Morality in War Fighting and Strategic Bombing in World War II

by Louis A. Manzo

Astute observers of World War I quickly saw that the airplane had changed warfare. In 1923, the historian Henry Smith Williams, for example, wrote "in that year 1918, the airplane was by way of revolutionizing warfare."[1] Williams was among those in the early 1920s who could already foresee that future wars would be different precisely because planes would be "dropping sundry tons of bombs where they would be least relished by the enemy."[2] World War II proved him right, for this is surely how many people picture this historic conflict. Despite the heroic accounts of land invasions and the drama of sea battles, the images fixed in most American minds are of bombed-out cities. The Second World War completed the revolution begun in 1918.

But in this war the airplane brought something more than a change in military methods. With it came a new ethics of warfare. In the words of one commentator: "Some observers noted in the history of air power in World War II and afterward not just parallels and vestiges but signs of a revolution—in weapons, in military techniques, and in the moral outlook of those who used the means of war."[3] It was the bomber, of course, that was the instrument of these radical alterations. The bombing campaigns of the war marked a sharp departure not only in the use of weapons but also, for some observers, from what had been considered up to then moral conduct in war.

Both of these revolutionary changes have been the subject of much debate since World War II. Historians and military analysts have argued over the military effectiveness of the bombing campaigns, about the choice of targets, about the doctrine on the employment of air power. At least as enduring, however, has been the controversy over the morality of the bombing campaigns. Lee Kennett, in fact, maintains that the moral dimension has been the more intensely argued aspect of the discussion: "The strategic-bombing offensive has been criticized for its fundamental inefficiency, but it has been more roundly condemned for its no less fundamental savagery. The plain fact is that most people have had difficulty in accepting the argument that since the entire nation now makes war, any part of that nation may justifiably be attacked."[4]

Indeed, the bombing campaigns of World War II have been the object of scathing moral condemnation. In the opinion of some commentators, the aerial assault on cities marked the loss of all civilized sensibilities and a reversion to barbarism. One writer, expressing the sentiments of many critics, uses these harsh words:

> "It is unlikely that the untutored horse-warriors of Attila or Genghis Khan, had they had the advantages of block-busters or atom bombs, would have scrupled to use such devices. . . . In the Second World War, however, we had the spirit of the Mongol tribesman, and in addition the miraculously effective new tools of annihilation—in other words, the mood and social morality of the barbarian governing the products of science."[5]

The debate on the morality of strategic bombing in World War II is the subject of this article. The aim here is to examine the issue in the context of the traditional Western ethics of warfare. We will begin with a brief account of the development of the ethics of warfare in our civilization and then survey the views of the theoreticians of air power between the two World Wars. We will next look at the practice of the Allies in World War II and the criticism it provoked. The discussion will conclude with some comments on the enduring nature of this issue. The lesson is that in American society warfighting will be severely hampered if the moral issue is not considered in planning and execution, and if the political and military leaders cannot provide a

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1. Henry Smith Williams, *Super-Engines of War* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1923), 154.
2. Ibid., 155.
3. Ronald Schaffer, *Wings of Judgment: American Bombing in World War II* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 217.
4. Lee Kennett, *A History of Strategic Bombing* (New York: Scribner's, 1982), 186.
5. Stanton A. Coblentz, *From Arrow to Atom Bomb* (South Brunswick, N.Y.: A. S. Barnes and Company, 1967), 403.

moral justification for their operations. To be able to do this, these leaders should have some knowledge of the traditional thinking on moral conduct in war.

The Just-War Tradition

The moral reaction most people have towards war may be in large measure an instinctive response to slaughter. There is, however, a long theoretical tradition in the West about the morality of warfare. This tradition considers war as something other than mere violence. It is thought to be, as Ralph Potter explains, a human activity governed by rules and regulations:

> 'War' is not merely a descriptive term employed to inform us that violent battles are occurring between two organized antagonists. It is also a legal term, indicating a state of hostility in which certain rules and relations ordinarily obtaining between parties or states have been suspended. And it is also a moral term which, when properly applied, is meant to suggest that the bearers of violence are to be considered as acting as officers of the public good.[6]

Probably every culture has some regulations about the conduct of armed conflict, for throughout history warriors have developed a sense of the acceptable ways of confronting a foe. This is surely true of the Western world, which has codified or expressed these rules in various ways. We find such precepts formalized in international law and in military manuals that define proper behavior in combat. They are implied in political and popular debates about nuclear warfare and military intervention abroad. This heritage provides the words and concepts we use to discuss the legitimacy of war, even for those who are not consciously aware of the theoretical background. "In a fundamental sense," as James Johnson has pointed out, "we in the West cannot think about war without using the terms of this broad tradition."[7] Our discussions about the propriety of warfare are necessarily framed in the inherited terminology.

This understanding of war is usually called the "just-war tradition." Some would argue that the concept of the "just war" is not as consistent or as unified as the expression implies, and that in using the term "just-war tradition" we may be oversimplifying Western moral thinking on war. Philosophers, theologians, jurists, statesmen, and warriors have all made their contribution, thereby creating a complex intellectual structure. One author has concluded that there are really several just-war theories within the broader tradition.[8] Scholars generally agree, though, that all the modern theories are heirs to thinking that began in the fourth century of our era.

Augustine

The tradition begins with Augustine of Hippo, probably the most influential thinker in Western Christianity after the authors of the Scriptures themselves. Augustine, who died in A.D. 430, lived at a time when Christians were becoming a significant proportion of the Roman Empire. This came about as the result of one of the great turning points in Western history. The Emperor Constantine had legalized Christianity in A.D. 313 and encouraged its growth by his massive ecclesiastical building projects. His support produced a new situation for Christians who could now engage themselves fully in civic life. With their religion now approved and encouraged by the Emperor, the Church became increasingly involved in the affairs of the secular community.

Some Christians, believing that their religion required them to reject the world, opposed this official recognition and the civic involvement it offered. They chose to avoid public obligations in pursuit of uncompromising perfection, and some went so far as to flee the cities to live alone in the desert or together in monasteries. Augustine, on the other hand, was among those who thought that Christians had to accept responsible membership in the Empire. This put him especially at odds with those of his fellow believers whose search for perfection led them to renounce any resort to violence. Augustine had a different understanding of the faith. He argued that Christian love at times demanded the use of force to restrain evildoers.

The circumstances of the Roman Empire in Augustine's time compelled him to confront the use of force. The Empire was under pressure from "barbarians," who were attacking the very center of the Roman domain. The Visigoths, led by Alaric, had invaded Italy, and in 410 they overwhelmed and sacked Rome. In the same period the Vandals moved into Spain, and by the time of Augustine's death the they would be laying siege to Hippo, the North African city where he was bishop. Another threat came from divisions within Christianity. Some Christians had separated from the Catholic Church and were now harassing Catholics and destroying their churches. The people of the Empire lived under the threat of violence from marauding invaders and lawless neighbors.

Faced with these realities, Augustine could not simply reaffirm the strain of Christian thinking that had rejected all use of force. He foresaw social disaster if evildoers were not opposed, and he sought an answer that both protected society and maintained Christian faith. His solution was to distinguish between wars which were morally acceptable and those which were not. He condemned fighting for the glory of combat or to conquer other countries. Only those wars that were waged to resist evil and correct injustice were permissible. "In Augustine's theory, three kinds of war were morally defensible: a defensive war against aggres-

6. Ralph B. Potter, *War and Moral Discourse* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1973), 204–5.

7. James Turner Johnson, *Can Modern War Be Just?* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1984), 2.

8. LeRoy Brandt Walters, Jr., "Five Classic Just-War Theories: A Study in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas, Vitoria, Suarez, Gentili, and Grotius," Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1971, 420.

