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Publisher: *Routledge*

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Routledge Handbook of Ethics and War Just war theory in the twenty-first century

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Just War Theory

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203107164.ch3>

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Published online on: 08 Jul 2013

How to cite :- Richard Werner. 08 Jul 2013, *Just War Theory from:* Routledge Handbook of Ethics and War, Just war theory in the twenty-first century Routledge

Accessed on: 23 Jun 2021

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203107164.ch3>

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JUST WAR THEORY

Going to war and collective self-deception¹

Richard Werner

The truth is, there is a growing body of work coming out of psychology and cognitive science that says you have no clue why you act the way you do, choose the things you choose, or think the thoughts you think. Instead, you create narratives, little stories to explain away why you gave up on that diet, why you prefer Apple to Microsoft, why you clearly remember it was Beth who told you the story about the clown with the peg leg made of soup cans when it was really Adam, and it wasn't a clown.²

1. Cognitive biases and heuristics

Each of us possesses a deep desire to be correct always and to be both moral and wise. Cognitive biases and heuristics aid and abet us in pursuit of these illusions.³ Cognitive biases are predictable patterns of thought that lead us to draw incorrect conclusions. For instance, confirmation bias leads us to look for information that confirms our beliefs and ignore information that disconfirms our beliefs, the opposite of what creates successful science.⁴ We consult news sources that confirm our politics and disregard news sources to the contrary. The political slant of the news sources one consults generally track one's politics. The reasons offered for consulting the source usually cite their accuracy, whether true or not, rather than that the slant confirms our bias.⁵

Heuristics are mental shortcuts we use to solve problems. While they may speed processing of the brain, they sometimes lead us to think so fast we make mistakes. Priming is an example. For instance, if we hold a warm drink in our hand, absorb the aromas of a bakery, or find change in a telephone booth we are more likely to do a kind act. Ask us why we did the kind act and we will invent a reason unaware of the actual cause of our action.⁶

In what follows we will use the findings of contemporary psychology to explain why we are prone to self-deception through cognitive biases and heuristics and especially prone when considering war.⁷ There is no need for conspiracy theories or grand theories of history to explain why recent wars failed or proved illegitimate or why our leaders and populace engage in self-deception in attempts to justify war. Indeed, our collective self-deception about recent wars may lead us to pity both them and ourselves for the harm we cause through our collective self-deception.

Self-deception is a deeply engrained part of our nature as humans. I am no exception. It may not be curable but it can be ameliorated so our ignorance need not remain eternally invincible.

Self-deception moves easily from the individual to the group through in-group-out-group bias as we will see and especially given modern media technology. In-group-out-group bias causes us to identify with and excuse those with whom we identify while denigrating and distancing ourselves from those outside our group solely because of the irrelevancy of group membership.⁸ Perhaps the best example is Jane Elliot's famous story of dividing her third grade class into two groups based on eye color the day after Martin Luther King was assassinated.⁹ Elliot told the blue-eyed group they were superior to the brown-eyed group and gave the blue-eyed group greater power. While bonding among themselves, the blue-eyed began to ridicule and shun the brown-eyed. Then she reversed the story and the power. Soon the brown-eyed behaved just as the blue-eyed had done. The story has been replicated many times with different groups and markers.

In war, emotionalism and exceptionalism masquerade as patriotism encouraged by in-group-out-group bias. Because of self-deception we can expect to make the same mistakes in future wars that we made in past ones: destroying undeserving nations while knowingly and directly killing millions of noncombatants, including 100,000s of children. As such, it becomes clear why the burden of proof to warrant future wars should be very heavy: war is just too dangerous and self-deception is just too deep.

1.1 Memory and multiple selves

Memories often lie. Our memories are not episodic, not pictorial, and not like a video. Memory is not a representation of the past. Memories are fragmented, incomplete. When we recall we supplement with imagination and inference to construct present memory.

