ETHICS OF COUNTERINSURGENCY

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Ethics of war courses traditionally revolve around two main claims. The first is that ethical practices inhere in the practice of war itself. The second is that we are bound by moral duty — whether required of us by God, humanity or natural law, to act honourably to those with whom we engage in battle. For the most part, most tend to agree with Kant that we have no way of inferring causal relationships outside experience. We cannot infer from a causal order of nature to a God who is the author of nature. There may well be an intelligent designer at work in the world, but if there is we cannot prove it. We cannot infer from the injunctions of God any moral obligations to behave well. We derive those from the experience in dealing with each other.

Let us take a central tenet of Kant’s *Perpetual Peace*, the only book of his that is likely to be found on the syllabus of an ethics course in a military academy or college: ‘No state at war with another shall permit such acts of hostility as would make mutual confidence impossible during a future time of peace’ (Kant 1983: 96). The Kantian injunction cited above is to do nothing in war that makes peace impossible. It is really at one with his most famous formulation, the Second Categorical Imperative: we are all rational beings and therefore should be treated as ends in ourselves, not merely as means or building blocks to the ends of others. If peace is the only reason for going to war, then we must wage it in a way that does nothing that makes it unattainable — by treating our enemies, for example, as a means to some ill-defined greater end. Kant’s views are embodied in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man* (1789) which grounded right behaviour in reason and social contract theory, though we can find similar sentiments in Cicero’s *De Officiis*.

Indeed, Cicero’s work is particularly interesting because of the absence of social contract theory in the ancient world. In Cicero’s day humanity was the prerogative of the aristocracy — when mercy was shown at all it had to be earned, usually in combat. It was rarely shown to commoners (who did not extend it to aristocrats in turn). Mercy was a gift that might be expected but not demanded. It might have a political pay-off but it was largely part of a warrior’s existential identity — it often marked a disdain for the world of instrumental ends.

Cicero could have left the argument there — he could have dealt himself out of the game but instead he dealt himself in. In the *De Officiis* he leaves the reader in no doubt about his message. ‘Let us remember that justice must be maintained even towards the lowliest’ (Cicero 1991: 39). Cicero did not say that cruelty to one’s own kind is wrong; he counsels us to avoid being cruel.
even to the lowliest of our enemies. He accepts the common humanity of both the well-born and the low-born which was more than they tended to grant each other. He accepted that in war both find themselves in the same community of fate. He was intelligent enough to recognise that restraint from cruelty need not be the product of fellow feeling; it is a demand of war. Cicero’s counsel against cruelty was grounded on the understanding that we have escaped the state of nature into a state of reason. It is our ability to perceive the consequences of our actions that sets us apart from more primitive people. Cruelty always put one at risk of regressing into warfare: as Thucydides had warned it can deprive people of the ability to satisfy their needs and reduce them to the level of their circumstances. When a soldier is stripped of all his socially acquired virtues and left in a moral vacuum he is in danger of returning to the primal state. His reason for reaching this conclusion carries with it a real insight. ‘There is no military power so great that it can last for long under the weight of fear’ (Cicero 1991: 2.26). For fear can beget fearfulness – to inspire fear and appear fearful at the same time is usually ruinous – it is likely to provoke a defeated people to revolt.

In short, Kant’s injunction is not new. It inheres in the practice of war itself. It is merely expressed in a language with which we are more familiar: that of rights and duties. Indeed, when we look back at the Western battlefield over the last 500 years we see a remarkable consistency of practice. The laws of war rely on a mixture of natural law, military law, common custom and self-interest, and not much has changed. All that has happened is that in the course of the modern era natural law as part of international law has gone ‘positivist’ for the first time: the customs of war (the precedents created by the conduct of war itself) have remained much the same, but they have been gradually embodied in legal conventions negotiated by states. This should not be allowed to obscure the fact that the conventions that have been transformed into laws such as honouring surrenders, sparing the wounded, or respecting flags of truce – the social conventions that have reduced the danger and chaos of conflict for all combatants – have been observed for centuries. They can be seen as ‘contractual etiquettes’ which provide each party with a vital framework of expectations concerning the conduct of the other. We situate these rights in conventions, or laws of war. But a ‘convention’, as the word suggests, is the institutionalisation of a common practice and the practice is independent of its judicial formulation (i.e. enforcement in a court of law). As a modern thinker, Kant preferred the word ‘responsibility’: we are responsible for the soldiers we capture, or the women and children who fall into our hands. And that responsibility inheres in the dialectic between war and peace. What is important is not to stop, but to stop short: to prevent limited war from becoming unlimited.

