Grim Virtue: Decisiveness as an Implication of the Just War Tradition

By Marc LiVecche

> *I do not slay man or beast needlessly, and not gladly even when it is*
> *needed. . . . War must be while we defend our lives against a*
> *destroyer who would devour all. But I do not love the bright sword*
> *for its sharpness, nor the arrow for its swiftness, nor the warrior*
> *for his glory. I love only that which they defend.*[1]

So proclaims J.R.R. Tolkien's Faramir, second son of Denethor, brother of Boromir, captain of the rangers of Ithilien, and later captain of the white tower when his brother falls. Faramir makes this assertion in a moment of great peril, in the midst of conflict, when he is given an opportunity to do a terrible thing in order to bring about a great good. He does not do it, and his proclamation, above, as to *why* he does not provides a tidy summary of the core of the just war framework, which could be rendered thus: Wars may be justly fought only in the last resort and for the aim of peace, when a sovereign authority—over whom there is no one greater charged with the care of the political community—determines that nothing else will properly

retribute a sufficiently grave evil, take back what has been wrongly taken, or protect the innocent. In such cases, and only such, force may be rightly deployed to restore justice, order, and peace.

While it took its more recognizable form only in the Middle Ages, what we know as the just war tradition evolved over a long expanse of religious and secular thinking about the moral use of force within the context of responsible government of the political community. The tradition's early roots rest in the intellectual loam of classical Greco-Roman political thought and practice and deeper down into the more ancient earth of the Hebrew world and scriptures.[2]

The tradition's more specifically Christian expression is found, if somewhat latently, in St. Ambrose and his student St. Augustine of Hippo. While Augustine is widely regarded as the father of Christian just war thinking, the tradition's systematic character would not emerge until the 12th century and, particularly, with St. Thomas Aquinas in the latter part of the 13th century.

My whole point in this summary is to signal that the tradition of just war thinking has been a developing one; it did not land ready-made. Instead, while a basic framework was established early, the just war tradition represents the Christian faithful—and others—standing in ancient streams of thought, harnessing, refining, and renewing the moral patrimony of Christian intelligence in order to think more properly about war, peace, sovereign responsibility, the common good, love of neighbor, and much else.

Of course, the fact that the human practice of morally reflecting about war is an ancient practice only proves that war is ubiquitous in human history. Nevertheless, as this volume makes plain, World War I—the human cataclysm of 1914–1918—in some ways shoved humanity into a new era. Here we are, a hundred years on, still striving to compel 21st-century moral reflection to account for 20th-century history—beginning with the Great War and the advent of modern, mechanized industrial warfare.

I mean to reflect a bit more on the just war tradition itself and, through that, to tease out what I take to be two rather grim—though

virtuous—implications of just war moral reflection: namely, the necessity of decisiveness and callousness. I will suggest that it is because justly fought wars ought to be fought decisively that those who fight them will need a degree of callousness. Nigel Biggar's chapter in this volume discusses callousness, and, while I take some of my bearings from his work, I hope to survey some new terrain as well. In any case, I am willing to risk some repetition because I think Biggar's suggestion about the necessity of callousness is important enough to bear repeating. I trust what follows will prove this suspicion sound.

Everything I assert hinges on the fact that the just war tradition in which I stand has as its central commitment the Dominical command "to love" our neighbor. This is exemplified in Thomas Aquinas, whose discussion of war in his great masterwork the *Summa Theologica* takes place in the midst of his discussion of love.[3] St. Paul does something similar in his letter to the Romans.[4]

This love command is not an option; it is an absolute mandate. But because of the conditions of this world and the human soul, it is not always clear precisely how it is we are to love our neighbor. For instance, how do we love one neighbor when he is unjustly kicking in the face of another neighbor—who we are also called to love? If the first neighbor—let's call him the enemy-neighbor—refuses to stop his kicking and our victim-neighbor is unable defend himself, then we cannot love *both* neighbors in precisely the same way. But the question is never *whether* to love one or the other, but what does loving both, individually, look like *now*, in this moment? The just war tradition provides guidance in how we are to love, in conflict situations, both our enemy-neighbor as well as our victim-neighbor.

A brief review of the tradition's criteria is helpful. There are, of course, two sets of related guidelines. The first tells us about when to fight, and the second about how to fight.

The jus ad bellum criteria, answering the question about when it is justified to go to war, gives us three conditions that need to be met: proper authority, just cause, and right intention. These, not by accident, map onto

what Augustine asserted were the chief political goods of order, justice, and peace. These are political goods without which other goods—like health or life—are imperiled.

The necessity of *proper authority* underlines the necessity of order and, therefore, of ruling authorities to meet their divinely appointed responsibilities. On that dark day when the planes hit the Twin Towers in September 2001, the late political ethicist Jean Elshtain remarked to a friend, "Now we are reminded what governments are for." Elshtain was gesturing to the assertion that the most basic task of government is to provide for the care of the political community. The just war tradition helps orient a sovereign toward the proper exercise of his vocation.

The second condition that must be present before going to war is a *just cause*, which maps to the political necessity of justice. Classically, there are three just causes: the protection of the innocent, the taking back of what has been wrongly taken, and the punishing of evil. Each, in different ways, provide for both the vindication of victims as well as the restraint of the enemy and the incapacitation of his ability to continue his injustice.

The final condition of *right intention* aims at being sure that motives are pointed toward the proper end of war. This intention can be conveyed in both negative and positive terms. Negatively, we are reminded of what we ought always to avoid: hatred, desire to see the enemy suffer per se, cruelty, a lust for power over others, and the like.[5] Positively, right intention reminds us that the properly desired end of war ought always to be peace.

