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## 2

# Love in war

### I. 'Kind harshness': forgiveness and the qualification of violence

The New Testament does not generate an absolute prohibition of violence, but it does generate an absolute injunction of love. Accordingly, just war doctrine's claim to belong to a *Christian* ethic rests on its conception of the right use of violence as an expression of love for the neighbour. This makes obvious sense when the neighbour in view is the innocent victim of unjust aggression, on whose behalf the just warrior takes up arms. However, the innocent victim is not the only neighbour on site. Since love is an absolute injunction, applying always and everywhere, the just warrior is also bound to love the unjust aggressor. His love—as Jesus made plain—must extend itself to the enemy. But in what plausible senses can it do that?

According to the leading patriarch of Christian just war doctrine, St Augustine, the just warrior loves the unjust aggressor insofar as he withholds himself from vengeance, commits himself to benevolence, and so uses violence to punish him 'with a sort of kind harshness', doing him the service of constraining him from further wrongdoing and encouraging him to repent and embrace peace.<sup>1</sup> What this amounts to is the qualification of the use of violence by forgiveness. Such a claim will seem strongly counter-intuitive to many Christians and non-Christians alike, for surely punishment and forgiveness are mutually exclusive alternatives? Surely one forgives *instead of* punishing? As I see it, that is not quite so; and in order to show

1. Augustine, Letter 138 (to Marcellinus), in *Political Writings*, ss.9, 11, 14 (pp. 35, 36, 38).

why, I must set out here the theory of the process of reconciliation that I have developed elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

It seems to me that discussion of the process of reconciliation and of forgiveness is generally vitiated by a tendency to conflate two moments that ought to be distinguished. On the one hand, this leads some to hold on biblical and theological grounds that victims are bound to forgive their oppressors unilaterally and unconditionally—that is, without waiting for any sign of repentance.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, it leads others to hold on philosophical and psychological grounds that the victim's forgiveness must be conditional upon the perpetrator's repentance, if it is to be morally responsible.<sup>4</sup> It seems to me that both sides are half-correct, for each champions a different moment of forgiveness, one of them unilateral and initial and the other conditional and final. I call these, respectively, 'compassion'<sup>5</sup> and

2. See Nigel Biggar, 'Forgiveness in the Twentieth Century: A Review of the Literature, 1901–2001' in *Forgiveness and Truth*, ed. Alistair McFadyen and Marcel Sarot (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2001), pp. 215–17; 'Making Peace and Doing Justice: Must We Choose?', in *Burying the Past: Making Peace and Doing Justice after Civil Conflict*, ed. Nigel Biggar (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003), pp. 7–13; 'Conclusion', in *ibid.*, pp. 314–17; 'Epilogue: Burying the Past after September 11', in *ibid.*, pp. 328–9; 'The Ethics of Forgiveness and the Doctrine of Just War: A Religious View of Righting Atrocious Wrongs', in Thomas Brudholm and Thomas Cushman, eds, *The Religious in Responses to Mass Atrocity: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 105–23; 'Forgiving Enemies in Ireland', *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 36/4 (December 2008), pp. 559–79; and 'Melting the Icepacks of Enmity: Forgiveness and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland', *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 24/2 (May 2011), pp. 199–209. Much of what follows immediately here has been taken from 'The Ethics of Forgiveness and the Doctrine of Just War' and 'Forgiving Enemies in Ireland'.
3. E.g. Paul Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, pp. 176–7; and L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 21, 102, 121, 144, 146, 160–1. Fiddes appeals to the cases of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10) and the prostitute who anointed Jesus' feet with ointment (Luke 7:36–50) in support of his view that, according to a Christian understanding, forgiveness should precede repentance: 'When Jesus asks for hospitality from Zacchaeus, the notorious tax collector of the Jericho area, he does not first require him to return what he has gained through fraud and extortion, though this is the happy outcome. He accepts from a prostitute the intimate act of her anointing his feet and wiping them with her hair, without first establishing whether she has given up her trade, and pronounces the forgiveness of God without further enquiry' (Fiddes 1989, p. 177). Alternatively, according to my own view, Jesus' asking for hospitality amounted to an act of compassionate forbearance rather than one of absolving forgiveness; and he did not need to ask first whether the prostitute had repented, since her tears made it implicitly clear that she had.
4. E.g. Richard Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 81–6, 148–9.
5. It might be thought odd, even inappropriate, to use the word 'forgiveness' to refer to compassion. Why not speak simply of an initial moment of compassion, and reserve 'forgiveness' for the concluding moment of absolution? The reason is that in colloquial speech we do not so reserve it. It is not uncommon to hear victims say that they have 'forgiven' their oppressors, when what is meant is not at all that they have been reconciled with them, but rather that, in spite of the absence of any apology or reparation, they have nevertheless managed to tame or transcend

'absolution'. Yet both sides are also half-wrong, since each champions one moment to the exclusion of the other; whereas in fact a Christian theory of reconciliation should incorporate them both.

The first moment of forgiveness—compassion—is where the victim allows her feelings of resentment to be moderated by a measure of sympathy for the perpetrator. Moderated by what? Partly by the acknowledgement of the authority of certain truths. These truths are: that she herself is no stranger to the psychic powers that drive human beings to abuse each other; that some individuals, for reasons that remain hidden in the mysterious interpenetration of history and the human will, are less well equipped than others to resist common pressures; and that some are fated to find themselves trapped in situations where only an extraordinary moral heroism could save them from doing terrible evil.<sup>6</sup> Even victims have responsibilities; and one of them is to acknowledge truths like these, even in the midst of the maelstrom of pain and resentment.

Openness to the truth, however, is not the only matrix of sympathy and the only force for moderation. There is also the commitment to rebuild rather than destroy—to reconciliation rather than vengeance. Now, 'reconciliation' should mean different things according to the nature of the relationship between victim and perpetrator. In the paradigmatic case of relationships between family members or friends it will mean the restoration of intimacy, signalled typically by the act of embrace. In the case of relationships between political dissidents and their informers or of *génocidaires* and surviving victims, however, it will usually mean something analogous and weaker—say a readiness to coexist in the same city or neighbourhood

their anger toward them. It means that the victims' lives are no longer possessed by rage and hatred. This does not quite amount to the growth of compassion, although it is a major step in that direction. The main point, however, is that the victims' taming of anger and growth of compassion are both entirely subjective processes, which proceed independently of what the perpetrators do or do not do, and which do not change the objective relationship between them. To refer to such processes as 'forgiveness' is appropriate, partly because it describes what actually happens and partly because it is good that it does so. Were it otherwise, the deliverance of victims from all-consuming rage would have to wait upon the perpetrators to repent; and in some cases, that would condemn them to vengeful obsession forever.

6. I allude here to the Christian concept of original sin, which refers to the fated dimension of human wrongdoing. This does not displace the individual's responsibility for his choices; but it does refer to the fact that every individual makes his choices under the weight of history's socio-psychological legacy. If we are free, we are free only within bounds; and the bounds are unequal, for history has dealt more kindly with some than with others. This freedom-under-fate is something that victims share with perpetrators.

or street.<sup>7</sup> But whatever kind of reconciliation is appropriate, victims should prefer it to the sheer wreaking of vengeance—that is to say, action whose overriding intention is to inflict harm and which takes no care to moderate the harm inflicted.

Why should victims prefer reconciliation? They should prefer it at least because of a proper care for their own souls—or, if you like, for the shaping of their moral and spiritual characters; for to devote oneself to vengeance is to drink a poison that embitters and tyrannizes. The point is arrestingly made in Peter Shaffer's play, *The Gift of the Gorgon*. Here, Edward Damson, hot-blooded playwright of Slavo-Celtic parents, champions the cleansing, cathartic virtue of the passion for revenge. Liberal forbearance and tolerance, in his eyes, are 'just giving up with a shrug—as if you never really cared about the wrong in the first place... *Avoidance*, that's all it is!<sup>8</sup> But to this, Helen, his wife and cool English daughter of a classics don, retorts:

You go on about passion, Edward. But have you never realised that there are many, many kinds—including a passion to kill our own passion when it's wrong? ... The truest, hardest most adult passion isn't just stamping and geeing ourselves up. It's refusing to be led by rage when we most want to be... No other being in the universe can change itself by conscious will: it is *our privilege alone*. To take out inch by inch this spear in our sides that goads us on and on to bloodshed—and still make sure it doesn't take our guts with it.<sup>9</sup>

At the very end of the play Helen wins the argument by showing that it is forgiveness, not revenge, that requires the greater strength and realizes humanity. But there is one cliff-hanging moment when, enraged by a macabre trick that Edward has played on her, Helen sways on the brink of plunging into vengeance. What pulls her back are the bald words of her stepson,

7. For further discussion of the relationship between political 'reconciliation' and its interpersonal paradigm, see Nigel Biggar, 'Conclusion', in *Burying the Past*, pp. 314–17. Why do I suppose that the paradigm of forgiveness is interpersonal? One immediate reason is the paradigmatic status in Christianized culture of the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Another reason is that when, referring to an injustice that I have done to you, I say that I repent, you forgive, and we are reconciled, none of the verbs needs to be qualified. However, when I say that Prime Minister Tony Blair has 'repented' on behalf of the British people for the Irish Famine, or that paramilitary prisoners released early from prison in Northern Ireland have been 'forgiven', or that supporters of the apartheid state in South Africa and members of the ANC have been 'reconciled', then qualification is needed.

