that the Germans fought on from fanatic adherence to Nazi ideology. Patterns of surrender and desertion demonstrate that German Army resistance was instead a function of a primary group's capacity to remain cohesive, which depended on primary groups fulfilling 'primary gratifications'. Generally, this only failed to occur when individuals or groups became isolated, lost significant numbers or key leaders, or faced depleted ammunition, food supply, or medical care.<sup>83</sup>

The influence of the primary group for German soldiers largely paralleled the effects of the American small unit. It served as a social system of loyalties and intimacy, and exercised informal regulation through some degree of adherence to

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<sup>80</sup> The two University of Chicago sociologists spent the war as researchers in the Psychological Warfare Division of General Eisenhower's staff. Their report is primarily an analysis of the attitudes of German prisoners of war based on interrogations, 'intensive psychological interviews', and a monthly opinion poll of inmates at various prison camps. Their work is, of course, reflective only of the war in western Europe. A similar study undertaken of prisoners taken by Soviets would certainly have produced a different narrative.

<sup>81</sup> This statement concerns regular army units made up of German nationals. Units made up of conscripts from conquered territories surrendered far more readily and in much larger numbers.

<sup>82</sup> Shils and Janowitz, "Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II," 281.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

formal institutional legitimacy. For the German soldier, the primary group “held his aggressiveness in check [and] provided discipline, protection, and freedom from autonomous decision.”<sup>84</sup> As in the American Army, fear and deprivation were mediated by group support. Likewise, group loyalties could lessen the stresses caused by the conflict of military and familial obligations, though this issue was perhaps more acute for the German soldier because proximity allowed visits home during breaks from the front. And for both armies, ideological motivations were quickly subordinated to primary group motives in the immediacy of combat.

Nazi ideology did play some role in maintaining group cohesiveness, particularly within larger formations, but only ten to fifteen percent of enlisted soldiers could be categorized as ideologically ‘hard core’—those whose toughness served as a model for ‘weaker’ men and whose presence served as a reminder of the political power of the regime to check dissent in the ranks.<sup>85</sup> More important to German soldiers was a popular acceptance of ‘soldierly honor’, which placed military service in higher social esteem than was experienced by their American or British counterparts. While honor is not unique to German militarism, Shils and Janowitz suggest that the responsibilities placed on German officers for their men by German society, coupled with their troops’ belief in both the “efficacy and moral worth of discipline and the inferiority of the spontaneous, primary reactions of the personality,” created soldiers who were highly effective at and committed to their

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 285.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 286. The authors also note, without explanation, the “definite homo-erotic tendencies” of the Nazi ideologues.

assigned role.<sup>86</sup> Comparing relaxed US and British discipline to their own, prisoners often remarked, “I don’t see how it works!”<sup>87</sup>

German officers took on a highly paternal role that further enforced the cohesiveness of their subordinate units. This paternalism is also evident in the highly positive sentiment most German soldiers held for Hitler. Though soldiers held Nazism in low regard, their confidence in Hitler remained high until the end: Hitler’s approval rating among German prisoners remained consistently over sixty percent until January 1945 when the final German offensive failed. Even as late as March 1945—a month in which the cities of Bonn and Cologne were lost and the Allies gained control of the Rhine—a third of German prisoners still held confidence in Hitler, though only ten percent believed the war was winnable.<sup>88</sup> As psychological warfare specialists, Shils and Janowitz address the power of enemy propaganda, most of which they say had little impact on German combat motivation.<sup>89</sup> The German soldiers’ continued confidence in Hitler suggests that a particular sort of political belief does, in fact, play a meaningful role in motivation. That belief is of one’s inclusion among, and duty toward, a people. For the German soldier, Hitler did not

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 295.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 298. American scholars, particularly Stephen Ambrose, might respond to the German observation that American troops had been brought up in a society largely free from military indoctrination, and that successful leaders and units exercised sufficient autonomy to overcome the hyperinstitutionalization that a more professional military might have imposed.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 304.

<sup>89</sup> It is important to note that the influence of enemy propaganda is not addressed in the rest of the literature, which suggests an assumption by researchers that defeat of their own military would never occur.

represent Nazi ideology, but the German nation-state. It is possible to imagine (or perhaps impossible to imagine) an American army fighting on against a foreign invader, despite the inevitable prospect of defeat, up to or beyond the collapse of an American government or the army's own disintegration. In World War II, the only truly effective propaganda against the Germans was creating the trust that surrender to the American or British forces would be safer—when the situation seemed impossible to escape—than fighting on in isolation. The experience of the German soldier suggests that a culturally enforced sense of honor and duty leads soldiers to continue to act in combat against an honorable enemy until hardship and isolation allow for an honorable surrender or retreat.

### **Disentangling Military Necessity from Militarism**

The primary point in the preceding discussion is that the conduct of war does seem to necessitate a collective ethic among soldiers. However, the processes of both militarist and military indoctrination to achieve that are based on tenets that have shifted over time, yet have been offered as natural and inviolable. Because these tenets are not mutually exclusive on their face, they may be present to varying degrees at any given time in a military's institutional ethic. The question arises of whether an ethic founded on multiple tenets—each the product of particular circumstances—can be coherently practiced by soldiers in war.

While criticism may only reify assumptions about military indoctrination's necessity in producing soldiers willing to perform in combat, it does at least highlight the constructed nature of principles underlying traditional military authority. It is



important to note that a small number of more canonical scholars have questioned the necessity and efficacy of traditional military indoctrination. Clausewitz, for all his attempts to rationalize a science of war, still held that true military virtue was only ever a product of an army's "incessant activity and exertion" in "a succession of campaigns and great victories."<sup>90</sup> There may be value in a peacetime army's indoctrination of "order, smartness, good will, [and] a certain degree of pride and high feeling," and military virtue achieved in war may be maintained in peacetime through "a certain plodding earnestness and strict discipline." However, Clausewitz also points to examples of ill-disciplined forces attaining military virtue and of military losses of disciplined armies lacking in military virtue. He also claims that military virtue may be dispensed with completely in wars between national, conscript armies. All forms of military regulation and practice should be viewed in relation to "the real conduct of war" as no more than possible "modes of proceeding," but the successful conduct of war occurs in the adaptation to conditions that arise in the course of events. Reflecting this same sentiment, S.L.A Marshall challenges the necessity of military discipline as just one available, perhaps imperfect, method:

Our weakness lies in this—that we have never got down to an exact definition of what we are seeking. Failing that, we fall short in our attempt to formulate in training how best to obtain it, and our philosophy of discipline falters at the vital point in its practical, tactical application.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 117.

<sup>91</sup> Marshall, *Men Against Fire*, 23.

Keegan argues that indoctrination practices in formal military training have been too often the result of military pedagogy perpetually caught between preparing for the next war and lessons of the last, and war scholarship's tendency "to make orderly and rational what is essentially chaotic and instinctive."<sup>92</sup>

This distinction raised by Clausewitz between the real conduct of war and doctrinally available methods of doing so raises the question of whether indoctrination to belief in traditional military authority serves to replace what is actually arbitrary. Testing doctrine for ideological content may be the most effective means of distinguishing military necessity from arbitrary militarism, but to the extent that military membership demands some organizing moral principle that defines the institution, that test is by no means a simple one. Even realistic combat training is part of an ideological mechanism. Keegan argues that in such training, the soldier must apply the rote-learned lessons of doctrine, including those ways of thinking "to organize his sensations, to reduce the events of combat to as few and as easily recognizable a set of elements as possible, [and by which] avert the onset of fear or, worse, of panic and to perceive a face of battle which... need not, in the event, prove wholly petrifying."<sup>93</sup> Indoctrinating soldiers to think in a particular way about combat seems necessary to prepare them for it. Yet, all of these elements of training will, either directly or indirectly, reflect the ideological tenets that organize the broader institution. More overtly ideological indoctrination is part of that training, and will

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<sup>92</sup> Keegan, *The Face of Battle*, 18.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

ideally if it must occur prove its military necessity. If Plato was correct that an ideal city would depend on the agreed to truth of constructed ‘noble lies’ (Republic, III, 414b-417b), the ideal military institution must as well.

Still, the effort to distinguish the ideologically necessary from the arbitrary is in itself a project of military necessity. Whether an ethic is based on lies or in facts, its practice must not be divorced from conditions in which it originates. For Clausewitz, the potential “evil” of any anachronistic institutional practice, even those originating in true military necessity, is that “such a manner originating in a special case easily outlives itself, because it continues whilst circumstances imperceptibly change.”<sup>94</sup> Because the most widely held beliefs about the military’s proper role have been largely bounded by the prerogative of the military institution itself, the basic assumptions of soldiering go largely unquestioned both outside and within the military institution. The strict social expectations of being a soldier—which define the relationship of soldiers to each other, to the army, the state, and society—depend more on the power of institutional legacies than on the realities soldiers face in war. While common sense might suggest that a society’s military institutions exist to respond to *military* necessities, the historical development of this relationship—particularly as the perspective of the individual soldier is more closely approached—demonstrates the greater influence of various *political* necessities that have shaped military institutions. Samuel Huntington calls this the conflicting demands of ‘functional imperatives’ of war fighting and the ‘societal imperatives’ that demand

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<sup>94</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 81.

the military institution reflect the society it serves.<sup>95</sup> However, an analysis of institutional practices complicates Huntington's model. In modern military institutions, much of what passes for functional imperatives is in fact disguising *institutional imperatives* that serve only the interests of the institution and certain communities within it through the rejection or cooptation of societal imperatives, even at the expense of functional imperatives. Institutional imperatives reflect the deep conservatism of military institutions. For example, the same basic hierarchical arrangements developed in the seventeenth century persist as the basic organizing principle of the military institution today, despite technological shifts that have forced the devolution of control and decision making to the lowest levels. Technological advances in the early-twentieth century, particularly mass-casualty producing weapons like the machine gun and high explosive artillery, demanded the breakup of mass formations on the battlefield into small teams operating with a great degree of independence in combat. So while the small unit, led directly by enlisted, noncommissioned officers rather than the officer corps, has taken on greater tactical and even strategic importance—the evolution of the 'strategic corporal'<sup>96</sup> in contemporary parlance—there has been no corresponding change in the institution's hierarchy to reflect the devolution of authority. Though sized and equipped

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<sup>95</sup> Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*.

<sup>96</sup> Krulak, "The Strategic Corporal."

differently, the basic organizational and command structure of the regiment of the early United States is nearly identical to that of the contemporary brigade.<sup>97</sup>

Rather than focusing on their imperative origins, institutional practices can be better considered in the ‘military’ versus ‘militaristic’ purposes they serve. Practices in the pursuit of military necessity are characterized by “a primary concentration of men and materials on winning specific objectives of power with the utmost efficiency...[and] humane use of the materials and forces available.” Militaristic practices, on the other hand, are the “vast array of customs, interests, prestige, actions and thought associated with armies and wars and yet transcending true military purposes.”<sup>98</sup> A genuine functional imperative is militarily necessary. Societal imperatives could serve military or militaristic purposes, but may also be wholly unrelated. Institutional imperatives may serve military purposes at odds with societal imperatives, but many are purely militaristic. Those things that are militarily necessary are generally defined externally by the actions of potential adversaries and internally by availability of resources. For example, changes in the geo-political situation of states may lead to new strategic choices about the appropriate size and shape of their armed forces or the range of missions states envision for their military forces. Similarly, technological developments, such as the introduction of new weapons, lead to the development of new tactics. At an operational level, military

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<sup>97</sup> Compare the formation of the regiment in von Steuben’s *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops* (known popularly as the ‘Blue Book’; it was adopted by Congress in the Militia Act of 1792), and the organizational structure of the infantry brigade combat team in current US Army doctrine (in HQDA, *FM 3-96 (2015)*).

<sup>98</sup> Vagts, *A History of Militarism*, 33.

necessity is captured in the Army's planning mnemonic 'METT-TC': Mission, Enemy, Terrain and weather, Troops and support available, Time available, and Civil considerations.<sup>99</sup>

The continuity and persistence of particular interests within militaries, and the deference of civilian political leadership to military expertise, have contributed to the remarkable conservatism of military institutions. At its core, today's military institution is a legacy of traditions that persist primarily for pursuit of the institutional imperative of its own self-perpetuation. This has made attempts to redefine the soldier's role in ways that might better reflect both military necessity and appropriate contemporary societal imperatives highly incremental and incomplete. From this institutional perspective, the soldier as a moral actor is measured in conformance to political, cultural, and institutional expectations of obedient fulfillment of institutionally defined roles. The military purpose of the soldier is undermined by militaristic indoctrination inappropriate to the conditions of contemporary warfare.

Further complicating the moral expectations of the soldier's role, the ideals and practices of military indoctrination may be at odds with many tenets of recruits' earlier indoctrination to a broader set of political and cultural ideals. This gap will reflect institutional efforts to maintain political and cultural autonomy and the pursuit of its own interests in modern societies that demand their military institutions reflect broader societal values. The persistent reliance on a tradition of authoritarianism in defining the role of the soldier has often been challenged by the strong anti-

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<sup>99</sup> HQDA, *ADP 3-0 (2011)*, 2.

authoritarian bent of liberalism, but most attempts to liberalize military culture have been only nominally successful, while others have been resisted entirely. Still, liberal individualism has always been part of the modern military ideal, though how and by whom individualism can be acted on has been tightly controlled and limited to those with full institutional membership. Such membership has expanded and contracted, but the perpetuation of traditional military authority through the indoctrination of disciplined obedience, small-unit loyalty, and altruistic service to the nation remains the precondition of full membership. In sum, the conflict of functional, societal, and institutional imperatives results in an ideal soldier caught between expectations of altruistic deference to traditional military authority motivated by a narrative of military necessity, and egoistic fulfillment of liberal democratic idealism. Neither of the two sides of the soldier are founded wholly, if at all, upon the necessities of war, and so their potential for failure in combat is likely.

In this case, anomie might be considered as a centrifugal force throwing off broken elements from the moral center. Ideally, soldiers are drawn to military service by the common cause of the political community, and soldiers are held in orbit by the moral strength of the common cause until crisis arises and the moral connection with the center is challenged. If it is true that the value of nationalism is its power over domestic dissent, the principles that define membership in a moral institution may serve the same purpose. The process of creating an identity of institutional membership will result in both inclusion and exclusion. To be morally alienated is to be a dissenter, and there are political consequences for that. Conformity to the

demands of moral authority becomes a source of moral disgust for the alienated person, but the danger of sanction must become a source of constant anxiety. The political mobilization of fear might strengthen the us/them impulse, but it also creates the sense that the only ones we can trust are ourselves. This dynamic is, I will argue, the precise goal of indoctrination in the US Army.

My argument is not that military indoctrination for the unique demands of combat is unnecessary. It is instead that training in both its ideal form and as it is practiced might serve ends distinct from victory in war. Clausewitz is certainly right in his worries about the uncritical reliance on tradition to hold the moral center. Though he is specifically concerned with dogmatic adherence to regulation and method strategically and tactically, if trauma is the result of military indoctrination then that indoctrination has to be questioned as to whether or not it has outlived its usefulness. That problem, in itself, will undoubtedly contain any number of strategic and tactical implications. Because military indoctrination occurs outside the field of war, even if the institution was designed to operate in that field, and because the institution, never mind its individual members, may go decades without engaging in the role it was designed for, it is worth asking about the relation of particular institutional practices and the ends they may achieve. My goal in the chapters that follow is to demonstrate that much of what the contemporary US Army takes for granted in its institutional ethic is the product of particular political and cultural moments, the logic of which might no longer apply to the necessities of combat.



## Chapter Six

### The American Military Tradition and the Institutional Imperative to Perpetuate It

As discussed in the previous chapter, the fundamental condition of the modern soldier's relationship to the military institution is disciplined obedience to traditional military authority. That authority is not monolithic, however, and the frictions of modern war have produced multiple sources of moral authority upon which the soldier might act: the institution itself; its heroes and great leaders; the nation; or the comrades of a soldier's own small unit. The Army's attempts at self-definition have, more or less successfully, accounted for each of these elements. In this chapter I consider the defining traits of the ideal American soldier that reflect the gap between military necessity and militaristic institutional imperatives by tracing a history of the ever evolving ideal as it has been expressed culturally, politically, and institutionally in the American military tradition. Based on assertions that the tradition has been established in military necessity, US Army recruits are indoctrinated to belief in an idealized standard of disciplined obedience to military authority, loyal comradeship to their assigned units, and altruistic service to the nation as citizen-soldiers. Adherence to these doctrinal tenets becomes the soldier's principle of moral action, and, as no clear lines distinguish these ideals, each reinforces the other as the basis of the institution's traditional authority. In practice they serve as a selection mechanism for institutional membership, which is, of course, defined primarily by institutional imperatives. Exploring these ideals in the historical development of the US Army

reveals some of the ways they have been mobilized to serve both military necessity and militaristic interests.

The significance of history in the US Army cannot be understated, but its place in doctrine requires a brief explanation. First, the Army relies on history to justify its authority over its members, a dynamic that is reflected in its indoctrination model of ‘Learn, Comply, Believe’.<sup>1</sup> That process begins with leaders (full members of the institution who have already been selected for their conformity to the institutional ideal) teaching institutional values through both formal lessons and modeled behavior to their subordinates (new or less fully ‘developed’ members of the institution). The Army’s institutional values exist as such (have been adopted and perpetuated) because they have been ‘validated’ in the experiences of leaders and subordinates throughout Army history.<sup>2</sup> The outcome of teaching is the subordinate’s learned understanding of Army culture—that is, institutional practices are linked to institutional values, establishing the foundation of traditional military authority.<sup>3</sup> In the next stage of indoctrination, leaders reinforce institutional values through disciplinary practices that have been historically validated in experience, resulting in their subordinates’ compliance with military authority as disciplined soldiers who can be judged against historically validated measures of performance. Finally, leaders

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<sup>1</sup> HQDA, *FM 22-100 (1999)*, Appendix B.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraph 7-75.

<sup>3</sup> By doctrine, military authority “originates in oaths of office, law, rank structure, traditions, and regulations” (*Ibid.*, paragraph A-11). Each of these in turn represents particular relationships to authority (the Constitution; statute law; senior members; past members; the institution itself) that have been validated in historical experience.

shape the ethical climate of their disciplined subordinates by creating conditions in which institutional values are validated in experience, resulting in their subordinates' embodied belief in those values. At this stage, subordinates can become leaders themselves, people of character who can judge themselves against the historically validated achievements of their predecessors, and therefore capable of exercising the requisite military authority to themselves teach institutional values, reinforce those values through discipline, and shape the ethical climate for their own subordinates.

The Army also relies on history to define its relationship to the American state and culture. To maintain its political autonomy in American politics, Army leaders have attempted to define the institution as a 'profession'<sup>4</sup> to distinguish it from bureaucracies and vocations with less social capital in contemporary American culture. As a profession, the institution would be defined by four characteristics that justified its continuing political autonomy by establishing its own justification in a simplistic reading of its role in American history: its long history of successful 'service to the nation', an 'expert knowledge' demonstrated in that success, a 'unique culture' necessary for military success, and a 'professional military ethos' that would assure future success. It is no mistake that the Army's doctrinal statement of its own identity as an institution and profession begins with an (entirely uncritical) account of

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<sup>4</sup> Current doctrine explains this in terms of military necessity: "The trust we have earned and continuously reinforce is essential for the autonomy granted by our society and our government, permitting us to exercise discretion in fulfilling our role within the defense community. The ethical, effective, and efficient accomplishment of our mission depends on the freedom to exercise disciplined initiative under mission command" (HQDA, *ADRP 1 (2015)*, paragraph 1-90).

its own history.<sup>5</sup> By its telling, the Army formed spontaneously from “citizens from all walks of life” drawn together by their “dedication to individual freedom.” The military success against all odds of those ‘citizen-soldiers’ established the “heritage of service and sacrifice that won our Nation's freedom and sustains The Army's unique relationship with the Nation today.” With independence, the Army was “essential” to westward expansion, extending the frontier while protecting both Indians and settlers; it faithfully endured “four long years of war to preserve our Union” and reconstructed the south after the Civil War; served as an “expeditionary force for a burgeoning world power,” and, led by a “brilliant generation of Army leaders,” “provided decisive land power” in two World Wars, “without which the forces of freedom and democracy throughout the world would likely have suffered defeat.” In doing so, “the common experiences of millions of American Soldiers of two generations helped establish our Nation as a superpower.” Afterwards, the Army “remained alert for imminent war” through “45 years of Cold War against an implacable foe.” Faced with the “dangerous but stable” strategic reality of “practically assured mutual destruction,” it faithfully responded to all of the nation’s calls, including two wars that were “limited in terms of American objectives and scope.” Since then, the Army has “remained engaged in critical regions to reassure

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<sup>5</sup> HQDA, *FM 1 (2001)*. The purpose of FM 1 is to define “who we are, what we do, and how we do it. It points the way to the future and establishes doctrine for employing land power in support of the national security strategy and the national military strategy. It also delineates The Army's purpose, roles, and functions as established by the Constitution; the Congress in Title 10, USC; and the Department of Defense Directive 5100.1” (iv).

allies and deter aggression, to shape the international environment, and to prevent disorder from possibly leading to war,” while ceaselessly preparing “for an uncertain future in a far less stable world.” Still, like those founding patriots who pledged their lives, fortunes, and sacred honor, today’s “professional Army made up of citizen-soldiers” continues standing “guard over those freedoms, still sustained by the selfless service of patriots. The traditions of commitment, dedication, determination, and character continue in today's all-volunteer force. Americans volunteer to serve their country in the profession of arms.”

In the more critical history that I offer in this chapter it becomes apparent that the institutional practices built on this narrative have been deeply embedded as institutional imperatives. To the extent that Army indoctrination becomes the soldier’s principle of moral action, that principle may be inherently contradictory, both in relation to other military practices or even on its face. An historical analysis of discipline, comradeship, and altruistic national service as principles of the Army’s ideal soldier—those principles defining the relationship of the soldier to the Army and the state—shows that each has been a means to disparate functional, societal, and institutional ends. Each may have served a legitimate military purpose, but in the contemporary US Army their practice is primarily a militaristic effort to maintain traditional modes of military authority.

This chapter traces the genealogy of the American military tradition from its European roots and establishment in the early years of the United States from the Revolution, through more than a century of frontier expansion, to the country’s

tentative entry into internationalism in the early-twentieth century. The US Army experienced a radical shift away from its long history as a political and cultural afterthought to become one of the dominant actors in American politics after World War II. That war is certainly the single most important event in the institution's history, and WWII narratives continue to serve as the standard by which American society understands its soldiers and its soldiers understand their institution. Still, despite the radically different functional and societal demands between the small, largely ignored frontier force of the country's first century and a half and the large, professional force of a global superpower, institutional imperatives have perpetuated many practices of that earlier era through an institutional ethic that is out of time and place with the values of both contemporary liberal democratic politics and the necessities of modern battlefields. By misreading its own history for purposes that have little to do with military necessity, the Army creates the preconditions of anomie in a moral environment in which its moral authority is more likely to be invalidated in the experience of its members.

### **Origins of the American Military Tradition**

The successes of the Prussian regimental system in the eighteenth century led to its emulation across Europe, and its influence was equally important in the establishment of American military institutions. However, the American military tradition has to be understood as an extension of British military tradition. Britain's unique strategic position in relation to the other European powers placed its armies in a somewhat

different relationship to domestic political forces than those of continental Europe.<sup>6</sup> Unlike Prussia and France, Britain's low threat of invasion did not necessitate large, permanent forces. Instead, given its cultural aversion to standing armies going back at least to the English Civil War, Britain relied instead on formalizing its militia system for defense against invasion and a check against centralized authority. The position was rooted in the rediscovery of Roman republicanism by English philosophers, most notably James Harrington's *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656). Harrington argues that republican citizenship rests upon inheritable, freely held land: the exercise of private power is dependent upon ownership, and private power is the prerequisite of any public exercise of power. Not owning land is to be in a condition of dependency, and only independent individuals could be citizens willing to defend themselves and the republic to which they are citizens. Harrington's work became the basis of the position of radical Whig politicians that "constitutional stability depended on the willingness of freeholders to fulfill the civil and military functions of citizenship," and "a deep distrust of any constitutional arrangement that provided government with a military force independent of the citizen militia."<sup>7</sup> These radicals also held that the presence of a standing army was a sign of society's weak moral character. The specialization of interests and activities comes at the expense of civic and military obligation; the nobility had been lured by tyrannical monarchs into the luxurious life at court, corrupting the martial values of that class. Like the royal court and the

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<sup>6</sup> Holmes, *Redcoat*; Conway, *War, State, and Society*.

<sup>7</sup> Cress, *Citizens in Arms*, 15.

increasingly powerful state bureaucracy, a standing army was seen as the monarchy's undermining of aristocratic power and would pose the same threat to the middle classes. The professionalization of state power was equated with corruption, as the hierarchical authority of bureaucracy and military command were antithetical to ideals of independent citizenship. The constitutional establishment of Parliament's supremacy in the 1689 Bill of Rights led to a moderating view toward the military establishment. That political sentiment is exemplified in Daniel Defoe's claim: "The Mischief does not lie in the Army, but the Tyrant."<sup>8</sup>

However, the more radical position persisted in British politics and would be taken up in Revolutionary America, though it ultimately came to have little influence on British military policy. The militia system experienced a series of Parliamentary reforms through the early- and mid-eighteenth century in ways that would strongly influence the American military tradition.<sup>9</sup> Parliament's 1757 reforms declared all military age men universally eligible for militia service through draft by lottery, though this was often avoided by those with the means to pay fines or purchase substitutes. While the reforms conjoined the militias to the state's military authority, in practice local elites used control over militia membership, funded by the state, as an avenue of patronage in their efforts to maintain control of local populations. In times of mobilization, landed gentry were brought into competition with each other to raise 'noblemen's regiments' with the assignment of officers at the discretion of the

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<sup>8</sup> Defoe, "A Brief Reply to the History of Standing Armies."

<sup>9</sup> Conway, *War, State, and Society*.



regiment's aristocratic colonel, usually based on the capacity of subordinates to recruit volunteers, thus creating hierarchical dependencies having little to do with military competence. Britain did rely on a small regular army for overseas service, which did professionalize and gain greater efficiency throughout the eighteenth century. This force retained and perhaps exaggerated the class distinctions between the officer corps and their enlisted soldiers. For the British officer corps, the monarchy served as "the focal point of the army's allegiance" through centralized control of all officer promotions and standardization of uniforms and disciplinary practices across the king's regiments.<sup>10</sup> The crown's control over officer appointments was a patronage relationship for the nobility and gentry in the provision of "a socially respectable livelihood for their younger sons or spurious progeny."<sup>11</sup> Officership was a 'gentlemanly' profession, even though its members were drawn as much from the middle class as from the landed elite,<sup>12</sup> and the enforcement of class distinction came at the expense of the enlisted ranks.

A study of British military culture by historian Richard Holmes points to a number of cultural forces that devalued the lives of ordinary soldiers in British military and civilian culture and naturalized assumptions about the necessity of strict, violent discipline to rationalize institutional class stratification.<sup>13</sup> The sentiment is captured in the Duke of Wellington's assessment of the common soldiers of his army

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<sup>10</sup> Smith, *Georgian Monarchy*, 115.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>12</sup> Razzell, "Social Origins of Officers in the Indian and British Home Army."

<sup>13</sup> Holmes, *Redcoat*.

in the 1813 Peninsular Campaign: though made “fine fellows” through the strictest discipline, they were otherwise “the scum of the earth,” particularly the voluntary recruits who were “the very worst members of society.”<sup>14</sup> Of course, most regulars were from the lower classes, though in times of broader mobilization members of the lower-middle class did join the ranks.<sup>15</sup> However, the low pay of regular soldiers made other options more enticing. Military service was often offered in lieu of criminal punishment, and so some portion of the enlisted ranks warranted the label of ‘black guard’, though criminal conduct in that era often included conditions of poverty, for instance, failure to pay debts, vagrancy, or other crimes of idleness, that were unrelated to violent behavior. The most significant contributor to the perception of eighteenth-century British soldiers as undesirables may have been the outcome of military housing policies. Rather than establish barracks, seen as dangerous concentrations of both monarchical power and moral depravity, the army housed its regulars in public houses, designated by Parliament in the Mutiny Acts as “inns, livery stables, alehouses, victualling houses, and all houses selling brandy, strong waters, cyder or metheglin by retail to be drunk upon the premises, and no other.” The policy had been a response to popular outrage over the forced quartering of soldiers in private homes during the English Civil War, a policy that had been loathed even by the army as taking the “livelihood from them, who are fitter to receive

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 148–50.

<sup>15</sup> Razzell, “Social Origins of Officers in the Indian and British Home Army”; Conway, *War, State, and Society*.

alms.”<sup>16</sup> The obvious result of such a policy was the problem of public drunkenness. It also placed small villages in the dangerous position of lacking the resources to feed large bodies of soldiers, who, it must be remembered, relied in times of war, as a matter of military policy, on foraging for their subsistence and on looting to supplement their meager wages. The more insidious result for the army itself, however, may have been the encouragement of violent discipline by officers of their troops, as individual officers were held accountable, at the risk of their commissions, for the bills of their soldiers and empowered to punish nonpayment to their own violent satisfaction. According to Stephen Conway the persistent opinion in British society of the morally subversive nature of soldiering was made worse by practices of impressment (arbitrarily coerced enlistment), the perception of the unemployable veterans returning from wars adding to crime and vagrancy, and practice of officers treating their commands as “semi-autonomous fiefdoms.”<sup>17</sup>

Still, by the time of the American Revolution, British politics had fully accepted the professional, standing military. The work of Adam Smith is representative of this consensus, particularly his argument that the complexity of market societies requires a rationally specialized division of labor, including in the conduct of war. By Smith’s reasoning, a true citizen-soldier could exist in no more complex a society than that of the Roman Republic. Unlike ancient warfare, in which the available weapons allowed for or required individual practice to achieve mastery,

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<sup>16</sup> Cited in Holmes, *Redcoat*, 266–67.

<sup>17</sup> Conway, *War, State, and Society*, 54.

Smith claimed that the technology of his day made individual skill of far less value than the “regularity, order, and prompt obedience” of a highly disciplined, well-trained and organized standing army. The possession of such discipline was the defining trait of the ordinary soldier, and could not be achieved among militia forces but only by standing armies like that of Prussia.

The soldiers, who are bound to obey their officer only once a week or once a month, and who are at all other times at liberty to manage their own affairs their own way, without being in any respect accountable to him, can never be under the same awe in his presence, can never have the same disposition to ready obedience, with those whose whole life and conduct are every day directed by him, and who every day even rise and go to bed, or at least retire to their quarters, according to his orders.<sup>18</sup>

In this way, the uncritical acceptance of discipline as both military necessity and socially appropriate to an advanced economic society comes to erase the arbitrariness in the practice of violence by officers toward their troops. The officer’s practice of discipline becomes merely the skilled practice of directing a specialized workforce in a highly specialized field. The soldier’s experience of discipline could be viewed by the officer or an outside observer as merely learning and performing a rationally justified skill. An officer’s authority would no longer need to rest on social superiority alone. Instead, class distinction could be naturalized by opening traditional military authority—with its origins in aristocratic authority—to the middle class’s valuation of itself through the competence and merit of individuals. If authoritarian practices persisted in rapidly liberalizing societies like Britain or America it is

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<sup>18</sup> Smith, *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 2:190–91.

because the liberalizing narrative of military specialization found new justifications for their continued application.

These characteristics of the British military tradition were all present in that of colonial America. Following the lead of Parliament, the policies of colonial legislatures made no claim to the republican connection of military service and citizenship. Like the British, colonial governments relied on the poor and laboring classes to fill the ranks when circumstances required the standup of significant military forces, for instance, in the fight against France and its Native American allies during the Seven Years' War. The precedent of Parliamentary control over regular army units inspired colonial legislatures to demand those same powers for control of British regulars deployed to their territories, proposals Parliament of course rejected. Further, those changes in British colonial policy after 1763—which would come to justify the colonial revolt—challenged the colonial legislatures' presumptions of their own sovereignty. In response, Americans mobilized the republican ideology of the radical Whigs, in particular pitting the vices of standing armies (reinforced in public opinion by perceived abuses by British regulars like the Quartering Acts and the Boston Massacre) against the civic virtue of citizen militias.<sup>19</sup>

The modern United States Army traces its institutional history to the establishment of the Continental Army by act of Congress in June 1775. The act established a command, staff, and regimental structure based on that of the British army, and reflected that system's dependence on a hierarchy led by agrarian elites and

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<sup>19</sup> Cress, *Citizens in Arms*, 35.

their violent discipline of the working-class soldiery. Exemplary of this, General George Washington enforced rigid social distinctions between officers and enlisted troops for fear the egalitarian, class-leveling traditions of New Englanders might undermine discipline,<sup>20</sup> and was given authority by Congress to do so through harsh corporal punishment.<sup>21</sup> The few military professionals the colonies had produced came primarily from the southern and middle colonies, most notably Washington himself. As well, anti-British rhetoric in those colonies was much less reliant on arguments against standing armies than in New England. However, as most militia officers had been appointed by British colonial governors, the newly independent State legislatures were forced to reconstitute their forces, and in doing so militia membership in each of the states became an expression of support for the establishment of a new, republican, constitutional order.<sup>22</sup> Republican rhetoric led Congress to adopt the blue and buff colors of the English Whigs for the Continental Army uniform.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, appeals to republican virtue did not produce sufficient numbers of volunteers to fill the ranks of the State or national forces, and so

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<sup>20</sup> Stewart, *American Military History, Volume I*, 52.

<sup>21</sup> Donohue, "The Anatomy of Discipline," 56. Donohue notes that during the American Revolution, Washington's "frustrations over the state of indiscipline of his soldiers" led him to request authority from Congress to "raise the maximum number of lash strokes from the religiously symbolic limit of 39 to 100 (although Congress disapproved Washington's subsequent request to raise the maximum number again to 500)." Citing Allen Bowman, *The Morale of the American Revolutionary Army* (Washington: American Council on Public Affairs, 1943), 29; and Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 20.

<sup>22</sup> Cress, *Citizens in Arms*, 47–49.

<sup>23</sup> Jacobs, *Beginning of the U.S. Army*, 7.

the legislatures were forced to rely on British models of induced or compelled military service, including paid bonuses, long-term enlistments, grants of frontier land, and impressment of unemployed men.<sup>24</sup> As the war progressed for the Continental Army, “on the battlefield Smithian perceptions of the military in society won out” over republican idealism.<sup>25</sup> Rules of organization and discipline along European lines were introduced to the Continental Army by its Inspector General, the Prussian Baron von Steuben, and were formally adopted by Congress in 1779.<sup>26</sup> This legally established the same basic hierarchical arrangements that persist as the basic organizing principle of the Army today, despite technological shifts that have forced the devolution of control and decision making to the lowest levels. For instance, though sized and equipped differently the basic organizational and command structure of the infantry regiment prescribed by von Steuben is nearly identical to that of the contemporary infantry brigade.<sup>27</sup>

While policy and practice went the way of disciplined professionalism, the rhetoric of republican idealism persisted. The modern ideal of the citizen-soldier, and thus the truly national army, begins with the American Revolution’s drawing on idealized conception of military obligations in Greek and Roman citizenship. After the war, Washington argued that the citizen-militia was not just necessary for defense

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<sup>24</sup> Cress, *Citizens in Arms*, 49–53; Conway, *War, State, and Society*.

<sup>25</sup> Cress, *Citizens in Arms*, 59.

<sup>26</sup> Steuben, *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops*.