Since Kant’s day that responsibility has extended even further. So has the law of war. We have added what Michael Walzer calls the *ius post bellum*, the law of war after formal hostilities have ceased between two states, but during the continuation of military operations against non-state actors including in particular insurgents. As Hans Jonas reminds us, the concept of responsibility nowhere played a central role either in the moral systems of the past, or most philosophical theories of ethics. Nor did the feeling of responsibility appear as the affective moment in the formation of the moral will. Quite different feelings such as love or reverence were assigned this office. And that was largely because responsibility is a function of power and knowledge and until recently both were constrained. Today, by contrast, we have immense power, and greater knowledge though not alas greater wisdom. We are always having to relearn the lessons of history as we are doing in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Jonas and the new ethicists maintain that unlike traditional ethics which reckoned only with non-cumulative behaviour, we have to deal with uncertainties for which there is no historical precedent. We have to deal with the unanticipated consequences of our own actions. The military even coined a term for this in the 1990s; effects-based operations. In our networked world we pile
up cumulative effects faster than ever before. Consequences can snowball. Our risk societies deal with probabilities not certainties; they are always estimating, measuring and anticipating the consequences of their actions, the better to manage them as best they can. We live in a world of perceptions, predictions and scenarios. Our actions are based on assumptions, projections and statistical probabilities. At this stage in history this is the shape of our ethical universe.

Finally, we no longer live in the stable world of the past. Once ethics was associated with continuity, its main concern was that the state should survive; hence the importance of prudence (not exceeding one’s grasp), as well as moderation (not demanding a Carthaginian peace which could stoke up resentment followed by a wish for revenge). Our world, by contrast, is dynamic. Nothing is stable. Everything is in flux. We are future-oriented for this reason. Responsibility, insists Jonas, is a correlate of power, and the scope and the degree of power we enjoy must determine the scope of our responsibility. What morality restores to an increasingly uncertain world is the idea of responsibility – that what we do severally and collectively makes a difference and that as a consequence the future lies in our hands (Jonas 1999: 5).

Counterinsurgency operations clearly present a very demanding ethical challenge. We do not enter into contracts with insurgents, and they certainly have not signed up to the Geneva Convention. But most ethicists would argue that a state is bound to honour its own customs and conventions even so. The US Supreme Court ruled to this effect in 1967 when the US government asked the judges whether the Vietcong (VC) were owed the same rights as guerrilla fighters as the United States was bound to grant any regular combatant it found itself fighting (Bourke 1999: 197). We are bound for prudential reasons to act in good faith. The same ethics of war must apply in a counterinsurgency as they do in a conventional war.

The second approach to ethics insists that we are bound to act correctly according to the dictates of conscience or religious faith. Even Kant invokes a metaphysical concept: a Categorical Imperative. At which point, his critics would contend, he asks too much of us. First, he places far too much faith in reason. Reason for Kant is what it was for Plato – who also saw it as the necessary context of Man’s deepest aspirations and ambitions, though Kant by contrast saw it as a mark of our common humanity (which can be seen as a nobler concept than Plato’s). This fused at a critical moment with the French Revolution which Kant believed had opened a supreme historical window of opportunity for humanity to realise its own freedom in concrete political action – such as the Declaration of the Rights of Man.