As the split brain experiments reveal, the self is multiple, composed of the many different modules of the brain. The brain functions like a committee with many voices. But the conscious brain does not hear the voices, hence the success of priming. The conscious brain is unaware that it is caused to reach decisions by the unconscious brain. The decision just seems to bubble up to the conscious brain that then, mistakenly, thinks it is solely responsible for the decision.¹⁰

Each of us tells a narrative about our past that creates the illusion of a single self. The narrative of the slow deliberative conscious brain creates the present self but the fast automatic unconscious brain motivates the narrative. That narrative helps us to construct our memories. The conscious brain rationalizes what the unconscious brain causes the conscious brain to decide, while the narrative created by the conscious brain helps to tame the unconscious brain.¹¹

Recall that when priming succeeds we invent reasons that are irrelevant to explain what are actually the effects of priming. It is how advertising, political campaigns, and subliminal messages work. When we rationalize well we form tenable beliefs and desires that give us understanding. When we rationalize poorly we form untenable beliefs and desires that lead to self-deception and misunderstanding. We can tell the difference because some webs of belief and desire are unsuccessful. Some lead to death, destitution, or misery. Webs of belief and desire that work are to be preferred. Our beliefs and desires face the tribunal of experience not singly but as a corporate body, to paraphrase W.V.O Quine's "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," and they do so continually throughout a lifetime, changing as we and the environments we inhabit change.

We build our memories to fit our narrative and our narrative to fit our memories.¹² Hindsight bias tells us that we tend to edit our memories so that when we absorb what we just learned we assume we knew it all along. We quickly confabulate our past by reorganizing our web of belief and desire so that we can maintain our over-confidence about always being correct.¹³ Our

memories are so fallible that eyewitnesses to murder are too frequently mistaken to be taken at their word. Murder convictions based on eyewitness testimony are routinely overturned by DNA evidence. About 75 percent of capital cases overturned by DNA evidence were based on eyewitness testimony. Because of the fallibility of eyewitness testimony New Jersey recently put restrictions on such evidence in capital cases.¹⁴

We tend to remember the good and forget the bad. This may allow women to have another child, runners to run another marathon, and soldiers to fight another battle. Self-serving bias tells us that we excuse our failures and focus on our successes.¹⁵ If we honestly assessed our faults and failures, we would be overcome by doubt and fear, unable to act. So we don't honestly assess. There is survival-value in our deceived memory. When we succeed it is because we are wonderful while when we fail it is the world that is to blame. Self-serving bias leads to the illusory superiority affect: each of us believes that we are superior to those around us in everything that matters.¹⁶ Yet that is clearly false. In-group-out-group bias is the extension of superiority affect from self to group. We confabulate our memories to fit our narrative, exaggerating the positive while exenterating the negative, causing self-deceived over-confidence about our own and our group's superiority.

1.2 Prediction

Worse yet we are poor predictors of the future: our own future or the future of events generally.¹⁷ The illusion of control tells us that we often believe we have control over outcomes that are either random or too complex to successfully predict.¹⁸ 'Magical thinking' allows us to think we can control outcomes we cannot: for example, the superstitions of athletes or fans designed to control the outcome of the sporting event. The Dunning-Kruger Effect tells us that we are generally poor predictors of our competence and the difficulty of our tasks because we are over-confident.¹⁹ While over-confidence occasionally aids us through the self-fulfilling prophecy and explains why confabulating our memories has survival value, it too often deludes us.

Notice how easily we forget to attend to our past mistaken predictions and to continue with overly confident ones. Weak memory works to enhance weak prediction. Our narrative redescribes our failures so that we either forget them or come to remember them as successes. We do this with the wars in Southeast Asia and we will soon do it with the wars in the Middle East. We too rarely learn from our mistakes because we do not remember them as mistakes. Hindsight bias helps us forget that our predictions failed and to maintain the self-deception that we predicted correctly.

The psychologist Philip Tetlock provides perhaps the most damning evidence of the reliability of even expert predictions.

Beginning in the 1980s, Tetlock examined 27,451 forecasts by 284 academics, pundits and other prognosticators. The study was complex, but the conclusion can be summarized simply: the experts bombed. Not only were they worse than statistical models, they could barely eke out a tie with the proverbial dart-throwing chimps. The most generous conclusion Tetlock could draw was that some experts were less awful than others.²⁰

1.3 Over-confidence

Let's put this together. We have bad memories. We are poor predictors. Both are fed by over-confidence. We tend to be overly optimistic about the tenability and correctness of our beliefs because we are so fraught with confirmation bias that we readily ignore available evidence that

renders our cherished beliefs false.²¹ Our fallibility is vast but not nearly as vast as our hubris when it comes to our need to be correct. The problem is that our faith in our cherished beliefs is nothing but a feeling like anger or fear. That feeling of certainty colors the strength of the belief but it does not improve the probability of its truth. Faith in our cherished beliefs is a psychological matter, not an epistemic virtue.