This peace is desired, in the first place, for the innocent victims under unjust assault. But, in the second place, this desire for peace extends to the enemy as well—toward the restoration of the enemy into the fellowship of peace. You cannot reconcile with someone who has not seen the error of his ways, repented, and given you solid reasons to trust that he will not seek to harm you again. There is much more to say about this, and some of it will be said in a moment. For now, suffice it to summarize the point this way: right intention, properly understood, casts warmaking as peacemaking. It stresses that just war is the initiation of the process of forgiveness.[6]

The second set of guidelines instructs us in how to prosecute a just war. There are two primary requirements. The first mandates *discrimination* separating combatants and noncombatants and allows for the intentional targeting of the former only. The second, *proportionality*, argues that the amount of force and means of expenditure employed should be appropriate to the intended task.

In sum, the primary aim of the just war framework is to show us when and how to love our neighbor through rescuing him: whether our victim-neighbor under assault, who needs deliverance from his assailant, or our enemy-neighbor, who needs to be rescued from the evils of his own wrongdoing. The rescue in both cases is aimed at the flourishing of our neighbor. In both cases the prize is peace. Now, with that in hand, let's get historical.

On October 30, 1918, General John J. Pershing, the commander in chief of the American Expeditionary Forces, gave a letter to the Allied Supreme War Council. The council was meeting to discuss the terms of armistice with Germany. Pershing's letter argued that the Allies should refuse to grant Germany any terms and that they should instead press their attack against the Kaiser without quarter. Oddly—and of continued historical dispute—this appeared to contradict Pershing's view from 5 days earlier.

On October 25, Pershing had attended a conference of Allied commanders to discuss the cessation of fighting. He apparently gave no indication that he was opposed to the idea. But he did have particular views as to the character of a truce. He asserted that "If Germany was really sincere in its desire to end the war, then neither the German government nor the German people should object to strict conditions." Because of the extraordinary carnage of the war, Pershing suggested "there should be no tendency toward leniency with Germany."[7]

The terms he listed included the German withdrawal from Allied territory and Alsace-Lorraine. This retreat was to be accomplished at a pace so rapid that the evacuation could only be done in chaos. Pershing wanted to force what would clearly be a full retreat; there could be no capacity for an ordered repositioning. The Allies would then occupy the departed territory,

as well as the Rhineland and bridgeheads across the Rhine. Pershing further demanded the freedom to continue to transport American troops overseas, the return of French and Belgian railroad equipment, and the surrender of all U-boats and U-boat bases to a neutral power until such time as the treaty could determine their fate.

All this points to Pershing's insistence that "the armistice should provide a guarantee against resumption of hostilities" and, if Germany *did* become aggressive again, then the terms would give the Allies an absolute advantage over a resurgent Germany.[8]

It is important to understand that Pershing genuinely believed the Allied position to be strong; therefore, the conditions they imposed should not be light. This carries a presumed corollary: the German position must be weak; therefore, they should not hesitate to accept even harsh conditions. So, all this was a kind of test. Should Germany refuse to accept harsh—though just—conditions, it could only mean that Germany did not, itself, believe its position to be weak and the Allied position strong.

President Woodrow Wilson worried that Pershing's terms were harsh to the point of being humiliating to Germany. He accepted only the commander's suggestion regarding the German evacuation of Allied lands—though without the speed requirement—and a qualified version of the U-boat ultimatum—under Wilson's terms, Germany should intern the U-boats in neutral waters, but it need not surrender them; and he did not threaten their future status. It was only after Wilson's general dismissal of Pershing's suggestions that the general sent his missive of October 30 arguing that no armistice whatsoever be given.

There are a great many details to all of this that would need to be evaluated before arriving at any firm conclusion as to precisely what Pershing was up to. I am going to leave resolute explanations to the historians. But I do want to assert one thing that does seem perfectly clear about Pershing's intentions. I will then evaluate that intention through the just war lens.

But first a basic assumption: both Wilson and Pershing wanted an armistice, and both agreed that this must involve a German surrender.

However, for Pershing this meant an *utter* surrender. His proposal was intended to confirm and safeguard the Allied victory. Wilson's proposal would not destroy the military potential of Germany. For instance, the Germans could still back and secure a defensive perimeter. That is to say, they could preserve the ability to fight again. Wilson appeared content to accept a Germany strong enough to negotiate terms. Pershing, it seems clear, wanted to impose peace terms on a Germany that knew—*knew*—that it had been beaten, and that therefore could not refuse terms.

Pershing's aspirations would go unrealized. At 11 a.m. on the 11th day of the 11th month, the Great War—after some 4 years, 3 months, 7 days, and 16 million lives—was over.

While Pershing was glad the shooting had stopped, he continued to insist the armistice was a mistake. "We shouldn't have done it," he stated. "If they had given us another ten days we would have rounded up the entire German army, captured it, humiliated it."[9] Some have attributed this attitude to Pershing's unrelenting competitive nature—or to ambitions for a Presidential run. I suspect that a more satisfying explanation is found elsewhere. Pershing also stated, revealingly, the "German troops today are marching back into Germany announcing that they have never been defeated. . . . What I dread is that Germany doesn't know that she was licked. . . . Had they given us another week, we'd have taught them."[10] Pershing believed that a premature "cessation of hostilities short of capitulation postpones, if it does not render impossible, the imposition of satisfactory peace terms."[11] Pershing was looking for a decisive victory that would lead to a durable peace.

How does the just war tradition evaluate such an ambition? On the surface, there seem to be at least two immediate problems. One, recall that the right intention—the aim of war—is peace. Is it not clear that if peace is being offered, then peace should be accepted? Job done, correct? The aim has been achieved; there is no more just cause. Two, if peace is being offered, does it not become disproportionate to continue fighting? If the objective has been gained, further force is simply gratuitous. I will take these in turn.