Of course, today we have far less confidence in reason. We do not spell it with the upper case. And our ability to act unreasonably out of purely rational ends is unlimited as the revolutionary Terror in France later showed. Ethical rules are a manifestation of the Zeitgeist. And the spirit of the times can be murderous as the poet W.B. Yeats recognised in his poem, The Second Coming. Its most famous line is ‘the centre cannot hold’. But there is another which is even more telling: ‘Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world’. What he meant was not disorder or anarchy as such; he meant licensed killing. Twentieth-century states licensed their soldiers to kill in the name of abstract principles, those great ‘alibis of aggression’, Gay calls them, which allowed them to kill with a good conscience, and to kill on a large scale. One of the books whose insights I find especially invaluable is The Cultivation of Hatred, one of the volumes which comprise Peter Gay’s monumental study of the bourgeois experience in nineteenth-century Europe. The Victorians engaged in continuous debates about the moral nature of aggression. These were particularly intense when nation clashed with nation, or class with class. The modern age was always trying to master nature, geography or the ‘other’ and ultimately, of course, ‘self’. And it produced alibis of aggression which helped to identify the outsider who was to be bullied, ridiculed or exterminated at will. All this amounts to ‘cultivated’ hatred in both senses of the term – at once fostering and restraining hatred at the same time (Gay 1993).
In his writings on the war in the Caucasus, Tolstoy had shown how quickly civilised men can revert back to their natural state, how war can revert very quickly to warfare or indiscriminate violence when they see their enemy – as the Nazis saw the Slavs as little better than savages. In 1942 Ernst Junger in his *Caucasus Notebook* invoked Tolstoy by name, though he attributed the barbarism he witnessed at the Front to the new Dark Age in which he lived. ‘Things like that belong to the style of the times’ (James 2007: 338). *Zeitstil* is the word in German. The point is that barbarism inheres not just in our natures, but in the tendency of war to revert back to its origins, especially when discipline breaks down. The state of nature from which we have fled is one to which we can return quickly enough. ‘War’ is the distance we place not between ourselves and our nature, but between ourselves and the state of nature. The soldier must feed on war from a distance and the discipline of war (the warrior’s honour) is precisely the distance he must maintain.

Unfortunately, the Germans, although largely adhering in the West to the laws of war which were later to be enshrined in the Geneva Conventions, refused to acknowledge they had any responsibilities in the East where they engaged in a war of extermination against an allegedly barbaric people. And the mentality – the spirit of the time – the *Zeitgeist* was not just a reflection of Nazi indoctrination. It was also to be found in the upper reaches of the German army whose senior officers liked to pride themselves that they had managed to retain their honour by wearing a uniform unsullied by the doctrines of national socialism. In the winter of 1941, as the German offensive stalled in front of Moscow, it was decided to let Russian POWs freeze to death by taking away their winter clothing including their overcoats and felt boots. The decision to give them to German soldiers was in defiance of German military law, not to mention the laws of war. Admiral Canaris, the Head of German Military Intelligence, added in a memorandum on the legality of the war that this was not just a rejection of the Hague Conventions, it was a rejection of the entire core of customary law that had defined European behaviour in war for the past 200 years, including the belief that soldiers that have surrendered have a normative right to life (Kassimeris 2004: 86).

Kant’s critics level another charge against him; they claim he drew an unhelpful distinction between the Categorical and Hypothetical imperatives which encourage us to treat prisoners of war well because of what might happen if we do not. This is the hypothetical imperative of prudence. The Categorical Imperative is limited to no such consideration; it is an absolute duty that we owe each other. When we have discerned a Categorical Imperative we discover a rule which admits no exception. It does, of course, have particular uses. The main one is that of individual responsibility: we are agents, not only actors. We are responsible to our conscience for our actions. The Categorical Imperative absolves us of the need to follow orders. But it does not help much in telling us what we should do; it only tells us what we should not. It is problematic in that it detaches the notion of duty from the notion of ends, purposes and needs. We need a more instrumental understanding of ethics. In the end, not only does Kant demand too much of us, he also demands too little.

We need an ends-means ethics which is precisely what the Geneva Conventions provide. War is not a moral activity at all; it is ethical. To be moral, an action must be disinterested, it must be independent of the old legal question, *cui bono*: who benefits? Even to save a life of a companion by throwing oneself on a grenade is not a moral duty: it is an ethical gift. A soldier cannot be court-martialled for not offering it (MacIntyre 2002: 28). Most soldiers for that reason live in a distinctive ethical community. Ethics is inherently interested. The ethics of war inheres in that most challenging of questions: how do you get the enemy to surrender or to admit defeat, or even to swallow the shame of defeat? Kant’s injunction to do nothing in war that puts peace out of reach is not a moral injunction at all: it is a conditional, ethical response.
Of course, all this is problematic for moral philosophers and pacifists who would like to outlaw war altogether. And it is true that the rules of war make it possible for us. The only effective counter to war would be to make it so violent that it became its own deterrent. W.B. Gallie calls this the sub-rational option as opposed to the 'super-rational' as when Christian love meets oppression by non-violent means (Gallie 1978: 119) He draws our attention to a passage in Tolstoy’s novel War and Peace where we find Prince Andrei on the evening before the battle of Borodino overhearing a snippet of a conversation between two German staff officers in Russian service, one of whom happens to be Clausewitz. Both are talking about extending the war. Andrei is already sickened by the butchery which he has witnessed at first hand and is appalled that the rules of war preach chivalry and flags of truce, but do nothing to stop homes from being plundered, or children killed, or foes treated in the most outrageous fashion. ‘To hell with all this magnanimity business in warfare’, he thinks. ‘It boils down to this. We should have done with humbug and let war be war and not a game’ (Gallie 1978: 117).

