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WARCRAFT AND THE FRAGILITY OF VIRTUE

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THERE IS MUCH TALK currently about virtue and virtues, and this, I suppose, is all to the good. But if the current debate aspires to be more than an academic exercise, it needs to show how discussion of the virtues makes a difference in moral philosophy. Any serious alternative to the status quo¹ should satisfy the following three conditions: It should involve a shift in the fundamental vocabulary of ethics; it should reorder, if not reject, some of the emphases and priorities found in the status quo; and finally, it should issue in a reevaluation of specific acts and policies as understood within the status quo. I propose in what follows to look both at the considerations which might lead to adopting an understanding of ethics grounded in the virtues and at the difference this would make in understanding war.

The approach to the virtues adopted here I'll call 'orthodox aristotelianism' in order to distinguish it from various other accounts. It is well known that for Aristotle a virtue is a habit, which enables a certain sort of activity to be chosen and to be carried to a successful completion. In the case of the virtues of human character, habitual success in completing the acts is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for ascribing virtue, for we also insist that the agent know what she is doing, choose that action for its own sake, and be of such a character that she would normally choose that sort of act in those sorts of circumstances.² Possession of a virtue renders a person—or anything else, for that matter—not adventitiously good, but good after her kind.

What is less frequently recognized is that the virtues of human character are, of their nature, fragile.³ This fragility is

not an unfortunate happenstance that we should strive to overcome. Rather, it is an essential aspect of what it means to be a virtue. For virtue, if it is to flourish, must be practiced, not merely possessed. Like any other skill or art it will weaken and eventually vanish if not regularly employed. The most common enemies of virtue are indifference, self-indulgence, and despair, which persuade someone that something needn't be done, or not just now, or can't possibly be accomplished anyway—note the language of necessity, to which we will return—and thus might as well be dispensed with. Aristotle treats some aspects of this problem in book seven of the *Ethics*, but there is an earlier and much more vivid diagnosis that will repay a detailed analysis of the text.

At the end of the first year of the Peloponnesian War Pericles delivers a funeral oration for the Athenian dead. But, he says, he will not praise the dead. Their sacrifice speaks more clearly and more eloquently than anything he could say. Pericles undertakes, rather, to give an account of what they died for and why. And so Thucydides constructs for him the classic account of Athenian virtue. Why did these men die? For Athens. Why would somebody do such a thing? Because Athens, unlike Sparta, offers justice to stranger and friend alike. Athens is the center of wisdom and learning for the civilized world. Athens is the wellspring of culture. “This,” he concludes:

is the kind of city for which these men, who could not bear the thought of losing her, fought nobly and nobly died . . . you should fix your eyes every day on the greatness of Athens as she really is, and should fall in love with her. When you realize her greatness, then reflect that what made her great was men with a spirit of adventure, men who knew their duty, men who were ashamed to fall below a certain standard.⁴

Note the connection of Athens “as she really is” with a “certain standard.” It is the reality of Athenian virtue that makes the polis lovable, and it is that reality for which men fight and die. The loss of Athenian virtue would mean the loss of that loveliness and render Athens itself unworthy of their deaths.

Pericles' funeral oration is, of course, well known to everyone. Less frequently noted is what follows immediately in Thucydides' account: the plague. Like an invisible enemy, it lays waste the city with hideous, indiscriminate and unpredictable disease:

Those with naturally strong constitutions were no better able than the weak to resist the disease, which carried away all alike The most terrible thing of all was the despair into which people fell . . . no one expected to live long enough to be brought to trial and punished: instead everyone felt that already a far heavier sentence had been passed on him and was hanging over him, and that before the time for its execution arrived it was only natural to get some pleasure out of life.⁵

The citizens of Athens ceased caring and gave themselves up to all sorts of bestiality and vice. The uncertainty of the hour and the expectation of future misery conspired to crush Athenian virtue:

. . . people now began openly to venture on acts of self-indulgence which before then they used to keep dark As for what is called honour, no one showed himself willing to abide by its laws, so doubtful was it whether one would survive to enjoy the name for it. It was generally agreed that what was both honourable and valuable was the pleasure of the moment No fear of god or law of man had a restraining influence. As for the gods, it seemed to be the same thing whether one worshipped them or not, when one saw the good and the bad dying indiscriminately.⁶

Thucydides concludes that “Athens owed to the plague the beginnings of a state of unprecedented lawlessness.” This lawlessness does not extend simply through the duration of the plague, and in an important way this underscores the fragility of virtue. Once virtue is lost, it is hard to recover, and the continuing war perpetuates the inclination to self-seeking. There is, in Thucydides’ account, a close connection of the lawlessness of the plague to the reduction of justice to prudence in the Mytilenian debate, the rejection of all values in the Melian dialogue, and the ultimate destruction of Athenian culture.⁷

In fact, war is much better captured by the metaphor of plague than by that of hell, for in hell everything is final and accomplished, while plague, with its constant and unanticipated variations on horror, breeds despair, self-indulgence and indifference to the way I shape my life. It leads to accepting the bestial and the vile as something we have to live with—note again the language of necessity—and perhaps even undertake ourselves. It is, in short, the ultimate laboratory in which to test the strength, or fragility, of virtue.