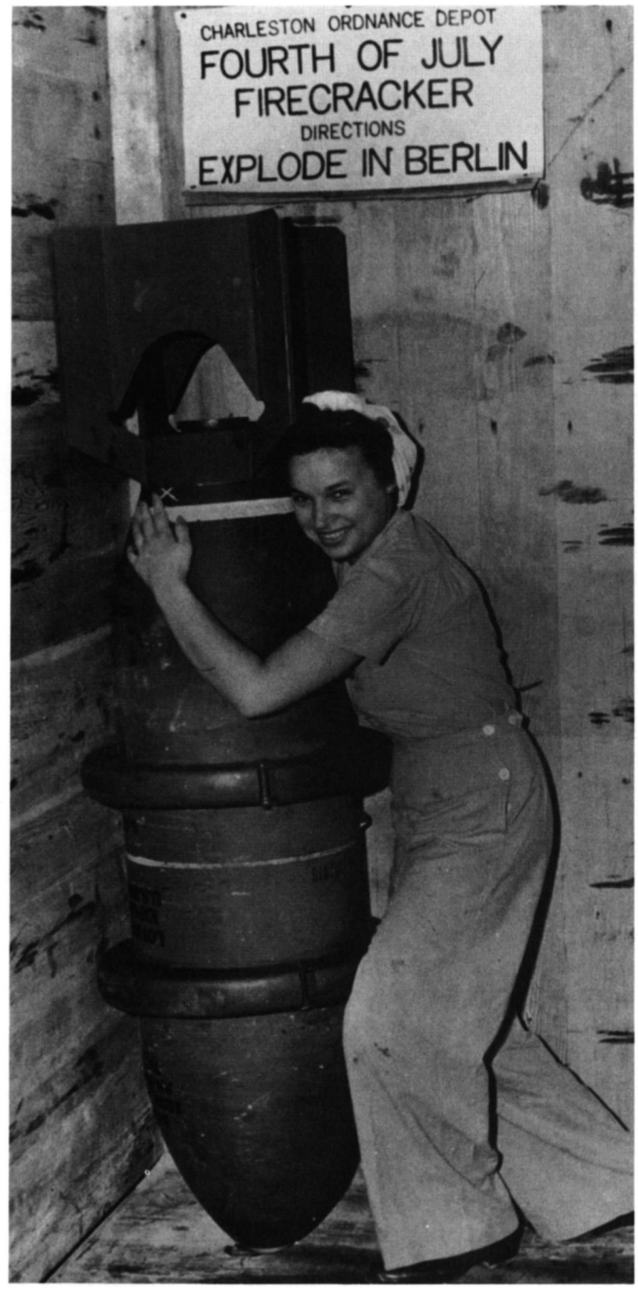
sion, a war to gain just reparations for a previous wrong, and a war to recover stolen property."[9] By limiting war to these categories the great theologian and bishop believed he had been faithful to both his religious doctrines and his civic duty.

Augustine's reconciliation of Christian faith with the justification of war was of momentous significance, for the Catholic Church was soon to develop into the dominant institution in the West. In medieval Europe the writings of Augustine acquired a status next to the Bible and became the chief authority in matters of faith and ethics. Church leaders and thinkers turned to the writings of the Bishop of Hippo for an explanation of their faith and the duties it entailed. And so, for hundreds of years the writings of Augustine provided Western civilization with its notion of the morality of war. The chief feature of this understanding was that at times a nation had a right, indeed a duty, to go to war.

Aquinas and Chivalry

The next great name in the theological tradition appeared in the thirteenth century. Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) adapted church teachings to the social and intellectual conditions of his age. In keeping with the academic tenor of the High Middle Ages, his approach was more methodical than that of Augustine. This was the age of theological organization, and so Aquinas systematized Augustine's position by clearly specifying certain criteria to justify going to war. He concluded that three basic conditions were necessary for a war to be legitimate: a just cause, a right intention, and a declaration by a legitimate authority. So Aquinas accepted that war could at times be morally correct, but he imposed limiting conditions.

It is important to note that Aquinas, like Augustine, did not glorify war nor see it as a positive moral good. He made a presumption in favor of peace and held that one who wants to go to war must make a case for such action. One who argued for a particular war had to be able to explain why the greater good demanded a rupture of the peace. Yet it was enormously significant that Aquinas believed in some cases a successful argument could be made to justify war. "Although the burden of proof may lie on those who would resort to war," as George Weigel puts it, "it was clear to Aquinas that the burden could be met."[10] With the judgment of Thomas joined to that of Augustine, the view that war could be just and moral gained massive theological authority. These two theologians towered over the Middle Ages, and their opinion approached the status of dogma.



Yet another important influence on the rules of war was at work in the Middle Ages. The knights, those who actually conducted war, made their own contribution. They operated under a set of rules known as chivalry, the code that dominated so much of medieval life. Chivalry imposed upon warriors a set of regulations for the conduct of war. These were added to the consideration of the basic justice of going to war. Once a war was legitimately declared and commenced, the chivalric code forbade unrestrained violence. Certain acts were prohibited, most notably attacking noncombatants. The only legitimate object of a knight's attack was another armed warrior.[11]

9. George Weigel, *Tranquilitas Ordinis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 29.
10. Ibid., 37.
11. Michael Howard, *War in European History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 1–19.

Augustine and Aquinas had formulated a theory for the just declaration of war. The medieval warriors provided rules for the proper conduct of war once it had been declared. The theologians were concerned with defining the operations of Christian love. The professional fighters had their own reasons for defining certain rules. "Stated succinctly, it appears that knights had two important reasons for guaranteeing the protection of noncombatants. First, there was no glory in armed combat with a nonknight, for knights were professionals. . . . Second, noncombatant serfs, peasants, artisans, and merchants were the source of the wealth of the knightly class."[12] It was considered both cowardly and counterproductive to attack noncombatants. Desire for honor and material gain moved the knights to construct a code for the methods of warfare.

The tradition of the just war thus came to have two major parts, the right to go to war and the right conduct of war. The Latin names given to these two aspects are often retained: the *jus ad bellum* and the *jus in bello*. The first, the basic issue for Augustine, Aquinas, and the Middle Ages, specified the conditions under which war could legitimately be declared; the second listed rules that were to be followed once war was begun. The chief conditions of the *jus ad bellum* were that the war had to be declared by a legitimate authority, and for the right intention; the cause must be just; and also that war must be the last resort. These criteria imposed a moral limitation on the resort to armed conflict, but they also provided a moral justification for war. A legitimate ruler acted rightly, at least sometimes, in going to war.

Three criteria of the *jus in bello* are often listed. First, the immediate object is not to kill but to restrain, so that soldiers who surrender may not be killed. Second, it is not legitimate to attack noncombatants directly or to use indiscriminate methods of warfare. Third, unnecessary suffering is prohibited. These criteria, although they originated in the religious culture of the Middle Ages, have become part of the general moral inheritance of Western civilization. As one author has put it: "While in a formal or technical sense this doctrine is essentially medieval and Catholic, in more loose and diffuse terms it remains to this day the dominant military ethos of the Western world."[13] These attitudes and concepts have remained central to Western thinking about the ethics of warfare.

Francisco de Vitoria

As the Middle Ages faded, historical changes made the early just-war theory less applicable, and by the sixteenth century a new formulation was required. This need was created above all by the voyages of Columbus and his discovery of America, which initiated the age of colonialism. Spain, the greatest power in Europe, sent out expeditions to expand her dominion into the New World. Armed explorers, the famous conquistadors, brought Spanish might to America and her inhabitants. But eventually reports began to come back about atrocities committed against the native peoples. In particular, Bartholomew Las Casas's stories of massacres by the conquistadors and his energetic defense of the Indians imposed upon Spanish theologians the question of the morality of the wars in America.

The center of thinking on this issue was the University of Salamanca, where Francisco de Vitoria "more than any other individual served to recast the medieval just-war consensus for the dawning of the modern age."[14] The struggle with the natives on the other side of the Atlantic had created a whole new context for thought about armed conflict. Europeans found themselves entering a broader world than they had previously imagined and confronting peoples they had not known existed. The discovery of the New World demanded a fresh understanding of relations between nations, and the reflections of Vitoria went beyond the rules of war. He and his followers "set forth foundations of international law not only for Christendom but for whole world."[15]

Vitoria held that there was one worldwide human community and that it was not acceptable to prevent international commerce or to forbid visitors from other countries. The Spanish, in his view, therefore had the right to go to the New World for the purpose of trade, provided that they intended no harm to the inhabitants. But he thought that the native Americans, being unsophisticated, might misunderstand the activities of the explorers and fight to prevent legitimate contacts. In Vitoria's judgment, the new situation made it difficult to determine whether it was justified to go to war, that is, to apply the criteria of the *jus ad bellum*. He saw that this was still the basic issue, yet he recognized that both sides might be convinced that their cause was just because the issues could not be made absolutely clear. In the resulting wars both sides would think that they were declaring a just war.