The question of peace: was it really nearly at hand? It pays to revisit Augustine, for whom war was a sometimes morally appropriate—if always tragic—necessity for the maintenance of a peace defined by the presence of justice and order. Ultimately, this is the only kind of peace durable enough to hold firm against the conditions of the world. For *Augustine* to say this, it seems to me, is really to be saying something. Remember, Augustine was not talking about the eschatological peace of *shalom*—that blessed state of comprehensive welfare in which everything is as it really ought to be. He was talking about the peace of the *Pax Romana*—compelled peace.

Nevertheless, however tawdry an imitation of the goodness of shalom, however much lacking in appropriate degrees of justice, the Pax Romana was significant. More than any available alternative, it appeared best capable of keeping neighbor from eating neighbor, and of preserving the interconnected web of culture, civilization, art, and tradition that, by Augustine's time, was well in jeopardy. The approximate good of compelled peace is more often than not a far sight better than anarchy.

Much better still, of course, is Augustine's notion of the *tranquilitas ordinis*, the tranquility—the peace—of order. Such peace, rooted in justice, is not externally compelled but rather internally coaxed by love of God and neighbor. This peace, Augustine tells us, is born of a commitment that "one be at peace, as far as lies in him, with all men." The basis of this commitment is the "observation of two rules: first, do no harm to anyone, and, secondly, to help everyone whenever possible."[12] Of course, the pursuit of this kind of peace, in our world, must be accompanied by a modesty of expectation. It will not result in the "perfect peace" promised to believers in the Kingdom of God, the one in which the lion lies down with the lamb. Instead, we must remember, as Elshtain liked to remind us, that if the lamb rests against the lion in *this* world, the lamb will need to frequently be replaced.

Pershing did not, of course, believe that by marching on Berlin love would suddenly spread across the battlefield, or that Germany would suddenly come awash with the inner tranquility of uncompelled order. But neither, more basically, was he confident that Wilson's terms, without the

imposition of order, would sufficiently deter Germany from attempting to eat its neighbors again.

In pressing for conditions in which the German people should know they had been licked, Pershing recognized that a beaten enemy is more easily compelled toward a durable peace. A decisive victory, having taken the fight out of the enemy, allows for a more realistic hope than a weak armistice that the matter has truly been settled and that the contest will not have to play out again.[13] The simple fact that someone is *not* shooting at you does not mean he does not *want* to or that he *will not* if given half a chance. Peace is more than the absence of open conflict.

As it turns out, history sides with Pershing. Despite its surrender, Germany did not appear exactly convinced that it had really lost the war. On Armistice Day, to cite one example, General Karl Von Einem, commander of the German 3rd Army, announced to his troops, "Firing has ceased. . . . Undefeated! You are terminating a war in enemy country."[14] He was not being entirely revisionist. When Germany surrendered, its armies were indeed on French and Belgian land—it still held enemy ground. On the Eastern Front, Germany had already won the war against Russia and concluded the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. In the west, it had come within close reach of winning the war entirely with the 1918 Spring Offensive. Importantly, German propaganda led—or, rather, *mis*led—the German people back home into believing they were winning the contest abroad. Pershing's fear that Germany's martial spirit had not been broken seemed legitimate.

The Treaty of Versailles would do little to change this. It left Germany neither pacified nor conciliated nor weakened beyond recovery. This inability to reconcile the apparent facts on the ground with the fact that it had surrendered left Germans grasping for an explanation. Alas, to terrible consequence, they would find one.

In the autumn of 1919, Sir Neill Malcolm, the head of the British Military Mission in Germany, was dining with German Chief of Staff General Erich Ludendorff. Malcolm asked Ludendorff why he thought Germany had lost the war. Ludendorff gave a laundry list of excuses but stressed that

the homefront had failed the army. For clarification Malcolm asked, "Do you mean, General, that you were stabbed in the back?" We are told that Ludendorff's eyes lit up and that he leapt on the idea like a dog on a bone. "Yes! That's it exactly. We were stabbed in the back!"[15]

Just how pernicious this myth of the stab in the back would prove—morally and practically—became clear a scant decade later. Adolf Hitler found the cultural and political conditions ripe for his vindication of the German people through his toxic cocktail of blood-and-soil nationalism, scapegoating, and insatiable expansionism. In its wake were set the conditions for a new and terrible conflagration. The lamps would soon go out all over Europe again. But everything else would be burning.

The Treaty of Versailles did not yield a durable peace. It did not prove the Allied victory decisive. Therefore, Pershing was correct to reject it, and he could do so without violating the principle of right intention. To the second point, by stressing that the right intention principle is not seeking simply *any* peace, but only one that sufficiently approximates a rightly ordered political community, both within and among nations, I suggest that Pershing's push to defeat Germany in the field even after it sued for peace is not a violation of proportionality.

It is a mistake to conceive of proportionality as having economy of effort or restraint as its basic imperative. It is true that combatants are required to employ only as much force as is necessary to achieve legitimate military objectives and as is proportionate to the importance of those objectives. The just warrior must be neither gratuitous nor excessive. So if the basic imperative of proportionality is not restraint, what is it? I propose it is the deployment of that amount of force sufficient for a decisive victory aimed at a durable peace.

In this rather exploratory section, I have tried to present a description of the just war tradition that has as its chief aim the acquisition of an enduring, enforceable peace characterized by the presence of justice and order. In looking at the example of General Pershing, I have suggested that one implication of the just war tradition is the necessity of decisiveness

in war. If it is just to fight a war, it is just to fight to win it. Indeed, in light of right intention and neighbor love, this is something more than a mere allowance—it is a mandate.