Consider the second invasion of Iraq. We believed strongly at the time of the attack that we had just cause. Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. Iraq was aiding and abetting Al Qaeda including the 9/11 attack. Iraq was in serious violation of international treaties regarding nuclear arms. Saddam Hussein was a very bad man. With the exception of the last of these, the rest proved false. We could have known better before the invasion if we were not so fraught by collective self-deception.²² The invasion killed tens of thousands of children and over one hundred thousand civilians²³ for reasons that proved false. The war destroyed Iraq's economy and fragmented its civil society. Yet we ignore our mistakes.

Consider the invasion of Afghanistan. The travesty of 9/11 was a criminal act, not an act of war. Al Qaeda, a gang of criminals but not a nation-state, attacked the US. Afghanistan offered to try bin Laden before we attacked (*CNN U.S.* 2001). After we attacked, they offered bin Laden for trial in a neutral country (*ABC News* 2001). We destroyed Afghanistan's economy and civil society, killing countless children and noncombatants with no tenable cause.²⁴

Yet at the time of the attack on Afghanistan, and later on Iraq, the vast majority of the U.S. nation, including its leaders, were convinced that the war was justified while those who disented were considered at best cowards or at worst traitors. We were so over-confident of the justice of our cause in both Afghanistan and Iraq that we ignored the readily available evidence that rendered both wars unjustified albeit for different reasons.²⁵ We looked for reasons to wage war and we found them by ignoring the better reasons to refrain from war. In short, we committed confirmation bias. We believed what made us feel good while ignoring what the evidence supported. We practiced motivated reasoning. False memory, poor prediction, and over-confidence become a lethal combination when assessing the risk of war.

Accurate recall interferes with our over-confidence, our moral righteousness, and our need to feel correct about everything. To recall would be to admit our hypocrisy, fallibility, and self-deception even when we were certain. As Mark Twain wrote, "It's not what you don't know that kills you, it's what you know for sure that ain't true."

Nor is this an isolated example. Much the same analysis can be offered about the war in Vietnam. Our initial reason for attack, the Gulf of Tonkin incident, was manufactured and then marketed to the populace.²⁶ We were duped by metaphors like 'communism is a cancer' and 'nations are dominoes'. We killed noncombatants not only as collateral damage but also intentionally as a means to end the war sooner. We dropped more bombs in the Quang Tri province alone than in the whole of Europe in WWII.²⁷ We dropped more tonnage on Cambodia than we did in all of WWII, including the two atomic bombs. Our attack on Cambodia created Pol Pot's killing fields that left over a million dead.²⁸ Revisionist historians and hindsight bias help us to recall that we had just cause and that we fought a just war in Southeast Asia. Such biases may even help us remember that we won when we did not.

Presently we contemplate an attack on Iran or North Korea because of their pursuit of WMDs, an attack on Syria because of human rights violations, and an attack on Pakistan because they harbor Al Qaeda. We understand that we kill innocent people such as children when we kill with drones. We are undeterred by the fact that we mistakenly attacked other nations and killed countless numbers of children because we held false beliefs not unlike those we presently hold or had irrational fears not unlike those we presently have. We believe now as then that we have warrant for our planned aggression. The attack then and now feels like

self-defense because of our biases that cause self-deception. Our fallible memories and bad predictions live comfortably with our over-confidence.

2. Collective self-deception

When we move from the self-deception of individuals to that of the collective nation-state, do we commit the fallacy of composition? The fallacy of simply assuming that what is true of the parts must be true of the whole, that what is true of the individuals must be true of the nation? Recall the in-group-out-group bias. We define ourselves in terms of the groups with which we identify. We define our in-group by the creation of out-groups. We are quick to denigrate those in the out-group to identify and protect the in-group. Consider any sports rivalry. The inhabitants of some geographic area identify with their team just as the inhabitants of another identify with theirs. Citizens identify with their national team during the Olympics and derive pleasure from their team's successes and disappointment from their failures. Folks engage in serious argument about the excellence of their team and the failings of their rival ignoring the arbitrary nature of their in-group-out-group bias. Sometimes the arguments turn to violence and even to death.