So Vitoria gave increased emphasis to the *jus in bello*. "The category of just-cause war was modified to allow for the possibility that both sides subjectively perceived themselves to have justifiable reasons for war."[16] Although Vitoria declared that he could not see any justification in the wars of the conquistadors, he retreated a bit from the insistence that only one side could have a just cause. He rather stressed the *jus in bello* in the hopes of at least limiting the scope of violence in war. In later centuries, when questions of the basic justice of war seemed even more difficult to

12. Johnson, *Can Modern War Be Just?* 5.
13. Paul Peachy, "New Ethical Possibility," *Interpretation* 19 (January 1965): 26–27.
14. Johnson, *Can Modern War Be Just?* 76.
15. James Brown Scott, *The Spanish Origins of International Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), 9a.
16. Bryan J. Hehir, "The Just-War Ethic and Catholic Theology," in Thomas A. Shannon, ed., *War or Peace?* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1980), 17.

Coventry, England, November 1940

decide, those who reflected on war would make a similar move.

Vitoria wrote as a theologian and a Catholic moralist. He placed his thinking in the medieval context in which all Europeans could be expected to respect the authority of the Church of Rome. His position had a cogent moral force only in a society in which there was a universally accepted church. But this was a world that was coming to an end. It is enough to point out that Martin Luther (1483–1546) was a close contemporary of Vitoria (1480?–1546) to indicate the great transformation that was taking place in Europe. The religious unity of Western Christianity was dissolving as the Spanish professor wrote. Later European writers on war could no longer argue from common religious presuppositions.

Hugo Grotius

The man who would most notably rework the tradition in the new European context was Hugo Grotius (1583–1645). Grotius, born in Holland, had to flee his native land because he found himself on the losing side in a religious and political power struggle. He spent much of his life in France, where he served as Swedish ambassador to the French Court. In 1625 he published *De jure belli ac pacis [On the Law of War and Peace],* which has led some scholars to consider Grotius the father of international law. Even those who would not give him this title admit his great importance. "Although the paternity of international law belongs as much to Vitoria and Gentili, yet Grotius is still considered the most significant writer on international law."[17] He has had a radical influence on understanding the legal relations between nations.

By Grotius's time the theological and political unity of medieval Europe had disappeared. Not only were Catholics contending with Protestants, but theological disagreement had split the Protestants into opposing parties. And a new political order added to the antagonisms. The modern world with its many sovereign nations was taking shape. A system of nation states organized according to a balance of power was taking the place of the unified Christian commonwealth. No longer could people think of themselves as first of all citizens of Christendom and only then members of a particular nation. Their primary allegiance now was to their country, and it was their country's interests that they would serve and defend.

It seemed that the just-war tradition might disappear with the medieval unity that was the setting for its development. A common church and a shared religion no longer provided a source of restraint. Instead, in this new Europe, religion became the source of conflict as nations resorted to war to promote the concerns of religious parties. Grotius was concerned to eliminate religious warfare and to propose a theory that would appeal to both Catholic and Protestant. "Grotius thought to save the demise of the concept of the just war as a method of both controlling recourse to force and limiting objectives—objectives that had been lost sight of in the religious fervor that swept the period—by seeking to throw out theological causes, which were getting people into war, and re-emphasizing the non-ideological basis of the older concept."[18]

Since a common religious authority could no longer be presumed, Grotius appealed not to religious reasons but to natural law and the customary practice of nations. Accepting the traditional categories of *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello,* he framed them according to these nonreligious presuppositions. In considering the *jus ad bellum,* he concentrated on just cause and gave little attention to right authority and right intention. This was a shift away from the inner and religious realm of conscience that had been a prime concern of Vitoria and toward the exterior and observable. This move would strongly influence later thinking about war. "This emphasis on externals," James Johnson points out, "is a mark of secularized just-war doctrine."[19] In the absence of an agreed moral theory, it made sense to keep to what everyone could see.

17. William Ballis, *The Legal Position of War: Changes in Its Practice and Theory from Plato to Vattel* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1973), 108.

18. Morton A. Kaplan and Nicholas deB. Katzenbach, *The Political Foundations of International Law* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1961), 203.

19. James Turner Johnson, *Ideology, Reason, and the Limitation of War: Religious and Secular Concepts, 1200–1740* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), 214.

Grotius also adapted the *jus in bello* to the changed world. Recognizing the new reality of nation-states, he considered the entire hostile nation, with all its citizens, as the enemy. War was now not just the affair of the ruler and his army; it was a clash of nations. But he argued that there must be some moderation in making war, and in this direction he established distinctions among the citizens of a warring nation. There are some, he said, who make no direct contribution to the war and so should not be attacked. Among these he numbered women, the elderly, children, students, priests, and merchants. So, while considering the whole nation as the enemy, Grotius maintained the medieval distinction between warrior and noncombatant. The just-war tradition was kept alive, most particularly in the *jus in bello.*

Grotius was very much a transitional figure. A committed Christian, like his Catholic predecessors, he also asked about the special demands of Christian charity. His view of morality, though, was quite different from that of Aquinas and Vitoria. These earlier writers had appealed to both Christian charity and natural law, but for them charity was one of the theological virtues that exceeded the requirements of natural law. Grotius had no sense of virtue beyond the natural, and he did not recognize any uniquely religious morality. For him Christian charity was not a higher morality but only a "special sensitivity to the dictates of nature."[20] Since he had really removed any need for a religious element, Grotius made possible the move to a moral understanding independent of Christian belief.

Emmerich de Vattel

We can conclude this brief survey of the just-war tradition with Emmerich de Vattel (1714–67). Although he was Swiss born, Vattel served as a diplomat for the king of Saxony. His thinking on war, published in 1758 as *Le droit des gens [The Law of Nations],* was intended as a sort of handbook for statesmen. In this work Vattel completed the secularization of the tradition begun by Grotius. "In the thought of Grotius," James Johnson explains, "the doctrine is still in transition, though primary reliance is definitely placed on natural law and the *jus gentium,* not on religious sanctions. In John Locke and Vattel the transitional stage has definitely been left behind. Though a just-war doctrine much like that of a century earlier is present in their thought, it is developed without reference to the theological base that informed Augustine [and] Aquinas."[21] In Vattel we find some of the traditional moral attitudes, but now completely stripped of any religious motivation.

Instead of Christian moral principles, Vattel based his theory on what he considered the universal natural rights of self-perfection and self-preservation. Arguing from these rights, he said that every nation has the right to preserve itself and to establish the security of its members by resisting aggressors. At the same time, these very rights impose limits on the use of force, for others enjoy the same rights, which all must respect. Natural rights are thus the source of both the right of self-defense and the limits of the permissible exercise of self-defense. The right to go to war, the *jus ad bellum,* is inherent in every nation. The authority necessary for resort to war is not subject to a higher judgment, for sovereignty comes from the people as a natural effect of their social organization.

Having asserted a nation's basic right to use armed force, Vattel stressed the significance of the *jus in bello* that had originated in the earlier tradition. But he called for limits in warfare based on humanitarian ideals rather than religious beliefs. Reminding his readers of the common humanity of all mankind, he called for restraint in dealing with an enemy. Showing a respect for an opponent's artistic achievements, he condemned the destruction of fine buildings and cultural treasures, which "strikes a new note in this branch of the just-war tradition."[22] And he held that members of the enemy nation who do not directly contribute to the war effort should be exempt from assault. His list of noncombatants was similar to that of Grotius and included women, children, the aged, clergy, and teachers. He also prohibited the destruction of fields and the indiscriminate bombing of cities with hot cannon balls to start fires.

We see in Vattel, then, an emphasis on and even an expansion of the *jus in bello.* Yet even though his theory retains some of the external features of the earlier theologians, it has become totally secularized. Christian charity has disappeared as a motive. The moral considerations of the religious thinkers are replaced by humanitarian sentiments and especially by practical considerations. Vattel recognized that if nations were going to preserve the sovereign right to go to war, they would be wise to agree to contain its destructiveness. The fundamental reason here for constraint in war is really the mutual self-interest of nations, for it serves the purposes of everyone in the system of sovereign states to observe these rules. By agreeing to limit the methods of warfare, a nation protects itself as much as its neighbor.

With Vattel we conclude this brief sketch of the development of the just-war theory in Western civilization. A fuller presentation would include many other authors and even ancient moralists who preceded the Christian thinkers. This summary is presented only to indicate that Western thinking on the morality of war draws from a rich reservoir of both religious and secular sources. As Geoffrey Best so clearly makes the point, "justice cannot be done to the moral weight and historical depth of the theme unless it is well understood that the idea of restraint in war is no

20. Ibid., 228.

21. Ibid., 209. The English philosopher, John Locke (1632–1704), like Vattel, also developed an ethic of warfare based on natural law rather than religious sanctions.