8. Peter Shaffer, *The Gift of the Gorgon* (London: Viking, 1993), p. 16.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 60–1.

Philip: 'The truth is,' he says, 'you must forgive him or die.'<sup>10</sup> That is to say, she must forgive or forever be possessed by bitterness.

Another, real-life, expression of this prudential wisdom comes from the lips of the daughter of one of three women taken from the Spanish village of Poyales del Hoyo on the night of 29 December 1936 and murdered by Fallangists at the roadside. Interviewed sixty-six years later, she said: 'This thing has stayed in my mind all my life. I've never forgotten. I am reliving it now, as we stand here. All the killers were from the village... I can pardon, but I cannot forget. We have to pardon them or it makes us just like them.'<sup>11</sup>

Vengeance does grave moral and spiritual damage to the one who wreaks it. That's one good reason why victims should steer clear of it. Another is that vengeance is—by common definition—excessive.<sup>12</sup> It does not strive to proportion its retribution to the wrong done. Its driving ambition is to make the wrongdoer—together with his family or his village or his race or his country—*suffer*. As a consequence, vengeance has the effect of multiplying injustice, as wrongdoers are made to suffer more than they deserve and suffering is inflicted on innocents who do not deserve it at all.

There is yet a third motive for preferring reconciliation to vengeance: the knowledge that vengeance upon the murderer will not raise the innocent dead to life again. This is, of course, common sense. But some common sense is just too desolate to constrain the vital, throbbing pain of loss and indignation from spiralling into an ecstatic, destructive rage. Theological hope for the resurrection of the innocent dead, resting as it must on faith in a more-than-human power, can so infuse desiccated common sense as to strengthen its moral arm.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

11. Giles Tremlett, *Ghosts of Spain: Travels Through a Country's Hidden Past* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), pp. 13–14.

12. I am being careful here because I am aware that some argue for the moral rehabilitation of vengeance as an appropriate response to grave and malicious injury (e.g. Willa Boesak, *God's Wrathful Children: Political Oppression and Christian Ethics* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995]; Willa Boesak, 'Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation', in H. Russel Botman and Robin M. Petersen, eds, *To Remember and to Heal: Theological and Psychological Reflections on Truth and Reconciliation* [Cape Town: Hutman and Rousseau, 1996]; and Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence* [Boston: Beacon, 1998], pp. 9–24). One may, of course, choose to use the word 'vengeance' to refer to proportionate retribution. My own sense, however, is that in common English usage 'vengeance' tends to connote something excessive and out of control; and that therefore to talk of 'vengeance' when one means something moderated and proportionate is to risk at least confusion and perhaps even serious misunderstanding.

However it moderates resentment—whether through the confession of human solidarity in sin-as-moral-weakness or through the intention of reconciliation—forgiveness-as-compassion is unilateral and unconditional. It does not need the green light of the perpetrator's repentance in order to proceed. It is entirely the responsibility of the victim to acknowledge the truths of solidarity-in-sin and to commit herself to reconciliation rather than revenge.

Compassion, however, is just the first moment of forgiveness. The second is absolution. This is the moment when, paradigmatically, the victim addresses the perpetrator and says, 'I forgive you. The trust that was broken is now restored. Our future will no longer be haunted by our past.' Forgiveness-as-absolution should not be granted unilaterally and unconditionally. To proffer trust to someone who has shown himself to be untrustworthy and who is unrepentant about it is foolish. But it is also careless of the wrongdoer, for it robs him of the salutary stimulus to reflect, to learn, and to grow, which the punitive withholding of trust constitutes. Even worse, it degrades him by implying that what he does is of no consequence.<sup>13</sup> Out of respect and care for the wrongdoer, then, forgiveness-as-absolution should wait for signs of his genuine repentance—all the while looking upon him with the eyes of forgiveness-as-compassion.

As I understand it, then, the process of reconciliation involves two moments of forgiveness, one inaugural and one conclusive. In between those moments, as I have implied, there is room for both resentment and retribution of certain kinds. Again, to many contemporary Christians—and to many contemporary post-Christians—this will sound counter-intuitive; for surely love for the wrongdoer must exclude any hostile attitude or feelings toward him? Not so, according to the Anglican moral philosopher-cum-bishop, Joseph Butler, for whom resentment is a 'natural passion' that may be virtuous or vicious according to circumstances, but which in itself is indifferent.<sup>14</sup> Not so, even according to St Paul, who in his epistle to the

13. My thinking here follows Richard Swinburne (e.g. *Responsibility and Atonement*, pp. 81–6, 148–9), except that what he takes to be the whole of forgiveness I take to be just the second moment.
14. Joseph Butler, 'Upon Resentment', *Fifteen Sermons*, ed. W.R. Matthews (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1953), p. 123 (section 3). As I (and Butler, as it happens) understand common English usage, resentment is a constant form of anger. 'Anger' tends to refer to an explosive moment or passing mood, 'resentment' to a more settled attitude. 'Resentment', however, sometimes carries the connotation of meanness, lack of generosity, or egotism. When I use the word, I do not mean such a connotation, since I obviously do not think that resentment against injustice need carry any of those qualities.

Ephesian Christians enjoined them, 'Be angry, but do not sin' (Eph. 4:6). Not to resent an injustice is akin to not grieving the death of a beloved. Something—someone—of great value has been damaged, perhaps destroyed. Not to react negatively is pathological—a failure to care for something that deserves to be cared for. And in cases where another person is culpably responsible<sup>15</sup> for the damage, proportionate anger or resentment against that person is an appropriate expression of care for what has been damaged. Resentment can, of course, be inappropriate (because the wrongdoer should not be blamed for what he did) or disproportionate (because the damage done was not *so* great); and, given the pejorative connotation of the word, common English usage assumes that it is vicious in one of these two ways. Maybe here the language bears the imprint of fifteen centuries of Christianization—or, as I see it, mis-Christianization. After all, St Paul made a distinction between anger and sin. And Jesus himself showed no compunction about addressing 'the scribes and Pharisees' in stinging language that is replete with righteous resentment.

If a certain form of resentment is a morally fitting response to injustice, then so is a certain form of retribution. This is because resentment is the opprobrium for the wrongdoing and against the wrongdoer that naturally expresses itself in retributive punishment. The concept of retributive punishment is very controversial in contemporary Western societies, and in certain circles—not excluding the Christian churches—it is very unpopular. The main reason why many repudiate retribution (and war along with it) as an appropriate response to wrongdoing is their assumption that retribution is vindictive or vengeful, aiming at very best to achieve a barren equality of suffering. To this many Christians add the further assumption that the duty of forgiveness by definition logically excludes retribution. Let me deal with each of these in turn.

First, retribution need not be vengeful. Basically it comprises a negative 'giving back' or response to a wrongdoer on account of the wrong done. This response need not comprise a vindictive attempt to inflict pain on the one who first caused it *for the sake of seeing him suffer*. Rather, liberated from the temptations of rage, it can take the form of a disciplined reaction

15. One can be responsible for an effect without being culpable for it. I can choose to perform an act that I foresee will probably or certainly have an evil effect, without intending (or wanting) that effect, provided that my choosing is sufficiently reluctant and its reasons sufficiently strong. Hereby, of course, I endorse the doctrine of double effect. For further discussion, see my *Aiming to Kill*, pp.71–88; and Chapter Three below.



designed to spare the victims further injury and prevent the perpetrator from further wrongdoing. Moreover, it can take the form of responsible communication to the wrongdoer, whether in words or gestures, which recognizes his dignity as a moral agent, and which tells him that his action is not acceptable and that he must show a genuine willingness to change before a relationship of trust can be restored. Whether in fact it will take these forms depends, of course, upon how the victim sees the perpetrator and upon what ultimate outcome she seeks. If she is free to view him with the eyes of forgiveness-as-compassion, and to commit herself to keeping open the door of forgiveness-as-absolution, then her retribution will be proportioned accordingly and preserved from the demons of vengeance.

