

Some Positive Functions of War

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War is such a vicious and brutal form of human activity that humanitarian observers consider it to be an expression of insanity. An examination of any contemporary combat training program for American soldiers scheduled for assignment in Vietnam will reveal cunning and ingenious techniques and devices developed by the Viet Cong to torture, kill, and create horror. American techniques are even more devastating though less personal.

Today in a hospital such as Madigan General Hospital at Fort Lewis, double amputees can be seen using wheel chairs to substitute for legs crushed and lost in the Vietnam conflict. The blind, armless, and otherwise mangled bodies of soldiers who have survived grievous wounds are also there. In addition, there are the mental cases, wards of men vegetating in psychotic stupor or crying in manic confusion. Such are the spoils of war.

Moreover, physically sound survivors of such conflict often become brutalized. Souvenir hunters kick in the teeth of corpses in their search for gold. Conquering soldiers violate the chastity of women with impunity. Whole communities with names such as Lidice or Naha are wiped from the face of the earth. Military material is destroyed to the tune of billions of dollars, and untold millions of people's lives are shattered.

These facts are not new, nor are they obsolete. Weinberg and Shabat remind us that, "In the name of various religious slogans, almost one-third of Germany's population was slaughtered or starved to death during the Thirty Years War (1618-1648)."¹ And older records tell of mass mayhem committed in

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¹Meyer Weinberg and Oscar E. Shabat, *Society and Man* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1956), p. 672.

war as far back as recorded history. Captain Robert Lewis, co-pilot of the plane which dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima in 1945, is quoted as saying, "As the bomb fell over Hiroshima and exploded, we saw an entire city disappear. I wrote in my log the words: 'My God, what have we done?'"² In that war 22,000,000 men were killed and 34,000,000 more were wounded. Many of the world's greatest cities were laid waste. The human suffering was incalculable.

On Okinawa in 1945, the present writer visited the 88th Field Hospital where 1,000 patients were tormented with "battle fatigue." It was an unforgettable experience. Returning in his jeep to his own base after this experience he scribbled the following lines intended to reflect the feelings of a hospital patient:

The shell bursts' flame,
 The big guns' roar,
 Pound till I can stand no more!

The heavens, angry
 At man's plight
 Join with thunder in his fight.

The mud runs thick,
 And fearful screams
 Are worse than man's most horrid dreams.

And it's no dream
 On Naha's shore;
 This is vicious, bloody war!

I cannot live
 Another day
 In this mad hell!

Oh God, I pray,
 Restore my soul,
 Relieve my dread!
 Have mercy on us living dead.

Yes; war is hell! It is brutal, vicious, wasteful, and destructive. It creates animosities which brutalize men and divide the peoples of the earth into camps of hate. It is easy to see why rational men declare that war can only be a product of insanity.

But if this were the whole story there would be no war, for sanity surely prevails over insanity among men. The fact is that war is functional to societies which wage it. In this paper an

²*Ibid.*, p. 668.

effort will be made to list some of the positive functions which have made warfare a technique of human interaction from the beginning of recorded history to the present day, a day in which men live as close to war as at any period of historical time.

Man is a social creature. Without social interaction man would have no language; he would have no goals or values above the biological gratifications of dumb animals. It is unlikely that he would have more than a rudimentary concept of self, or, in fact, that he would even survive.

Social interaction which makes men human and preserves their existence also creates forms of social order. As Durkheim, Toennies, Cooley, and others have pointed out, living together in intimate proximity causes men to undergo similar socializing experiences from which agreement on basic roles and values develops. Such agreement, illustrated universally in ethnocentric attachment to existing local social values, creates a level of social solidarity which stabilizes human behavior and unifies men in emotional attachments to each other and to values which transcend individual personalities. Such groupings of men will die if necessary to defend their cherished values, and herein is a basic element in the development of war as a means of protecting the group.