The in-group-out-group bias has its way in forming our sense of nationalism in the Olympics and one can easily see how that transfers to war. Indeed, the ancient Greek Olympics were founded to lessen the frequency of Greek city-state wars and the modern Olympics were formed for similar reasons. While the bias may have had survival value on the Savannah where our instincts formed, it may no longer in the ancient world of Greek city-states let alone a globalized world of technological warfare.

Recent work examines the basis in the brain's circuitry for in-group-out-group processing. One recent study showed that the effect of in-group identification becomes even more intense when people feel mortally threatened.²⁹ We turn to those in our in-group when we feel that we are at risk of harm from the other. We detest and vilify those who we believe threaten us. We do this individually and collectively. Now consider war. It is essential to vilify the enemy and, if possible, dehumanize them thereby making it easier to fight and kill them. Moreover, the threat we feel the other poses to our mortality helps us bond and support one another in the fight.

The famous Milgram experiments on obedience to authority and the Stanford Prison experiment show respectively how susceptible we are to authority and how power corrupts. Both reveal how easy it is to exploit our willingness to do pointless violence to others under authority or because we are the authority. When we combine these two with the previous points about in-group-out-group bias we have a ready-made formula to explain why self-deception at the individual level helps us understand and extend our analysis of self-deception to the collective.

Recall how masterfully Hitler turned the Jews and Gypsies, the gays and lesbians, the communists and anarchists of Europe into scapegoats. They became the out-groups the Nazis claimed mortally threatened European Aryans, the rightful bearers of civilization. These out-groups became the foci of Nazi rage and hatred, promoting them to a sense of bonding around all things Aryan and with that to death and destruction of the out-groups. Recall how successful the US was at promoting racial hatred during the genocide of Native Americans, the apartheid of African-Americans, or against the Japanese in WWII, and how these aided bonding among the in-group and killing the out-group. Recall the recent wave of hatred of all things Arab and Muslim that swept the west after 9/11 and helped stoke American exceptionalism and war. Finally, recall the previously mentioned forgotten false reasons for going to war with Iraq and Afghanistan and the collective fear, hatred, and self-deception that motivated these false reasons.

We could have known better in both cases but the in-group-out-group bias helped propel us collectively into self-deception and unjust war.

Let us summarize. Cognitive biases and heuristics cause weak memories, poor predictions, deceptive over-confidence, and bias for our group and against others. At both the individual and the collective level they explain our individual and collective self-deception when we go to war. We will now turn our focus to just war theory (JWT) and the morality of war using our understanding of self-deception as background.

3. The morality of war

It is a striking fact that almost every category of self-deception we have described in this book is conducive to aggressive wars. Modern war is conducted against an out-group by powerful people who have an exaggerated opinion of themselves and their degree of morality, are overconfident, often have an illusion of control, enjoy taking risks, and are almost always male.³⁰

By “modern war” I mean a technological war that involves killing numerous noncombatants including children. History shows that prior to WWI far more combatants than noncombatants died during war. Since WWII that trend is strongly reversed. The cause of the reversal is largely technological: the power and imprecision of technological warfare compared to hand-to-hand combat.

3.1 Trolley problems and war

Aren't we justified in knowingly killing some people to save a greater number from death? Doesn't that justify war when it is reasonable to believe that more lives will be saved by waging war? Trolley problem (TP) examples seem to support the conclusion. Simply imagine a TP version where one must throw a switch to divert the trolley from killing one thousand children on track A onto track B where it will kill only one child. That is the beauty of TPs. There are no epistemic problems. There is no ambiguity about consequences or ethical responsibility. Everything is straightforward. In other words, TPs are not like real life and clearly not like war, where events rarely go as planned because epistemic problems abound about the probability and the value of the consequences of action. Consider that in our wars since WWII, far more civilians were killed than anticipated. Biases impacting prediction, our over-confidence based in part on weak memory, and limits of expertise play major roles in undermining the accuracy of assessing proportionality and the likelihood of success, key criteria of JWT as well as consequentialist reasoning. We overcome our ignorance with over-confidence about both our knowledge and the justice of our cause.³¹