In this centennial year of the end of Great War, it is a tragedy that we can look 2 years ahead to what will be the 75th anniversary year of the war that followed the war that was supposed to have to ended all wars. We had World War II because the first one did not settle things. Toward the end of his life, it must have been unimaginably grievous to Pershing that all the battlefields his army had occupied in 1917–1918 were again in possession of the enemy against whom it had fought and driven off the land at such staggering costs.

Of course, it is one thing to say, in principle, that when just wars ought to be fought, they ought to be fought in order to win. It is another thing entirely and practically to fight them that way. When the guns of the Nation discharge—even in the cause of justice, order, and peace—someone has to pull the trigger. In light of the advent of new understandings of moral injury, we recognize—and must account for—the cost of trigger pulling.

If Pershing had had his way, the costs of a decisive victory would surely have been great. An Allied march on Germany would have added, probably enormously, to the already inflated butcher's bill. Some of those costs would have been paid in Allied lives. But if one is justly fighting a just war decisively and with the aim of a true and durable peace, then it seems plausible for a commander to pay this bill, to spend the lives of his men, to quote Biggar again, without ever having wasted them. Nevertheless, as Biggar mentions, so sending your own men to their potential death requires a certain thickening of one's skin. Such callousness allows the difficult deed to be done.

But it is not only the costs in lives of one's own warfighters that carry a heavy burden and epidermal challenges. I want to touch briefly on the cultivation of callousness as a kind of martial virtue in view of adding to the enemy dead. I realize this might not sound promising. I dug around for an alternative term to *callousness*—which I agree seems grim—but I ended up

settling on *dehumanization*. I doubt this is precisely the spoonful of sugar needed to help the medicine go down.

Let me draw on a paper by two Jewish anthropologists who analyzed Israeli military snipers serving during the Second, or Al-Aqsa, Intifada of 2000–2005. The paper examines, and ultimately challenges, the prevalent assumption among scholars that in order to go about the business of sniping other human beings, one has to somehow dehumanize—to objectify or demonize to the point of refusing the humanity of—their enemies.[16]

Snipers are an interesting case due to their somewhat unique status among warfighters. While occupying a battlespace unlike either combat aviators or the infantry, snipers nevertheless share characteristics of both. They closely combine an aviator's distance-from-the-enemy with a boots-on-the-ground empirical awareness of the effects of their shooting—often with an even amplified clarity because, despite the range, there is no question as to exactly who is responsible for the corpse in the road. Just as importantly, the sniper's lethal task is most often not carried out in a miasma of physical exertion, situational chaos, and danger to life and limb out of which lethal action is assisted by the passion of combat. Instead, snipers often operate from a state of composure, situational awareness, intense emotional concentration, and determination—all intimately focused on a personal target.[17]

As with their medical counterparts, military professionals such as snipers must use an array of technologies to navigate the moral difficulty of their tasks. By technology, I simply mean any kind of craftlike knowledge, or *technê*, such as methods or devices, used to overcome practical problems. Here I want to enlist—or commission—one such technê: the four "images of the enemy" found in J. Glenn Gray's classic *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle*.[18]

On the same day in May of 1941, Gray received two letters in the mail. The first was from Columbia University, informing him that he had been granted a doctorate in philosophy. The second letter ordered him to report for induction into the Army. Entering as a private, Gray became a special

agent with the Army's Counter-Intelligence Corps and served in both the North African and European theaters. He would be discharged as a second lieutenant in 1945, having received a battlefield commission during fighting in France. *The Warriors* is Gray's unromanticized meditation on what war does to human beings and why warfighters act the way they do.

In Gray's typology, these "images of the enemy" are "ideal types" describing the common attitudes warfighters have toward those against whom they contend. The first image is of the enemy as a "comrade in arms" against whom one may use all destructive force necessary while he is still in the fight, but to whom we give the respect owed to any skilled professional who is simply doing his job. The second is that of the enemy as "totally evil" against whom our crusade must be absolute. The third image conceives the enemy as "a creature who is not human at all." Against such loathsome enemy-beasts, the warrior is freed in his lethal force from even remorse, let alone restraint. In the last image, the enemy is considered to be just another poor chump like any other—an "essentially decent man who is either temporarily misguided by false doctrines or forced to make war against his better will and desire."[19]

Clearly, some of these images conform closer to just war prescriptions than others. The image of the enemy as unadulterated evil or a subhuman animal comports hardly at all. Rather, these images call to mind Gray's observation that "most soldiers are able to kill and be killed more easily in warfare if they possess an image of the enemy sufficiently evil to inspire hatred and repugnance."[20] On the other hand, the images of the enemy as a peer professional or a generally decent person make the task of having to kill profoundly difficult. Gray writes:

> *It is nearly impossible for a combat soldier to prepare himself psychologically for bloody combat with a will to victory while holding such an image of his foe. How can he become enthusiastic about Operation Killer or look forward with eagerness to carrying out a superior's orders to close with the enemy? The war itself is more*

*likely to seem the greatest folly and criminality ever perpetrated. If
he kills, he is troubled in conscience.*[21]

If this is correct, we have a problem, or rather a crisis. We see it man-
ifest in the large number of psychiatric battle casualties suffered during
combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. Indeed, throughout history, combat
veterans have staggered home suffering not necessarily from physical inju-
ries—at least as classically perceived—but wounded all the same. I have in
mind here what I mentioned briefly above: "moral injury"—a proposed,
if controversial, subset of post(combat) traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
Following clinical interaction with Vietnam veterans, Veterans Affairs
psychiatrist Jonathan Shay began to recognize that many veterans all too
often suffer symptoms atypical to their PTSD diagnosis. Instead of, or in
addition to, the paranoia, hyper-vigilance, and other responses typical to
life-threatening ordeals, many veterans anguish over what Shay termed
soul wounds—crippling degrees of guilt, shame, sorrow, or remorse.[22] This
pointed to something new.