<sup>27</sup> HQDA, *FM 3-96 (2015)*.

from invasion, but a source of republican civic virtue. He wrote to Congress after the war:

It may be laid down as a primary position, and the basis of our system, that every Citizen who enjoys the protection of a free government, owes not only a proportion of his property, but even of his personal service, to the defence of it.<sup>28</sup>

Washington shared the commonly held assumption that a professional standing army might take on the characteristics of history's "Mercenary [sic] Armies, which have at one time or another subverted the liberties of all-most all the Countries they have been raised to defend."<sup>29</sup> He proposed that, in addition to a very small permanent force of a few thousand to guard arsenals and man coastal and frontier fortifications, all male citizens between ages eighteen and fifty be enrolled in the militia and equipped and trained in uniformly organized regiments. As well, he recommended Congress adopt a 'Code of Military Rules', including a 'plan of Discipline' that all officers would be held accountable to enforce. It is important to note that neither the Congress nor the States adopted Washington's recommendations for universal military service, and US military policy generally followed the British example of

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<sup>28</sup> Washington, "Sentiments on a Peace Establishment," 389. In a letter to Alexander Hamilton, May 2, 1783, who served as the chairman of the Committee of Congress on the Peace Establishment.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 388. The quote reflects the sentiment expressed a century earlier by the Whig politician Robert Molesworth: "Whenever a Nation suffers their Servants to carry their arms, the servants will make them hold their Trenchers" (quoted in Cress, *Citizens in Arms*, 19).



reliance on its naval power and call-ups of volunteer local militias in times of crisis well into the twentieth century.<sup>30</sup>

Notably, in Washington's idealized notion of service, officer-enlisted distinctions of class transcended mere citizenship and were naturalized as militarily necessary. This is reflected in the founding of the Society of the Cincinnati in May 1783 by Washington and other senior Army officers. Their vision for the society was inspired by the example of "that illustrious Roman, Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus," who was promoted to Dictator by the Roman Senate to save the city from invasion, but resigned the highest power as soon as the crisis passed and returned to his humble life as a citizen farmer. The society of American officers resigning their positions to return to civilian life as mere citizens would be dedicated to:

An incessant attention to preserve inviolate those exalted rights and liberties of human nature for which they have fought and bled, and without which the high rank of a rational being is a curse instead of a blessing. An unalterable determination to promote and cherish, between the respective States, that union and national honor so essentially necessary to their happiness, and the future dignity of the American Empire. To render permanent the cordial affection subsisting among the officers...<sup>31</sup>

But society membership would be hereditary and limited to the officers who served honorably under Washington in the war, all having earned their place by merit of their republican civic virtue. Though membership was also extended to a number of French aristocrats and military officers allied to the Americans, it was never extended to enlisted veterans or their descendants.

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<sup>30</sup> Stewart, *American Military History, Volume I*.

<sup>31</sup> "The Institution of the Society of the Cincinnati."

## **The Antebellum Army**

With this foundation, the culture of the US Army and the place of the Army in American culture were firmly established. As the Continental Army was disbanded in the year following the Revolution its strength was reduced to a total force of only eighty regular officers and enlisted in the garrison at West Point, NY. The Army remained a very small force for much of its history, particularly in comparison to European states. Throughout the nineteenth century a pattern was established of maintaining only a minimum force in peacetime, rapidly expanding in times of crisis, and demobilizing to retain a slightly larger peacetime force. On average, only about 0.1 percent of the country's population engaged in military service in peacetime during the entire nineteenth century.<sup>32</sup> In contrast, the strength of the British regular army in 1838 was 88,000, its lowest force level of the nineteenth century but still approximately 0.6 percent of its population.<sup>33</sup> The Army's small size reflected both its limited primary mission as a frontier force—a primary mission it would maintain until WWII—and its standing in American politics.

Without any meaningful foreign threat, states were generally unwilling to provide the resources to the federal government to maintain a significant force. Regular Army service was made unappealing to most Americans by the poor pay, poor equipment, harsh discipline, and demanding life on the frontier. Congress's

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<sup>32</sup> Segal and Segal, "America's Military Population," 5.

<sup>33</sup> British army troop strength is taken from Chandler and Beckett, *The Oxford Illustrated History of the British Army*. The population of Britain at the time was approximately 14.5 million (see Wrigley, Schofield, and Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541-1871*).

holding of the Army in low esteem certainly reinforced the negative public opinion of military service. Even with Congress's lack of interest in fully funding its own legally proscribed troop levels, lack of interest in Army service made it necessary for states to continue maintaining their own militias, though federal standards such as the Militia Act of 1792 were largely ignored. Prior to the Civil War, conflicts over regional interests made establishing a coherent national military policy impossible.<sup>34</sup> Western settlement demanded compelling Native Americans from their lands, but those settling the west were driven by an ideology of independence that rejected support for national authority and the taxation to support a large force. Similarly, southern states disproportionately benefitted from what little was spent on the Army, as the undue influence of southerners in the Presidency had ensured that most of the Army's few permanent installations were built there,<sup>35</sup> and, most significantly, the system of slavery was maintained through the threat and occasional use of force by federal troops.<sup>36</sup> Northerners were most removed from any immediate threat and saw no reason to maintain or support a large army, though did support and benefit from the presence of a national naval force.

While the regular Army's mission was frontier defense, the military requirements of ordinary soldiers was limited. Congressional policy required frontier posts be self-sufficient, and thus the work to build and sustain these posts fell to the

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<sup>34</sup> Watson, *Warfare in the USA, 1784-1861*.

<sup>35</sup> Jacobs, *Beginning of the U.S. Army*, 321.

<sup>36</sup> Young, "The United States Army and the Institution of Slavery in Louisiana, 1803-1815."

soldiers themselves, including clearing land, construction and maintenance of fortifications, and agricultural production. Perhaps the Army's most significant contribution to the early United States was the construction of roads, which served both the military purpose of moving troops between garrisons and into new territories, and civilian efforts to seize Native American lands and expand commerce. Future President Zachary Taylor, a midcareer Army officer in 1820, said of such work: "The ax, pick, saw & trowel, has become more the implement of the American soldier than the cannon, musket, or sword."<sup>37</sup> Though Army inspectors noted the resulting deficiencies in military training and preparedness, politicians tried to justify the employment of the Army for the construction *in itself* of public infrastructure in terms of military necessity. Secretary of War William Crawford wrote in 1816: "It is believed to be no less necessary to the discipline, health and preservation of the troops, than useful to the public interest."<sup>38</sup> Similarly, Secretary of War John Calhoun wrote in 1819: "Labor adds to its usefulness and health. A mere garrison life is equally hostile to its vigor and discipline; both officers and men become the subjects of its deleterious effects," although Calhoun took the position that soldiers' pay would need to be increased to induce enlistment given those working conditions.<sup>39</sup> Enlisted soldiers, however, were not convinced by these arguments. An anonymous soldier from 1838 wrote:

I never was given to understand that such duties were customary in the army, much less that I would be called on to perform them, or I never would have

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<sup>37</sup> Prucha, *Sword of the Republic*, 169.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

enlisted. I enlisted to avoid work, and here I am, compelled to perform three or four times the labor I did before my enlistment.<sup>40</sup>

Throughout American history, enlistment in time of war has been driven by political motivations. During the Revolution, many Continental Army officers had been of the middle, and even lower-middle classes, while many enlisted soldiers came from propertied farm families.<sup>41</sup> Military service is much more class conscious in the peacetime Army, bringing with it a harsher disciplinary regime. Officer-enlisted relations were shaped in large part by the “ambition for fame and reputation that genteel officers, or those aspiring to gentility, brought to military service [which] included a distrust of supposedly mercenary enlisted men shared by both civil and military elites.”<sup>42</sup> For example, in 1792 during the Northwest Indian War, General Anthony Wayne attempted to stem the high rate of desertion by either executing those later captured or branding the word ‘coward’ on the forehead and sentencing to forced labor in camp as an example to others.<sup>43</sup> Wayne’s successor in the Northwest Territories General James Wilkinson described his troops as presenting “a frightful picture to the scientific soldier. Ignorance and licentiousness have been fostered,

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>41</sup> Skelton, “The Confederation’s Regulars”; Skelton, “Social Roots of the American Military Profession.” A similar claim is made about the Army’s composition during the War of 1812 by J.C.A. Stagg, “Enlisted Men in the United States Army, 1812-1815”.

<sup>42</sup> Watson, *Warfare in the USA, 1784-1861*.

<sup>43</sup> Prucha, *Sword of the Republic*, 31.

while intelligence and virtue have been persecuted & exiled... [D]isorder, vice, absurdity & abuse infested every member of the *corps militaire*.”<sup>44</sup>

With Army units spread out along the frontier and distant from both institutional and political control, and given the ambiguity of formal military regulations, Army officers often relied on corporal punishment to maintain discipline.<sup>45</sup> An enlisted soldier observed that the Articles of War prescribed punishment “for all imaginable offenses,” while the ninety-ninth article, addressing “the prejudice of good order and military discipline,” covered “everything else that might have been missed in the preceding articles.”<sup>46</sup> Public opinion was generally opposed to both the arbitrariness and violence of such discipline, and a number of senior military and political leaders responded to calls for reform, most notably Winfield Scott, the Army’s commanding general from 1841-1861. Presidents James Monroe and John Quincy Adams censured Army officers for abusive punishments. In 1829, President Andrew Jackson, who during his military career had himself ordered the executions of militia members for desertion in battle, ordered the Army to enforce prohibitions on abuse, such behavior being contrary to federal law, American political beliefs, and military effectiveness:

Every soldier, before he becomes such, is a free man: and even after his enlistment surrenders those civil rights only, which are demanded of him by the legal, the constitutional authorities of his country. By the laws of that country he feels himself protected, when entering upon his enlistment, from every thing of personal abuse, and personal degradation. Even by a Court

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 322. Prucha does note that Wilkinson had some interest in discrediting Wayne’s leadership.

<sup>45</sup> Vargas, “The Military Justice System.”

<sup>46</sup> Meyers, *Ten Years in the Ranks*, 10.

Martial, stripes and lashes cannot be inflicted, because the law prohibits them: still less they should be suffered to be inflicted by an officer, whose duty it is to be the soldier's protector in all his legal rights and to watch over them, with the justice and care of a father. The soldier cannot be subordinate and faithful, while he sees himself subjected to the abuse and tyranny of his officers, in despite of the protection which the positive laws of the country assure to him.<sup>47</sup>

Use of the lash was limited by Congress in 1806 to sentence of court-martial; corporal punishment was banned altogether in 1812, but then reinstated in 1833 as punishment for convicted deserters; in 1861 it was abolished for good.<sup>48</sup> Despite these legal limits, extra-judicial punishment remained common practice because officers would rarely be held accountable. Watson blames the perpetuation of such abuses on an informal compromise between the Army and Congress, in the exchange of a “non-partisan, essentially ‘objective’, accountability to the national civil authority (and subjectively to white society and, more specifically, the values of ‘respectable’ middle-class and genteel elites) for a substantial degree of institutional and occupational autonomy.”<sup>49</sup> This autonomy left ordinary soldiers with few options to challenge abuse, making problems of discipline far greater. In the period 1823-28, during which time total Army manpower did not exceed 5,500, the Army conducted 7,058 courts-martial, most of which were related to either desertion or drunkenness.

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<sup>47</sup> Vargas, “The Military Justice System,” 3. Citing “General Order 28 of 1829,” *General Orders and Circulars of the War Department and Headquarters of the Army, 1808-1860*, Record Group 94, microfilm series M 1094, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

<sup>48</sup> McDermott, “Were They Really Rogues?”; Vargas, “The Military Justice System”; Stewart, *American Military History, Volume I*.

<sup>49</sup> Watson, *Warfare in the USA, 1784-1861*.

In 1830 alone, the Army reported 1,251 desertions though its strength stood at just 5,495 officers and enlisted.<sup>50</sup> In contrast, though court-martial proceedings against officers in the era were not uncommon, officers were rarely willing to hold their fellow officers accountable for illegal abuses.<sup>51</sup>

While democratic citizenship expanded in the era with universal, white male suffrage, the Army's class distinctions remained firm. The Army's Surgeon General Joseph Lovell blamed lack of discipline on the social origins of most enlisted soldiers in the laboring classes, and an 1826 report of the Army's Adjutant General to the War Department described the lower-enlisted soldier:

The spirit of restless inquietude which not infrequently induces him to enlist, but too often stimulates him to desert, in its influence is more powerful than any more restraint derived from his oath to serve 'honestly and faithfully'... The class from whence a majority of private soldiers are drawn scarcely regards the circumstance of desertion as an act of turpitude.<sup>52</sup>

Foreign observers of the United States made similar claims. An English travel writer in the 1830s observed American enlisted troops to be "either of the scum of the

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<sup>50</sup> Prucha, *Sword of the Republic*, 325–28.

<sup>51</sup> Vargas, "The Military Justice System," 12–14. Vargas notes that from 1821 through 1835 there were only thirteen cases of officers tried for illegal punishments, five of whom were found guilty and expelled from service, five were found guilty but had their sentences remitted by superior officers, and three found not guilty. Legally, soldiers could report abuses by officers and request court-martial, but records of only four such cases exist. More trials must certainly have taken place, but their occurrence would have been exceedingly rare, suggesting three reasons soldiers would have avoided reporting abuses by officers: such cases would only be heard by other officers; courts could rule on charges but were not legally empowered to punish abuses in these cases; and soldiers could themselves be charged and punished if the officer was found innocent.

<sup>52</sup> Prucha, *Sword of the Republic*, 325.



population of the older States, or of the worthless German, English, or Irish emigrants”; the anti-authoritarian culture of the US nurtured the belief in “the possibility of every man who has character making his way in a more creditable manner,” thus preventing “the ranks being filled with better subjects.”<sup>53</sup> The French Ambassador to the US wrote in 1851: “The recruits are generally men, who, as laborers and mechanics, receive much higher compensation than in the military service. They must, therefore, be infected with some moral infirmity, which renders them unfit for a useful, laborious life.” The ambassador was struck by the “sluggish and impassive physiognomy” of American enlisted soldiers that contrasted “so strangely with the national character... of the United States.” In contrast, the officer corps was “remarkable for its military knowledge, its moral character, its spirit of discipline, and its sentiment of honor and patriotism,” making the officer “animated by the feeling that his rank, as a member of a disciplined corps, on which society always has an eye, imposes upon him a rigid, and, as it were, dignified course of conduct.”<sup>54</sup>

The Army did play an important role in building national consciousness, but in ways only indirectly related to its military function. The establishment of the United States Military Academy at West Point, NY in 1802 was criticized in its early history as a “chaste reformation” by Thomas Jefferson of the Federalist dominated Army.<sup>55</sup> There, officers were trained in military science in the vein of European

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<sup>53</sup> Latrobe, *The Rambler in North America*, 2:319.

<sup>54</sup> Poussin, *United States*, 391–93.

<sup>55</sup> Crackel, “Jefferson, Politics, and the Army.”

theorists, though it is important to note that before the Civil War no American commander other than Washington or Winfield Scott in the Mexican War ever commanded a force in the field large than 5,000 troops, making those theory lessons of little practical value. Military education bore little resemblance to the missions most officers would actually undertake, which required instead, “diplomatic, logistical and tactical skills (roughly in that sequence) much more than proficiency in operational manouvre.”<sup>56</sup> Importantly, West Point was established in the same legislation that produced the Army Corps of Engineers, and the two institutions were strongly bound together, shaping the Army’s sense of its mission in westward expansion. Most importantly, West Point built an officer corps of cadets from every State by providing a common point of view of a national military institution subordinate to civilian control. West Point created an officer corps whose members were “able representatives of the nationalistic spirit of the age,” and an “outstanding expression of the romantic impulse which marked so much of early-nineteenth century America.”<sup>57</sup>

Of course, the politics of expansion put limits to such idealized notions of officership. The ideology of Manifest Destiny legitimated civilian para-military actions, for instance the raising of private forces by private interests to seize Native American lands or to conduct expeditions against foreign governments in Central

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<sup>56</sup> Watson, *Warfare in the USA, 1784-1861*.

<sup>57</sup> Prucha, *Sword of the Republic*, 331. Prucha argues the Army’s officer corps would come to be “conscious and conscientious agents of American empire and nationalism and zealous supporters of the attempt of the federal government to proceed with justice and humanity in its dealings with both the Indians and frontiersmen.”

America—a practice known as ‘filibustering’.<sup>58</sup> This actually placed the Army in an untenable position in relation to civilians on the frontier. When the Army in its Congressionally mandated constabulary role challenged these civilian practices, local white settler communities turned against it with acts of direct violence and through legal action against officers, neither of which was it protected from by Democratic politicians interested more in expansion than enforcing treaty law.<sup>59</sup> In a way, American militarism in the era was distinct from the military institution in a national sense, and complicated by the distribution of military power under federalism. It allowed the popular acceptance of what was essentially a civilian war of territorial expansion. The Army was placed in a position to both empower civilian expansion and in a limited way serve as the only viable expression of federal interests on the frontier.

If the officer corps was built to reflect a national ideology, enlisted service in the peacetime Army was less idealistic. Augustus Meyers, a soldier who enlisted in 1854, described the recruits with whom he served as being:

all young men, twenty to twenty-five years old, hailing from various parts of the country. A considerable portion of foreign-born, mostly Irish, although there were some Germans and a few other nationalities. Their previous occupations ranged all the way from a school teacher to farm laborer. Some were fairly well educated and others ignorant to the point of illiteracy. There were many mechanics of all sorts among them who had worked as journeymen at their trades. Also there were some runaway apprentices. We found those of a mechanical experience very useful later on at the frontiers.

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<sup>58</sup> Watson, *Warfare in the USA, 1784-1861*; May, “Young American Males and Filibustering.”

<sup>59</sup> Prucha, *Sword of the Republic*; Watson, *Warfare in the USA, 1784-1861*.

As usual, they had enlisted for various reasons. Some had the 'Wanderlust'; others had a taste for adventure and hoped to satisfy it in a soldier's life. Some had joined from sheer necessity, or inability to find any other occupation to support themselves. This last was the most common cause. There were also a few 'ne'er-do-wells' who were no use anywhere, and a detriment to the army.<sup>60</sup>

In contrast, the popular excitement in the prospect of war has often motivated a broader spectrum of the population to enter military service, but the antebellum Army did not necessarily benefit from the fervor. In the Revolution and War of 1812 most troops fought as members of State militia units. For example, while regular Army strength reached 38,186 in the War of 1812, militia forces numbered more than 450,000. By the Mexican War, the states had allowed the militia system to decay to the point where it could only supply about 12,000 troops for the war, a change of proportionate strength from eighty-eight to only twelve percent.<sup>61</sup> In place of militia service, the fervor for war was captured by volunteer units. Very much like the English gentlemen's regiments, these volunteers were privately organized by officers, less than one percent of whom had prior Army service, who were appointed by State governors but paid and armed by the federal government.<sup>62</sup> At the same time, the regular Army failed to meet its recruiting needs, and the Secretary of War explained to Congress: "The volunteer service is regarded generally by our citizens as preferable to that in the Regular Army, and as long as volunteers are expected to be called for it will be difficult to fill the ranks of the regular regiments unless additional

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<sup>60</sup> Meyers, *Ten Years in the Ranks*, 37.

<sup>61</sup> Upton, *Military Policy of the United States*, 221.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

inducements are offered or the terms of service modified” from the legally required five year term of service, a change that was made in the war’s second year.<sup>63</sup> With the exception of a few notable regiments, most volunteer units were not utilized in battle by Army commanders, and so the consequences of the national fervor for war fell disproportionately on regular troops. Approximately 12,000 volunteers had been mobilized in the opening days of the Mexican War for only three or six month terms of service, a decision made by Army generals (intent on a quick war) without Congressional approval. Of these volunteers, the units that actually arrived in Mexico would return to the United States after a very short time. Congress set the term of volunteer service to twelve months, but the result of the policy was that at the end of the war’s first year some 27,000 volunteers left the service and had to be replaced. Those few volunteer regiments who saw significant action suffered casualty rates similar to their regular counterparts, but otherwise volunteer casualties on the battlefield occurred at a rate of less than one in a thousand. Meanwhile, regulars bore the brunt of the war, particularly those enlisted prior to the policy change, more than thirteen percent of whom were killed in battle, a rate five times higher than that of volunteers. Faced with the prospect of a war they had not signed up for, or realizing the error of a five year enlistment, and encouraged in either case by Mexican offers of money and land,<sup>64</sup> the desertion rate of those regulars was more than twice as high as that of volunteers or those who later enlisted only for the term of the war,<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>64</sup> Wallace, “Deserters in the Mexican War.”

<sup>65</sup> Upton, *Military Policy of the United States*, 215–18.

suggesting a clear distinction between the willingness of enlisted soldiers to endure service in war as opposed to a military career. Where regulars benefitted most over volunteers was in the ability of regular officers to maintain the health of their soldiers. Deaths by disease occurred at a rate of less than seven percent among regular troops, while volunteers died of disease at a rate of nineteen percent.<sup>66</sup>

The distinction between regular and volunteer troops went generally unrecognized in American politics and popular opinion as it was contained within narratives of republican civic duty, which also disguised the continued unwillingness of Congress or the states to pay for a standing Army. An 1846 address to Congress by President James Polk illustrates the point:

Well may the American people be proud of the energy and gallantry of our regular and volunteer officers and soldiers. The events of these few months afford a gratifying proof that our country can, under any emergency, confidently rely for the maintenance of her honor and the defense of her rights on an effective force ready at all times voluntarily to relinquish the comforts of home for the perils and privations of the camp. And though such a force may be for the time expensive it is in the end economical, as the ability to command it removes the necessity of employing a large standing army in time of peace and proves that our people love their institutions and are ever ready to defend and protect them.<sup>67</sup>

Ignoring the distinction between regulars and volunteers, whether for reasons of economy or civic virtue, had the practical effect of requiring a steep learning curve for the Army as it adjusted to the demands of military crisis only after the fact. The cost is borne, of course, primarily by the ordinary soldiers caught up in military

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 220.

fiascoes, a problem not unique to the Mexican War, and which has probably been the rule rather than the exception in American politics.<sup>68</sup> Still, the military institution itself may have benefitted from such ignorance. The Army's success in the Mexican War, according to Civil War General Emory Upton, "for the first time in our history temporarily convinced our statesmen, if not the people, of the value of professional education and military discipline."<sup>69</sup> But Upton's claim is limited to the professionalism of the regular officer corps, educated, like Upton himself, primarily at West Point. The Mexican War's impact on American military culture cannot be overstated. It has been written into the Army's mythology as the proving ground of so many West Point graduates whose Civil War service would place them in the pantheon of American military heroes. In effect, the Mexican War made West Point and the Army's officer corps a sacred institution, further deepening the class distinction with ordinary soldiers. However, the antebellum officer corps' contribution to American national identity depended on the Civil War. On the one hand, national sentiment was not strong enough to hold the Army together as the southern states seceded. On the other, the officers who left the Army for the Confederacy fought on behalf of a nation-state, and in their opposition to irregular warfare they conducted a war as only a nation-state could.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Harlow, "Training for Military Service."

<sup>69</sup> Upton, *Military Policy of the United States*, 220.

<sup>70</sup> Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*.

## The Civil War to World War II

Despite the scale of the Civil War, it had little lasting effect on the soldier's relationship to the Army. Like earlier wars, national calls for military service did not benefit the regular Army, as volunteers were primarily mobilized in State militias. With the low standing of regulars in the popular imagination, filling the ranks for the Civil War required abolishing severe forms of corporal punishment. In itself, this was insufficient to meet personnel requirements and a draft was instituted in 1863, though the inequity by which it was implemented led to riots. The importance of the draft, however, was, according to the official history of the US Army, to establish "firmly the principle that every citizen is obligated to defend the nation and that the Federal government can impose that obligation directly on the citizen without the mediation of the states." It was also a recognition that "total reliance on militia and volunteers would not suffice," in modern wars.<sup>71</sup> If this is true, its effect was not felt for more than fifty years. Apart from the large-scale but temporary mobilizations for the Civil War, Spanish-American War, and World War I, the peacetime United States Army remained a frontier force until World War II.<sup>72</sup> Imperialist military policy was carried out by an officer corps whose politics was shaped in their experiences on the plains and mountain west during the 1870s.<sup>73</sup> Soldiers on the frontier, however, saw little

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<sup>71</sup> Stewart, *American Military History, Volume I*, 304.

<sup>72</sup> Of course, the mission would expand to colonial defense in Central America and the Philippines after the Spanish-American War, but this had little effect on the Army's relationship to American society or the soldier's relationship to the Army and its officers.

<sup>73</sup> Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 264.



change in their condition after the Civil War. A Nebraska newspaper in 1879 characterized the continuing pattern of non-military related work details for soldiers on the frontier:

The regular soldier on the frontiers is no more nor less than a beast of burden, and what is still worse, he is treated as such. He is exposed to continual hardships and fatigue, he has to work in the sun and in the rain. From sunrise to sunset it is work, building houses, stables, etc. The finishing of one building here is the beginning of another. Strangers and visitors from the East, often take them for convicts.<sup>74</sup>

An anonymous opinion letter to the *Army and Navy Journal* in 1870 described such work as a certain cause of desertion:

where soldiers are used almost exclusively as laborers, without rest or intermission and without drill of any description to instill habits of obedience and discipline, there you will have desertion... Instead of trying to make good soldiers of them, they are set to work at hard or even harder labor than that which they fled [in civilian life]. Their spirit is completely broken in a short time, they become disgusted at the life of a laborer at a frontier post, and the natural consequence is, that they quit that life at the first opportunity.<sup>75</sup>

In 1890 the US Census Bureau declared the western frontier 'closed' and that same year marked the Army's last campaign against Native Americans. While the nation shifted its focus overseas, the Army was once again left without a clear mission upon which to base its institutional identity. The Army's official history describes the importance of its frontier isolation from civilian society as an important element in the development of its modern corporate identity. In gaining a sense of its

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<sup>74</sup> McDermott, "Were They Really Rogues?," 169. Citing an anonymous correspondent of the *Omaha Herald* writing from Fort McKinney, Wyoming Territory in the *Army and Navy Journal*, August 30, 1879, page 63.

<sup>75</sup> Veritas, "The Causes of Desertion," 122.

own professionalism, the Army's "apartness and uniqueness" was reinforced by its disciplinary practices of distinction, such as the wearing of uniforms or its ceremonial customs and courtesies.<sup>76</sup> But as this process occurred in an era of bureaucratization, the standards of performance and behavior developed in the isolation of frontier posts served as the basic principles that would become deeply embedded in the thought and practices of the institution. In 1899 Secretary of War Elihu Root described the American soldier of his day as "a part of a great machine which we call military organization; a machine in which, as by electrical converters, the policy of government is transformed in the strategy of the general, into the tactics of the field and into the action of the man behind the gun." Unfortunately, Root claimed, that machine had been broken by the "thirty-three years of profound peace" during which time the Army had lost its capacity for innovation.<sup>77</sup> The recent war with Spain proved to Root and others the need for progressive reform, and Root led what were probably the most significant organizational reforms in the Army's entire history. These changes established the officer corps as a fully modern bureaucracy, but the experience of enlisted soldiers—in their relationships to the Army and civilian society—would remain largely unchanged, at least in the peacetime Army, until the Cold War.

The service of ordinary soldiers did take one important new dimension in American culture after the Civil War. While veteran officers had organized for

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<sup>76</sup> Stewart, *American Military History, Volume I*, 395.

<sup>77</sup> Root, "The American Soldier," 3-4.

political purposes since the Revolution, enlisted ranks had not and their interests were never meaningfully addressed in national politics. A veteran of the era observed that before the war an enlisted soldier:

was but little respected by civilians in the east. Only the people of the Western frontiers appreciated him and understood how much he did toward making the new country a safe place for them to acquire homes and develop the land. It required the lessons of the Civil War to teach the east the value of soldiers and sailors. The soldier particularly was looked upon as an individual too lazy to work for a living.<sup>78</sup>

The scale of the Civil War, in the breadth of society conscripted into enlisted ranks and the number of Americans directly affected by the war, changed that dynamic. Organizations like the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) were established by veterans in the immediate aftermath of the war and networks of local lodges spread across the country, though it was not until the 1880s that these groups gained significant national political power, the GAR, for example, becoming a powerful tool in Republican machine politics.<sup>79</sup> While from a political perspective these organizations were primarily interested in pursuing policies like service and disability pensions for war veterans, those efforts were consumed within a narrative of a wholly idealized American soldier. This generalization of military service was necessary, otherwise their political program might appear self-interested and “cheapen their own endeavors or call into question their sacrifice.”<sup>80</sup> These organizations had little effect on the popular opinion of peacetime Army service, but the narrative of soldiers’

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<sup>78</sup> Meyers, *Ten Years in the Ranks*, 22.

<sup>79</sup> O’Leary, *To Die For*.

<sup>80</sup> Kohn, “Social History of the American Soldier,” 555.

sacrifices in war contributed to the growing nationalist sentiment of the late-nineteenth century. Where the Mexican War established a national vision of the officer corps, the Civil War provided a nationally idealized vision of an American soldier—that is, an idealized member of the US Army, as opposed to a militiaman or volunteer. But the vision was limited to wartime service, and until the 1940s the only veterans who benefitted from pensions were those who served in war.<sup>81</sup> It was, however, a democratized heroization in that the ideal could apply to officer or enlisted.

That ideal was wrapped up in the broader politics of the era, shaped by a perceived crisis of national identity.<sup>82</sup> Historian Jonathan Hansen argues that responses to this crisis took three main forms that would shaped American conceptions of patriotism, expressed best in the positions of William James, Theodore Roosevelt, and Woodrow Wilson. James argued for a cosmopolitan liberalism that disassociates the basis of individual freedom in property rights: if the rights of the individual can only be understood relative to the rights of others, then American imperialism could not be morally justified. James's patriotism consists of a love of country expressed in the demand that the country adhere to a strict moral standard. It is an ideology descended from the republicanism of the Revolution, but its emphasis on moral principles of equality could not easily be translated into a politics appropriate to an era of international competition. It was a patriotism of dissent

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 558.

<sup>82</sup> Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*; Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*; Hansen, *The Lost Promise of Patriotism*.

among many anti-militarist elites, including academics like James and W.E.B. DuBois and activists like Eugene Debs and Jane Addams. Their positions would be silenced in the country's total mobilization for World War I.

Since the Revolution, republican ideals of citizenship had been coopted by liberal ideology, in both its elite and populist forms, and persisted “primarily in the rhetoric of liberals themselves who appropriated republican terms like ‘autonomy’ and ‘independence’ to lend liberalism moral authority.”<sup>83</sup> Elites like Wilson saw the social upheavals of the era as a loss of national discipline in pursuit of the nation's destiny: the burden of liberty placed a moral obligation on the United States to tutor the uncivilized world in the principles of self-government. Wilson's liberal universalism held that “liberty is the privilege of maturity, of self-control, of self-mastery and a thoughtful care for righteous dealings,” and that “some people may have [liberty], therefore, and others may not.” The United States had gained that maturity, and thereby its rightful place in global politics, in the act of conquering the continent, an act conceived in “the logic of a tireless people.” The country's social turmoil of the 1890s arose with the closure of the frontier. To regain the discipline necessary for liberal democracy Wilson believed that American internationalism, in service of the immature peoples of the earth, was the fulfillment of that patriotic citizenship. Given American maturity, its imperialism could not be the act of subjection. Military power would be central to American internationalism—Wilson interpreted American success in the Spanish-American War as establishing the

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<sup>83</sup> Hansen, *The Lost Promise of Patriotism*, 10.

country's "full self-consciousness as a nation"— but only as a means to fulfill America's moral duty to the world.<sup>84</sup>

Like Wilson's elitist idealism, Roosevelt's militarist populism was also an ideology of liberal universalism. However, it relied on patriotic sentiment resembling the 'organic nationalism' of European romanticism, expressed in the idea of the American nation as the historical continuation of the 'Anglo-Saxon race'. The opinion found justification in the work of Charles Darwin, who wrote in *The Descent of Man*:

There is apparently much truth in the belief that the wonderful progress of the United States, as well as the character of the people, are the results of natural selection; the more energetic, restless, and courageous men from all parts of Europe having emigrated during the last ten or twelve generations to that great country, and having there succeeded best.<sup>85</sup>

Organic nationalism had been politically mobilized since before the Civil War in all areas of American politics, from populist land policies to industrial capitalism. After the Civil War, the ideology was used in efforts to justify the war's losses through narratives that valorized, through aggregation, individual sacrifice as the act of a valorous people, losses that the rationalizing constitutional arguments used at the opening of the war could not justify. It was only after the Civil War that many of the practices of contemporary American patriotism came to be widely practiced and made sacred: recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance; observation of Memorial Day as

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 27. Citing: Woodrow Wilson. "The Ideals of America." *Atlantic Monthly* 90, no. 543 (December 1902), 721-734.

<sup>85</sup> Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 1:172. Here, Darwin cites the research of his cousin, the eugenicist Francis Dalton.

a veneration of soldiers killed in war; sacralization of the American flag; the adoption of formal rules for the playing of the national anthem.<sup>86</sup> Liberal populists like Roosevelt saw the social upheaval of the late-nineteenth century not as a problem of industrial capitalism, but of the nation's identity crisis: the excesses of individualism could be tempered by the meaning found in national imperialist undertakings. American national character was built in the frontier experience, and the closure of the frontier meant not just a loss of the nation's collective discipline, but the weakening of individuals. In a revival of the radical Whig belief that luxury breeds corruption, Roosevelt argued that modern civilization undermined individual masculinity, claiming that "over-sentimentality, over-softness, in fact washiness and mushiness are the great dangers of this age and of this people. Unless we keep the barbarian virtues, gaining the civilized ones will be of little avail."<sup>87</sup> Politically, this ideology justified American imperial policy as both morally right and necessary for national survival: military action was not simply one available tool to civilize the people of the earth, but an end in itself. Patriotism required the active participation of men in military service, and that required the nation to provide its men the opportunity to practice the barbarian virtues. It also required valorizing the American soldier in terms of these virtues. Because the nation needed to be prepared for war, citizenship meant being prepared to fill the role of soldier. If not every man's

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<sup>86</sup> O'Leary, *To Die For*.

<sup>87</sup> Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 3. Citing an 1899 letter from Roosevelt to G. Stanley Hall, an American psychologist known as 'the Darwin of the mind' and whose research agenda was focused on preventing the 'racial suicide' of European civilization.

citizenship could be fulfilled through actual wartime service, a true citizen had at least to present himself as willing and able to go to war. This meant that questioning American military policy marked the dissident as both unpatriotic and an unmanly coward.

Of course, these three patriotic ideals were contested. James's cosmopolitan idealism was attacked by both internationalist and populist proponents of imperialism, and could only have been a minority position. Its anti-imperialism also ensured that its influence on the military institution would be negligent. But the conflicts between internationalists and populists ensured that neither form of patriotism would become hegemonic across American culture. Despite the firm cultural establishment of American nationalism, the nation lacked the political will to provide for a large standing military or adopt universal military service. If the culturally ideal soldier became more unquestioningly patriotic, the Army itself remained marginal in American politics.

The military ideal remained linked to American citizenship, but as the Civil War had broadened that ideal to include both officer and enlisted, demographic changes provided a more diverse population to fill the ranks. This, of course, had its limits. When Theodore Roosevelt led his handpicked Rough Rider volunteers at the battle of San Juan Hill, the regiment would proudly include among their number not just frontiersmen and Ivy League athletes, but a small number of Hispanics, Native Americans, Irish, and one Italian; volunteers included Protestants, Catholics, and at least one Jew. To Roosevelt, the American experience produced a force "in whose



veins... blood stirred with the same impulse which once sent the Vikings overseas.”<sup>88</sup> Roosevelt could not, however, bring himself to write as animatedly about the equally successful Negro Cavalry Regiments with whom the Rough Riders were forced to intermingle in their joint assault. He credited the success of Black troops to their dependence on white officers, and claimed the personal necessity of drawing his revolver on a number of Black soldiers in order to force them to the fight.<sup>89</sup>

For Elihu Root the Army succeeded because the American soldier is “as stern a foe as ever man saw on the battlefield,” yet brings to the fight “the schoolbook, the plow, and the Bible.”<sup>90</sup> For that reason, the Army could not be faulted for the Philippines uprisings that began six months after annexation. The occupying forces were the objects of Filipino “abuse and ridicule and defiance and insult,” yet demonstrated “the stern resolve, the self-control, the power of obedience to orders and to duty to restrain themselves”<sup>91</sup> as they patiently carried out President McKinley’s program of ‘Benevolent Assimilation’<sup>92</sup> and Filipinos plotted against them. Root’s valorization of the American soldier is an example of erasing individuality to create a politically useful symbol, a common practice in American politics “for a nation diverse in culture, uncertain in unity, and concerned through

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<sup>88</sup> Gerstle, “Theodore Roosevelt and the Divided Character of American Nationalism,” 1287. Quoting Roosevelt’s *The Rough Riders* (New York, 1902), 22-23.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 1292. Quoting Roosevelt’s *The Rough Riders*, 149-152.