As conquest and migration expand the borders and increase the population of communities, and as urban development increases segregation and specializations, it becomes more difficult for bonds of mutual agreement on values to keep the people united in mutual support. But interdependence preserves the cooperation and trust needed to maintain social order. The shoemaker spends all of his time making shoes, trusting that the farmer, the baker, and the groceryman will make available to him the food he needs in exchange for his handiwork.

Nevertheless, when the bonds of mutual agreement on basic values break down, interdependence may not be strong enough to maintain trust. Having no personal conviction about his obligations to others, a person may decide that it is easier to steal than to work. Another may decide to sell a product which traditional values repudiate but which many people who have not accepted traditional values may want to buy, prostitution being an example. Thus conflicts may arise between people whose most cherished values have been flaunted and people with other values who refuse to conform to "worn out" standards.

To maintain social order it becomes necessary under these circumstances to analyze the issues and to agree to compromise in setting up arbitrary standards with which all must comply. Some, however, may be so unwilling to support such standards that their opposition may remain a threat to social order. Others may see in the standards a challenge from which they may gain wealth. Outlawing prostitution, for example, increases the risks of that enterprise, but it may also greatly increase the rewards for those who will take risks. An illegal enterprise may be very profitable for those who can function in it and avoid society's sanctions.

The problems related to such disagreement may be solved either by relaxing standards so that no one will be restricted or by enforcing standards with physical might. When standards mean more to a powerful segment of population than the risk of death does, however, these people will not allow the standards to be relaxed if they can prevent it. On the other hand, when efforts are made to enforce standards with might, conflict will also result. Indeed conflict is almost inevitable if opponents of arbitrary standards consider them oppressive enough or unrealistic enough to require opposition.

Apparently there is no way to avoid some conflict in a heterogeneous society as long as men cherish values more than they fear suffering or death. The question is simply to decide whether or not society should organize the clash under governmental controls or under controls of private agencies, unless men can be taught to give up their values. It would seem, as Vilfredo Pareto has said, that in any case, assuming that men will continue to cherish values, rational social regulation would make use of people's "prejudices" to win their support, but to be ready to use force also when necessary:

The art of government lies in finding ways to take advantage of such sentiments, not in wasting one's energies in futile efforts to destroy them—the sole effect of which, frequently, is to make them stronger.

But this is by no means to aver that force is unnecessary in ruling. Far from it. . . . The need for governments to apply force arises from the fact that a small group of citizens, if prepared to use violence, can impose its will upon ruling circles which are not willing to meet violence by equal force.

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Thus a governing class can only maintain itself in power and exercise its authority effectively if it is prepared to use

both force and persuasion. If a governing class could apply both of these in appropriate proportions it could, in principle, maintain itself forever. No governing class has ever succeeded in doing so. History is a graveyard of aristocracies. This is because the type of person who favors recourse to violence is usually unwilling or unable to have recourse to persuasion and *vice versa*. The two styles of governing are, on the whole, mutually exclusive. In this lies the key to the rise and fall of governing classes.³

Pareto added:

. . . we should specially note the fact that, if the governing class is incompetent, unwilling or unable to use force to suppress transgressions against the uniformities in private life, the vacuum created by its inaction is filled by anarchic action on the part of the subject class. The evidence of history clearly shows that the private vendetta waxes or wanes in ratio to the public authority's failure or success in replacing it as a means of suppressing crime. . . . Moreover, when it is weak, little states are formed within the state itself.⁴

Maintaining peace and order on the international level involves the same logic, but different nations may find even less in the form of common sentiments than large cities. If this is true, the validity of Pareto's following comments is apparent:

In international relations, beneath all the surface tinsel of humanitarian and ethical declamation, what prevails is force alone. . . . Politicians who imagine they can make unarmed law a substitute for armed force delude themselves most grievously. . . . The constitution of Sulla collapsed because the armed force which would have ensured respect for it was not maintained. The constitution of Augustus endured because his successors had the power of the legions to support them. Thiers believed that his government should be sustained by the rule of law rather than by armed force; his laws were scattered like leaves in the wind before the hurricane of democratic plutocracy. . . .⁵

The first positive function of war, or the ability to wage war, then, would be the maintenance of political order by thwarting groups who would usurp authority which society has not agreed that they should have. Neville Chamberlain's unwillingness to test Hitler with a threat of war, for example, could have been the mistake which turned Europe into a holocaust.