And this is particularly regrettable because since 9/11 we have been encouraged to see our enemies in terms that make it possible to ill-treat them. The Bush administration was roundly condemned both at home and abroad for sanctioning torture, the abuse of prisoners in detention centres such as Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay, and the practice of extraordinary rendition (the interrogation and torture of suspected terrorist by third parties at the instigation of the United States). For a typical Western stereotyping, see Sam Harris’ book The End of Faith: Religious Terror and the Future of Reason. There is, we are told, a Western way of war practised by civilised democracies and there is also a Muslim way of war, ‘standing eye-deep in the red barbarity of the Fourteenth Century – a kill-the-children-first approach to war’ (Harris 2004: 20) But we ignore the fundamental difference between their violence and ours at our peril. Once you externalise violence onto the ‘other’, every tool and tactic becomes justified, including torture. Once you externalise your own actions as good, and theirs as evil, you find it easier to humiliate them which may render it, in turn, more difficult for them to come to terms with defeat.

Kant’s key insight, that we should respect our enemies, still holds. For he saw that the moment you externalise violence and project it onto the ‘other’, you may well fail to acknowledge the impulses within yourself that permit you to carry out indefensible acts. In the end – watching at a distance – you end up dismissing Guantanamo Bay or Abu Ghraib as possibly regrettable but inevitable. Like Junger, we may even comfort ourselves with the thought that ‘things like that belong to the style of the times’. ‘Stuff happens’, as the US Defense Secretary said notoriously of the outbreak of the looting in Baghdad within days of the Americans arriving in the city.

**UAVs and managing war**

In August 2009, a British journalist spent a day at Creech Air Force Base in the Nevada desert, where he visited a mobile ground control station for Predator drones. ‘Is this it?’ was his first thought, after being shown into the back of a caravan parked beside a two-lane highway about 45 miles outside Las Vegas. The caravan was a US Air Force mobile ground control station and the rather unimpressive-looking machine at the back of it was the flight deck for a remote-controlled Predator aircraft operating 7,000 miles away in Afghanistan.

It is hard to describe how surreal for the journalist it was to watch two young pilots operating such a lethal device on a different continent from the battlefield. The advantages from a logistical standpoint were overwhelming: these twenty-first century pilots got to live essentially the same lives as suburban sales executives. They kept regular hours. They commuted back and
forth from home. Their workplace was clean, safe and air-conditioned. But where was the soldiers’ honour in killing an adversary 7,000 miles away? What happened to looking your enemy in the eye? How could you understand the consequences of your actions? Surely, the journalist concluded, killing should not be like sending an email – otherwise where would it all lead?

His questions were informed by a new feature of counterinsurgency operations – the use of military robots, especially Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) which present a new challenge – in extending the scope of our responsibilities post bellum are we in danger of narrowing the scope of our individual moral concerns?

We are engineering robots for many reasons. One of the most important is to reduce human risk. It is precisely because we are weak, vulnerable beings, that the body is exposed to harm, that we are always seeking to put ourselves out of harm’s way. Robots may indeed enhance our ability to fight war, but they also offer a chance to reduce suffering, both physical and mental. Among the ethical properties this may be the most important of all. In rebooting war for our own age we aspire to go beyond spreading risks, we aspire to eliminate them altogether. Risk avoidance has now become an absolute military priority. Henry Yuen, an expert in anti-submarine warfare, wrote an internal paper for the Defense Department shortly after the end of the Gulf War. ‘One of the foremost objectives in the development of new weaponry’, he wrote, ‘should be the reduction or total elimination of human risk. Put simply, weapons or equipment in harm’s way should, to the extent possible, be unmanned’ (Toffler and Toffler 1993: 141).

We use technology as a substitute for risk. We use for instance Pacbots – a ground system that can be used for scouting hostile areas, or which can disable basic IEDs; the advantage of such a system, according to one military officer, is ‘when a robot dies, you don’t have to write a letter to its mother’. Fanciful or not, as Ralph Peters, a retired Army Officer, has put it ‘there’s a uniquely American pursuit of the Grail that technology will solve all human problems, that we can have bloodless wars’ (Singer 2009: 291). In the years to come the military will be using robots more and more to reduce the risk of combat. Take the case of Pacbots: the service these provide is grounded in risk aversion. John Dyer, the President of I-robot, the company that makes them, plays up the life-saving effects: ‘Pacbot allows personnel to safely neutralise roadside bombs, car bombs and other IEDs, and perform other life-threatening missions, helping to save soldiers’ lives.’ The trade-off seems so obvious and simple: why should a 20-year-old soldier have to look around a corner when a replaceable machine can do the same job? The same is true, of course, for disposing of potentially dangerous ordnance.

