

Culture of War

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Unlike Gaul, this paper falls not into three parts but five. Part I deals with the nature of the subject, i.e. the culture of war, and why it is important. Part II speaks of the non-utilitarian factors that act as the driving forces of war, which in many ways represent the true origin of the culture in question. Keeping in mind the available space, Part III provides some examples of the culture of war; whereas Part IV tries to answer the question as to what will happen in case that culture is lost. Finally, Part V represents our conclusions.

I. What Is the Culture of War, and Why Does it Matter?

In theory, war is simply a means to an end, a rational, if very brutal, activity intended to serve the interests of one group of people by killing, wounding, or otherwise incapacitating those who oppose it.¹ In reality, nothing could be farther from the truth. Facts beyond number prove that war exercises a powerful fascination in its own right—one which, while it has its greatest impact on participants, is by no means limited to them. Out of this joy and this fascination grew an entire culture that surrounds it and in which, in fact, it is immersed. Like any other culture, the one associated with war consists largely of "useless" play, decoration, and affectations of every sort;² on occasion, affectations, decoration and play are even carried to counterproductive lengths. So it has always been, and so, presumably, it will always be.

The culture in question ranges from the often far from utilitarian shapes and decoration of armor (or, before there was armor, war paint) to today's "camouflage" uniforms and "tiger suits"; from war games played by the ancient Egyptians with the aid of tokens on specially-made boards all the way to the enormous variety of present-day war games, exercises, and maneuvers; and from Yahweh's commandments which, in the book of Deuteronomy,³ laid down rules for treating various kinds of enemies in certain kinds of war, to the numbered paragraphs of today's international law. It includes the values and traditions of warriors as manifested in their deportment, customs, literature, parades, reviews, and other assorted ceremonies, as well as the

¹ See on this, above all, C. von Clausewitz, *On War*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1976, pp. 75-99.

² On the "uselessness" of culture and its affinity to play see, above all, J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, New York, NY, Beacon, 1971 [1939], especially chapter 1.

³ 20.10-21.15

endlessly varied ways in which wars have been declared, brought to a formal end, and commemorated.

Some people go so far as to claim that war and culture are absolute opposites. Like Lord Byron, all they see is "the windpipe-slicing, brain-splattering, art"; as a result, each time a flag is raised, or a bugle calls, they look away or stop their ears. Others, while prepared to admit that a culture of war does exist, look at it as an expression of that worst of all bad things, "militarism". Academics, many of whom are politically on the left, are especially likely to consider things in this light. This may explain why, in spite of the undoubted popular appeal of works with titles such as *Medieval Arms and Armor*, *Uniforms of the Wehrmacht*, and *Military Aircraft of the World* a scholarly, comprehensive study of the subject has yet to be written. Perhaps it also explains why one volume whose declared subject is "the symbols of war"⁴ in the ancient world is completely dominated by discussions of weapons, armor, and tactics.

Even if the charges were true, it does not follow that the culture in question does not deserve close attention. War has always played a critically important part in human affairs. No empire, civilization, people, or religion has ever risen to greatness without, as one British officer once put it to me, excelling at "the smacking business". Very often, the most successful ideas, religions, peoples, civilizations, and empires are simply those that acquired the most cannon; and, having done so, used them to crush the rest. Conversely, few if any great ideas, or religions, or peoples, or civilizations, or empires, have fallen without trying to reverse their fortune by force of arms first. Much as bleeding hearts may dislike the fact, war and its culture form an integral element of human history and human life and are likely to do so for all future to come. As part of human life, they need to be understood. To be understood, they deserve to be studied no less carefully, and no less sympathetically, than any other parts.

As with any kind of culture, much of that which surrounds war does not fit into a utilitarian framework of any kind. However, this fact does not reduce its importance one whit. Stripped of its "useless" culture, war will degenerate into a mere orgy of violence, a thing sustained by no organization, no purpose, and no sense. It goes without saying that history has witnessed many such orgies. On occasion, some of the best armies in history have been guilty of them. Throwing discipline to the wind, losing control, and lashing about in a blind fury. However, such orgies do not war make. In general, those who failed to distinguish between the two have been no match for well organized, well regulated, armies with all their cumbersome cultural accoutrements.

This brings us to the real reason why the culture of war matters: namely, the critical role it

⁴ A. Santosuosso, *Soldiers, Citizens, and the Symbols of War*, Boulder, CO, Westview, 1997.

plays in overcoming men's natural inclination to avoid, or flee from, danger while at the same time preparing them to make the supreme sacrifice if and when required. Troops of every kind may be prepared to kill, rob, and destroy in order to serve this or that purpose. They may also possess every attribute needed for realizing those goals: resources, numbers, organization, equipment, whatever. However, unless they are also prepared to defy nature and risk their lives, they will be useless and worse.

II. On Motives and Causes.

At all times and places, most men have probably hated war for the discomfort and the hardship it involves, the violence, the havoc, and the bloodshed it causes, and the grief and desolation it leaves in its wake. At all times and places, very often this hatred did not prevent men—even the same men—from enjoying it. They eagerly looked forward to it, reveled in it, and looked back on it with pride and satisfaction when it was over.