³Vilfredo Pareto, *Sociological Writings*, Selected and Introduced by S.E. Finer (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1966), pp. 53-54.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 259.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 260.

A second major positive function of war is to challenge, test, and clarify the values by which men are presumed to live. If risk of death is a price too high to pay to preserve a value, that value will lose prestige in the hierarchy of human values. Such a stern test will help to clarify where men really stand and just what the limits of social controls may be. In the words of Patrick Henry:

What is it that Gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take: but as for me give me liberty or give me death!⁶

Even Hitler, the arch advocate of terror who proclaimed that "terror is not broken by power of mind, but by terror . . .,"⁷ argued that only spiritual rejuvenation and defense of a great ideal justifies measures as extreme as war:

Every attempt at fighting a view of life by means of force will finally fail, unless the fight against it represents the form of an attack for the sake of a new spiritual direction. Only in the struggle of two views of life with each other can the weapon of brute force, used continuously and ruthlessly, bring about the decision in favor of the side it supports.⁸

Closely related to the first and second functions mentioned, a third positive function of war is to cleanse and to unify a nation in the presence of hallowed sacrifice. Americans united as a nation in World War II more, perhaps, than they had before in history. People found a struggle bigger than their own little problems, and they rose to meet its challenge. Suicide rates appeared to drop as men found life more meaningful. Freedom became a value to live for, and to die for. Crime rates went down. National honor was brightened by sacrifice. Winston Churchill solemnly and proudly proclaimed that national defense in that same war also brought England to her "finest hour." And Adolf Hitler saw edification for Germany in war. He gloried in war's challenge and condemned enemies of nationalism and advocates of stagnant peace and order:

Our time's fear of chauvinism is the sign of its impotence. Since it not only lacks but considered disagreeable all seething

⁶Patrick Henry, "The War Inevitable, March, 1775," *Hundred and One Famous Poems with a Prose Supplement* (Rev. ed., by Roy J. Cook; Chicago: The Cable Co., 1929), p. 177.

⁷Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (New York: Reynal & Hitcock, 1940), p. 495.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 223.

energy. Destiny has not chosen it for a great deed. For the greatest changes on this earth would not have been thinkable if their driving force, instead of fanatical, even hysterical passion, had been only the bourgeois virtues of peace and order.⁹

. . . Germany became defenseless, not because there was a shortage of arms, but because the will was missing to guard the arms for the preservation of the nation.¹⁰

In the United States, General Douglas MacArthur praised in eloquent language the honor and sacrifice of men who fight for their ideals in his farewell to West Point, May 12, 1962. The importance of love for country and willingness to give all for it was dramatically voiced by the patriarch of American generals as he admonished the young cadets who heard him in a voice hoarse with age but nevertheless strongly appealing and heavy with emotion:

Duty-Honor-Country. Those three hallowed words reverently dictate what you ought to be, what you can be, and what you will be. They are your rallying points: to build courage when courage seems to fail; to regain faith when there seems to be little cause for faith; to create hope when hope becomes forlorn.¹¹

In the dignity of his advanced age, he eulogized his fallen comrades as he challenged his listeners to bear the sword that he and his comrades could no longer bear against the foe:

And what sort of soldiers are those you are to lead? Are they reliable, are they brave, are they capable of victory? Their story is known to all of you; it is the story of the American man-at-arms. My estimate of him was formed on the battlefield many, many years ago, and has never changed. I regarded him then as I regard him now—as one of the world’s noblest figures, not only as one of the finest military characters but also as one of the most stainless.

The soldiers he spoke of were the sons, fathers, and husbands of American families from all across the land. Their sacrifice could not be brushed aside lightly; and the many who died had hallowed to their nation the ideals for which they had died. Speaking of such men, MacArthur said,

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 636.
¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 459.
¹¹General Douglas MacArthur, "Duty-Honor-Country," *Vital Speeches* (June 15, 1962), pp. 519-521. The following quotations from MacArthur are from this same source.