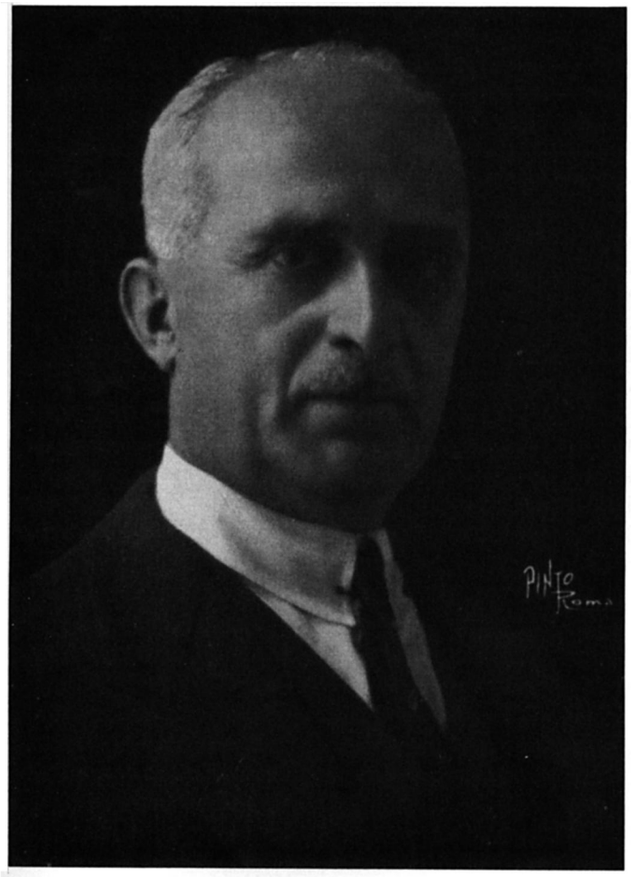
22. James Turner Johnson, *Just War Tradition and the Restraint of War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), 213.

sentimental venture of more or less modern man but is a still continuing preoccupation of humane and moral-minded people with a history as long as that of humanity itself."[23]

Modern Military Theorists

Giulio Douhet

The just-war tradition was acknowledged, if not always observed, up to the twentieth century. Even as it became more and more difficult to establish the *jus ad bellum,*



Giulio Douhet

jurists gave increased attention to the practice of war. Indeed, Michael Howard calls the period from the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 to the Hague Conference just before the First World War, "the golden age of the *jus in bello,* of formal, positive constraints on the conduct of war."[24] Some military theorists, however, began to question the tradition after World War I. This long and ruinous conflict forced people to rethink the nature and methods of war. Nations had found themselves locked for years in a bloody struggle without any effective means to arrive at a conclusion. After the stalemated horror and enormous carnage of the trenches, the prime issue for military strategists was how to restore decisiveness in warfare. Some found the answer in the new technology of air power.

The man usually considered the founder of air power doctrine was the Italian Brigadier General Giulio Douhet (1869–1930). During and after World War I, military theorists put forward proposals on the use of air power, but Douhet "was the first to weave them into a coherent and relatively comprehensive philosophy."[25] He presented his ideas in 1921 in *The Command of the Air* and reiterated them in later publications. Some authors believe that his views influenced both the Americans and the British between the wars, although Liddell Hart claimed that the British were not under his influence.[26] It is known that by 1923 the U.S. Air Corps Tactical School had an English translation of *Command of the Air,* and Bernard Brodie claims that Douhet inspired United States Air Force doctrine more than Billy Mitchell.[27] David MacIsaac, though, points out that there were significant differences between Douhet's theories and those of the Americans.[28]

Douhet began with the conviction that warfare had entered a new age because of two developments. In the first place, modern society had eliminated any possible distinction between combatant and noncombatant. "The prevailing forms of social organization," he wrote, "have given war a character of national totality—that is, the entire population and all the resources of a nation are sucked into the maw of war."[29] Making war was now the effort of an entire nation, and so it was no longer possible to distinguish the warriors from other citizens. It was obvious to Douhet that any future war would be total in its character and scope. In such a conflict it made no sense to discriminate among citizens on the basis of their contribution to the war effort.

For Douhet, however, it was the second development, the invention of the airplane, that had most decisively altered warfare. In past conflicts there were battle lines behind which "the civilian populations of the warring nations did not directly feel the war."[30] Even in the First World War, though whole nations were engaged, only a minority of the people experienced combat. This was because an army had to break through defensive lines to reach the heart of the country. "But that situation," Douhet insisted, "is a thing of the past; for now *it is possible* to go far behind the fortified lines of defense without first breaking

23. Geoffrey Best, *Restraints on War by Land before 1945,* in Michael Howard, ed., *Restraints on War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 18.

24. Michael Howard, "*Temperamenta Belli:* Can War be Controlled?" in Howard, ed., *Restraints on War,* 5.

25. Bernard Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965), 71–72.

26. B. H. Liddell Hart, *History of the Second World War* (New York: Paragon Books, 1979), 590

27. Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age,* 77.

28. David MacIsaac, *Strategic Bombing in World War Two* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1976), 8.

29. Giulio Douhet, *The Command of the Air,* trans. Dino Ferrari (New York: Coward-McCann, 1942), 5.

30. Ibid., 9.

through them. It is air power which makes this possible."[31] Planes could leap over barriers on the ground and go directly to the enemy's center of power and control.

The absolute freedom of the airplane to fly over any surface obstacle had, Douhet proclaimed, given warfare a new form. This led him to a remarkable new definition of combatant and the claim that in any future war there would be no noncombatants.

> No longer can areas exist in which life can be lived in safety and tranquility, nor can the battlefield any longer be limited to actual combatants. On the contrary, the battlefield will be limited only by the boundaries of the nations at war, and all of their citizens will become combatants, since all of them will be exposed to the aerial offensives of the enemy.[32]

According to this novel definition, a combatant is not one who fights but one who is attacked. Obviously, to frame matters this way eliminates any restriction on assaulting noncombatants.

The use that Douhet assigned to air power further contributed to his dissolving of the distinction between military and civilian. Theorists had imagined several possible roles for the plane, including reconnaissance, support of ground troops, and pursuit. The only mission, though, that made sense to Douhet was bombardment, for he asserted that any future war would be quickly decided by bomber attacks. The conflict would begin by the bombing of cities with explosives, incendiaries, and gas bombs. Word of such an assault on a few of the urban centers of a nation would so terrorize the citizens of other cities that all social order would collapse. Soon the nation would cease to function and its people would plead for peace. All this could happen even before the army could be mobilized.

Thus Douhet envisioned a strategy of a massive aerial assault against enemy cities as soon as one decides to go to war. In a world dominated by air power, a belligerent nation could not even pause for a formal declaration of hostilities. "Whatever its aims, the side which decides to go to war will unleash all its aerial forces in mass against the enemy nation the instant the decision is taken, without waiting to declare war formally, trying in this way to exploit to the utmost the factor of surprise."[33] Douhet was convinced that the first side to carry out such an attack would be the victor. Airplane technology had decreed that an assault must now be against the opponent's homeland, and it must be swift. The nation that did not recognize this new reality, or hesitated from a reluctance to kill civilians, was doomed.

Some commentators have considered Douhet a fitting successor to his countryman of the sixteenth century, Niccolò Machiavelli. Neither seemed to respect the inherited ethical tradition. "Giulio Douhet," as Ronald Schaffer claims, "was more than a revolutionist of strategy. He was one of the small group of theorists in the early twentieth century who rationalized the collapse of the moral barrier between killing troops and destroying the populace of 'civilized' countries."[34] Douhet, though, saw himself as simply a man coming to terms with reality. New technology had made the traditional moral considerations obsolete. Like the author of *The Prince,* Douhet argued against sentimentality: "War is war. Either one wages war or one doesn't; but when one does, one must do it without gloves and without frills on either side."[35] Survival and victory are the only considerations.

We see here a total rejection of the just-war tradition. The long-established distinction between warrior and civilian was swept away in what the Italian airman admitted was a "dark and bloody picture."[36] The time-honored military ethic was gone, a fearful prospect for some observers. Ronald Schaffer, expressing a moral repugnance not unique to him, offers this comment: "One senses here the final and frightening abandonment by the soldier of any sense of responsibility for the political and social consequences of his military acts, not only abroad but at home."[37] This sense of alarm arises from the radical shift that Douhet has made. At the same moment, he discarded both the old military methods and the traditional ethics of the warrior, leaving what could seem to be only a cruel and heartless pragmatism.