Around 1466, Jean de Bueil in the *Jouvencel* had the following to say about the matter:⁵

War is a joyous thing: one hears and sees many good things and learns much of value in war. One loves one's comrade so in war. One thinks to oneself: Shall I let this tyrant by his cruelty take the property of one who has nothing? When one sees that one's cause is good and one's blood is hot, tears come to one's eyes. There comes in the heart a sweet feeling of loyalty and tenderness to see one's friend, who so valiantly exposes his body to accomplish the commands of our Creator. And then one determines to live or die with him, and because of affection not to abandon him. From that resolve come such a joy that he who has not experienced it cannot rightly say what it is like. Do you think that a man who does that fears death? Not at all; for he is so strengthened, he is so joyful, that he does not know where he is. Truly, he is afraid of nothing. I believe that he is happy in this world and in the next, he who serves the profession of arms in this way, and that he is a true servant of God.

Back in 1992, I asked a class of U.S Marine Corps officers how many of them had been at the Gulf and how many of them would have missed it "for their lives". After the first question, some two hundred hands went up. After the second, every single one went down.

Quotes from Robert E. Lee ("it is good war is so terrible, or else we would love it too much"), Winston Churchill (for whom war had a "hideous fascination"), Adolf Hitler ("I passionately loved soldiering"), George S. Patton ("how I love war"), Moshe Dayan ("I know of

⁵ J. le Beuil, *Le Jouvencel*, Paris, Laurens, 1887, 2.20-1.

nothing more exciting than war"), Ariel Sharon (telling a group of students about the October 1973 War: "We had a great time, didn't we?"), and countless others confirm how enjoyable war can be, and often is. Some such statements originate in the most unexpected quarters. Take Wilfred Owen, the British World–War I officer best remembered as the author of violently anti-war poems such as *Dulce et Decorum Est*. This is the very same men who, on another occasion, wrote that "there was extraordinary exultation in the act of slowly [going over the top and] walking forward, showing ourselves openly". The same is true of Guy Sajer, a Wehrmacht soldier whose memoirs evoke the terror of war as few other works have. Yet at one point speaks of the "almost drunken exhilaration" that follows fear (and which can make "the most innocent youths on whatever side to commit inconceivable atrocities").⁶ Briefly, for every man who has ever said he loathed war, there was another one who felt that it was great "fun" and who "loved it" with all his heart.⁷ At least for a time, and at least as long as things did not go so badly that everything ran short, discomfort and suffering reached levels unimaginable in peace, the forces fell apart, defeat stared people in the face, and they felt powerless to help their nearest and dearest.

Much more remarkable still, the same person will sometimes mix hatred for war and exultation in it in a single breath—proving, if proof were needed, that the two are not separate but two sides of the same coin. What follows is an exchange I had with a retired Israeli Air Force colonel and squadron commander who, during the half-forgotten "War of Attrition" of 1969-70, had flown a Phantom fighter jet against the Egyptians over the Suez Canal. It emerged accidentally, as a result of him expressing his disgust over the way Israel's Government and General Staff had conducted the war:

M.v.C: As usual, it is the foot soldiers, in your case pilots, who pay the price. S.G: Let me tell you. Only few have paid the price. We enjoyed the fighting, as fighter pilots who seek fighting but hate wars. So young and hot we were, like children playing with wood-made guns. 8

Just what is it that makes fighting as enjoyable an activity as it undoubtedly can be? In part, the answer is to be sought in the field of physiology. The combination of violent movement and imminent danger causes the brain and body to be flooded with dopamine and adrenaline;⁹ this is a phenomenon that humans have in common with other animals. Here, however, what interests us is the psychological side of the question.

⁶ *The Forgotten Soldier*, p. 286.

⁷ Quote from W. Broyles, "Why Men Love War", in W. Capps, ed., *The Vietnam Reader*, New York, NY, Routledge, 1991, pp. 71-2.

⁸ E mails exchanged on 29-30 December 2005. The identity of S.G is available on request, provided he agrees.

⁹ See, on these changes, U. Mayer and B. Baker, "Neuroendocrine Stress Responses to Aggression", in J. Haller and M. Kruk, eds., *Neurobiology of Aggression*, New York, NY, Humana Press, 2003, pp. 93-118.

Let us start by noting that, when war and fighting begin in earnest, people take leave of the "ordinary" world, entering a different one where normal rules of conduct cease to apply. As tension rises, one's horizons shrink. Past and present, "because of" and "in order to", are left behind and discarded. So are concerns, worries, obligations, relationships, and the many things other people want of us and expect of us. In short, whatever was previously most important is forgotten and whatever was most oppressive is lifted. This explains why some Australian veterans of World War I pointed to the trenches as the happiest as time in their lives;¹⁰ and they were certainly not the only ones.