Over time, and through the corroborating work of other clinicians,
moral injury has come to signify the harm that comes from committing, fail-
ing to prevent, or witnessing acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs. It
has become increasingly clear that while psychic wounds occur, appropriately
enough, after atrocities—intended or accidental—warfighters are suffering
moral injury from having performed the most basic business of war: killing
a lawful enemy under conditions cohering with the rules of armed conflict
and commensurate with the dictates of reason and natural law.

As I have argued elsewhere, I believe much of this is owed to a dimin-
ished confidence in the West—especially the Christian West—that love
can be compatible with the use of force.[23] This slide toward an increasingly
maudlin view of love has been taking place for some time. In his own day,
the Oxford don C.S. Lewis observed that we mistakenly conflate "love"
with "kindness," which he termed as "the desire to see others than the self
happy; not happy in this way or in that, but just happy."[24] Believing that

one cannot both restrain another's actions *and* will his happiness, love has come to mean the antithesis of judgment and coercive power. One upshot of this is that too many people, including too many in uniform, now believe that killing is, and always is, *malum in se*—morally wrong in and of itself, even when morally required. We see this, if we look for it, in one combat memoir after another. It presents itself in some form of the locution: "I know that killing is wrong, but in war it is necessary." Thus, the very business of warfighting is rendered inevitably morally injurious.

This is not simply a theological or conceptual crisis. Clinical experience has shown that having killed in battle is the chief predictor of moral injury among combat veterans. In turn, moral injury has been shown to be the chief predictor of suicide among veterans. In those cases falling short of self-slaughter, moral injury is the chief predictor of functional impairments, violent behavior, substance abuse, marital and other relational difficulties, unnecessary risk-taking, and depression.

This brings to mind combat veteran Karl Marlantes's lament in *What It Is Like to Go to War*, his memoir of his service in Vietnam. "The violence of combat assaults psyches, confuses ethics, and tests souls," he writes. "This is not only a result of the violence suffered, it is also a result of the violence inflicted."[25]

Illustrating this, Marlantes recounts a fierce assault he led up a steep hill laced with interconnecting fighting positions. From one of the positions above, a Vietnamese soldier kept dropping grenades blindly down on him and his team. Knowing it was only a matter of time before one of the explosions killed them both, Marlantes's buddy pinned down the soldier with a grenade toss of his own while Marlantes quickly maneuvered into a flanking position. In place, he settled the stock of his weapon into his shoulder and waited for the enemy soldier to pop up again. Marlantes writes:

> *Then he rose, grenade in hand. He was pulling the fuse. I could see blood running down his face from a head wound. He cocked his arm back to throw—and then he saw me looking at him across my*

*rifle barrel. He stopped. He looked right at me. That's where the
image of his eyes was burned into my brain forever, right over the
sights of my M-16. I remember hoping he wouldn't throw his gre-
nade. Maybe he'd throw it aside and raise his hands or something
and I wouldn't have to shoot him. But his lips snarled back and he
threw it right at me.*[26]

As the grenade left his hand, Marlantes fired. The soldier died, and the
grenade detonated harmlessly. When Marlantes asks himself what he felt
then, he answers, "pleasure and satisfaction—he was alive! That felt good.
Relief, no more grenades! Another obstacle was out of the way; that felt good
too." But, he admits, "it also felt just plain pleasurable to blast him. . . . There
is a primitive and savage joy in doing in your enemy."[27]

Now, however, he feels differently. Now he has the time to imagine the
North Vietnamese soldier as one of his own sons. He sees him trapped,
filled with fear as he battles against these huge Americans who charge
"relentlessly from out of the jungle, swarming up the hill, killing his friends
in their holes around him." In his sensitized state, Marlantes envisions the
boy's final moments: wounded, knowing that "death is coming in a crummy
little hole hundreds of miles from his family, and he has never made love to
a woman and he will never know the joys and trials of a family of his own."
Marlantes asks, "My feelings now? Oh, the sadness. The sadness. And, oh,
the grief of evil in the world to which I contributed."[28] He continues:

*What is different between then and now is quite simply empa-
thy. I can take the time, and I have the motivation, to actually
feel what I did to another human being who was in a great many
ways just like my own son. Back then I was operating under some
sort of psychological mechanism that allowed me to think of that
teenager as "the enemy." I killed him . . . and . . . moved on. I
doubt I could have killed him realizing he was like my own son.
I'd have fallen apart. This very likely would have led to my own
death or the deaths of those I was leading.*[29]

Gray's four images reflect a larger practice of creating various kinds of distance between an agent performing a difficult, sometimes harmful action and the object of that action. What I want to do is focus on dehumanization as a primary distancing technique, especially in combat, and to then suggest that dehumanization is both not as morally disturbing as it might immediately appear and, in any case, not as inevitable among warfighters as immediately assumed.[30]

Moral agents across a spectrum of circumstances find themselves cultivating distance between themselves as subjects and the object against whom they are acting. Sometimes this distancing is a psychological mechanism by which individuals overcome social conditioning that prevents them from becoming perpetrators of atrocities. Dehumanization, for example, "draws on other defense mechanisms, including unconscious denial, repression, depersonalization, isolation of affect and compartmentalization . . . [and] . . . allows the perpetrator to go beyond hatred and anger, and commit atrocious acts as if they were part of everyday life."[31] Marlantes describes this process as *pseudospeciation*, the "disassociation of one's enemy from humanity." He writes, "You make a false species out of the other human and therefore make it easier to kill him."[32] This should call to mind Gray's typologies.