In his discussion of obedience to superior orders Michael Walzer tells the story of a German soldier who refused to serve in a squad charged with executing non-combatant civilians. The soldier was summarily court-martialled, placed with the civilians, and shot. Walzer comments:

Here is a man of extraordinary nobility, but what are we to say of his (former) comrades? That they are committing murder when they fire their guns, and that they are not responsible for the murder they commit . . . Responsibility passes over the heads of the members of the firing squad . . . because of the direct threat that drives them to act as they do.⁸

These are not their acts, it would seem. The soldiers are but parts, screwed inescapably into the machine, which is manipulated by their superiors. But that this is false is shown by the one soldier who refuses. How might we understand this refusal?⁹ His presence as a soldier indicates a willingness to be part of an army, while refusing to follow orders, even at peril of his life, reflects a belief that some things simply cannot be demanded. Why might this be? The best answer, I think, lies in attributing to the soldier the perhaps unarticulated belief that he is a certain *kind* of person, engaged in a certain *kind* of activity, with which the particular *kind* of act he is called upon to carry out is not merely inconsistent, but repulsively so. I have underlined the notion of kinds because nothing in the story suggests any involvement with individuals or the particulars of the day in the soldier's motives. No impression is given that he was particularly fond of these civilians, or even that he knew them. He is not primarily concerned with the integrity of his physical person; that's what he is willing to give up. What we're called on to assume is that he recognizes the execution of non-combatants as murder, and that, on the basis of his own sense of self, he would rather die than commit murder. Not *killing* but *murder* as a kind of act is the issue, otherwise his presence in the army makes no sense. As in Thucydides, war may be a good though tragic enterprise, and a person who thinks himself good may feel responsible for doing his part. He may not be able to eliminate the tragedy, but he must still acknowledge his acts as his own; this, after all, is part of what entitles someone to think himself good. But no decent person who understands what 'murder' means can commit it without shame, regardless of the consequences. Walzer's language blinds him

to the fact that this is a man of “extraordinary nobility” only when viewed from a perspective so fully debased as to believe that persons could fail to be responsible for the murders they commit. In order not to be responsible for my actions I must truthfully be able to say that I did not know what I was doing, or that I was unescapably constrained in my actions. But this is not the case. If one soldier can act courageously, then that is an indictment of the rest. For as Aristotle notes, “there are some things we cannot be compelled to do, and rather than do them we should suffer the most terrible consequences and accept death.”¹⁰ To think it extraordinary that someone refrain from murdering reflects poorly not only on Walzer but on our own self-understanding as well. For we are tempted to say that the soldier’s refusal is heroic. And the reason we’re so tempted is that we worry whether or not we could do the same. We fear that we could not do what common justice demands, and that the shape, both of our war and of our lives, would be one that shamed us to acknowledge. The most brutal irony of war is that on the one hand conducting it justly demands the firmest and most self-disciplined exercise of the virtues, while on the other war appears to shatter the very virtues it demands.

As I suggested above, this fragility of the virtues is no different from that of any skill or craft. Ascribing virtue to a person is rather like calling her a craftsman in that her products must not only be of an acceptable standard, but she must achieve this standard, not haphazardly, from a firm grasp of the particulars of her craft. If someone were to produce one good pot and never duplicate the feat, we would not call her a ‘potter’. If the person were to set herself up in business and produce pots of an inferior sort, we might charitably, call her an inferior potter; but if every time she attempted to fire one it crumbled to bits, or if every pot she sold disintegrated as soon as it was used, it would be tempting to say that this person was not a potter but a fraud. And at the learning stages, as with an apprentice, while we might refer to her as a potter, this is really a sort of shorthand for saying that she is on the way to becoming one. As yet she needs external guidance and instruction, correction and discipline. It is only when she can succeed on her own, choosing the steps because she sees that they are the right steps to-

ward creating an acceptable product, do we say she has mastered her craft.