Next comes the joy of grappling with, overcoming, resistance. In this respect war has not one thing to offer but two. First, unlike many other dangerous kinds of sport, it pits us against the most powerful, most intelligent, and most fearsome opponent of all, another man; compared to him and what he can do, every other challenge simply does not count. Second, having done so, war is unique in that, alone among all games of strategy in which humans face each other, it does not have any rules that dictate what the enemy may do to us and we, to him. It is the only one that permits, even requires, the mobilization not just of some human qualities, but of all. Most of the time those qualities are like hounds on a chain. Let them go; and see where they fly.

As mortal danger stares people in the face, they seem to undergo a two-fold process. On the one hand they bring the entire personality into play, no holds barred. At the same time there is an extraordinary focusing of the senses as everything superfluous is discarded, thrown away, forgotten. The outcome is best described as a combination of concentration with lightheartedness and freedom—to speak with Ernst Juenger, a "pleasant kind of intoxication, the sort that one experiences, maybe, on a roller-coaster".¹¹ This is the kind of freedom most of us, but men perhaps more than women, keep seeking during most of our lives and only experience at rare moments, if at all. And which, since it is in a certain sense self-generated and can be neither granted nor imposed from outside, is perhaps the most absolute a human being can experience.

If, for all these reasons, coping with death can be a source of joy, indeed the greatest possible joy, how about the other side of fighting, i.e. killing? Some researchers have argued that killing does not come naturally to man. To make it possible, they say, it is first necessary to brutalize one's own side and de-humanize the enemy.¹² This seems to fly straight into the face of everything we know about war as it has been waged from the Stone Age on. From my terrier up,

¹⁰ B. Gammage, *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1975, p. 270.

¹¹ Juenger, *The Storm of Steel*, p. 171.

¹² See, most recently, Grossman, *On Killing*, especially pp. 4 and 29 (quoting S.L.A Marshall) as well as 249-61.

many animals seem to enjoy killing, seizing their prey, playing with it (as cats do) and never letting go until it is dead, when they proceed to carry and display the corpse as a trophy. So do many, perhaps most, hunters. In this context it is by no means irrelevant that, during perhaps ninety percent of our existence as a species, men hunted whereas women gathered. Whereas the former had the fun of the hunt bred into their genes, so to speak, the latter did not.

One reason why killing is, or at any rate can be, fun is because it involves overcoming resistance. Tearing up a living creature, drilling holes in it, breaking it to pieces, smashing it, doing away with it once and for all; speaking as a scholar whose self-imposed task in life is to try to understand people and society, if a greater manifestation of power exists I would dearly like to know where to find it. Furthermore, for every person who kills there are usually several who watch, whether in reality or, in modern life, by way of television and the movies. The more people die and the more violent the way they do so, the louder the roar of the crowd. This is not necessarily because they are more bloodthirsty than average. Rather it is because, like the rest of us, they are simultaneously curious and afraid. Afraid that something similar might happen to them; curious to know what it would feel like. Probably one reason why people so often enjoy killing is because it enables those who commit the act and watch it to come face to face with their fears. Since we must all face death in the end, inflicting it, and seeing it inflicted, could almost be called a form of psychotherapy.

Along with bloodshed comes destruction. To build is to cope and to overcome, but so is to destroy. Anyone who has ever watched children playing with wooden blocks or Lego knows that they enjoy destroying things just as much, if not more than, putting them together; prevent them from doing the one, and very likely they will cease doing the other too. The same, without question, is true of adults as well. Of course circumstances are almost infinitely varied, and various "rational" considerations, such as strategy and greed, will also help decide what is and is not destroyed in war. Still, at least as far back as the time as when Alexander and his troops wrecked the royal Persian palace, the annals of war have always been full of acts of wanton destruction. Including many which, as in this case, were committed for no better reason than that a drunken courtesan led an equally drunken band of warriors.¹³

Most destruction, like most of life itself, is merely banal. On occasion, however, it can be turned into artistry and carried to the point where it compels a sort of reluctant admiration. If not for the wisdom behind it, then for the imagination that was put into designing it and fury it took to execute. As, for example, when King Sennacherib of Assyria boasted of having massacred the

¹³ Plutarch, *Alexander*, XXXVIII; E. N. Borza, "Fire from Heaven: Alexander at Persepolis", *Classical Philology*, 67, 4, October 1972, pp. 233-45.

population of Babylon, demolished its buildings, and torn up the soil so it would wash into the sea; or when the Romans razed Carthage and seeded the soil on which it had stood with salt so it would never bear fruit again; or when Timur the Lame had pyramids built out of the skulls of his defeated enemies. Centuries, millennia even, after these acts were committed they are still the subject of tales that make people shudder—in fact, the reason why they keep being told is precisely because they make people shudder. In the face of the evidence, pretending that most people do not, or at any rate cannot, delight in destruction independently of any practical benefits that it may bring, is useless.