This brings us to the second questionable assumption: that forgiveness logically excludes retribution. It is clear from what I have just said that I do not believe this. Rather, I think that forgiveness should qualify, not supplant, retribution. Retribution remains vitally important as an attestation of the importance of the wrong done and thereby of the one who has been wronged. If qualified both by forgiveness-as-compassion and by a desire for forgiveness-as-absolution, retribution can also be an act of fraternal responsibility toward the wrongdoer, caring that he should learn and change, so that reconciliation might be possible. Forgiveness that supposes itself to be sufficient without retribution amounts to premature absolution, implying that neither the wrong, nor the victim, nor the wrongdoer matters—truly, a shrug of avoidance.

Let me bring to a conclusion this discussion of forgiveness, and its relation to resentment and retribution, with a summary. As I see it, the process of reconciliation consists of the following sequence of moments:

1. Victim: forgiveness (i) as compassion: unilateral, unconditional, abjuring vengeance, and intentionally conciliatory.
2. Victim: proportionate expression of resentment in retribution. In addition to preventing the wrongdoer from further injury of the innocent, proportionate retribution seeks to uphold before him the value of what has been damaged and to communicate to him the wrongness of damaging it, in the hope of eliciting his repentance and so enabling reconciliation. (If, however, the wrongdoer were already penitent, then the expression of resentment in retribution would be unnecessary and therefore disproportionate.)
3. Wrongdoer: repentance.

4. Victim: forgiveness (ii) as absolution: conditional upon 3, and ushers in...
5. mutual reconciliation.

## II. How Christian a theory?

Such is my theory of reconciliation and of twofold forgiveness; but is it Christian? Without doubt, forgiveness is *characteristically* Christian. It has a prominent place in the teaching and practice of the founder of the Christian religion and in its founding documents—the New Testament—and it often has a correspondingly prominent place in subsequent Christian ethics (even if many Christians are, I think, rather confused about what it requires). Perhaps less certainly, but still probably enough, forgiveness is *distinctively* Christian—as has been noted, not always with approval, by some informed and reflective non-Christian observers.<sup>16</sup> What is Christian, of course, is not necessarily theological. Christians are human beings as well as believers in God. Their ethics too are formed partly by common human experience. They too know the damage that vengeance can do to its devotees, and the injustices that it proliferates. Nevertheless, to call such knowledge ‘common sense’ is actually to indulge in a complacency only open to those who have managed to avoid noticing how often human societies dissolve into vicious

16. This is a very grand claim, and counter-evidence can certainly be brought against it. Historical religions are complex entities, finding different—and sometimes contradictory—expressions at different times and in different places. On the one hand, there are instantiations of Christianity, for example, where retributive (even vindictive) punishment appears to be the norm. And forgiveness is by no means absent from, say, Judaism and Islam. Indeed, it might even be more present in certain versions of them than in certain versions of Christianity. Nevertheless, it was the Jewish philosopher, Hannah Arendt, who accredited Jesus with being ‘[t]he discoverer of the role of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs’ (*The Human Condition* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1958], p. 238). It was Jewish commentators on *The Sunflower* who rebuked Christian ones for judging that the concentration camp inmate should have granted forgiveness to the dying SS officer (Simon Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower: On the possibilities and limits of forgiveness*, rev. edn [New York: Schocken, 1997], pp. 164–6 [Abraham Joshua Heschel], 216–20 [Dennis Prager]). And it was Christian influence on South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission that is blamed by some critics for using forgiveness to buy reconciliation at the price of justice (e.g. Richard A. Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation: Legitimizing the Post-Apartheid State* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001]; ‘Reconciliation and Revenge in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Rethinking Legal Pluralism and Human Rights’, *Current Anthropology*, 41 [2000]). According to the testimony of *outsiders*, then, it seems that Christianity and forgiveness have a close association that is not only characteristic but distinctive.

cycles of increasingly atrocious vendettas. Take as witnesses Ireland in the 1920s, Spain in the 1930s, Bosnia and Rwanda in the 1990s, and Iraq after March 2003. What passes for common sense in social circles privileged with a long history of peace is far from universal. Experiences may be common and yet give rise to seriously different lessons. Not everyone experiences vengeance like Shaffer's Helen. Arguably, most people experience it like Edward: 'There's only one real moral imperative: don't piss on true rage—it can be the fire of sanity.'<sup>17</sup> It may be, then, that the counterproductiveness and futility of vengeance only appear obvious (or rational) in the light of a particular set of beliefs—or, more modestly, that a particular set of beliefs helps them to appear obvious. One such set of beliefs is provided by Christian theology. The belief that there is a more-than-human agent, who is able and intends to do justice beyond this world of space and time, frees theists to accept the limits of such justice as can be done here and now without compounding injustice. The belief that human creatures are responsible to their Creator for the growth of their lives *as a whole* endows theists with a greater sense of participation in spiritual weakness and moral shortcoming—and so with a disposition to compassion for fellow sinners—than is possessed by those who measure themselves moralistically in terms of their avoidance of bad conduct in discrete relationships with other humans. The belief that Jesus was God Incarnate imbues his teaching and example of forgiveness with an unusual moral authority—for this, after all, is how the Creator and Redeemer seeks to right wrongs. And the belief that Jesus rose from the dead transforms forgiveness from being a symptom of moral weakness—the feeble shrug of avoidance—into the salvific route to glorious vitality beyond death.

It is arguable, then, that the norm of forgiveness is distinctively, as well as characteristically, Christian; and that its distinctiveness is rooted in Christian theology. But what about a theory of forgiveness that finds place for resentment? How Christian is that? Of course, the notion that resentment is a fitting response to wrongdoing has not been given to the world by Christian theology. On the contrary, it is, as Joseph Butler admits, a natural passion. No one needs to be taught to resent injustice—although one might need to be taught what it is that truly deserves resentment. However, not everyone supposes that resentment *should* be moderated by forgiveness-as-compassion and by the desire to achieve forgiveness-as-absolution; and not everyone

17. Shaffer, *Gorgon*, pp. 16–17.

supposes that it *can* be so moderated. As I understand it, a properly Christian ethic holds that such moderation is both possible and obligatory; and, as I have explained above, some of the reasons for taking such a position are theological. This does not mean, of course, that one must own those theological reasons—that one must be a Christian theist—in order to take this particular ethical position. Nevertheless, it might still be the case that Christian theism provides stronger reasons or, more boldly, the only fully adequate ones. Whatever the truth of this moot point, it is clear that Christian theology makes a difference: it supports a particular, finely balanced position that commends resentment while requiring its moderation—and this is a position that not everyone takes. It is not a conclusion of natural reason. It is not common sense.

So much for resentment; now for retribution. Given its high esteem for the vocation of human beings and given its deep concern for their salvation, Christian theology is bound to treat injury to innocent victims very seriously. Therefore, provided that forgiveness-as-compassion has exorcised vengeance, theology will endorse a benevolent form of retribution that aims to uphold the dignity of the injured and contradict the offence of the perpetrator. Except for the fact, some might object, that Jesus himself did not. But is that a fact? His reaction to those whom he saw as lacking in compassion or as exploitative was often verbally explosive: 'You brood of vipers' (Matthew 3:7, 12:34, 23:33); 'Woe to you . . . hypocrites!' (Matthew 23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29); 'You blind fools!' (Matthew 23:16, 17, 19). To describe such language as 'critical' is to tame and civilize it. Surely it is also violent language, designed to wound and sting. Is it vindictive? Not necessarily. Not if it aimed to sting into new awareness and a change of mind. Not if it aimed to provoke repentance. Not if, governed by forgiveness, it was benevolently retributive. The notion that retribution is an appropriate response to atrocious wrongdoing is, of course, not peculiarly Christian. The notion, however, that such a response should take the form of forgiving retribution is as peculiar to Christianity as is its emphasis on forgiveness. As we have argued above, that is *quite* peculiar and strongly formed by theological considerations.

It is my view, therefore, that a genuinely Christian understanding of reconciliation and forgiveness includes space for resentment and retribution. It was for that reason that I dared to say of St Augustine's explanation of the love that the just warrior bears toward the unjust aggressor that it amounts to forgiveness. On the one hand, insofar as the doctrine of just war insists

that just belligerents understand what they are doing as a policing action of one set of sinful creatures to limit and repair the wrongdoing of another set—and *not* as the crusading action of the righteous upon the unrighteous, or the godly upon the infidel—it enjoins a constitutive element of forgiveness-as-compassion. This in turn serves to moderate the use of violence, so that it is proportioned both retrospectively to the nature of the wrongdoing and prospectively to the goal of reconciliation or a more just peace.<sup>18</sup> Thus it is saved from the vengeful temptation to answer injustice with atrocity. On the other hand, since just war makes a punitive, retributive response to wrongdoing, it withholds the political analogue of forgiveness-as-absolution until the offender has demonstrated the political analogue of repentance. However, the fact that just war is looking for repentance at all means that its goal is reconciliation, not vengeful annihilation—peace with the living, not peace among the dead.