<sup>90</sup> Root, “The American Soldier,” 12.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>92</sup> Blount, *The American Occupation of the Philippines, 1898-1912*.

much of its history with proving its superiority to the rest of the world.”<sup>93</sup> The symbolism allows Root to ignore the contradiction between the justifications for the American military response to the uprising. On the one hand, the actions taken by the US military were proper since “the title of America to the island of Luzon is better than the title we had to Louisiana.” On the other hand, Root claimed that the “finest thing about the American soldier is that he is an American citizen. He carries with him not the traditions of a military empire, but the traditions of a self-governing people.”<sup>94</sup>

The validity of both claims are challenged in the accounts of the war by Black soldiers in the occupying force. American studies scholar Matthew Frye argues that Black soldiers were keenly aware that they were viewed no differently than the ‘savage’ populations of the new American territories. One Black infantryman in the Philippines wrote, “The whites have begun to establish their diabolical race hatred in all its home rancor,” by propagating white supremacist ideology to further divide the existing Spanish and Filipino populations.<sup>95</sup> Another observed that the nationalist Filipino independence movement that followed the seizure of the islands from Spain were justified:

All this never would have happened if the army of occupation would have treated them as people. The Spaniards, even if their laws were hard, were polite and treated them with some consideration; but the Americans, as soon as they saw that the native troops were desirous of sharing in the glories as

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<sup>93</sup> Kohn, “Social History of the American Soldier,” 556.

<sup>94</sup> Root, “The American Soldier,” 10–11.

<sup>95</sup> Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 251. Citing Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., *Black Americans and the ‘White Man’s Burden,’ 1898-1903* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 282.

well as the hardships of the hard-won battles with the Americans, began to apply home treatment for colored peoples; cursed them as damned niggers.<sup>96</sup>

An Army officer serving as a provincial governor reported the practice by American soldiers of calling Filipinos ‘niggers’ to William Howard Taft, the civil governor of the Philippines in 1901, and noted “the natives are beginning to understand what the word 'nigger' means.” The officer requested this and other abusive practices by American troops be promptly addressed as the Filipino population’s trust in their American governors was “being fast destroyed and a deep hatred toward us engendered.”<sup>97</sup> A general order was issued by Army commanders to end the practice, though the sympathy of some Americans toward Filipinos was the product of their own racism toward Black Americans. An American judge assigned to the Philippine courts observed that American southerners tended to have a higher opinion of Filipinos because of their experience with American Blacks.<sup>98</sup> Of course, the Army took no action to end the practice of white soldiers’ use of the term as an epithet or other abuses against Black soldiers.<sup>99</sup> White racism created a sense of solidarity between many Black soldiers and the Filipinos, leading many Black veterans to settle in the Philippines—as well as a policy proposal by some southern legislators to resettle America’s Black population there.<sup>100</sup> The racial character of American

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid. Citing Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., *‘Smoked Yankees’ and the Struggle for Empire: Letters from Negro Soldiers, 1898-1902* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 257.

<sup>97</sup> United States Senate, “Affairs in the Phillipine Islands,” 884.

<sup>98</sup> Blount, *The American Occupation of the Philippines, 1898-1912*, 101.

<sup>99</sup> Cadusale, “Allegiance and Identity.”

<sup>100</sup> Ngozi-Brown, “African-American Soldiers and Filipinos.”

nationalism also appears in the tendency to cast the Philippine-American War in terms of the Army's experience on the frontier. Army General Frederick Funston described the insurgency as "semi-savage" Filipinos waging war "against Anglo-Saxon order and decency," and described the American mission as use of the "chastening rod" to make the Filipinos good "Injuns."<sup>101</sup> Many of the regular officers sent to the Philippines had led the final wars against the Native Americans, and viewed the conflict through the same lens.<sup>102</sup> Jacobson argues that the American experience in the Philippines represents a (largely forgotten) bridge between early American militarism and the interventionism of more recent history. In this light, references by American soldiers in the 1960s to Vietnam as 'Indian Country' should be read as an expression of a "deeper ideology" and not as "a matter of a simple metaphor."<sup>103</sup>

To match the nation's shift toward an imperialist foreign policy, calls arose during the era to reconsider the military's institutional position in American politics. For example, John Grier Hibben, the successor to Woodrow Wilson as president of Princeton University, supported the arguments of professional military officers for a permanent change in military policy. The history of ignoring the military until time of crisis was rooted in "the easy going and popular idea that when the emergency comes unknown resources will be discovered and extraordinary powers suddenly evoked."

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<sup>101</sup> Cadusale, "Allegiance and Identity," 32. Citing Frederick N. Funston, "Interesting Letter from Funston," *Kansas City Journal*, April 22, 1899.

<sup>102</sup> Krenn, *Race and U.S. Foreign Policy from 1900 Through World War II*.

<sup>103</sup> Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 264.

History had proven that idea to be “a fallacy as silly as it is false, and that it is disastrous to attempt to learn the art of war in the midst of war itself, because war is the time for action, not for education.” The popular trust of the American officer corps’ expert knowledge, gained in the mistakes of earlier conflicts, would be “the supreme test of wisdom and proof of its presence and power.”<sup>104</sup> The outbreak of World War I in Europe in 1914 brought about the ‘Preparedness’ movement, led by a number of prominent civilian politicians, including Roosevelt and former Secretaries of War Henry Stimson and Elihu Root, with the goal of adopting a policy of universal military training and reserve service. The movement’s leaders included Army officers at the highest ranks, most notably Army Chief of Staff General Leonard Wood. Wood characterized ‘Preparedness’ as the “organization of all the resources of a nation—men, material, and money—so that the full power of the nation may be promptly applied and continued at maximum strength for a considerable period of time.”<sup>105</sup> Popular opinion, however, remained firmly against such a policy. Wilson’s policy of armed neutrality focused on building naval strength, and generally ignored the Army. The Preparedness movement’s only significant achievement before the US entered the war was the establishment of ‘summer camps’ to train college students in basic military skills and leadership. The camps would ultimately train over 40,000 officer candidates for the war, and serve as the model for what would become the modern Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC).

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<sup>104</sup> Hibben, “Introduction.”

<sup>105</sup> Wood, *The Military Obligation of Citizenship*, 3.

The movement also had little influence on the relationship of soldiers to the institution. For the soldiers mobilized to fight the First World War, the racial and class-based distinction of officer from enlisted and of soldier from coward remained the institutional norm. For instance, as the US debated entry into the war, Major General John O’Ryan, commander of the New York National Guard, told an assembled crowd of New York businessmen, “We have to have our men trained so that the influence of fear is overpowered by the peril of an uncompromising military system, often backed up by a pistol in the hands of an officer.”<sup>106</sup> Certainly, not every officer felt this way, but institutional forces put limits on personal sentiment. A leader’s ability to encourage willing participation was limited by bureaucracies that had little regard for even the material needs of individual soldiers beyond the necessities of combat. If casualty figures are indicative of a military’s attitude towards its soldiers, the modern bureaucratized army could utterly disregard any soldier’s emotional or spiritual needs. While Americans might not have experienced the intensity of losses experienced in the more infamous blunders of other combatants during the war—Britain’s 57,000 casualties in the opening day of the Battle of the Somme, or the Russian and Austrian disasters of 1914 that cost those countries 1.7 million and 1.2 million casualties, respectively—the American soldier’s experience of the First World War is certainly comparable to their French and British allies. The

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<sup>106</sup> “Would Use Pistol to Rule Soldiers.” General O’Ryan’s comments were later critiqued in Emma Goldman’s essay “Preparedness, the Road to Universal Slaughter,” a harsh polemic against America’s impulse towards joining the war in Europe.

Army's casualties in World War I included over 50,000 killed and more than 190,000 wounded. But most of these casualties occurred in a relatively brief time period, just a little less than six months. While the US officially entered the war in April 1917, the Army was not involved in major operations in France until the Battle of Aisne at the end of May 1918. In fact, more than half of the Army's casualties came in the final weeks of the war during the Battle of Meuse-Argonne (September 26 through November 11, 1918), in which more than 122,000 Americans (of the 1.2 million directly engaged or supporting the battle) were killed or wounded.<sup>107</sup>

## **The Army and World War II**

Between the World Wars, the Army was a relatively small, all-volunteer force of about 125,000 active-duty personnel, a figure that included the Air Corps.<sup>108</sup> The number reflects the isolationist foreign policy of the interwar period. As late as 1931 the Army's planners defined the role of the force—for which it was organized, equipped and trained—as frontier defense, a mission that included defense of its overseas territories, most notably the Philippines and the Panama Canal Zone. Otherwise, until 1941, military policy did not extend its expectations of possible action beyond the western hemisphere. The Army's most significant activity during the era was probably the administration of the Civilian Conservation Corps' mobilization and training of more than 3 million men. The effort would influence the

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<sup>107</sup> Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts*.

<sup>108</sup> The brief institutional history that follows is taken from the Army's current official history, see Stewart, *American Military History, Volume II*.

experience of many of the CCC members who would later serve in WWII, and provided an institutional foundation for the war's massive mobilization efforts. Territorial expansion by the Japanese in Asia and fascist regimes in Europe led Congress to begin funding personnel increases and the Army's combined active-duty and National Guard strength reached 400,000 in 1937, with plans to mobilize if necessary up to 4 million. The National Guard was activated for federal service in August 1940. At the same time, the draft was reinstated for the first time since World War I. When the US entered the war total personnel strength stood at 1.6 million, though the mission for which the force had been prepared still did not extend beyond defense of the hemisphere. Stouffer's researchers described the interwar Army as "a small organization... more or less isolated from the democratic society which rather grudgingly supported, and possessing institutional characteristics which contrasted sharply with the civilian life around it." Still, the Army's "professional traditions and its professional skills, modified in some degree as new lessons were learned in the war," set the institutional forms for the force that would fight the war<sup>109</sup>—and thus of the modern US Army.

The institutional isolation from broader American politics and the persistence of the Army's anachronistic mission are related to the popular mistrust of patriotism and high-minded politics following WWI. Such idealism, the willingness to support a

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<sup>109</sup> Suchman, DeVinney, and Stouffer, "The Old Army and the New," 54–55. The authors are careful to note that those 'traditional institutional forms' may or may not have been well-adapted to the conditions of modern wars, a judgment that was beyond the scope of their work.



cause, was generally dismissed as little more than ‘propaganda’ and American politics tended toward pragmatism.<sup>110</sup> In an analysis of pre-war popular opinion polling, psychologist Jerome Bruner, a colleague of Shils and Janowitz on Eisenhower’s psychological operations staff, points out that only about a quarter of Americans before the war were willing to support international sanctions against fascist expansion; less than half of Americans supported any sort of intervention, and of those more than two-thirds would not support military intervention. Shocked by this in 1944, Bruner argued:

The fact of the matter is, that of all the alternative ways of assuring our future national security, we were prepared to accept none of them. We did not want to arm; that smacked of war. We did not want to join the League [of Nations], even if the League proved that it could work successfully. We did not even believe, in 1937, that the dissolution of the League would make any difference to the future peace of the world. We did not believe that it was the President’s responsibility to try to interfere with the armament race going on in Europe. That was our feeling in 1937. It was our opinion in pre-war 1939.

... We knew that there would be a war. But our blindness was too comforting to abandon. Yes, said America, war there will be, but not for us. That was the last barrier between inaction and action.... Had we not been conditioned by our history to such a strong faith in our impregnability, in our geographical isolation, in the inherent stability of things political, perhaps we might have abandoned the notion that war did not threaten us. Because we did not see our own danger, we did not feel that the problems brewing in Europe needed a solution here. Why get entangled gratuitously in an affair which can only hurt one?<sup>111112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Wecter, *The Hero in America*, 491; Star, “The Orientation of Soldiers Toward the War,” 437.

<sup>111</sup> Star, “The Orientation of Soldiers Toward the War,” 436–37. Quoting

<sup>112</sup> Jerome S. Bruner, *Mandate From the People* (Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York, 1944), 19-20. Quoted in *Ibid*.

Dixon Wecter observes that the generation that would fight the war had “decided they would never fall for the bait of nationalism as their fathers had fallen.”<sup>113</sup> While the sentiment may have been a simple return to a more traditional attitude toward militarism after Wilson’s principled justifications for WWI proved empty,<sup>114</sup> some placed blame on dangerous ideas brought home from that war. For example, Archibald MacLeish, Librarian of Congress, held particular authors responsible, including Ernest Hemingway and John Dos Passos, claiming: “The books they wrote in the years just after the war have done more to disarm democracy in the face of fascism than any other single influence.”<sup>115</sup> Paul Fussell, who agrees with MacLeish’s assessment of their influence if not his sentiment, argues that “Those who fought the Second World War didn’t at all feel that it was good for them. For one thing, they had access to a lot of profoundly unbellicose literature not available” to those enthusiastic WWI recruits and volunteers, like Hemingway and Dos Passos, who would turn cynical during the war.<sup>116</sup>

Wecter argues that by 1941 there had been a turn in popular sentiment. Those disenchanted children of the WWI generation were beginning “to grope for the traditions of our great past. They are about to decide that the heroes bred by that tradition are not jingoist symbols. They wonder if something is not to be said for the bitter, but tonic, taste of sacrifice.” While still “critical of war hysteria,” the

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<sup>113</sup> Wecter, *The Hero in America*, 491.

<sup>114</sup> Star, “The Orientation of Soldiers Toward the War,” 441.

<sup>115</sup> MacLeish, “Post-War Writers and Pre-War Readers.”

<sup>116</sup> Fussell, *Wartime*, 130.

realization of war's necessity suggested to them that "one who dies for his cause in cooler blood is a greater hero than one who dies intoxicated by hysteria."<sup>117</sup> Where Wecter sees an embrace of something positive, the country's solid heroic traditions, a more negative assessment is probably more appropriate. Stouffer's researchers found little positive in the attitudes of soldiers toward the country's war effort. The only consensus opinion toward the war, both in the Army and among civilians, was the necessity to defeat the Japanese after the attack on Pearl Harbor: while the war "might be deplored... it could not be opposed." Otherwise, they could find only a general "absence of thinking about the meaning of the war," with "little consistency in men's views," and the "tendency to accept momentarily any plausibly worded interpretation of the war."<sup>118</sup> Stouffer found that soldiers simply came to accept American participation in the war as "an unavoidable fact," and their own participation depended on "excluding from consideration everything but the immediate events" of the country's participation. When less immediate concerns were suggested to them, such as political events prior to the war or questions of what might come after, soldiers' personal rationales became less coherent. More notably, Stouffer finds that attitudes towards the value of the war as 'worth fighting' were more negative among soldiers closer to combat: "There was a certain amount of revulsion to war as men

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<sup>117</sup> Wecter, *The Hero in America*, 491.

<sup>118</sup> Star, "The Orientation of Soldiers Toward the War," 431. If the reader is unfamiliar with the particulars of the Four Freedoms or World Government, Fussell's point is made. Stouffer's survey in mid-1943 found that over one-third of respondents had never heard of the Four Freedoms and only 13 percent could name three of the four (see Star, 433).

were more and more forced to look upon it.” As well, the war’s value was questioned more often as it progressed, and Stouffer notes a significant surge of criticism at the war’s end.<sup>119</sup>

Fussell’s assessment is more pointed, arguing that for American soldiers the war seemed “devoid of ideological content,” especially after the Soviet Union joined the Allied war against Germany.<sup>120</sup> Fussell sees a general ideological problem facing both the American and British effort to justify the sacrifices of their troops:

a German officer could write that these men had died for the Reich, for the Führer, or to forward the struggle for *Lebensraum* and against Bolshevism. A Japanese officer could write that the dead soldier had glorified his family and his Emperor. But what could we say? That the man had died for the Four Freedoms or for the principle of World Government, to be realized after the war?<sup>121</sup>

Fussell goes on to cite the observation of an American soldier in the Pacific theater as representative of the ideological limits to soldiers’ motivation:

99 of 100 people in the army haven’t the faintest idea what the war’s about. Their two strongest motives are (a) nationalism... and (b) race prejudice—they dislike the Japanese in the same way, though not as much as, they dislike Negroes.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 441.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 442. Stouffer’s findings also point to the ideological confusion arising in the alliance with the Soviet Union, noting “soldiers well knew that victory in World War II would mean victory for countries like America and Britain but also victory for a country whose way of life differed greatly from ours and whose power might be tremendous—namely, Russia.”

<sup>121</sup> Fussell, *Wartime*, 133.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 137. Citing Mary Jarrell, ed., *Randall Jarrell’s Letters* (New York, 1985), 103.

It must be remembered that, though the war in Europe has come to receive much more historical emphasis than the war against Japan, the United States only entered war against Nazi Germany when the American declaration of war against Japan after Pearl Harbor obligated Hitler to declare war against the US. Most Americans, both soldiers and civilians, accepted the administration's argument that the Nazis had to be defeated first "so that the maximum attention could be devoted to the real business, the absolute torment and destruction of the Japanese."<sup>123</sup> For most soldiers, apart from hatred of the Japanese, the primary motivating principle was simply "getting the job over at any cost."<sup>124</sup>

While creating acceptance of American participation was not politically difficult after Pearl Harbor, negative cultural attitudes toward the military proved difficult to overcome. Despite the enormous mobilization effort that began in earnest with military personnel increases in 1937, the War Department's Bureau of Public Relations still needed to justify its efforts to indoctrinate recruits to military expectations. In an article published in the *Annals of the American Academy of Social and Political Science* in March 1942, First Lieutenant B.N. Harlow, who had only the year before left his position as the assistant librarian of the US House of Representatives, explained the military's educational system to American scholars. Interestingly, the article opens with a justification for organized training to a bureaucratized standard of performance during the mass mobilization because of the

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 7.

country's historical "addict[ion] to the almost fatal delusion that an army animated by patriotism needs neither instruction nor discipline to prepare for battle." Harlow forgives the tendency as perhaps "to be expected from a nation which traditionally has opposed large standing armies as inimical to democratic institutions," but points out that it had produced a "reliance upon American ingenuity to solve crises *after* they appear." The cost of America's antipathy toward the anti-democratic tendencies of traditional military institutions could be seen in the history of repeated "military fiascos, ...the futile shedding of torrents of American blood on battlefields in this country and abroad, and ...the dissipation of American wealth and resources garnered through generations of travail."<sup>125</sup> The War Department was responding to both the necessities of the war and the realities of American culture by recognizing that the American soldier must be a product of "infinite patience and a meticulously planned program."<sup>126</sup> Because the purpose of all military training must be the achievement of victory in war, the Army's training programs would take great care:

to develop an aggressive, inflexible spirit in American soldiers, so that they will have the desire and the ability to close with and destroy the enemy. This aggressive attribute is not necessarily inherent in an army, but requires the careful and persistent instilling of such qualities as initiative, leadership, and discipline.<sup>127</sup>

If such qualities were in fact required of soldiers to achieve victory, the message the Army sent directly to its recruits was more pointed. In the 1941 edition

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<sup>125</sup> Harlow, "Training for Military Service," 29.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 30.

of the Army's *Soldier's Handbook*, the field manual of basic soldier instructions given to all recruits at the beginning of their military training, the words 'initiative' and 'leadership' are entirely absent. 'Discipline', on the other hand, is described as "the most important thing in the Army."<sup>128</sup> Recruits were expected to understand discipline from civilian life: it was the same "spirit of team play" they had learned from their parents, in sports, and in the workplace. Of course, the stakes for soldiers were much higher than civilian life, and so team discipline takes on more importance:

Here lack of discipline in a soldier may not only cost him his life and the life of his comrades, but cause a military undertaking to fail and his team be defeated. On the other hand a team of a few well-disciplined soldiers is worth many times a much larger number of undisciplined individuals who are nothing more than an armed mob.

While soldiers, just like civilians, would need to learn a certain set of skills to do their jobs, to achieve military discipline the Army's training programs had to at the same time place an emphasis on "what appear to be minor details," such as holding a rifle in the prescribed fashion, making one's bed to a specific standard, or saluting officers. For the American soldier, the purpose of such exacting demands, though seemingly pointless from a civilian perspective, "is to teach you obedience, loyalty, team play, personal pride, pride in you organization, respect for the rights of others, love of the flag, and the will to win." Discipline is not punishment, it is simply "learning to place the task of your unit—your team—above your personal welfare." If the lessons of military discipline are learned, the soldier will "obey promptly and cheerfully" the

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<sup>128</sup> United States War Department, *Soldier's Handbook (1941)*, 9–10.

orders of their superiors to the best of their ability, even in the absence of direct supervision. This is “the kind of discipline which will save lives and win battles.”

It is clear in Stouffer’s research that the Army’s claims about the military necessity of discipline were found wanting by most troops. Most new soldiers felt that much of the training they received was unnecessary, or even detrimental, to their preparation for combat. The sentiment was much more prevalent among better educated recruits, but even a majority of those with less than a high school education did not see the purpose in much of their training. One new soldier observed that, “Too much time is spent on close order drill, which is pretty to see but doesn’t make fighters. You won’t stop a tank by doing present arms in front of it!” Others questioned the effectiveness of the constant inspections that created “a wholly false emphasis [on passing inspection] and takes it off the necessity of [being ready for combat].” The reality of the task before them was obvious, and new soldiers were eager for “more rifle and bayonet work, machine gun, bridge building, and active field maneuvers,” and wanted to be part of a “tough, hard hitting field Army and not a bunch of garrison soldiers who are pretty to look at.”<sup>129</sup> In contrast, the attitudes of the pre-war soldiers to the new draftees and volunteers reflect the effects of traditional notions of discipline. For example, one ‘old regular’ observed: “My own pet gripe is that [draftees] are treated much better than *we soldiers*. They grunt and gripe too much.” Another: “I think discipline was relaxed on [draftees], from what it was formerly on Regular Army men. [Draftees] have been allowed to wise off too

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<sup>129</sup> Suchman, DeVinney, and Stouffer, “The Old Army and the New,” 77–79.



much. Many of them are too smart for their own good.”<sup>130</sup> Notably, there was also a significant distinction in the attitudes about traditional practices of discipline between enlisted soldiers and officers. Where only about one-quarter of officers believed “The Army places too much importance upon military courtesy,” and forty percent that “The Army places too much importance on ‘spit and polish’,” a full three-quarters of enlisted agreed with both statements.<sup>131</sup> If there is any military value in such practices of traditional military authority, it is probably only, as the veteran poet Louis Simpson observed, that “The aim of military training is not just to prepare men for battle, but to make them long for it.”<sup>132</sup> Fussell, calling the practices ‘chickenshit’, notes their “natural alliance” with “totalitarian conceptions of personality,”<sup>133</sup> and John Keegan argues that the Second World War “exposed over 12 million [Americans] to a system of subordination and autocracy entirely alien to American values.”<sup>134</sup>

Whether modern warfare required the soldier’s exercise of individual initiative or disciplined obedience, the technological changes that brought about the devolution of power toward the individual soldier had been recognized by the Army prior to the start of WWII. For instance, Harlow’s article recognizes the necessary

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 68. Emphasis in original: “the significant underlining [of ‘we soldiers’] was the writer’s own.”

<sup>131</sup> Suchman, DeVinney, and Stouffer, “Attitudes Toward Leadership and Social Control,” 419.

<sup>132</sup> Fussell, *Wartime*, 81. Quoting Louis Simpson’s *Air with Armed Men* (London, 1972), 101.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>134</sup> Keegan, “Britain and America,” 544.

mediation of the chaos of modern combat by preparing individuals to act on their own initiative:

Modern battle, a maelstrom of noise and confusion, has enormously increased the importance of the training of the individual. He must acquire such skill in the technique of operating his implements of war, whether vehicles, weapons, or men, that he habitually follows correct procedure under any conditions which may be encountered. Modern warfare has also required the decentralization of responsibility for making decisions. The increased tempo of war today, its rapid changes in local situations, and the great spaces it covers make it impossible for commanders to control the detailed action of subordinate units. Hence, the accomplishment of the will of the commander depends, in final analysis, upon the ability of the subordinates to make the proper decisions in unpredictable situations on the battlefield. These decisions require sound judgment and initiative—qualities which must be carefully developed and fostered in the training of every individual.<sup>135</sup>

Though Harlow's piece was written as propaganda to convince academics to support the Army's indoctrination programs, it reflects the Army's institutionalized faith in its own professionalism. Though the Army is well aware that warfare has changed, what goes unsaid is the presumption that its training has adapted appropriately. It also takes for granted that 'sound judgment and initiative' can be trained at all and that its training programs actually produce this result. It presumes that the will of the commander, exercising the legitimate authority of the Army's officer corps and given troops properly trained to institutional standards, is sufficient to success in modern warfare. As discussed in the previous chapter, the US Army's experience in World War II provided the first opportunity to establish the validity of claims like this in its studies of combat motivation. While those studies pointed to the necessity of small-

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<sup>135</sup> Harlow, "Training for Military Service," 45.

unit loyalty as the basis of combat motivation, Fussell's account of the soldier's experience suggests the relationship is more complex. He admits that "men will attack only if young, athletic, credulous, and sustained by some equivalent of the buddy system—that is, fear of shame," but the operative word in this passage is 'sustained'. Again, the question raised by Stouffer was not, 'why do men fight?' but rather what "made it possible for the combat soldier to sustain the extraordinary stresses to which he was subjected."<sup>136</sup> Sustainment of the individual soldier's willing participation was particularly important in WWII because of the war's objectives. Lacking clear ideological motives and faced with the Allied demand of the enemy's 'unconditional surrender', American soldiers had little option but to embrace an idealized notion of comradeship. Fussell argues that, for the individual soldier, "if you embraced the right attitude, you could persuade yourself that in the absence of any pressing ideological sanction, the war was about your military unit and your loyalty to it... And to kill effectively and go on living, you had to believe in your comrades." However, even these relationships had their limits, particularly given the high casualty rates among ground combat units. Just as the necessarily irrational faith in one's own invincibility "seldom survives a few bombing missions or a few weeks on the line,"<sup>137</sup> the motivating potential of an idealized faith in one's comrades depends on sustaining the illusion. As well, small-unit loyalty does not arise only as a means of surviving combat. It is also an adaptation for surviving the dehumanizing

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<sup>136</sup> Smith, "Combat Motivations among Ground Troops," 105.

<sup>137</sup> Fussell, *Wartime*, 150.

abuses of the institution. Short of desertion, and more than 50,000 American troops did just that during the war,<sup>138</sup> “the only way to escape most of the chickenshit was to be in combat and so far forward as to be virtually unreachable and surely uninspectable.”<sup>139</sup> The solidarity that arises from this sort of shared experience relies on an idealizing narrative of comradeship that “compensates for the insignificance of actuality,” because even false narrative “is better than the absence of narrative. Even a pessimistic, terrifying story is preferable to unmediated actuality.”<sup>140</sup> Still, even these attempts to fill the ideological void could fail and soldiers compensated with a simple and universal “fall-back reason, which close scrutiny might expose as equally irrational: namely, to get home. To get home you had to end the war. To end the war was the reason you fought it. The only reason.”<sup>141</sup>

And so it is somewhat ironic that World War II is remembered as the ‘Good War’. Fussell argues that this narrative is a result of the totalizing propaganda of the American and British war efforts: lacking any positive ideology, one had to be manufactured. The result, ultimately, given the reduction of the war by many to a task that simply had to be done with, was to frame that task in the simplest moral terms possible—a ‘Great Crusade’ of the morally pure Americans and British (and the Soviets, to the extent anyone could believe the claim) against an utterly evil enemy. For example, the Office of War Information reminded Hollywood filmmakers of the

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<sup>138</sup> Glass, *The Deserters*.

<sup>139</sup> Fussell, *Wartime*, 81.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

necessity of such binary narratives: “This is total war. Everyone is either a friend of a foe.” But that enemy was to be portrayed as an ideology, “a poisonous doctrine of hate, of might making right,” rather than a particular state or people, lest the post-war will be lost to redeem those people through democratic institutions once they were liberated from the ideology of their leaders.<sup>142</sup> The homefront propaganda, Fussell argues, was so effective that support for the war effort came to be understood in terms of personal virtue: assurance of one’s “worthiness” was expressed in willingness “to pitch in, to abandon disbelief, sarcasm, pessimism, or any sign of heterodoxy, and to play the game with sincerity and devotion.”<sup>143</sup> If the experience of the troops did not permit this sort of naïve idealism, they lacked the discursive power to challenge the new narrative, its moral power making the “actuality” of their own experience now “inexplicable.” Fussell offers the account of one veteran’s return, reminiscent of Paul Bäumer’s homecoming in *All Quiet on the Western Front*, encountering smiling Salvation Army and Red Cross volunteers as he disembarked the troop ship:

They give us a little bag and it has a couple of chocolate bars in it and a comic book... We had gone overseas not much more than children but we were coming back, sure, let’s face it, as killers. And they were treating us like children. Candy and comic books.<sup>144</sup>

The persistence of the narrative of national virtue served other political purposes. At the beginning of the war, President Franklin Roosevelt had recognized

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<sup>142</sup> Koppes and Black, *Hollywood Goes to War*, 68, 249.

<sup>143</sup> Fussell, *Wartime*, 168.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 288. Citing Barry Broadfoot, ed., *Six Years War, 1939-1945: Memories of Canadians at Home and Abroad* (Toronto, 1974), 289.

that victory would lead to US dominance of global politics, and rejecting isolationism for internationalism would require a commitment to a very large, permanent military. In the short-term, however, WWII required a total mobilization of American society. The government's mobilization propaganda relied on a 'strategy of truth'. On the one hand, Americans were well aware of their opponents' mobilization efforts that glorified totalitarian leaders and violently stifled opposition. On the other, propagandists worried that appeals to individual self-interest would "identify patriotism with consumption rather than hard work and sacrifice." Instead, the Office of War Information (OWI) took the position that, "To tell the truth at home is to mobilize behind the war the support, initiative, imagination, and genius of the American people."<sup>145</sup> Despite the obvious limits to the policy (censorship was rampant) and criticism for its hypocrisy (American racial segregation, internment of Japanese-Americans, alliance with the totalitarian Soviet Union), the policy was able to draw on republican cultural traditions to create a "mystique of unconditional sacrifice" in the nation's collective memory of the war. Susan Brewer observes that remembering WWII as 'the good war' when all Americans 'pulled together' served to erase the years of ignoring fascist expansion and the widespread skepticism many Americans felt during the war. If we prefer to remember a "noble war fought for democracy and freedom by innocent people forced to defend themselves against a vicious enemy, a war fought overseas by decent men while on the home front everyone contributed, a war that delivered a better life," it is in part because this

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<sup>145</sup> Brewer, *Why America Fights*, 98.

narrative presented the US “conversion to internationalism as complete and wholehearted,” and proclaimed that Americans “embraced their role as leader of the Free World and keeper of the peace.”<sup>146</sup>

### **The Army and the Cold War**

American foreign policy changed radically after WWII as the US took on the role of global superpower. WWII is undoubtedly the most significant event in the Army’s history, but with the war’s end the Army’s understanding of itself was contested as it adjusted to its role in the Cold War. In the war’s immediate aftermath, large numbers of troops were still required for the occupation of Japan and Germany, but demobilization was very rapid. As the US became a military superpower, for the first time in its history the country established a large standing ground force. From a wartime high of 8.2 million, personnel strength was reduced by mid-1947 to 990,000 (including 306,000 Air Force personnel). The draft authorized by Congress in 1940 expired that same year, but was reestablished in 1948, though only 30,000 personnel were inducted into the US military in 1948 and 1949.<sup>147</sup> The active personnel strength of the Army, decoupled from the Air Force under the National Security Act of 1947, fell below 600,000 prior to the start of the Korean War in 1950, but the decision to maintain a permanent standing Army would ensure that the institution’s strength would remain well above that until after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>147</sup> United States Selective Service System, “Induction Statistics.”

Throughout the Cold War, total manpower of the US military equaled one to two percent of the country's population.<sup>148</sup>

Still, the hierarchically bureaucratized structure of the American military institution remained and was only made deeper after WWII. The new necessity of a standing force did stir debate about how the institution might better reflect American society. Cultural reactions against military service made it impossible for President Truman to institute a universal military training (though not universal service) program for all adult males, criticism of which ranged from calling it “a system in which the American mind finds no pleasure” to the more extreme observation that it resembled Nazi indoctrination programs.<sup>149</sup> As well, the ‘caste-like’ distinctions between officers and enlisted became an issue in domestic politics after the war. The problem had been observed by Stouffer's researchers at the very beginning of the war (in a survey conducted December 8, 1941) in the resentment of draftees toward the formal privileges of officers. they describe the relationship as having as its “nearest analogy in civilian life... the social relations of whites and Negroes, especially in the South”<sup>150</sup> Given the anti-authoritarian (and racist) bent of American culture, it is no wonder that resentment among enlisted toward the institution's leadership “was to be

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<sup>148</sup> Segal and Segal, “America's Military Population,” 5.

<sup>149</sup> Stewart, *American Military History, Volume II*, 214.

<sup>150</sup> Suchman, DeVinney, and Stouffer, “The Old Army and the New,” 56. They also propose, based on their surveys of segregated Black units, that “it may have been even easier for Negro civilian soldiers than for white soldiers to adjust to the Army's pattern of social privilege.” Still, “the analogy is not quite fair to the Army, and the word ‘caste’ is perhaps not strictly applicable since it was possible for a substantial number of enlisted men to cross the social chasm and themselves become officers.”



a cumulative matter, tending to increase the longer a man was in the Army and tending to increase in later years of the war, especially among soldiers in inactive theaters overseas or in rear areas of active theaters.”<sup>151</sup> This distinction arising from proximity to combat is important because it is indicative of the institutional power of tradition that is so distinct from the functional requirements of combat and suggests that claims of the military necessity of officer-enlisted distinctions were proved false. In response to the complaints of so many veterans, the War Department and Congress established the Board on Officer-Enlisted Man Relationships in early 1945, known popularly as the ‘Doolittle Board’ for its chairman Air Corps Lieutenant General James Doolittle who was famous for leading the first bombing raid on Tokyo in 1942. Prior to the Board’s report, Secretary of War James Patterson attempted to contain the criticism of Army leadership “of everything the Army did in waging war [as the] fashion of the day, most of the criticism coming from individuals who never served.” The nation could rest assured that the Army understood that the “American soldier has always had a wholesome respect for authority based on competence,” however, the War Department needed to act, since:

unbalanced judgments will be formed unless account is also taken of the fact that the prime purpose of the armed forces is to win without excessive loss of life... In that purpose the Army won a success without precedent in our history, and this is proof enough of the character of the military leadership. It could not have succeeded if there had been anything radically wrong with our leadership supplied by those in uniform... The Doolittle board is a thoughtful

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 71.

discussion of inadequacies and of remedies. The soundness of most of the recommended measures will not be disputed by Army command.<sup>152</sup>

General Dwight Eisenhower, then Army Chief of Staff, recognized the Board's purpose in addressing the problems arising out of American cultural individualism and the necessity of military discipline under the authority of the officer corps. He admitted that abuses occurred, and had himself been forced to address the problem "throughout the war and have given it an extraordinary amount of attention since the shooting stopped." In the American military, he argued, the distinction between leaders and subordinates "must never imply or condone any assumption of human superiority, which is not only un-American and unethical, but is ineffective in developing the kind of unit that is necessary to battle success." Still, Eisenhower attempted to alleviate any concerns about anti-democratic class distinctions as he reminded the public that more than sixty percent of the military's officers during the war had been promoted from the enlisted ranks. He urged caution in the government's response, while hoping the Board's actions would lead to adoption of "methods and doctrines that will eliminate justifiable complaint."<sup>153</sup>

Secretary Patterson's response to the recommendations of what he and others called the 'gripe board' was indicative of the institution's defensiveness:

Nothing in the report... should be taken as a reflection on the officer corps that has served the country in the war... The vast majority of them did their duty as soldiers with courage, ability, and fidelity, and it should not be

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<sup>152</sup> "Patterson Raps Army Critics."