But if war is becoming bloodless for one side, at least, as Peters claims, it is quite the opposite for the insurgent, or indeed the troops on the ground. And there is the rub. For there are moral consequences of using robots in this way. The armed forces are using them in dangerous operations from which they might otherwise shy away if the risks were greater. Employing robots lowers the threshold for war. Indeed, one commander thinks that these unmanned systems may significantly change how commanders approach war. The conviction that technology can or must substitute the risk to human life has a pernicious tendency to distort the consideration of risks and rewards. A lower threshold for war may encourage us to engage in more operations than might be wise. Technologies, unfortunately, are not ethically or socially neutral. They have a huge impact on the societies that build and maintain them, changing attitudes and even normative assumptions. Technology first changes the environment and then changes our way of thinking and our values, hence the popular adage to the person whose only tool is a hammer, all problems look like nails.

The point is that we build the technology that we need. Michael Ignatieff, writing of the first risk-averse war in Kosovo (1999) in which not a single allied pilot or soldier lost his life, wrote at the time that the West had begun to challenge ‘the basic equality of the moral risk, kill or be
killed’ (Ignatieff 2000: 29). Is killing insurgents from thousands of miles away, as we can do with today’s drones, a moral response? ‘I hope that many more computer chips will lay down their lives for their country.’ This remark is attributed to an American general on the loss of a UAV somewhere in Bosnia. It has become quite well known. It has almost entered folklore as a sign of the times – an anticipation of the shape of things to come. But it has profound implications for the ethics of war. For computer chips do not lay down their lives for their country; soldiers do. UAVs remove the ‘sacred’ from sacrifice. It is sacrifice – the willingness to run risks and – if necessary – pay the supreme price with one’s life that is the chief legitimating factor of war; ultimately, it is what makes it different from common murder. Sacrifice offers a window into a soldier’s interior life as well as our own (for we are both human). As the etymology of the word reveals, sacrifice is derived from sacred. All militaries regard the sacrifice of men (and now often women) to be sacred for that reason.

This presents another problem. The warrior ethos – correct behaviour concerns two related moral demands – accepted and acceptable behaviour. Accepted behaviour is behaviour that is legally sanctioned. Acceptable behaviour is behaviour that may be legitimate (in the eyes of others) but which may not necessarily be within the law. The drone pilot still operates within an environment of accepted behaviour; he has rules of engagements (though they are not always standardised), and he has to obey legal conventions. There is a chain of command, and the lawyers are part of it. Acceptable behaviour is different; soldiers often reach a point where they conclude that their own behaviour merits hostility on the part of the enemy; they deserve what they get, translated into the biblical metaphor, one reaps what one sows.

Are UAV pilots likely to be disengaged from the enemy? All technology gets us to see the world differently. This is the warning that we find in John Ellis’ splendid book, *The Social History of the Machine Gun*, which shows how it opened up the last phase of imperial expansion in Africa. The gun was the product, clearly, of a rational society because only a rational society could invent it. It was a weapon that was used to get the natives to see reason: to see how foolish it was to resist. It followed that if they continued resisting, they were clearly being unreasonable. The machine gun gave us what no other technology had given the people before; the right to occupy the moral high ground. Except of course when we turned the machine guns against each other in 1914, we found ourselves in a moral No Man’s Land. We saw the machine gun in a completely new light precisely because our enemies shared the same moral world with ourselves; both were high-tech.

We must choose our tools carefully, not because they are inhumane (all weapons are), but because the more we come to rely on them, the more they come to shape our view of the world, and it is clear that as we are becoming increasingly reliant on robotics it may be reshaping our inter-subjective experience with the enemy which constitutes what we used to call a community of fate. We are human, wrote Richard Rorty, to the extent that humanity is not a given; it is real only insofar as our humanity is recognised by others in us.