### III. The coercive justice within forgiveness

Forgiveness, properly understood, includes the proportionate expression of resentment and retribution. Resentment and retribution are hostile forces: they seek to coerce the wrongdoer—to stop him, to make him conscious of the evils he causes, to urge repentance onto him. Therefore forgiveness qualifies, rather than excludes, coercion; and coercion sometimes takes physical form. In asserting this, I am relaxing a tension—even dismantling a contradiction—that is often supposed to exist between love and justice. This common supposition is attributable above all to the influence of the thought of Reinhold Niebuhr.<sup>19</sup> On the one hand, Niebuhr writes of Christian love<sup>20</sup> as rising in ‘sublime naïvete’<sup>21</sup> above the mean calculations of prudence<sup>22</sup> and in ‘sublime madness’ above immediate enmities.<sup>23</sup> Here he refers specifically to

18. The observation that the proportionality of just warfare is constituted by both a backward and a forward reference is Oliver O’Donovan’s (*The Just War Revisited* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003], pp. 48–63).

19. What follows in this section is a modified version of part of my chapter, ‘Reinhold Niebuhr and the Political Possibility of Forgiveness’, in Richard Harries and Stephen Platten, eds, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Contemporary Politics: God and Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

20. Throughout *Moral Man and Immoral Society* Niebuhr talks about ‘religious love’ when he means primarily Christian love.

21. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Scribner’s, 1960), p. 53.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 57, 257, 263, 265–6.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 255.

what he sees as the crown of the ideal of love<sup>24</sup>—forgiveness, self-sacrificially transcending the claims of remedial justice by absolving injustice unilaterally and unconditionally. Niebuhr thinks it both unrealistic and inappropriate to expect such forgiveness to find expression in relations between large social bodies at the level of national or international politics. This is because social injustice *deserves* coercive opposition, perhaps punishment:

The victim of injustice cannot cease from contending against his oppressors, even if he has a religious sense of the relativity of all social positions and a contrite recognition of the sin in his own heart. Only a religion full of romantic illusions could seek to persuade the Negro to gain justice from the white man merely by forgiving him. As long as men are involved in the conflicts of nature and sin they must seek according to best available moral insights to contend for what they believe to be right. And that will mean that they will contend against other men. Short of the transmutation of the world into the Kingdom of God, men will always confront enemies...<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, Niebuhr does recognize that justice—and the coercion it inevitably involves—needs to be leavened by love: '[a]ny justice which is only justice soon degenerates into something less than justice. It must be saved by something which is more than justice.'<sup>26</sup> In a rare allusion to just war thinking, he acknowledges that violent coercion can be governed by benevolence,<sup>27</sup> in which case 'its terror must have the tempo of a surgeon's skill and healing must follow quickly upon its wounds'.<sup>28</sup> He thinks that love can qualify coercive justice in several ways. It can curb the element of vengeance, increase the intention of reform,<sup>29</sup> and restrain the use of violence. This it achieves partly through an appreciation of the transcendent and equal worth of the life of the enemy;<sup>30</sup> and partly through the spiritual disciplining of resentment<sup>31</sup> by placing the moral agent 'under the scrutiny of [God's] omniscient eye',<sup>32</sup> thus generating contrite acknowledgement that the enemy's moral frailty is also his own.<sup>33</sup> This latter element of the disciplining of resentment I ascribe to

24. Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (New York: Seabury, 1979), p. 137.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 140–1.

26. Niebuhr, *Moral Man*, p. 258.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 170, 172.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 220.

29. Niebuhr, *Interpretation*, p. 67.

30. Niebuhr, *Moral Man*, p. 255; *Interpretation*, p. 65.

31. Niebuhr, *Moral Man*, pp. 248–9.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 51, 60.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 254–5.

forgiveness (as compassion); and indeed at one point so does Niebuhr, when he explicitly identifies with forgiveness 'the demand that the evil in the other shall be borne without vindictiveness because the evil in the self is known'.<sup>34</sup> What this implies is that even Niebuhr sometimes acknowledged that love-as-forgiveness *can* shape coercive justice.<sup>35</sup>

The reason for Niebuhr's inconsistency over the relationship between forgiveness and coercion lies, I think, in his failure to distinguish clearly between vengeance and retribution; and in his mistaken tendency to *identify* forgiveness with the self-sacrificial abandonment of all claims to justice. While I do think that forgiveness always involves the absolute self-sacrifice involved in swallowing one's impulses to vengeance and in suffering discipline by the motive of compassion and the intention of peace, I do not think that it must or should involve the bypassing of justice, appropriate resentment, and proportionate punishment.

The analysis of forgiveness into the two components of compassion and absolution affords the advantage of enabling it to incorporate coercive justice. According to this conception, the process of reconciliation contains not only initial compassion and final absolution, but between them also the coercive contradiction of injustice by the expression of proportionate resentment and the meting out of proportionate punishment. Forgiveness-as-compassion qualifies but does not replace coercive resentment; and it qualifies but need not replace coercive retribution.<sup>36</sup> It makes them both media of communication intended to persuade the wrongdoer of the wrong he has done, to elicit his repentance, and so to enable forgiveness-as-absolution and consequent reconciliation. By ordering resentment and retribution toward reconciliation, it saves them from vengeance.

However, there is coercion and there is coercion. Emotional coercion that takes the form of furrowed brows or pursed lips and physical coercion in the form of a refusal to shake hands or of forcible confinement are one thing. Physical coercion that wounds or kills is surely another. How on

34. Niebuhr, *Interpretation*, p. 137.

35. Where Niebuhr differs from me is in thinking that the contrite recognition of one's own sinfulness and the acceptance of mutual responsibility for the sin of the accused are completely beyond the capacities of collective man (*Interpretation*, p. 67).

36. Insofar as the resentment of injustice finds any external expression—say, in the victim's mistrustful attitude and behaviour toward his wrongdoer—it is itself a kind of informal retribution. Forgiveness-as-compassion should not replace the retributive expression of proportionate resentment. However, were the expression of this resentment to succeed in communicating to the wrongdoer that he has done wrong, and in eliciting from him sufficient apology and reparation as to restore trust, then further, formal retribution would be rendered unnecessary and so disproportionate.

earth can that be an expression of forgiveness—as-compassion? I believe that it can be. Even wounding or lethal coercion can be compassionate at least insofar as it refuses vengeance, intends to stop the wrongdoer doing wrong, intends that he should not resume it, would be content to achieve that by persuading him to surrender, and restrains its use of violence according to its intentions.

This integration of forgiveness with the hostile, coercive expression of resentment and meting out of retribution, sometimes wounding and lethal, confers a further advantage; for it enables us to discern how forgiveness could find fitting political expression in circumstances where simple absolution would be breathtakingly naïve and inappropriate—that is, in circumstances of hostility born of atrocious injustice from which there has been no repentance. And insofar as forgiveness is a defining feature of a Christian ethic of response to wrongdoing, this conception spares such an ethic from having to choose between relevance and plausibility.

For example, I take it for granted that, in response to the attacks of 11 September 2001, it would not have been heroic but ludicrous for the US government to have addressed al-Qaeda and said, 'We forgive you. We will not let what you have done sour our regard for you. We will continue to treat you as friends.' If such absolution were the sum of forgiveness, then it could have had no plausible place in America's reaction. If, however, forgiveness can take the form of compassion as well as absolution, then it could have had two plausible roles. First, it could have ordered the use of force toward the end of peace, and disciplined it away from vindictiveness. And second, it could have moved the US government to entertain the possibility that, though al-Qaeda's ill-disciplined resentment had festered out of all proportion, not all of its roots were simply malevolent and irrational, and that in the rank growth of its malice and falsehood there lay genuine grievances that deserved sympathetic attention—for example, the plight of the Palestinian people. Thus conceived, forgiveness could have had plausible political purchase even where violently coercive retribution is appropriate.

#### IV. Love, hope, and modesty

So far I have considered at length the relationship between love-as-forgiveness on the one hand, and coercive resentment and retribution on the other. I have done this because forgiveness is widely reckoned to be the



epitome of Christian love and because it is widely assumed to exclude coercion. If this is true, then, since war is a form of coercion, it cannot be compatible with forgiveness, and the concept of just war has no good claim to the title 'Christian'. Against this conclusion, I have argued that forgiveness should be understood to include and qualify coercion, rather than displace it, where repentance is not forthcoming. In the next section, I shall take this argument one stage further and seek to show that love, even in the specific form of forgiveness, can find expression on the battlefield. Here I want to pause briefly and observe that, in its pursuit of just peace and in its use of coercive, perhaps belligerent, means, Christian love is qualified by religious hope and therefore by realistic modesty in its secular expectations.