Whatever its precise sources, quite often the joy of destruction and killing is carried to extremes. It is quite capable of making an otherwise reasonable and well-balanced person to take leave of his senses. Either it causes him to break down; or else it drives him to the point where, to quote Juenger again, it lends wings to his stride. With supple body, determined face, and bloodthirsty eyes he is no longer capable of feeling fatigue, pity, remorse, even the pain that is caused by wounds. Elated, he is struck by "blind fury", as the saying goes and becomes "ecstatically happy". Elated, he is overcome by a "daemonic lightness" sometimes attended by irrepressible laughter. Elated, he understands "as in a flash of lightning, the true inner purpose and form of [his] life".¹⁴ He fights much harder than he ever knew he could fight or that it was possible to fight. To fight this hard cause and consequence must be left behind, abolished, and absolute concentration achieved. In this way, however paradoxical it may sound, going through war, the most serious activity of all, as if it were some light-hearted game may actually make a crucial contribution to survival and victory.¹⁵

All this is summed up in what the ancient Greeks called "the dance of Ares" and what the Scandinavians meant by a "berserker". In both cases, the terminology is taken from the realm of the supernatural. Ares, of course, was one of the Olympic gods. "Berserkers" were supposedly possessed by the spirit of animals, especially bears and wolves, in whose skins they dressed and whose grunts and howls they imitated. Both tales suggest that one very important way to leave the natural world for the supernatural one is to fight. Doing so, one may forget oneself in the same way as believers, praying, singing, leaping, dancing, fainting, speaking in "tongues", contorting and convulsing their bodies, and perhaps flagellating themselves, sometimes do.¹⁶

¹⁴ *Storm of Steel*, pp. 93, 216, 232, 281.

¹⁵ For an excellent analysis of this point see C. O. Scott, *Ender's Game*, New York, NY, Doherty, 1985, especially the last chapter.

¹⁶ For a good description of such practices as they appear in American Evangelist churches see R. M. Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited; The Making of American Pentecostalism*, Peabody, MA, Hendrickson, 1979, pp. 10-27.

In the case of both saints and warriors (at any rate, saints and warriors of a certain kind), it is possible, indeed appropriate, to speak of madness. In the case of both saints and warriors, the saving grace is that madness grows out, and is acted out in the name, of a cause. A cause, I hasten to add, is not the same as an "interest". "Interest" is the name which, speaking of important things such as war and politics, we give to the practical benefits we hope to derive from our actions. It is the pillar on which modern—and, as Polybios shows, not only modern—strategic thought rests; the column of fire which, marching in front of the host, points to the way ahead. Reading the literature, one is tempted to misquote Alexander Pope's rhyme about Isaac Newton: "Strategy's world was shrouded in dark and night/God said let 'interest' be, and all was light".

Of course it is true that interest plays a very large role in war, particularly at the top where the weightiest decisions are made. Now as in Polybios' day, those whose task is to lead their people to war must follow what they see as that people's "interest"; failing to do so, they are criminals if the failure is advertent and madmen if it is not. Yet it is also true that only rarely is the "interest" of such a kind as to percolate down the ranks and take hold of most, let alone all, those who fight. Menelaus and Agamemnon had an "interest" in getting Helene back (both for her own sake, as the most beautiful woman in the world, and to deter other attacks in the future); but the overwhelming majority of the quarter of a million men they allegedly led did not. President George W. Bush may have had some kind of "interest" in attacking Iraq, but the overwhelming majority of the American people—least of all, the soldiers who had to take leave of their families and travel halfway around the world—did not.

As is also shown by the fact that few of us reserve any particular admiration for those who die serving their "interest" during, let us say, a robbery, the closer to the fighting line and death one gets, the less relevant "interest" becomes. Men may be, indeed often have been, willing to fight for God, king, country, people, family, their unit, their mates, or whatever. But to say that they do so because they have some kind of continued "interest" in what, once they have left this earth, may happen to others—even to their nearest and dearest—is a travesty of reality and an insult to the intelligence.

By definition, a cause must be more important, greater, nobler than oneself, or else it cannot be worth dying for. Almost by definition, to be worth dying for it must be more than simply grasped or understood with the aid of the intellect. It must be so understood, but it must also enter a man, as it were; take him over, consume him, and possess him; it is not so much the brain that we are talking about as the heart. Without question, a cause as powerful as this is itself a form of madness. And yet, at the same time, the fact that the warrior (and the saint) has a cause is precisely what separates him from the madman, tying him back to the real world even as, "fighting mad", he

takes his leave of it. This applies even to a berserker and even if, at the time he is possessed, he commits such terrible deeds as to cause nature itself to rise and vomit, as it were.

As usual, it is Homer who provides the perfect illustration of this. Enraged by the death of his friend Patroclos and reconciled with king Agamemnon, Achilles stops sulking and resumes the fight. He kills so many Trojans, some of them as they kneel in front of him begging for mercy, as to make the River Skamander run with blood and cause it to burst its banks, trying to drown him.¹⁷ Having barely escaped with his life, he goes on to kill Hector and to mutilate his body, the latter being a crime that really puts him beyond the pale of civilization as the Greeks, as well as most people coming after them, understood that term. And yet, throughout this tale of horror, there is not the slightest hint of "interest" on his part. Which is why, having repented, he is forgiven in the end.