His name and fame are the birthright of every American citizen. In his youth and strength, his love and loyalty, he gave all that mortality can give. He needs no eulogy from me or from any other man. He has written his own history and written it in red on his enemy's breast.

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The soldier, above all other men, is required to practice the greatest act of religious training—sacrifice. In battle and in the face of danger and death, he discloses those Divine attributes which his Maker gave when He created man in His own image. No physical courage and no brute instinct can take the place of the Divine help which alone can sustain him. However horrible the incidents of war may be, the soldier who is called upon to offer and give his life for his country is the noblest development of mankind.

Despite the corruption, debauchery, fraud, and cowardice which are so prevalent in war, the nobility cited by MacArthur is just as real. The courage, conviction, and determination seen every day on the battlefield are humbling and awesome in their desperate dignity. Intelligent men of good will cannot help but respect heroes who give their all for their concept of duty.

There are many, many examples of dedicated military heroism. Just one will illustrate. In 1945 on Okinawa, fifty infantrymen from the U.S. Seventh Division were assembled in a religious service on the eve of their return to combat after a two-week rest in the rear areas. After the meeting one of the soldiers, a strong, bright-eyed man, spoke to me about returning to "the line."

"I'd give my right arm if I didn't have to go back," he said. "I have survived years of fighting in the Aleutians, the Phillipines, and here. I can't last forever. Besides I am sick of killing! I wish it would end!" I marveled at his composed strength in the face of such a deadly assignment, and I made a clumsy attempt to encourage him and to honor him for what he had endured. Finally I said, "It is really a shame that you have to go back to the line. You have done your share. Others should take your place and let you go home."

I think I shall never forget the surprised look on his face or the piercing dedication in his bright eyes as he replied, "You don't understand. I said I would give my right arm to go home, but no one can take my place! No one can leave until this job is done! Men with my experience have the biggest responsibility. We can never stop until the job is done. I will go to fight

in the morning. I will watch my friends die, and I will kill again, and maybe the bullet with my name on it will find me. It all makes me sick in my soul, but there is no other way. I just wish there were."

He went to the line the next morning. Maybe he died that day. But the memory of his determined acceptance of his duty to defend the ideals which made his world, and mine, beautiful rises to haunt me when I am inclined to shirk my responsibility as a citizen.

Nations which have known such heroism cannot easily turn their backs on it. Stories of great deeds are handed down from generation to generation to build loyalty and gratitude upon which national unity can stand.

Such stories can do much to remind a nation of its ideals and to spot-light hypocrisy. Status struggles of some American minorities illustrate the importance of this consequence of war. For example, American Indians were granted citizenship by the Citizenship Act of 1924 as a concession to their participation in World War I and as a retreat from the hypocrisy which our claims of fighting to make the world safe for democracy made unbearable.

Harsh and unjust prejudices against Orientals in America were shown to be untenably ridiculous by their acceptance of war-time confinement to "relocation centers" and by the remarkable military accomplishments of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team from Hawaii (America's most decorated military unit) in Italy and France in World War II. Many Negroes also proved to be faithful and able soldiers in that conflict, and they learned lessons from their participation which are now being used to shame Americans into moving closer to the ideals of equality published in the Declaration of Independence. As Julian Bond, prominent Negro politician, says, war-time commitments challenges us to face up to our own ideals:

We strive for the day when the nation that fights wars to make the world safe for democracy can assure its citizens that democracy is safe for them; or to smash those who now control, to seize control from their hands, to use raw power to insure that constitutional rhetoric becomes reality.¹²

Many Americans resent threats of minorities to use "raw power," but in the cold light of international publicity they are

¹²"A Separate Path to Equality," *Life*, Vol. 65, No. 24 (Dec. 12, 1968), p. 89.

forced to make good the ideals for which so many of their heroes have died or stand convicted of prejudice and hypocrisy in the eyes of the world. The crucible of war lays bare the real facts of life and forces men to see things as they are with the camouflage and trimmings stripped away.