Recall the previous discussion of recent wars. Consider that when we attacked Vietnam and Iraq the second time, we expected these wars to be short and sweet. However, each of these wars lasted longer than any previous US war. They jointly killed over a million civilians including countless children. Vietnam led to wars in Laos and Cambodia that killed a million more civilians, mostly children.³²

We have yet to see what the full scale of the unintended consequences of the Middle East wars will yield, but it is difficult to think that they will be optimistic given the terrible state in which we leave these nations. Children are the most vulnerable during modern war, and deserve special attention. Recall that the Iraq War began in 1990 and was followed by years of devastating economic sanctions against Iraq that predated the second invasion and killed

countless children. Recall that consequentialism tells us to count all of the consequences of an action when making our assessment. Recall that the most plausible versions of consequentialism tell us to act on rules general observance of which will have the best consequences. Indeed, if history is our guide, and TPs our model, then the track with the greater number of children on it, not the lesser, represents the more likely outcome when we choose to wage modern war. That is the lesson of recent war. Consequentialism comports with the notion that modern war is strongly presumptively wrong.³³ However, our individual and collective biases, particularly confirmation bias and over-confidence, limit our capacity to effectively predict these negative consequences in advance.

These issues about prediction and consequentialism are debatable. Some will argue that most recent wars were successful. They will point to different consequences or assess the stated consequences differently or conceptually carve wars differently. My actual point is that consequentialism is too pliable to be a successful guide to action,³⁴ a point explained in part by our vulnerability to biases and heuristics.

3.2 Consequentialism

Unlike JWT, consequentialism is a monist rather than a pluralist legalism. That is, consequentialism has a single basic principle: act solely to produce the best consequences. Given that there are not multiple principles to conflict, as there are in JWT, perhaps consequentialism is less vulnerable to such biases in practice than JWT. Consider the consequences of past wars or predictions of the consequences of future wars. The values we assign to the consequences of either past or future wars are arguable. The probabilities for consequences of past and future wars are arguable. The consequences themselves are arguable. What constitutes the particular war conceptually is arguable. The facts and concepts are arguable. What this reveals is that consequentialist moral theories can be used to justify just about any war before or after the fact simply by assigning concepts, consequences, probabilities, and their values—and by framing the issues and controlling the narrative.³⁵ Consequentialism is too pliable, too open to multiple interpretations to be a successful guide to action. Couple this pliability with our recognition of the capacity for self-deception, and it is a dangerous moral theory for assessing war.

3.3 Just war theory

JWT offers no decision procedure to determine which rule trumps in cases of conflict of its plurality of rules. The choice is left to reason, which is to say the slow rational conscious brain. Recall that the slow, rational conscious brain rationalizes what the fast, nonrational unconscious brain causes the conscious brain to decide. Consider how we have deceived ourselves with JWT into thinking we have justification in our recent wars when there was none. We unconsciously begin with the conclusion we intend to establish, that is to say we engage in motivated reasoning. Rationally, we play the various rules of JWT against one another to remove cognitive dissonance and provide a narrative consistent with what the unconscious causes the conscious brain to decide—that is, the one that feels best to us rather than the one suggested by reason alone. It is uncontroversial to state that just war theorists frequently disagree. Their disagreement is evidence for this claim. National leaders can then enlist the advice of the just war theorist who tells him what he wants to hear in accord with confirmation bias.

JWT contains two parts. One set of rules to assess the morality of engaging in war, *jus ad bellum*, and a second set governing the morality of waging war, *jus in bello*. Each contains a principle of proportionality that informs us that both the engaging and the waging of the war must

be proportionate to our ends. These principles of proportionality in essence are consequentialist principles, allowing consequentialist reasoning to trump the other principles of JWT. This is especially so whenever we fear that the threat of not initiating war or the cost of losing the war is too great, which is to say most of the time when we wage war. Collectively, the cognitive biases and heuristics aid us to overpredict the cost of failure to attack as well as the high cost of losing the war. As we have seen with the in-group-out-group bias increases when we fear dire consequences for the in-group. National leaders help us stoke the fear of the other. It is easy to deceive ourselves with JWT by trumping with proportionality if all else fails.

When we engage JWT we are often caught in the emotionality of war and so we frame the war in terms like American exceptionalism. Recall the false fear of both WMDs and Al Qaeda that motivated our second invasion of Iraq. Or our similar false fears of the spreading cancer of communism that lead us into Southeast Asia. We lost those wars in Southeast Asia, yet less than 20 years later the Soviet Union peacefully dissolved. Our fears and exceptionalism help us dupe ourselves with JWT.