So far, we have spoken of the individual. For good or evil, though, war is a collective enterprise and not an individual one. The very fact that people are under pressure (and as long as the pressure is not so great as to push them beyond the breaking point) will cause them to come together, ending their existence as isolated atoms and forging them into a group. Things also work the other way around: if a cause had been lacking, then the mere creation of a group that is more than a gathering of atoms accidentally thrown together will quickly, almost miraculously, provide it. The combination of cause and outside pressure is, of course, much more intensive in war than in ordinary social life. Between them can easily bring people to the point where they cease looking after their own interest. They cease to be themselves while at the same time becoming part of something much larger and more powerful. Feeling oneself part of something much larger and more powerful brings, yes, joy.

In the modern strategic literature, a favorite term is "force multiplier". By it, students mean some factor—usually, some kind of sensor, computer, "data link", or precision-guided missile—that can greatly increase the ability of an army of a given size to carry out its mission and defeat its enemy. Too often, what is overlooked, or perhaps merely taken for granted, is that no other "force multiplier" is nearly as powerful as the sense of belonging just described or, in other words, cohesion. Cohesion is what turns a unit, formation or army from a gathering of people accidentally thrown together into a machine capable of setting itself goals, fighting to reach them, and overcoming obstacles and taking losses as it does so; it is cohesion which enables a handful of guards can control thousands of prisoners. Conversely, without cohesion one cannot conduct war. I have set forth the organizational factors that make for cohesion in another volume.¹⁸ Here I

¹⁷ *Iliad*, books 20 and 21.

¹⁸ van Creveld, *Fighting Power*.

want to look at the cultural side of the question.

III. The Culture of War Revealed.

Regardless of whether they express the joy of combat, or embody a cause, or are used as instruments towards imposing discipline and creating cohesion, examples of the culture of war are too numerous to count. To return to King Agamemnon, here is what Homer has to say about the gear he wore in battle:¹⁹

First he girded his splendid greaves about his legs, fastening them with ankle-clasps of silver; and about his chest he set the breastplate... It had ten courses of dark cyanus, twelve of gold, and ten of tin. There were serpents of cyanus that reared themselves up towards the neck, three upon either side, like the rainbows which the son of Saturn has set in heaven as a sign to mortal men. About his shoulders he threw his sword, studded with bosses of gold; and the scabbard was of silver with a chain of gold wherewith to hang it.

The poet goes on and on, lovingly describing every detail of the king's shield, the sword, and the spears. So splendid was the equipment that the goddesses Here and Athene, no less, took notice of them and let loose a clap of thunder in order to honor them.

From that time on, hardly a warrior people that did not decorate its weapons and military dress to the best of its ability. These decorations range from the war paint applied by countless tribal warriors before they go into battle to the fancy uniforms worn by Napoleon's generals; and from medieval and early modern suits of armor, many of which were so elaborate that they constituted real works of art, to today's "tiger suits" worn by swaggering soldiers while on leave. Nor is it true, as some archaeologists claim, that the more splendid pieces of equipment were only meant to be worn on parade. In fact there is an enormous body of evidence, coming from all parts of the globe, that they were used in battle. To recall but two examples, the fourth-century AD writer Ammianus Marcellinus, says that the Romans used their "magnificent" equipment in order to intimidate and overawe their Germanic enemies, sometimes with success. Vegetius, who wrote a little bit later, adds that centurions' armor and helmets were ornamented with silver so that they might more be easily distinguished by their respective soldiers.²⁰ When the Swiss beat the

¹⁹ Iliad, xi.16-32.

²⁰ Ammianus Marcellinus, 18.2.17; Vegetius, *Roman Military (Epitoma rei militari)*, Philadelphia, PA, Pavillion, 2004, p. 88.

Burgundians at Grandson in 1476 they found their dead opponents' armor and horse trappings so heavily studded with precious stones that they could hardly believe their eyes. So overwhelming is the evidence that at least some expensive equipment was used in battle and not simply on parade and similar occasions that one can only wonder why some academics resolutely continue to close their eyes to it. In fact, on more than one occasion, so elaborate were the weapons and equipment commanders and noblemen wore that they became tactically counter-productive; Japanese history in particular has many examples of this.

As if to convince people that all of this is still alive and well, back in 2006 the Musée d'Art et d'Industrie at Saint Etienne, France, held an exhibition called *Bang! Bang! Guns, Gangs, Games et Oeuvres d'Armes*. It included an astonishing display of highly decorated weapons, some of which were no doubt intended simply as show pieces but also such as were actually used in war. Not only dress and equipment, but military buildings too were decorated, often at very great expense. This particular story could be carried back all the way to ancient Babylon and Nineveh. Again, some of the best examples of this come from Japan. Azuchi Castle, not far Kyoto and a masterpiece of its kind, looks as if it were ready to spread its wings and soar to heaven.²¹ Elsewhere city-fortifications, gates, watchtowers, and casernes, far from being simply Spartan and utilitarian, were often equally elaborate. Regarding the Middle Ages, I can do no better than to quote the modern historian to whose expertise I am indebted for this subject. "The overall impression made by Caernarfon and its companions", he says, "is of an elite group of men-of-war, long-standing comrades in arms of the king, indulging in an orgy of military expression on an almost unlimited budget; a medieval forerunner of the recent American 'star wars' program".²² Down to the present day, many of the buildings that house officer schools, academies and colleges are beautifully proportioned and decorated. Almost without exception, they so filled with memorabilia of every sort that they resemble museums—in fact, they are museums.