<sup>153</sup> "'Caste' Discussed by Eisenhower."

forgotten that their casualties were proportionately heavier than with other ranks.<sup>154</sup>

Still, the political situation demanded the military acknowledge the Board's findings, at least in part. The Board's recommendations approved by the Secretary included: changes in personnel policy to base officer selection, retention, and promotion on merit; equality in leave policies; allowing social mingling between ranks; equal application of military justice (which led to the 1950 adoption of the Uniform Code of Military Justice); and promises to adopt policies and practices to encourage closer contact between military and civilian communities. A few recommendations were rejected outright, for example, the abolition of the terms 'officer' and 'enlisted'. The Board's recommendation that complaints filed against officers be handled by inspectors outside the chain of command was rejected for its "tinge of Gestapo" implications.<sup>155</sup>

Anthropologist G. Dearborn Spindler, a veteran of the Air Corps during the war, criticized the Board as little more than a "public bid for faith in the army system." Those reforms most at odds with the officer-enlisted distinctions were coopted in their implementation in ways that perpetuated the old institutional interests. For the officer corps, eliminating those distinctions "might mean a disturbance of authority and lines of communication, for a highly indoctrinated and self-conscious officer corps is not the organizational equivalent of a rank group

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<sup>154</sup> "Army Backs Up 'Gripe Board,' Curbs Salutes."

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

succeeding to promotion by merit of efficiency.”<sup>156</sup> Writing in the early-1990s, US Army Major Kevin Donohue concluded that the Board’s recommendations were actually very conservative, but that the officer corps’ response to the Board, interpreting the proposed changes as a “vast watering down of discipline,” was an angry overreaction.<sup>157</sup> The Army’s doctrinal response was “to abruptly and unceremoniously jerk the doctrine of discipline back to the nineteenth-century interpretations of the concept.”<sup>158</sup> While discipline had been explained to wartime recruits as the willing adherence to “the spirit of team play,”<sup>159</sup> it came to be redefined in doctrine as “the state of order and obedience among military personnel resulting from training.”<sup>160</sup> Donohue argues that the change was a shift away from understanding discipline as an individual attitude “of voluntary, self-sustaining, value-based functions of courage, identification, internalization, and initiative” achieved through a program of individual training and the building of unit cohesion, back to an attitude of discipline as obedient behavior. Yet, after the Army’s embarrassments in the Korean War, the Doolittle Board’s recommendations were a useful excuse for the officer corps to push back on civilian interference with military authority.<sup>161</sup> It was argued that the officer corps’ authority, and by extension the

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<sup>156</sup> Spindler, “The Military: A Systematic Analysis,” 308.

<sup>157</sup> Donohue, “The Anatomy of Discipline,” 63. Citing Hamilton H. Howze, “Military Discipline and National Security,” *Army* (January 1971): 11-15.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>159</sup> United States War Department, *Soldier’s Handbook (1941)*.

<sup>160</sup> United States War Department, *FM 22-5: Leadership Courtesy and Drill*.

<sup>161</sup> Donohue, “The Anatomy of Discipline,” 63.

authority it vested in the corps of noncommissioned officers, depended upon its self-policed professional standing. A general agreement had developed, much like the Army's compromises with Congress in the early-nineteenth century,<sup>162</sup> among senior military and civilian defense leaders that "most of the silly little local rules governing conduct and privileges should be abolished and greater trust be placed in an officer's word."<sup>163</sup>

Despite the total revision of the Army's role in American society, little changed in the fundamental relationship between the soldier and the institution. Even contemporary Army historians admit that "old ways of organizing for combat seemed inadequate to meet a nuclear attack, yet historical precedents were lacking when it came to devising new ones."<sup>164</sup> At the same time, the Army bureaucracy faced the challenge in the years between Korea and Vietnam of defining "a mission that would garner sufficient resources to maintain a core of well-trained ground forces ready for a variety of missions."<sup>165</sup> Personnel policy, given the possibility of nuclear war and the expectation of a very quick resolution, would have to rely on a standing army and an organized, trained and equipped reserve force, rather than the general mobilization of the civilian population relied on for the World Wars.<sup>166</sup> Incentives created by the

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<sup>162</sup> Watson, *Warfare in the USA, 1784-1861*.

<sup>163</sup> Norris, "Rank Is Winning Back Its Privileges." Quoting Colonel R.W. Hall, director of the military personnel policy division of the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

<sup>164</sup> Stewart, *American Military History, Volume II*, 263.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 286–87.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

draft pushed more volunteers into the Navy and Air Force, leaving the Army reliant on conscripts to fill its ranks. With conscripts, there was no incentive inside the military to liberalize its policies to reflect the cultural distaste for authoritarianism.

A much more concerted effort was undertaken to change popular attitudes about the military and its members. Politically, a large standing military required that Americans be convinced of the presence of a persistent, credible threat to national security and the trustworthiness of the military institution.<sup>167</sup> The former was easily found in the Cold War rivalry with the Soviet Union, but the latter had to be constructed. Leaders were keenly aware of the anti-militarist tendencies in American culture. President Truman, for instance, warned West Point's cadet corps of the cultural turns against the military after earlier American wars:

It is nothing new. There is going to come a time now when people are going to be sorry that they ever saw a soldier or a sailor or a marine. Don't let that worry you. We are going to need leadership now, and from now on, just as badly as we have needed it in this great emergency through which we have just been... Give the country the best you have, and no matter what they may say about you for wearing a uniform in the future, maintain that dignity that goes with the leadership that has made this country great...<sup>168</sup>

The military set out to build a more militarized narrative of the 'American character' in order to ensure political support for the draft and facilitate future mobilizations. In making WWII an ideological war, propagandists had established the basis for the Cold War as an ideological struggle against evil and created the institutional structure within the military to propagate an American ideology. The military became a tool of

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<sup>167</sup> Grandstaff, "Making the Military American."

<sup>168</sup> Truman, "Remarks to the Cadet Corps at West Point."

indoctrination to produce soldiers as good citizens capable of resisting the influence of ‘godless communism’ through a narrative of national character built on belief in American moral leadership established in WWII, middle-class values, and evangelical Christianity.<sup>169</sup> In so doing, the military successfully eliminated the cultural aversion to the military profession by equating all military service with republican civic virtue.

The realities of war, of course, challenged those narratives, first in Korea and then in Vietnam. As the war in Korea was fought to a stalemate, anti-communist ideologues like Senator Joseph McCarthy and the evangelist Billy Graham attacked the nation’s ‘toughness’, leading militarists to make masculinity more central to the American character narrative. Some military leaders created the war’s POW scandal—falsely asserting that prisoners of the North Koreans had collaborated with the enemy *en masse*—by purposefully drawing attention to the twenty-one American prisoners who refused repatriation at the war’s end as the failure of both American civic education and military indoctrination in order to undo the Doolittle Board’s reforms.<sup>170</sup> The political environment of the 1950s was, however, highly favorable to the new militarism and military service gained unprecedented public support.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Grandstaff, “Making the Military American”; Bogle, *The Pentagon’s Battle for the American Mind*.

<sup>170</sup> Bogle, *The Pentagon’s Battle for the American Mind*. Citing Albert D. Biderman, *March to Calumny: The Story of American POWs in the Korean War* (New York: Macmillan, 1963).

<sup>171</sup> Grandstaff, “Making the Military American,” 322. Polling in 1955 showed over 70 percent of respondents believed military personnel were desirable in their communities; over 80 percent believed military service did not lead to bad behavior; and, most importantly, a majority of middle-class parents would support their son’s

The military and political failures of Vietnam, of course, undermined that support. Ironically, the Johnson administration's escalation of the war was structured around the assumption that public support could not be counted on given the "basic antimilitarism of the American people." The decision to undertake the war without a formal declaration, without public mobilization, and even without activating the National Guard or Reserves was made to avoid "arous[ing] the passions of the American people," for either good or ill. Army leaders, however, called for a large-scale mobilization. In 1965, Army Chief of Staff General Harold Johnson led a study of the American position in Vietnam and recommended the war would require deploying over 1 million troops and the full mobilization of reserve forces. Johnson's report was, however, quashed by the other service chiefs and was never presented to the President. General Johnson presciently warned Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara that, with the reliance on regular Army units filled with conscripts rather than the relative expertise of reservists, "the quality of the Army is going to erode and we're going to suffer badly."<sup>172</sup>

Given the changes in American society and its position as a superpower, the Vietnam War did provide an opportunity for an academic reassessment of combat motivation and the proper role of the American soldier. Sociologist Charles Moskos's *The American Enlisted Man* (1970) became the most significant contribution to

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decision to serve. Citing Department of Defense, Office of Armed Forces Information and Education, *Attitudes of Adult Civilians Toward the Military Service as a Career, Part I* and *Attitude of 16 to 20 Year Old Males toward the Military Service as a Career, Part II* (Princeton, N.J.: Public Opinion Surveys, 1955).

<sup>172</sup> Sorley, *A Better War*, 288.



combat motivation research in the post-war era.<sup>173</sup> To analyze motivation, Moskos begins very specifically from the ‘combat situation’, and, like Marshall, attempts to recreate accounts of combat at the micro-level of the individual soldier in the small unit. His conclusions do not disregard the role of primary groups, but do counter their extreme formulations in which it is believed primary group loyalties can override social norms, military necessity, and the individual’s own interests. Instead, the effect of primary group relations, shared cultural beliefs, and formal military organization must all be mediated through the context of the individual’s specific combat situation. This recognition of situational complexity allows for a huge range of possible individual reactions—fear, bravery, exhilaration, comedy, or atrocity.<sup>174</sup> By starting with the situation, the soldier’s individual agency is accounted for, in which case, the power of individual self-interest may match that of primary group relationships. While cultural, institutional, and primary group factors define the soldier’s role, the particular conditions of combat leave the soldier, briefly, wholly isolated and fully agential. Moskos notes that this often played out in the decisions soldiers in Vietnam made about the risks they were willing to accept in fulfillment of their mission and primary group obligations. Thus, if action in combat is a result of social and situational factors mediated through self-interest, there must be an acknowledgement

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<sup>173</sup> The study is based on interviews conducted with enlisted soldiers in Vietnam. Moskos had been drafted between his undergraduate and graduate studies and served as an enlisted Army soldier in the mid-1950s. The enlisted experience clearly shapes his work and allows a perspective that previous studies by professional academics and military officers do not provide.

<sup>174</sup> Moskos, *The American Enlisted Man*, 141.

that the soldier's institutionally defined role is not the role actually exercised by soldiers in combat.

In addition, Moskos identifies broad cultural influences on motivation not previously considered, most importantly, the influence of social class on enlisted culture. Though others had noted the class-based divide between officers and their men, the more fundamental difference in Vietnam era America may have been the conflict of middle and working classes in the enlisted ranks. In the draft era, a large number of low-ranking soldiers came from middle-class backgrounds, while career-enlisted soldiers tended to come from the working class. Overall, the distinction of career-soldiers from the mass of recruits and draftees created a conflict of authoritarian and egalitarian cultural tendencies. The opportunity afforded to the working class by career military service had one of the greatest class-leveling effects in US history. This also played out along racial lines, as integration moved more quickly in the military than other parts of American society, leading to a disproportionate number of Black service members choosing career military service as a viable means of economic mobility.<sup>175</sup> But the social distance between career-soldiers and middle-class conscripts more deeply institutionalized traditional authoritarian discipline, even if disciplinary practices became less violent. Where authoritarianism once marked the class distinction between officer and enlisted, the evolution of the American military institution and cultural idealization of the soldier

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 116–18.

produced a new relationship of the soldier to the institution in the distinction between recruits and career-military.

This is one of the most immediate influences on the individual lower-enlisted soldier. The ability to conform to cultural norms of discipline and obedience acts as a selection mechanism for admission to full institutional membership. To illustrate, Moskos notes that during the first two decades of the Cold War the reenlistment rate for first-term soldiers was highly stable—around twenty percent every year.<sup>176</sup> Keep in mind that this was in an era of conscription when draftees made up around forty percent of the Army's personnel in Vietnam.<sup>177</sup> Remarkably, throughout the 1960s half of all Black soldiers chose to reenlist for second terms of service, reaching a rate of two-thirds in 1966.<sup>178</sup> As further evidence of the reliance on authoritarian discipline as institutional selection mechanism, Moskos surveyed career and first-term soldiers' attitudes toward military life. For senior officers, around sixty-eight percent viewed life in the military favorably, and the number was around forty-five percent for senior-enlisted. However, for junior officers it was only thirty-five percent, and a mere thirteen percent for junior-enlisted soldiers.<sup>179</sup> These rates led Moskos, sounding very much like Durkheim, to conclude that “those least committed to the military as a career are the very ones getting killed or wounded in combat.”<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>177</sup> Savage and Gabriel, “Cohesion and Disintegration in the American Army,” 364.

<sup>178</sup> Moskos, *The American Enlisted Man*, 220.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 52.

The problem was not lost on the American public, and the experience of Vietnam turned public opinion against conscription, which, again, had historically only been relied on during national emergencies prior to 1948. While resistance to the draft had been a central theme of the anti-war movement, ending conscription was also a key message of Richard Nixon's campaign for the Presidency in 1968. As a candidate, Nixon said of the draft: "a system of compulsory service that arbitrarily selects some and not others simply cannot be squared with our whole concept of liberty, justice and equality under the law. Its only justification is compelling necessity." Many who called for reforming the draft, Nixon noted, were justifiably outraged by the unfairness of the process, but he insisted that "the only way to stop the inequities is to stop using the system."<sup>181</sup> Nixon signed legislation to reform the Selective Service system in 1969, but also appointed a special commission (the 'Gates Commission', for its chairman, Secretary of Defense Thomas Gates, Jr.) tasked with developing "a comprehensive plan for eliminating conscription and moving toward an all-volunteer armed force [AVF]."<sup>182</sup> The commission's recommendation to end the draft and establish the AVF were most strongly influenced by arguments of the 'Chicago School' economists appointed to the board by Nixon, most notably Milton Friedman and Alan Greenspan, that conscription amounted to an unfair 'tax-in-kind' upon servicemembers themselves, much like the

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<sup>181</sup> Nixon, "The All-Volunteer Armed Force."

<sup>182</sup> Rostker, *I Want You!*, 66. Citing Richard M. Nixon, *Statement by the President Announcing a Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Forces*, Washington, D.C.: Office of the White House Press Secretary, March 27, 1969.

obligations of peasants to a feudal aristocracy. The compelled draftee's labor is the collection of a tax in "the difference between the pay that the inductee or reluctant ['draft-induced'] volunteer actually receives as a first-term serviceman and the pay that would be required to induce him to enlist." Further, even 'true volunteers' in an otherwise conscripted force are taxed in this way because they are paid significantly less than the labor market would allow in a wholly volunteer force. For the Gates Commission, the popular political outrage over the draft's unfairness in the Vietnam era reflected the realization that the true cost of the war—in purely economic terms—had been hidden from the public, as taxes-in-kind have never been reflected in US government accounting practices. Because the tax burden of conscription falls so regressively on such a narrow segment of the population, particularly in a limited war like Vietnam, the authors could not imagine a democratic government ever imposing "a general tax of the kind now imposed by the draft."<sup>183</sup> Still, the political achievement of the neoliberal economists in ending conscription cannot be understated: before public opinion turned against the Vietnam War conservatives had militantly attacked "anyone [including Friedman] who dares to raise a principled voice against conscription" as a "Communist dupe."<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force, *Gates Commission Report*, 23–33.

<sup>184</sup> Singleton, "Slaves or Mercenaries?," 7. Quoting Ronald Hamowy, "'National Review': Criticism and Reply," *New Individualist Review* 1, no. 3 (1961): 5.

Not surprisingly, the Army and its political supporters were reluctant to embrace the all-volunteer concept.<sup>185</sup> It had long been known that the draft created incentives to voluntary enlistment in the Navy and Air Force, leaving the Army to depend primarily on conscription for new members: in 1970 it was estimated that sixty percent of voluntary enlistments across the Department of Defense in both active and reserve forces were draft induced, and the Gates Commission's initial estimates of volunteer accessions proved to be overly optimistic. Arguments were also offered about long-term military readiness, as competition for volunteers with the National Guard and Reserves, whose strength had relied on draft-induced enlistment, would threaten the country's capacity for a large-scale mobilization. The quality of volunteers was also a major concern, particularly if Congress did not approve adequate pay levels, especially given the Army's low standing in popular opinion: it was assumed recruiting standards would have to be lowered, leading to problems of discipline and the inability to recruit personnel qualified for the growing technological demands of modern war. Both progressives and conservatives worried the Army would be forced to rely disproportionately on Black volunteers who lacked the greater economic opportunity available even to poor whites. The former, including military sociologists like Janowitz and Moskos, offered paternalistic concerns about the "concentration of casualties in one segment of society."<sup>186</sup> Conservatives worried that "a disproportionately Black Army would lead to increased

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<sup>185</sup> The issues addressed in this paragraph are all raised in the Gates Commission report.

<sup>186</sup> Janowitz and Moskos, "Racial Composition in the All-Volunteer Force," 110.

racial tensions and... an unreliable and less effective military force.”<sup>187</sup> In contrast, Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm argued the debate had nothing to do with military necessity:

All this talk about a volunteer Army being poor and black is not an indication of ‘concern’ for the black and poor, but rather of the deep fear of the possibility of a Black army. Very few people desire to verbalize the underlying anxiety of a large number of black men trained in the military sense in a nation where racism is rampant.<sup>188</sup>

The economic narratives around the all-volunteer force raised questions of the loyalties of such ‘mercenaries’ and Washington’s concern about their threat to the republic. The Gates Commission dismissed the issue as “demean[ing] the hundreds of thousands who voluntarily serve today,” and argued that removing the tax penalty of conscription would “enhance the attractiveness of the armed forces for citizens who will serve for a variety of reasons.”<sup>189</sup>

To make the transition to the AVF successful, the Army’s most important goal would be avoiding “the *appearance* of reducing qualitative standards to achieve numbers.”<sup>190</sup> The Army knew, however, that achieving its recruiting goals made

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<sup>187</sup> Rostker, *I Want You!*, 322. Citing Mark Jan Eitelberg, *Evaluation of Army Representation* (Alexandria, Va.: Human Resources Research Organization, 1977), 12.

<sup>188</sup> Schexnider and Butler, “Race and the All-Volunteer System,” 425. Citing Representative Shirley Chisholm, testimony before House Armed Services Committee, March 11, 1971, quoted in *Congressional Digest* 50 (May 1971), 154-158.

<sup>189</sup> President’s Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force, *Gates Commission Report*, 136.

<sup>190</sup> Griffith, *U.S. Army’s Transition to the All-Volunteer Force*, 226. Citing the author’s interview with former Secretary of the Army (1973-1975) Howard H. Callaway, September 23, 1983. Emphasis added.

lowering standards, particularly education requirements, unavoidable. Somewhat ironically, the Army decided on a strategy of *over*-recruiting less qualified candidates and discharging ‘without prejudice’ those who failed to quickly adapt to the Army’s institutional culture,<sup>191</sup> a policy that would more deeply embed the importance of institutional indoctrination.<sup>192</sup> The move to the AVF required the Army to ‘sell’ its efforts to comply with the new system to both Congress and the public, and the policy of over-recruiting and discharging trainees would also require the Army to pursue ideological narratives for service. Central to both was a consistent message that, while economic incentives were important to attracting volunteers, patriotic service to the country would be a meaningful part of the recruit’s life.<sup>193</sup> Formal recruiting efforts, however, followed the market logic behind the AVF and quickly settled into narratives of individual opportunity—pay and benefits, skill training, money for

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<sup>191</sup> The ‘Trainee Discharge Program’ allowed commanders to administratively discharge recruits “who could not adapt to military life or who did not meet minimum standards” prior to completing 180 days of active service (see Cocke, *Department of the Army Historical Summary: Fiscal Year 1974*, 52).

<sup>192</sup> Though no longer recognized as the Army’s recruiting strategy, the policy of discharging recruits remains in effect as the “Entry Level Performance and Conduct” separation by which recruits can be discharged—in practice, even at the request of the recruit—for “unsatisfactory performance and/or unsatisfactory conduct as evidenced by: inability; lack of reasonable effort; failure to adapt to the military environment; minor disciplinary infractions” (see HQDA, *AR 635-200 (2016)*). While the program’s continued use does not reflect the conditions under which it was adopted it, such discharges are no less common today than in the first years of the AVF (see Strickland, “A Longitudinal Examination of First Term Attrition and Reenlistment among FY1999 Enlisted Accessions”; US Department of Defense, “Table D-32. Continuation Rates by Years of Service, 1980-2009.”)

<sup>193</sup> Griffith, *U.S. Army’s Transition to the All-Volunteer Force*, 231. Citing “Letters by the Secretary of the Army Soliciting Support for the Volunteer Army,” *DCSPER Information Paper*, October 18, 1973.



college, personal adventure and fulfillment—devoid of calls for patriotic sacrifice, a pattern that persisted into the post-9/11 era.<sup>194</sup> Army advertising, not surprisingly, came to be consumer oriented, and emphasized new recruiting incentives and a liberalizing institutional culture as “product improvements.”<sup>195</sup> However, cultural changes—the elimination of “needless irritants,” essentially, those same practices of traditional military authority WWII soldiers complained of—were very unpopular with career-soldiers.<sup>196</sup> Just as the Doolittle Board’s reforms had been rescinded or coopted by institutional interests after WWII, post-Vietnam changes were eliminated or made to fit more traditional forms of military practice. Still, the move from conscription to the all-volunteer force in the early-1970s was one of the earliest victories for neoliberal theorists’ attack on the social ‘universalism’ that permeated much of the political culture in which the WWII generation had come of age—the common narrative of national sacrifice in war had much in common with Keynesian economic policy and American internationalism. After Vietnam, ‘voluntary’ military service was an expression of individual freedom, and “one of the primary normative means for the poor to practice their ‘freedom’ and ‘protect’ everyone else’s.”<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Bailey, “The Army in the Marketplace.”

<sup>195</sup> Griffith, *U.S. Army’s Transition to the All-Volunteer Force*, 32. Quoting Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs (1968-1969) William K. Brehm.

<sup>196</sup> Bailey, “The Army in the Marketplace,” 113. Quoting William C. Westmoreland, keynote address to Army Commanders’ Conference, the Pentagon, edited transcript, Nov. 30, 1970, All-Volunteer Army Collection.

<sup>197</sup> Cowen, “Fighting for ‘Freedom.’”

But perhaps the Army's most important political move after Vietnam was the erasure of that war—or, at least, the military's culpability for the war's outcome—from its own and the nation's collective memory. To the extent Vietnam was ever considered by Army leaders in the post-war era it was to qualify its role, and many would insist that *militarily*, the Army was successful in Vietnam. John Galvin, a midcareer Army officer in Vietnam who would later command NATO before becoming dean of the Fletcher School, replied to the Army's critics that, "No one brought the Army to its knees in Vietnam." Instead, the war's outcome was the result of inept politicians, "the collective American leadership, [who] in those last days, concluded that there were no life signs that would make a continued effort worth the cost. And the Army was withdrawn. *On its feet.*"<sup>198</sup> General William Westmoreland, commander of US forces in Vietnam from 1964 to 1966, insisted for the rest of his life that, "We did not lose a single battle against those people,"<sup>199</sup> and instead placed much of the blame for the war's failure on the American media, which irresponsibly "confused reporting with influencing American foreign policy."<sup>200</sup> Some placed the blame for problems in Vietnam upon the soldiers themselves. Historian Lewis Sorley, an Army intelligence officer in Vietnam and faculty member at the Army War College in the mid-1970s, writes that the one year rotation policy "guarantee[d] a constant influx of soldiers freshly imbued with the influences of domestic America.

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<sup>198</sup> Galvin, "Cincinnatus Recidivus," 18. Emphasis added.

<sup>199</sup> Shipler, "Robert McNamara and the Ghosts of Vietnam."

<sup>200</sup> "Uncensored Press Failed Viet Test, General Says." Westmoreland's criticism of the media was unequivocal: "If the media can create a defeat of our armies on the battlefield, they can also eventually defeat the viability of our system."

Many of those influences [Sorley cites ‘racial disharmony’, ‘dissent and indiscipline’, and ‘drug use’], it turned out, were incompatible with the good order and discipline on which effective military organizations depend.”<sup>201</sup> As well, efforts by the military and Johnson and Nixon administrations pointed to domestic political opposition of the war for undermining both the war effort and the military’s standing in society, planting the seeds of a narrative of public disrespect for returning veterans by the anti-war movement that would have its greatest effects a generation later.<sup>202</sup>

Whether or not the critics or the Army loyalists are correct in their assessment of Vietnam, Roger Spiller notes the remarkable unanimity regarding the war’s effect on the Army: by 1973 it had become “an institutional wreck.”<sup>203</sup> As well, few if any in the Army disagreed with the public consensus on Vietnam as a ‘bad war’, and it is not surprising that the Army turned back to narratives of WWII to redefine and restructure itself as a force for fighting wars more closely resembling that war—and specifically, the European theater of WWII. Further, those narratives were formalized in doctrine. According to Spiller, even if the need for institutional reform was self-evident, given the Army’s historical disinterest in doctrine before the Vietnam War, the move is remarkable. The general distrust within the institution of individual professional judgment influenced the establishment of the Army’s Training and

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<sup>201</sup> Sorley, *A Better War*, 288.

<sup>202</sup> Beamish, Molotch, and Flacks, “Who Supports the Troops?”; Lembcke, “The News and the Myth of Spat-Upon Vietnam Vets.”

<sup>203</sup> Spiller, “In the Shadow of the Dragon,” 42. A widely cited poll from 1973 ranks the military profession among the least respected in the country, just above that of sanitation workers.

Doctrine Command (TRADOC) to oversee all the institution's training programs and to "rationalise 'combat developments'—the way in which new equipment was researched, developed, tested and produced—with the way in which equipment was integrated with the standing army."<sup>204</sup> Before Vietnam, the formalization of military thought as doctrine had been generally seen as an academic undertaking, never linking ideas with training directives or weapons development, and so commanders could freely ignore doctrinal developments. The establishment of TRADOC, however, made the creation of doctrine "generals' business"—making adherence to doctrinal standards a measure of institutional control. Though initially focused on combat operations, the Army's 'doctrinal revolution' established a venue in which all institutional thinking could be formalized as the binding set of rules for all members of the institution (of which more will be said in the following chapter).

The means to erase the experience of Vietnam from the Army's new institutional narrative came from outside the US. First, the outbreak and quick resolution of the Arab-Israeli War of October 1973, in its clarity of military and moral purpose, provided a "new professional reference point, uncontaminated by association with Vietnam."<sup>205</sup> Second, the mission of NATO in defense of Europe against possible Soviet invasion was both politically and morally unambiguous. An offensive doctrine was unthinkable among European commanders, particularly the West Germans, who became strong supporters of the Army's efforts to redefine its

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 46.

position in American politics. With an expectation that future wars would resemble the Arab-Israeli experience and a guiding purpose in the defense of Europe, Army doctrine organized the institution around a strategy of ‘Active Defense’ (revised in the early-1980s as ‘AirLand Battle’). The strategy’s primary reliance on armored units evoked an image of war that looked very much like the Army’s successes in Europe during WWII. The Army’s position in Europe as a deterrent against Soviet aggression evoked the same ‘good’ versus ‘evil’ ideological narratives of WWII, but in an even simpler moral proposition: “victory simply meant not losing.”<sup>206</sup> Also central to the logic of the new doctrine was the assumption that US forces might not possess either numerical or technological superiority, and so would have to gain advantage through the quality of the troops themselves, in both training and leadership: moral and political superiority would serve as the decisive factor in a war against Soviet aggression just as the democratic genius of American citizen-soldiers defeated the numerically and technologically superior, ideologically driven armies of Hitler; but perhaps most importantly in the doctrinal erasure of Vietnam from the Army’s collective memory, a force organized around the heavily armored equipment necessary for the defense of Europe would be of little use in another conflict like Vietnam.

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 52. Citing Romie Brownlee and William J. Mullen III, *Changing an Army: An Oral History of General William E. DePuy, USA, retired*, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: United States Army Military History Institute, 1979), 192; and Paul Herbert, “Deciding What Has to be Done: General William E. Depuy and the 1976 Edition of FM 100-5,” *Leavenworth Papers*, no. 16, (Fort Leavenworth, KS: United States Army Command and General Staff College, 1988), 61-67.

## **History and Moral Authority**

This more critical account of the Army and the American military tradition raises a number of important factors relevant to the traumas experienced by veterans of more recent American wars. It points to the Army's intentional misunderstanding of its own identity and challenges its claims of moral exceptionalism as a trusted profession. The Army's long and ongoing pursuit of political autonomy reveals the depth to which institutional imperatives are privileged over functional and societal imperatives in the Army's policies and practices. Autonomy is certainly a requisite condition of existing as a profession, but the tenuous nature of the claims about its professionalism—its unquestionably altruistic service to the nation, its body of expert knowledge, the uniqueness of its culture based in military necessity, and the practice of a professional military ethos—suggests that institutional autonomy is the end in itself. Claims of professionalism are made to establish the Army's moral authority, both internally and in the broader realm of American politics. Challenging the Army's own historical narrative reveals just how tenuous that authority might prove. The problem in such strong claims of moral exceptionalism is twofold. First, there is a transference of moral exceptionalism to the institution's members that may be untenable in the moral environment of wartime experience at precisely the moment it purports to be most reliable. Second, the totalizing nature of this moral exceptionalism precludes criticism, either internally or externally, and makes the failure of moral authority all the more traumatic.

The relationship of the American soldier to the US Army is in no small part defined by the institution's relationship to society, and its expectations of the mission assigned it by society. Historically, the relationship of the soldier to the military institution can be largely reduced to the caste-like relationship of enlisted soldiers to their officers. Since WWII, that relationship has developed into an equally caste-like relationship of the recruit to the professional, career-soldier. This fundamental conflict of the Army's authoritarian collectivist traditions with the liberal individualism of American culture has been a persistent source of political tension, and at the end of the Cold War created an institutional identity crisis that made the US Army's traditional values a matter of national debate, the results of which, as will be shown in the following chapter, would have a profound impact on the veterans of the war in Iraq.

## Chapter Seven

### Logical Flaws of the Army's Moral Doctrine

Just as the Army's senior leaders turned to doctrine in the years after Vietnam to establish a new operational focus founded upon the institution's successes in the Second World War, the institution's 'ethicists'<sup>1</sup> turned to narratives of that war to begin writing a new body of doctrine—which I will refer to as 'moral doctrine'—in order to reestablish the institution's political autonomy in the wake of Vietnam. Focused primarily on 'professionalism', this doctrinal movement gained its greatest traction during the Army's post-Cold War identity crisis. As it had done throughout its history, the Army of this era would coopt reform efforts and maintain political autonomy through well-managed relationships with lawmakers. More importantly, maintaining its high regard in American popular opinion required convincing the public of the military necessity of its unique institutional culture and values. The doctrine produced is a culturally resonant statement of the moral exceptionalism of the Army and its soldiers that depends on a narrative of altruistic service to the state, disciplined obedience, and idealized comradeship. With the previous chapter's historical account in mind, this chapter provides a close-reading of the Army's moral

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<sup>1</sup> As an academic discipline, military ethics has long perpetuated, with wide-ranging influence, a realist understanding of morality in war that privileges political justification over the lived experience of soldiers. There is also blame to be shared among the many 'applied' ethicists within the military institution, including its chaplaincy and legal corps, leadership schools, mental health practitioners, and its top leaders.



doctrine as it was established in the years immediately preceding the 9/11 attacks and in the early years of the wars that followed.

Military doctrine, according to Janowitz, is the logic of professional military behavior: “a synthesis of scientific knowledge and expertise on the one hand, and of traditions and political assumptions on the other.”<sup>2</sup> What I will refer to as ‘moral doctrine’ represents the totality of the institution’s formal expectations of the soldier’s behavior, including ethics and leadership doctrine and their various creeds, but also legal and administrative regulations such as the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) and personnel policies. While the Army does not recognize any particular body of doctrine as ‘moral doctrine’, my use of the label reflects my institutional approach to the nature of morality. Moral doctrine are those official statements by the institution that define the soldier as a moral actor. In general, the Army’s moral tenets become doctrinal when published in leadership doctrine. For instance, Army leadership doctrine was rewritten in 1999 around seven newly devised ‘Army Values’. The concept of a ‘warrior ethos’ was introduced in that volume as well, and in 2006 an official ‘Warrior Ethos’ was written into leadership doctrine. In the most recent doctrinal publications moral doctrine has been split between two bodies of doctrine—leadership on the one hand, and what might best be labeled as ‘vision’ doctrine for the institution with the publication for the first time of a manual on the ‘Army Profession’. Somewhat ironically, Army leadership doctrine has been built on

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<sup>2</sup> Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, xii.

a framework of ‘Be, Know, Do’—the standards upon which the ideal soldier will be judged—making the habitus of practice a particularly appropriate analytical approach.

My analysis reveals the dynamic nature of moral doctrine as the Army has responded to various internal and external crises since the end of the Cold War. The response to competing internal and external pressures may undermine the internal consistency and coherence of an institutional ethic, a common problem for public institutions. Scholars have identified a clear delineation in the values that guide decision making processes for private and public sector managers<sup>3</sup>—a point that is certainly further exaggerated among military leaders. Further complicating the matter, not all values are of equal importance within an institutional ethos, and understanding their relative worth requires accounting for each principle’s purpose and meaning in relation to others in a hierarchy of values.<sup>4</sup> And when changes are imposed on an institutional ethos, inconsistent interpretation impedes the development of practices that are logically appropriate to new and existing values; ignoring such inconsistencies will result in unintended consequences both internally and in the broader political environment.<sup>5</sup>

Contradictory moral expectations have been written into the Army’s moral doctrine, in large part because the social and political functions of those values were never designed entirely, if at all, to create ideal soldiers. The Army recognizes that its own values (in some cases for good reason) differ from those of society more

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<sup>3</sup> van der Wal and Huberts, “Value Solidity in Government and Business.”

<sup>4</sup> Beck Jørgensen and Bozeman, “Public Values.”

<sup>5</sup> Needham, “Customer Care and the Public Service Ethos.”

broadly, yet it willfully ignore the effects of this ‘culture gap,’ never asking whether the institution or the soldier is better off for it. It must be taken on faith that moral doctrine is both necessary and effective, because institutional common-sense makes it impossible to consider the culture gap as anything other than natural and inviolable.<sup>6</sup> More importantly, moral doctrine is totalizing, presented as a complete set of moral principles that: are voluntarily incurred through the oath of service in place of old, inferior beliefs from civilian life; define the soldier’s identity and provide moral justification for the military’s very existence; are applicable in all aspects of the soldier’s life, both on and off duty, even after leaving military service; and can be relied upon even when other formal rules cannot offer a clear course of action.<sup>7</sup>

The all-volunteer Army has recognized that America’s cultural and religious diversity created a base of potential recruits with widely differing moral beliefs. Aside from screening recruits’ criminal histories, and any self-reported ‘extremist’ affiliations (communism, organized racism, gang-membership), any US citizen or permanent resident who met age, education, and medical requirements, and demonstrated sufficient aptitude (via standardized test) might enlist in the armed forces.<sup>8</sup> But, rather than adapting the Army to the country’s diversity of belief,

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<sup>6</sup> If empirical evidence exists to justify the military’s current body of moral doctrine I have been unable to find it (see also Challans, *Awakening Warrior*; Casey, “Advancing the Army Professional Military Ethic”; Cook, *Issues in Military Ethics*).

<sup>7</sup> Each point is taken from the current doctrinal statement of the Army’s Ethic in *ADRP 1 (2015)*, chapter 2.