Douhet was well aware that his depiction of war without the conventional restraints would be morally repugnant to some people. He argued, though, that resistance to accepting his view came from a false attachment to old ideas. Nevertheless, he did offer some moral justification for his proposals. He was convinced that international agreements would not be observed when war came, and that it did not make sense to abide by rules that others did not observe. Nor did he see any virtue in accepting the destruction of one's country for the sake of observing limits in warfare.

> He is a fool if not a patricide who would acquiesce in his country's defeat rather than go against those formal agreements which do not limit the right to kill and destroy, but simply the ways of killing and destroying. The limitations applied to the so-called inhuman and atrocious means of war are nothing but international hypocrisies.[38]

In other words, rules do not apply when one's very existence is at stake.

He also offered a defense that was somewhat in line with the traditional attitudes. While admitting that raids on civilians would be a "frightful cataclysm," he suggested that it might really be less brutal than assaulting only the military. Soldiers are trained to endure attack and to respond, and so a clash of armed forces is likely to be long and costly. A war fought with bombers would be horrible, but

31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., 9–10.
33. Ibid., 202.
34. Schaffer, *Wings of Judgment,* 23.
35. Douhet, *Command of the Air,* 196.
36. Ibid., 189.
37. Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age,*99.
38. Douhet, *Command of the Air,* 181.

it would also be short. The brevity of the fighting might more than compensate for its ferocity. "Mercifully, the decision will be quick in this kind of war, since the decisive blows will be directed at civilians, that element of the countries at war least able to sustain them. These future wars may yet prove to be more humane than wars of the past in spite of all, because they may in the long run shed less blood."[39] From this point of view, his kind of warfare would actually reduce violence.

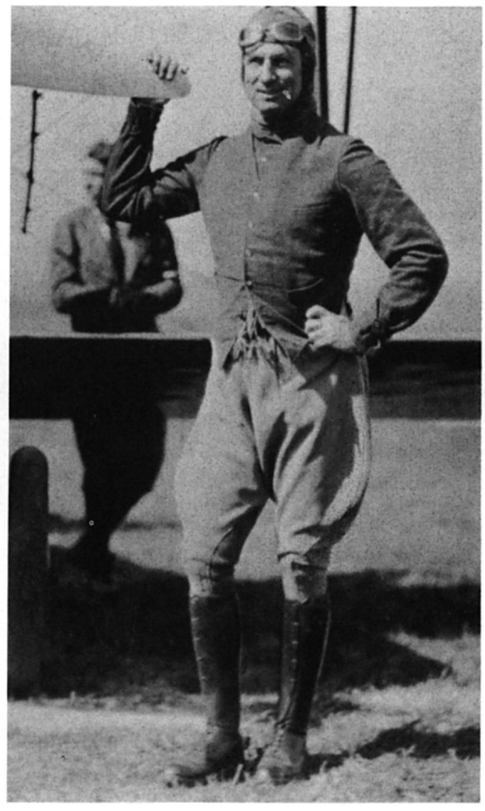
Finally, Douhet dismissed the very notion of noncombatant immunity as an odd idea. He here offered a logic that could appeal to those who had clear memories of the carnage of the trenches. It was, he opined, "a peculiar traditional notion which makes people weep to hear of a few women and children killed in an air raid, and leaves them unmoved to hear of thousands of soldiers killed in action. All human lives are equally valuable; but because tradition holds that the soldier is fated to die in battle, his death does not upset them much, despite the fact that a soldier, a robust young man, should be considered to have the maximum individual value in the general economy of humanity."[40] His appeal to the equal value of all human lives seems to put him on the moral high ground. Put in these terms, it is the inherited distinction that must be defended, rather than his rejection of it.

Billy Mitchell

Brigadier General William (Billy) Mitchell is one of the most famous names in the history of American military aviation. He had flown against the Germans in France during World War I and acquired firm attitudes towards waging war in the age of the plane. "He came home from France in 1919 convinced that air power would soon make land and sea power obsolete. He also became convinced that air power must be separate from the control of land and sea forces."[41] With great determination he set about to bring the nation and its political and military leaders around to his view. Unfortunately, he combined such intemperate criticism of his superiors with his defense of air power that he was court-martialed in 1925. He then decided to retire from the army rather than to accept punishment.

Mitchell began to develop his theories during the First World War. Unlike Douhet, who always focused on bombardment aircraft, Mitchell's "aim was to stimulate *all* aspects of the military air potential."[42] Like the Italian general, he at first seemed to abandon the notion of discriminating between military and civilian targets, saying that the entire enemy population had to be considered combatants. He accepted the idea of total war, that the whole opposing nation is the enemy. All those who contributed to the war effort had to be attacked, because those who manufactured weapons were as vital to the battle as those who used them. In this early position he seemed to lack any notion of noncombatants.

In the next few years Mitchell proposed inconsistent



William "Billy" Mitchell

views of air power. In 1921, in *Our Air Force,* he wrote that any future war would entail the destruction of cities with poison gas bombs. But in the same year he also presented air power as an adjunct to the land battle. By 1923 he had a different view, proposing the bombing of manufacturing centers after civilians had been notified that the factories were to be attacked. He now thought that attacks on civilians would be used primarily as reprisals. Unlike Douhet, he did not from the first present an unwavering and consistent understanding of air warfare.

It is possible that Mitchell's shift in ideas was an attempt to appease American public opinion and to accommodate the views of military authorities. He may have been concerned at first to avoid antagonizing government leaders, and while he was an army officer he was subject to pressure from his superiors. But after his court-martial and retirement from the army in 1926, his views on bombardment were essentially the same as those of Douhet. In the memoirs published after his death, he asserted that to defeat an enemy one had to attack his vital centers. In traditional

39. Ibid., 61.
40. Ibid., 194.
41. DeWitt S. Copp, *A Few Great Captains* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980), xiv.
42. MacIsaac, *Strategic Bombing in World War II,* 8.

Mainz, Germany, May 1945

warfare, armies protected these centers and it was necessary to fight one's way through this land defense. The bomber made defeat of the land army unnecessary. It could pass over the army and directly attack the vital centers which are the real target.[43]

Billy Mitchell had a broader view of the use of air power than Douhet, seeing a role for planes other than bombers. But the American apparently agreed with the Italian on the use of the bomber to attack cities. Both air power crusaders were impressed with the possibility of passing over a land army to reach an enemy's heartland, believing that this ability had brought a new day in warfare. Neither of them was reluctant to accept that such a doctrine meant a direct attack on civilians. This was simply a feature of war in the modern technological age. Noncombatant immunity was but one of the traditional aspects of warfare that was now obsolete, a remnant of an ethics that had to be discarded.

Air Corps Tactical School

During the 1930s, the primary source of American air power doctrine was the Air Corps Tactical School (ACTS) at Maxwell Field near Montgomery, Alabama. Here a group of captains and majors made up the staff, formulating theories and training aviators for future war. Like Mitchell and Douhet, they were convinced that war had been essentially changed by the advent of air power. Unlike the two generals, they were in a position actually to formulate doctrine and to prepare men for the next war. The doctrines and attitudes generated at ACTS would have a strong influence on the use of air power in World War II.

The ACTS faculty, like Douhet and Mitchell, ignored the traditional concept of noncombatants. They began with a "refusal to make any distinction, from the point of view of strategy, between the armed forces of the enemy and the civilian population and industrial structure which support those armed forces."[44] They argued that modern war is total war and so the old discriminations between armed forces and civilian population were obsolete. But they had a distinctive approach to air warfare. They did not focus on the collapse of civilian morale, as Douhet had. The ACTS staff rather considered the national economy as the most profitable target. They were convinced that the modern industrialized economy was such a delicately arranged mechanism that it would all collapse if only one critical part was destroyed.[45] Such destruction, they believed, was the ideal task of air power.

This approach was considered a "direct strategy." It aimed at the root of military power, the industrial base of a nation, and promised victory without defeating an army on the battlefield. It rested on the presupposition that a nation's entire economy could be disrupted by eliminating critical nodes in the system. The enemy forces would be left without the ability to fight because its sources of supply and production were destroyed. This scenario raised the

43. Schaffer, *Wings of Judgment*, 26–27.

44. William R. Emerson, *Operation POINTBLANK: A Tale of Bombers and Fighters in Readings: Book 2 Military Strategy Analysis DS 611* (Maxwell AFB: Air University, 1988), 98.