By analogy, any activity about which we can deliberate requires a certain craftsmanship for its successful completion. For the orthodox aristotelian life is not something that happens but something that is made. It is not composed of discrete events, collected like mementos, but is something shaped and patterned, in which the place of a particular is anticipated by what came before—chosen on the basis of skills developed through experience, employed toward an end.¹¹

The virtues are skills for crafting a life, which must be assessed in its fullness. War can only be undertaken and understood as part of a life, and for the person of virtue it must be seen as a field upon which he practices warcraft. But let me return to the skillful potter. When she throws her clay, what is she doing? She is not simply tossing about mud but beginning a pot, which will have a particular size and shape, serve a particular end, and be representative of her craftsmanship. It is a product of that craftsmanship, and one to which no one else can lay claim. In fact, she will allow no one else to claim the products of her craft. This, in large part, is the difference between craftsmanship and the assembly line. In an assembly line the individuals are merely parts of a machine. That they are made of flesh and blood and go home at five is incidental to the product of that machine. If they can be replaced efficiently by individuals made of steel and circuit boards, so much the better.

Let me pause to guard against a possible misunderstanding. I am not saying that assembly workers cannot be craftsmen, even superb ones. My point is that their craftsmanship is incidental to the work of the machine, and this may be made clear in three ways. The assembly worker cannot lay claim to the product of the machine, but only to some aspects of that whole; the car, for example, is trash, but those are damned fine welds. Further, the assembly worker is answerable to a standard he does not set, but which is set for him by the nature and requirements of the machine. What is required of the worker is that he meet this standard, and if he does not he is replaced, like any other faulty part. But most telling is that the standard may not measure up to the worker's own, so that if he is a craftsman that

may well conflict with the workings of the machine in such a way that he is forced to sacrifice his craftsmanship in order to remain a part. He must content himself with the set standard rather than the best of which he is capable—follow orders or accept the consequences.

One consequence of this is that he can no longer take pride in his product, for pride is the prerogative of craftsmanship. I cannot take pride in something unless, in one way or another, it is mine, of my doing. I must have chosen it, known what I was choosing, and succeeded in producing it as a consequence of my craftsmanship. This way of putting the point should sound familiar. Indeed, I intend to draw a close connection between virtue, craft, and pride. A good craftsman takes pride in his work, and this is part of what it means to be a craftsman as opposed to a cog in the machine. For to take pride in something is to put it forward as worthy and to claim the credit for its praiseworthiness. In so doing the craftsman also exposes himself to risk, for he must acknowledge and accept responsibility for failure. More than this, pride that is honest allows no one else to accept that responsibility, no matter the magnitude of the failure. Only his craftsmanship enables him to negotiate this risk, but how should we understand this?

Any craftsman masters the skills necessary to his craft, but it is important to remember that this mastery is not simply learning the rules, even if there are rules. For rules of a craft can only be rules of thumb, starting points for responding to the demands of a particular project or situation. This is so because the rules are only generalizations derived from studying the creations and methods of the great practitioners of the past. If only the rules were followed, I could, I suppose, be confident in regularly producing an acceptable product, something at least “minimally decent.”¹² But I could not *set* the standard. If I wish to excel, what is required is not action in accord with the rules for beginners, but the continual practice and discipline that will make craftsmanship second nature and enable me to meet a situation with something worthy and uniquely mine.

Consider the following story.¹³ An emperor of China was presented with an exquisite piece of jade. He sent it to an old and famous jade carver with instructions to make a lion befitting the stature of an emperor. Some time passed and the old

man arrived at court with two exquisite fish and a box containing the remnants of the original jade. The emperor asked how the old man dared flout his orders in such a fashion. The old man answered that there was no lion in the stone. Less than pleased, the emperor asked what he meant by this, whereupon the old man opened the box, revealing only enough jade dust to cover the nail of his little finger. This, I take it, is pride in craftsmanship. But the story illustrates several other points as well. The jade carver responds to the task in no preordained way. Rather, he perceives the nature of his material and what its possibilities are. He does this on the basis of skills developed and perfected through time. As a craftsman he desires and chooses the best that he sees, and he presents it as his own, come what may. If he fails to carve the fish, it is because he holds his craft in too little esteem. Perhaps he prefers fortune or fears the wrath of the emperor. But from the perspective of *our* jade carver, to subordinate his craft to any of these concerns would be to prostitute himself and the craft to which he has dedicated his life.