JWT allows the foreseeable but non-intentional killing of innocent civilians, so-called collateral deaths. Like many others, I do not understand how one can knowingly and directly cause the terrible deaths of thousands of children and deny both the intention to kill them and any responsibility for their deaths. I suggest that in-group-out-group bias conjoined with confirmation bias and motivated reasoning help us accept the distinction between intentional and foreseeable killing of innocents. JWT's principle of double effect sanctions knowingly and directly killing innocents, children for example. So by my lights JWT does allow the violation of persons' innocent status. Some argue that those who build highways know that people will be killed and these deaths are not morally different from collateral deaths in war. But in war one is the proximate cause of death. In the highway example one is perhaps the mediated cause, removed from the proximate cause. Others choose to drive on the highway thereby accepting the risks of death. So there is a morally relevant difference between the collateral deaths of war and those from building highways. Those who build highways don't kill those who die in highway accidents although they know that some will die in highway accidents. Those who wage war knowingly and directly kill the innocent. The former are the mediated cause of death while the later are the proximate cause of death.³⁶

James Sterba and Andrew Fiala both argue that JWT strictly interpreted comports with conditional pacifism when applied to modern war.³⁷ Both offer many recent historical examples to support their case.³⁸ Yet one can find just war theorists to justify almost any war in which we have engaged. This is not surprising given our analysis that cognitive biases drive the pliability of JWT reasoning.

So while Sterba and Fiala are correct in their assessment that JWT strictly interpreted entails conditional pacifism, we have a long tradition of loose interpretation and moral casuistry with respect to JWT that makes JWT even more pliable. Taking cognitive biases seriously, we see that the traditions of loose interpretation of JWT give the desired conclusion and reason does not. Again, this is especially so during the emotionally charged times when we contemplate war. Given interpretive variability, JWT can provide a *carte blanche* for leaders of nations who want to start war. As Sterba and Fiala reveal, recent history teaches that much. Coupling cognitive biases with self-deceived or even unscrupulous leaders, which is to say all leaders, and their citizens, allows JWT to become a dangerous moral theory.

Consequentialism and JWT both suffer from and encourage self-deception, and thereby allow us to reach almost any conclusion we like on the morality of wars: past, present, or future. Both are a *carte blanche* for nations to wage wars. Both are dangerous moral theories to assess war since national leaders use both to justify any war they want. Recent history teaches as much.

3.4 The irrationality of interventionist war

Consider that we can no longer win the wars we are likely to fight. We can be defeated by a nonindustrialized nation of insurgents: Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Our military advantage is technological. We can reduce any nation to rubble. While we can likely win a war with any of the industrialized nations, we are unlikely to go to war with them. The nations we are likely to attack know that if they are willing to suffer the punishment we will inflict technologically that they may defeat us in a long-fought asymmetric war of insurgency.

The national and global economic burdens of war are immense. Noble Prize economist Joseph Stiglitz estimates that the Iraq War will cost over \$3 trillion.³⁹ Estimates place the combined total for Iraq and Afghanistan at \$3.7 trillion and counting.⁴⁰ In adjusted dollars that is approximately the cost of WWII. The national debt is above \$15 trillion and mounting for the foreseeable future. We confront serious economic stagnation and chronic high unemployment. The national infrastructure declines. Public education fails. The lack of adequate national health care is an epidemic. Climate change promises serious problems. It is the opportunity costs of war that hasten our decline.

4. Beyond just war theories: a better way

So does challenge to JWT posed by cognitive biases leave us with a potentially untenable situation of passivism? I think not, I find the ethics of modern warfare simple. It is strongly presumptively wrong knowingly and directly to kill children who present no imminent threat.⁴¹ Call this the Principle of Innocence (PI). PI is as well understood as any belief can be. PI stands fast. It wears its warrant on its face. We cannot warrant the better known by means of the lesser known. Any reason offered for PI will be less well known than PI itself.⁴² Its clarity should render PI less vulnerable to the described biases than the complex pluralism of JWT or the vague monism of consequentialism.