45. Ibid.

hope that air power alone could win a war and that an attacking nation would not have to rely on armies and navies. "Indeed, not a few airman believed that air power might make armies and navies obsolete."[46] Of course, this view relied on an assurance that bombers could get through and accurately hit industrial targets. This was to be tested in World War II.

In Douhet, Mitchell, and ACTS we can see how air power (and the memory of World War I) brought a new approach to warfare. The plane had opened up new possibilities for military operations and at the same time led to new attitudes toward the right conduct of war. It is clear that between the world wars military thinkers had largely rejected the traditional criteria of the just war. Technological advancement had occasioned a profound moral shift. This is not to say that this modern thinking was amoral, but only that it did not reflect the centuries-old thinking on the ethics of combat. Explicitly or implicitly, a new code had been fashioned. When World War II began, this new morality would compete with the age-old ethics of warfare.

Policy During the War

The Americans

In spite of the new theories formulated after World War I, the old just-war tradition, particularly the *jus in bello,* was still alive in World War II. The Americans, at least, announced that they would hold to the traditional distinction between the combatants and noncombatants. Their declared position, as Ronald Schaffer points out, was that they would bomb only facilities that directly supported the war effort: "During World War II the United States Army Air Forces (AAF) enunciated a policy of avoiding indiscriminate attacks against German civilians. According to this policy, American airmen were to make selective strikes against precise military and industrial targets, avoiding direct attacks on the populace."[47] The Americans insisted that any killing of civilians would be accidental, the unintended consequence of an attack on forces or plants directly related to the war effort.

This stated policy seemed to set the United States morally apart from the other warring nations. Germany, Japan, and Great Britain imposed no such limitation on themselves and were quite willing openly to attack civilian populations. These other belligerents made no gesture toward the protection of noncombatants. The official histories of the United States armed forces, on the other hand, strongly imply that this was not acceptable to the American military leaders. In particular, senior AAF leaders Carl Spaatz and Ira C. Eaker are presented as being seriously concerned to avoid the bombing of civilians. In this official telling, these American airmen set a moral standard above that of the other belligerents.

But Ronald Schaffer claims that this was not really the position of these AAF leaders.[48] He argues that they had absorbed the attitude of Douhet and were at least ambivalent on the question of bombing population centers. They did generally oppose bombing civilians, Schaffer admits, but he claims that this position was based on practical rather than moral concerns. Following the theories developed by ACTS, they simply believed that bombing industrial centers was a more efficient use of their resources. Recognizing that they had a limited number of planes, they did not want to waste their assets on nonmilitary targets. In Schaffer's view, any reluctance they felt to attacking civilians was purely pragmatic. These American airmen, he believes, merely clothed their pragmatism in moralistic language.

It is difficult to decide fully the case of American ethical standards during the war. Schaffer's claim that the American pronouncements were simply an exercise in duplicity would need more evidence. It is clear that the Americans bombed civilians as the war went on, but this does not necessarily mean that they had no moral standards in the matter. The experience of the war and the nature of the enemy had surely put intense pressure on beliefs they initially held. Locked in a struggle with a potent and feared enemy, they discovered that their bombers could not operate as effectively as they had imagined before the war. Many of the prewar theories about the use of air power turned out to be wrong. It is possible that they eventually felt constrained to act against their true principles, that a cruel reality had forced them to compromise their convictions.

It remains significant, whatever the case, that the leaders of the American war effort announced their adherence to the principle of noncombatant immunity. They felt, at least, that this was the ideal that had to be proclaimed, the position that would most strongly appeal to the American public. In some way the just-war ethic was still alive and in competition with the more modern thinking. The traditional code may well have been the one that the United States military really wanted to live by and the principles the American people wanted to embrace as they entered the war. But even if this is the case, the bombing of Dresden in February 1945 and the later raids on Japan show that by the end of the war this code was losing its force.

In fact, the Americans never seemed to be as morally sensitive about bombing Japan as they were about attacking Germany. The attacks on Japan were ferocious and indiscriminate. There were several reasons for this. In the first place, in the war with Germany the Americans distinguished between the Nazis, who were the real enemy, and the German people, who were at least partly victims. No such distinction was made when considering the Japanese; the entire population of Japan was perceived as the enemy.

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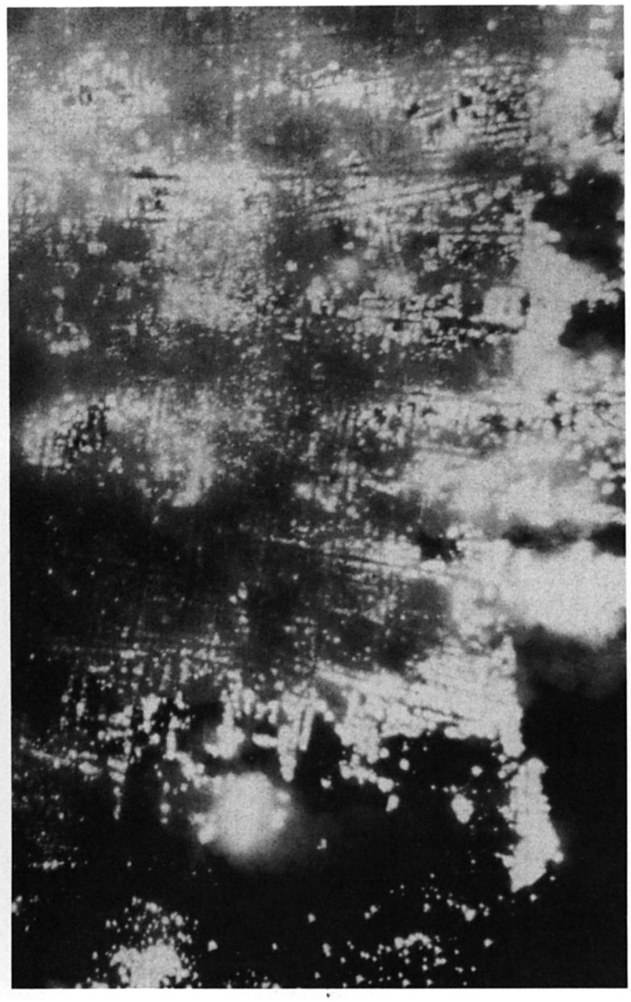
46. Ibid.

47. Ronald Schaffer, "American Military Ethics in World War II: The Bombing of German Civilians," *Journal of American History* 67 (September 1980): 318.

48. This is his main point in "American Military Ethics in World War II."



Toyama, Japan, August 1945

Further, there was a racial prejudice against the Japanese that the Americans did not feel towards the Germans. Added to this was the intense anger aroused by the sight of starved and abused American POWs who had been rescued in the Philippines in February 1945. And finally, the war with Japan offered a final opportunity to show that air power could be decisive.

Even before the atomic attacks on Japan, American bombers had targeted Japanese cities. In March 1945, General LeMay ordered the first incendiary raid against Tokyo. The destruction was even greater than anticipated, and this "most devastating air attack in history, not excluding the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, became the pattern for most the remaining operations of the XXI Bomber Command"[49] David MacIsaac goes on to say that "the incendiary raids on Japan marked the ultimate demise of the prewar theory of precision bombardment. . . . Once again the grim logic of war had prevailed over those who sought to find some surgically precise method for the application of force."[50] In these assaults near the end of the war there was not even the pretense of restraint.

To judge the treatment of Japan, of course, we have to understand its historical context. We must recognize, as MacIsaac reminds us, that the men who directed the fighting against Japan had to win as quickly as possible. The country had been at war for years and had already paid a high price in lives and treasure. The American people were understandably impatient to end the war, and the national authorities had instructed the military to achieve an unconditional surrender. In this situation, "had any Allied commander been found guilty of bringing less than the total possible force to bear on the enemy, thereby to shorten the war and 'bring the boys back home,' he would have been well advised not to appear unprotected on Main Street, U.S.A."[51] In these circumstances it is not surprising that questions about the morality of their methods did not take first place in the minds of military commanders.