But dehumanization, while always potentially dangerous, need not be malignant. At its benign core, dehumanization is simply a psychoanalytic defense mechanism allowing agents to avoid fully processing troubling events: "Sometimes dehumanization can be adaptive; for example, in a crisis, dehumanization of the injured or sick allows for an efficient rescue. Certain occupations classically teach and perhaps require selective dehumanization, including law enforcement and the military and medical professions."[33]

While it is the military profession that is of primary interest to me, to note the prevalence of distancing techniques within the medical profession may serve to provide a useful analogue, less emotionally charged than killing in war, by which we can suggest the existence of a morally neutral, and carefully delimited, species of dehumanization that we can then reinsert into our martial context.

It is widely understood that medical professionals necessarily employ coping mechanisms to insulate them from what they are actually doing. For instance, the role language plays in coping with discomfort is evident in the tactic of *medicalization*, or the use of overly technical language by which healthcare providers view patients not as hurting human beings but only in terms of their medical status or diagnosis—for example, referring to a patient by his surgical procedure, such as "the bowel resection in Room 2" or simply as "cases."[34] Language is also routed through euphemism to speak about uncomfortable situations: a dying patient may be referred to simply as "boxed," or other terms that mask the uncomfortable reality.[35] Since feeling the pain of every patient would overwhelm a doctor, physicians may morally disengage when having to cause necessary pain—such as when setting a bone. It is also seen in the operating room in which surgeons reduce a patient's body to a "field of operation" around which are arrayed marked-off sections and curtain covers. While these serve to help ensure sterility, they have a dual function in creating a visual disfigurement of the body's *gestalt*. Around the planned incision area, the flesh is brushed with disinfectant, coloring the skin in an alien orange-brown rust. Additional practices follow, by the sum of which the patient effectively vanishes from the surgeon's view.[36] Numbing, humor, anger, euphemism—each is a distancing technique employed by medical professionals.

In the martial realm, dehumanization can rely on mechanisms such as racial and ethnic distance, assertions of moral superiority, and social stratification. To this, David Grossman—an expert on the psychology of killing—adds the dimension of mechanical distance, which includes the videogame-like unreality of killing on computer screens, through a thermal sight, sniper sight, or other mechanical buffer permitting the killer to dispense with empathy toward the enemy and thereby deny the humanity of his victim.[37] Certain linguistic technologies further collaborate to cultivate distance. Our Israeli snipers might blur the clarity of what they are doing by referring to killing as "neutralizing," "cleaning up," "surgical action," or "focused assassination."[38] Nevertheless, the

snipers appear to remain aware of the linguistic ploy. One specifically acknowledges the process:

> *From my view, I have a target, an object that is now carrying out certain actions that threaten the force I am working with. And the object is the enemy. And I neutralized* [him] *... Sometimes when I say "neutralized" it's like Freud, it's a sort of repression. Listen, I know what I am doing and believe in what I am doing. . . . But try to disengage from the fact that this is a human being and it becomes an object that is shooting and threatening the situation. I neutralized him and he no longer does what he does and won't do it in the future.*[39]

Closer to home, in his autobiography *American Sniper,* Chris Kyle, the late Navy SEAL operator who garnered both wide public celebration and vilification, may have sometimes employed distancing euphemisms like "hit," "took out," or "dropped" to describe taking a shot, but he far more often, by my own count, simply wrote "kill."[40]

Similarly, shifting to a related trope, Israeli snipers, while often referring to enemy personnel as a "terrorist," "target," "Arab," or simply "armed person," no less commonly used the designation "human being" (*ben-adam,* literally "Son of Adam").[41] This corresponds with the sniper study's overall findings: dehumanization, while objectifying, was generally unaccompanied by demonization of the enemy. What I take this to demonstrate is that while objectification obtains as a self-protecting measure, enemies are not generally perceived, themselves, in terms of personified evil, so emotions of hate and disgust are not usually created. These last observations seem crucial. As with the medical profession, it appears within the martial vocation that the object of one's harmful actions can undergo a certain degree of objectification—genuine dehumanization—without, finally, being denied his due humanity. Just as the surgeon knows that beneath the orange-brown disinfected surface is human skin, that amid the cloth partitions, drapery, dressings,

instruments, tubes, and all the assorted medical equipment there lays, in the surgeon's good care, a human being, so, too, it is at least possible, if not altogether prevalent, for warfighters to understand, all objectification and obfuscation aside, that captured within their crosshairs is an adversary who is a Son of Adam as well.

From this we might draw several conclusions. First, it must be wrong to refer to dehumanization strictly in the pejorative. For certain, distancing oneself from the object of one's action does not mean the object is not loved, not cared for, or necessarily disrespected. In fact, the very need to dehumanize strongly suggests that the object is perceived precisely as a human being of some value—otherwise, the dehumanization would not be necessary. Moreover, second, the very fact that one dehumanizes the object of his action does not prove the action itself to be wrong; it only proves that the action is hard, that it bears moral gravity.

This suggests that the casual assumption that distancing or dehumanization is morally reprehensible requires greater nuance. The surgeon, like the warfighter, knows that on occasion a hard thing has to be done to prevent the advent of an even harder thing. The surgeon also knows, as at least a *just* warfighter ought also to know, that the hard thing is not simply necessary but, very often, morally right—therefore morally obligatory. It is clear, it seems, to medical professionals that they are not performing "lesser evils" but rather the greatest *possible* good. Military professionals employ essentially the same techniques to equip themselves with the moral insulation to do the hard but necessary and moral thing.