We understand going into modern war that we kill numerous children, kill them in a terrible manner. Given PI we should understand that modern war is strongly presumptively wrong because modern war involves knowingly and directly killing innocent children who present no imminent threat. Unlike JWT, PI is clear about the presumptive immorality of modern war. While the strong presumption against modern war may be overridden, that presumption presents a weighty burden. One instance where PI may comport with war is if one's national territory is invaded and one's besieged nation fights only to repel the invaders while refraining from acts of violence against the invader's noncombatants. PI allows defensive war as defensive war was understood before technology changed the face of war and society, stretching the notion of a just war beyond reasonable recognition. It remains an open question whether violent or nonviolent direct action of the sort the Danes used so successfully against the Nazis would be the best option for national defense.⁴³ This comports with the intuitions that inform existing JWT, as a self-defensive position is commonly held to be one of the strongest justifications for going to war.

We can no longer expect to win the wars that we are likely to fight and we cannot afford them. Our history evidences that we continually fight aggressive wars killing millions of innocent people, weakening our economy, fragmenting our civil society, and losing international confidence in our nation. We have no credible enemies near our borders. Anyone who attempts to mount a naval attack can be stopped long before they reach us. We remain vulnerable to air attack no matter what we do as 9/11 revealed. We can continue to do our best to subvert terrorist attack to our homeland. We no longer need to grow the military to defend ourselves

successfully. Our false belief in the right to intervene in the affairs of others stokes our false belief in the need to grow the military to defend ourselves. The constant preparation for and waging of aggressive, interventionist war is irrational, based in our collective self-deception. It is time we pursue positive peace through a foreign policy of military noninterventionism. It is time we come home.

Unlike JWT, PI does not present us with options for modern preemptive or preventive wars or modern wars of so-called humanitarian intervention which through collective self-deception too frequently masquerade as wars of aggression and usually end badly. Simply consider Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Afghanistan, and Iraq or the Falklands, Bosnia, and Libya. Honesty and simplicity recommend we replace JWT with PI and accept that modern war is waged against civilians and especially against children and is, thereby, strongly presumptively wrong.

To say that modern warfare is strongly presumptively wrong is to say that the burden of proof is on those who would wage war rather than on those who oppose war. This reverses the traditional order in our society. It is to say that the burden of proof is a heavy burden. It involves showing why this war is different from all previous modern wars: why it won't involve the terrible deaths of countless children, why it can be expected to be better than any other available alternative, and why it is truly the last alternative. Given recent history, it is unlikely that all of these standards can be met, especially before the war begins. PI does not have the tradition of self-deceived casuistry that undermines JWT and makes it a dangerous moral theory. Moreover, collective international decision-making helps to defeat the proclivity for self-deception just as it does in science. In addition to PI, requiring a representative international association to approve war would help diminish unjust war.

5. Conclusion

Those who understand me correctly understand that the argument for military noninterventionism rests not only on PI but that it comports with political realism, consequentialism, and JWT. Political realism is consequentialism relativized to the national interest. If we frame the issue of war from the perspective of PI, then our collective self-deception is less likely to lead us to pursue aggressive war and hasten our decline. The four perspectives dovetail when we lead with PI because of the pliability of JWT, consequentialism, and realism.

I am also aware of the dangers of my own self-deception. I recommend noninterventionism as the safest position given our proclivity for collective self-deception with respect to waging terrible wars. First, do no harm. History teaches that recent wars are largely failures and that future ones will also fail. Care and safety recommend PI and noninterventionism given our history of collective self-deception and aggressive war.

Military noninterventionism is not isolationism. We are engaged in a global economy from which we cannot easily extricate ourselves. We can influence the behavior of other states in a variety of ways short of war. But in our attempts we should be mindful of how our collective self-deception will attempt to blind us both to the need in our globalized world for a just international order and to the nature of that order.

My hope is that we may understand that human nature is so prone to self-deception that we move to overcome our collective ignorance with respect to war and realize the dangers of both JWT and consequentialisms. PI is a means to that end. PI allows us rightly to defend ourselves from attack yet avoid misguided future wars that will hasten our decline. I suggest that the best means to that end is a noninterventionist foreign policy.

Notes

- 1 I thank Adam Henschke for invaluable advice, insight, and editorial help on the chapter. I thank Beril Esen for making me aware of the in-group-out-group bias for understanding collective self-deception in war. Mistakes remain mine.
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