<sup>8</sup> Officer selection is somewhat more stringent, and in addition requires the candidate’s appearance before a ‘board’ of officers whose judgments are largely of enthusiasm, potential, and proper character.

recruits have been expected to adapt (or discard) their own sense of moral character to the principles of the Army Values.<sup>9</sup> However, the principles of Army moral doctrine are mostly institutional residue, reactions to political and cultural shifts, and attempts by the military to consciously distance itself from American society in order to maintain its political autonomy. Complicating the matter, moral realism permeates military culture. While many military ethicists may insist on the existence (or, at least the necessity) of moral truth, an institutional understanding of morality suggests that the values of military institutions are no less political than a state's contested political culture.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the environment of early post-Cold War politics in America. With the radical changes in global politics and the rise of neoliberal governance, each branch of the US military faced its own institutional identity crisis. Lacking a clear mission but needing to justify its continued existence, the Army's identity was particularly subject to scrutiny. The 'culture wars' that were fought out in broader American politics were paralleled in fights inside the Army over the content of moral doctrine. The natural alliance between conservative politics and Army traditionalists ensured that arguments about the military necessity of maintaining the military-civilian culture gap would generally prevail. However, the influence of progressive neoliberalism that dominated American popular culture more broadly was ultimately inescapable. Thus, the Army's efforts to produce a body of moral doctrine played out as unhappy compromises between progressive and

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<sup>9</sup> Wilson, "An Ethics Curriculum for an Evolving Army."

conservative values. While disciplined obedience, altruistic service to the state, and idealized comradeship remained the primary principles of moral practice among soldiers, the tenets of moral doctrine that were developed in the era complicated the doctrinally ideal soldier, who would have to also exemplify idealized traits of leadership, moral character, and a ‘warrior ethos’. By accounting for the multi-contextual development of these tenets of moral doctrine, its logical flaws and moral incoherence become evident. If traumatic experience is in fact an institutional phenomenon as I propose, adherence to such an internally inconsistent institutional ethic, at odds with both military necessity and American cultural values, would have been a primary cause of the anomie suffered by so many veterans of the recent American wars.

### **The Military-Civilian ‘Culture Gap’ and the Army’s Identity Crisis**

The Army’s efforts to “[kick] the Vietnam syndrome once and for all”<sup>10</sup> came to fruition beyond all expectations with the overwhelming military success of the 1991 Gulf War. The war validated the Army’s operational doctrine in what was all but universally recognized as a just war, leading an international effort to ‘liberate’ Kuwait from “Saddam Hussein’s efforts to destroy completely Kuwait and its people.”<sup>11</sup> Unprecedented support for the military in popular opinion polls reflected the nation’s trust in both the institution and its members. That support, however, was

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<sup>10</sup> Bush, “Remarks to the American Legislative Exchange Council.”

<sup>11</sup> Bush, “Address to the Nation (Feb. 23, 1991).”

in part the result of a carefully crafted narrative that equated dissent with betrayal of ‘the troops’. After Vietnam, national security elites effectively framed the anti-war movement as having been ‘anti-troop’, and by the beginning of the Gulf War the image of crowds of ‘hippie’ protestors spitting on returning Vietnam veterans with shouts of ‘baby killer!’ was firmly established in the popular imagination. Even today, the Army’s official history claims that “[m]any of the soldiers who returned from Vietnam faced a hostile or at best indifferent public reception.”<sup>12</sup> The reality of that experience is questionable, however. A study of American news coverage of anti-war protests found no published accounts of such direct confrontations between protestors and veterans, despite a generally derisive attitude of the national media toward protestors.<sup>13</sup> For the Gulf War, the Bush administration successfully established a narrative of unconditional support for ‘the troops’, even among anti-war activists, as a critical ‘lesson’ of the American loss in Vietnam. In effect, the new narrative of unquestioning support for ‘the troops’ placed soldiers, and ultimately the

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<sup>12</sup> Stewart, *American Military History, Volume II*, 373.

<sup>13</sup> Beamish, Molotch, and Flacks, “Who Supports the Troops?” The earliest news account I could find of veterans claiming to have been called ‘baby killers’ is 1975 *Washington Post* coverage of a Maryland community college workshop on veterans issues. A Korean War veteran tells the group: “Hell, I felt the same way after the (Korean) war but I adjusted myself,” to which a Vietnam veteran responded, “It’s not the same. Did anyone ever accuse you a being a baby killer?” (see Becker, “Area’s Vietnam Veterans Bitter About the Fall of Danang.”) Sociologist Jerry Lembcke, a Vietnam War veteran turned anti-war activist, argues that the myth of ‘spat-upon’ veterans returning from Vietnam forms a “genre of defeated male-warrior fantasies” that erases from the collective memory “the legacy of anti-war veterans and distorts the historical record of activists’ solidarity with soldiers and veterans” (Lembcke, “The News and the Myth of Spat-Upon Vietnam Vets,” 31, 28.)

military institution, above and beyond politics. The sentiment was entrenched by the military's success against Iraqi forces, which today's Army historians claim is:

largely explained by the superb equipment, rigorous training, and professional character the coalition's armed forces brought to the fight, as well as by the poor quality of the Iraqi Army. The epitome of the coalition's qualities was the professional American soldier, thoroughly trained to make the best use of the most modern equipment. The operational scheme for Desert Storm was well conceived and capitalized on coalition strengths while exploiting Iraqi weaknesses. Never before had American forces been more fully prepared for war. The Army that had recovered its balance in the 1970s and trained so hard in the 1980s had done all that was asked of it in the desert in 1991.<sup>14</sup>

This institutional highpoint, however, was short-lived. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 the US military lost its enemy, its mission, and its primary organizing principle. The massive force reductions and budget cuts that followed required the Department of Defense and each branch of service to justify their very existence. The threat created a sense of siege inside the services, which only intensified with the election of Bill Clinton, as the Pentagon's leadership, who had all begun their military careers in the Vietnam War, found themselves answerable to a commander-in-chief who had protested the war and avoided the draft. What should have been a serious debate about the military's role in the new international order devolved into an institutional identity crisis and the insistence by those within and close to the military institution that the civilian-military 'culture gap' was both necessary and problematic.

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<sup>14</sup> Stewart, *American Military History, Volume II*, 427.

The problem was representative of a broader crisis in American political culture, the ‘culture wars’ that raged in the conflict over the seemingly contradictory values of American progressives and conservatives. One of the earliest references to a conservative culture war comes from a *National Review* article from April 1990 by Illinois Congressman Henry Hyde, who described the conflict as:

the struggle between those who believe that the norms of “bourgeois morality” (which is drawn in the main from classic Jewish and Christian morality) should form the ethical basis of our common life, and those who are determined that those norms will be replaced with a radical and thoroughgoing moral relativism.<sup>15</sup>

The most significant domestic event of the culture war was the Los Angeles riots in the spring of 1992. Many conservatives took issue with President Bush’s comments on the riots, which suggested the blame was a national failure that transcended the event itself: “We are embarrassed by interracial violence and prejudice. We are ashamed. We should take nothing but sorrow out of all of that and do our level best to see that it’s eliminated from the American dream.” In contrast, Vice President Dan Quayle, recruited for the position because of his credibility with the GOP’s religious

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<sup>15</sup> Hyde, “The Culture War,” 25. Hyde’s article is not a declaration of war, but an acceptance that two sides were in conflict over the public funding of ‘homoerotic’ art of Robert Mapplethorp and Andres Serano. In the political atmosphere of 2017, the article reads now as a well-reasoned and reasonable suggestion that public funding of the arts ought to avoid “trashing of others’ deepest convictions.” He quotes Aquinas’s test of the artist’s greatness that “does not lie in the will with which he goes to work, but in the excellence of the work he produces,” to suggest the self-indulgent artist fails to transcend “the mere satisfying of a neural itch.” Hyde notes the difference between censorship and sponsorship, and the inevitability of aesthetic discrimination in public funding under any circumstance, an act that reflects legislative accountability to the public and does not impinge artistic freedom. Hyde closes with the hope of an intelligent debate on questions of public art policy.



conservatives, blamed the riot on the rioters' 'poverty of values', suggesting that those who excused the riots as the product of economic poverty and racism betrayed "all those people equally outraged and equally disadvantaged who did not loot, who did not riot."<sup>16</sup> Even Bill Clinton, at the time campaigning for the Democratic nomination, put the riots in a framework of failed character: "People... are looting because they are not part of the system at all anymore... They do not share our values, and their children are growing up in a culture alien from ours, without family, without neighborhood, without church, without support." But, he added, "I would start with the elemental proposition that the people in the other America deserve the same law and order the rest of us demand, and I would work to make the streets safer."<sup>17</sup>

Jeffrey Dill and James Davison Hunter characterize the culture war as the conflict of 'orthodox' and 'progressivist' conceptions of moral authority, the one side sensing that reality is ultimately 'rooted in transcendent authority' of eternally fixed moral standards, the other rejecting the notion of authority beyond the senses of human experience; unfortunately, American pluralism makes cultural conflict "likely if not inevitable."<sup>18</sup> Lipschutz observes, "the very notion of a 'culture war' thus forces one to choose sides. It does not acknowledge a range of acceptable beliefs or behaviors; it requires that one be either 'for us or against us.' And those who are not

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<sup>16</sup> Rosenthal, "After the Riots."

<sup>17</sup> Brownstein, "A City in Crisis."

<sup>18</sup> Dill and Hunter, "Education and the Culture Wars," 275–76.

‘for us’ are the enemy.”<sup>19</sup> David Harvey cites Antonio Gramsci’s observation about the impossibility of solving political issues “disguised as cultural ones.”<sup>20</sup> By turning to conservative values and appealing to individual freedoms and (more importantly) individual responsibility, neoliberal politics creates a fatalism that there is simply “no alternative.”<sup>21</sup> Individualism is potentially incompatible with social justice, which depends on subordinating individual objectives to the shared needs necessary for the existence of social solidarity; social movements based on individualist ideals are thus easily coopted by neoliberalism. “Neoliberal rhetoric, with its foundational emphasis upon individual freedoms, has the power to split off libertarianism, identity politics, multi-culturalism, and eventually narcissistic consumerism from the social forces ranged in pursuit of social justice through the conquest of state power.”<sup>22</sup> The growing economic insecurity of the white working class created a “besieged sense of moral righteousness,” which was easily mobilized by racist, sexist, and homophobic appeals.<sup>23</sup>

The conflict also played out in the discourses of American militarism and international politics. In a speech at the 1992 Republican National Convention, conservative commentator and recent presidential candidate Pat Buchanan equated the stakes of the culture war with the recently concluded Cold War, and invoked

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<sup>19</sup> Lipschutz, *Cold War Fantasies*, 193.

<sup>20</sup> Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 39.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 40. ‘No alternative’ is attributed to British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 40–41.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

conservative values and the policies of conservative hero Ronald Reagan as the war's deciding factor:

And Ronald Reagan won the Cold War. And it is time my old colleagues, the columnists and commentators, looking down on us tonight from their anchor booths and sky boxes, gave Ronald Reagan the credit he deserves—for leading America to victory in the Cold War. Most of all, Ronald Reagan made us proud to be Americans again. We never felt better about our country; and we never stood taller in the eyes of the world.<sup>24</sup>

Buchanan, whose success in the presidential primary had come from religious and populist conservatives opposed to the incumbent President Bush, put the stakes of the upcoming general election between Bush and Clinton in the same militaristic terms, asking the convention: “Which of these two men has won the moral authority to call on Americans to put their lives at risk? I suggest, respectfully, it is the patriot and war hero, Navy Lieutenant J. G. George Herbert Walker Bush.”

Though Clinton would win the election—in large part because independent candidate Ross Perot drew a large number of populist voters away from Bush—conservative cultural narratives were so deeply embedded by that time that any military failure Clinton faced could be cited as a failure of progressive political values. Ironically, the American victory over the Soviet Union in the Cold War brought on the greatest crisis the US military had faced since WWII. Lipschutz says of the era that the US “was not prepared for peace,” citing a story of a Soviet diplomat’s comment to an American counterpart: “We are about to do a terrible thing to you. We are going to deprive you of an enemy.” This loss presented a “political

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<sup>24</sup> Buchanan, “1992 Republican National Convention Speech.”

and economic dilemma from which the United States has yet to recover.”<sup>25</sup> For the Army the loss of the Soviet Union as an enemy had two equally devastating effects. First, the institution—built in the Second World War, maintained afterward in anticipation of a third world war, and rebuilt after Vietnam on an idealized notion of itself as the same force that won WWII—no longer had a mission. Second, lacking an enemy the US had no need for such a large, standing force. Thus, without a mission and facing radical budget cuts and force reductions, each branch of the US military found itself having to justify its very existence. Democratic Senator Sam Nunn, chair of the Armed Services Committee, characterized the nation’s defense policy as a directionless filling in of budgetary and strategic ‘blanks’ derived from the new ‘threat blank’; Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney responded that Nunn’s equally directionless ‘pontificating’ reflected a “noticeable lack of any significant, substantive plans on Capitol Hill.”<sup>26</sup> Just as the military had the opportunity to completely reinvent itself for the new strategic conditions the country faced after WWII, the end of the Cold War demanded a rethinking of the military’s structure and practices to reflect the strategic goals of the US in a unipolar world. Yet, just as in the years following WWII, the institutional interests of the military branches impeded meaningful change. American military institutions drew on the conservative narratives of the culture war, deepening the military-civilian culture gap, in order to maintain their political autonomy and coopt reform efforts. Still, the loss of a defining

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<sup>25</sup> Lipschutz, *Cold War Fantasies*, 171–72.

<sup>26</sup> Van Voorst, “Sticking to His Guns.”

mission and the political uncertainty of the era left the military branches in an institutional identity crisis as internal conflicts threatened their political autonomy.

This identity crisis is best demonstrated by the political controversy surrounding the military's reluctant adoption of the 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' policy (DADT), which placed loose limits on its authority to administratively or judicially punish homosexual conduct of service members. Though military service was fully opened to gay and lesbian service members in 2012, it must be remembered that DADT was seen at the time as a radical invasion of progressivism into traditional military culture. DADT, along with the question of women's roles in combat raised by the experience of female service members in the Gulf War, challenged the widely held assumption that military effectiveness depends on masculine comradeship inside the small unit. In 1993, Army Chief of Staff Gordon Sullivan testified to Congress in defense of the status-quo, stating that a soldier whose "open orientation and self-definition is diametrically opposed to the rest of the group will cause tension and disruption."<sup>27</sup> Air Force Chief of Staff Merrill McPeak was more direct, stating that the presence of openly gay and lesbian service members would "paralyze a unit, and degrade unit cohesion and erode combat effectiveness."<sup>28</sup> Against this sentiment, academics offered evidence that military commanders at the operational level placed

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<sup>27</sup> Kier, "Homosexuals in the U.S. Military," 7. Citing U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Policy Concerning Homosexuality in the Armed Forces, July 20, 1993* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1995), 710.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. Citing U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Policy Concerning Homosexuality in the Armed Forces, July 20, 1993* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1995), 762.

little value on unit cohesion, and that development of social cohesion is well beyond the power of institutional regulation. As well, the sort of social cohesion that the generals believed would be undermined by the presence of gay and lesbian service members is not the same as the task oriented cohesion necessary for military effectiveness; rather, unit cohesion is much more a product of effective performance than the generals' inverse assumption would indicate.<sup>29</sup>

This gendered dynamic deeply influenced the identity crisis of the Army in particular. The Vietnam War had led to a disastrous collapse of the Army's moral authority in American society, but an 'intellectual renaissance' during the 1980s, culminating in the overwhelming success of the Gulf War, restored its legitimacy in the eyes of the American public.<sup>30</sup> American foreign policy throughout the 1990s demanded a shift in the nature of Army's mission to 'operations other than war' (OOTW), including the deployment of ground troops for peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance in Somalia, the Balkans, Haiti, and Kurdish Iraq—a policy some in the military termed 'Albright Syndrome', a derisive reference to Madeleine Albright, the first woman to serve as Secretary of State.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, the Clinton administration's limitation of offensive operations to air and cruise-missile strikes threatened to undermine the Army's claim to be a 'profession of arms'.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Kier, "Homosexuals in the U.S. Military"; MacCoun, "What Is Known About Unit Cohesion and Military Performance"; MacCoun, Kier, and Belkin, "Does Social Cohesion Determine Motivation in Combat?"

<sup>30</sup> Challans, *Awakening Warrior*.

<sup>31</sup> Sarkesian, "The US Military Must Find Its Voice."

<sup>32</sup> Wilson, "An Ethics Curriculum for an Evolving Army."

In the 1990s there was a perception among Army leadership that the institution's culture was 'out of balance', that professional practices had become inconsistent with traditional Army beliefs.<sup>33</sup> It was claimed, for instance, that the Clinton administration's strong limitations to the use of force during peacekeeping and humanitarian missions led to a culture of 'risk-aversion' and a crippling 'zero-defects mentality' among leaders.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, progressive reforms like DADT and opening combat roles to women were argued to contribute to "the apparently diminishing role of war in forming the Army's identity."<sup>35</sup> Such narratives suggest the belief that the institution's problems had been inflicted by outside influences that contaminated or desecrated the institution, which could only be resolved by civilian deference to institutional expertise—a position that justifies the culture gap as militarily necessary.

The Army's response to its identity crisis played out in the development of its moral doctrine by the institution's various ethicists to define the institution as a 'values-based organization', reliant upon a 'professional ethic', which would instill an expectation of appropriate moral behavior throughout its ranks. Following WWII, an overemphasis on military effectiveness pushed military ethics to two extremes. On the one hand, the era's technological revolution and the bureaucratic necessities of superpower-status created a technocratic elite capable of utterly dehumanizing warfare, who would, for example, use 'systems analysis' to judge military progress in

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<sup>33</sup> Franks, "Foreword."

<sup>34</sup> Snider and Watkins, "Introduction."

<sup>35</sup> Wong and Johnson, "Serving the American People."

Vietnam on the basis of ‘body-counts’.<sup>36</sup> On the other, the traditional ideal of the ‘soldier’s soldier’ was reified among WWII veterans who recognized that the qualities that made individuals morally respectable in American society carried little weight in combat, where many of the most effective warfighters had been judged as poor citizens by society and poor soldiers by formal institutional standards.<sup>37</sup> Given the institutional decay of the Vietnam War and the shift to the AVF, the Army’s post-Vietnam ethicists responded against both views. They set out to undertake a “torturous process of self-examination,” leading the Army through one of the “great intellectual renaissances in American military history” during the military build-up of the Reagan years.<sup>38</sup> The institutionally perceived truth of this moral transformation was reinforced by the triumphal revisionism of the Reagan buildup<sup>39</sup> and the battlefield success of the Gulf War, which returned the Army to its place among the nation’s most trusted institutions.<sup>40</sup>

In the heat of the culture wars, the result of these efforts was a body of moral doctrine that defined the ideal American soldier against an impossible standard that

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<sup>36</sup> Murray, “A Will to Measure.”

<sup>37</sup> Marshall, *Men Against Fire*.

<sup>38</sup> Wilson, “An Ethics Curriculum for an Evolving Army,” 32–33.

<sup>39</sup> Post-Cold War narratives of the inevitable victory of a superior ideological system following Reagan’s carefully planned strategy of ‘peace through strength’ ignored initial justifications for the military buildup based on fear of the Soviets as “the most serious challenge to [United States’] survival in the two centuries of its existence” (see Wirls, *Irrational Security*, 25–26, citing: *Republican Party Platform of 1980*, [www.presidency.ucsb.edu/showplatforms.php?platindex=R1980](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/showplatforms.php?platindex=R1980)).

<sup>40</sup> Snider and Watkins, “The Future of Army Professionalism”; Kitfield, *Prodigal Soldiers*; Wilson, “An Ethics Curriculum for an Evolving Army.”



combined traditional ideals of disciplined obedience to military authority and altruistic service to the state, institution, and small unit, with liberal Christian ideals of individual achievement and personal responsibility, and romanticized notions of individual heroism. In short, moral doctrine expounds an inconsistent and ultimately incomprehensible ethic of what I will call *selfless-individualism*. The soldier would be both an unquestioningly disciplined member of the hierarchy and a leader charged with individual moral responsibility and decision making authority; a person of unimpeachable character, the embodiment of both selfless sacrifice and egoistic honor and integrity; professional soldier and heroic warrior. Whether or not these ideals were wholly embraced by the broader institution, the doctrinal efforts were a significant contribution toward maintaining the Army's autonomy in American politics. However, this success came at the expense of an ever-widening gap between military and civilian culture, deepening the anomie results for soldiers unable to rely on moral doctrine where its tenets ought to be most self-evidently effective: in wartime experience.

### **The Soldier as Leader**

Since the post-Vietnam doctrinal revolution it has become a matter of practice for the Army to formally recognize particular tenets of moral doctrine by their publication in the manuals and regulations of leadership doctrine. Leadership manuals have served as the institution's primary means for operationalizing moral doctrine, providing both decision making frameworks and standards of individual and organizational performance. In Army doctrine 'leader' has become synonymous with 'ideal soldier',

thus the publications of leadership doctrine can be read as an expression of the institutionally ideal American soldier. Army leadership doctrine presumes an institutional equivalence of (good) leadership with morality, and of soldier and leader. That is, to be a leader is to be a person of moral character; and to be a soldier is to be a leader—the terms become interchangeable. There is a basic assumption that every soldier must be prepared to step into a leadership position at any moment, a lesson that begins in basic training, making leadership doctrine universally applicable to all members of the institution. For example, the 1999 leadership manual (which served as the foundational text of moral doctrine in the first years of the post-9/11 wars) is explicit about the universal applicability of leadership doctrine, noting that, “At any level, anyone responsible for supervising people or accomplishing a mission that involves other people is a leader. Anyone who influences others, motivating them to action or influencing their thinking or decision making, is a leader.”<sup>41</sup> There are other, less direct institutional forces that create this equivalence as well. Certainly, to be a *career*-soldier is to be a leader, given the historically consistent low reenlistment rate for first term soldiers: half of all recruits don’t complete their first enlistment, and only about 20 percent go on to a second enlistment.<sup>42</sup> Under the Army’s promotion

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<sup>41</sup> HQDA, *FM 22-100 (1999)*, paragraph 1-51.

<sup>42</sup> Meaningful statistics on reenlistment and retention are difficult to come by. Moskos cited consistent first-term reenlistment rates of around 20 percent throughout the draft era (*The American Enlisted Man*). The Army Research Institute tracked the careers of 62,631 (of a total 63,938) Army enlistees in 1999. The status of each enlistee was determined 48 months after entering service: only 7,914 (12.7 percent) were still in the Army; 21,813 (35 percent) were lost to 'attrition' (performance, non-service related medical, and moral disqualifications); the remainder left the Army at the end of their contractual obligation. However, the report also cites 23.4 percent as

system it is all but impossible for a soldier not to move into a leadership position before the completion of a second enlistment, and the 'up-or-out' career management system requires all officers and NCOs to serve in leadership positions regardless of their actual leadership competence.

Most critical to explaining the moral environment of the generation of soldiers who would serve in Iraq and Afghanistan, the 1999 revision of the Army leadership manual, FM 22-100, is organized around the principle of 'Be, Know, Do'. This carry-over from previous editions systematically attempts to outline the character, necessary knowledge, and required actions of Army leaders. What the leader must 'Be' is divided into two categories, 'Values' and 'Attributes'. Here, the Army introduced its seven Army Values (of which more will be said in the following section) into formal doctrine: Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage, under the acronym LDRSHIP. The other element of the leader's being and character, 'Leader Attributes', is somewhat less tangible than the Army Values. Mental attributes include 'will', 'self-discipline', 'initiative', 'judgment', 'self-confidence', 'intelligence', and 'cultural awareness'. Physical

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the rate of 'immediate reenlistment' and does not make clear the disparity (see Strickland, "A Longitudinal Examination of First Term Attrition and Reenlistment among FY1999 Enlisted Accessions"). Comparable data does not appear to be publicly available for other years. However, rates of continuation in service among enlisted ranged between 85.5 percent and 89.1 percent at the completion of one year of service (mean 87.14 percent) from 1990-2010 (1999 = 85.6 percent), suggesting that the Army's retention rates have remained highly stable throughout the post-WWII era, and that the shift from conscription to an all-volunteer force in 1973 had little influence on long-term career trends (see US Department of Defense, "Table D-32. Continuation Rates by Years of Service, 1980-2009.").

attributes of the leader include ‘health fitness’, ‘physical fitness’, and ‘military and professional bearing’. Finally, emotional attributes include ‘self-control’, ‘balance’, and ‘stability’. In all, a leader’s character is linked to (a vaguely defined) ‘warrior ethos’, ethics, military orders, and personal beliefs. Character is recognized as the product of lifelong learning, and good character is believed to be ‘contagious’ when demonstrated and reinforced by an organization’s leaders.

Competence, what the soldier must ‘Know’, is broken into four domains: ‘interpersonal’, ‘conceptual’, ‘technical’, and ‘tactical’ knowledges. Little is said about each of these domains because competence is so vocationally specific. It is emphasized, however, that knowledge drawn from experience, knowledge that is applied rather than theoretical, is the basis for ‘leadership decision making’.

The principles of what leaders ‘Do’ were written into the manual’s very definition of leadership: “*influencing* people—by providing purpose, direction, and motivation—while *operating* to accomplish the mission and *improving* the organization.”<sup>43</sup> While ‘influencing’ and ‘operating’ are perhaps self-evident elements of leadership and easily reconciled with dictionary definitions, the requirement to ‘improve the organization’ is clearly indicative of specific circumstances. In fact, the 1990 edition of the leadership manual never mentions organizational improvement, and given the historical circumstances of the late-Cold War, it is reasonable to expect that Army leadership viewed itself at the top of its game in 1990. Similarly, historical circumstances of the Clinton era military

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<sup>43</sup> Emphasis in original.

establishment—loss of an easily identifiable mission, budget cuts, the civil-military culture gap—suggest an uneasy Army institution willing to place the burden of an uncertain future upon its own personnel.

This becomes more obvious when the 1999 manual applies ‘Be, Know, Do’ to the Army’s various echelons of leadership: ‘direct’, ‘organizational’, and ‘strategic’ leadership. ‘Direct leadership’ positions are the vast majority of leadership positions in the Army, and include all face-to-face relations of leader and subordinate. Though deemed less complex than organizational or strategic leadership, organizational improvement is placed squarely in the hands of this echelon. For instance, it is recognized that ‘critical reasoning’ and ‘creative thinking’ are key conceptual skills these leaders must possess, and the value of ‘reflective thinking’ is emphasized in achieving mission success and organizational and personal improvement. Leaders are also encouraged to communicate ‘solutions, not problems’ in their relations with their superiors. The average soldier’s interaction with Army leadership is almost entirely direct: with the corporal leading the four-man fire team; the sergeant leading the two-team squad; the lieutenant and platoon sergeant leading a four-squad platoon; the captain and first sergeant of the four-platoon company; the lieutenant colonel and command sergeant major of the five-company battalion. Thus, each ordinary soldier has eight direct leaders, providing five echelons of authority, with whom they may come into contact on any given day, and in a battalion of approximately 700 personnel there are approximately 200 members who exercise some degree of formal,

direct leadership responsibility by virtue of their rank or job function.<sup>44</sup> Spread across the whole institution, it is reasonable to estimate that at least twenty-five percent of all Army personnel officially serve in direct leadership positions. Despite the sheer number of these positions in the Army, the manual's emphasis is oddly placed far more strongly on describing the roles of organizational and strategic leaders (essentially, only colonels and generals) as reflected in the occurrence of these terms within the text. In part, this reflects an assumption that all leaders will ideally serve in strategic positions at the culmination of their career. That is, to be an effective direct leader, one must aspire to strategic leadership.

The formality of the 1999 manual sets it apart from earlier leadership doctrine, obviously influenced by management literature of the day,<sup>45</sup> granting it an air of scientificity. Leadership becomes a procedural check-list for anyone who fits the basic 'Be-ing' of the soldier-leader. However, modern leadership research has been largely stuck in a 'great man' paradigm, emphasizing individual characteristics and best practices of successful leaders and formal leadership positions.<sup>46</sup> The weakness of this method is that "narratives about individuals who occupy these types of positions have shaped the mental models that people hold about leadership." The

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<sup>44</sup> This estimate includes executive officers and staff personnel who have direct influence on the work of soldiers but are not included in the formal echelons of the official chain of command.

<sup>45</sup> Among others, FM 22-100 references or suggests management texts *Built to Last* (Collins and Porras, 1994), *Emotional Intelligence* (Goleman, 1995), *Reengineering the Corporation* (Champy and Hammer, 1993), *Leading Change* (Kotter, 1996), and *A Passion for Excellence* (Peters and Austin, 1985).

<sup>46</sup> Ospina and Dodge, "It's About Time."

resulting product is a romanticized vision of leadership “compiled from a narrow set of voices,” rather than “ways to understand and approach the work of leadership.”<sup>47</sup>

The emphasis on leadership also ignores the continued place of traditional military authority and disciplinary practice. While practices had certainly changed in the sixty years between World War II and the Iraq War, the US Army’s doctrinal assumptions about discipline remain largely unchanged. The 1999 leadership manual defined discipline as, quoting an anonymous sergeant major, “a moral, mental, and physical state in which all ranks respond to the will of the [leader], whether he is there or not.”<sup>48</sup> This is because disciplined people, soldier or civilian, “take the right action, even if they don’t feel like it” because they are “truly committed to the organization.” This commitment is achieved through “true discipline,” which requires each individual’s “habitual and reasoned obedience.” This in turn requires that individuals “understand the purpose of the mission, trust the leader, and share Army values,” a condition that acknowledges at the same time the unquestioned authority of the institution vested in the leader and the uniformity of the group’s purpose and values. It is the leader’s responsibility to instill discipline in the individual soldier and the unit by “training to standard, using rewards and punishments judiciously, instilling confidence in and building trust among team members, and creating a

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 149. As opposed to ‘post-heroic’ leadership models of ‘meaning making’/‘sense-making’, as something experienced rather than a behavior, “as a collective achievement or the property of a group, rather than something that belongs to an individual.”

<sup>48</sup> HQDA, *FM 22-100 (1999)*. Brackets around “[leader]” are in the original text. This and the quotes that follow are taken from pages 3-2 and 3-3.

knowledgeable collective will,” each of which, it is asserted, is fundamentally necessary in combat. The manual, which is certainly not written for the average soldier’s reading, reflects a similarly idealized version of discipline as that expressed by the War Department during WWII (see B.N Harlow quoted in the previous chapter), for instance, quoting former Army Chief of Staff (1949-1953) General J.

Lawton Collins:

I am confident that an army of strong individuals, held together by a sound discipline based on respect for personal initiative and rights and dignity of the individual, will never fail this nation in time of need.

Like its WWII predecessors, the *Soldier’s Handbook* issued to recruits in the early years of the Iraq War treats discipline in terms of controlling deviant behavior. Unlike the 1941 edition, however, discipline is *not* “the most important thing in the Army.” Because the Army is no longer a conscripted force, no effort is made to justify the seemingly arbitrary disciplinary practices of trainers and leaders. Of greater priority is the soldier’s understanding of the ‘Army Values’. The *Handbook* goes to great lengths to define each Value and illustrate its embodiment through quotes of historically important military leaders and vignettes of heroic soldiers whose experiences in war exemplify each Value. In contrast to the virtuous behaviors expressed in the Army Values, discipline is treated more formally in the *Handbook’s* third chapter, “Standards of Conduct,” which begins with a discussion of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). In contrast to the 1941 definition of discipline in terms recognizable as the civilian value of team play, discipline is less a virtue than the fundamental condition of being a soldier, the result of training that creates “a



mental attitude that will result in proper conduct and prompt obedience to lawful military authority.” The *Handbook* then lists three “basic rules”<sup>49</sup> of military discipline, followed by a few examples of how discipline manifests, which, other than unit cohesion, are all individual traits, including, “smartness of appearance,” “cleanliness,” “respect to seniors,” “prompt and willing execution” of lawful orders, and “fairness, justice, and equity for all soldiers, regardless of race, religion, color, gender, or national origin.” It does not distinguish between disciplined behavior and the enforcement of discipline through judicial and administrative punishment. Immediately after its list of examples, the handbook establishes the legal authority for enforcement of discipline through the UCMJ, “the statute that prescribes criminal law for soldiers.” Recruits are instructed that “it is your *duty* to abide by the laws and regulations governed by the UCMJ, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for as long as you are in the Army.” Such authority is justified as “essential to the Army’s ability in accomplishing its military mission.”<sup>50</sup>

The fundamental problem arising from the Army’s conception of leadership is the contradictory demand that the ideal soldier should aspire to strategic leadership while traditional military authority treats new soldiers, particularly lower-enlisted, as merely the subject of discipline—a discipline that is radically different from behavioral norms of American liberalism. Coming from a culture in which individual entrepreneurial excellence is the ideal it can certainly be expected that the Army’s

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<sup>49</sup> “Don’t break the rules (What are the rules? Example - UCMJ, regulations); Take responsibility for your actions; Keep your hands to yourself.”

<sup>50</sup> HQDA, *Soldier’s Handbook* (2003). Emphasis in original.

conception of discipline will be radically at odds with the expectations of recruits. To be effective, the aspiration to strategic leadership—that is, to full institutional membership—must negate the logical flaws of discipline and traditional military authority; or disciplinary practices must select for members unaffected by discipline’s incongruity with civilian cultural norms. By equating leadership with the ideal soldier, moral doctrine establishes the standard for full institutional membership by creating an incentive to gain rank in order to achieve some level of personal autonomy and the capacity to exercise moral authority. At the same time, it also means that the achievement of rank is an indication in itself of the possession of moral character, thus fulfilling the institutional imperative of perpetuating traditional military authority, without regard to military necessity or the values of civilian culture.

### **The Soldier as a Person of Character**

The logic behind the Army’s doctrinal requirement that ordinary soldiers—historically derided as ‘the scum of the earth’—be people of exceptional moral character may not be immediately self-evident. The soldier’s primary task, killing in war, might elicit expectations that its very immorality makes the soldier’s morality immaterial at best, a detriment to effectiveness at worst; other, more thoughtful observers might propose that soldiers as agents acting on behalf of others should be expected to act within the moral norms of those for whom they act. The Army’s experience in Vietnam suggests the former position held significant weight for many conducting that war; the popular reaction against the war and the Army suggests a

more general expectation of the latter. In practice, of course, the Army's adoption of a moral doctrine based on individual character development depended on much more complex imperatives. The Army's character education programs developed in the years following WWII in response to a number of disparate political circumstances.<sup>51</sup> For a few, the Doolittle Board's findings pointed to the lack of character among too many Army officers. As well, the pre-war attitudes that placed military enlisted service in such low regard outlasted the war and many religious conservatives saw military culture as an immoral influence on soldiers; character education became a public health policy in response to the high incidence of venereal disease among forces in occupied Germany. Post-war conscription required building public trust that the Army would not corrupt middle-class draftees, and the threat of communism produced a new wave of national preparedness activists who saw the indoctrination of American religious and civic values among so many American youth as the surest defense against it. Whatever the influence on individual soldiers, these efforts were undoubtedly successful in building the Army's public esteem and firmly establishing the persistent cultural belief that enlisted military service is an expression of civic virtue.

Vietnam, of course, undermined public trust, threatening the Army's political autonomy, and also made Army service less desirable, at least temporarily. The shift to an all-volunteer force also changed the political calculus: when military service is

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<sup>51</sup> Grandstaff, "Making the Military American"; Loveland, "Character Education in the U.S. Army, 1947-1977."

commodified as a consumer product, institutional values only need to serve external audiences to the extent the recruiting market demands. Otherwise, moral doctrine would only need to serve institutional purposes: maintenance of public standing for political autonomy; legitimation of traditional military authority; internal social control; and fulfilling the interests of powerful individuals and communities atop the institutional hierarchy. Faced with need to reestablish public trust and internal control, Army leaders in the 1970s dropped character development and civic values programs in favor of revitalizing a ‘professional military ethic’.