A corollary to the pride which a craftsman takes in seeking the best and trying to set the standard of excellence is that he must possess a robust capacity for contempt. The ability to recognize an inferior product and the inclination to hold it and its maker in disdain are part of what it means to have developed a particular skill or virtue. Simply to do the emperor's bidding would be contemptible, and while he might excuse another, he cannot excuse himself. This isn't to say that there might not be some circumstances under which craft should be subordinated to other values, but this isn't one of them. Pride compels the craftsman to accept and even desire the risks present in the pursuit of excellence, and those with pretensions to craftsmanship who are willing to sacrifice their craft for lesser values are contemptible. They are not made of the same stuff as, for example, Walzer's soldier.

Here I'll guard against another possible misunderstanding. My emphasis on pride and contempt may sound as though I were endorsing a haughty and elitist perfectionism. But this would be a mistake. The contempt of my craftsman stems from his perception of pretense and sham. He does not expect perfection, if there is such a thing. But he does expect a mem-

ber of his guild to strive honestly to produce an artifact of quality. Part of being a member lies in sharing standards of quality and in recognizing whether or not a particular product measures up to the level of its maker. Thus what my potter disdains from the hand of her equal she praises as the early assays of the apprentice. And of course what she would frown on if offered her by the apprentice she accepts lovingly from her young child. To have contempt for shoddy workmanship should not suggest pridefulness or arrogance in general. She just goes on about her business, and the expression of pride in her work simply is that work.

For the orthodox aristotelian, the work of life lies in crafting a product in which I can take pride, which I wish to claim for my own and offer as praiseworthy. The cardinal virtues are the basic skills for crafting a life. They make it possible for me to acquire, hone, and protect whatever other skills I choose to pursue. They allow me to perceive the way the world is, to recognize what is in accord with human flourishing,¹⁴ to choose that and pursue it to a successful completion. All I am claiming is that among the key animating aspects of this moral psychology are pride and contempt.

Two important points emerge from these considerations. First, rules are for beginners. Not only do I achieve, but I recognize the good as a result of habits and perceptions that are in accord with virtue and right reason. Once I have acquired the virtue in question, rules become superfluous. A second and more important point follows. There is little purchase here for the language of obligation. It has no epistemic import, so such language does not help me see what virtue requires. To invoke an obligation amounts to saying that some kind of commitment has been made for the satisfaction of which there are clearly defined conditions and that this commitment stands over and against me as a standard to which I must conform. But how might the craftsman respond to such an invocation? It is otiose, pure and simple. When he undertakes a commission, he offers to exercise his craft on my behalf. It is a matter of pride that he attempts to produce the best he can. What else, after all, will a good craftsman do?

To invoke an obligation can be to do one of two things. If my potter says to herself "I have an obligation to deliver that

commission by the third," she is reminding herself not to be distracted, reminding herself what the situation at hand requires if she and her customer are both to be satisfied. For example, a student who must decide whether to go to a party or work on a paper might say, "I owe it to Professor Burroughs to do a good job; I'd better stay home and work on it." There is no contract to "do a good job"; either you do or you don't. Rather, this reminder expresses a desire to produce something in which the student can take pride, which he can offer up without embarrassment to a professor he admires. Working rather than going to the party cannot ensure the quality of the paper, but it can at least ensure that he does not become contemptible.

There is another use to which the invocation of obligation might be put. It might be used not by the craftsman but by his client, and here again there are two ways to take it. It may be an insult, indicative of the low estimation this person has of him. To think, after all, that he is so low as to neglect what he has said, or to avoid the consequences of what he has done, is a vulgar affront. On the other hand, if the averring to obligation does in fact have any weight, that itself is a symptom of the contemptible. It indicates that pride in craftsmanship has decayed to such an extent that the ability to count on even the adequate or the minimally decent has been lost. Such a situation is not worth preserving, much less cultivating. It is not clear what, if anything, the genuine craftsman can or should do, but it is a sorry state of affairs. To invoke obligation is always to call into question the characters involved and the world in which they live. This is true of rules, and by extension the same is true of duties and the moral law. From the aristotelian perspective of virtue as craft, this sort of language is irrelevant when the virtues are functioning and probably useless when they are not.

The contrast between the aristotelian and the status quo, with regard to ethics in general and with specific reference to the understanding of war emerges in a look at James Childress's influential article "Just-War Criteria."¹⁵ Discussing the traditional criterion of just intention in resorting to war, Childress writes:

Some would hold that the dominance, if not the mere presence of hatred, vitiates the right to wage war even if there is a just cause . . . Such a contention, however, is difficult to establish, for if all the conditions of a just and justified war were met, the presence of vicious motives would not obliterate the *jus ad bellum*, although they would lead to negative judgments about the agents.¹⁶

This reasoning relies heavily on the vocabulary of rights, duties, and obligations. The argument goes something like this: (1) There is a prima facie duty to refrain from injuring others; (2) this prima facie duty is overridden by a sufficiently severe violation of rights on the part of some other; (3) given this violation of rights, there no longer exists an obligation to refrain from injuring that particular other; (4) while acting hatefully would be nasty, it would not be in violation of any duty; (5) consequently, nasty motives do not render resort to war wicked if there is just cause.