The confusion in Southeast Asia is wilting under the bright lights brought to bear upon it through war. The only escape from such exposure is to hide behind walls and "curtains," but the very act of hiding advertises deceit to the whole world and forces adjustment in terms of bullying defense of oppression, as in the case of the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia. But this reveals the deceit even more clearly and thereby increases the threat of foreign contempt which in time will put pressure on rulers to strive to live more closely to the ideals which they have told the world are at the heart of their country's greatness.

Besides helping to build and maintain political order, challenging, testing, and clarifying social values, and cleansing and unifying nations in the presence of hallowed sacrifice, war provides many material benefits. Among the most gratifying of these is the development of medicine. Today 99 per cent of the American soldiers wounded in Vietnam survive. Medical care this effective has never before been known by man. Military doctors are forced to adjust to all kinds of emergencies, and they develop techniques in such things as caring for burns and amputations which are of lasting value to mankind. One of the marvels of our age has been the increase in human longevity. Is it possible that medical improvements developed under the pressures of war have saved as much or more life in terms of years as has been lost in combat?

War also stimulates the development of industry and the proper management of natural resources. The struggle for survival forces man to husband his wealth. The vast waste of resources in war may make this claim appear to be false on its face, and there is no doubt that war is extremely wasteful, but awareness of the waste increases awareness of the need to conserve and to find new resources. In this connection, developments in the harnessing of solar energy, managing agricultural and water systems, and in the reclamation of sea water, all of which have been spurred by the demands of war, are opening the doors to new horizons in human standards of living. Space exploration, with all that it promises in the development of physical sciences, is also largely the child of war.

In all of these developments opportunity has been given to untold numbers of people for exciting employment, and millions who might have spent their lives in ignorance and monotony have found employment in occupations which have enabled them to travel and to learn. Even the millions who have served in the armed forces against their will have had to face the realities of the twentieth century. Smug little pockets of ignorance and isolation have had to become involved with mankind. This may not be an unmixed blessing, but it has done much to enlarge the compassion of men for other men everywhere. An appeal, for example, from an Oriental orphanage, "He doesn't eat much . . . will you take my little brother?" does not fall on deaf ears when the listener has seen children starve.

Orientals cannot remain "gooks" to men who acquire Oriental wives and children. Germans become more than "krauts" to men who live among them and marry their women. With all of its viciousness in actual combat, war is a powerful breaker of boundaries between peoples, as witnessed by the amity between Americans, Germans, and Japanese today.

This is not to argue that wars may not also create slavery and produce brutal exploitation. This, in fact, is a major argument for war, that nations which would plunder should be confronted by the military might of those who will not tolerate plunder. The gleaming new cities of Germany and Japan witness to the world that conquerors can uplift the conquered as they crush the evil which justified the conflict in the first place. Unfinished war may create jealousies and plant the seeds of perpetual strife, but war which achieves the goals of fair-minded victors can root out the evil seeds of strife and lay foundations for peace by opening avenues of communication which break down barriers between peoples at the same time that it destroys the power of those who would erect such barriers.

And even the victors can be refined by war, as previously stated. Knowing what prices they have been forced to pay for their values, they may reexamine them to see if they are worth that price. Unsupportable value systems will fall under the impact of war.

Finally, it may be argued that there may be times when the *alternatives* to war are untenable in that they mean the loss of proven values more dear than life. Responsible men cannot stand by and watch Nazis systematically murder 6,000,000 hu-

man beings in concentration camps simply because they were guilty of the crime of being Jews! Men who have learned to value human freedom know that freedom has to be won anew by each new generation. Learning this lesson and struggling to carry it to all men will not come without challenge, and the man who seeks to preserve his most precious values without being willing to risk his life may well lose both.