The reemergence of character development as the key element of professionalism reflects the interests, or lack thereof, of the Army’s senior leadership. To the extent ethics was concerned with morality, commanders had largely delegated such work to the chaplain corps, giving work on moral doctrine a distinctive evangelical Christian bent. And interested in maintaining their own traditional conceptions of authority, leaders would be most interested in a doctrine of professionalism to legitimate that authority and select for new members most likely to perpetuate it. The logical connection between conservative religious morality and the Army’s professional ethic is captured in an influential article from the early-1980s by military ethicist Malham Wakin. Society, for Wakin, expected its military institutions to adhere to a professional standard of moral behavior for two basic reasons: first, the intersection of functional and societal imperatives made the profession’s purpose one “necessarily involving moral integrity”; second, the profession served as modern society’s most important symbol of “the heroic,” which obliged society to sustain the

profession's "moral qualities... or perhaps accept the depressing conclusion that it exists nowhere."<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Wakin found two reasons for the institution to insist on linking the profession and moral virtue: first, certain virtues are militarily necessary; second, the profession's own moral standing was founded upon the assertion that "its ultimate purpose in a morally sound nation must involve one of mankind's highest values,"<sup>53</sup> a condition fulfilled in the profession's defense of traditional American values. To translate the nation's moral purpose into an individual sense of purpose, the institution must be a profession, a calling, rather than a job. Military service must be just that; the work of individuals must be in pursuit of a higher purpose and there must be some sense of achievement of that purpose in the work done. The problem arises, however, that the military profession's function is war: at its most effective, the profession will never fulfill its function, and so society can never acknowledge the importance of the profession or its members. And thus the moral character of soldiers takes on critical significance:

Unless the profession captures the full dedication of those who are competent both morally and intellectually to meet its challenges, unless it becomes for the most talented a complete and fulfilling vocation, it is likely to fall on hard times. In the hands of the mediocre or the morally insensitive, the vocation of arms could find its noble purpose distorted with tragic consequences for all humanity.<sup>54</sup>

The Army's political successes of the 1980s, validated in the military successes of the 1991 Gulf War, affirmed the legitimacy of traditional military

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<sup>52</sup> Wakin, *War, Morality, and the Military Profession*, 5.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

authority. The political challenges of the post-Cold War, however, gave new impetus to develop the professional ethic, and ensured that the doctrinal outcome would be found in the natural affinity between traditional military authority and conservative American politics. Focusing on ‘character development’ and ‘virtue ethics’—important concepts in the 1990s in both moral philosophy and culture war politics<sup>55</sup>—the Army published its seven ‘Army Values’ in 1998 as the guiding principles “necessary for instrumental success on the battlefield.”<sup>56</sup> The effort was centered on the expression of a ‘professional ethic’ that would validate the institution’s moral doctrine based on what former TRADOC Commander (1991-1994) General Frederick M. Franks called the “moral requirement of expertise in land warfare.”<sup>57</sup> Conceiving of the Army as a self-regulating profession with its own code of ethics was required to distinguish it from other government bureaucracies because, as Don Snider argues, “Professions excel where bureaucracies do not in the creation, adaptation, and application of abstract expert knowledge to new situations.” More importantly, the particular societal function of the Army required the organizing logic of professionalism as an inherently “better means of shaping human behavior in situations of chaotic violence, stress, and ambiguity than bureaucratic management can ever hope to achieve.”<sup>58</sup> Specific values had been written into earlier leadership doctrine, but had not been so clearly constructed to create a synthetic whole. These

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<sup>55</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*; Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*; Bennett, *Book of Virtues*; Greer and Kohl, *A Call to Character*.

<sup>56</sup> Wilson, “An Ethics Curriculum for an Evolving Army.”

<sup>57</sup> Franks, “Foreword.”

<sup>58</sup> Snider and Watkins, “Introduction.”

seven Values replaced two distinct sets of moral principles: the “four individual values that all soldiers (leaders and led) are expected to possess,” ‘courage’, ‘candor’, ‘competence’, and ‘commitment’; and the four elements of “the professional military ethic,” ‘loyalty’, ‘duty’, ‘selfless service’, and ‘integrity’.<sup>59</sup> Indoctrination of the Values would begin with the initial training of all new soldiers, and in leadership schools as they progressed through the ranks, through a pragmatic approach that relied on historical ‘case-study’ of important military figures who best exemplified the Values. Most importantly, it became the responsibility of leaders, by demonstrating their personal adherence, to ensure their subordinates ‘internalization’ of the Values in a process of ‘Learn, Comply, Believe’.<sup>60</sup>

In the following pages the doctrinal expression of each Value is compared in its conceptual evolution—from the late-Cold War, the post-Cold War, and the early years of the war in Iraq—in the field manuals of Army leadership doctrine:

FM 22-100, *Military Leadership* (1990)

FM 22-100, *Army Leadership: Be, Know, Do* (1999)

FM 6-22, *Army Leadership: Competent, Confident, and Agile* (2006)

### *The Army Values: Loyalty*

Prior to 1999 loyalty was one of the ‘Four Elements of the Professional Army Ethic’ along with duty, selfless service, and integrity, and explained as necessary to reinforcing the ‘individual value’ of commitment. The objects of loyalty are the nation, the Army, and the soldier’s unit, and under this schema soldiers can rely on

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<sup>59</sup> HQDA, *FM 22-100 (1990)*, 23; 29.

<sup>60</sup> HQDA, *FM 22-100 (1999)*.

loyalty when faced with ethical dilemmas. While loyalty to the military's civilian leaders is required of soldiers, the higher duty is to the nation's ideals, as expressed in the oaths of service to "support and defend" the US Constitution. Leaders create loyalty among their soldiers by ensuring adherence to high standards and professional excellence, and by relating to their subordinates. Loyalty is most strongly directed to the nation, but shared loyalties among soldiers result in stability of the Army and the unit.

In the 1999 revisions, loyalty is the first of the Army Values. It is to "bear true faith and allegiance to the US Constitution, the Army, your unit, and other soldiers." Leaders should never set loyalty in opposition to honesty, and it should not be the sole basis for the promotion of subordinates. The Army's subordination to civilian authority is expressed in the loyalty of soldiers "to one another and to collective victory [and] reflects perhaps the noblest aspect of our American warrior ethos."<sup>61</sup> It is worth noting that this understanding of loyalty to nation as the foundation of primary group loyalty and combat motivation was even more strongly expressed in the leadership manual's 2006 revision. Here, after nearly five years of continuous war in Afghanistan then Iraq, the Army makes clear that loyalty to the nation, as expressed in the Army Values and Warrior Ethos, is the source of the bond between soldiers, which allows them to stand up to the terrifying challenges of modern war.

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<sup>61</sup> HQDA, *FM 22-100 (1999)*, para. 2-90.



### *The Army Values: Duty*

Duty has a somewhat different character than the other Army Values in that it is often interchangeable with ‘job’ or ‘assignment’, although this ambiguity has been largely written out of the most recent leadership and ethics corpus.<sup>62</sup> Prior to 1999, duty was one of the ‘Four Elements of the Professional Army Ethic’ along with loyalty, selfless service, and integrity. Duty was most closely linked to leadership actions: showing concern for, counseling, relating to, and discussing personal issues with subordinates; it derives from adherence to discipline and standards.

Duty takes on new meaning in 1999 with its official definition in the Army Values: “Fulfill your obligations.” The objects of duty are in law, regulations, and orders, but also the individual soldier’s own commitment to personal “excellence in all aspects of their professional responsibility,” pursued ideally through personal initiative. Duty derives from a commitment to the Army profession and adherence to standards, which leaders must demonstrate through their personal example. Duty also requires discernment of soldiers to recognize the legality of the orders they give and receive, as soldiers “have no choice but to do what’s ethically and legally correct.” Under the 2006 leadership revisions, this insistence on the ethical character of duty and the individual’s ethical decision making ability is equated with the ‘conscientious’ internalization of a sense of dutiful fulfillment of individual obligations: the conscientious soldier will be “consistently alert” to the obligations of duty through their “high sense of responsibility for personal contributions to the

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<sup>62</sup> HQDA, *ADRP: 6-22 (2012)*; HQDA, *ADRP 1 (2015)*.

Army, demonstrated through dedicated effort, organization, thoroughness, reliability, and practicality... to do what is right—even when tired or demoralized.”

*The Army Values: Respect*

Prior to 1999, respect was not doctrinally recognized as a value to be embodied. Still, it does appear frequently in the 1990 leadership manual. Here, respect derives from rank and discipline. Leaders create mutual respect by building bonds within their unit, and showing concern and caring for subordinates. At the same time, soldiers cannot be expected to have respect for others unless they first respect themselves. Along with confidence, respect produces pride in the unit and trust among its members.

The introduction of respect to the Army’s moral doctrine in 1999 is a radical departure that reflects both the Army’s recognition of the changing demographics of its recruiting base, popular criticism of military scandals, and the changing nature of its mission from major land combat to ‘Operations Other Than War’ (OOTW) that required cultural sensitivity. Where earlier understandings of respect see its source in either legitimate authority or individual character, the 1999 inclusion of respect is a directive to all soldiers to “treat others as they should be treated.” Because soldiers are the Army’s “greatest resource,” the demand that soldiers be “sensitive to other cultures,” and recognize and appreciate “the inherent dignity and worth of all people... regardless of race, gender, creed, or religious belief,” comes from respect’s essential role in the “development of disciplined, cohesive, and effective warfighting teams.” Leaders who seek credibility can create a climate of dignity and equal opportunity by demonstrating mutual respect for their subordinates and other soldiers.

In the 2006 revision, leaders who demonstrate interest in others' points of view build mutual respect with their subordinates, especially in emotionally demanding circumstances. Respectful leaders maintain effective command by building trust through open communication. Respect ultimately derives from the broader values our nation stands for.

*The Army Values: Selfless Service*

Prior to 1999 selfless service was one of the 'Four Elements of the Professional Army Ethic' along with loyalty (to the nation, Army, and unit), duty, and integrity. When leaders adopt this ethic, it can be relied upon to resolve ethical dilemmas in the decision making process. The ethic would be violated when, for example, a leader, motivated by self-interest, covers up deficiencies during an inspection.

In the 1999 doctrinal revisions, selfless service is to "put the welfare of the nation, the Army, and subordinates before your own." Selflessness is a careful balancing act between fulfilling one's obligations to the nation and Army without neglecting personal obligations to family or even fulfillment of one's own "healthy ambition"; such neglect "weakens a leader and can cause the Army more harm than good." This principle is undermined when soldiers take undeserved credit for the achievements of others. Selfless service is the "essential component of teamwork," and the institutional demand for selflessness increases with rank. Selfless service recognizes that some soldiers may have to "give themselves completely so that their comrades can live and the mission can be accomplished." Positively responding to the needs of the nation and Army is "the only way a professional could." The 2006

revision more strongly emphasizes the origin of selfless service in the soldier's oath to the Constitution, and Army civilians assert their selfless service in the Civilian Creed.

*The Army Values: Honor*

Prior to 1999, honor was not a doctrinally recognized tenet. Still, the concept was central to conceptions of leadership and the soldier's identity. When soldiers are convinced of their leader's support they can develop strong, honorable character. Leaders nurture the honor inherent in the 'warrior spirit' to build pride and obedience among their subordinates. Honor, derived from the principles of American life and transmitted through stories of honorable service, allows the soldier to be brave. Lies, even in service to duty and loyalty, are dishonorable, and can lead to a tainted victory.

When formally adopted in 1999, doctrine writers recognized the inherent ambiguity in a concept like honor, yet claimed that most people can instinctively recognize honor in "those with a keen sense of right and wrong, those who live such that their words and deeds are above reproach." To be honorable is simply to "live up to all the Army values." Paradoxically, it is both a function of the Values while being a Value itself: to live the Army Values produces an honorable reputation, but those Values are expressed in the act of "taking pride in the community's acknowledgment of that reputation." To live the Army Values, to be honorable, "even though the temptations to do otherwise are strong, especially in the face of personal danger," is an expression of the highest military virtue. Honor is the moral compass by which those who serve judge their conduct within the profession, and derives from the

collective pride of the Army community in the reputation of those serving honorably. Though leaders face many challenges in war, its “ultimate end, at least as America fights it, is to restore peace” through honorable means. Doctrinal revisions in 2006, perhaps influenced by the formal inclusion of the Warrior Ethos, emphasized that a soldier’s honor is the source of bravery in battle and resistance to the suffering of war. And in the latest revisions of moral doctrine, ‘honorable service’ is one of five characteristics of the ‘Professional Army Ethic’, along with ‘military expertise’, ‘*esprit de corps*’, ‘trust’, and ‘stewardship of the profession’.<sup>63</sup>

*The Army Values: Integrity*

Prior to 1999 integrity was one of the ‘Four Elements of the Professional Army Ethic’ along with duty, loyalty, and selfless service. No aspect of leadership or service is more important than adherence to this ethical tenet. A leader’s integrity can be relied upon to resolve ethical dilemmas among their choices in the decision making process, and by doing so demonstrate honesty and sincerity to their subordinates. Candor with their superiors ensures that leaders of integrity only issue legal orders to their subordinates.

For the 1999 leadership manual, doctrine writers began with the assertion that the American people expected professional expertise of their military, and that the profession be composed of people of integrity consistent in their determination to “do what’s right—legally and morally.” The soldier or integrity is charged to be simultaneously “morally complete and true to yourself,” but in their moral judgments

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<sup>63</sup> HQDA, *ADRP 1 (2015)*.

religious and personal values must not conflict with the Army Values. Right action is the result of well-developed integrity that “permits no less... even at personal cost.” Most significantly, the Army’s conception of integrity demands the soldier’s totalizing interpretation of moral doctrine: “Any conflict between your personal values and Army values must be resolved before you can become a morally complete Army leader.” Doctrinal changes in 2006 deepened the soldier’s total commitment to moral doctrine: integrity is not just a standard by which to judge the self or others, but a tool, the will to resist temptation by discerning right from wrong in a given situation, deriving from a commitment to truth and the soldier’s oath to the Constitution.

*The Army Values: Personal Courage*

Prior to 1999 courage was one of the four ‘traditional Army values’ along with candor, competence, and commitment. Courage is not the absence of fear, but the strength of character to do what is right when “the wrong is more attractive.” Courage derives from commitment to truth, and, with confidence and high morale, is the basis for unit cohesion.

The 1999 qualification of courage as ‘personal’ admonishes soldiers to “face fear, danger, or adversity (physical or moral),” though this may only reflect the need to fit a compelling acronym.<sup>64</sup> Its discussion, however, begins with an interesting exemplar of ‘professional courage’ that speaks volumes of the Army leadership’s political vulnerability. Quoting former Sergeant Major of the Army (1979-1983)

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<sup>64</sup> Challans, *Awakening Warrior*.

William Connelly, ‘professional courage’ is more than “being as tough as nails,” but is rather the “willingness to listen to the soldiers’ problems, to go to bat for them in a tough situation, [and] ...knowing just how far they can go. It also means being willing to tell the boss when he’s wrong.” Physical courage, bravery, is demonstrated, not in the willingness to shoot at an enemy, but to take calculated risks to save their comrades or ensure mission success. Moral courage is equated with integrity and honor. Leaders are instructed that both physical and moral courage are demanded in combat, and the section closes with an account of an Army helicopter pilot at My Lai, Vietnam whose personal courage saved the lives of civilians from the atrocities being committed by his fellow soldiers by placing himself and his crew in between rampaging Americans and Vietnamese civilians and ordering his crew to fire upon their own compatriots if necessary. In later doctrinal revisions, explanations of personal courage emphasize professional responsibility and the moral courage necessary to accept personal accountability for decisions, even when things go wrong. Further, it is personal courage that allows soldiers to act in the absence of orders.

Accounting for the historical context surrounding the adoption of the Army Values and the shifting use of the concepts in moral doctrine suggests that their very presence is much more strongly attributable to the culture war and the influence of virtue ethics on political thought than to the military necessity of character development or any particular tenet of the Values. But the Army Values as a doctrinal project ignores American tradition of moral pragmatism (what Tocqueville called the

virtue of self-interest, properly understood) as it tries to impose a totalizing moral realism (virtue of virtue) of a unique and morally exceptional culture.

While the Army Values are fairly well-integrated conceptually throughout the 1999 manual's text, reflecting the effort to become a values-based organization, the self-referential character of individual tenets indicates an inability to attach particular values to leadership itself (beyond their acronymic synthesis as LDRSHIP). Thus, the value of any given tenet is negligible beyond offering an opportunity, through vignettes, to characterize the actions of historically ideal soldiers. So, for instance, the selfless service of Master Sergeants Randall Shughart and Gary Gordon (Medal of Honor recipients for action in Somalia whose story is told in the book and movie *Blackhawk Down*) is presented as an ideal for all soldiers to follow, but the concept of selfless service as a leadership ideal is never developed beyond the basic foundation of a peculiar work ethic. Most importantly, the Army Values are internally contradictory on a number of levels. The fundamental flaw arises from their very purpose: establishing an institutional standard of conformity by means of individual character development. In principle, the logic might be tenable in a culturally isolated, politically autonomous, and truly total institution. The reality of American politics necessarily undermines that effort: the first four Values (loyalty, duty, respect, and selfless service) are self-evidently collective values, as their implied principle of action is external to the individual; while the final three (honor, integrity, and personal courage) are individualist, placing ultimate moral authority with the individual actor. If any sense could be made of the Values collectively, it is only that



the ideal soldier is exemplified in the pursuit of egoistic self-fulfillment through altruistic selflessness (and vice versa).

### **The Soldier as Warrior**

Though the military-civilian culture gap became much less threatening to the US military with the election of President George W. Bush in 2000, the institution's underlying identity crisis had not been resolved. This manifested most violently during the US invasion of Iraq in March 2003 when Iraqi forces captured five Army Reserve soldiers, including Private First-Class Jessica Lynch. Though Lynch was temporarily elevated to the status of national hero through the Bush administration's cynical manipulation of the facts of her capture,<sup>65</sup> for many in the Army Lynch became the symbol of the emasculation of its culture, particularly among combat troops and their leaders. The event made plain to such troops that many soldiers in non-combat occupations were being exposed to direct combat, but the failed institutional culture in which these soldiers normally performed outside of combat hindered their performance under fire. Prior to the invasion of Iraq there was a common assumption across the Army that support occupations would never experience direct combat. The invasion of Iraq became the first instance since the Vietnam War in which large numbers of support units were subject to direct engagement with enemy ground forces. The contrast between embarrassingly

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<sup>65</sup> Kampfner, "Saving Private Lynch Story 'Flawed'"; Priest, Booth, and Schmidt, "A Broken Body, a Broken Story, Pieced Together."

unprepared support troops and the lightning-quick advance on Baghdad of highly motivated combat units invigorated efforts to rapidly overhaul the Army's culture. By September 2003, Army doctrine re-envisioned every soldier a 'warrior', and devised a program of training reforms around this theme for all non-combat occupations. Here, the Army borrowed directly from the Marine Corps' 'Every Marine a Rifleman' approach to basic training in which all Marine recruits are instructed in basic infantry skills.<sup>66</sup> At the same time, the Army introduced the 'Warrior Ethos' in its official doctrine, and all new soldiers have been drilled in its recitation ever since.

The idea that such an ethos existed had been introduced in the 1999 leadership manual, but the concept was neither defined nor particularly critical to the doctrinal model of leadership. It simply suggested that "the professional attitudes and beliefs that characterize the American soldier" composed a 'warrior ethos'. It expressed the nation's "proud tradition of winning," the American soldier's "refusal to accept defeat" that is implicit in each of the Army Values and acquired through "discipline, commitment to Army values, and knowledge of the Army's proud heritage."<sup>67</sup>

In contrast the Warrior Ethos is the current doctrinal statement of the American soldier's standard of moral behavior in combat, but extends that logic to a

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<sup>66</sup> Every Marine Corps recruit must complete thirteen weeks of basic training before moving to occupational training; basic training standards are uniform for all recruits. In contrast, Army basic training has been extended in recent years from eight to ten weeks; while training standards are uniform across the Army, training for most combat occupations is segregated and combines a period of basic training followed by a period of combat occupational training; combat occupations train a combined fourteen to sixteen weeks.

<sup>67</sup> HQDA, *FM 22-100 (1999)*, paragraphs. 2-85 to 2-90.

work ethic that drives all members of the institution in all their efforts. It is embedded within another doctrinal statement, the *Soldier's Creed*, which reads in full:

I am an American Soldier.  
I am a Warrior and a member of a team. I serve the people of the United States, and live the Army Values.  
*I will always place the mission first.*  
*I will never accept defeat.*  
*I will never quit.*  
*I will never leave a fallen comrade.*  
I am disciplined, physically and mentally tough, trained and proficient in my Warrior tasks and drills.  
I will always maintain my arms, my equipment and myself.  
I am an expert and I am a professional.  
I stand ready to deploy, engage, and destroy, the enemies of the United States in close combat.  
I am a guardian of freedom and the American way of life.  
I am an American Soldier.<sup>68</sup>

The Ethos and Creed were developed as part of the doctrinal reimagining of the Army beginning in the 1990s, but implemented during the early years of the Iraq War. The Creed is intended to reflect “the spirit of being a Soldier,” the soldier’s dedication to a higher calling, and obligations to comrades, unit, the Army, their family and society. The Ethos, on the other hand, is prescriptive of “the very essence of what it means to be a Soldier,” through selfless commitment to others, and most importantly, “[w]hen internalized, it produces the will to win.”<sup>69</sup> The Ethos is described in doctrine as a thing in itself, a long present virtue of the institution, “developed and sustained through discipline, commitment to the Army Values, and pride in the Army’s heritage.... [It] is the foundation for the winning spirit that permeates the

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<sup>68</sup> HQDA, *FM 6-22 (2006)*., paragraph 4-48.

<sup>69</sup> HQDA, *AR 600-100 (2007)*, 18.

institution.”<sup>70</sup> It is also an expression of the “total commitment” required to achieve victory in the seemingly ceaseless War on Terrorism, a form of warfare that demands the “deep moral courage” of all soldiers to “[pursue] victory over extended periods with multiple deployments,” and their “unrelenting and consistent determination to do what is right and to do it with pride across the spectrum of conflicts.” Even in the morally ambiguous environment of counter-insurgency operations, the Ethos “helps create a collective commitment to win with honor.” The necessity to formalize this virtue in doctrine was explained by Army Chief of Staff (1999–2003) General Eric Shinseki:

A true warrior ethos must underpin the Army’s enduring traditions and values... Soldiers imbued with an ethically grounded warrior ethos clearly symbolize the Army’s unwavering commitment to the nation we serve. The Army has always embraced this ethos but the demands of [the institution’s ongoing reorganization plans] will require a renewed effort to ensure that all Soldiers truly understand and embody this warrior ethos.<sup>71</sup>

For the individual, to practice the Ethos “connects American warriors of today with those whose sacrifices have sustained our very existence since America’s founding.” For the institution, its “continuing drive to be the best, to triumph over all adversity, and to remain focused on mission accomplishment, does more than preserve the Army’s institutional culture—it sustains the Nation.” Those connections make the Ethos, by this logic, the very source of cohesion in the small unit, among all the Army’s soldiers, and between the Army and the state.

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<sup>70</sup> HQDA, *FM 6-22 (2006)*. This and the following quotes are taken from paragraphs 4-46 to 4-54.

<sup>71</sup> HQDA, *FM 6-22 (2006)*, paragraph 4-46. Ellipsis in original.

In order to translate the Ethos into actual behavior, the Army solicited proposals early in the program for scientifically based methods to integrate it into combat skills training. Drawing from theories of ‘experiential learning’ and ‘cognitive work analysis’, the report produced for the Army Research Institute by security consulting firm The Wexford Group International recommended that the moral attributes of the Ethos be linked to demonstrable behaviors that could be operationalized in specific training methods.<sup>72</sup> For example, training for ‘Warrior Tasks’ such as marksmanship, radio communication, or first aid would rely on linking specific training events to real-life examples of the Ethos in practice drawn from the official narratives of soldiers awarded the Medal of Honor, the US military’s highest recognition for heroic behavior in combat. To be effective, however, the training model would have to also holistically connect the acts of these role models to military service in a way that transcends the individual. The report states:

The challenge is to internalize Warrior Ethos to the greatest extent possible during the limited timeframe [of basic and occupational training] and then to sustain it well beyond its initial training. A Soldier’s lifestyle and daily behavior must reflect Warrior Ethos.<sup>73</sup>

Implementing the Ethos would be through a process of ‘immersive inculcation’ to ‘internalize’ the “attitudes and behavior associated with the Warrior Ethos” in both the soldier’s daily work performance and, more broadly, the soldier’s off-duty ‘lifestyle’ choices.<sup>74</sup> Inculcation would occur from first contact with the recruiter,

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<sup>72</sup> The Wexford Group International, “Warrior Ethos.”

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

through basic training and the daily routine of garrison life, and on to combat itself and the evaluation of individual and unit performance. For instance, vignettes of the actions of Medal of Honor recipients would be tied to specific elements of the Ethos; training of battle drills (the doctrinally applied tactics of varying combat situations) would demonstrate the necessity of compliance with the Ethos in the decisions of individual soldiers;<sup>75</sup> and the ‘after-action reports’ of completed missions would be required to link performance successes and failures to adherence to, and the ‘frictions’ revealed by reflection upon, the tenets of the Ethos.<sup>76</sup>

It is interesting to note that tenets of the Warrior Ethos were developed in adherence to seven attributes of individual psychology (rather than collective behavior), including perseverance, motivation from a higher calling, and the ability to set priorities, make tradeoffs, adapt, accept responsibility for others, and accept dependence on others.<sup>77</sup> For instance, in placing the mission first,<sup>78</sup> soldiers are

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 13–18.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 10–11.

<sup>78</sup> The idea of ‘mission’ is key to understanding any military undertaking, whether an infantry combat patrol, joint naval exercise, or daily operations of the highest levels of command. It is the doctrinal core of the ‘military decision making process’ (MDMP). By doctrine, missions are described in the ‘mission statement’, which may be no more than a sentence or short paragraph “that describes the organization’s essential task (or set of tasks) and purpose.” It is a “clear statement of the action to be taken and the reason for doing so,” with the approval of the commander and the assumed authority of higher echelons of command. If done well, a mission statement will clearly express “the elements of who, what, when, where, and why.” The ‘how’ of the mission should be left to the discretion, constrained within standard operating procedures, of the commander undertaking the mission. The mission statement “forms the basis for planning,” and its clarity and understanding “by subordinates are essential to success.” (United States Department of Defense, *JP 3-0 Joint Operations*, II-7).

expected to ‘de-conflict’ the institution’s requirements and their personal “learned needs (family, safety, comfort, etc.).” Encouraging belief in a ‘higher being’ will allow the soldier to never accept defeat or stop resisting when confronted with capture by enemy forces. And America’s acceptance of responsibility for failing the families of its missing in action during the Korean and Vietnam wars, and the demonstration of its continued perseverance to recover the remains of those missing will reproduce those same values in the individual soldier: that is, knowing they will not be left behind will allow them to place the mission first.<sup>79</sup>

While the recommendations of the Wexford report were never fully implemented, the report illustrates the US Army’s dependence on an ideology of heroic service as the basis of institutional membership. The Warrior Ethos formalized the expectation that soldiers should be held to a standard of heroic behavior throughout their entire Army service, both on and off duty. To live the Warrior Ethos is to carry on the traditions of exemplary service established by heroes of past wars, and, because many of them died in their heroic achievements, to fail to fulfill these standards is to dishonor the dead.

Adoption of the Ethos was slow, at least in the sense that its recitation would not be regularly practiced outside of basic training for some time.<sup>80</sup> However, the

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<sup>79</sup> The Wexford Group International, “Warrior Ethos,” 7.

<sup>80</sup> I left the Army in January 2005 completely unaware of the existence of the Creed or Ethos. I was recalled to active service in mid-2007 and served until March 2012. Though I knew of the Creed and Ethos, I was not required to learn or recite the statements until mid-2011 after telling my commanding general I did not want to be a warrior—my more immediate supervisors were not impressed with my frank assertion and decided that our company would recite the Soldier’s Creed at our daily

term ‘warrior’ quickly became central to the Army’s doctrinal lexicon. For instance, the training of ‘Soldier’s Common Tasks’ is now ‘Warrior Skills Training’; ‘Warrior’s Leader Course’ replaced the ‘Primary Leadership Development Course’ required of junior noncommissioned officers; and injured troops awaiting medical discharge became ‘Wounded Warriors’ assigned to ‘Warrior Transition Units’. Other services have taken up the warrior theme as well. The Air Force’s ‘Airman’s Creed’ declares, “I am an American Airman. I am a warrior.” The branch went one step further than the Army by doctrinally invalidating all other creeds.<sup>81</sup> The Marine Corps has developed its own martial arts program as a way to “increase the warfighting capabilities of individual Marines and units, enhance Marines’ self-confidence and *esprit de corps*, and foster the warrior ethos in all Marines.”<sup>82</sup> Notably, the US Navy has rejected the concept of a warrior ethos, instead developing a ‘Navy Ethos’ that “captures the entire spectrum of activities of Sailors and civilians, moving beyond the narrow focus of the Warrior Ethos and expanding it to the broader umbrella of all who serve the United States Navy regardless of background, personal experience, or position.”<sup>83</sup> This may reflect the more specifically strategic, rather than tactical, nature of the Navy’s mission as ‘guardians of peace’.<sup>84</sup>

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formations. Creeds are pervasive throughout Army life. These include, among many others, the ‘Infantryman’s Creed’, ‘The Creed of the Noncommissioned Officer’, and the ‘Ranger Creed’. There is even an ‘Army Wife’s Creed’.

<sup>81</sup> Moseley, “CSAF Presents Airman’s Creed.”

<sup>82</sup> Headquarters United States Marine Corps, *MCRP 3-02B (2011)*.

<sup>83</sup> “Navy Ethos Frequently Asked Questions.”

<sup>84</sup> “United States Navy Ethos.”



Whatever the Army's motives in adopting the Ethos, the question arises: why a specifically 'warrior' ethos? To offer some historical context, I conducted a search for the phrase in leading US newspapers dating back to the mid-nineteenth century, and identified only twelve unique articles using the term prior to its formal inclusion in Army doctrine.<sup>85</sup> These include a 1959 report on the influence of Ghengis Khan on Mongolia's Communist Party and a 1990 concert review of former Led Zeppelin singer Robert Plant. References to a warrior ethos specifically in the context of the American military only began appearing in late-1993 and largely constitute a response to perceptions about the Clinton administration's post-Cold War defense reforms, relating in particular to the topic of women in combat and DADT. In contrast to the preceding hundred-plus years, thirty-five unique articles featuring 'warrior ethos' appear in these newspapers for the ten-year period September 2003 through September 2013. Of these, twenty-four articles refer to the Army's adoption and use of the term, or are used by an American service member in reference to personal wartime experience. Five articles use the term academically, for instance in a *New York Times* review of a showing of Japanese samurai art from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The remaining six articles, however, suggest a link between the Army's adoption of the ethos and American popular culture's renewed romanticization of combat. For instance, a southern California artist who produces gigantic representations of medieval weapons from whole tree trunks claims that,

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<sup>85</sup> ProQuest database search for "warrior ethos" of the *Los Angeles Times* from 1881, *New York Times* from 1851, and *Wall Street Journal* from 1889. Accessed February 5, 2014.

“The combat warrior ethos is part of my personality.” Another article reviews a commercial fiction retelling of a centuries-old Japanese legend of honor killing in the story of a John Wayne-style American action hero. A third cites a professional football coach’s adherence to the sport’s own warrior ethos despite the tragedy of a losing season.

*New York Times* columnist William Safire noted that beginning in the 1990s use of the term ‘warrior’ shifted from the pejorative reference to ‘Cold-Warriors’ or ‘Muslim holy warriors’ to a complimentary characterization of, for instance, ‘warrior-journalists’ and ‘warrior-scholars’, and that use of ‘warrior’ in newspapers had “quadrupled” since the 1991 Gulf War.<sup>86</sup> The word has long been used primarily to evoke a sense of contrast to the professional soldier of the modern western state and of military science. The British Philological Society’s account of the word in 1928 noted its use: “Now chiefly [poetic] and rhetorical, [except] as applied to the fighting men of the ages celebrated in epic and romance and of uncivilized peoples, for who the designation soldier would be inappropriate.”<sup>87</sup> They also note the 1920 dedication of the Unknown Warrior memorial in Westminster Abbey, where choice of the “comprehensive word ‘warrior’ was both necessary and felicitous,” as the tomb’s occupant would be the unnamed representative of the whole British Empire’s “many multitudes who during the Great War of 1914-1918 gave the most that man can give

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<sup>86</sup> Safire, “The Old Combatant Is on the March.”

<sup>87</sup> Murray, Craigie, and Onions, “Warrior.”

life itself.”<sup>88</sup> While the British military could reasonably invoke the romantic implications of ‘warrior’ in the particular circumstance of an anonymous tomb alongside those of the country’s monarchs, the US military’s Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery, dedicated in 1921, is perhaps indicative of the American distaste for the chivalric and primitive connotations of the ‘warrior’ label. Though inspired by the British example, the memorial complex has retained the ‘Soldier’ label despite the interment of remains from across the military services.

The historical distinction of ‘warrior’ and ‘soldier’ is certainly not accidental.<sup>89</sup> A ‘warrior’ is “a person who makes war upon,” and ‘war’ is of Germanic origin. But the ancient Germanic tribes had no word for ‘war’ in the modern sense of the term as a conflict between groups of people; it was Latin writers who imposed the meaning on the Germanic root *werra*, meaning simply “confusion, discord, strife,” and closely related to ‘worse’ in its moral sense. That is, the origin of ‘war’ and ‘warrior’ is found in the distinction between Germanic ‘barbarian’ warfare

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<sup>88</sup> The quote is taken from the tomb’s inscription, which reads in full: “BENEATH THIS STONE RESTS THE BODY / OF A BRITISH WARRIOR / UNKNOWN BY NAME OR RANK / BROUGHT FROM FRANCE TO LIE AMONG / THE MOST ILLUSTRIOUS OF THE LAND / AND BURIED HERE ON ARMISTICE DAY / 11 NOV: 1920, IN THE PRESENCE OF / HIS MAJESTY KING GEORGE V / HIS MINISTERS OF STATE / THE CHIEFS OF HIS FORCES / AND A VAST CONCOURSE OF THE NATION / THUS ARE COMMEMORATED THE MANY / MULTITUDES WHO DURING THE GREAT / WAR OF 1914 – 1918 GAVE THE MOST THAT / MAN CAN GIVE LIFE ITSELF / FOR GOD / FOR KING AND COUNTRY / FOR LOVED ONES HOME AND EMPIRE / FOR THE SACRED CAUSE OF JUSTICE AND / THE FREEDOM OF THE WORLD / THEY BURIED HIM AMONG THE KINGS BECAUSE HE / HAD DONE GOOD TOWARD GOD AND TOWARD / HIS HOUSE” (see “Unknown Warrior”).

<sup>89</sup> The following definitions and etymologies are taken from *Oxford English Dictionary* (“military, adj. and n.”, “soldier, n.”, “war, n.1”, “warrior, n.”. OED Online. June 2017. Oxford University Press.); Glare, *Oxford Latin Dictionary*; Tucker, *Etymological Dictionary of Latin*.

and the ‘civilized’ warfare of Rome. In contrast, ‘soldier’, a French word, derives from Latin *solidus*, generally meaning ‘solid’ but specifically here it refers to a Roman coin: to be a soldier is to be in ‘the pay of’ and therefore dependent on another; as well, it is the same root of the word ‘solidarity’.<sup>90</sup> Notably, the Romans called their soldiers *miles*, a word that has the same root as ‘mile’ (*mille*, thousands), and so meant something like ‘gathered in mass’ or ‘the thousands’—essentially, ‘the ranks’; it is the origin of ‘military’. Thus, to be a soldier in a military is to be among the ordered, interdependent ranks; to be a warrior is to be already in a state of anomic discord.