The doctrine of just war understands it to be a retributive act, motivated in part by a proper resentment at a grave injustice. The resentment and the retribution that it fuels, however, should be qualified by forgiveness-as-compassion and disciplined by the intention of the reconciliation or peace that forgiveness-as-absolution ushers in. Ideally this peace should involve the repair of the damage done to the victim, the healing of the moral corruption of the perpetrator through his coming to own and repudiate his deed *as wrong*, and the consequent restoration of trust between the perpetrator and his neighbours. In fact, justice as rectification usually falls far short of the ideal. Some kinds of damage are simply beyond human repair: the death of victims, the apparently irreversible moral corruption of some wrongdoers. One of the distinguishing features of *atrocious* wrongs is that their combination of extension (the massive number of victims) and intensity (the high degree of indiscriminateness, mercilessness, and cruelty) exposes the limits that almost invariably attend human attempts at justice, but which are usually not so shockingly obvious. Just war doctrine is wisely Augustinian in the modesty of its end:<sup>37</sup> the stopping

37. I say 'Augustinian' here because it was St Augustine who characterized our historical situation as 'secular'. By this he meant that we belong to the *saeculum* or age that runs between the token of the glorious transformation of the world, which is the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and its fulfilment. As a consequence, our moral and political endeavours are fraught with tragic tension, aspiring to ideals that can only be realized partially, ambiguously, and fleetingly under the conditions of secular history. In *The City of God* Augustine offers an arresting judicial example of the tragic character of secular endeavour (*City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson [London: Penguin, 1972], Book XIX, chapter 6, pp. 859–61): the need perchance to torture someone who might be innocent, in order to find out the truth about a crime. And at one point in a letter to Paulinus of Nola in AD 408, he gives moving voice to the spiritual agony that the exercise of judicial office produces in the judge: 'On the subject of punishing and refraining from punishment, what am I to say? It is our desire that when we decide

of the wrongdoing by the disabling of those who are perpetrating it, and the building of a new political order that is at least *sufficiently* just and stable not to return to the old ways. The building of a just future will require that there is sufficient public repudiation of the past; but the building of a stable future may well require something less than comprehensive retribution. Some wrongdoers will not be punished at all; others will not be punished enough. Some may learn the errors of their ways; others will not. And, when all is said and done, their murdered victims will remain dead. No 'infinite justice' here, then.

Such Augustinian modesty is partly inspired by the prudence that cumulative common experience teaches: to insist on too much justice is to risk propagating further injustice. However, what experience would teach and what humans are prepared to learn are often discrepant—especially when those humans are disturbed and driven by inordinate resentment at terrible wrongs. So prudence alone may not be a sufficient matrix of patience. Augustinian modesty, however, also has the fuel of religious, eschatological hope. This is the hope that the justice that we humans cannot do here and now—the raising from the dead of innocent victims, the meting out of retribution upon those perpetrators who have escaped earthly punishment, the maturing of penitence and reconciliation that history has cut short—will yet be done by God at the end of history. While such hope can be construed in such a way as to undermine moral effort, equally it can be construed so as to inspire it. And while such hope can be dismissed as nothing but wishful thinking, it can also be proposed as a reasonable wager upon the truth of the value of the good of human beings: if that value is not an illusion, if our commitment to defend and promote it is not a noble absurdity, and if eschatological hope is necessary to make such commitment maximally intelligible, then adhering to such hope is both morally serious and rational.

whether or not to punish people, in either case it should contribute wholly to their security. These are indeed deep and obscure matters: what limit ought to be set to punishment with regard to both the nature and extent of guilt, and also the strength of spirit the wrongdoers possess? What ought each one to suffer? ... What do we do when, as often happens, punishing someone will lead to his destruction, but leaving him unpunished will lead to someone else being destroyed? ... What trembling, what darkness! ... "Trembling and fear have come upon me and darkness has covered me, and I said, Who will give me wings like a dove's? Then I will fly away and be at rest'.... [Psalm 55 (54):5-8] (Augustine, *Political Writings*, Letter 95, pp. 23-4)

## V. Can love walk the battlefield?

In this chapter so far, I have sought to explain how Christian love might qualify coercion. But can it really? It might be possible in theory, but is it possible in practice? And even if it is possible in the case of certain limited kinds of coercion, what about physical violence? What about war? Surely soldiers in the heat of battle are driven by hatred and vengeance, not love? As the non-religious pacifist, Robert Holmes, puts it: '[O]ne cannot help but wonder . . . whether it is humanly possible amidst the chaos of slaughter and gore that marks . . . combat to remain free of those things Augustine identifies as evil in war, the cruelty, enmity, and the like . . .'<sup>38</sup>

I do not doubt that soldiers are sometimes motivated by vengeance and hatred. That, however, does not count against my thesis. What would count against it is evidence that it is psychologically necessary that war-fighting be motivated by malevolence; for then the shaping of violence by love would indeed be a mere academic fantasy. In support of my thesis, however, I can offer empirical evidence that malevolence does not necessarily motivate soldiers, even in the front line, and that various forms of love do.

Battlefield motivation varies enormously. Sometimes what prevails is a clinical professionalism. 'In the heat of battle,' writes the eminent military historian Richard Holmes, 'most soldiers regard their adversaries as ciphers: anonymous figures to be dealt with as expeditiously as possible . . . Most soldiers in contact killed to stay alive, and some went further, gaining professional satisfaction from outmanoeuvring or outshooting their adversaries, even if the consequence of this success was the death of another human being.'<sup>39</sup> Such cool professionalism is evident in Ernst Jünger's classic memoir of the First World War. 'Throughout the war,' Jünger wrote, 'it was always my endeavour to view my opponent without animus, and to form an opinion of him as a man on the basis of the courage he showed. I would always try and seek him out in combat and kill him, and I expected nothing else from him. But never did I entertain mean thoughts of him. When prisoners fell into my hands, later on, I felt responsible for their safety, and would always do everything in my power for them.'<sup>40</sup> Karl Marlantes, a veteran of

38. Robert L. Holmes, *On War and Morality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 133–4, 135.

39. Richard Holmes, *Dusty Warriors: Modern Soldiers at War* (London: HarperPress, 2006), p. 317.

40. Ernst Jünger, *Storm of Steel*, trans. Michael Hoffman (London: Allen Lane, 2003), p. 58.

jungle combat in Vietnam, concurs: 'Contrary to the popular conception, when one is in the fury of battle I don't think one is very often in an irrational frenzy... I was usually in a white heat of total rationality, completely devoid of passion, to get the job done with minimal casualties to my side and stay alive doing it.'<sup>41</sup>

Another motive, especially among soldiers entering battle for the first time, is to prove oneself by meeting an inner, almost spiritual challenge. Thus Private Bosch of 7 Platoon, C Company, 1 Prince of Wales's Royal Regiment, describes his first experience of combat in Iraq:

And then it happens, your first contact. You come face to face with the demon inside you. Fear and anxiety grips [sic] you and squeezes [sic] the very life out of you. This is life and death. This is where a man stands up and faces his destiny... This is what you were born for... You were born to be strong and courageous; to be a man. And with that the demon turns and runs. The fear and anxiety disappears [sic] and your senses sharpen into a knife's edge with which you take control of yourself and lunge forward...<sup>42</sup>

Perhaps the predominant military motive is love for one's comrades, which is one of the forms of love that the Johannine literature in the New Testament endorses in Jesus' name: 'Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends' (John 15:13). In her analysis of face-to-face killing in 20th-century warfare, Joanna Bourke observes the predominant extent to which soldiers are motivated to kill by love for their comrades and their families, rather than by vengefulness against the enemy. Quoting a 1949 study, she writes:

In a survey of 568 American infantrymen who had seen combat in Sicily and North Africa in 1944, men were asked what was the most important factor enabling them to continue fighting... [V]indictiveness... and self-preservation ('kill or be killed') were scarcely mentioned. Rather (after simply desiring to 'end the task'), combatants cited solidarity with the group and thoughts of home and loved ones as their main incentives.<sup>43</sup>

41. Karl Marlantes, *What it is Like to Go to War* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2011), p. 96.

42. Holmes, *Dusty Warriors*, p. 316.

43. Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing. Face-to-face killing in twentieth century warfare* (London: Granta, 1999), p. 142; quoting from Samuel A. Stouffer et al., *The American Soldier: Combat and its Aftermath*, 2 vols., Vol. II (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949), p. 109. In his 1995 study Lieutenant-Colonel Dave Grossman confirms this point and extends its significance. 'Numerous studies have concluded,' he writes, 'that men in combat are usually motivated to fight, not by ideology or hate or fear, but by group pressures and processes' (Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* [Boston: Little Brown, 1995], p. 89; quoted by Coady in *Morality and Political Violence*, p. 175).