Along with decoration came, and are still coming, ceremonies of every kind. Some are held on a daily basis and become routine to the point where they are only noted when, for one reason or another, they do not take place; I am referring, of, course, to the hoisting and lowering of the flag, roll calls, and the like. Others are held on a periodical base or else in order to mark special occasions such as mustering, swearing in, the beginning and end of training, dismissal, leave taking, burials, memorials, and the like. Still others mark the beginning and end of campaigns. As is also the case with civilian ceremonies, military ones are usually held either to celebrate victory and strength—as used to be the case of the famous Roman triumph—or in order to deal with

²¹ S. Trumbull, *Samurai Warfare*, London, Arms and Armor, 1996, pp. 83, 89.

²² Morris, "The Architecture of Arthurian Enthusiasm", p. 63.

moments of weakness, such as the anxiety that precedes battle or the disposal of the dead after it. Nothing brings out the power of military ceremonial more than the fact that it is often attended not merely by soldiers but by civilians too; many military ceremonies acted as models for civilian ones, as they often still do.

Another very important part of military culture is music. From an evolutionary point of view, music probably had its origins in the desire to display and attract a mate, as among songbirds.²³ From very early on, it was also deliberately used to create and maintain bonds among people; specifically including the very powerful bonds that war and fighting require. Many tribal warriors all over the world enter battle to the sound of musical instruments of every kind, be they horns or conches or instruments made out of elephants' tusks, as well as singing. From ancient Greece we have at least one painting of two phalanxes about to clash head on, accompanied by a young flute-player who looks as if he is trying to pierce the very heavens with his tunes. Roman legions came with their tubicen (trumpets) and horns (cornicen), apparently using them to draw the troops' attention to the orders the standards conveyed.

Historically many armies have deliberately sought to produce outlandish sounds, from yells to blasts of the trumpet, to intimidate and demoralize the enemy. In close combat, this is by no means rare even today. The interesting point is that doing so inevitably tasks the lungs and consumes oxygen; indicating the role "culture" may be allowed to play even if, considered "realistically", it means an unnecessary expenditure of physical energy. Cultural differences are also important, since what some people experience as a cacophony sounds like music in the ears of others. Still, there is good reason to think that, underneath the cultural differences that separate peoples, there is some psychological or even biological basis for all this. This is proved by the fact that, in martial music around the world, strings are rarely used. Wherever we look, the main, usually the only, instruments are various kinds of wind as well as percussion. The drum, a Chinese invention, seems to have been imported into Europe sometime during the fifteenth century. So hypnotic is its sound that, as at Union Monument at Gettysburg, it was often used into one of the symbols of armed force.

From the time the first regiments were established in the sixteenth century, every one of them had its musicians as a matter of course. Towards 1700, possibly imitating a model originally provided by the Ottoman Janissaries, those musicians started to be formed into real bands. The bands would play not only on the march, when they were very useful in countering fatigue,²⁴ but

²³ G Miller, "Evolution of Human Music through Sexual Selection", in M. L. Wallin and others, eds., *The Origins of Music*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2000, pp. 329-60.

²⁴ See Maurice de Saxe, *Reveries on the Art of War*, Carlisle Barracks, PA, Army War College, 1943, pp.

strike up immediately before, and even during, battle. In addition to popular tunes known throughout the army each regiment had its own tune, thus strengthening cohesion still further; in the British Army to this day, every officer from colonel upwards has his so-called "personal tune". The importance of music in creating fighting spirit is brought out by the fact that, following his victory over the Scots at Culloden in 1745, the Duke of Cumberland ordered captured bagpipes to be treated as "weapons of war" and smashed.

As armies grew during the nineteenth century the number of bands continued to increase. Certainly the military were not to everybody's taste. On the other hand, the idea that everything military was necessarily inferior had not yet been born. Even in Britain, a nation of shopkeepers, military bands were considered inspiring enough to be invited to play at private social functions such as parties and weddings, let alone public ones such as dedications of buildings, bridges, and even churches. In 1819, after the public had been excluded from the Sunday performances of the Coldstream Guards' band at the Tower, the outcome was a flood of angry letters to the editor of the *United Services Journal*.²⁵ In 1914, the German Army alone had no fewer than five hundred and sixty bands.²⁶ In both World Wars we hear of troops, British ones in particular, leaving their trenches and attacking to the sound of bagpipes. Preparing for a last desperate charge on the River Oder in 1945, German troops tuned their tank-radios so that Wagner's *March of the Valkyries* would blare out of each and every one of them.