The writer, who expressed his shock and grief at the costs of war in "Battle Fatigue," also learned the greatness of values for which men give their lives. After the Okinawan campaign, he sat in a pyramidal tent with some soldiers who were complaining about what they had suffered in the war. Some of them were sick and deeply bitter, but others were solemn in their determination to live so that their suffering and the sacrifices of their comrades would not be in vain. Remembering this experience later, the writer penned another poem:

"Of Sons And Sires"

Shorn of things in life that matter,
 Haunted still by stench of death,
 Men saw war clouds break and scatter,
 And hoped for peace with bated breath;
 Still numb from shock of mass destruction,
 Soldiers pondered reconstruction;
 But a heart-sick bitter one spoke his mind:
 "I'd wipe my feet on our rotten flag!
 And I'd never have the guts to drag
 A son through a life like mine!
 "Helpless children to see our sin!
 To suffer here as we have done,
 To learn what monsters men have been!
 "To live like rats in stagnant holes,
 To hear men scream and watch them die!
 Rooting dirt like blinded moles;
 "Our past is more than men should bear,
 The future brings but mass destruction,
 Which I'll ask no son of mine to share!"

In compassion I heard him speak.
 His wounded spirit needed to speak.
 But what he said was so terribly wrong!
 How could I tell him he was wrong?
 But another man stepped forth and spoke:
 "Without strong sons, who will bind the
 wounds of a world bleeding and torn?
 Who will stay the tyrants' hands, which
 rise to steal their fellows' lands?"

Who will there be to plead the cause
 for which men die and widows mourn?"
 "Oh God, give me sons with spirits and
 bodies strong
 To carry the torch which flickers now and
 will die if men do wrong!
 "Let not my buddies die in vain,
 Because we who live retreat from life,
 And fear the price of freedom's pain!
 "God, give me sons, alive with freedom's fire!
 And make me strong, a worthy sire!"
 I walked alone into the night
 And wondered *who would* bind man's wounds,
 Who would lead us back to light.
 Without strong sons, the devil's plan of
 thought control will dull man's brain,
 Will starve the soul of enslaved man;
 Without strong sons, all life is vain!
 I knelt and prayed with deep desire,
 "Oh God, give me sons, and make me strong,
 Oh let me be a worthy sire!"

Four conditions must exist before successful war can be waged: (1) Those who do the fighting must have the will to fight; they must be stirred by promises of great rewards for victory or threats of great punishment for failure to fight if they are to risk their lives in combat. This means that they have to be indoctrinated zealots, greedy and desperate opportunists, or men with carefully thought-out ideals which they would rather die for than see destroyed. The existence of the first or second type of soldier makes the existence of the third type mandatory if mankind is to live on a level of creative and free intelligence. (2) There must be a powerful military organization to plan and direct the battles. Military organizations are the product of much planning and social support. Only a nation unified by strong agreement on values or one unified by coercive indoctrination could be strong enough to maintain such a force. (3) Adequate logistical support must be available; this depends on the availability of natural resources, industrial plants, and transportation facilities to deliver the material where and when it is needed. No amount of organization and will to fight will avail in the absence of munitions, oil, and vehicles. (4) There must be a supporting population able and willing to produce the material needed. No matter how dedicated soldiers may be or how efficient their organization or how overwhelm-

ing their resources, they are not likely to endure the brutal realities of war if their loved ones at home refuse to support them in their sacrifice. And if people on the home front refuse to man the munitions factories or refine the oil or build the machines, the army cannot fight. If the people at home work only because they are forced to, or only for money, costly sabotage may be expected, and the morale of their loved soldiers will sag. The Russian armies of 1917 provide an illustrative example, as does the Napoleonic debacle in Russia in 1803.

Despite sincere pleas for peace from men who know and hate the horrors of war, Plato was probably right when he said that only the dead had seen the end of war. There appears to be no compelling reason to suppose that a time will come when there will not be at least some groups of men able to wage war who will cherish certain values more than life. Until the values of other groups able to wage war do not clash with them, there will probably be conflict. The functional value of war, as long as it remains an instrument of intergroup relations, will depend largely upon which groups win and how they use their victories.