One form that this sense of solidarity—this love—can take is a resolve to be worthy of one's predecessors in an historic regiment with a gallant reputation. As Patrick Bishop writes of the men of 3rd Battalion, the Parachute Regiment, during their tour in Helmand Province in the summer of 2006: 'They were fighting not just to hold their position but for the reputation of a regiment that was as dear to them as were their families.'<sup>44</sup> However, more frequently what mattered was less the esteem of long-dead ancestors than the trust of still-living comrades: '[T]he ideals that motivated every proper soldier... were nothing to do with queen or country, religion or political ideology. What sustained them was the determination not to let themselves down, and above all, not to let down their friends.'<sup>45</sup> Writing about his own experience in Helmand two years later, Lt Patrick Bury of 1st Battalion, the Royal Irish Regiment, puts flesh on this abstract point as he reflects on an exchange with his corporal:

'Corporal McCord, I'm sorry for shouting at you in front of the...'

He interrupts and speaks hurriedly, passionately. '... I love you, boss. I'd do anything for you... I'd take a bullet for you.' He looks at me. It is not often that a man tells another he loves him. Especially in front of other men. I think of... the effort I have made to... respect and protect the boys, to build this team. To earn their trust and respect. And we call it respect because it's easy to say. It's not soft and it's not embarrassing. But Matt has called it by its true name, love. Simple, platonic love. This love that motivates men to do the most touching, brave, selfless things for their brothers. A love so deep it burns and tingles in you when it flickers, reminding you there are things greater than you, more important than you, things that last longer than you... And sometimes, out here, you get a glimpse and you understand. You understand why soldiers charge machine guns or hold out to the death while others escape. Love. For love melts fear like butter on a furnace; it transcends it.<sup>46</sup>

Later, an eighteen-year-old private, earlier found sobbing uncontrollably after a Taliban attack, steels himself to go out on night patrol. Bury comments: '[Mark] has refused... to leave the platoon, and has forced himself to come out with us tonight, despite all his fear, his terror... I watch him

44. Patrick Bishop, 3 *Para* (London: Harper Press, 2007), p. 188.

45. Bishop, 3 *Para*, p. 268.

46. Patrick Bury, *Callsign Hades* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2011), p. 136. The publishers ascribe Mr Bury's account to 2006; he himself has told me that it relates to 2008.

nervously twitch and scan, but endure. It was pure courage, the very essence of it. The triumph of will over fear . . . *Greater love hath no man*.<sup>47</sup> Sebastian Junger writes along the same lines of a US infantry unit in eastern Afghanistan in 2007–8, observing that the attraction of combat had more to do with protecting comrades than killing the enemy.<sup>48</sup> In a nutshell, ‘Courage was love.’<sup>49</sup> To civilians this might seem a counter-intuitive, eccentric, even perverse interpretation. Nevertheless, it is confirmed by the commandant of the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, who, in a BBC documentary first broadcast in 2011, concluded his eve-of-commissioning address to the officer cadets: ‘I’m often asked, “Is there one Golden Rule for leadership?” As officers you are serving your soldiers. Some day you may have to lead men into battle. This is an extraordinary thing to do. You are their servants and you do that through leading them. That’s how it works. If you don’t understand that, *you ain’t got it!* That’s “serve to lead”. Go out and *love* your soldiers.’<sup>50</sup>

Self-sacrificial love for one’s friends is admirable, but he that would follow Jesus must extend love to his enemies, too. Is this possible in the heat of combat? Many will suppose not, assuming that soldiers typically hate their opponents. But this is not so. In his acclaimed history of the Spanish Civil War, Antony Beevor makes this remarkable report: ‘There was said to have been a sweet-natured youth among Moscardó’s [nationalist] defenders at Toledo [in 1936], who was called the Angel of the Alcázar because before firing his rifle he used to cry, “Kill without hate!”’<sup>51</sup> This is remarkable presumably because it is so unusual. What is unusual about it, however, is the pious, adolescent scrupulousness with which the absence of hatred is expressed, not the absence as such; for hatred of the enemy is not at all a constant motive of soldiers in the field, or even a usual one. Indeed, it seems that hatred is more common among civilians than combat troops. In his extraordinarily wise meditation on the psychology and spirituality of combat, informed by his own experience of military service in the Second World War, Glenn Gray writes: ‘A civilian far removed from the battle is nearly certain to be more bloodthirsty than the front-line soldier whose

47. Bury, *Callsign Hades*, pp. 231–2, 261–2. The italics are the author’s.

48. Sebastian Junger, *War* (London: Fourth Estate, 2010), pp. 214, 234. See also pp. 120, 123–4, 210, 239–40, 243.

49. Junger, *War*, p. 239.

50. Major-General Marriott, Commandant, Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst at the end of Episode 3 of BBC 4’s documentary, ‘Sandhurst’, first broadcast on 3 October 2011.

51. Antony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain: The Spanish Civil War, 1936–9* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2006), p. 425.

hatred has to be responsible, meaning that he has to respond to it, to answer it with action.<sup>52</sup> This view is substantiated by R.H. Tawney, the Anglican economic historian, who fought in the early stages of the battle of the Somme in July 1916 before he was severely wounded and invalided back to England. The following October he published an article in the press, where he reflected on the bewildering gulf in understanding that, he felt, had opened up between the men at the front and their families and friends back home. At one point he protests against the view of the soldier that has come to prevail in many civilian minds:

And this 'Tommy' is a creature at once ridiculous and disgusting. He is represented as . . . finding 'sport' in killing other men, as 'hunting Germans out of dug-outs as a terrier hunts rats', as overwhelming with kindness the captives of his bow and spear. The last detail is true to life, but the emphasis which you lay upon it is both unintelligent and insulting. Do you expect us to hurt them or starve them? Do you not see that we regard these men who have sat opposite us in mud—'square-headed bastards', as we called them—as the victims of the same catastrophe as ourselves, as our comrades in misery much more truly than you are? Do you think that we are like some of you in accumulating on the head of every wretched antagonist the indignation felt for the wickedness of a government, of a social system, or (if you will) of a nation? . . . Hatred of the enemy is not common, I think, among those who have encountered him. It is incompatible with the proper discharge of our duty. For to kill in hatred is murder; and soldiers, whatever their nationality, are not murderers, but executioners.<sup>53</sup>

Tawney's experience was by no means unique. It was shared by Charles Barberon of the 121 *Régiment d'artillerie*: 'It's surprising, but the soldier who has suffered the enemy's fire does not show the same hatred for the enemy as civilians.'<sup>54</sup> Further confirmation, if it is needed, is available from the next world war. RAF pilot Michael Constable Maxwell reports in his diary an encounter he and some colleagues had had with a local lawyer, who was friendly with his squadron. The lawyer was told of the Dornier [the German plane that Maxwell had just shot down]. 'Oh how absolutely splendid of you, I do hope they were all killed!' he remarked. Maxwell found this, he

52. J. Glenn Gray, *The Warrior: Reflections on Men in Battle*, intro. Hannah Arendt (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), p. 135.

53. R.H. Tawney, 'Some Reflections of a Soldier', in *The Attack and Other Papers* (London: George, Allen, Unwin, 1953), pp. 25, 27.

54. William Philpott, *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme and the Making of the Twentieth Century* (London: Little, Brown, 2009), p. 177.

wrote, 'the filthiest remark I have ever heard and I was staggered by its bloody sadism... it is this loathsome attitude which allows papers to print pictures of wounded Germans. They must be killed and I hope to kill many myself... but the act is the unpleasant duty of the executioner which must be done ruthless and merciless [sic]—but it can be done silently.'<sup>55</sup>

Front-line servicemen do not necessarily hate the enemy. Sometimes they even feel a sense of solidarity or kinship with him. Thus Gerald Dennis, who fought on the Western Front, confessed that at Christmas 1916 he would:

not have minded fraternizing as had been done the previous two years for in a way, [sic] the opponents on each side of No Man's Land were kindred spirit. We did not hate one another. We were both P.B.I. [poor bloody infantry], we should have liked to have stood up between our respective barbed wire, without danger and shaken hands with our counterparts [sic].<sup>56</sup>

Thus, too, Ernest Raymond, a British veteran of the Gallipoli campaign in 1915, recalled that the Turk 'became popular with us, and everything suggested that our amiability toward him was reciprocated'.<sup>57</sup>

An absence of hatred for the enemy, even a certain sense of kinship with him, are not at all uncommon in the experience of front-line troops. But what about compassion? I put this question to a British veteran of the Falklands War in 1982. Chris Keeble, then a major in the Parachute Regiment, found himself in command of a battalion during the Battle of Goose Green after its colonel had been killed in action. The paratroops, he told me, were very ferocious as long as the battle continued, but once it was over he witnessed many instances of his men cradling wounded Argentine soldiers in their arms.<sup>58</sup> Compassion for the enemy—after combat—was not foreign to that battlefield. And if Glenn Gray is to be believed, it is commonly found elsewhere.<sup>59</sup>

This is all true, but it is not the whole truth. It would surely strain credibility to pretend that pleasure in destruction, anger, and hatred are all stran-

55. Patrick Bishop, *Fighter Boys: Saving Britain 1940* (London: HarperCollins, 2003), p. 336.

56. Bourke, *An Intimate History*, p. 148, quoting Gerald V. Dennis, 'A Kitchener Man's Bit (1916–1918)', 1928, p. 129, Imperial War Museum.