I want to see if I can press this a bit further. Can one love *while* fighting his enemy? Let's first consider a scene from Gray in which he recalls the experience of advancing with the Allied front across France. He notes the strangeness, sitting in a hotel room, of writing in his notebook by the light of a German candle. Hurriedly fleeing the enemy advance, the Germans abandoned an array of food and equipment, which subsequently sustained and benefited their pursuers. Gray notices the humanizing elements of this arrangement: sheets that only a few nights ago comforted Germans are

now slumbered on by Americans. Writing desks at which sat the enemy—possibly writing letters to friends or family in the Fatherland—now give support to writers of homeward-bound letters in English. This sense of intimate connection grows, and Gray wonders if the German who slept in what is now his own room was the same German whom he earlier spotted dead alongside the road. That German corpse was notable in that it was lying with hands folded neatly over the chest, one of the few corpses, Gray remarks, that did not look altogether horrible. An accompanying French officer noted the corpse and commented, "I'd like to see them all this way." One wonders if the Frenchman means he would like to see all his German enemies dead or, more likely given the reverie's tone, that he would prefer to see all corpses so pleasantly arrayed.

It strikes me as clear that what Gray is experiencing is empathetic love for his enemy. Regardless, the sense of intimacy with one's adversary casts a jarring discordance with what follows. Gray writes, "The basic aim of a nation at war in establishing an image of the enemy is to distinguish as sharply as possible the act of killing from the act of murder by making the former into one deserving of all honor and praise." Gray continues, "Most soldiers are able to kill and be killed more easily in warfare if they possess an image of the enemy sufficiently evil to inspire hatred and repugnance. Thus, the typical image of the enemy is conditioned by the need to hate him without limits."[42]

Perhaps. But I do not think so. And neither, by the way, I think, does Marlantes. Let's conclude by returning to him and that hillside in Vietnam. Remember that Marlantes contends that had he been aware of his love for that Vietnamese boy then, in the midst of combat, he never would have been able to kill him. But, if I might suggest, Marlantes's own testimony appears to stand against his claim. Recall that after he and that boy locked eyes over the sights of his M-16, Marlantes hesitated. He hesitated long enough to hope the kid would not throw the grenade, that he might, instead, simply toss it harmlessly aside and raise his hands "or something," and he would not need to be shot.

What is that about? What is that silly, foolish, naïve, hoping-against-any-reason-to-hope hope in the midst of combat? It is desiring that he might not have to do the terrible, and terribly necessary thing when that necessary thing means bringing harm to the human being positioned against him. In this "interval of hesitation"—that luminous moment in the midst of raw, red, flesh-hewn conflict—Marlantes encountered a *fifth* image of the enemy: the enemy as *neighbor*. What is that? By my lights, that is love.

And then Marlantes killed him.

And yet, because the neighbor is worthy to be loved, the just warrior keeps the goal of peace as the chiefly desired end: in the first place for the tormented-neighbor through his rescue but, in the second place, to the enemy-neighbor through establishing the conditions that, alone, might lead to reconciliation. That the motive for all of this is love ought to be clear to anyone with children.

On more than one occasion, Augustine made plain that parenting is a study in the interpenetration of love and justice. Among the many corollaries, a loving father gives his children their due. When praise is what their child's actions warrant, then praise is dispensed; when a rebuke, then a rebuke; when a stronger restraint, then a stronger restraint is employed to prevent the child from further wrongdoing, to confront him with his own injustice and to point him toward what he ought to be, and so to encourage him toward repentance and the mutual joy of fully restored relations.

Conclusion

The just war proposal that I have been advocating does not see a contradiction in hoping for peace but engaging in war, and weeping over it after the fact. Nor is there a contradiction in loving your enemy and fighting to win. Decisive victory is sometimes a bridge too far, and, therefore, it is a strong presumption based on prudent reasoning rather than a categorical imperative. But for both strategic as well as moral reasons, we should lean toward clean margins and err in the direction of thoroughness, just as we would in surgery for cancer. It is because we desire the good of concord

that we fight for a decisive end to conflict, one that secures and allows the enforcement of a durable peace.

Granted, in light of this, the image of the enemy-as-neighbor requires the cultivation of a certain callousness—much as that surgeon does when cutting away tissue and limbs to save lives, as does a parent when punishing an errant child, so *too* a warfighter when stopping an enemy by slaying him. If everyday life furnishes us plenty of occasions in which we must thicken our skin to do the right thing despite painful—even destructive—side effects, how much more will a life in a combat zone? But callousness, like other forms of distancing, betrays itself. It makes plain that the calloused heart can be the one that, in fact, grasps the gravity of the present task. With a kind of peripatetic moderation, the calloused warfighter knows it must not be too easy, nor too hard, to make the necessary kill.

All the while there is sorrow—the image of the enemy-as-neighbor means that we never rejoice in *getting* to kill, but lament in *having* to. It is, perhaps, only in this way that it is possible both to recognize the humanity of the enemy and to kill again and again and again, and yet not be a man of blood.[43] One can fight, decisively, and yet not lose sight of the prize.

Notes

¹ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: 50ᵗʰ Anniversary*, one vol. ed. (Boston: Mariner Books, 2005), 671.

² James Turner Johnson, "Just War, as It Was and Is," *First Things*, no. 149 (January 2005), 14–24.

³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, n.d., II.ii.40.