The nearest parallel in the American military tradition for the popularity of ‘warrior’ today is probably Theodore Roosevelt’s invocation of the ‘barbarian virtues’ a century earlier. In both cases, the nation’s changing political circumstances internationally and domestically demanded a cultural turn toward what some believed to be a more primitive and authentic masculinity. While the Army’s doctrine writers were careful to frame their embrace of ‘warrior’ in terms of combat-related skills and attitudes necessary for success in war, the institution’s outside supporters were more

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<sup>90</sup> The link between ‘soldier’ and *solidus* may belie barbarian origins. Julius Caesar wrote of the devoted followers of Celtic chieftains called *soldurii*, “the conditions of whose association are these, -that they enjoy all the conveniences of life with those to whose friendship they have devoted themselves: if any thing calamitous happen to them, either they endure the same destiny together with them, or commit suicide: nor hitherto, in the memory of men, has there been found any one who, upon his being slain to whose friendship he had devoted himself, refused to die” (see C. Julius Caesar, *Caesar’s Gallic War*, 3.22) Tucker claims *soldurii* is either a latinization of the Celtic original, or a “virtual sense-reduplication” of Latin *soleo* (to draw together) and *durus* (hard, unyielding).

blunt. Shortly after the issue of women in combat was raised by the experience of many female soldiers in the Gulf War, retired Army Colonel David Hackworth, an atypically thoughtful critic of the American military institution, acknowledged the country's well-placed gratitude toward those "women warriors" in the growing willingness of many to even consider gender integration; though Hackworth refused to state, "women can't do it," he also insisted that a "hushed-up double standard" prevented the military from gathering enough data to change the policy without risking lives.<sup>91</sup> But the debate was not always so thoughtful. A former Army officer, fearing the 'feminization' of the US military had already been accomplished, insisted the Army's adoption of the phrase 'warrior spirit' in the late-1980s was actually the image of an "androgynous warrior," and thus doomed to failure unless men "resist this loathsome imposition on their inner self."<sup>92</sup> A *Los Angeles Times* opinion piece by another former officer used the phrase "women warriors" to suggest the utter incomprehensibility of the very idea—except to the "feminists and zealots" pushing their agenda on Congress—by asking, "As a society, do we want to have women... wielding bayonets in what we infantrymen delicately call close combat."<sup>93</sup> The same former officer, later working as an aide to a Republican Senator, advocated publicly for preserving 'warrior culture', telling a *Wall Street Journal* reporter, "If a bunch of girls could [be in combat jobs] when I was 18, I would have joined the French

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<sup>91</sup> Tucker, *Etymological Dictionary of Latin*, 225.

<sup>92</sup> Mitchell, *Weak Link*.

<sup>93</sup> Luddy, "Men Are Men and Women Are Women."

Foreign Legion or Outward Bound or something.”<sup>94</sup> A *Chicago Tribune* editorial reduced the DADT debate to a comparison of the “courtly” idealism of the military’s warrior tradition to the “brutal slang used by soldiers to describe homosexuals,” to argue that the policy was an inappropriate meddling of outsiders in an institution that rightly believed “that the nation’s armies constitute a purer and certainly more disciplined stratum of American society, the inheritors of the warrior code.”<sup>95</sup> And one retired general insisted in a 1998 *Wall Street Journal* opinion piece that the military was being “co-opted” by politically correct “cultural warriors” and “social engineers whose agenda is to promote ‘equality’ rather than prepare forces for the next war.” The Clinton administration’s “lowering of standards” in “pursuit of opportunity for all,” its fascination with “silver-bullet technology” and attacks on “[o]ur noble military institutions, culture and life,” amounted to an arrogant and “dangerous” undermining of the “warrior ethos.”<sup>96</sup>

After grudgingly adopting DADT and Clinton’s expansion of jobs open to women, some argued that the Army’s recruiting difficulties in the late-1990s were a direct result of the counterproductive intrusion of gender integration, a position Tom Ricks summed up: “aggressive masculinity has a proven track record in combat—and may be what pulls many young men into the military.” According to the Army’s demographers, this had its greatest impact among Blacks and Hispanics, who were “perhaps more sensitive than the general population to a dilution of the warrior

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<sup>94</sup> Ricks, “Army Faces Recruiting Obstacle.”

<sup>95</sup> McNulty, “Gay Debate Goes to Core of Military Ethos.”

<sup>96</sup> Moore, “The Military Must Revive Its Warrior Spirit.”

culture.”<sup>97</sup> In contrast, the Marine Corps claimed its consistently successful recruiting efforts were the result of “holding the line” in their practice of traditional military authority “while all the other services are caving in to what is politically correct.”<sup>98</sup> The *National Review* argued that, while so many junior and retired officers spoke out against the “twilight of the warrior culture,” the military’s “loss of *esprit*” resulted in fact from its senior leadership going “AWOL on an issue of such fundamental importance.”<sup>99</sup> Similarly, a scholar at the Council on Foreign Relations argued that it was up to senior leadership to “find the courage to ‘stiff arm’” civilian leaders on problems arising from the shifting image of the ideal soldier from the institution’s traditional “heroic warrior” toward the progressive ideal as “peacekeeper, hacker, information manager.”<sup>100</sup> Martin van Creveld argues that these progressive reforms undermined the social esteem of the US and other western military institutions. The efforts by these states at gender integration, he argues, necessarily lowers standards for all soldiers, humiliates male soldiers as “louts who do not know how to treat women properly,” and places additional burdens on them to “compensate for women’s physical weakness.” And because “feminism is and has always been a

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<sup>97</sup> Ricks, “Army Faces Recruiting Obstacle.” Citing retired Army General Marc Cisneros. Also cited in O’Beirne, “Breads & Circuses.”

<sup>98</sup> O’Beirne, “Breads & Circuses.” Quoting Marine Corps Commandant General Charles Krulak.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Hillen, “Must US Military Culture Reform?,” 57 & 44.

peacetime luxury,” the negative impact on the armed forces in just the first few years of gender integration was “incalculable.”<sup>101</sup>

While some proponents of the Warrior Ethos are careful to equate it merely with military professionalism, others are more overtly militaristic, particularly those seeking to perpetuate traditional, illiberal standards of military authority. From the comfort of his whitest of ivory towers at the London School of Economics, international relations theorist Christopher Coker has mused upon the difference between the mere soldier and the true warrior based on his twenty years of reading about them. The ugliness of war—its hardships, fear, and suffering—is transformative for all who experience it. But where war tears down the soldier, who will be left with the scars of trauma, Coker’s true warrior embraces the pain and the constant danger, as the possibility of death “allows a warrior to tap into the vein of his own heroism. It allows him to lead an *authentic* life.”<sup>102</sup> This is, of course, pure romanticism, and Coker, who draws on Nietzschean conceptions of power and will throughout his argument, makes no apologies for it. He claims a loss of the heroic is, in fact, a failing of the modern world. Without a return to the ‘warrior ethos’, western culture is doomed to lose its ability to fight and win wars. Coker is writing to argue that western society has lost its love of glory and war and this is a bad thing: “What keeps war an ethical activity is the warrior ethos.”<sup>103</sup> Fortunately, traditional military discipline serves to subordinate “the passions of the warrior to reason,” by

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<sup>101</sup> Van Creveld, “Less than We Can Be,” 13–15.

<sup>102</sup> Coker, *The Warrior Ethos*, 4–5. Emphasis in original.

<sup>103</sup> Coker, *The Warrior Ethos*, ix.



transforming the warrior's existential self-fulfillment in combat "into a socially prescribed good," and translating fear "into a healthy respect for dangers and risks." According to Coker, military indoctrination in the ethos depends on an ethic of sacred trust as the basis of social interaction within the institution. Unfortunately, Coker laments, this trust is undermined through liberal modernity's instrumentalization of the soldier in war: for a military organization to operate effectively in war it must recognize that its relationship to soldiers is a covenant rather than contract. Coker argues that the US military had forgotten this before the Iraq War, but its adoption of the 'Warrior Ethos' was the proper response to the institution's post-Cold War failures under the Clinton administration. That is, the liberal belief in war as morally abhorrent is just as damaging to the soldier's ability to fight as the feminization social conservative despise. For Coker, if war is to be more humane then reestablishing a cultural tradition of disciplined warrior honor is the only viable option.

On the face of it, the Warrior Ethos effectively reconciles individual heroic traits and the collective needs of an army at war. It also seems to mesh the romantic warrior ideal to modern notions of moral obligation, and seems to coincide with popular conceptions of the soldier's role in American society. It is embodied in both the glorious exploits of our action heroes and the collective sacrifice of 'the troops.' Thus, while the military institution inculcates the ethos in our soldiers, cultural institutions inculcate this belief in the rest of us. However, what the Warrior Ethos fails to reconcile is its own moral certainty with the chaos and moral ambiguity of war. And, the unapologetic romanticism of its moral claims cannot be reconciled with

the inherent bureaucratic amorality of the institution itself. The ‘Warrior Ethos’ demonstrates that the soldier’s role remains determined by institutional legacies that have little to do with modern warfare, and suggests that this inconsistency may ultimately result in the failure of a soldier’s combat motivation.

### **The Fundamental Contradiction of Moral Doctrine: Selfless-Individualism**

In its essence, the Army’s moral doctrine provides the ideal soldier a habitus of heroic moral exceptionalism. It ignores, however, that it is the exercise of freewill, in fact, which separates the hero from the ordinary soldier. The demand for the soldier’s strict obedience all but eliminates the possibility for heroic agency. To be heroic, one must have the authority to act. For common soldiers, militaristic visions of egoistic heroics may move them freely toward the battle, but this false ideal cannot survive the grind of prolonged combat. Idealized notions will ultimately be discarded, or rendered unimportant by superiority of force, as armies struggle to achieve victory on the battlefield. It is only in the crises and chaos of actual face-to-face combat (the conditions of which isolate the individual from the institution) that the ordinary soldier is left the possibility of freewill.

But like Achilles, there is for modern American soldiers also a peculiar form of heroic-egoistic morality moving them toward battle. Yet, the honor of the modern soldier is not measured in war prizes, but in achievement and fulfillment of the mission, regardless of sacrifice. Thus, the American heroic ideal is equally altruistic. Taken together, moral doctrine amounts to an ethos of *selfless-individualism*—a logically absurd but absolute standard of conduct that serves as a selection

mechanism for full membership in the military institution. It is the selfless-individualism of moral doctrine that drives the ideal American soldier, who is judged against both a bureaucratized standard of deferential selflessness, and a tradition of idealized heroic individualism. Soldiers who cannot make this principle internally coherent simply will not survive its powerful selection effects. Once initiated, deviations from the norm create hysteretic dissonance for all involved. The degree to which group belief is institutionalized in practice (and many institutionalized practices will be maladapted to rapidly shifting contexts) will affect the limits in which the individual and group may reconcile. If dissonance cannot be made coherent there will be a sense by one side or both that the other has betrayed the moral foundations of the relationship. In peacetime, those who cannot make sense of the conflicting demands of moral doctrine are either forced out or elect to leave the Army during or at the completion of their first term of service. During war, however, the extreme conditions of combat, and the inability to escape them, make these incoherent moral absolutes the source of emotional trauma. Further, while the tenets of moral doctrine have long been present in military culture, by their formal inscription they transcend mere idealism and may deepen both their ideological selection effect and traumatic potential. However, it is critical to point out that Army leaders, who have survived this selection process, simply cannot recognize the cognitive gap between individual moralities and institutionally indoctrinated belief. Military doctrine and popular culture have synthesized a heroic warrior ideal that soldiers must embody, but in the extreme crises of combat experience the absurdity of

selfless-individualism may begin to reveal itself. While an ethos of selfless-individualism is central to our cultural conception of soldiers at war, such an inconsistent body of morals must fail in the reality of combat experience, as it undermines soldiers' personal moral foundations. Such betrayal of moral belief is the source of individual traumatic experience, the effects of which are made worse by the unbending principles of idealized military service. And while this false ideal serves the purposes of society and military institutions by forming citizens into recruits, recruits into soldiers, and soldiers into armies, the moral failure that results is the soldier's to bear alone, because psychology places the causal burden, not on flawed social institutions, but inside the flawed mind of the flawed individual.

As the Army continues to refine its moral doctrine after more than a decade at war,<sup>104</sup> it remains the case that the Army has made no evidentiary claim to the military necessity of doctrinal revisions, nor empirical analysis of what an Army ethic should include, nor how changes would materially impact military performance. To speak of the Army as a values-based organization belies its reputation as an institution known for more harshly punishing a private for losing a piece of equipment than it does a general for losing a war, and in which a charge of sexual 'misconduct' will destroy the careers of senior leaders (even where the only violation is a charge of adultery), yet war crimes go uninvestigated.<sup>105</sup> Still, the Army systematically imposes a system of beliefs, and in such a way as to make its tenets

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<sup>104</sup> The most recent moral doctrine is contained in HQDA, *ADRP: 6-22 (2012)* and HQDA, *ADRP 1 (2015)*.

<sup>105</sup> Challans, *Awakening Warrior*.

seem inherently real, universal, and apolitical. It renders deviant those who have learned the fallibility of moral doctrine in traumatic experience by making communication impossible with those who still accept doctrinal reality.

Throughout the Second World War, Army historian S.L.A. Marshall recorded the war stories of tens of thousands of American soldiers in Europe and the Pacific. His observations and analysis, published as *Men Against Fire* in 1947, became one of the foundational texts for the sociological study of soldiers in combat. Marshall concluded that a soldier's motives are fundamentally a question of moral action, and thus he characterized the American soldier: "He is what his home, his religion, his schooling, and the moral code and ideals of his society have made him. The Army cannot unmake him."<sup>106</sup> This is, however, a qualified assertion. The Army of the day could not unmake the American citizen-soldier, but changes in military organization, training, indoctrination, and improved communication between all levels of the hierarchy could allow the individual soldier far greater autonomy and the capacity to act in the chaos of combat. Marshall was writing in response to the inability of a large majority of American soldiers in the Second World War to actively engage their enemies in direct combat, a direct result of conflicting moral demands. Though motivated to do their jobs well and go home, the soldiers Marshall interviewed reported being immobilized by conflicting institutional and cultural values of duty, masculine self-respect, and obedience to authority. He suggests that the fundamental

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<sup>106</sup> Marshall, *Men Against Fire*, 78.

correction to this anomic paralysis is the “substitution of reality for romance” in our cultural and institutional understanding of war.<sup>107</sup>

The same rejection of romance is the necessary correction to overcome the crisis of moral injury trauma. Technological and organizational changes in the Vietnam era made the soldier far more effective on the battlefield than the soldiers Marshall observed, but the result was merely a change in the moral calculus of action in combat, an intensification of the institutional exploitation of selfless-individualism.<sup>108</sup> Contemporary military life, though less overtly violent and perhaps more inclusive than earlier eras, is, as the Warrior Ethos illustrates, equally exacting. Moral expectations of the soldier provide a sense of authority to act, because the soldier’s sense of duty is shifted, at least in the moment, from personal moral obligations to fulfillment of the mission. On reflection, however, the moral impact of this temporary shift might undermine all sense of moral obligation.

Loyalties within small group relationships and coercive institutional authority minimize deviance from norms of military culture. The result is a strongly embodied morality of acceptable conduct that isolates soldiers whose actions do not fit neatly into a narrowly prescribed ethos. Failure against such absolute standards becomes inevitable, leading to disillusion and failed morality, creating a resignation among some soldiers to quietly go along, essentially abdicating autonomy and individual agency. Others will resist: the majority of the Army’s expulsions from the ranks after

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>108</sup> Moskos, *The American Enlisted Man*.

initial-entry training are “for reasons related to the Soldier’s moral character.”<sup>109</sup>

Enforced morality represents the unwillingness of the American military institution to match military necessity to cultural realities, particularly given the power of American traditions of democracy, freedom, and human rights. In the Warrior Ethos, the fundamental relationship of soldier to the institution is largely a relic of militaristic tradition that persists only for its own self-perpetuation. War is complicated, and any narrative that does not at least acknowledge this is intellectually and morally dishonest. Society’s failure to acknowledge war’s complexity in favor of the dominant institutional narrative is, as much as anything, the source of betrayal for the morally injured soldier.

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<sup>109</sup> Strickland, “A Longitudinal Examination of First Term Attrition and Reenlistment among FY1999 Enlisted Accessions,” 313.

## Chapter Eight

### The Valorization of Comradeship in American Militarism

In the winter of 2003, a few weeks before I deployed to Kuwait for the invasion of Iraq, I was stuck in my bunk over a long weekend in the barracks at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, recovering from a nasty stomach bug. I was probably a little high from the phenergan<sup>1</sup> injection the medics had given me earlier that day after I passed out during the morning accountability formation. Half-asleep I flipped through the television channels and settled on a marathon of the HBO miniseries *Band of Brothers*,<sup>2</sup> though I'd seen the series in full twice before. Based on the book of the same name by historian Stephen Ambrose, the series tells the story of a single company of American paratroopers—'Easy Company', 506<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division—from the unit's initial call-up at Camp Toccoa, GA in 1942, to their jump into France during the D-Day invasion, to the unit's deactivation in Austria at the end of the war. I had enlisted in the Army shortly after 9/11 and was now in the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, the same Army parent unit of the soldiers of Easy Company. The popularity of the series among the division's members was universal. I had friends who could quote the dialogue of whole scenes verbatim. That day in my bunk I came into the marathon at the concluding scenes of the series' companion documentary, "We Stand Alone Together," a collection of interviews with the actual

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<sup>1</sup> Phenergan (promethazine) is a prescription anti-nausea medication and sedative.

<sup>2</sup> Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks, *Band of Brothers*. (New York: HBO Video, 2002), DVD.



WWII veterans whose story is chronicled by Ambrose. This episode concludes with a question put to the veterans about heroes, and all their responses suggest the fallacy of individual heroism. The final word, though—and the scene still gives me chills—comes from the group’s former commander and the works’ primary character, Richard Winters:

I cherish the memories of a question my grandson asked me the other day, when he said, “Grandpa, were you a hero in the war?” Grandpa said, “No. But I served in a company of heroes.”<sup>3</sup>

On screen, before the credits roll, Winters’ eyes filled with tears, while I on my bunk felt my emotions spill out uncontrollably. I cried for several minutes as the implications, what I might experience in the coming months with my own ‘band of brothers’, imposed themselves on my temporarily sedated reality. I cried out of profound sadness: sadness that the world had experienced (and would very soon again) the horror of war and that young men must stand up to face it; sadness that these men, nearly sixty years later, were still so obviously haunted by the war, and still so strongly held together in the memory of shared experience; and, perhaps mostly, sadness that I wasn’t worthy to follow in their footsteps—or something to that effect, which my memories, now fourteen years later, cannot quite capture. I might have cried from something akin to selfishness, but at the time I could not have understood the irony.

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<sup>3</sup> Mark Cowen, *We Stand Alone Together* (New York: HBO Video, 2002), DVD.

In the pages that follow, I consider this concept—the ‘band of brothers’—as the defining cultural articulation of the American conception of patriotic heroism at the start of its post-9/11 wars, an idea critical to the cultural mobilization for war, shaping both the US military response and the motivations of its servicemembers. The analysis draws on a range of evidence and relevant methods, including close-reading of texts, a more ‘distant’ reading of news media, and a critical reflection on my own position in the cultural-historical conjuncture ‘band of brothers’ represents: the popular conception of the American soldier in the early years of the American ‘war on terror’. Apart from 9/11, the series was simply a moment in the cultural project to memorialize those Tom Brokaw called the “Greatest Generation.” It attempts to portray the uniquely American potential for equality of status gained through experience of shared hardship and collective sacrifice. It offers a narrative of the republican civic ideal of the ‘citizen-soldier’ and democratic citizenship earned through individual sacrifice for the collective good. It is telling that a cable-television miniseries created a critical thematic in the American cultural and political mobilization from 9/11 through the early years of the Iraq War. I attempt to offer some insight into the competing motivations that composed a defining moment in the relationship of the American people and its warfighters. In doing so I hope to explain the connection between wartime experiences of my generation of veterans and the cultural politics of the time. The 9/11 attacks evoked images of the threat faced by the US in WWII, and so the themes of *Band of Brothers* set the heroic ideal for military service in the wars that followed. It certainly motivated me and many of my fellow

veterans to enlist and gladly serve in Iraq, but we never stopped to notice that, unlike WWII, the military response to 9/11 never necessitated a call for collective sacrifice in national service. The themes of the series filled that ideological void in our imaginations, but this narrative of idealized service would eventually be undermined by the strategic and tactical conditions we faced in Iraq. Our idealist expectations simply collapsed in the cognitive dissonance of encountering a war we were neither ideologically nor institutionally prepared to fight.

### **The Problematics of Patriotic Sacrifice and the Soldier's Motivations**

It is remarkable how strongly Americans continue still to associate their military with the institution that fought WWII. That narrative still justifies American military intervention today, but the realities of America's wars since have failed to fulfill those narrative requirements on nearly all counts. Still, the memory of WWII has been so powerful that national leaders need not expressly call for patriotic national sacrifice in war. For example, President George W. Bush's address to Congress after the 9/11 attacks is a clear statement that the nation was now at war, but his demands of the American people do not amount to a national mobilization or call to collective sacrifice. He simply asks Americans to "live your lives and hug your children," "be calm and resolute," "uphold the values of America," "support the victims of this tragedy with your contributions," cooperate with FBI investigations of the attack, offer "patience with the delays and inconveniences" of "tighter security," demonstrate their "continued participation and confidence in the American economy," and to "continue praying for the victims of terror and their families, for those in uniform,

and for our great country.’<sup>4</sup> The irony of the moment was not lost on *Time* correspondent Frank Pellegrini who, in an article that would provide the seed of a myth commonly believed among Bush’s critics, reduced the part played by American citizens in the eyes of the Bush administration to: “And for God’s sake keep shopping.”<sup>5</sup>

In Bush’s announcement of the start of the Iraq War, there is equally little call for collective sacrifice. He places the burden upon the armed forces for “the peace of a troubled world and the hopes of an oppressed people,” and acknowledges the sacrifices of military families, for which they receive the “gratitude and respect of the American people.” Bush does warn of the possibility of America’s “sustained commitment” in “helping Iraqis achieve a united, stable and free country,” but more importantly the threat of Iraq’s “outlaw regime” would be met with military force now “so that we do not have to meet it later with armies of firefighters and police and doctors on the streets of our cities.” Of course, the message is that “we will prevail,” and ‘we’ is the people of the United States, but the effort would be seemingly carried out only by the few willing agents of the state.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, the Iraq War is presented by Bush in terms that evoke the nation’s collective memory of WWII. Comparisons of Saddam Hussein to Adolf Hitler, firmly established in the first Gulf War in 1991, allow Bush to simultaneously call the world

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<sup>4</sup> Bush, “Address to Congress, September 20, 2001.” This and the following speech excerpts are taken from *Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush, 2001-2008* (Washington: National Archives, n.d.), <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov>.

<sup>5</sup> Pellegrini, “The Bush Speech.”

<sup>6</sup> Bush, “Address to the Nation, March 19, 2003.”

to act and justify US unilateral action in Iraq by invoking the failures of the League of Nations in the appeasement of the “aggressions and ambitions of the wicked” that brought about WWII.<sup>7</sup> This fight would be of the US and its allies against an “axis of evil” that posed an existential threat to the United States and world peace.<sup>8</sup> War in Iraq would be waged to defend the US and the “civilized world” from the threat of weapons of mass destruction in the hands of that axis and its terrorist allies. Perhaps more importantly the US would, as it had done in WWII, ‘liberate’ the innocent victims of the fascist tyranny of Saddam Hussein’s ‘totalitarian apparatus’. And just as American sacrifice had been fulfilled in the democratic institutions built to replace the genocidal regimes of WWII fascists, the liberation of Iraq would replace Saddam’s “torture chambers and poison labs” with free and democratic institutions that would bring peace and stability to the entire Middle East.<sup>9</sup>

But unlike WWII, the world was also prepared to face the existential threat of this new axis because the US was its leader, and the US came already prepared with a military up to the task. That is, patriotic sacrifice did not have to be directly invoked after 9/11 because the US possessed a large, standing military force that was both professional and ideologically idealized as just and patriotic. The American public would idealize the sacrifice of these professional ‘citizen-soldiers’, even if not asked to sacrifice itself. Just as Congress had abdicated its war-making power to the

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<sup>7</sup> Bush, “Address to United Nations, November 10, 2001.”

<sup>8</sup> Bush, “Address to Congress, September 20, 2001.”

<sup>9</sup> Bush, “Remarks on the Future of Iraq.”

Presidency,<sup>10</sup> so would the American people abdicate the conduct of the war to the professional military in its idealization of ‘the troops’. In a sense, this may have further distanced the public from the wars and their military by making the professional American soldier a sort of super-citizen beyond the pale of criticism. But, as Brewer notes, “The flexibility with which the administration could recast the mission contrasted with the permanence of the sacrifices made by the American men and women in military service.”<sup>11</sup> If the war’s original justifications did not match the war’s reality—if the US war in Iraq was not a liberation, if Saddam was not an existential threat—then soldiers themselves had little to turn to for motivation but the idealized vision of service instilled in them through their military indoctrination and the American culture of war. For American soldiers in Iraq, that ideal of service was of sacrifice on behalf of one’s own comrades-in-arms, an ideal articulated in the cultural conjuncture of the time as the ‘band of brothers’.

### **A Contested Articulation of Military Brotherhood**

Less than a month after 9/11, *Time* magazine noted an immediate ‘suspension’ of culture in the profound shock of the attack, asking, “Have we shifted so suddenly from a Sex and the City culture to a Band of Brothers culture?”<sup>12</sup> It certainly seemed that way in the short-term, but this critic understood history well enough to know that the war culture of a post-9/11 America would depend on the kind of war the country

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<sup>10</sup> Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Brewer, *Why America Fights*, 270.

<sup>12</sup> Poniewozik, “What’s Entertainment Now?”

would actually fight. The point is hard to refute, but incomplete: rather, the wars we end up fighting, or at least our understanding of them, depend on our culture of war. Undoubtedly, the ideal of comradeship, of brotherhood-in-arms, is and has historically been a major part of western militarist culture. Understanding how that ideal has changed through time is one entry-point to begin mapping out the conjuncture of American popular culture and America's post-9/11 wars.

The phrase 'band of brothers' as a synonym for military comradeship goes back at least as far as Shakespeare's use in *King Henry V* (1599), in which the English king, in what has come to be known as the St. Crispin's Day speech, urges on his lieutenants toward an unlikely victory at the Battle of Agincourt:

From this day to the ending of the world  
But we in it shall be remembered,  
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers. (4.3.58-60)<sup>13</sup>

These few lines are Ambrose's inspiration for his book's title, and its epigraph is taken from these three lines as well, though edited somewhat oddly into a very pointed statement (ellipses in original):

From this day to the ending of the World,  
. . . we in it shall be remembered  
. . . we band of brothers.

If Ambrose suggests that this brotherhood depended on neither fewness nor happiness, it is because there may have been a different cultural appreciation of comradeship for the generation that fought WWII than existed in Shakespeare's time

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<sup>13</sup> All quotes from *King Henry V* are taken from T. W. Craik's edition, *The Arden Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1995).

or had come to be when Ambrose wrote in 1990s America. The title was suggested to Ambrose by Carwood Lipton, an original member of Easy Company who would go on to become its senior noncommissioned officer. Lipton would later explain his meaning of brotherhood, saying at a fiftieth anniversary commemoration of D-Day, “We wanted to be heroes, not to the American public or in books, but to each other.”<sup>14</sup> Beyond the epigraph the phrase appears just once in the book’s nineteen chapters. Ambrose gives Easy Company this title at a point in the narrative which, in contrast to Henry’s speech, comes *after* a critical battle for the unit’s survival. During the German counter-offensive of December 1944, the entire 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne was surrounded and besieged at the Belgian town of Bastogne. Greatly outnumbered, minimally supplied with food, ammunition, or adequate winter equipment, Easy Company was able to survive nineteen days of combat and extreme conditions, because, to Ambrose, “they had become a band of brothers.”<sup>15</sup> Yet read against the passage’s immediate surroundings, the point Ambrose makes is about the transcendence of social class in the wartime experience of the ordinary American soldier in WWII. A few paragraphs prior, Ambrose shares a few lines of the diary of Private David Webster, who enumerates the company’s losses, listing the names of the nine veterans remaining in his platoon with whom he had served in Normandy and Holland. Ambrose turns to Webster to emphasize the nature of their brotherhood. Webster is Harvard educated, comes from the American upper classes, refuses to

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<sup>14</sup> Goldstein, “C. Carwood Lipton, 81, Figure in ‘Band of Brothers,’ Dies.”

<sup>15</sup> Ambrose, *Band of Brothers*, 352.



accept a leadership position and offers of his parents' political influence to keep him out of combat. Yet, his position is no better or worse than the "hillbillies, Southern farmers, coal miners, lumbermen, [and] fishermen" who make up the bulk of the unit's enlisted men, and "it is this unlikely group of men that Webster found his closest friendships."<sup>16</sup> It is this uniquely American potential for equality of status that Ambrose wants his readers to recognize as the outcome of shared experience—both the intimate experience of the small unit in combat and the collective experience of hardship and recovery for a generation that came of age in the Great Depression.

Further complicating our understanding of the phrase, Carwood Lipton's notion of heroic brotherhood would have derived from a particular interpretation of Shakespeare. The author's intent in writing *King Henry V* has long been debated: is the play a patriotic glorification of war or anti-war satire? The twentieth century's two most notable film productions of the play fall along these lines. The 1944 production by Laurence Olivier, financed in part by the British government and dedicated to the British Paratroopers engaged at the time in the Second World War, offered its audience a thoroughly romanticized vision of war, the British state, and its troops. Similarly, in Henry's comedic romance with the French princess Katherine, the film provided the war-weary public a "lively portrayal of achieved manhood," and the hope of marriage for all the returning veterans who would revive British society, "while promising an extension of its happiness into a generation to come."<sup>17</sup> Olivier's

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 353.

<sup>17</sup> Rabkin, "Rabbits, Ducks, and Henry V."

was a self-consciously nationalistic project imposed onto Shakespeare. “I had a mission,” Olivier would write. “My country was at war; I felt Shakespeare with me, I felt the cinema within him. I knew... what he would have done.”<sup>18</sup> Decades later the film was remade by Kenneth Branagh, who felt Olivier’s Elizabethan pageantry “did not accord with the impression I received as I read the text afresh. To me, the play seemed darker, harsher, and the language more bloody and muscular than I remembered.”<sup>19</sup> Instead of romance, Branagh’s 1989 adaptation offers a “crudely material” politics.<sup>20</sup> Henry’s cynical manipulation of morality and the film’s realism in its images of battle place Branagh’s work solidly among the other anti-war films of the post-Vietnam era, such as Oliver Stone’s *Platoon* (1986) or Stanley Kubrick’s *Full Metal Jacket* (1987).

It is this sort of postmodern critique of warfare that influenced post-Cold War claims by many military scholars of an emasculated contemporary military institution in a liberal society that had rejected the ‘warrior ethos’. Most notably, Shakespeare is central to international relations theorist Christopher Coker’s argument that western culture has given up on its heroic tradition to its own detriment. However, such a reading might be even more one-sidedly militaristic than even Olivier’s. Any discussion of poetry or art as the basis for a political claim depends on recognition of the artist’s genius in the portrayal of the human condition, and Coker rightfully says

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<sup>18</sup> Donaldson, “Taking on Shakespeare,” 61. Quoting: Laurence Olivier, *On Acting* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 275.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 60. Quoting Branagh’s introduction of *Henry V by William Shakespeare: A Screen Adaptation by Kenneth Branagh* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1989), 9.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

this of Shakespeare's storytelling: "What Shakespeare takes seriously so should we... We find our own faces reflected in the characters he created and our own stories refracted through the tales he tells."<sup>21</sup> But for Coker, there is little room for the nuance of human experience. His reading of *King Henry V* is of Shakespeare singing the praises of war, at least a certain type of war: the play's moral ambiguity is Shakespeare's call for civilized warfare, mediated by the 'instrumental reason' of western society and, more importantly perhaps, "by the personal honour of the warrior himself."<sup>22</sup> This all depends, however, on a very literal reading that ignores the politics of Shakespeare's day. Coker claims, for example, "The juxtaposition [of Henry and the thief Bardolph] may be intentionally ironic, but no sixteenth-century writer, not even Shakespeare, is likely to have ridiculed so great a warrior as Henry." However, if the play is a reflection on English politics in 1599 and not a purely historical account, then the audience, including the London aristocracy, might not have taken much offense. At the time, the impending military adventure in Ireland to be led by the Earl of Essex, who many believed might instead turn his army against the monarchy, weighed heavily on all classes of English society. Shakespeare himself, the playwright and the actor, says so quite loudly during the play's first run in the epilogue of Act V, describing Henry's return from battle:<sup>23</sup>

As, by a lower but loving likelihood,  
Were now the General [Essex] of our gracious Empress [Elizabeth],  
As in good time he may, from Ireland coming,  
Bringing rebellion broached on his sword,

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<sup>21</sup> Coker, *The Warrior Ethos*, 89.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>23</sup> Shapiro, *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare: 1599*, 87.

How many would the peaceful city quit  
To welcome him! Much more, and much more cause,  
Did they this Harry. (5.0.29-35)

The problem with finding a heroic ideal of brotherhood in the St. Crispin's Day speech is that *King Henry V* makes clear that the interests of the king in exhorting the soldier toward combat through narratives of masculine camaraderie are at odds with the interests of the soldiers themselves. Throughout the play King Henry's actions are paralleled in the those of the thieves Bardolph, Nym and Pistol—the three who have sworn their brotherhood to France (2.1.13) and to 'filching' (3.2.45)—because Henry is himself a thief, both politically in his invasion of France and literally: the thieves are his old drinking buddies (in *King Henry IV*). When Henry is before the walls of Harfleur urging his army, "Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more, / Or close the wall up with our English dead," (3.1.1-2) we soon find the thieves malingering, no nearer the breach than the king, commenting on the battle: Bardolph mocks, "On, on, on, on, on, to the breach, to the breach!" (3.2.1); Nym plays along, "Pray thee, corporal, stay... I have not a case of lives" (3.2.2-3); and Pistol philosophizes:

Knocks go and come, God's vassals drop and die,  
And sword and shield  
In bloody field  
Doth win immortal fame. (3.2.8-11)

Henry's lieutenant Fluellen runs the three off stage, but remains in the rear to comment on the mistakes made by the English at the breach. Then, intending to quiz the Irish captain MacMorris in the "disciplines of the pristine wars of the Romans,"

(3.2.82) Fluellen falls into a nationalist argument with the Irishman, a scene that nearly ends in bloodshed except for the sounding of parley from the distant town.

There, Henry approaches the walls to demand the town's surrender, warning of the consequences for continued resistance:

...Therefore, you men of Harfleur,  
Take pity of your town and of your people  
Whiles yet my soldiers are in my command,  
Whiles yet the cool and temperate wind of grace  
O'erblows the filthy and contagious clouds  
Of heady murder, spoil and villainy. (3.3.27-32)

The irony of the scene is that these English troops, held at the edge of barbarity by the king's leadership, seem not to be the same characters previously called on by Henry at the breach. When pushing them onward Henry only sees their English nobility, honor, and willing sacrifice for the crown:

...On, on, you noblest English,  
Whose blood is fet from fathers of war-proof,  
Fathers that like so many Alexanders  
Have in these parts from morn till even fought,  
And sheathed their swords for lack of argument.  
Dishonour not your mothers; now attest  
That those whom you called fathers did beget you.  
Be copy now to men of grosser blood  
And teach them how to war. And you, good yeoman,  
Whose limbs were made in England, show us here  
The mettle of your pasture; let us swear  
That you are worth your breeding - which I doubt not;  
For there is none of you so mean and base  
That hath not noble lustre in your eyes. (3.1.17-30)

The parallel of Henry and the thieves continues after the town's surrender. Speaking with Fluellen of Bardolph, who has been condemned to death for theft of a lute, Henry declares, "We would have all such offenders so cut off" (3.6.106) and orders

that the English forces will not pillage the French countryside. Yet, the French ambassador Montjoy immediately arrives to remind Henry of his own transgressions toward the French, “the losses we have borne, the subjects we have lost, the disgrace we have digested” (3.6.125-7). Henry responds that, though his army has taken significant losses, “...if we be hindered, / We shall your tawny ground with your red blood / Discolour” (3.6.159-61).<sup>24</sup>

### **Historical Contexts and Reappropriated Articulations**

The phrase ‘band of brothers’ has since become deeply embedded in the military, and to a lesser extent the popular, cultures of Britain and the US through a series of resurfacings in the words of important historical figures. For instance, George Washington’s *Farewell Orders to the Continental Army* draws on the achievement of comradeship in itself to ask the his veterans to embrace the “enlarged prospects of happiness” to which they “contributed so essentially”:

Who, that was not a witness, could imagine that... [m]en who came from different parts of the Continent, strongly disposed, by the habits of education, to despise and quarrel with each other, would instantly become but one patriotic band of Brothers, or who, that was not on the spot, can trace the steps by which such a wonderful revolution has been effected, and such a glorious period put to all our warlike toils?<sup>25</sup>

Here, the brotherhood of war serves as the foundation for a brotherhood of national citizenship, limited of course by the classed, racialized, and gendered problematics of

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<sup>24</sup> Even here Henry takes neither personal nor command responsibility: “...Yet, forgive me, God, / That I do brag thus! This your air of France / Hath blown that vice in me: I must repent!” (3.6.149-151).