The aristotelian finds this way of proceeding very puzzling. While she might find (1) an awkward, though intelligible, variation of the definition of justice as rendering to each his due, (2) is very strange. Whence come these duties, and why should it be the case that the overriding of them licenses certain forms of behavior? It seems much clearer to avoid this vocabulary and say that when someone attacks me and mine I don't have any good reason not to resist, and all sorts of good reasons to do so. On this account the third step is superfluous, since there was never, strictly speaking, any obligation in the first place. To injure someone is to detract from his well-being—that's what the word means—and so to do it without reason is unjust—that's what *that* word means. The person of virtue doesn't do that any more than my potter gives her client a product she knows to be defective.

Step (4) deserves somewhat more detailed attention. What does it mean to hate someone? Hate is not anger. I can be angry for any number of reasons, and some of these reasons will justify my anger. If, for example, I have told my five-year-old son not to play with the computer in my study, and return to find he has done so and has erased my files, I will be angry. This anger is justified. Nor is hate the desire to inflict injury. Given what my child has done, I form the intention of punishing him, and I do so in a way that detracts from his immediate

desires and well-being. A spanking is a spanking, and if you don't intend it to sting you don't understand what you are doing. Perchance my son was courageously pursuing a colleague who had broken in to erase my files; but not believing this, I punish him anyway. This is unfortunate, and it may perhaps be unjust on my part. It is still not hatred.

What then, for the aristotelian, is hatred? In lieu of a detailed discussion by the Philosopher himself, I'll turn to his best commentator:

Now when a man turns naturally away from something it is because, by its nature, it ought to be avoided. Just as all creatures seek pleasure naturally, they avoid sorrow in the same way, as Aristotle says. And just as love comes from pleasure, so hatred comes from sorrow. We love what gives us pleasure because its pleasure-giving aspect is considered a good; so we hate what gives us sorrow because its sorrow-giving aspect is considered an evil. But envy is sorrow, i.e., over our neighbour's blessings, and sorrow is hateful to us. Thus out of envy comes hatred.¹⁷

This long passage from St. Thomas is useful for several reasons. In the first place, it displays the aristotelian emphasis on moral psychology and the way the world is. Hatred is not an abstract notion but is tied up with feelings, habits, and responses to the world. Thomas undertakes his analysis free from the vocabulary of duties and obligations. Nonetheless, he provides a nuanced account that makes clear why unjust intent renders a war wicked. Hatred stems from envy, and envy is sorrow over the flourishing of our neighbor. But this is not any sorrowing. If I am upset with the good life of a mafia capo, this may be an expression of my outrage over his unpunished wickedness. Envy is to want something another person has, regardless of the justice with which he acquired it. Hatred carries this a step further. When I hate someone, I wish him injury, not to redress an injustice but as a consequence of my envy. I move from wanting what is his to hoping he loses it, just so that he doesn't have it. One of the impressive features of this aristotelian account is that we can all, I trust, recognize first hand the feeling under discussion.

How would the aristotelian view a war undertaken out of hatred? What does someone who hates want when he goes to war? He does not simply want to redress a wrong, although he might view this as a foreseen but unintended consequence. He

wants to inflict injury for injury's sake. But this short-circuits the appeal to just cause. The person who hates, hates in the absence of *just* cause and refrains from acting on his hate out of fear, or weakness, or whatever. He *wants* to inflict injury whether or not it is due, and this desire is contrary to justice. Since just acts are not simply of a certain sort but stem from a certain character, acts carried out in hate cannot be just. Talk about obligation and duty obscures the deeper relations of action to character in this and indeed in all discussion. Returning to the contrast between the craftsman and the assembly line, it's as though I were to say that the limits of responsibility for my creations simply were the limits of the warranty. You can't, I suppose, seek redress under law if I have fulfilled the obligations of the warranty, but if the product was inferior, then my craftsmanship was inferior. And if I don't insist on taking the responsibility for this, then I render myself contemptible, not merely in your eyes but in my own.

So the aristotelian views Childress's understanding of intention as enfeebled by a poor moral psychology, which portrays acts as somehow to be understood apart from the agents who perform them. This is not only implausible but also perverse, as though we were looking at generic brands and judging them without considering how adopting them shapes our lives. But we don't commit generic acts. An act committed is specific, mine, in just the same way as the pots belong to the potter or the jade to the carver.