The British

The British attitude going into World War II was the result of both their doctrine and their experience in World War I. Liddell Hart reports that soon after the First World War the British developed a theory of strategic air attack. This theory, like many constructed during this period, relied on the capacity of a bomber directly to attack an enemy nation so as to deprive it of the means to carry on a war. The British shared the view of men like Douhet and Mitchell and others that this ability to strike at the heartland of a country presented a critical new possibility in warfare.[52] So even before World War II began, the British had in place a doctrine of strategic bombing.

The experience of the Second World War further inclined the British to adopt the direct attack against Germany. Any inhibitions they may have retained were eroded by Hitler's raids on population centers. The German bombing of Rotterdam in May 1940 and later of other cities had reduced British repugnance to using such means themselves. They saw that they would be at a great disadvantage if they imposed upon themselves rules that their enemy did not observe. And then the German bombing of London in August 1940, although it was accidental, removed what resistance remained. Unaware that the bombing was the result of navigational errors, the British had a strong impulse to react in kind.

Inspired by both anger and fear, the British were determined to reciprocate, and the bomber provided them with their only practical means to do so. Churchill, who inspired and provoked his countrymen with his own outrage, was especially determined to respond in kind. Having concluded that the RAF provided the only realistic means of retaliation,

49. MacIsaac, *Strategic Bombing in World War II*, 106.
50. Ibid., 107.
51. Ibid.
52. Liddell Hart, *History of the Second World War*, 594.

he pressured the Air Staff to mount a direct attack. On 30 October 1940 they issued a directive, Liddell Hart reports, "ordering that oil targets should be attacked on clear nights and cities on other nights. That embodied, quite clearly, their acceptance of the idea of indiscriminate, or 'area bombing.'"[53] The thrust of their bombing policy was set; experience in bombing campaigns would push them in the same direction.

As the British carried on their aerial attacks against Germany, they learned of the bomber's limitations. They discovered that it was not as easy to find and hit their objectives as the theorists had imagined. It seemed impossible to strike small targets such as production facilities or transportation lines. The advocates of strategic bombing thus had to make some adjustments to support their claims for the effectiveness of this use of air power. Their original theory was willing to accept loss of life in factories, but it did not include the destruction of civilians in their homes. "But when it became clear that bombing could not be precise, area bombing was proposed as a way by which an air force could live up to the claim that it could win a war."[54] And so the British began direct attacks on cities as the only practical way they could bring the war to the German homeland.

This British policy culminated near the end of the war in the raids on Dresden. The bombing in February 1945 of this Baroque masterpiece was motivated, it is said, purely by the desire to terrorize the citizens. There is some debate about this, and the decision to destroy Dresden was both complicated and in some ways casual. In his biography of General George C. Marshall, Forrest C. Pogue claims that the attack on Dresden grew partly out of plans that had been made months before for ending the war by attacking key cities and vital communications centers.[55] These plans remained as possibilities for action when the occasion arose. Later impetus was added at Yalta, when the Soviets had asked for attacks on communications centers so as to hamper the movement of German forces to the eastern front. And for the RAF's Harris, Dresden was just another name on his list of cities marked for potential obliteration.[56]

American military leaders, questioning both the military value of raids on Dresden and their effect on public opinion, initially had some reservations. Perhaps they also had moral qualms about the action. But in the end the Americans supported the attacks, and Eisenhower's headquarters probably cut the orders.[57] Apparently none of the decision makers foresaw the controversy that would follow, for they did not think that they were making a radical break with past policy. The assault on Dresden seemed to be a continuation of plans and methods they had long used. And so they launched the operation with little sense that it would become one of the most debated actions of the war. The British struck the city on the night of February 13, with the Americans hitting it the next day and in three later attacks.

In the United States there was no widespread public outcry over the bombing of Dresden,[58] but it did arouse some latent moral sensibility in the British conscience as the war ended. The devastation aroused a sense of remorse that most British seemed not to feel during the earlier stages of the fighting. Perhaps the collapse of the hated enemy removed the loathing necessary to incite the passion to destroy. In any case a debate took shape in England that finally placed the blame on Arthur Harris, perhaps unfairly, since Churchill had supported and encouraged the bombing. But Harris and his Bomber Command suffered the punishment. "In Britain Bomber Command became the object of disapproval. Air Marshal Harris and his men were denied campaign medals and Harris was not included in the titles and distinctions given by the British government after the war."[59] In imposing this penalty the British seemed to find some comfort for their conscience.

Criticism of Allied Bombing

Public Criticism

During the war, neither America nor Britain experienced widespread protest against the Allied bombing campaigns. Perhaps the moral issue was not significant for many people. But there was also the sense that the survival of civilization was at stake and people feared "the consequence of not acting forcefully against incarnate evil,"[60] accepting that there could be no restriction on the means used to defeat such a menace. The nations that confronted Germany saw themselves in an apocalyptic struggle in which the fate of the world was at stake. It was not clear that moral rules applied in this situation. The British Prime Minister, at least, had no doubt about the magnitude of Nazi malevolence. If Hitler were to march into hell, Churchill proclaimed, he would have kind words for the devil.

There were, nevertheless, some British and American citizens who clung to the tradition of the just war. These were usually people of explicit Christian faith who recognized that the nature of war had changed but who still felt that the old principles provided some authoritative guidance. The most noteworthy example in Britain was Dr. George Bell, Bishop of Chichester. He admitted that one had to accept many more deaths in modern war than had previously been the case. Yet he held that there was still a line that should not be crossed. "Even if it was permissible to kill

53. Ibid.
54. Peter Calvocoressi and Guy Wint, *Total War* (New York: Penguin, 1972), 491.
55. Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Organizer of Victory* (New York: Viking, 1973), 541–42.
56. Michael S. Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987), 260.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid., 263.
59. Kennett, *History of Strategic Bombing*, 187.
60. Peter Mayhew, *A Theology of Force and Violence* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989), 97.

men and women at work in factories, it was not permissible to kill men and women in their homes."[61] The bishop announced this view in the House of Lords to an unreceptive audience, and few of his countrymen were moved to embrace his position.

In the United States there was a protest by some American clergymen. In March 1944, twenty-eight prominent American clergy published a letter opposing the bombing of Germany.[62] This protest so alarmed officials in the War Department that Robert A. Lovett, the Assistant Secretary for War for Air, went to AAF leaders in Europe to inform them of the problem of adverse publicity. Shortly after D-day he told General Spaatz that there was sentiment against indiscriminate bombing both among the public and in Congress, and he warned against announcing this as AAF policy.[63] American leaders feared that such an announcement might undermine popular support for the war effort. Without using the term, they believed that some of the just-war tradition remained in the American conscience.

John Ford

The old understanding of the right conduct of war was not, however, without its defenders. The clearest restatement of the traditional morality was an article by a Catholic moralist, John Ford. In "The Morality of Obliteration Bombing," published in September 1944, Ford condemned the strategic bombing of Germany and offered a sustained defense of the just-war criteria. This lengthy article has become something of a classic and is frequently referred to by those who discuss the morality of modern warfare. The thrust of the argument is that, despite the new situation of "total war," there still are true noncombatants.

Ford was no pacifist. He accepted the *jus ad bellum*, stating that war could still be morally acceptable in the twentieth century. He had no inclination to join those Christians who argued that there could no longer be any moral justification for war. But he strenuously argued that the means had to fall within the traditional regulations of the *jus in bello*. "I believe that it is possible for modern war to be waged within the limits set by the laws of morality, and that the resort to obliteration bombing is not an essential part of it, even when war is waged against an enemy who has no scruples in the matter."[64] He rejected the idea that the ethical principles for the practice of war had become obsolete in the modern world.

It was obvious to Ford that the conditions of warfare had changed and that it was more difficult to distinguish combatants from noncombatants. "But it is not necessary," he wrote, "to draw an accurate line to solve the problem of obliteration bombing."[65] Just because there was an area of uncertainty, he contended, this does not mean that no discriminations were possible. Much was changed, he admitted, but not everything. "Is it not evident that the most radical and significant change of all in modern warfare is not the increased co-operation of civilians behind the lines with the armed forces, but the enormously increased power of the armed forces to reach behind the lines and attack civilians indiscriminately, whether they are co-operating or not."[66] It was precisely this change that demanded a reassertion of noncombatant immunity.

Ford denied that one could begin with a facile presumption that the whole enemy population was a military target. The starting point had to be that only the armed forces were combatants and thus legitimate targets of attack. Those who wanted to extend assaults beyond the uniformed forces had to provide the argument to justify such an extension of military operations. The burden of proof, in Ford's eyes, was clearly on those who claimed that the conditions of modern war have made civilians a proper object of attack. Without such proof, he insisted, the old distinctions still imposed their moral demands.