<sup>25</sup> Washington, “Farewell Orders,” 224.

the early United States. Considering Washington's disdain for enlisted soldiers,<sup>26</sup> his ideal of brotherly inclusion is perhaps far more narrow than even Shakespeare's Henry.

The phrase entered the naval tradition through the British Admiral Horatio Nelson who gained fame in the Napoleonic Wars. After the 1798 Battle of the Nile, in which the British victory reversed Napoleon's advance in North Africa and the Middle East, Nelson moved to preempt contention among his subordinates (and solidify his position in the Admiralty) by publicly recognizing the equally valiant action of all his captains. Nelson's superior Lord Howe noted of the battle that "every Captain distinguished himself," to which Nelson replied, "I had the happiness to command a Band of Brothers"<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, it was not Nelson's first use of the term. In a letter published after his death in an essay by Coleridge, Nelson admitted of his personal frustration at remaining in command of (the apparently dull) blockade of the Atlantic coasts of France, being passed over by the Admiralty for a more noteworthy assignment fighting the Spanish.

It was not enough to have robbed me once before of my West-India harvest—now they have taken away the Spanish,—and under what circumstances, and with what pointed aggravation! Yet, if I know my thoughts, it is not for myself or on my own account chiefly that I feel the sting and the disappointment: no! It is for my brave officers; for my noble-minded friends and commanders—such a gallant set of

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<sup>26</sup> Stewart, *American Military History, Volume I*, 52; Donohue, "The Anatomy of Discipline," 56.

<sup>27</sup> Lambert, "Nelson's Band of Brothers."

fellows! Such a band of brothers! My heart swells at the thought of them.<sup>28</sup>

While there is an obvious romanticism of military service in the ‘band of brothers’ invocation by both Washington and Nelson, each also depends on the political effects seemingly inherent in the phrase. It is an expression of the social order of the time and the speaker’s position in it: Washington is the individual embodiment of the potential unity of the States and the contribution of the ‘citizen-soldier’ (a highly particular conception in Washington’s time, at odds with its application in World War II, which is itself at odds with contemporary notions); Nelson sat near the top of an aristocratic social order opening itself to the middle classes, particularly in a Navy in which merit served as a source of social mobility,<sup>29</sup> but in which a feudal notion of dependence upon one’s vassals still shaped relations within the political and social elite.

It is with such political dynamics in mind that the contemporary popularization of the phrase should be considered. When Ambrose published *Band of Brothers* in 1992 the book’s reception was not particularly noteworthy, although it did establish Ambrose as a particular sort of military historian and writer able to tell convincing oral histories that contributed to scholarship on broader historical events. The book was generally well received in the popular press and among military historians, but it was not an immediate commercial success. In fact, it was his follow

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<sup>28</sup> Coleridge, “Sketches and Fragments of the Life and Character of the Late Admiral Sir Alexander Ball (March 15, 1810).”

<sup>29</sup> Preston, *Men in Arms*.



up work, *D-Day* (1994), that first moved Ambrose onto the bestseller lists. It was only in 2001 that the ‘band of brothers’ articulation made its mark on popular culture when HBO aired the miniseries, a faithful adaptation of the Ambrose book, produced by Tom Hanks and Stephen Spielberg, with whom Ambrose had consulted on their 1998 film *Saving Private Ryan*.

The late-1990s saw the mass heroization of the generation of Americans who fought the Second World War, dubbed by TV news anchor Tom Brokaw as the ‘Greatest Generation’ in a 1998 bestselling book by that title, which, like Ambrose’s work, takes the form of an oral history collection. These men and women became “the greatest generation that any society has ever produced,”<sup>30</sup> by surviving the Great Depression, winning the war, returning to take their parts in the post-war economic boom, parenting the Baby Boom generation, and crystalizing a new but lasting image of traditional American life. Brokaw speaks for the children and grandchildren of the Greatest and offers the book as an act of atonement<sup>31</sup> for America’s failure to appreciate their hardships and accomplishments. The same sentiment was expressed by Ambrose: “I was 10 years old when the war ended. I thought the returning veterans were giants who had saved the world from barbarism. I still think so. I remain a hero worshiper.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation*, xxxviii.

<sup>31</sup> McDowell, “A Rare Moment for All of Us,” 347; Wetta and Novelli, “Now a Major Motion Picture,” 868.

<sup>32</sup> Goldstein, “Stephen Ambrose Dies at 66.”

Brokaw's project was paralleled in Hollywood by Spielberg's blockbuster *Saving Private Ryan*, and the series of films it inspired toward box office success through a formula that continued to heroize the American veterans of WWII. Though eventually producing diminishing returns, efforts to recreate Spielberg's success lasted nearly a decade. Before Quentin Tarrantino turned the World War II combat genre on its head with the darkly satirical *Inglorious Basterds* (2009), Hollywood's more notable war films included: a surrealistic adaptation of WWII veteran James Jones's novel *The Thin Red Line* (1998); submarine movie *U-571* (2000); Michael Bay's CGI enhanced *Pearl Harbor* (2001); an American officer's struggle for honor in a German POW camp in *Hart's War* (2002); John Yoo's story of the Navajo *Windtalkers* (2002); POW rescue movie *The Great Raid* (2005); and Clint Eastwood's telling of the Battle of Iwo Jima in *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006). In 2010 HBO did for WWII Marines what it had done for the Army with *Band of Brothers*, when it released the ten-part miniseries *The Pacific*. Combat-centric war movies in general took on this same theme of heroization of the soldier's personal sacrifices made meaningful through comradeship, most notably in *Black Hawk Down* (2001) and *We Were Soldiers* (2002).

But *Band of Brothers* was unique in its cultural effects. One measure of the miniseries' influence on American popular culture is the appearance of the phrase in major American newspapers (*New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Wall Street*

*Journal*).<sup>33</sup> On average the phrase appeared in just six articles per year in these papers collectively from 1985 to 2000. Then in 2001 the phrase appeared in 120 articles, obviously in relation to the miniseries. What is interesting is its use since: on average the phrase appeared in fifty-four articles per year from 2002 to 2014. Many reference the miniseries or book, and Easy Company became a genre unto itself, but the ‘band of brothers’ has also taken on a cultural life of its own, more vibrant and varied than before the miniseries. For instance, in 2014 the country singer Willie Nelson released an album by that name. The phrase has described the dynamics of a vast array of male groups: the general failure of racial integration of the New York City Fire Department over almost fifty years; siblings working in the Los Angeles Fire Department; concert goers to a dance music festival; boys who survived ebola in Sierra Leone; refugee boys in the Central African Republic; the Denver Broncos football team; a BBC adaptation of *The Three Musketeers*; US homebuilders criticized as “malignant, socially corrosive, architecturally putrescent”; or New Jersey governor Chris Christie’s attempt to raise funds from among the most active Republican Party donors. In the post-9/11 era the phrase could even shift across genders, with the phrase ‘band of sisters’ commonly used in recent years.

But the phrase’s most important impact can be seen in its influence on the US military. For example, a similar pattern of use is found in the US military’s internal

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<sup>33</sup> Search of “band of brothers” conducted April 30, 2015 in ProQuest databases: *New York Times* (1980 - current); *Los Angeles Times* (1985 - current); and *Wall Street Journal* (1984 - current).

newspaper *Stars and Stripes*.<sup>34</sup> More importantly, however, the success of the book and miniseries had formal institutional effects. Perhaps most notably, the Army reactivated the 506<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in 2004 during a force restructuring in which the typical Army division was increased from three to four brigades. The new 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne was established to include 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> battalions of the 506<sup>th</sup> and adopted the old 506<sup>th</sup> motto and nickname ‘Currahee’—a reference to a north Georgia mountain at Camp Toccoa, the name meaning ‘We stand alone’ in the Cherokee language.<sup>35</sup> The 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne deployed to Iraq in 2005 as ‘Task Force Band of Brothers’.<sup>36</sup> Easy Company’s story became part of official US Army doctrine in the 2006 revision of the Army Leadership field manual.<sup>37</sup> The revision was based on a new ‘Leadership Requirements Model’ in which three ‘Core Leader Competencies’ were prescribed: ‘Leading’, ‘Developing’, and ‘Achieving’. A sub-competency of Leading is ‘Building and Sustaining Morale’, a critically ‘intangible

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<sup>34</sup> *Stripes.com*. Search May 14, 2015. The paper is a daily publication distributed to service members based or deployed outside of the continental US. It published 133 unique articles from 2003-2014 in which ‘band of brothers’ appears, on average nearly one article per month. The range of uses is comparable to those in civilian newspapers—the book, miniseries, their characters, sports teams, politicians, etc.—though obviously skewed toward military references. In contrast, ‘band of sisters’ appeared in the paper only three times.

<sup>35</sup> Ambrose, *Band of Brothers*, 8.

<sup>36</sup> In the Army’s post-Iraq reduction of forces, the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade was deactivated and the 506<sup>th</sup> Regiment once again relegated to history

<sup>37</sup> HQDA, *FM 6-22 (2006)*. The following quotes come from paragraphs 7-40 through 7-45. Sherman is, of course, the Civil War general notorious for the scorched earth tactics in his ‘march to the sea’. Murphy was the most decorated American soldier of WWII and starred as himself in the 1955 film *To Hell and Back*. Durant is the downed helicopter pilot captured by militants in the 1993 Battle of Mogadishu, Somalia, whose story was central to the book and movie *Black Hawk Down*.

element' of the 'human dimension' of war, and it is here that the Army relies on the example found in Easy Company's commander Richard Winters, alongside other historical exemplars of embodied morale building, including William Tecumseh Sherman, Audie Murphy, and Mike Durant. The Army draws on Winters' example of balancing "hard work and sacrifice in combat with appropriate recognition and rewards" to emphasize that morale is the result of relationships of mutual respect; that leaders must always be prepared to give to, but never take from, the led; and that a unit's high morale, like that of Easy Company, is based on comradeship's bonds of trust built in training and combat. If morale building is indeed a tangible skill then this characterization of Winters and Easy Company is the most coherent exemplar the manual provides, suggesting the significant influence of the 'band of brothers' articulation on thought inside the Army. Without Winters, the Army's conception of morale as something that can be produced inside an institutional framework falls apart. Sherman's quote simply calls attention to a general's necessity to consider morale as a tool to gain the effectiveness of his soldiers. Durant serves to illustrate the claim that "exceptional morale is always present in our Army's Soldiers." And the quote from Audie Murphy might actually be at odds with the idea that the moral bonds present in a military unit bear any relation to the broader institution:

You have a comradeship... a rapport that you'll never have again, not in our society, anyway. I suppose it comes from having nothing to gain except the end of the war. There's no competitiveness, no money values. You trust the man on your left and on your right with your life, while, as a civilian, you might not trust either one of them with ten cents.

Comradeship has, of course, long been recognized as the key element of a soldier's combat motivation. It is remarkable, then, that the Army's study of combat motivation led by Leonard Wong during the 2003 invasion of Iraq found that, unlike earlier wars, American soldiers were equally motivated by political ideals, specifically the 'liberation' of the Iraqi people.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, the Army's evaluation of combat motivation during the Iraq invasion settled on a narrative of social cohesion of highly professionalized primary group members. Comparing victorious US troops to utterly demoralized Iraqi prisoners of war, the study ascribes American effectiveness, not to overwhelming technological advantage, but to two objects of the soldier's trust. First, the faith in primary relations among soldiers that is created in training and shared hardship allows soldiers to act "free of the distracting concerns of personal safety."<sup>39</sup> Equally important is the professional trust that soldiers expressed for the Army institution and the moral direction it provides.<sup>40</sup> The study attributed the change to three characteristics separating American soldiers in 2003 from their predecessors: they were more highly educated, with the average soldier having some education beyond high school; the US had moved away from conscription following the Vietnam War to an 'all-volunteer' military; and soldiers

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<sup>38</sup> Wong et al., "Why They Fight." Ultimately, Wong's report amounts to a superficial restatement of the canonical texts, but lacks the vital nuances that give the literature continued significance. The report's failure comes from its limited scope, relying solely on interviews conducted between March 20 and May 1, 2003 (the date on which President Bush declared 'Mission Accomplished'). Despite this, Wong remained committed to his findings well after Iraq collapsed into civil war (see: Wong, "Combat Motivation in Today's Soldiers."

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 23.

were more comfortable expressing moral and ethical values, reflecting the institutional socialization of new soldiers based on, for example, the “Seven Army Values” and “Soldier’s Creed” as official Army doctrine. From the Army’s report it must be concluded that military indoctrination refines, or selects against, the recruit’s pre-existing values and produces a new articulation of institutionally defined moral belief and practice. If the American soldier’s motivations during the invasion of Iraq were drawn from American just war ideologies of democratic liberation and nation building, it is because, in the military’s eyes, these traditional values of American culture matched both military institutional values (which could finally be recovered after a decade of cultural conflict in the Presidency of Bill Clinton) and the values claimed in the Bush administration’s public justifications for war.

### **Configuring Comradeship in the War on Terrorism**

The US military’s everyday institutional practices operate, however imperfectly, within the collective values of its traditional culture. Collectivism is the foundation of the American military ethic in its institutionalized discipline, valorization of comradeship among soldiers in their units, and the persistence of the ‘citizen-soldier’ ideal of patriotic sacrifice. But while American society has often drawn on narratives of republican civic virtue during moments of political crisis, American cultural values have been undeniably individualist for much of the nation’s history. This was certainly the case in the years before 9/11 as neoliberal high-individualism came to permeate American culture. According to Wendy Brown, neoliberalism’s atomization of the individual occurs as social bonds are “broken *from within* as the individual is

excised from the corporate community and broken *from without*,” and hegemonic forces tear down “the protection from the nation afforded the community by spatial separation and discursive autonomy.”<sup>41</sup> That is, economic, political, and cultural conditions of neoliberal capitalism tend to cut off the individual from social life by destroying localized community practices through cultural homogenization, then reincorporating the individual within a state, rather than community, discourse.

In the 1990s the Army was well aware of the anomic results of neoliberal atomization. A 1999 Army Research Institute survey of recruits in basic training found that economic motives for enlistment far outweighed altruistic motives.<sup>42</sup> For example, only forty-four percent indicated ‘patriotic service’ and less than one-quarter claimed ‘military tradition’ as highly important reasons for enlistment, while seventy-one percent were drawn to the Army’s job security and two-thirds for retirement benefits.<sup>43</sup> Asked the importance of the Army Values in their own lives, eighty-eight percent of recruits indicated ‘respect’ (in the survey defined as *self-respect*) as highly important, while only fifty-nine percent noted ‘selfless service’. Interestingly, when separately asked about the value of social responsibility, roughly sixty percent of the cohort agreed that they felt personally responsible ‘for the environment’ and ‘for making the world better’; but the value of social commitments

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<sup>41</sup> Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 92–93. Emphasis in original.

<sup>42</sup> Ramsberger et al., “An Assessment of the Values of New Recruits.”

<sup>43</sup> Given that only twenty to twenty-five percent of all Army recruits in the post-WWII era have opted to complete a first enlistment and continue their active service, the number suggests two things: first, that the military has been highly successful in advertising the value of its retirement packages; second, that this generation of recruits was aware of the growing precarity of the neoliberal economy.



was less strong: more than half felt that people dissatisfied with their work should leave their jobs for something more fulfilling, and nearly one-third expressed general reluctance to commit to relationships. Studies of American society more broadly found that attitudes among the country's population of potential military applicants were often at odds with the Army's collectivist culture. One national survey in 1998 found that youth career goals were overwhelmingly focused on individual fulfillment and economic advancement, while altruistic goals were important only to a minority of respondents.<sup>44</sup> Self-employment was the most desired career goal, with seventy-eight percent calling it desirable or acceptable, though jobs in large and small businesses were comparably ranked (seventy-four and seventy-two percent, respectively); government work was considerably less desirable at fifty-three percent, and schools, police departments, social work, and the military were progressively less attractive (forty-five, forty-one, twenty-nine, and twenty-eight percent, respectively).<sup>45</sup> Importantly, military surveys found that the political attitudes of respondents were more strongly directed toward particular, self-selected issues related to less tangible political ideals of global scope, rather than national or local issues.<sup>46</sup> The force sent to Iraq in 2003 would have been composed primarily of economically motivated recruits with relatively weak social connections to their communities or the

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<sup>44</sup> From 'Monitoring the Future', an ongoing, long-term study of youth values, conducted by the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center. Cited in Committee on the Youth Population and Military Recruitment, *Attitudes, Aptitudes, and Aspirations of American Youth*, 162.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

nation; those whose service was more politically motivated would have been moved to act by abstract ideals transcending loyalty to the state that could only be judged by the individual.

Brown argues that even the conduct of the war against Iraq followed a pattern of neoliberal atomization: ‘decorporatization’ of Iraqi institutions, from the Ba’athist regime to the army to tribal representation in politics; and replacement of those bodies with market alternatives that would substitute ethnic and religious identity for the more rational identity of neoliberal individualism. Just as significantly, the American soldiers tasked with carrying out that project had been indoctrinated to an atomized ideal of service. If, as Brown argues, neoliberalism creates in its subjects the “anxiety about the contiguity of politics and violence, an anxiety that identity conflict must either be suppressed or be fought to the death,”<sup>47</sup> then the soldier enters military service already anxious about their political identity. This must then be greatly exacerbated by one’s personal understanding of the war to be fought. Consider in Iraq, those who began the war defining their American identity around democratic ideals, fighting *for* the liberation of the Iraqi people and the establishment of democratic institutions to stand as an exemplar for the other nations of the Middle East, would certainly have held a set of expectations about the conflict and the identity of the enemy than those soldiers who understood their American identity in a fight *against* a particular people or an ideology.

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<sup>47</sup> Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 90.

But unifying these soldiers there is a clear and important logic in the politicization of comradeship in neoliberal culture found in the ‘band of brothers’ articulation. Communications studies scholar Stephen Klien argues that the contemporary relationship of the US and its soldiers is shaped in large part by the visual nature of American culture. If, for example, there was no evidence of chemical or biological weapons in Iraq, there were enough images of Saddam Hussein’s tyrannical rule to establish a rhetorically indisputable threat to the US that demanded unquestioning popular support for ‘the troops’.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, the realism of combat in movies of the era, coupled with the clear avoidance of ideological motivation in their narratives, creates a sense of empathy with ‘the troops’ that serves to universalize the hardship of military service. The potentially horrific environment any soldier might face makes all soldiers equally worthy of support, but makes any tangible act of support by the individual citizen for the individual soldier all but impossible. It also eliminates the military institution—as embodiment of ‘the troops’—as a legitimate object of political criticism. Military historians Frank Wetta and Martin Novelli call this realistic but ideologically sterile dynamic of the post-Vietnam war film ‘New Patriotism’, a reaction against the sentimental, overtly patriotic tradition of Hollywood warfare, best exemplified by John Wayne’s eighteen war movies. For militarists and anti-militarists alike, that sentimentality had been worse for the American public’s understanding of war than “no knowledge at all.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Klien, “Public Character and the Simulacrum.”

<sup>49</sup> Wetta and Novelli, “Now a Major Motion Picture,” 38–39.

Still, it must be asked whether the realistic war movie, though its combat scenes are less obviously false, is any closer to the ‘truth’ of combat experience than films of the John Wayne era. Ambrose and Spielberg are observant enough to recognize the disconnect between the ideological claims about America’s experience in WWII and the moral ambiguity so prevalent in the oral histories of the war’s veterans, and so their retelling of the war unapologetically privileges the veteran’s perspective. However, the problem with removing overt ideology from war narratives, or with making realistic movies that are anti-war but pro-soldier, is that any meaning to be found in war could never transcend its actual experience.

The means by which stories shape cultural and institutional discourses is as important as their content. Stories themselves have power. Historian William Manchester wrote of the war stories he and his fellow Marines carried with them in the Second World War and how they shaped expectations of action in combat:

The minority who avoided Hollywood paradigms were, like me, people who had watched fewer B movies than we had read books. That does not mean that we were better soldiers or citizens. We certainly weren’t braver. I do think that our optics were clearer, however – that what we saw was closer to the truth because we weren’t looking through MGM or RKO prisms.<sup>50</sup>

Two generations later, former US Marine Anthony Swofford wrote of his experience awaiting combat in the Gulf War, “As a young man raised on the films of the Vietnam War, I want ammunition and alcohol and dope, I want to screw some whores

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<sup>50</sup> Kindsvatter, *American Soldiers*, 288–89. Quoting William Manchester, *Goodbye, Darkness: a Memoir of the Pacific War* (Boston: Little Brown, 1980), 67-68.

and kill some Iraqi motherfuckers.”<sup>51</sup> If there are significant misconceptions among the pool of military recruits about the actual roles of American soldiers the military bears a share of the responsibility. The military actively supports Hollywood filmmaking, yet does so with little consideration of the consistency of its message, or the contradictions in the message. If military service is a consumer product then creation of desire for that product might be the only goal of those efforts. If, on the other hand, military service is a military necessity, the goal ought to be to accurately reflect the values necessary for that. Lynne Hanley argues that these inconsistencies and contradictions perpetuate the myth of war’s “independent agency, [which] lifts the burden of guilt from the men who declare and organize war.”<sup>52</sup> Hanley also believes it lifts that burden from the soldiers actually engaged in war, but direct experience of war will certainly act to undermine the myth’s authority. Trauma is proof of that.

In an era of neoliberal atomization, the unavoidably ‘pro-soldier’ moral of the realistic war film gives the ‘band of brothers’ articulation an ideological force that is no less powerful than republicanism or nationalism. However, the only substantive connection it builds for the individual is to the experience of war itself. In the days before the Iraq invasion, my Army ‘brothers’ and I could not help but uncritically and wholeheartedly embrace this ideology. It was, after all, an articulation of our very being as ‘American soldiers’. We watched *Band of Brothers* and *Saving Private*

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<sup>51</sup> Swofford, *Jarhead*, 7.

<sup>52</sup> Hanley, *Writing War*, 29.

*Ryan*, and also *Platoon* and *Full Metal Jacket* and *Black Hawk Down* and who knows what else, and in every horrific scene we shouted “Hooah!”<sup>53</sup> in recognition of heroes of past wars and for the hope we might proudly imagine ourselves beside them one day soon. The heroes of these films were transformed into generic representatives of all those who came before us, even if the only way we truly knew them was in the representation given us by Hollywood. What we saw in these films was the achievement of heroic virtue by other ‘American soldiers’ drawn together by horrific circumstance and their devotion to each other as ‘bands of brothers’ within a wider brotherhood-in-arms of all those ‘American soldiers’ who already had, or soon would, willingly pursue that heroic virtue.

In our idealism, we could never have considered the circularity of that logic, nor understood that the actual soldiers of Easy Company developed such close and lasting relationships out of genuine necessity, not heroic virtue. For literary historian Paul Fussell, himself a veteran of WWII, such idealization of comradeship arises to compensate for the “unmediated actuality” of war’s “prevailing atmosphere of uncertainty for all and mortality for some.”<sup>54</sup> The significance of military comradeship is the narrative shift it offers: to know ‘some of us will die’ may be horrifying, but is still preferable to knowing ‘I will die’. As comradeship plays out in experience, as some do die and some do not, the narrative of those relationships takes

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<sup>53</sup> ‘Hooah’ is Army slang that can take on any number of meanings depending on context. It can convey excitement, agreement, cynicism, indifference, etc. Here it means something like, “Fuck yeah!”

<sup>54</sup> Fussell, *Wartime*, 35.

on more and more significance. It is why Richard Winters could only ever deny his own heroism while insisting on the heroism of the company with whom he served. That the relationships of Winters and his comrades lasted sixty years seems, to Ambrose and Spielberg, a testament to the horrific conditions under which they formed.

I realize now, after two tours of Iraq and many years reflection on that experience, that it might be more a testament to those intervening sixty years, returning to a country that willfully insisted that the war they fought would have a moral—a problem their chroniclers and admirers unwittingly perpetuate. For my generation of veterans, it seemed that we would achieve the virtue of brotherhood and find fulfillment as individuals and as Americans simply by experiencing war first hand as ‘American soldiers’. I am confident that few of us had read Tim O’Brien’s warning in *The Things They Carried* (1990): “A true war story is never moral. It does not instruct, it does not encourage virtue, nor suggest models of proper human behavior.”<sup>55</sup> I certainly had not. And so I am not sure any of us could have understood what our uncritical admiration of the heroes of these films would come to mean for us individually or collectively.

More than a decade of wartime experience has undone the ‘band of brothers’. In recent war films, we are confronted instead by the pure individuality of the soldier. In most cases, films offer one of two options: the individual super-heroism of the Special Forces operator, such as in *Lone Survivor* (2013) and *American Sniper*

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<sup>55</sup> O’Brien, *The Things They Carried*, 65.

(2015); or the alienated victim of posttraumatic stress disorder in *The Hurt Locker* (2008), *Stop-Loss* (2008), or *Brothers* (2009). In an interview for the 2015 movie *Good Kill*, a story of trauma among US drone warfare pilots that serves on many levels as representative of this new war narrative, actor Ethan Hawke expressed the problematic relationship between American culture and the American soldier:

“Something happened after 9/11. There used to be movies all the time that were so critical. Oliver Stone made big, swashbuckling films, conspiracy and anti-government films. Now, everybody’s like, you gotta be ‘pro-soldier.’” The film’s writer Andrew Niccol added, “This isn’t anti-soldier—it’s pro-humanity.”<sup>56</sup>

However inadequately achieved in *Good Kill*, it was a narrative not available to the generation of veterans sent to fight in Iraq: we went to war to find a connection to humanity that was too often denied us in the society we left behind. What we could not have known was that humanity has a hard time expressing itself in war outside of the bounds of the small unit, and so faith in our ‘brotherhood’ could never offer any sense of fulfillment beyond our shared experience. Recognizing that would have demanded a willingness to critique not just war but also the warfighter—our heroes, our comrades, ourselves. But being ‘pro-humanity’ includes accounting for the flaws and failures of the soldier, individually and collectively, and identifying the institutional and cultural forces in which these failures originate. By valorizing Easy Company we forgot the specific historical conditions that made their brotherhood possible, and failed to realize that the ideal could not simply be imposed on other

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<sup>56</sup> Pasternack, “On Pixels and Moral Injury.”



soldiers in another war. What *Band of Brothers* did for my generation of veterans was make us aware of the emptiness of modern life, and so our pursuit of brotherhood-in-arms was “nothing less than spiritual in its pure intensity.”<sup>57</sup> For too many of us, life after wartime found us back in the same empty, solitary places we came from.

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<sup>57</sup> McDowell, “A Rare Moment for All of Us,” 351.

## Postscript

People aren't supposed to look back. I'm certainly not going to do it anymore.  
I've finished my war book now. The next one I write is going to be fun.  
This one is a failure, and had to be, since it was written by a pillar of salt.

Kurt Vonnegut  
*Slaughterhouse Five*

Having written the previous nine chapters and still feeling the work's inherent inadequacy, I decided that including a few more observations about wartime experience and trauma from war novels, excerpted as chapter epigraphs, might be a good way of more clearly expressing the points I hope I have made. Luckily, I began my search for illuminating quotes with Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* and gave up on the idea. In a novel full of witty gems, including the above quote, one passage, just forty-four words, captures the whole of what I have attempted to communicate in the previous 140,000-plus painfully scripted words:

The book was *Maniacs in the Fourth Dimension* by Kilgore Trout. It was about people whose mental diseases couldn't be treated because the causes were all in the fourth dimension, and three-dimensional Earthling doctors couldn't see those causes at all, or even imagine them.

Those lines now serve as the dissertation's epigraph. I hope that at this point the passage's meaning in relation to this project is entirely self-evident. I mention it here as a sort of apology for the inadequacies of my own attempt to make sense of trauma

and war and the ways we think about both. Proposing a theory of trauma, pointing to works of fiction as evidence to support it, and then cataloging the ideological inconsistencies of American militarism does not, of course, amount to an objective empirical finding that will force psychiatrists to rewrite their diagnostic manuals. It is only a partial and inadequate mapping of the multi-dimensional contexts of trauma among American veterans of the war in Iraq. Hopefully, however, it is at least recognizable as: first, a challenge to psychology's dominant explanations of trauma; also, as a statement against the paradigm's inadequate treatment of the soldier's wartime experience due to its deference to (and barriers it imposes on questioning) traditional discourses of military service; and as an indictment of the American military institution, specifically the US Army, for perpetuating those discourses under the guise of military necessity.

My argument has been that, to the extent it is the result of failed moral expectation, trauma requires an institutional theory to explain it phenomenologically. I have proposed that the condition we recognize as PTSD, or at least some segment of cases that fall within that diagnosis, is the behavioral manifestation of an individual's anomic break with embodied belief in the moral authority of institutions. That belief represents a relationship defined by a pattern of hysteresis, and this requires accounting for the means by which individuals are indoctrinated to accept the legitimacy of institutional authority and define themselves as moral actors. There could be any number of ways to study these relationships, and I chose to attempt this discursively because I am convinced of the method's efficacy generally and its

particular suitability to the problematic of trauma as a crisis of belief. Rather than survey some population of veterans, it was more appropriate for the purpose of theory building to survey the work of past veterans who have critically evaluated their own experiences of war and the military institution. These works suggest that, contrary to psychology's paradigm, the experience of combat is not in itself traumatic. Fear and terror in combat may produce the physiological response of affective distress, but the long-term disabling condition we recognize as trauma, by which our society is so troubled to see in our war veterans, is the result of some identifiable experience of moral failure in an institution. That is, the failure of a soldier's moral expectations is the fault of the military institutions that impose those expectations. If trauma is institutional, it suggests the source of those expectations ought to be the analytical starting point for mitigating traumatic effects and preventing a mental health crisis for a future generation of veterans.

The catalog of American militarism's logical inconsistencies that I have compiled is not offered as 'proof' that these inconsistencies are the cause of trauma. The point of this project was not the testing of a hypothesis—I cannot say to any degree of scientific certainty that, for instance, the Warrior Ethos causes trauma. However, if trauma is institutional and is the result of failed moral expectations, the sheer breadth of logical inconsistencies in the dominant discourses that establish the soldier's moral expectations looks awfully suspicious. If trauma is an institutional phenomenon, the role ideologies might play in its causes, effects, and treatment demands further study, which is impossible without the sort of theory building I have

attempted. Impossible not because psychological theories are correct or because institutional theories have not already been proposed, but because the capacity to study trauma as an institutional phenomenon is a political project.

If trauma is the result of failed moral expectations, even if it is limited to only some subsection of trauma cases, then trauma researchers must have a well-developed model of morality to study it. Unless morality is purely determined by human biology (or by god), then that model must account for institutional effects of human behavior. This makes trauma an appropriate object of study for scholars across the social sciences and humanities. As critical as I have been of psychology throughout this dissertation, the constant evolution of trauma theory in response to changing cultural and political circumstances, including the very existence of moral injury as the model of trauma from which I started, suggests that breaking down disciplinary boundaries can shift a scientific consensus. It seems certain that advances in neuroscience in the coming decades will revolutionize our understanding of human behavior and mental illness, and this makes rigorous academic challenges to old models vitally important.

I am less optimistic about challenging the hegemony of military ideologies. To begin to explain the social forces that motivate individual moral action in war, we must first overcome the problems associated with traditional military epistemology by embracing the perspective of the common soldier—a perspective that is erased in discourses of military discipline and patriotic service, and has been misunderstood in idealized notions of comradeship. The problem exists in large part because, for scholars of war, the disciplinary boundaries that have evolved over the centuries are

inseparable from the political boundaries that military institutions have constructed to maintain their power and autonomy. War may be a popular topic across modern academia; the soldier is not; because military institutions are not; because an academic challenge to military knowledge is a political act in the most narrow sense.

This is why I have devoted so much time to cataloging the logical inconsistencies of American military ideology, and have tried to frame my critique in terms of military necessity and efficacy. But this is where I need to say a few things about what I missed or glossed over, and spell out the consequences of linking trauma and militarism (including the US Army's institutional ideology—what I have called moral doctrine). There are a few points that I would want to make if I could put this all in front of military leadership. The first has to do with the Army's performance of its legitimate role in national security. The values of an effective moral doctrine ought to be directly reflected in the strategic and tactical decisions of soldiers at all levels. For such a doctrine to serve any military purpose, the Army's performance on or off the battlefield should not be deemed morally or militarily effective unless its actions are conducted within the limits of its own institutional values (which, in my analysis has not been the case). The second point relates to the ways individual soldiers might rely on their moral indoctrination in their various roles as soldiers. An effective doctrinal ethos should, at a minimum, offer soldiers an appropriate moral justification of the actions the Army demands of them. So, an ordinary soldier trained in accordance with doctrine, ought to be able, within the moral framework provided by that doctrine, to justify both their own actions and the actions of others, in accordance

with the mission assigned them, as morally appropriate. And, if there is a military consequence when actions cannot be doctrinally justified by the individual soldier, then the first element of military efficacy (the judgment of the Army's performance) may also fail.

I am not claiming that the whole body of moral doctrine is just militaristic fluff. But the cultural and political deference given to military institutions has made it all but impossible to evaluate their claims that their values are based in military necessity. At the same time, given that American political culture assumes, at least to some degree, a generally held belief in liberal democratic values, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the pursuit of military necessities should reflect those values. A moral doctrine based in societal imperatives, then, is not necessarily antithetical to military efficacy. For instance, failure to sustain the popular legitimacy of a conflict could certainly result in military failure. It should not, however, be taken on faith that the Army's acceptance or rejection of a societal imperative serves an actual military purpose.

Life in the modern US Army, though perhaps more inclusive, is equally as exacting as earlier eras. Primary group relationships and coercive institutional authority may minimize deviance from the norms of military culture, but it is highly questionable whether or not deviance undermines military efficacy. It also cannot be doubted that the enforcement of these norms remains a selection mechanism for full institutional membership, which serves to preserve the status of institutional elites. The result is a strongly embodied morality of acceptable conduct that isolates soldiers

whose actions do not fit neatly into its narrow prescriptions. Failure against such absolute standards becomes inevitable, and the result is not merely failure to perform but failure of one's moral obligation. The possibility of moral failure creates the resignation among many of their inability to properly fulfill their role as soldiers. But these institutionally prescribed roles are largely a relic of military traditions that persist only for the institution's own self-perpetuation. Doctrinal failure thus represents the inability of the Army to match military necessity to political and cultural realities.

But this leads back to the underlying epistemological issue of how our knowledge of war influences individual moral action, including the soldier's combat motivation. Soldiers are not merely products of military institutions; they are products of their societies and all of the individual relationships and political acts entailed in that. But misunderstanding (and misrepresenting) the morality of individual motivations for service and imposing an institutionally defined and enforced identity (as a soldier, in an army, of a state), an identity that might be out of step with an understood social and cultural reality, does have real-world effects on the Army's mission. Tactically, recognition of moral leadership is the basis for the soldier's immediate combat motivation: to trust their leaders they must trust the institution, and vice versa. But the soldier's individual morality is equally important strategically. Because, for a modern liberal democratic society that privileges individuality and freedom of conscience, the potential for and effects of a soldier's traumatic experiences are going to be compounded. With so much possible variation in



soldiers' pre-existing moral beliefs, democracies have to accept that the psychiatric disabilities that may result from their military's (and therefore the state's) failed moral authority will be far more prevalent in the wars they wage. If the moral authority of the democratic state's mission is not maintained to a more universally recognized moral standard, then individual combat motivation is more likely to fail: leading to both military failure (like the unwinnable wars the US keeps finding itself in) and persistent mental health crises for its soldiers and veterans. The alternative is to turn away from liberal ideals and to enforce a much narrower body of moral authority upon all members of society.

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