⁴ In Romans, 9ᵗʰ verse of the 12ᵗʰ chapter, St. Paul launches into a discussion of love, beginning with the instruction that we ought to love—cling to—what is good and to hate what is evil. He shows how this love ought to be manifest not only in succor for the distressed but also in care for one's enemy. From here Paul seems to change direction, and, in the 13ᵗʰ chapter, he begins to discuss the role of the government in wielding the sword against evil. But scant verses later, he is again talking directly about love. The chapter breaks obscure the fact that Paul finds it relevant, in a discussion about love, to discuss the ruling authority's divinely appointed role as a punisher of wrongdoing.

⁵ St. Augustine, "Contra Faustum," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Richard Stothert, vol. 4 (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), 22.74.

⁶ To explore this in more detail, an excellent starting point is Nigel Biggar, "Natural Flourishing as the Normative Ground of Just War: A Christian View," in *Just War: Authority, Tradition, and Practice*, ed. Anthony F. Lang, Jr., Cian O'Driscoll, and John Williams (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013).

⁷ Bullitt Lowry, "Pershing and the Armistice," *The Journal of American History* 55, no. 2 (1968), 282.

⁸ See HS Secret File: Fldr. H-1: Cablegram in: *United States Army in the World War, 1917–1919, The Armistice Agreement and Related Documents*, vol. 10, part I (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1991), 23.

⁹ Donald Smythe, *Pershing: General of the Armies*, 1ˢᵗ paperback ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 232.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ HS Secret File.

¹² Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 2003), IXX.14.

¹³ For a very good book-length discussion of the importance of bringing wars to decisive conclusion, see Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War*, 3ʳᵈ ed. (New York: Free Press, 1988).

[14] Smythe, *Pershing*, 232.

[15] John Wheeler-Bennett, "Ludendorff: The Soldier and the Politician," *The Viginia Quarterly Review* 14, no. 2 (Spring 1938), available at <www.vqronline.org/essay/ludendorff-soldier-and-politician>.

[16] Neta Bar and Eyal Ben-Ari, "Israeli Snipers in the Al-Aqsa Intifada: Killing, Humanity and Lived Experience," *Third World Quarterly* (2005), 133.

[17] Ibid., 135.

[18] J. Glenn Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1959).

[19] Ibid., chapter 5.

[20] Ibid., 133.

[21] Ibid.

[22] See, for example, Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

[23] See, for example, Marc LiVecche, "Kevlar for the Soul: The Morality of Force Protection," *Providence: A Journal of Christianity & American Foreign Policy* (Fall 2015), available at <https://providencemag.com/2016/01/kevlar-for-the-soul-morality-force-protection/>; Marc LiVecche, "The Fifth Image: Seeing the Enemy with Just War Eyes," *Providence: A Journal of Christianity & American Foreign Policy* (Summer 2016), available at <https://providencemag.com/2017/01/fifth-image-seeing-enemy-just-war-eyes/>.

[24] C.S. Lewis, *Problem of Pain* (London: Collins, 2012), 35–40.

[25] Karl Marlantes, *What It Is Like to Go to War* (New York: Grove Press, 2011), xi.

[26] Ibid., 29.

[27] Ibid., 30.

[28] Ibid., 31.

[29] Ibid., 32.

[30] I grant that *dehumanization* is a problematic term. While the aim of my handling of the term is to argue that not all dehumanization is morally wrong, the fact that it remains the term, by definition, has to be seen as offensive to human beings. Various other terms, including *depersonalize*, would be better options. Nevertheless, the term dehumanize is the one used in the discussion regarding distancing in the several medical journals to which I referred. I therefore keep the term but note its problematic usage.

[31] Michael Grodin and George Annas, "Physicians and Torture: Lessons from the Nazi Doctors," *International Journal of the Red Cross* 89, no. 867 (2007), 639–640.

[32]   Marlantes, *What It Is Like to Go to War*, 40–41.

[33]   Grodin and Annas, "Physicians and Torture," 640.

[34]   D. Schulman-Green, "Coping Mechanisms of Physicians Who Routinely Work with Dying Patients," *OMEGA—Journal of Death and Dying* 47, no. 3 (2003), 256.

[35]   Ibid., 257.

[36]   Stefan Hirschauer, "The Manufacture of Bodies in Surgery," *Social Studies of Science* 21, no. 2 (1991), 279–319.

[37]   Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (E-Reads, 2010), Loc. 2654. This idea is also found in Bar and Ben-Ari: States one sniper, "When you look out a window, everything appears less human. Also when you ride a car and look outside it looks less human. . . . That's what makes a difference between riding in a car or on a motorcycle. . . . It is much harder to shoot a man, and the fact that I look at him through a [rifle] sight it is like looking at something on television more or less. Of course, you know to differentiate between them because this is real, but to look through the sight makes things less human." "Israeli Snipers in the Al-Aqsa Intifada," 142.

[38]   Bar and Ben-Ari, "Israeli Snipers in the Al-Aqsa Intifada," 143.

[39]   Ibid., 143.

[40]   Chris Kyle, Scott McEwen, and Jim DeFelice, *American Sniper: The Autobiography of the Most Lethal Sniper in U.S. Military History* (New York: William Morrow, 2012). Of course, a published memoir might differ from interviews in that particular phrases may be used for stylistic purposes, the avoidance of redundancy, or other reasons. Nevertheless, the raw frankness of Kyle's frequent description of what he did as "killing," while perhaps of suspect clinical value, stands out.

[41]   Bar and Ben-Ari, "Israeli Snipers in the Al-Aqsa Intifada," 134.

[42]   Gray, *The Warriors*, 131–132.

[43]   John of Salibury, *Policraticus*, trans. Cary J. Nederman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), BK IV.ii.31.