In undertaking any activity, the aristotelian thinks of herself as a craftsman and her acts as shaped by the virtues. Warcraft, on this account, presupposes the cardinal virtues and requires me to reflect on what further particulars of skill and knowledge I need to acquire, what conditions need to be satisfied in order to create a worthy product. Unlike some situations where it is up to me to accept or decline the endeavor, war and the circumstances in which war is a possibility vigorously impose themselves on me, circumscribing my movements, limiting my resources, hurting people, places, and things that I care for and, though we needn't think this is the most important point, putting me in jeopardy of life and limb. Some response is required. To ignore the issue is either gross stupidity or wishful thinking.

In pondering the worthiness of war, I am already asking how it might fit into and alter the life I am making. This leads me to another difference with Childress, for there is not and in fact cannot be any neutral ground for assessing war as such. Consequently, it will not do to think of just war criteria as “a formal framework within which different substantive interpretations of justice and morality as applied to war can be debated.”¹⁸ The concrete and specific acts that I undertake, and which go to make up my life, are not carried out *in vacuo*, but essentially involve a substantive understanding of justice. Even if I granted that “there is no single substantive theory of just war,”¹⁹ it would not follow that just war criteria can serve only as a “framework for debates.”²⁰ They must, on the contrary, be the sort of considerations which can help me discover how to shape a product that I can take pride in. How, the aristotelian asks, can I make this war mine?

This is not the normal way of putting the issue. Usually we’re asked to wonder whether or not a war is just, whether there is a duty to fight, or a duty to resist. But for my craftsman these questions, if intelligible at all, are subsidiary to the first and follow only after it has been addressed. I can only make this course of action mine if I deem it worthy of pursuit, and I can only determine this on the basis of the substantive values that shape the whole of my life. I must know what I am doing because I am risking the shape of my life and, as with my jade carver, the ability to negotiate this risk depends on the strength of my virtues. Not only this, but having virtues means having acted in ways that reflect concrete beliefs about what in this world is genuinely worthy and what is to be disdained. Walzer’s soldier, having accepted the tasks of war, recognizes the act his superiors demand as contrary to warcraft, as an abomination. Thus, returning to Childress, both *ad bellum* and *in bello* criteria should be seen as minimal conditions for an acceptable war, what the apprentice is allowed to get away with. When acts do not measure up, they are simply unacceptable.²¹ Further, as a craftsman, the aristotelian goes into war desiring not the minimally decent but the superior. From this perspective the refusal of the German soldier, who seems so extraordinary to Walzer, is just what you would expect of a person whose virtue did not crumble when his life was threatened.

This brings me to a point about the vocabulary of war as understood by the aristotelian, which has been anticipated at several points above. It is often said that some acts are necessities of war. Walzer offers the most elaborate discussion of this. He is attempting, quite properly, to indicate the ways in which “necessity” can be invoked and to establish at least some constraints on its use. Walzer notes, again quite rightly, that “necessity” too often means “expediency,” which degenerates into calculating acceptable and unacceptable risks and losses in response to a threat. He suggests that

. . . the mere recognition of such a threat is not itself coercive; it neither compels nor permits attacks on the innocent, so long as other means of fighting are available. Danger makes only half the argument; imminence makes the other half.²²

When these conditions are met, we may be excused methods which would ordinarily be condemned. This suggestion will be roundly rejected by my craftsman as contemptible and base. It is, as a technical matter, an abuse of the very notion of “necessity,” for any enterprise, after all, can be given up. I may not want to give it up. I may be afraid to give it up. But that is a different matter.

Still, that is not the main consideration. What upsets the craftsman are the notions of “coercion” and “other means.” He knows that some means and methods are central to the exercise of his craft, and to give these up is to give up the craft itself. Here I’m reminded of the monk in the Xerox commercial. What comes out of the machine may be readable, it may even be indistinguishable from the original, but it is not a manuscript, illuminated or otherwise. It is something new, and if it replaces the older forms of copying, then a certain craft will be lost. But no craft must be lost. The language of necessity, even carefully circumscribed, leads to neglecting this point, and this would be to neglect what the craftsman holds most important. It is never necessary for me to give up my craft, although if I don’t I may risk sacrificing something important. It was in no way necessary for German soldiers to murder their comrade along with the other victims, although if they had refused they would have risked their own lives. Nor was it necessary for the citizens of Athens to give in to the despair of the plague, though their virtue was too fragile to see them through it.