57. Ernest Raymond, *The Story of My Days: An Autobiography 1882–1922* (London: Cassell, 1968), p. 120, quoted by Richard Harries in 'The De-romanticisation of War and the Struggle for Faith', in *The Straits of War: Gallipoli Remembered*, introduced by Martin Gilbert (Stroud: Sutton, 2000), pp. 190–1.

58. Chris Keeble, in conversation with the author, June 2009.

59. Gray, *Warriors*, pp. 83–4.



gers to the battlefield. Of course, they are not. 'The least acknowledged aspect of war, today,' writes Karl Marlantes, 'is how exhilarating it is.'<sup>60</sup> This exhilaration, however, is not always malicious. It is not always the destruction that pleases, so much as the thrill, even the ecstasy, of danger. A month before he was killed at the very end of the First World War, the poet Wilfred Owen—yes, he of the pity-of-war fame—wrote to his mother:

I have been in action for some days. I can find no word to qualify my experiences except the word SHEER . . . It passed the limits of my Abhorrence. I lost all my earthly faculties, and fought like an angel . . . With this corporal who stuck to me and shadowed me like your prayers I captured a German Machine Gun and scores of prisoners . . . I only shot one man with my revolver (at about 30 yards!); The rest I took with a smile.<sup>61</sup>

More recently, and less angelically, Patrick Hennessey has written of his first experience of battle in Afghanistan in May 2007: 'But what I couldn't say in an email because maybe at the time I didn't know it or didn't want to believe it in case it ran out or wasn't true, was just how easy it all was, how natural it all felt and how much fun.'<sup>62</sup> And describing a later engagement, he says:

I want to sit with him [the major] in the ditch and try and explain, try and piece together what it is about the contact battle that ramps the heartbeat up so high and pumps adrenalin and euphoria through the veins in such a heady rapid mix. I want to sit with him . . . and wonder what compares; the winning and scoring punch, the first kiss, the triumphant knicker-peeling moment? Nowhere else sells bliss like this, surely? Not in freefall jumps or crisp blue waves, not on dance floors in pills or white lines—I want to discuss with him whether it's sexually charged because it's the ultimate affirmation of being alive.<sup>63</sup>

A British veteran of the Iraq invasion in 2003, explaining his eagerness to go to Helmand, agrees: 'There's no better buzz than having a bullet flying past your face.'<sup>64</sup> Here, the exhilaration, the ecstasy of war seem akin to that of extreme sports—adolescent perhaps, but not exactly malicious.

60. Marlantes, *What it is Like to Go to War*, p. 62.

61. Wilfred Owen, Letter 662, to Susan Owen, 4 or 5 October 1918, in *Collected Letters*, ed. Harold Owen and John Bell (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 580. The irregular capitalization is Owen's.

62. Patrick Hennessey, *The Junior Officers' Reading Club: Killing Time and Fighting Wars* (London: Penguin, 2010), p. 179.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 211.

64. A soldier from the 2nd Battalion, The Royal Welsh, in Episode 1 of the BBC Radio 4 documentary, 'While the Boys Are Away', first broadcast on Wednesday 16 March 2011.

On other occasions, however, the ecstasy that impels soldiers is that of rage, which is more morally complex, perhaps dubious. Sometimes what inspires it is the death of comrades. In the Battle for Normandy in 1944, according to Antony Beevor, a member of the US 30th Infantry Division noticed that '[r]eal hatred of the enemy came to soldiers . . . when a buddy was killed. "And this was often a total hatred; any German they encountered after that would be killed."' <sup>65</sup> Sixty-three years later, their counterparts in eastern Afghanistan reacted in the same way. After the death of a popular comrade, Sebastian Junger tells us, 'Second Platoon fought like animals . . .'<sup>66</sup> And after a similar incident, one of its members commented, 'I just wanted to kill everything that came up that wasn't American.'<sup>67</sup> Fierce anger in response to the violent killing of a comrade seems to me quite natural, not merely in the sense of 'predictable', but also in the sense of 'appropriate'. Anger at the deliberate destruction of anything valuable is appropriate. Not to resent its loss is to fail in love for it. If it was valuable, then its violent destruction *deserves* resentment. Still, it deserves only *proportionate and discriminate* resentment. It deserves anger that is not sinful. This raises the important psychological question: Is it actually possible to control anger under battlefield conditions? It seems so. Describing a unit's reaction to the death of a popular colleague in Afghanistan, Sergeant Dan Jarvie of the Parachute Regiment observed: 'There wasn't a feeling that they [the dead man's section] were going to go out and do anything for revenge. That's not what we were there for. We weren't going to hand out any punishment to anyone who wasn't Taliban. But we had a resolution . . . we will go out there and fight harder, fight more aggressively . . .'<sup>68</sup>

What appears to anger combat soldiers most, however, is not the death of a comrade, but enemy conduct that breaks the rules, be they formal or informal: treachery, gratuitous sacrilege, wanton cruelty. So Michael Burleigh comments on the behaviour of troops in the Second World War: 'Anything that seemed sneaky . . . were [sic] liable to elicit a vicious response.'<sup>69</sup> During the battle for Sicily in 1943, American troops of the

65. Antony Beevor, *D-Day: The Battle for Normandy* (London: Viking, 2009), p. 260.

66. Junger, *War*, p. 60.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

68. Bishop, 3 *Para*, p. 144.

69. Michael Burleigh, *Moral Combat: A History of World War II* (London: HarperPress, 2010), p. 380.

45th Division responded to cases of treacherous surrender by German troops by adopting a policy of taking no prisoners.<sup>70</sup> In South-East Asia, '[a]s they pursued the Japanese, the Australians encountered countless examples of sadism: the body of a native boy, his head incinerated with a flamethrower and a bayonet protruding from his anus; a woman whose left breast had been cut off before she died; the body of a militiaman tied to a tree with a bayonet left rammed into his stomach. By the time the Australians found evidence of cannibalism, they had come to regard the enemy as something other than human.'<sup>71</sup> Similarly, US Marine Eugene Sledge told of 'an incident where he happened upon Marine dead, one of whom had been decapitated and had his hands cut off at the wrist—his head was posed on his chest—while his penis had been cut off and stuffed in his mouth. Another man had been "butchered" into neat pieces . . . "From that moment on I never felt the least pity or compassion for [the Japanese] no matter what the circumstances."<sup>72</sup>

Again, it seems to me that deep anger is the only morally fitting response to such appalling, sadistic cruelty; and that fitting anger here may require the intensity of a certain kind of hatred. Confronted with such atrocity, soldiers have cogent reason not to extend to those responsible any benefit of doubt; and if such conduct is typical of the enemy, or unless and until they can find a way of discriminating between the guilty and the innocent among them, they have sufficient reason to withhold doubt's benefit from anyone wearing the enemy's uniform in the relevant arena. Such fitting hatred and mercilessness need not last forever, however: 'During the assault on Longstop Hill in Tunisia in April 1943 a captured German drew a concealed pistol and shot several of his Argyll and Sutherland Highlander captors. The latter were "roused to a state of berserk fury—We just had a hate—at the Germans, the hill, everything." For a few days they accepted no surrenders, but by the time they had stormed the hill, losing a third of their own men in the action, they had taken three hundred prisoners.'<sup>73</sup> Nor need hatred be universal and indiscriminate. An American infantryman, Sidney Stewart, leapt into a bomb crater and found himself face to face with a Japanese soldier who had done the same thing: "I knew I couldn't take him prisoner. We didn't have time . . . He said something in

70. Carlo D'Este, *Bitter Victory: The Battle for Sicily 1943* (Glasgow: Collins, 1988), p. 317.

71. Burleigh, *Moral Combat*, p. 382.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 365.      73. *Ibid.*, p. 379.

Japanese . . . I knew it was surrender . . . He didn't cringe or sneer, nor did he show any hatred. Why, I don't hate this guy. I can't hate him . . . This man was like a friend." Nonetheless, when ordered to move out, Stewart ignored the prayer board the Japanese was tugging from his pocket and shot him dead. He did this, however, neither out of hatred nor without necessity.<sup>74</sup>

Writing of his experience in Helmand Province in 2008, Patrick Bury tells a very revealing tale about what happened when a Talib blew himself up while laying a roadside bomb:

I was glad he was dead. It was funny. He had tried to blow us up, and the stupid fucker had blown himself up. That was gratifying, warming, pleasant. But later I see photos of his body and I feel sick. Somewhere within me, under the hardening crust, compassion still pervades my thoughts. *What about his mother, his family? What a waste of a life.*

My compassion lasts less than twenty-four hours. As we debate whether to return his body to a mosque before sundown, like the soft, moral, Geneva-bound men we are, the Taliban prepare to ambush us at the mosque. Luckily, we don't have the manpower. The family can collect him later. Then we find out about the ambush. Rage.