If music seems to appeal to some deeply rooted human need for rhythm,²⁷ so, to an even greater extent, does the drill if often accompanies. According to legend, Albert Einstein once said that, in providing men who march in step with a brain, God had wasted His time because, to do that, a spinal cord was enough. One understands what he meant, but this does not change the fact that, as every army under the sun knows, drill and marching are powerful instruments in building up cohesion and esprit de corps. What is less often noted, but in fact self-evident, is how very enjoyable they can be. Almost half a century after leaving the Army, a famous American historian recorded, not without surprise, how much he had liked "strutting around" on the parade ground.²⁸ "Words", he wrote, "are inadequate to describe the emotion aroused by the prolonged movement in unison that drilling involved. A sense of pervasive well-being is what I recall; more specifically, a strange sense of personal enlargement; a sort of swelling out, becoming bigger than

30-31.

²⁵ Meyerly, *British Military Spectacle*, pp. 142-43.

²⁶ According to B. Matthews, *Military Music and Bandsmen of Adolf Hitler's Third Reich*, Winchester, Tomahawk, 2002, p. 16.

²⁷ B. Merker, "Synchronous Chorus and Human Origins", in *ibid*, pp.31-28.

²⁸ W. M. McNeill, *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 2.

life, thanks to participation in a collective ritual".

Some parts of the culture of war make themselves felt before battle, some after it, some even as it is fought. Decoration, ceremonial, music and drill apart, the last-named also include the vast body of the law of war which prescribes what may and may not be done, by whom, to whom, under what circumstances, and with what means. Such laws have been known to virtually all war-making societies at all times and places; they range from the Biblical Book of Deuteronomy to the Fourth Geneva Convention and beyond. In a famous sentence, which is actually the only one he devotes to the subject, Clausewitz claims that the law of war does little if anything to restrain the latter's "elementary fury" and that it can therefore be all but ignored. I answer that, since war is an organized activity and since organized activities depend on law by definition, without law, in other words culture, it is simply impossible.²⁹

IV. But for the Culture of War, What Then?

As the American proverb saying goes, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. I have now listed some—not many—manifestations of the culture of war and explained why it is important. Suppose, however, an army that does not have, nor cherishes, a culture of this kind; what then? In that case, experience shows there are four different possibilities:

A. A wild horde: meaning, a mob of barbarians subject to no discipline, no tradition, and, as a result, no capacity for coordinated action. Starting at least as early as the groups whom the Romans called *Latrones*—highwaymen—history has witnessed countless hordes of this kind; contemporary examples include the militias in Sierra Leone, East Timor, Bosnia, and The Sudan. One of the commentaries on Sun Tzu's *Art of War* speaks of "mad bandits".³⁰ Either because they lack a common culture or because they have discarded it, wild hordes respect neither heavenly commands nor human ones. They understand neither themselves nor the enemy. As a result, they are hardly able to take organized action on any scale. Though luck may favor them on this occasion or that, in the long run they cannot win; in one sense, indeed, the term "winning", when applied to them, loses its meaning. Having gained a victory, they give themselves to feasting and are rarely able to follow up. Having suffered a defeat, they tend to become demoralized and disintegrate. Working themselves into a blind fury, often they do not distinguish between friend and foe. This in turn may mean that they lash out so brutally and so indiscriminately as to create even more enemies than they already have. Wherever they turn, they spread first fear and then,

²⁹ Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 76.

³⁰ *The Art of War*, S. B. Griffith trans. Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 84.1963.

hatred.

Lawless, disorganized and universally hated, wild hordes cannot trust anybody or make anybody trust them. The one way they can hold on to anything is by utterly destroying it. The destruction they wreak is, however, in many cases counter-productive, given that the dead are useless to the living and that a ruined country cannot sustain human life. They tend to be extremely wasteful of resources, both their own and those they may have taken from the enemy. Either they neglect to husband those resources or they willfully destroy them. All this explain Clausewitz's contemptuous dismissal of such troops when he writes that they should be employed in secondary theaters where they can amuse themselves.³¹ In war they tend to be more or less useless, as great menace to their commanders and to themselves as to their enemy.

B. A soul-less machine: meaning, an organization that is held together by nothing but discipline on the one hand and bureaucracy and political correctness on the other. Again history knows many examples of such machines; as Herodotus never tires of telling us, the vast Persian Army that invaded Greece back in 480 BC was held together almost exclusively by fear. In today's world perhaps the best known example is the German Bundeswehr. Everybody knows how, down to World War II inclusive, the German military, aided by one of the most highly developed military cultures in history, fought and bled and died. Since then, for reasons that everybody also knows, it has been forced to surrender that culture. In today's Germany, about the worst thing of which one may accuse anybody is "militarism". The result is an army without a soul—and one which, in the opinion of many of its own officers, may very well break and run in the admittedly unlikely case it is ever be called to fight a real war.