The dangers in a language of necessity emerge with particular vividness in Walzer's account of the disgracing of Arthur Harris. Harris was responsible for the saturation bombing of the German interior during World War II. The policy was a matter of debate at the time, but the British commanders, Churchill above all, considered it necessary for victory. Nevertheless, the neglect of Harris after the war, Walzer writes, amounted to public disgrace:

Harris and his men have a legitimate complaint: They did what they were told to do and what their leaders thought was necessary and right, but they are dishonoured for doing it, and it is suddenly suggested that what was necessary and right was also wrong.²³

Walzer argues that the pursuit of the policy in the later years of the war was wrong and at the same time allows that the imminence of the threat might have made it necessary and thus excusable. He suggests that Churchill should have found a better way of responding than dishonoring Harris, perhaps by praising the bomber pilots:

. . . even while insisting that it was not possible to take pride in what they had done . . . he never admitted that the bombing constituted a wrong. In the absence of such an admission, the refusal to honor Harris at least went some small distance toward re-establishing a commitment to the rules of war and the rights they protect.²⁴

This, I think, is a remarkable statement. It suggests at one and the same time that we needn't take responsibility for the wrongs we commit, that it is better to blame somebody else than nobody at all, and that in blaming somebody else rather than nobody we are in some way affirming our commitment to decency. But none of this is true. A commitment that can be turned on and off like a light switch is not a commitment, and the only thing affirmed in the dishonoring of Arthur Harris is that we should think of ourselves during war as parts in a machine. Then after the war we can blame failures on the waywardness of the parts rather than on the wickedness of their maker, even if the parts perform exactly as they were designed to perform. This is a view that the craftsman cannot accept, and it is fostered by the language of necessity, which he will contemptuously reject.

If, as I have been arguing, the aristotelian views the virtues as crafts in the design and execution of a life, then failure in virtue is failure in life. It is a failure not in the sense that I can fail to acquire or achieve some further end, be that financial gain, prestige, or power. Rather, to ask how a particular action mars the shape of a life is more like a painter asking how introducing a particular motif or image affects the shape of the whole. And this brings me to yet another point. The painter does not ask, "What will happen if I don't put in that scene?" This is a bad question in any event, but it is one which does not even occur to the artist or craftsman, for he does not imagine absences, but alternate presences. The man of virtue does not ask "What will happen if I don't pursue this war," but rather which of the possibilities in sight is most worthy. I can shape a life in which I die, protecting my wife and children, or one in which I hike over the mountains, leaving them before the rush of the approaching tanks. Which can I choose with pride? Which is contemptible? There is no getting around these questions, certainly not by invoking a spurious necessity.

I'll bring this discussion to a close by returning to the beginning. I established for myself three tasks. Taking Walzer and Childress as sophisticated and influential figures in the contemporary debate, I argued that not only particular judgments but also the very vocabulary they bring to discussions of war must be rejected by the exponent of virtue. Virtue as craft, understood in the aristotelian sense, has no place in its mature exercise for appeal to rules and obligations, formal frameworks, and values choices. Further, the vocabulary is pernicious, because talk of necessity, coercion, imminent threat, and formal theories fosters the view that shaping our lives is either arbitrary or out of our control, and this opens up the gates of indifference, indulgence, and despair. When this happens, I've argued, we lose the ability to take pride in ourselves, and we admit the contemptible as the norm. As Thucydides shows us, virtue, being fragile, cannot thrive in such a community, for these are the conditions of plague. All that matters is survival. Anything can be excused in the name of survival, whether it be the Athenian destruction of Melos or the saturation bombing of Germany or whatever we discover in tomorrow's *Times*.

NOTES

This paper was originally presented to the ethics section of the American Academy of Religion annual conference in Atlanta, 22 November 1986. I wish to tender my thanks to the other panelists, especially Stanley Hauerwas, for their many insightful questions and comments.