*Fuck them, the dirty despicable bastards. Is nothing sacred? Ambush your enemy as he returns your dead? Honour? You bastards. YOU FUCKING BASTARDS. I WILL KILL EVERY LAST ONE OF YOU.*

. . . I am struggling with this war . . . Struggling with our enemy. An enemy that says it is strictly Islamic yet runs harems and makes and takes drugs, an enemy that uses handicapped kids as mules for suicide bombs, that executes children for going to school. I start to hate them. Hate them for what they are doing to me. Hate them and their terrifying suicide bombs that separate us from the locals. Hate them for eroding me.

*Do they hate us in the same way?*

Yes.

And I hate the locals for not standing up to them. For harbouring them, sheltering them. For not returning our smiles. For not being human. For hating us. For watching us walk over IEDs [improvised explosive devices].

*Not all of them . . . Not all of them.*<sup>75</sup>

In the first place what this reveals is the emotional maelstrom within Bury: on the one hand, a sense of satisfaction that an enemy had got his come-uppance, sharpened by righteous indignation against the Taliban's

74. *Ibid.*, p. 367.

75. Bury, *Callsign Hades*, pp. 218–19. The italics and the block capitals are all Bury's.

outrageous unscrupulousness,<sup>76</sup> and on the other hand the constraining voice of compassion ('*What about his mother, his family? What a waste of a life . . . Do they hate us in the same way? Yes . . . Not all of them . . . Not all of them*'). In the second place it displays the struggle that Bury undergoes to retain his compassion, which he articulates elsewhere: 'Faced with the poor chances of our own survival, with death permeating everything, with the cheapness of life and the Afghan disregard for it, our morality, our compassion, diminishes within us. We try to keep our empathy. Our humanity. But it is getting harder.'<sup>77</sup> Finally, Bury's experience implies that the enraged hatred of the enemy, powerful though it may be, need not get its own way, need not take over, because in his case it did not. The voice of compassion was able to speak, to push back.

It seems to me that anger, even with the intensity of rage and hatred, can sometimes be a morally fitting motive on the battlefield. Despicable deeds deserve no less of a reaction. For sure, even morally justified rage and hatred are dangerous emotions, not easily governed; but the empirical evidence is that they can be governed. If it is love of justice that grounds and inspires them, then perhaps that same love is well placed to restrain them.

It has to be admitted, however, that rage is not always inspired by care for goods and love for justice. Sometimes, it is fuelled by the sheer joy—the ecstasy—of destruction. Ernst Jünger bears witness from the First World War:

As we advanced, we were in the grip of a berserk rage. The overwhelming desire to kill lent wings to my stride. Rage squeezed bitter tears from my eyes. The immense desire to destroy that overhung the battlefield precipitated a red mist in our brains. We called out sobbing and stammering fragments of sentences to one another, and an impartial observer might have concluded that we were all ecstatically happy . . . The fighter, who sees a bloody mist in front of his eyes as he attacks, doesn't want prisoners; he wants to kill.<sup>78</sup>

76. Bury's view of the Taliban is not just an expression of partisan prejudice. Michael Semple, an Irish expert on Afghanistan and deputy to the European Union's special representative to Afghanistan in 2004–7, has written: 'In terms of the insurgents' operating methods, most sections of the insurgency have developed ruthlessness as an in-house style, even more so now than pre-2001. In fact the insurgents have developed a reputation for using extreme and arbitrary violence . . . In the post-2001 insurgency, the Taliban have been even more dependent on tactics that by any definition constitute acts of terrorism, including targeted assassinations of civilian figures and bomb attacks on civilian targets or on military targets without due precautions to prevent civilian casualties' (*Reconciliation in Afghanistan* [Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2009], pp. 36–7, 46).

77. Bury, *Callsign Hades*, p. 210.

78. Jünger, *Storm of Steel*, pp. 232, 239.

Looking back at his experience in Vietnam, Karl Marlantes recognizes the same phenomenon: 'This was blood lust. I was moving from white heat to red heat. The assigned objective, winning the hill, was ensured. I was no longer thinking how to accomplish my objective with the lowest loss of life to my side. I just wanted to keep killing gooks.'<sup>79</sup> Marlantes is acutely aware of 'the danger of opening up to the rapture of violent transcendence', of 'falling in love with the power and thrill of destruction and death dealing . . . There is a deep savage joy in destruction . . . I loved this power. I love it still. And it scares the hell out of me.'<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, he is quite adamant that it is 'simply not true' 'that all is fair in love and war, that having rules in war is total nonsense'.<sup>81</sup> Appealing to incidents of German and British generosity towards the enemy during the North African campaign in the Second World War,<sup>82</sup> Marlantes comments, 'They remembered their common humanity and controlled the beast that lies within us all.'<sup>83</sup>

Anger, hatred, rage, the sheer pleasure of destruction: these are all powerful emotions on the battlefield, but they can be governed. The last one can be refused; the first three can be rendered discriminate and disproportionate. Whether or not they *will* be governed depends crucially upon the military discipline instilled by training, and especially upon the quality of leadership in the field. This last point is underscored by Patrick Bury's testimony:

Most soldiers do not want to kill per se. Almost all of us have an inherent belief that killing is wrong. However, the situations we find ourselves in often mean we are forced to consider the use of lethal force. Our training helps us differentiate between threat and appropriate use of force, but also, by its very nature, makes it easier for us to kill . . .

Killing, whatever its form, can be morally corrosive. Mid-intensity counter insurgency, with its myriad of complex situations, an enemy who won't play fair and the constant, enduring feeling of being under threat, compound such corrosiveness. A good tactical leader must recognise this and constantly maintain the morality of those he commands.

79. Marlantes, *What it is Like to Go to War*, p. 103.

80. *Ibid.*, pp. 61, 63, 67, 160.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 228.

82. It must be admitted that the fighting in North Africa during the Second World War was unusually civilized.

83. Marlantes, *What it is Like to Go to War*, p. 232.

... [A]t the beginning of the tour, it was relatively easy to maintain a sense of morality amongst the platoon. But when the threat to our lives increased, as the Taliban began fighting increasingly dirty, as the civilians became indifferent and as we were either nearly killed or took casualties, this became increasingly difficult. Soldiers who did not want to kill for no reason began to become unconcerned.

There is a balance to be struck between morality and operational effectiveness, between softness and hardness. It is a fine line to walk, but one which must be walked nonetheless. My platoon sergeant would always strive to keep the soldiers sharp, aggressive and ready to fight their way out of any situation...

However, as a junior officer I felt the need to morally temper what the platoon sergeant had said to the men. His could not be the final word on the subject... In the morphing, grey conflict we found ourselves in I pointed out that the civilians, even if they were untrustworthy and indifferent, were still our best form of force protection. They told us where the IEDs were. If we lost them, we lost everything... We had to treat captured Taliban correctly. Otherwise we might as well not bother coming out here.

I think, in hindsight, this unacknowledged agreement I had with my platoon sergeant worked well. He kept the platoon sharp and ready, 'loaded' as it were, and I just made sure the gun didn't go off at the wrong place at the wrong people... The platoon was so well drilled it barely needed me for my tactical acumen. But they did need me for that morality.

Sometimes I felt my own morality begin to slip, that hardness creeping in. Sometimes I thought that I was soft, that my platoon sergeant was right and I should shut up and get on with it. Sometimes I'm sure the platoon felt like that! I was unsure. And at these times my memory would flit back to Sandhurst, to the basics, and I would find renewed vigour that what I was saying was indeed right. My moral compass, for all its wavering, was still pointing North. And that was the most important lesson I was taught in Sandhurst, and that I learnt in Afghanistan.<sup>84</sup>

## VI. Conclusion

The testimony that I have adduced is first-hand and comes from front-line soldiers in six wars, spanning almost a century from 1914 to 2012.

84. Lt Paddy Bury, 'Pointing North', unpublished paper, May 2009. Bury instances the demoralization that poor leadership allows to develop in *Callsign Hades*, pp. 117, 233: 'I can't trust some of that platoon to make the right decisions. Some of them are fully aware that down here they are indeed deities of their own little universes... Much of it is down to leadership... It feels like the platoon commander lost the respect of his platoon months ago. It was the little things that added up, the little things he didn't do.'

It contradicts the charge that military violence is mainly and necessarily motivated by hatred. It disturbs the assumption that battlefield hatred is always morally unfitting and ungovernable. It confirms the thesis that soldiers are usually motivated primarily by love for their comrades. And it supports the claim that they can regard their enemies with respect, solidarity, and even compassion—all of which are forms of love. Therefore, the notion that love can govern the use of violence is no mere academic fantasy. Love can be active in the making of war. Augustine was right: belligerent harshness can be kind.