Another situation that may turn an army into a soul-less machine is when the culture of war, instead of serving military effectiveness war, becomes a substitute for it. Again perhaps the best example comes from German military history. Under Frederick the Great the Prussian Army was a fearsome machine that disciplined and drilled its troops until they could carry out tactical evolutions with unequalled precision. Probably not since the Romans during the Second Punic War had any army endured so much only to emerge victorious in the end. However, the king's successors did not understand his secret. Picking on external forms, they turned that discipline and that drill into ends in themselves. As Napoleon's chief of staff, Field Marshal Berthier, noted during a visit, training concentrated on the mindless repetition of obsolete maneuvers that would be worthless in the face of the enemy. Instead of learning to fire, soldiers in training were made to use wooden clappers; they were, however, also forced to polish their muskets until the barrels

³¹ *On War*, p. 632.

were so worn away that they could no longer be used in battle.³² The outcome was the defeat at Jena in October 1806, one of the most complete suffered by any army in the whole of military history.

C. Men without chests; meaning, men who are unable and unwilling to defend themselves. Historically, perhaps the best example is the Jews. As the Old Testament and the work of Josephus Flavius testify, originally Jewish military culture was as highly developed as any other. However, during the centuries of the Diaspora it was lost, to the point where King David, a great warrior, was re-interpreted as a rabbi and his heroes, who had helped him conquer and extend his kingdom, as religious students. It was against this background that they became a nation contemptible in their eyes of their neighbors. Supposedly they had an "un-athletic build, narrow shoulders, clumsy feet, [and] a sloppy, rounded shape". All these ideas were voiced not just by anti-Semites but by many Jews themselves; ³³ indeed the notion that Jews could not ride was even taken up by Theodor Herzl in the most famous Zionist tract of all, *Old New Land*, when he noted that his imaginary settlers "rode like the cavalry at Leuthen" [the Prussian victory over the Austrians in 1757], no less. Consequently, when Zionism around 1920 set out to create the first Jewish armed forces in almost 2,000 years, almost every aspect of Jewish military culture had to be built up from scrap.

D. In the absence of the culture of war, the fourth possible outcome is feminism. As every soldier who has ever put on a uniform in an effort to cut a figure in the eyes of the other sex will readily admit, the support of women is absolutely essential to the maintenance of any kind of military culture. It is their cheers, their admiration, and their receptiveness both to the culture itself and to those who wear it and display it that keeps it alive; to that extent, women even provide it with its *raison d'être*.

Since the maintenance of the culture of war depends on women's support, women are also capable of wrecking it. There are two ways in which they can do so. First, by looking away from it, despising it, and ridiculing it—that, after all, is precisely the story developed by the ancient Greek dramatist Aristophanes in his celebrated play, *Lysistrata*. The other consists of themselves joining that culture and participating in it. As experience shows, such an attempt, if successful, will cause the prestige of the culture to decline in the eyes of both men and women. While it is true that cause

³² According to P. Schreckenbach, *Der Zusammenbruch Preussens im Jahre 1806*, Jena, Diederichs, 1906, p. 24.

³³ The words in quotation marks are by Walter Rathenau, the great turn of the twentieth century Jewish industrialist; quoted in G. Heckler, "Walter Rathenau und sein Verhältnis zum Militär", in F. Naegler, ed., *Deutsche Jüdische Soldaten, Von der Epoche der Emanzipation bis zum Zeitalter der Weltkriege*, Hamburg, Mittler, 1996, p. 147.

and effect are hopelessly intermingled, there can be little doubt that the ongoing decline of the military of all the "advanced" countries during the last three decades or so is strongly connected with the entry of women into their ranks.

V. Conclusions: The Great Paradox.

In theory, war is simply a means to an end, a rational, if very brutal, activity intended to serve the interests of one group of people by killing, wounding, or otherwise incapacitating those who oppose it. In reality, nothing could be further from the truth. War, and combat in particular, is one of the most exciting, most stimulating activity that we humans can engage in, capable of putting all others in the shade; quite often, that excitement and that stimulation translate themselves into pure joy. This fact alone is, or should be, enough to lift it out of the realm of mere utility, as Clausewitz and, even more so, many of his "realist" followers would have it, and into that of culture. Indeed it could be argued, as my friend Edward Luttwak does, that if war is not enjoyable then very likely something is very wrong with the purpose for which it is waged.

While the ostensible function of the culture of war is to make men willing, even eager, to look death in the face, it can only do so if it is understood not as a means to an end but as an end in itself. Those who give their lives for the eagle know very well that it is just an image of a rather nasty bird, painted this or that color and put on top of a pole. A commander who, before making a speech, or sounding the trumpet, or holding a review, or arranging for a ceremony in which fallen comrades are honored, informs listeners or participants that his goal is to "psych them up" for battle will earn nothing but ridicule and/or contempt. Thus reality and pretense mix; to be of any use, the culture of war must be useless. Such is the abovementioned "great paradox".

Like so many books, this one ends where it began. I am neither a commander nor a defense official; in deciding to become an academic and choosing the *vita contemplativa*, my aim has always been not so much to offer guidance or change the world as simply to understand. It appears to me now, as it did when I started working on this project, that the culture of war does not deserve the contempt in which some people tend to hold it. Instead, it is at least as interesting, at least as important, and at least as worthy of being studied as any other subject I might have chosen to study. If, having got to this point, the reader shares this feeling, then I have achieved all I set out to do.