To sustain any ethical discourse on a battlefield requires us to also recognise the humanity in the enemy and this is as old a challenge as war itself. Thucydides describes the exchange between a Spartan prisoner of war and an Athenian ally. The ally asks the captive whether his fellow Spartans who died rather than surrendered had been men of honour. The Spartan replies that a weapon would be worth a great deal if it could distinguish a gallant man from a coward. But of course it cannot (Lendon 2005: 47). A weapon is merely a weapon. It is dumb, not smart. Even today a drone pilot operating a UAV over the skies of Afghanistan does not know when he launches it whether he is killing men who are brave or cowards. He may see more than anyone has ever seen before, but the vision does not help that much; he still cannot see the man within.
The ethics of the suicide bomber

In Plato’s *Republic* sons are expected to accompany their fathers into battle to learn their trade young. Today in the West Bank you will find summer camps in which children as young as eight are trained in military drills; they are encouraged to write poems about the suicide bombers and to learn how to take their life – and the lives of others. At al Najah University a student exhibition in 2001 included a recreated scene of the Sbarro pizzeria in Jerusalem after a particularly destructive suicide bombing, with fake blood and body parts hanging from the ceiling as though suspended in mid-air.

The ethics of war for state actors revolves around killing. For non-state actors there is another dimension – it revolves around dying. ‘And we must tremble so long as we have not learned to heal the sinister ease of dying.’ The words are Victor Hugo’s writing after the high death rate in the Paris Commune in 1871. Sacrifice becomes problematic when dying becomes too easy. Sacrifice becomes problematic when it appears to betray a contempt for life which is at the centre not of heroism, but of fanaticism.

One of the chief objections to suicide bombing is that it reduces life to Hobbes’ state of nature – the war of all against all, ‘every man the enemy of every man’. What is distinctive about the state of nature is the absence of any instrumental dimension. The young (usually young men but sometimes women) are corrupted by the violence to which they resort. It is in this sense that the one-dimensional existential view of war is so deeply corrupting. Referring to the lone individual who takes his own life, Camus also used the same phrase as Hugo – ‘a terrible strength’. Yeats used a different phrase about the Easter Rising in Ireland in 1916 – another foolhardy revolt by young men. He called it a ‘terrible beauty’. Camus’ ‘terrible strength’ is now, alas, a feature of politics in the Middle East. And because it is ‘political’ – because it’s intended to influence others, particularly, impressionable, young men – it is used to dominate others and allow the bombers (and especially their controllers) to dominate the moral high ground in the region where a willingness to die for one’s beliefs is so often taken as a sign of moral conviction.

This terrible strength used to be nourished by secular ideologies; it is now fuelled by religion. ‘God has come back into history through the door of terror’, wrote Paul Virilio in 1983, the year that witnessed the appearance of the first suicide bomber in the Hezbollah campaign in the Lebanon in 1983. The suicide bomber is an existentialist tout court. He kills, of course, as well as dies. He dies in order to kill. The mark of warrior cultures throughout history and the reason why people dislike them is that one can only hazard one’s life for glory if one is prepared to take the life of another. This is what makes the warrior such an ambiguous figure in the Western world. But the true warrior is a better man for the experience; whether he survives or not he still masters it. And that is why the world is often a better place because of him.

So, is the suicide bomber an ethical figure? Few ethicists would accept the claim they make for themselves, and the main reason for that is that they have too much rage. Radical Islam sanctifies rage. The violence of the suicide bomber is unmediated which is why suicide is not an act of war, but what Hobbes calls ‘warre’ – the war of all against all, prior to the state. Like Hobbes’ creature in the state of nature he is a lonely, atomised figure finding solace only in the company of like-minded persons. He tends to be driven by impotent rage, easy prey for those who can give their empty lives a sense of significance or meaning. War is the great educator; Hegel claimed it educates for freedom. It is rite of passage; a developer of character; a way by which a warrior may come to know himself, and ‘become’ what he is as a result of insight into his own nature. In the foot soldiers of jihad or the faith we have killing machines, human bombs, men who find the pain and labour and shame of the world too hard to master.
But the objection goes much further and gets to the very heart of the ethics of war. In a famous essay on suicide the English writer G.K. Chesterton wrote that ‘the man who kills a man kills a man. The man who kills himself, kills all men; as far as he is concerned he wipes out the world’. There is much truth in Chesterton’s remark. Indeed, we can echo him by asserting that his acts threaten to ‘wipe out the world’ because they end that dialogue which war constitutes and which makes peace possible. This is an ultimate negation of Kant’s injunction that we should do nothing in war that would put permanent peace forever out of reach.

**Recommended readings**


**References**