1. I take it for granted that the status quo in moral philosophy does not think of itself as grounded primarily in the virtues. One reason for thinking this is that I take Alan Donagan, William Frankena and the like as representative of the status quo, and such puzzlement at virtue talk as may be found in Frankena's "Conversations with Carney and Hauerwas," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 3.1, 1975: 45-62, as standard. Nothing much depends on whether or not anyone recognizes himself or others as part of 'the status quo' and for purposes of the argument it is sufficient to think of the status quo as whomever I am discussing at the moment.
2. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1105a25-1105b5. The translation used throughout, when text is quoted, is that of Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1985).
3. This paper was written, in its original form, before I became aware of Martha Nussbaum's *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, Cambridge, 1986. Despite differences in terminology and emphasis I think we are on the same track. Nothing in my argument depends on my agreeing with Nussbaum, or her being right about Aristotle and Greek ethics, but if she is, it will simply be further confirmation that my aristotelianism is Aristotle's aristotelianism.
4. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954) bk. 2, para. 34-46.
5. Thucydides para. 47-55.
6. Thucydides para. 47-55.
7. The mytilenean debate takes place in the fourth year of the war, bk. III, 36ff., while the melian debate comes at bk. V, 83 ff., in the 16th year. It is my contention that part of Thucydides' purpose in his entire history lies in delineating the causes of moral and political breakdown, and the inability of people to protect themselves against assaults on virtue. Nothing in my argument depends on this reading of Thucydides, though again, Nussbaum provides an interesting and plausible context for so situating the *Peloponnesian War*.
8. Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 1977) 314.
9. Nothing in what follows hinges on Walzer's soldier actually reasoning as I suggest. His could have been a form of suicide or a quick, and not very accurate, calculation of the general welfare along utilitarian lines. Neither of these accounts adequately grasps the nature of the story's impact. This may tell us something about the relative plausibility of alternate analyses of moral action.
10. *Nicomachean Ethics*, bk. 3, 1110a27-29.
11. Aristotle makes this point in discussing whether or not a child can, properly speaking, be called happy. "And for the same reason," to quote *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1100a3-5:

a child is not happy either, since his age prevents him from doing these sorts of actions; and if he is called happy it is because of antici-

pated blessedness, since, as we have said, happiness requires both complete virtue and a complete life.

The child has the status of my potter's apprentice. Neither has made the skills necessary to his or her work part of his or her character. Or, as he puts it at 1098a17-21:

if there are more virtues than one, the good will express the best and most complete virtue. Moreover, it will be in a complete life. For one swallow does not make a spring, nor does one day; nor, similarly, does one day or a short time make us blessed or happy.

12. The reference, of course, is to Judith Thomson's "A Defense of Abortion," which first appeared in *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1.1 (1971): 47-66.
13. I read this story many years ago in a book on jade by Richard Gump. I no longer have the book, and cannot find a copy and so am unable to verify details or give proper citations, for which I apologize.
14. My use of "flourishing" here will be recognized as stemming from Elizabeth Anscombe's "Modern Moral Philosophy," which first appeared in *Philosophy* 33 (1958): 1-19.
15. This piece originally appeared in *Theological Studies* 39 (September 1978): 427-445. It has subsequently been reprinted in Childress, *Moral Responsibility in Conflicts: Essays on Nonviolence, War, and Conscience* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982). References are to the reprinted form.
16. Childress 78.
17. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae. 34, 6, trans. Thomas Heath (London: Blackfriars, 1972) vol. 35.
18. Childress 90. I have a difficulty here which, while not appropriate for the body of the paper, should be addressed. The language which Childress and Walzer use, despite differences between them, is so much at odds with the vocabulary I want to use that I am not comfortable with my own exposition. I've made this point with respect to 'obligation,' and I should also make it with regard to 'value.' Childress's remarks about formal frameworks, competing values and 'theories' of justice make it seem that we are presented a range of alternatives and then asked to adopt some set of them. Having done so, we say we have *these* values, from which follow our judgments about right and wrong, good and bad. My own inclination is simply to say of some thing, person, or act, that it is (or is not) good. If asked why, I want to respond that it is a fine exemplar of its 'kind. If asked what this means, there is no recourse other than pointing out other examples, making connections, and explaining that's the way the world is, that's the kind of creature we are. This way of proceeding betrays the fact that I not only consider myself an orthodox aristotelian, but an orthodox wittgensteinian as well, but it is not necessary here to expand on the relations of Aristotle to Wittgenstein. The impetus for providing this footnote came from Mr. Chris Iosso, who recently brought to my attention in seminar Stanley Hauerwas' essay "How Christian Universities Contribute to the Corruption of Youth: Church and University in a Confused Age," *Katallagete* (Summer 1986): 21-28. My remarks on value in analysis of Childress should not obscure my agreement with Hauerwas' attack on teaching as presenting alternative theories of value.
19. Childress 91.
20. Childress 91.

21. The best recent application of this approach to reasoning about war remains *Nuclear Weapons and Christian Conscience*, ed. Walter Stein (London: Merlin Press, 2nd ed., 1965). The authors clearly distinguished the reflections that would apply to any agents from those that especially arise for Christians, and this being the case most of the argument sits well with the aristotelian.
22. Walzer 255.
23. Walzer 324.
24. Walzer 325.