The principal justifications that had been offered to eliminate the notion of noncombatant, Ford thought, were worthless. To make this point he presented a list of reasons that had been given for (what he called) obliteration bombing (the enemy did it first, military necessity demands it, it is justified as reprisal, the present situation is desperately abnormal, the whole nation takes part in the war) and rejected all of them. He gave particular attention to the last one, recognizing that modern warfare involves a broadly based effort. He insisted that it was a grave distortion to claim that nearly all members of a modern society contribute immediately to a war. He pointed out that throughout history civilians have always made some contribution to armies, providing food, for example. But the principle of noncombatant immunity was developed with this fact in mind.

To confirm his point, Ford gave a lengthy list of people who he believed were obviously noncombatants. He identified dressmakers, cobblers, librarians, glove makers, bankers, deliverymen, children, and more than a hundred other classes of people as clearly not being directly involved in the war. This showed, Ford said, that the majority of civilians are noncombatants, no matter what claims are made about the modern reality of total war. "Facts and common sense tell us to guard against the total-war fallacy that the whole nation is arrayed in arms against the whole enemy nation."[67] Even though modern industrialized economies brought citizens into greater unity, a belligerent nation was still divided into some who were clearly combatants and some who were not.

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61. Calvocoressi and Wint, *Total War*, 490.
62. Kennett, *History of Strategic Bombing*, 187.
63. Schaffer, *American Military Ethics in World War II*, 323.
64. John C. Ford, "The Morality of Obliteration Bombing," *Theological Studies* 3 (September 1944): 267.
65. Ibid., 280.
66. Ibid., 281.
67. Ibid., 288.

It cannot be said that this argument greatly affected the conduct of the war, which was reaching its last stages when Ford's article was published. This was not the likely time for any deep consideration of the morality of the war effort. But Ford's reasoning has had an enduring appeal to many who think about war in the modern world. His article was the clearest defense of the traditional ethics of war. Moralists still quote him when they discuss warfare, and his position was adopted by many who have more recently protested against the use of nuclear weapons. In the middle of the twentieth century, after the new techniques and technologies had been put into practice, he served as a bridge to the age-old just-war tradition.

Conclusion

The moral issue is still with us, and not just as a concern for the professional ethicist, the conscientious objector, or the individual soldier trying to do his or her duty. It remains near the heart of warfighting. It seems clearer than ever that an effective strategy has to include ethical considerations, for the moral issues have been become more prominent in discussion since World War II. Without a moral justification for a war, it will be impossible either to arouse the essential popular support or to maintain the spirit of the war fighters themselves.

This became evident long after World War II in the national upheaval over the Vietnam War. Many of the opponents of the war expressed their opposition in moral terms, and they received a sympathetic hearing throughout much of the nation. In his memoirs, Henry Kissinger tells how the government, unable to offer a suitable response, was caught off guard in this debate. He writes of spending hours with student protesters, trying to reason with them. But neither he nor other government officials could make their case, and they lost the moral argument. Setting out to do what they thought was right, American leaders saw themselves and the United States cast as villains. "For too many," Kissinger laments, "a war to resist aggression had turned into a symbol of fundamental American evil."[68]

This lack of moral legitimation for the Vietnam War haunted the nation for years. In retrospect it was folly for the national leaders to enter the war without such a justification. This failure both undermined the war effort and caused many to doubt American decency. Some critics still point to Vietnam as a demonstration of the fundamental wickedness of the United States. This charge weakened our ability to promote legitimate national interests in the world, because America's image as the bearer of human ideals had been damaged. Our foes could therefore present themselves as the true defenders of justice and human rights. Henry Kissinger, for example, bemoans the fact that Marxism, with so little to offer needy people, had been able to make a

68. Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1979). 56.

believable moral claim against our democratic system.[69]

The irony of the government's situation in the debate over Vietnam was that many of the protesters who were appealing to the just-war tradition did not really comprehend it. As John Courtney Murray, a respected authority in this area, has made clear, sincere but uninformed students used the criteria of the tradition without really understanding them. In particular, they held that the burden was on the government to prove that they were observing all the aspects of the just-war tradition. But, Murray explains, the traditional understanding is that a properly declared war must be considered just unless it can be shown to be otherwise.[70] Perhaps the protesters could have framed an argument even on this basis, but they did not do so. They had a great advantage, though, in that they controlled the terms of the debate.

Desert Storm, though, demonstrated that a change has taken place since the Vietnam War. There is some evidence that the American military leadership has learned a lesson, for during the Gulf War their public statements were couched in traditional moral language. American reports of bombing raids always stressed that only military targets were being struck and that every effort was being made to avoid injuring civilians. A well-known author on the ethics of warfare, Michael Walzer, pointed with some astonishment to the use of the classic categories by the official spokesmen. "The early briefings on the air war," he said, "sounded like the briefers had been reading the just-war theory."[71] It may well be that they had been studying the theory, but it could as well be true that they were using this language because, as James Johnson has said, we can't speak in any other terms. Whatever the cause, in Desert Storm the moral discourse was not controlled by those protesting the war.

The administration also showed that it had learned a lesson. President Bush repeatedly told his countrymen that the Vietnam experience would not be repeated, and he offered the hope that the Gulf War would lead us to finally kick the "Vietnam syndrome." Unlike Lyndon Johnson, President Bush made sure that he had popular support for his war before ordering the start of hostilities. He convinced the majority of Americans that the cause was just and the means were proper. Inspired by a sense of high moral purpose, the nation was ready to pay the price. More than the President could have realistically expected, the Vietnam complex was laid to rest. In fact, the glory of the Gulf War even shone on the veterans of Southeast Asia, who now received belated recognition for their service.

Nevertheless, after the war was over there was some complaint that the government was not making the moral case, allowing the nation to become confused and unsure of the justness of our actions in the Gulf. As the enthusiasm of the victory began to fade and the suffering of Iraq's minorities was displayed on the evening newscasts, Irving Kristol insisted that the American people "need reassurance that our behavior is both right and sensible." He went on to say that the administration was not able to provide such reassurance because "it does not have available a rhetoric that would permit it to speak in such terms."[72] While Kristol is not appealing for a reassertion of the old just-war principles, he makes a persuasive argument that our government must be able to provide a cogent moral justification for our international conduct. Our leaders are still not as articulate as they should be in acquitting this duty to the country.

Our national authorities also owe it to those who fight in the defense of the United States to provide a convincing moral justification for any war. As Henry Kissinger has reminded us, "from the time of the Declaration of our Independence, Americans have believed that this country has a moral significance for the world."[73] Many of our citizens will surely react against any perceived violation of this national self-identity, especially in what they take to be an unjust war. This became sadly evident in the opprobrium suffered by many veterans on their return from Vietnam. America's leaders cannot expect military personnel to risk their lives when the reward is to be treated like criminals. Those who do their duty defending the nation deserve an exuberant welcome home like that given to those returning from Desert Storm. Such a homecoming depends on the country's conviction that a war was fought for a noble cause. Our political leaders must be ready to explain the moral basis for this conviction.

Finally, our fighting forces should know the just-war tradition because it is an essential part of their history. Telford Taylor, chief American prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials finds great significance in the fact that warriors themselves have helped develop the rules of war. "The idea that rules of war were made by civilians," he insists, "is simply not so."[74] He notes that military men have been severe in punishing violation of these rules by enemies, even if they resent such punishment of their comrades. Warriors expect that even foes will observe certain rules of combat. This indicates that such principles are solidly in the fighting tradition, an important part of the military heritage. They impart to the profession of arms an essential moral structure, a sense of honor, and a source of pride.

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69. Ibid., 69.

70. John Courtney Murray, "War and Conscience," in James Finn, ed., *A Conflict of Loyalties* (New York: Random House, 1958), 19–30.

71 Quoted in Peter Steinfels, "How Do You Tell a Victorious War From a Just One?" *New York Times,* 17 March 1991, Sec. 4, 4.

72. Irving Kristol, "Tongue-Tied in Washington," *Wall Street Journal,* 15 April 1991, Sec. A, 14.

73. H. Kissinger, "Morality and Power," in Ernest W. Lefever, ed., *Morality and Foreign Policy* (Washington: Ethics and Public Policy Center of Georgetown University, 1977), 59.

74. Quoted in Studs Terkel, *The Good War* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 461.