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# Essays in Philosophy: Moral Psychology and War

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# Essays in Philosophy

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## Moral Psychology and War: Introduction

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The conversation between moral psychology and war is both old and new. It's old in the sense that scholars, psychiatrists, and soldiers have long been acquainted with the moral psychological dimensions of war and combat. Moral injury, for example, has been a familiar topic in the literature for at least twenty years. Yet the conversation is also new in the sense that the scholarly terrain isn't well worn. There are still many underexplored or unexplored contours, which we can see clearly in the work of scholars like Nancy Sherman. It is my hope that this volume will make some contribution to this ongoing conversation.

The call for submissions for this volume was intentionally broad in the hopes that the papers would show the range of possibilities within the topic. For example, in my own work, I examine questions about child soldiers' moral emotions and their feelings of responsibility. These questions fall under the category of moral injury considered broadly. Even though moral injury is now a widely recognized phenomenon, less work has been done on the role of moral emotions in moral injury. Often those emotions are seen as irrational or pathological, but I argue that they need not be. This is just one example of the many different directions moral psychology and war can take. As scholars, we would do well to keep in mind how many avenues there are to examine this topic. Although scholars and practitioners often focus on the moral psychology of combatants (not without good reason), we ought not limit our discussions only to those who fight. Additionally, rich questions about moral psychology can be found in contexts other than moral injury.

The intersection of moral psychology and war also has an important practical dimension. There are valuable theoretical gains to be made, but the questions that arise here also arise in the course of real human lives. Soldiers and their loved ones, commanders, politicians, and the public all have roles to play and are affected by war. The relationships between all the parties are accompanied by obligations, demands, and deliberations that have to be traded and negotiated. What, for example, do civilians owe to combatants coming home from war? How should politicians address citizens' fears and sorrows when their nation is engaged in war? Not only can philosophy help answer the theoretical aspects of these questions, philosophy also has the potential to help the people who currently face these questions think through them in fruitful ways.

Moral injury is often the first thing that comes to mind when we think of moral psychology and war. Two papers in this volume deal explicitly with moral injury and both of them offer new approaches. The first, "Haunted by a Different Ghost: Re-Thinking Moral Injury," uses the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty to sketch an account of moral injury as the loss of a moral world. Rather than thinking of moral injury primarily

about what combatants have done or failed to do within war, this paper suggests that moral injury can be thought of losing the sense that the world has moral meaning. Examination of soldiers' testimony reveals that they sometimes voice concerns that the world isn't really just after all. This possibility may lead us to expand our definition of moral injury.

"Despairing about War: The Democratic Limits of Pessimism" explores the relationship between democratic commitments and intractable wars. Nations seem to be increasingly faced with the possibility of continuing involvement in violent conflict, and yet should still be committed to trying to establish peace. Given these contrary forces, we can reasonably see that citizens could become pessimistic about peace and about the cessation of conflict. As such, this paper argues that a properly democratic nation has the obligation to foster hope in its citizens. In examining questions about the importance of attitudes of citizens whose nations are involved in war, it demonstrates the wide range of possibilities for the topic of moral psychology and war.

It's commonplace to think that soldiers ought to display courage in battle, but simultaneously worrisome that this sort of courage is defined solely by a willingness to fight and kill. Are there other possibilities for soldiers to display courage? "Oppositional Courage" sketches an account of courage as resisting or standing up to strong social norms. This type of courage is exemplified in Yossarian from Heller's *Catch-22* and Faulkner's unnamed character in *A Fable*. On a standard view of soldier's courage, both Yossarian and the unnamed soldier are cowards: they refuse to fight. Yet this paper shows how they take great risks in refusing to fight and in bucking the norms of soldiering, which demand that they fight. Oppositional courage thus expands the possibilities for soldiers to display courage in the context of war.

Continuing the theme for expanding the moral possibilities for soldiers, "Military Professionalism: On the Need for Solider Artists" focuses on military moral education. Moral education in the military has recently gone in the direction of professionalization in order to address disillusion and moral conflicts. Soldiers sometimes experience a disconnect between their conceptions of themselves as soldiers and the military culture they find themselves in. Professionalization focuses on inculcating good habits and acting well in order to address these conflicts. This paper argues, however, that soldiers are not being allowed to *reflect* ethically. On this view, the disconnect between the soldier's calling and military culture is better explained by "not feeling at home in the world." As such, military moral education should focus on expanding soldiers' moral imaginations rather than simply on "being professional."

The second paper on moral injury examines the question from the perspective of *jus ad bellum* rather than *jus in bello*. Typically moral injury is thought to arise from what soldiers experience in combat. “Moral Injury and Jus Ad Bellum” argues that soldiers can also experience moral injury if they fight in wars that aren’t fought on just grounds. As the paper shows, fighting in a just war can often help soldiers avoid moral injury. For example, there are far fewer instances of moral injury in WWII veterans than in Vietnam veterans. This paper argues that in part this phenomenon is due to the widespread perception of Vietnam as an unjust war. Soldiers who fight in unjust wars don’t have *jus ad bellum* justifications to fall back on in order to help alleviate their feelings of guilt or shame. Thus thinking of moral injury as just involving *jus in bello* concerns fails to account for the connection between a soldier’s perception of her own actions and the justifications for the war she fights.

Moral emotions comprise one of the unexplored contours of the scholarly map of moral psychology and war, which is what makes “Objective and Subjective Blame After War” a welcome edition to this volume. Questions about how we hold soldiers responsible for their actions have long been a part of just war theory. Typically these sorts of questions are examined using external or objective standards similar to *mens rea* standards in law. We ask: could the soldier have done otherwise? Was she in control of her actions at the time? This paper offers an alternative by appealing to Strawsonian reactive attitudes. On this view, blameworthiness is intimately tied to feelings of guilt, shame, resentment, and indignation rather than to *mens rea*. The Strawsonian model can better account for both the soldiers’ own experiences of their responsibility and for the complex relations between soldiers returning from combat and civilians.